

The strength to improve even after setbacks

Barry: Barry, I served in the Army from 1987 to 1989. When I came back from the military, after 9/11 type sentiment. A lot of people still didn't like people in the military, from I guess the Vietnam era and stuff like that, so it wasn't really that popular. I had a lot of depression because I couldn't get a job. I had a lot of anxiety. I used to get panic attacks and I self-medicated with alcohol.

It really affected a lot of my relationships. I have a son, but my anger and drinking a lot, I really couldn't have very long lasting relationships with anybody, with a female or just friends in general. I'd get an overwhelming feeling that a panic attack and I just wanted to jump out of my body.

I had a girlfriend and she just got tired of me drinking all the time. Sometimes I'd leave and not come home for a few days. It was her home and so she pretty much kicked me out. My family didn't want me around because I drank too much and I'd do the same thing. I'd take off and not come back for a while. That's pretty much when I went out on the streets and basically I was going from friends' to friends' houses. Finally I just ran out of friends and just had a campsite where I'd go and camp for a while.

I had talked to an old friend that I worked with right when I came out of the service and he's an Army guy and he told me about the VA and that you could get help there. They really were very understanding, considerate and they really respected my feelings. I went through their alcohol program and their behavior health program, how to deal with different scenarios that might arise and be able to have a productive life.

I went back to college and got my degree. I was hanging around with all these intellectuals, so I had already gone almost three years without drinking and they were going out their toasts and different things, and I thought, "oh man, I've gone three years, I can handle that," so I started drinking again and not too long after that, I got another DWI, and it was my sixth. So, I went to prison.

We had a representative over there from the VA that came over and I didn't know about it until towards the end of my sentence and he came over, gave me a lot of encouragement, told me what kind of programs they got ready for me when I get out, and it was something to look forward to. So, I immediately when I got out, went to the VA and they got me in behavioral health again, the alcohol and drug counseling, mentorship for getting a job.

My son, when we were growing up, he couldn't trust me because I was an alcoholic. But after I got out of the prison and I cleaned up my act, and now we have a really good relationship and with my family, I have a really good relationship with them too.

There's plenty of people that are going through and have gone through the same thing that you're going through. If it wasn't for the VA, I'd probably still be on the streets right now.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**