

## The best thing that I could ever do for myself

**Kelly:** My name is Kelly. I was in the Air Force Reserve from 1983 until 2004. I worked in job control, plans and scheduling. I think everybody kind of needs a sense of belonging, so when you're new you want to be a part of the crew, a part of the group, so we would go to the enlisted club and drink and dance and have fun and listen to music, and it was really more of a social thing, so I'd probably say my first maybe five years or so was just kind of fun.

I decided that I wanted to progress in my career and I got a job as an E-7 and made for sergeant, and I remember having to change my friendships too because there were people that I now supervised and it wasn't appropriate for me to be drinking with them and partying with them. So I drank by myself, but it gets lonely at the top and I was reaching the top, I was reaching all my goals, but I was lonely and I drank more and more and more and I started to isolate myself. That's just kind of how it ended up. There was a time that came and I knew I was going to be found out, and I wasn't reaching my goals. Now I look back it was probably because of what I was doing. I put in my papers to retire, I had my party, the things that everybody has, and I left and I thought it'd be great and it was really empty. It was worse than ever. I didn't have a sense of purpose. I just really didn't know what to do. So of course my drinking increased. I started gaining weight, my health was not all that great, I wasn't sleeping. I'm pretty sure I was drinking a great big bottle of wine every day.

It was time for me to get my labs, but normally you can get the results on the internet, and it said "You need to see your doctor," so I thought, "Oh, I haven't seen him for a while, I'm just going to go," right? I didn't think anything of it. And he said "No, I'm very concerned about you and you need to start getting taking care of yourself. You're on the road to diabetes and you're at the point now that you need to start injecting yourself, so we're going to start really low," and he starts explaining insulin to me.

I couldn't believe it, I was really in a personal shock about it, and I was panicking and I got to my car and I started crying, I started bawling and I called my best friend, and my best friend told me, "Well, you know, Kelly, it's not anything new, you know you need to lose weight, you know you need to take care of yourself and you know that you drink every day. This is not new news, but now it's in your face what are you going to do about it?" and I said "I am hard up. I've got to do something today. Today's the day."

Someone told me about a Vet Center. I had no idea that you could go to a Vet Center. All you needed was your DD 214 and it was confidential. They had real counselors there, so I entered a day treatment program. That's where I learned all about addiction and that addiction is caused from pain. I learned how to acknowledge it and forgive and forgive myself, too. Now I'm in my fourth year of clean and sober, I'm happy again, I've got my health under control. By sharing my story, and I do now, it isn't just for me, it's for other people that can connect with the pain and realize that we all have challenges in our life and we deal with them differently and I dealt with them with alcohol. I learned how to be forgiving and move on and I'm still Kelly, but I'm a better Kelly. It was the best thing that I could ever do for myself.



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