

I did it, and you can do it too

La Wanda: My name is La Wanda. Everybody calls me Wanda. I served in the United States Navy from 1985 to 1997. I remember when I first got to Pearl Harbor. If we can back up to A school of Philadelphia. Everything was based around when we weren't working or we weren't in school, where are we going to go tonight? What are we going to do tonight? And it was all based in partying. We worked hard, but we partied even harder and the fact that it was accepted, and it was the norm made it okay.

We ended up starting to do cocaine and it gets to be where, ah, it's okay you know, I'll do a little bit this night. And before you know it, you're doing it more often than you're not doing it. I had started some cocaine one evening knowing that I had duty the very next day on the ship and my number was called and consequently, I have an Other than Honorable Discharge and I was discharged from the Navy in April of 1997.

After I got thrown out, now I can party all the time. I can do what I wanna do. So, I started selling cocaine and it made it easier to stay in the lifestyle and I proceeded to smoke crack and my life deteriorated, but I didn't stop because I didn't know that it was the substance, you know, and there was something wrong with me with the obsession and the compulsion to use. So, I continued to use for the next 13 years.

I got arrested a few times, got some charges, got a few DULs. I got out of jail, down at Virginia Beach, Virginia. I was snorting cocaine and I was drinking and sometimes it got to the point where I would have to drink in the morning just to get up and function and one person told me, you've got a problem. And I was over at their house. I had drank excessively the day before and they told me point blank. They said, "You are no longer welcome in my home until you can do something about this. You know there's help out there available and you need to get it."

That was the thing that I had needed to hear to finally make me stop and I had to go through everything I went through in order to get there. I practice a program of recovery. It's 12 step fellowship. Being in a culture of like-minded people who are also in recovery, who believe in spiritual principles, you know, being honest, being open-minded, being willing, helping each other, talking about what you went through, talking about the things that you were feeling, that in and of itself is the thing that helps me to get better every single day and not just stay stopped, but to be a better person.

I do a lot of service in the community. I'm on the Drug Court Team. The Drug Court is an alternative to incarceration. We encourage people to find, possibly find a 12 step fellowship of their choice and I'm so glad that we have a Veteran Tract because we can identify with them on a level that the judge can't, that the lawyer can't, and most importantly, that the treatment provider can't and we let them know, hey, I did it, you can do it too.

I'll be coming up on seven years that I have not used a substance. I don't regret, and that's crazy, I don't regret everything I went through because I think, I believe I had to go through that to get where I'm at and be in a place where I wanna help others. I had to suffer in order to want to help people not suffer. I highly encourage all Veterans to go to the VA for substance abuse, PTSD, anything. We are here for you and where you can find us and we're always gonna be available.



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