

## Overcoming stress and living well without alcohol

**Larry:** My name is Larry. I served in the Navy. I was a Hospital Corpsman for the first 12 and a half years, and after which I got commissioned and finished my career as a Medical Service Core Officer, and I spent some time in Vietnam during that period. I spent a total of almost 24 years in service from 1958 to 1982. Being in Vietnam, because there were hazards everywhere, there was no front line. It was hard to tell who the enemy was. It was impossible not to be having adrenaline flow through your body all the time because wherever you went you had to be on alert, because you never knew where you could be ambushed or when an attack would be coming.

I liked being junked up on my own adrenaline and for a long time after I came back from Vietnam I would seek out high-risks behaviors to engage in just for the thrill. My first marriage did not survive, partly because being in the service there's a lot of periods of separation, and people cope with stress in all different kinds of ways, and that put a lot of stress on that marriage. My drinking at that point took kind of an intensive turn and a incident involving that came to the attention of my commanding officer. It so happened he was an Admiral but he was also a Psychiatrist, and he understood exactly what I needed, and so he disciplined me, he fined me a significant amount of money to make the point how serious this was, and then he ordered me into therapy.

I went through an intense multimodal therapeutic process for substance abuse, for alcoholism in particular, and it took a while for it to take. I was initially resistant. A lot of my masculine identity was tied up in my drinking behavior, so I had to come to realize you could be a man and still abstain, but that process gave me a set of tools that I could use to manage a lot of stressors in my life that were alternatives to substances. Those tools helped me. It helped me cope with a lot of life situations and choices since. I'm grateful for the day that I joined the Navy and left Nebraska and went to the west coast. I'm grateful that the Navy saw to fit to make me into an Officer. I'm grateful for the benefits that the military have provided while I was in the service and after I left. I think that I owe that to the fact that that experience with that Admiral in the Navy who probably saved my life or extended it significantly. I'm just an extremely fortunate and grateful person.



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