

Summoning the strength to work through challenges

Karem: My name is Karem and I am a United States Air Force Veteran. My first career field in 1998 to 2002 was Security Forces, after that I retrained to information management. Dealing with the information management portion, that is when I got deployed.

My mission, at that time, was dealing with communications, uploading classified pictures of wounded soldiers, and a lot of people who was on those pictures I knew. I was stationed at other bases as well, and the pictures were very graphic.

Before I went on a deployment, I was 145 pounds, came back 127 pounds. I was so stressed, I couldn't sleep. I was hearing noises in my home. I would be scared, I would check doors and locks. It was just so frustrating for me and as far as a lot of vivid images, so what I did, I started drinking.

Before I went to the desert, I would have a can or a drink here and there, but at that time, I became dependent on alcohol, even before I went to work. I would use that kind of cope, for me, kind of get some decent rest at night. Then I had a supervisor who encouraged me to seek some type of help. Even though he encouraged me, at that time, I still didn't do it. I had family members, and once my family members encouraged me, I sought some help. I wanted a better lifestyle for myself. I see how it was hurting my family members. I would go distant. I would pretty much isolate myself. If I had a female companion, I really wouldn't want to be around her, I'd probably want to be to myself.

One of the first programs I was in, they called it a Track program. It's a group therapy session, but that program, you must stay sober. They don't want anything to interfere with the treatment process. I went through some posttraumatic stress disorder courses, therapy, exposure therapy. I was provided medications, were to help calm my nerves a lot. What I thought at first, these medicines is not going to help, but it did help. It helped me to concentrate more on everyday life.

I still have problems from time to time, but now I know how to cope with them or just be able to accept it. That's the hard part. Accept that I do have an issue, but I can work through it. It's worth it. It's worth it big time. It's worth it in my opinion because I have been sober now as of August 2011. I am a little more focused then what I was before, because before, my attention span was very short. I couldn't even read just a simple magazine excerpt.

I do understand it is an everyday battle, but I kind of relate it as when I was in the desert. I didn't give up in that combat environment, so I am not going to give up on a PTSD treatment. So if you want a better lifestyle for yourself, it's a blessing, and Veterans do have help. So it can't hurt anything, it's only going to help you.



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