

Support to get past dark days and enjoy life

Nick: My name is Nick, and I was in the US Army for six and a half years as an Infantryman. When I found out about my first deployment, I had just got to my unit. I was out of basic for about four weeks and was told in two months we will be going to Iraq. Five or six of the guys that I grew up in the Army with, essentially went through basic training with, we had deployed together. We were in the same unit, same platoon, same squad. So, we didn't have to leave each other's sides. We went through it together.

My first two weeks in Iraq I was blown up twice. My vehicle was directly hit with an IED. About three weeks after that I got hit with an EFP IED that killed my friend, Brandon, that had taken me under his wing and showed me how to essentially be a Soldier.

I met my wife, we met online when I got home from my first deployment, about two months before I was supposed to leave for my second deployment. She met me when I was still in my dark days, as I like to call them. I wasn't at the top of my game at work. I was slacking off. I was starting to not care. I was coming in late, blowing everything off, nobody's opinions mattered to me. I didn't know how to ask for help. I never wanted help. I'd drown everything in alcohol. I was drinking about three-fifths of vodka a day, every day for a year.

I attempted suicide twice. I was drinking and driving. I was putting my life on the line again. I mean, I lost it. And that's when my wife decided it was time for me to either get help or she was going to go. She kind of gave me that ultimatum and that was what drove me to get better. It was because I wanted to be a good father to my son and I wanted to be there, but at the same time I didn't. I just wanted the pain to go away.

She admitted me into a mental institution, which saved my life. They generally only keep you there for up to 72 hours. I was kept there for three weeks. So, I stayed in there, did what I had to do, worked through my issues, and started to realize that life gets easier the more that I let things off my chest. It was a night and day difference for me.

I participated in a virtual reality study with the Army where I essentially just relived my entire experience through sight, smell and sound. As the study went on, I was able to be in my car. I was able to drive myself again home. I was able to take my son to a park. I was able to spend time with my wife in public. Go to a movie. All the things that I, for some reason, I couldn't do before I had sought help.

Once I realized that I was able to do these things again, I started to feel happy. It was the first time that my wife said she ever saw a smile on my face in a long time. So, I continue to see a counselor on a bi-weekly basis. I'm happy with where my life's at. And I find joy in things now. I never, before I always looked at the downside of life. I kept telling myself that things would never get better. And now I tell myself that things are good.

I would recommend counseling to each and every Veteran that's getting out of the military. Most Veterans won't talk with people because they don't feel that anybody will understand what they've gone through, that nobody really will care because nobody understands. So, we turn to each other. And I always encourage them to go seek help



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in any way, shape or form. I mean, put down the booze, put down the drugs and go to a counselor.



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