

Larry's challenges surfaced after retirement

Larry: I'm Larry. I was in the Army from September of 1965 to August of 1968. I served 1967-68 in Vietnam with the 101st. We travelled around a lot by helicopter and landed in a lot of hostile landing zones. I think there's a time after you get through that where you say, "I'm probably not going to make it out of here." You accept death and it's just the way it's going to be. You don't even think about it anymore.

Coming home from Vietnam was pretty difficult too. A week after I was out of the jungle, I got an early out to go back to school. I said something about, "I just got of the Army, just got back from Vietnam," and a young lady in the back of the room said, "Baby killer," and I was stunned. I just didn't expect that kind of treatment and after that, I just didn't talk about being in Vietnam. I just immersed myself in school, went to school in the daytime. I had nighttime jobs and just worked.

I moved from California to Idaho. I retired and I really started to have problems. I had nothing to do and I started to drink a lot. I had real trouble sleeping. I'd go from great periods of anger to sadness. I was on a cruise, a friend had invited me, he owns a travel agency, and invited me to go on a cruise, and I went with him and his wife. And I was talking to a man on the ship who was also a Vietnam Veteran and we got to exchanging stories a little bit and I told him some of the troubles I was having, and he said, "I think you have PTSD," and I didn't know what PTSD was. I'd never heard of it. And it wasn't too long after that that I really broke down. I couldn't stop crying for one thing. The slightest little thing would set me off or I remember being in a couple of bars, I don't think I got into a fight, got in near fights with the anger.

Somebody recommended that I go to the Vet center, and I got to the Vet center and there was an Army Veteran there as a counselor who had been to Vietnam. He understood Vietnam Veterans. He was a Veteran himself. He understood what we were going through. He diagnosed me with PTSD and, again, I didn't know what PTSD was. I mean, I didn't know what I had. I knew I wasn't doing too well, but I didn't know what I had. So, he went to the VA; they had a program there, a five-week program. He talked to them and suggested that I go through that program, and then he came to me and asked me if I would volunteer to go. I trusted him so much that I said I would, and it turned out to be a great program the VA put on. They brought in counselors for everything – to teach you yoga, to anger management, to breathing, helping you with your sleep. It was a great five-week program. It really helped me a lot. One of the things that's helped tremendously is they tried to talk me into going into a group, and I was very much against going into a group because I hadn't talked about Vietnam for 40 years, and I told them, "The last thing I want to do is go into a group with a bunch of guys I don't know and talk about Vietnam." Well, they finally talked me into it and that was, again, one of the best things that ever happened. These are guys that have experienced exactly the same things that I've experienced. They have the same problems. We talk about those problems. Sometimes it's just we talk about old cars and baseball, and sometimes we talk about specific battles and specific experiences in Vietnam.

Currently, my life is pretty good. I still have some of the same emotional problems, but overall my life is pretty good. I'm a mentor in a Veteran's court; these are Veterans that commit a felony, usually most of it is a DUI. They call me once a week. I take them to breakfast or lunch. I've got something to do again; I've got something to worry about



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besides myself. Don't give up. Keep fighting them. Keep going back to the VA. Get help. There's organizations that will help you. Even the VA will help you. Don't give up. Keep fighting and get help.



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