

I was in denial

Jesse: My name is Jesse Rivera. I served with the Army '67 through '69. I was wounded twice. The first time I wasn't that bad, so they sent me back to the field. But the second time it was a little worse. They sent me to Japan and then back to the States. The transition was so fast. I mean, you go from being in the jungle and sleeping with your rifle and going out, and then all of a sudden, you're back at home and getting back to what is normal was pretty tough.

I found myself sitting in a dark room there trying to figure things out. The main thing I wanted to do was get back to work. They wouldn't give me my job back initially because of the wounds that I had. But the VA talked to them and they were able to give me another job.

It was a lot of strain on my marriage. I just didn't seem like I fit in anymore. I just didn't seem like I had the patience for a lot of things. I got a divorce not too long after that. I've had two marriages really. My kids and them, I probably didn't have the affection that I should have had, that I would have had before. Like the love was gone. That emotion I hadn't felt in a long time. It was real strained. It was pretty tough on them. I should have known better and I should have controlled it better, but I just couldn't.

When my second wife left me, that same year my mother died. There was so much depression there that hit me all at one time. I just wasn't able to work then. I didn't answer the phone. I was an engineer then. I finally went to a good friend of mine that used to work for the VA, and she told me, "You have PTSD." And I said, "I don't know what that is." And when she told me, I said, "There's no way." I said, "My dad and my uncle and my grandpa all went to war, and they took it like a man. How come I can't?"

That was the way I looked at it. I'm too much of a man for that to have affected me this way. So, I was in denial until finally I just didn't have anywhere else to go. She guided me towards the Veterans Administration and had me lined up for an examination with a psychiatrist. I let everything out and I just cried myself crazy. A lot from the hurt of my mom dying, my wife leaving, and having to reveal all this other stuff that I had kept in all these years.

We had groups where they tried to get us to talk about it, and when it would come to my turn I would say, "No, I don't have anything to say." Finally, after so many years, I was able to start contributing a little bit to the group. I started coming out of my shell.

If you don't talk to another Veteran that's been there and done that, you can look at other people's eyes and they don't know what you're talking about. So, you really need to talk to another Veteran and get around more Veterans and maybe just get together and let it out. Lets that pressure out. If I could have done that before while I was married, I think I'd still be married. But I couldn't convince myself that I had a problem. The VA knows. There's been a lot of improvement with the VA in dealing with these things. They're really trying.

My dad, I understand him now. He used to drink a lot, had a lot of anger. I didn't know why, and now I do. They are a whole lot more aware of it now because even the VA would say bring your family in, bring your kids in. Because if you have PTSD, your kids have some of it also because they're feeding off of what you're giving them really, your



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anger and all this. They need to come and sit with you so that we can explain to them why you're doing this and why you act this way.

The VA had an open policy. You could just take 'em into a counselor, and you could sit there with them. And I had good counselors. God's put good people in my path no matter where I've gone. I gotta thank God for that. I gotta thank the VA.

You can't get out of the war without having some kind of issues. They need to know that it's going to cause a problem down the road. They might be able to suppress it now, you know for a long time, but when it bubbles up again it's going to bring your world down. Please, go get some help. It's free. Just find the avenues, talk to other Veterans that have been there already. Find out how you get there. And most of the time it's just for the asking. Ask for the initial exam with a psychiatrist. That psychiatrist was a main thing also. Those are the people that can help you. Those are the only people that you can talk to and they'll know how to treat you. If you can catch it early, you're gonna save your family and friends from a lot of pain.



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