

Managing bipolar and overcoming hopelessness

Craig: Hi, my name is Craig and I have three enlistments with the Army. My first enlistment was with the Army National Guard and then, I had a brief break in service and I moved to Ohio and there in 1990, I enlisted in the Army Reserve. Seven months, we were deployed. First, we mobilized to Fort Benjamin Harrison for about six weeks and then by November, we were in Saudi Arabia. We were at Log Base Charlie and as I was walking across the compound, I was fired upon by one of my fellow soldiers and the aftermath of getting justice for the situation was very tenuous and unfulfilling.

Coming home was a bag of mixed emotions. All the financial money that I thought was saved up was gone and spent including a \$6,000 tax refund and I had to go back to work at the prison as a Correction Officer three weeks after being home. I began to be withdrawn and isolate myself by working as much as I could to not be home because home was not what I had wanted it to be. My marriage was very estranged. I started having problems at work with lapse in judgement. I became a workaholic and not knowing during my period of being a labor organizer that I was catching those racing thoughts and using them in the useful way, but yet at the detriment to myself.

That hypermania episode turns into a rollercoaster downturn into depression and that depression felt like everything I touched turned to crap; that gave me a strong sense of worthlessness. It gave me a strong sense to feel that life was not worth living and that nobody cared and that's when I started getting mental help; that was in '96. I went to the out-patient clinic in Savannah, Georgia and they started me on Depakote and lithium regiment and slowly worked me up. I was able to continue working and fighting the depression. I found a therapist and he was able to give me one on one counseling and help me with the anxieties of rebuilding the relationships that I continued to damage. I ran out of my medication of Depakote and the lithium. I became very depressed and I self-medicated with marijuana. I took an overdose of REMERON. That was my first suicide attempt and my mindset back then was that, "Well, there's no hope. I was homeless at the time."

I went to the community. When I went out there to the Community Mental Health Center, they recognized that I had bipolar disorder and I was in a depressive state. Then, I was eligible for the Lodge which was a homeless shelter for mental health patients that were willing to be on medication and demonstrate their independent living skills. I then began to learn about cognitive behavior therapy. I learned what my medication side-effects were. I learned what my triggers for my depression were as well as my triggers for my PTSD in our group therapy sessions in addition to my individual counseling sessions that I got there. I was able to not only help myself, but help my peers. What let me know that depression was something that I could be was that there are things in life that I want to live for. I want to see my grandkids. I want to see them go to school and graduate.

To my brothers and sisters out there that are struggling with the racing thoughts, the loneliness, the isolation; there is help out there. Just keep on trying because no one has all the answers and you can only fail when you stop trying.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**