

## Establishing a surprising connection

**Ian:** My name's Ian. I was in the Army from 2004 to 2010. During that I deployed to Iraq from 2008 through 2009. I got out of the military in 2010, and I've been a student Veteran since then.

When we found out we were going home, I was very nervous. The first weekend was when I started noticing things. I couldn't sleep. So, I just got used to catching a couple hours here and there and waking up in the middle of the night thinking you hear the mortar siren go off or get stuck in a dream. Driving was probably the biggest adjustment. I was driving, and even though you know you're safe, I was driving down the highway and there was suddenly a trash bag on the side of the road and I crossed four lanes of traffic, like just instantly. I could easily blow two grand in a weekend, just going out to the bar. I was so focused on the fact that I had just lived through this incredible experience and had come out physically unscathed, I just went wild. I was like, "Whatever. I lived through that, like I deserve this."

When I got out, I started going back to school, so I was a student. I ran into another guy who was about the same age and we just kind of looked at each other and I was like, "Army? Marine?" He was like, "I was in the Marines," and I was like, "What'd you do in the Marines?" He was like, "I was in the Infantry." I was like, "I was in the Infantry in the Army," and we were instantly good friends, and so I kind of started building that support network up. We were leaving class one day and he was like, "Hey, dude, by the way, you should probably check out student services for their, they have counseling, like I go to it from time to time."

So, I started with counseling on campus and that helped for a little bit and then it was just, I realized like that I needed to go to the VA. So, I set up an appointment with the VA and I thought it was actually going to take a really long time and it was pretty quick. So, I went in and the guy who I saw was a Vietnam Vet, who was A) really cool, like he was easy to talk to and I think the fact that there was another Vet sitting there talking to me, or even some of the other people that I had seen after seeing him who weren't Vets but, you know, their spouse was a Veteran or they had some sort of connection or they had just worked with so many Veterans that they understood and they could empathize and really focus on getting stuff out, taking stuff off your shoulders. You know, I would walk out and take a breath of fresh air and feel good, and it was like, "Okay. I didn't really want to talk about that, but I feel better."



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