

A major surgery was a trigger for Rick

Rick: My name is Rick. I served in the United States Navy for 12 years from 1978 to 1990. I was on an ammunition resupply ship for Beirut in '82, '83 and in Grenada, 1983.

When I got out, I worked for a bank as a field examiner for off-lease vehicles and I moved down to Texas and I was working in the environmental, on the chemical and oil plants down in Texas, working in environmental cleaning. Then I worked my way up, becoming an equipment operator and a truck driver. And then I started becoming just a straight truck driver.

At first it was a little tough. I was used to doing 24-hour days. My wife couldn't understand why every Saturday night she would go to bed at 10 - 11:00 o'clock, and I'd come crawling into bed, like, 4, 5, 6:00 in the morning. It was tough readjusting, but I was able to survive it and did a lot of it on my own. All right, and then, as I said, everything that happened to me when I was in the service, I had suppressed.

A good 20-plus years, I had everything under control, not letting it bother me, not letting it come out to the surface. I literally put everything into a little imaginary box and stuck it in the corner and just let it be. And just hid it away. I didn't want to bother it. I didn't want to see that box anymore.

Something recently happened. I had a major surgery. He was supposed to be a small, little, easy surgery. They went and did a laparoscopic. They went, made two little slits, they stick the camera in, and they can't find what they were looking for. They found an infestation, an infection, in my intestines, in my colon. So, now instead of just doing a laparoscopic surgical procedure, they've got to go full-blown open surgery.

And while I was laying in ICU for 48 days, all the symptoms for mental health problems started popping up. The bad dreams, the nightmares. They all started coming in. And it was like, "I need help." I told my doctors, I said, "I need a referral to mental health. I need to see somebody from mental health." And me being in-patient at the hospital, they said, "Okay." So, they sent the psychologist down, and I explained to the doctor, I said, "This is my problems."

Luckily, I know that...what the symptoms were, what some of the problems are that can be seen. All right? Irritability, short fuse temper, things along those lines. It all came back. It was all coming in. And it was like, "I've got a problem, doc."

And the next thing I know, I've got a therapist coming to me while I was in the hospital once a week. Every, every Tuesday, she was coming in—no, every Monday. Every Monday, she was coming in to see me. And would sit down and we would discuss everything that was going on. And I would turn around and tell her, I said, "Yeah, I always tell my clients to take care of the man in the mirror first. Now I had to take care of the man in the mirror." That was me.

Going through the procedures and going through the process of healing, now I got to re-heal on the inside also, right, with my psychological conditions.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

I know I'm taking care of myself. And I'm taking care of my brothers and sisters. We stood on the line, some before me, some after me, some with me. But we got to take care of each other.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION