

Air Force Veterans' stories of strength

Marianne: I joined the Air Force at 18 because I wanted to see the world.

Kevin: One thing I noticed was when I got out of the military was, I guess you could say, the colors were kind of dimmed. Things weren't quite as exciting or enjoyable as I felt they should have been. In the military everything is very set; very scheduled. Everything is written down; for the most part everything is done in order, chronologically. Then you get out into the civilian world and a lot of that doesn't happen.

Ash: That was a hard transition because in the Air Force you always have something or someone that's going to meet you or say something or point you in the right direction. And civilian life is not necessarily like that, you have to kind of make those connections on your own.

Mark: Once I got back I would do very minimal with people. I didn't even have cable; I didn't care about trying to stay plugged into the mainstream.

Wesley: Isolate, you know, and that's a bad thing and when you're living there inside your head and you're the only one you can depend on and you feel that way anyway. I think that's when drugs and alcohol become a real problem for you; I know for me it was.

Heather: It was taking all of my energy just to keep from having a panic attack about something and I couldn't sleep. I just could not sleep at all.

Jim: My kids were always asking me like, "Dad, were you shot at?". And this is the truth, I don't think they were shooting at me specifically (laughs). So, I never felt like I did that much. I was always in these combat zones but I never... I didn't really think it was that big of a deal until I started having the nightmares.

Roger: I decided to talk to guys, and we started talking about some of the things that I was doing that are pretty classic signs that there's a lot of stuff pent up in me. So, we started some paperwork; I got involved with VA. I got involved with primary care and they recommended some counselling.

Wesley: When I went there, I pretty much told them, you know, I told them my circumstances and everything and I said, "I'd be willing to take any class you guys recommend for me. I mean, I'm here to get better; I'm not here to hide anything. I want to be open and honest about everything that's going on."

Ash: All these resources are out there just so it can be there when you're available, you know, when you're ready for it.



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Jim: There's nothing to be ashamed of. When I go to the VA it may sound strange but it's kind of like being back at a military base. Everybody says hello to each other; everybody's friendly.

Heather: Stay connected. Be connected. Reach out to the people that you've been friends with; to the people that... like in your family who are resources to you. Whoever's there for you; whatever your support system is, you don't have to do it by yourself.



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