

## Life can be better, and help is available

**Geno:** Hello, my name is Geno. I served in the United States Marine Corps from the years 1979 to 1985.

The greatest challenge I had in the Marine Corps was, I drank. Early on, I got in trouble and I went through a rehabilitation program, and after 3 years of Marine Corps service I was clean and sober. That sobriety lasted for 20 years.

I had an assignment going to South Africa and they offered complimentary drinks on the airplane and I took my first drink. Six months later I was drinking on weekends, a year later I was drinking every day. That's spiraled into a 10-year cycle of drinking on a constant basis.

I really went into depression, aloneness. The relationships that I had encouraged my drinking, so I hung out with other people who drank either as much or more than I did. I was homeless for approximately 7 years. I would stay with friends that would kind of support my self-abuse, and sometimes during a blackout I would get very violent and have no recall of it the next day. It got to the point where even the people that I was staying with could no longer tolerate my behavior.

I was so alone and so isolated and so angry that, you know, for me to actually ask for help was a big stretch. What I did was I sought help through the Veterans Administration, and I went through their Intensive Rehabilitation Program.

The process of my recovery, the first 3 months I was totally in the fog. After I came out of the fog, then I had to deal with my anger issues, that took about a year. I had an acute case of Post Traumatic Stress. In the Marine Corps I lived a violent life and all that stuff started to surface. All the guilt, all the shame, all the anger and repressed emotions.

Being in a safe environment through the VA, it allowed me to express those feelings and do it where it was appropriate. Listening to other Veterans share their stories allowed me to actually have that camaraderie and realize that I wasn't alone when dealing with the mental fluctuations of my emotions. That took about a year before I could even like start relating to people. Then it took about another year before I could actually speak right, walk straight, restore my physical health, because I had abused my body by drinking so much. The medical part of the VA helped me with Vitamins, they helped me with having a full checkup, seeing what damage I had done. They actually got me in to a program for nutrition so I could go ahead and bring my body back to being normal.

The biggest thing was the ability to ask for help and to receive the help and to acknowledge the help. I no longer harbor low feelings of self-worth. I feel some pride in, you know, serving in the US Military. I feel like a human being. I realize you know there is a way out. That life can be better. That help is available.



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