

## The Road Ahead

**Ray:** It's me and my life. Hope, that word hope is a very, very powerful word. My name is Ray. I served in the United States Army as an infantry soldier from 1998 to 2001. When I got out of the military, I felt like I was a fish out of water, that I didn't fit in with everybody else. A lot went down. I chose a drink as a way to deal with life. It was a downward spiral. I was pushing everybody away and I went through a divorce. I lost my home to foreclosure. I ended up homeless on the streets, endangering the public in and out of jail. So, I had really gotten into trouble there. That's when I was court ordered to mental health treatment.

The first time I ever checked into the VA I had no idea what I'm getting myself into. I was diagnosed with PTSD. I took it one step at a time, one day at a time. And I started to talk to a therapist about it and I started to open up the doors about what I've been experiencing and what I've been dealing with for the past 10 years in my life. The VA gave me the tools that I needed to make positive changes. And that's when I realized, "Hey, I'm not the only one going through this man." The road to recovery is extremely hard, but it's very worthwhile. We all have to find our own paths.

I decided to make changes in my life. When I'm riding in a group of other veterans that have gone through the struggles, that have been through this storm, riding side by side, there's something very different about it. Something very special about it. We just get together, get out there and explore and really forget about everything and be in the moment. Focus on the road ahead of me. For me, it's the best therapy a man could ask for.

Life is so much different. I've grown so much more in my recovery. Eight years of being sober and tobacco-free. Today I can be a positive role model towards my children. I get to just teach them how to live. Live life the best that you can. I'm very proud of Operation Restoring Veteran Hope, a nonprofit that I started a couple of years ago, and it's to help our veterans to be hopeful for a better future, to let go of all that guilt, all that pain. To be here where I'm at today, it's a very humbling experience and it brings peace to my heart.



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