

Feeling numb after surviving combat

Vijay: My name is Vijay. I am a U.S. Marine, I served in Iraq. My MOS was artillery. We were in Kuwait and we were playing around in Kuwait like twiddling our fingers for about a month and a half and then when we got the heads up, hey we going across the EOD into Iraq, we got the EOD call. It was like an adrenaline rush for me. It was like, "Oh, man, we're gettin some action now." Like about a 1000 meter, less than that, bombs exploding, "Boom, boom, boom!" Iraqis are fighting back. They were engaging with **block and runs** inside of this gun and firing away and that's when I was like, "Oh, I'm in Iraq."

I came back. I was happy. I was like, "Oh, I survived combat. I'm Superman, nothing could happen to me. I'm amazing." At the time, I had a girlfriend. I didn't realize nothing was wrong with me, but before I went to Iraq, I was in love with her. I love her. I came back from Iraq, I was a cold-hearted person. I was drinking alcohol every night. I wanted to go to college. I enrolled in college, became a 4.0 student. I was like, "Hey, drinking, that's good. His grades are great. Hey, I'm good to go."

Everything was going good in my life. I had a little job, a part-time job. I was getting my GI Bill at that time, making a little extra money for myself. My son was born March 3, 2008 and that's when I had a rude awakening. I was like, I saw my son, hold him in my arm. Usually for a guy, holding his own son in his arm, he'd be happy, excited. I didn't have no emotion. I didn't have no feelings. I was like, "Whoa, what is going on with me? This is not right." I didn't feel any love coming out of me. My grades just started going down and I'm like, "Something is not right. Why can't I focus?" Me and my ex-wife; I'm divorced now. We start having arguments and we will get into arguments and I will erupt. I'll get mad. And I'm like, "This is a big stress too now. I can't deal with all the problems and stuff like that anymore."

All day, I was talking to one of my friends and he was like, "Vet Center." He just said the word, "Vet Center." I didn't go and in the morning me and my ex-wife we got into a big argument and I couldn't deal with it. It was so stressful. I was like shaking. I was telling her all these hurtful words and everything, I'm like, "Dude, Vet Center." I go on Google, type in Vet Center, locate an address, call the person up. I was like, "Hello." The person I speak to, her name was Tracy. I was like, "I need to see you." She said, "Are you a Combat Vet?" I said, "Yes." "Did you serve in Iraq?" I was like, "Yes." I was like, "Look, I have to go to work in about an hour and a half from now, is there any way I can come and see you, just let you know what is going on in my head?" She was like, "Sure, sure, you can come right in."

She was very calm, and she would start telling me, she was like, at the end of our session, she was like, "I'll tell you something right now, don't worry. There's a lot of people like you that are going this right now. So, you're not the only one out there. Just, you did the right thing. You came to see me. I will be able to see what we can do to help you. We have different resources and will be able to help you." So, I was like, "Okay, fine." So, I scheduled the next appointment. And when I finished speaking to her, that was the reason why I scheduled the next appointment, I feel a little bit better because I could express myself, what is going on with my life, what is wrong with me. I told her everything and I feel so comfortable talking to her. She got me a printout and she showed me. She said, "These are the symptoms you describe to me ever since." And she said that, "You have PTSD." She was like, "It's normal for Combat Vets who come



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from the war to have this.” And I was like, “What? If I hadn’t come to this place, what would end up happening to me?” She was like, “We don’t know. It would have been worse.” I feel I’m making progress, but now I got a divorce case. I got child support hitting me now. I’m unemployed. Way more stress. I start back drinking because all this stress, work, school, ex-wife, son. To calm me down, relax me at night so I’ll take a shot, just to calm down or a beer.

Tracy sent me to the VA. She’s like, “I’m going to recommend you go to the VA.” So, I went to the VA now. And then, all of a sudden, a day I got so stressed out, I tried to commit suicide. I eventually checked myself into the mental facility in the VA. I was in there for one week. I talked to this guy. I was like, “Great. I have to go ahead to this nonsense again explaining what is going with me.” Well, in the first session, going to him, he was a Marine, a former Marine. He went through a divorce. He knows what I’m going through. I feel I trust this man. I was telling this man everything about me. Something has changed in my life. Hey, I can do it. I can do it now. I can focus my mind now and do what I want to do in life. So, this was like 2011 and I’m like, wow I make an achievement. I didn’t jump the ladder, but I took baby steps and I’ll make it to the ladder on top.



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