

This Veteran found hope in therapy

Rick: My name is Rick. I was a United States Navy Fire Control Tech. I went in in 1989 and got out in 1995. At the time I enlisted I was 20-years-old. My father was becoming ill and I was looking for a place where I could go. There wasn't many options. I had turned down a scholarship for school so I joined the Navy instead.

It was an adventure. It was a very fun time. I met a lot of wonderful people. I saw many beautiful parts of the world. I served just a little over five years in my six year enlistment. I ended up getting injured and I took Disability and stepped out.

The fact that I had complex PTSD before I ever went into the military to begin with was something that had never been addressed. It was very hard because I had no significant evaluation as to what it was that was driving my behavior. The only real opportunities I had to kind of abate it was to drink it off and I drank a lot, as did most of my fellow shipmates.

As I got out of the Service, of course, I started finding barbiturates and opioids and that love affair for self-medication continued for a long time, actually, 23 years. Going from being in a very structured military environment to completely unstructured was one of the hardest transitions I had ever made in my life. I did not really make that transition successfully until about five years ago when I started to seek some help in dealing with my PTSD issues.

There was one-on-one therapy involved, there was CBT of course, and there was writing therapy. The cognitive behavioral aspect of it led me to understand my triggers. It led me to understand where I had gotten sidetracked and gave me a path through it through self-evaluation, through group discussion, where I could really bring it out into the open and deal with it for the first time in my entire life.

I see an outside therapist through the Community Program that the Veterans Administration has put together. That was just the beginning of the process but it opened the door enough that I could get a foot in. Many things have transpired since that time that have made me really functional now.

This morning we engaged some inner species communication based on an equine program developed by a gentleman who has become a friend of mine over the last five years. The experience of this morning was about using the pureness of my intention to ask that animal if it would do things for me: if it would move a foot to the side, if it would turn its head to me, if it would walk in a circle around me. That program taught me how to do that and that was really at the core of getting past the masks to who I was.

There is a fly fishing organization that of course associates Veterans in recovery with the act of fly fishing. I adopted that and it became part of who I am. Then I started aligning myself with other people who are Veterans who are also into fly fishing and we found that there was a great meditation in all of it. The act of tying flies is one thing but the act of being out amongst the nature, amongst the trees and in the flowing water. You're out there finessing this fish to rise to something that you're throwing at it. It's transformative and it's peace bringing.



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My entire life, up until about five years ago, was a series of very chaotic mistakes that somehow went right, but the end result of that was recovery. Recovery from the drug addiction, recovery from the alcohol problem, but most importantly the recovery from the complex trauma of my life.

Every day I reflect on how lucky I am. The most important thing that I think I can share beyond any of the other things that I've shared with you today is that it's not worth throwing any of it away. There are legitimate ways to heal from it and there are people out there who genuinely care and will listen and help you. It's really an awakening experience, so allow yourself to be awakened.



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