

Connecting with fellow Veterans again

Tim: I was a Combat Medic in the United States Army. My last duty deployment was with the 4th Infantry Division out of Fort Hood under Operation Iraqi Freedom and that was to Kuwait and to Iraq. I needed to transfer my skills as I earned and learned out of the military, and I had a little bit of difficulty at first because we were the first thing that was back. After I was sent back after six months, there was no fanfare or parades. I was actually on an interview and my phone rang and it was one of my buddies and he had been killed in Iraq. He was hit by an RPG and he died and one of my best friends was a Medic that was on the scene and he worked on him 30 minutes after he was pronounced dead. He didn't want to give up. We had a great First Sergeant and we were trained very well, but it's one we couldn't save, and I was asked to fly to pick up his remains and I wound up giving his eulogy and that's when it hit me. Even though I'd saw combat and I patched and plugged them up as a medic while I was in theatre the best I could, that the war was real and not everybody makes it home. I looked down on the front row during the eulogy and I saw his widow and she was pregnant with a child that my buddy would never see.

As a Combat Medic, you're issued these two magical medical hands to go out and patch and plug up the best you can to make sure that when your warriors are wounded, that you keep them alive and safe until you can reach higher help. But what they didn't teach you is how to look for the hidden wounds. The wounds on the inside. Post traumatic stress. The symptoms that come with traumatic brain injury. We're not told to look for those and we're not trained to actually treat those. As I transitioned out and I looked at ten fingers, ten toes, I was OK. So, I thought. Five years, almost to the day later, as I transitioned out of the military, I knew I needed help. I was having trouble sleeping, I had reoccurring nightmares, I had severe survivors' guilt and I was depressed. I finally checked into the VA to seek out the services that were available to me, and I was immediately diagnosed with post traumatic stress, sleep apnea, after a sleep study, and some other issues and the VA was very good. They had some people that were there to, that were trained to help me on to that road to recovery. I met a Counselor who was able to take me each month, another step on my journey, which really helped out.

For me, I've always been probably the most energetic person in the room, and so when I came back from the latest deployment, my family knew that I had changed. I didn't suffer from anger issues, so I thought, and I was never abusive to my family, but I was abusive to myself. I put that turmoil inside. I wanted the rough stone feature outside so I could be that Rock of Gibraltar for the family, but inside, I was hurting. And my family finally took notice, and that's when I sought out the services, so I could get on that road to recovery as I spoke about, but my family still didn't know what post traumatic stress was and how it affected me and how I saw the world differently.

I can no longer drive down the road and see a car that was parked the other way and think that it was safe. The situational awareness that I was taught in the military spoke volumes to me and it screamed there's something wrong with this picture, and for a while I was like Frank Buckles, the last surviving World War I Veteran. I felt that I was the only one. Until I started connecting with other Veterans, and I heard their stories, I could breathe, and they were similar to mine, and they were like wow, yeah I went through this. And some of them had tried drugs, some of them tried alcohol, some of them had tried other things to make up for that in their lives, and it didn't work. Through counseling and meeting with other Veterans, I found a common bond, that camaraderie



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that esprit de corps that we're taught while we wear the uniform, that it's still available on the outside and that connecting with the Veterans means the world to me.



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