

## Living well after PTSD treatment

**John:** I'm John. I'm 64-years-old. I joined the United States Army in 1966 and went in the service in '67, January. The shock of being out in the bush or the jungle all the time was a real jolt to all of us.

While I was on leave, I fractured my skull and had spinal fluid draining out, so I left the service. I suppose one of the biggest challenges was dealing with civilians. When you're used to dealing with a brotherhood; that was a bond that you just couldn't create with civilians and the country was still torn radically by the war. So, it made us really cautious when we re-entered society. I'd get frustrated if something didn't go right, just the stupidest things. It created a sense of anguish and clenching of the teeth and not understanding, you know, why this is all taking place. I mean, normally you'd think it wouldn't bother you. And the nightmares, they started about six months after I got out and got progressively worse. I completed school and went to work, became an undercover operative and did some work for the government. I actively looked for that avenue where the adrenaline pump was continuous and I carried a weapon. My relationships with people were superficial at best. I saw myself on a road of deterioration and finally, I'd ruined, not just my marriage, but I had ruined some friendships, you know, with people that I liked all because of outbursts or rage, you know, temper.

And so, it was 1983 when I first drove to the Vet Center up in North Tampa; pulled in the parking lot, sat there for about 45 minutes and couldn't go in. So, about four months later, I went back because things were just, everything was coming apart and I went in and I talked to them; told them about my problems; told them about the drug problem; talked to them about the flashbacks. I was reluctant. It was difficult for me to talk about problems. I think there was an element of embarrassment and also the difficulty in exposing what I believed to be weaknesses and I continued to struggle. I was right back in the hole contemplating suicide, struggling with the nightmares. I went to a PTSD Program in 2001. It's a 90-day program. I was there for 105 days. I went through every conceivable type of, believe me, it's an excellent program. If you have too much time on your hands and you find yourself becoming irritated and angry because you don't understand what's going on in your brain, make a point to get help. Just start the process. Be willing to put your pride aside and say, "I need help. I'm not doing well." Just get out there and get the help you need and do something with your life.



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