

Righting the course after money and legal troubles

Brent: My name's Brent. I served in the Army for six years, active, then I was in the reserves. When I got out, I had a hell of a time assimilating back in the civilian society. I drank a lot, every night, and I did it to numb myself or try to forget what I saw and what I did. I got deployed, called back, deployed and the night after I got back, I went out, got liquored up and got arrested for drunk driving. That was not a good... not proud of it. It was pretty bad situation, but I was fortunate that the people involved, my lawyer, pulled out, used my military record, excellent record, and he said we just got a guy here that needs help and I got substance abuse through the city and had to go on probation.

I was having a hard time. I was bouncing from job to job and relationships weren't... I just wouldn't let anybody in. I just told myself, I came from a family or generation that you don't talk to people about your problems. You're not allowed to have mental issues, and so that's what I thought, and it went on for several years, just feeling lost — hopeless at times.

Just a few months ago, I was going on the highway and there was a terrible accident, a guy got killed and a big diesel RV rear ended the guy and — the median and then he was there, so I was 100 feet away watching this, and they brought a Medivac in, helicopter, and that night, I had flashbacks and nightmares. I was Medivacked out at one time. At that time, I'd been working with Veterans with PTSD and, and felt that I was recovering or recovered and I had about two, three weeks of that and I called a friend of mine that's a psychiatrist at the VA that I work with and he's always told me, everything, every time I see him, talking about other Veterans and he'd say, "But how are you?" and he said if I ever need to talk, to get a hold of him, so we talked and I understand all these things going through the classes, the training, and just picking it up while I'm doing it and I couldn't figure out why I couldn't stop it, and after talking to the VA doctor they kind of went away.

We had a tornado, that was 2008 in our area and I'd been out all weekend getting oxygen cylinders to people that were on concentrators because they had no electricity. I hurt my back again and two days later I was sitting at home kind of depressed cause it kind of hit me hard. I thought I was back on top and sheriff comes to the door with a foreclosure notice. I had to declare bankruptcy and I always thought people that declare bankruptcy — they're bums and scumbags and so on. And so I've got that mentality. So I'm just lower and lower and then my dog died all in 30 days and that's when I really really hit rock bottom, and I'd already been seeing the VA docs. And I just went in and we worked through it. I was depressed and I've always been, even with all the issues, I felt I was even keel. And then all of a sudden I just hit rock bottom.

Then when I went to the VA doc, I said, "I don't know how to be depressed." Which sounds kind of stupid. Who knows how to be depressed? I'd never had any experience with it, I'd probably been that way for a long time, but just didn't realize it. So, last five years or so, I'd been seeing the docs at the VA. We got the greatest doctors and social workers and psychologists around. I'd put them up against anybody cause they really care. They're there because they wanna be, cause let's face it, they could be making a lot more money in private practice, but they're there because they wanna be helping Veterans.

I have all these tools that I've gotten, I was given by the VA docs and now I can use them to help other Veterans and I can get these other Veterans to the doctors that they



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need to see. I'm in no way a counselor, I'm not doing therapy, I'm just a guy that's been through it and I can see it in their eyes when I talk to them and I'd tell them, "I was there a year ago and I'm doing good now, so don't give up, there's light at the end of the tunnel." There's people out there that want to help us. I beg you, get some help. Regardless what it is, talk to anybody, go to the VA, go a county Veterans Affairs rep, they can get you into the VA system or they can get you to somebody. There's no shame in asking for help. I learned that the hard way, and I don't want anybody else to go through what I did to learn it no matter how tough, no matter how strong you think you are. If it's there, go out and get some help.



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