

Therapy got Ernie on a path to success

Ernie: My name is Ernie. I was in the United States Marine Corps, active duty. I served 13 years. Being under patrols, we were always constantly in danger. The vehicles not stopping, just the IEDs was the biggest problem.

We just went on one of our daily patrols and one of the potholes was filled in with dirt and we ran it over. I looked out the window and I saw a flash and then I heard the explosion and the smoke and dust. I woke up outside. The Humvee door, the window was shattered. The door was off the hinges. That kinda made me realize that I was in a war.

Getting out of the Marine Corps, I was kind of excited but then when I really found out that I was all alone, my Marine Corps brothers weren't there, nobody was there to guide me, I found myself always constantly looking on rooftops. Helicopters would fly by from the police department and I'd always scan and things like that, hyper-alertness. If there was an accident or something going on, I'd always be the first one out the car or be the first one on the scene and that's when my wife noticed that I needed help.

I read an article in a newspaper saying that there was free help, mental health, from local therapists. They told me that there was one in Beverly Hills so I went to go see her and she was a licensed therapist and she diagnosed me with PTSD.

I would go over my fears of driving and just this hyper-alertness. And then the war is still going on and my friends were dying and I felt like I needed to be there with them. People would get in car accidents, I would be dragging them out of the car. I think that was just trying to compensate to get that adrenaline rush again.

I finally snapped. I was doing things that was out of my normal. My attitude changed; I was getting a little aggressive. People would tell me that I'm different because we would go to parties and I would always be by the door, by the back. I'd always be scanning.

At that time, I only checked into the VA just to tell them where I lived and to get my card. I didn't really think about the services and they told me there's classes, for returning Combat Veterans and I wasn't ready to go to group therapy. I needed to talk to somebody one-on-one. The VA Clinic was right next door and they have their own therapist and so once a week, I go see her. Before, I couldn't see myself going back to school and being around other people. Being a full-time student, you have to interact with the students and the teachers there, and I had that fear I couldn't do it, but once going through counseling, I'm able to cope with my anxiety.

A lot of guys call me up still. My former Marines and they still want to know, where they can get help because they hear my success stories, and they kinda want to know the information from me. You know you have a problem and there's somebody there to help you with it, and they're going to guide you the right way.



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