

After treatment, he's no longer on edge

Ertell: My name is Ertell, Veteran that served in the Marine Corps, 1968 to '74 and spent a year in Vietnam. I felt so much pride in just being a part of United States Marine Corps, until the day when we were accidentally attacked by friendly fire because they thought we were North Vietnamese and that just was mind blowing for me. To me the United States could not make a mistake, you know, they were perfect. So, "How could they not know?" that's what kept going through my mind when I was seeing the guys falling from machine gun fire and rockets.

So, I really had to make a decision that day to disconnect; disconnect from, actually, any kind of relationship or loyalty. So, I disconnected and when I disconnected, I turned the switch off; that's what really saved me mentally, but it didn't do much good for relationships after that.

When I came back, I was just basically numb actually. It had an impact on all my relationships, all my family relationships. I couldn't even... I was wondering if I ever had grandchildren, could I love them because of the disconnect? And I would never sit down when I went into someone's house; I would just stand. I would never go to dinner or that kind of thing because I just didn't feel... If I wasn't in a controlled situation that I felt I had some level of control I would not engage.

I didn't really know that I needed help, as strange as that might sound. I mean, me being hypervigilant and that kind of thing, it was normal to me. So for years, 40 plus years, I didn't get involved until I saw... I was coming out of the doctor's office about two years ago and a friend of mine from high school called out to me and we talked for a minute and he told me that he was a Veteran of Afghanistan and so forth and that I should come and check out this Veteran's group.

Post-traumatic stress disorder kept coming up in various conversations with people, just in general, and I was thinking, "That's not an issue for me." But what turned the light on for me was the psychiatrist; this was about four years ago, the psychiatrist who was evaluating me said, "There's no way that you could have experienced what you've experienced and it not have some impact on you."

The most difficult piece for me after I talked with the psychiatrist was finding the right fit for help and when I got around other Veterans and we just talked, not specifically about our problems, we just talked. There was a different connection; a different understanding about what was happening. I've got somewhere that I can go and have a conversation; not just one that is filled with complaints but one that is going to be productive in terms of looking at the new realities I just have to deal with. Being able to talk helps me to manage a lot, because it's not built up. There's nothing that's built up, which helps me to manage my anger now; helps me to manage my hypervigilance at some level. I'm not as suspicious of people as I once was.

What I would say to all Veterans is to know that there is a way that you can get help. There are people who want to help you; not to look at it as a Veterans system but look at it as a community of people who want to help.



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