

Strength to recover and repair relationships

Shawn: My name is Shawn. I served at the Duty Army from February of 1987 until October of 1993. I am a Veteran of the Persian Gulf War. I was a combat medic 91 Bravo. Not only did we treat U.S. Military, but Iraqi Military as well, and some of the things that I saw in that capacity caused me some issues for down the line, it did. But there was one particular incident where my immediate supervisor and I were having some words and I lost my temper, and I actually picked up and threw a wheelchair. That was one of my first warning signs that maybe something was underlying and something that I may have to deal with. I was sent to the emergency room, spoke with one of the psych doctors, but that was pretty much it. They left it alone and so did I. And it wasn't until I'm discharged from the military that my PTSD really started to catch up with me and affect me. I was a newlywed, had a newborn, I just purchased a new home and I had everything going for me, but I was really, really depressed and didn't know where my anger issues were coming from, especially at home with my wife, my first wife and I. And just displaying a lot of anger, difficulty sleeping...all the things that started to happen, it kinda all came at once it seemed like. Started day dreamin' and having flashbacks while I was at work, and was referred to the psychiatric part of the VA, which was the first time I had ever been told or spoken to about post-traumatic stress disorder and that you're not exactly right and it's difficult to accept it and seems more difficult sometimes to seek the help you need.

Initially, I was seeing a social worker and a psychiatrist during my lunch breaks and I saw them off and on for quite some time, but then a few months down the line I resigned that position. I was just depressed and in a really bad place, and so I left that position and at that point I also left the care. Depression was really the big thing for me. Can't pinpoint why I was so depressed, but that was a part of it and it eventually led to drugs and alcohol for me personally. It was the issues that I was dealing with that drove me to use. Trying to mask the feelings and not wanting to remember the things that I had went through and saw. I lost my first wife and everything with it during that time of my life. And so, I just went out on my own and went back to what I knew, which is the streets, it's where I came from.

I have never been in any legal trouble and really didn't have any obstacles in the way of being a success, just didn't know how to deal with that one particular issue, and I just woke up one day and just really had had enough, and said that if I expect to enjoy the last, what I call a full court, of my life then the first thing I need to do is manage my drug and alcohol addiction so that I can manage my PTSD, and I just woke up one morning, caught the bus down to-to the Veterans Administration. First two weeks I spent in the acute Psych and then from there I went to a dual diagnosis program that is geared toward both psychological and substance abuse, and was able to get to the post-traumatic stress disorder unit program. All of them being inpatient stays, and so that's when I really got the help that I needed. So, group some days, one-on-one some days, some days both. The group setting being what was best for me. Finally sitting down with other Veterans that had the same issues. I didn't feel like I was by myself anymore. When you take away the drugs and alcohol then you are lookin' for what it really is. It's a mental illness. It's an illness and when you're no longer masking or self-medicating then you are really forced to deal with it. That forces you to call upon some of the things that you have been taught, you as far as dealing with your stresses versus using. And I have been able to better my relationship with my children. They're older now and PTSD is something that almost everybody hears about now, and so together collectively it's



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helped them to understand, but cleaning up made them more receptive to me and I just continue to keep working on it. I played around for a long time, it's cost me a lot of years of my life until I finally got serious about trying to at least manage my post-traumatic stress. And so I would encourage any Veteran that may be experiencing whether they are re-living an issue in dreams or daydreaming or anger or rage, whatever it is, to seek out help, and if it's not what you're looking for the first time, go to somebody different, but definitely seek the help out.



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