

Healing old wounds to live well after retirement

Glenn: Hi, my name's Glenn. I was in the U.S. Army in 1967 and 1968, Republic of Vietnam. I was an Avionics guy. I took care of communication and navigation equipment on helicopters and I flew Door Gunner part time.

I'd only been in country about a month and a half and I got sent to Ban Wang for Cobra School, because we were getting Cobra's. A bunch of us decided to go into Saigon because we were going to be there overnight though we weren't supposed to go into Saigon, but we decided well we wanted to go anyway. Well we went into an unauthorized bar and there was four of us and we walked in and there was four Saigon cowboys in there. One of the guys came at me with a busted beer bottle and came at me and I ended up killing him with a knife and we were scared shitless. That one bothered me my entire life and I never told anybody, anybody ever, until I got to the VA.

When I got home from Vietnam, I kind of went... I was kind of off the deep end. Drank too much, I had pretty much a spotty employment record for 15 years. We decided to move out of LA and we moved to Idaho, and had kind of a rough year, first year here because we didn't know anybody. Then I went back to school, got my degree in electronics and the school hired me to teach. That was the start of my real stable employment. For the next 26 years I just taught.

I was so busy working that, you know, things stayed fairly stable. And then I got divorced and the drinking kicked back up again, and I was old enough to collect Social Security, so I said, "Well, I'll just retire." So, then Vietnam started kicking up even more. I'd never slept really great, but sleep started getting worse and my daughter had been trying to get me to go to the VA for about 12 years. She finally talked me into it, I came down here. They... got my ID card and they walked me over there and sent me through and started with physicals. I started seeing a counselor over there and she had me sign up for a class called trauma symptoms management, which is sort of an introductory class for about 12 weeks, and she said, "Well, there's a followup to that called cognitive processing therapy" and so I took that.

The Vietnam group with... I meet weekly. That's been a key part. I think the combination of being with a group of guys that have... even if they don't have an understanding of your exact issue, but they understand the general conditions.

My depression is I'd say completely under control. It hasn't reared its ugly head in a year and a half. I sleep better and now when I don't sleep, I can usually figure out why. Anybody who is a Vet should try the VA. You never know until you try and it was a life-saver to me. I honestly think the VA saved my life so, I think it made a huge difference in both what I do, how much joy I get out of life now, and it's getting better.



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