

## **Veteran's Affairs**

### **Living a better life after therapy**

**Michael:** I'm Michael. I was a Gunner's Mate, 2<sup>nd</sup> class, on the USS Dahlgren. I served from 1984-1990 in the United States Navy. Did two Med cruises, both Libya, Line of death, all that stuff.

I was married within 4 months of getting out of the Navy. I was divorced, I was partying every night, sleeping with any woman I could find. I was in a one-bedroom efficiency apartment after coming from my house and I had no car and I just you know I was bouncing job to job. Then I had a few deaths in the family, experimented with cocaine a little bit. I would go through periods and then all of a sudden I would quit, and I'd be ok for a while. Then something happened you know, some little thing or some big thing whatever.

So, my issue was to avoid dealing with it, well lets just go get fucked up. If you get fucked up and you are having a good time you ain't got nothing to worry about. That went on for a good many years and then after several failed relationships and stuff I started thinking well, something is not right.

For a lot of years, I thought it was just me. But I hate this term, back in the day, but in my time we didn't go to the doctor. We had a Corpsman on ship, you had a Corpsman everywhere. Unless you know it was an arterial blood spray we didn't go to the doctor.

I had some issues with my son, and I was avoiding him and that's a big thing with PTSD. You avoid everything, maybe just returning a phone call. I mean it tells you, "oh no don't do this, don't do that," you know. You want to avoid it. If a bar or family gathering was too crowded I'd come up with reasons to get away from it.

One time I really started thinking I needed help to explain the situation. I was the type that I'd wake up at 12 o'clock am, walk around and check the windows with a pistol in my hand, you know, look out you know, patrol my back yard. I heard a noise outside, and I thought "oh someone is coming" you know, that hyper alertness you know. I'd grab my pistol, go down to the door and the door starts to open and I put my pistol right in the face of this lady. This lady turned out to be my mom. And that's a big eye opener. If I had been self-medicating with alcohol that night, who's to say I wouldn't have pulled, you know. That's when I talked to my Primary Care Physician, then he sent me to the VA downtown to talk to the therapist and stuff down there, and all of a sudden it's like a big blast of fresh air.

What I found really funny is that stuff I had forgotten, through talking about it, it pops in. Then you get a full complete picture and I guess their main point is to make it to where its not traumatic to talk about it. I could have done just once a week, I did it twice a week just because I got on that momentum and it was like, you know what, a lot of what you are saying is right.

Hey, if I can do I after being out 23 years, you can do it. My biggest thing was reconnecting with my son, and I built it up to where it was going to be a big old issue. As soon as he heard my voice it was like you know I had never left.

Going to the beach, I don't go, I live right here in Charleston, I didn't go to the beaches. I do now. Am I completely comfortable on a beach yet? No. But I do go, and I can sit



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there and watch my other kids play or whatever. You know, and I'm not, ok we have got to go.

It's opened up a whole bunch of possibilities for me. I don't care if you have 20 years in or 3 years in, or 4 years in, talk to somebody. Before you get out and you are out there on your own and you think you can do it, talk to somebody before you get out. There is hope.



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