

## I'm worth being happy

**Tony:** My name is Tony. I was in the Army from 1979-1990. I loved being in the Army, but I had a bad experience probably about two months into the Army. I had some military sexual trauma. I didn't even think about telling nobody. It wasn't even a thought at the time, or it wasn't even an option at the time. I was just trying to figure out how to deal with these feelings that I didn't understand that I was having. Started having a lot of nightmares and stuff like that, and I started drinking a lot and the drinking would help me with that. So, of course, after you start drinking a lot and drinking a lot, you start hanging around with different kind of people that's kind of like that's their lifestyle.

Leaving Fort McClellan and going to Germany, the drugs over there was like more than I'd ever experienced in the States, you know, heroin and hash, stuff like that I had never even, you know, cocaine, I had never even really knew much about it, acid and stuff like that, and I had just got really into a lot of stuff. You know, I couldn't stop. I was just using and I didn't want to use. Money started becoming a problem. I kept using, kept using. And finally, after three years, I was able to leave Germany and I had to go back to San Antonio where the military sexual trauma happened at. I ended up having to go back there for training. I started not to understand why I was taking these, you know, using drugs and I couldn't understand after a while why I couldn't stop using them.

I was in the service for ten years and I was a Sergeant, and one day they just they came to me and told me they should put me in jail, they should lock me up, but they said, "We're not going to do that because you're a good guy. You're a good soldier, man, and we don't know what happened to you," and what that did is allow me to get out but with an honorable discharge.

My wife, she had divorced me, and I got out and I went home to Michigan. And in 1992, I was able to kind of stop for a minute and I got a job as a fireman. I was doing very well, and I started back smoking crack and I ended up losing my job.

What happened was I was going to these self-help meetings and I would hear people talking about different things. I would hear people talking about helping each other and, you know, all these things that I wasn't doing and wasn't even thinking about and what happened is I realized that I needed help. And what started helping me more than anything is when I was able to open up in the groups because what happened, every time I shared about it, at the end of that meeting at least one man would come up to me and ask me for my phone number and then later we would talk about it. I realized that the problem with me all along was what was going on inside of me, how I felt about stuff, and I had to figure out a way to do something with this stuff. That's what I was trying to figure out all the time and I found out that I had to talk about it.

Today, you know, I got a little apartment, a car, and a decent job and, you know, and it's all because I decided to let people help me. And so what I do is I just continue to let people help me, you know what I mean, and use everything that I've been through to help other people. That does a big, big thing for me. Something that's really, really important for me is to be open about this and talk about this because there are so many men that, you know, just won't talk about it, want to but don't know how, and I knew how that felt. Try to talk to somebody and be honest about how you're feeling because it's like this is my life and I'm worth being happy. I'm worth having peace. I'm worth having joy.



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