

Learning how to let go of fear

George: My name's George. I served in The United States Air Force. I served in Lackland Air Force Base, Gulfport Mississippi Naval Station and Randolph Air Force Base. I was in San Antonio for about three months when 9/11 happened. I was at Randolph Air Force Base doing my normal duties. We did construction while I was in the military and we were out on a job site; the first notification came through that a plane had actually hit the World Trade Center.

This was my first experience of ever having to deal with this type of scenario where we're getting attacked here on our own soil. I mean, actually it's probably the first experience for almost everybody. I went and hid away and one of my other buddies who actually was in the Army came by and asked me if I was doing alright and he could tell that I was a bit of a wreck at that point cause I didn't know what was about to happen and he looked at me and said, "Look man, I've been in combat before." He's like, "It's scary no matter what." He said, "So, we're going to be alright; we're all together so we'll all get through this together." I went back to the break room and tried to relax; then, of course, they told us, "We're going to war." and didn't know how to feel about that. All of the sudden the whole world changed in the matter of one hour.

When I got out, I actually got out on a medical separation and at the time that I was getting out I was going through a separation with my ex-wife, then I found out she was pregnant with our first child. I was scared because I didn't know what I was gonna do with myself. I wasn't finished with my college; I didn't have a job lined up. I'm going through a divorce and I'm also expecting my first child. How am I gonna be a father? How am I gonna support this child? I was scared and I was battling with other issues at the same time, alcoholism, something huge in the military that I wasn't able to get help with it because of the fear of getting in trouble for the problems that I was getting myself into.

Ten months after I had gotten out, I was involved in an auto accident. It involved alcohol and I lost everything that night. I lost my vehicle, a place to live, family cut me off and it was the moment that I had to realize what I needed to do in life, and I was confused. I started having really bad anxiety attacks, which was something that I'd been dealing with for some years. But I didn't know they were anxiety attacks so I decided to go to the VA. I asked them, "What do I need to do? How do I get rid of this?" They told me, "You need to talk to somebody." I started seeking help there and it actually helped me out a lot and to this day I still go on regular visits; go talk to my therapist so that they can see what's going on with me.

What I really like was there was options. It wasn't that you had to do this, no, it was, "We have group sessions; if you don't feel comfortable sitting in a group environment, we can do one-on-one. You know, we can make sure that the counselor that you're sitting with fits with you." It wasn't so much like it was in the military where it didn't matter how you felt about the process, you had to go through with it. It was more along the lines of, "This is what we can do for you; this is what we want to do for you. Will you accept that?"

I didn't want to be in a group because, again, I still had that fear of being judged and when they were able to match me with a counselor it was much better for me because I felt comfortable with that person. I was able to open up and tell them everything that



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was going on with me without having any fear of them judging me or telling me what I was doing wrong. Not once has my therapist ever told me, "You're wrong; what you're doing is completely wrong." What he's done is he's lifted me up. He's told me about his experiences; similar instances that he's gone through and what he's done to help himself.

They've given me a guide on how to live because a lot of times with anxiety and with the anger issues that I've had, it's stopped me from living because I shut myself off; I put a brick wall up and I no longer communicate with you or with the next person and that's a negative for me. So, they taught me just different techniques on what I need to do to make sure that I don't come across those types of situations and if I do, how to handle them and live a healthier life because of it.

The way it's helped out with my family life has been great because it's allowed me to open up; be more real with my family and explain to them what I'm going through and why I feel the way I do. I never actually saw combat and I feel guilty about that because I was enduring some of the most horrendous years that our country has seen and I feel like I wasn't a part of it. I wore the uniform, I received the pay, I received the benefits and I never saw the combat and I feel like I let everybody down. I feel like I let my family down because my uncles all were in Vietnam and it was a big guilt trip but then people started telling me, especially at the VA, the counselors told me, "You don't have control over what happened; this could be a good thing for you."

The VA's helped me with the relationship with my daughter; being able to be more open with her and explain to her what's going on and why I feel the way I do about certain things and it's built a pretty strong relationship with my daughter. I think you have to sit down and be real with yourself. We tend to worry too much about what everybody else is going to think; about how they're going to feel because we decided to get help.

Take care of yourself and seek the assistance that's available to you; it's out there. If you don't take advantage of it, it really only hinders you in the long run and your family. You have to think about if you're not in a good state of mind, how productive are you for your family? And I know everybody wants to be a great family person and you want to be able to provide and when you're not mentally stable, you can't be that provider. And even if you don't have family that you take care of, you have to take care of yourself. It's hard, it's real hard to sit down with somebody and tell them what you're going through because you're afraid of being judged. Let go of that fear and look for that help because there are people that want to help; it's just a matter of you asking for it.



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