

A Veteran's mother encourages him to find help

Ralph: Hello, my name's Ralph and I'm originally from Hope, Arkansas and I joined the military straight out of high school. I didn't think I was ready for college, I wanted to get out of my hometown, I wanted to do something, you know, I wanted to grow up. I figured my choices were college or military and so military seemed like the right fit for me at the time. I was also getting married right after boot camp, which that brought its own challenges, you know, two teenage kids, you know, living that far from home and I had to go straight overseas while she moved into a place in Virginia that I hadn't even seen yet, and I was overseas for over five months on a med cruise.

When I was growing up, you know, I had some physical stuff that happened that, you know, could be called, you know, I survived some traumas and certain things, but I don't know of any single incident that caused me to be so anxiety-ridden, so depressed and not wanting to live, so while in the military my drinking increased, which was my way of coping, but at the time I knew it was a solution for me, or I thought it was, and at the time I did not realize that that was a problem.

I was in London, England at the time when I made the decision that I didn't want to continue in the military, but it was just, you know, scary and the unknown and I'd never worked a regular job and, you know, I didn't know how to look for a job, I didn't know how to build a resume, I didn't know any of these things. My wife, who had just set up house when we first got in, had to come and set up house when I was getting out and we decided to move to Dallas, Texas, and I processed out in New Orleans and wasn't informed that I could use, like, the VA. I felt like I didn't belong or fit in even though on the outside I'm able to exude this normal cool guy, people like my behavior but inside, you know, I'm dying like a fearful little kid that's trying to run and hide, so looking forward to a drink to relieve that pressure that for whatever reason was in my head that maybe or maybe not didn't exist from these outside forces that I felt threatened by, whether it be paying a bill or I've got to go to work on time and my drinking was a lot and it was blackout drinking. And my first wife who was my high school sweetheart, married right after boot camp, had saw the writing on the wall. She eventually decided to divorce me, and I didn't see it coming, and when that happened, I thought to myself, "What am I going to do without her? I'm going to drink myself to death."

Instead of going and actively seeking that type of help I turned to people I didn't really know, started running with, say, the wrong type of crowd which led to drug use, but what I registered with the drug use, which was methamphetamines, was "Wow, I don't drink on this," you know, and I actually thought that was an answer to drinking myself to death, not knowing I was really, really, really going to compound my problems. So, this led to my family, my mother mainly, finding out that I could use the VA for rehab.

You know, I started out at rehab with just alcohol, substance abuse rehab, but I've been allowed to participate in cognitive behavior therapy, I've been allowed to participate in PTSD outpatient groups, work compensation therapy and incentive therapy which, you know, they kind of give you a little job to kind of offset, give you a little money but also give you something to do, the VA's housed me after rehab, so it's been a blessing to get to understand more about therapy and groups. You get to be around other vets, that that sense of ease and comfort of just being together again as a group, even if it's in the waiting room, but for me it's that, "Wow, I get to be a part of something." And what I've learned in mental health circles period out there and the recovery movement period is



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that's what it's all about. I don't know where else I could get that and feel that kind of at home.

If you're eligible to use VA services then you have an opportunity to be a part of the guys again, or the girls, or the team, that's what it's about is we're in this together and you don't have to be in this alone.



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