

Reconnecting with family

Drew: My therapist at the VA medical center was focused on giving me the tools to work, to make sure that I didn't get overwhelmed by all that stress again. My name is Drew. I was a 13 alpha field artillery officer. I was in the Army, and I served from 2009 to 2019. My dad was in the military, and he wasn't around a lot. He was only around when, like, report cards came out, basically, so I was raised mostly by my mother and my grandmother.

Tina: My name is Tina, and Drew is my son. Now, as Drew became a young man, it was very hard for him not to be around his dad.

Dennis: My first name is Dennis, and I am Drew's father. I was in the United States Army and served most of my time in Special Forces. I was gone a lot.

Tina: When Drew was getting ready to graduate high school, he did come to his father and I and voiced that he would like to enlist in the Army.

Dennis: Frankly, I almost had a heart attack.

Tina: He did not want to follow in his father's footsteps at all. He wanted to be better than his father.

Drew: I got my orders that said I was going to Afghanistan. So I'm flying over there with nothing but a knife, and then once I get off the airplane and the alarms go off and everybody starts like looking around like, "Oh, is this just a drill to see what's going to go on?" And so I started like yelling at people to put on their body armor and their helmets and stuff, and then somebody comes running and is like, "What are you guys doing the airfields are under attack?"

Dennis: I got a phone call, and I stepped outside the car.

Tina: And he said, "Dad, I don't have any weapons, and they're bombing us right now."

Dennis: And I probably turned white as a ghost.

Tina: So I remember feeling just concern and just scared to death, really.

Drew: We start hearing chatter about how there was a mass casualty event, and as we're kind of talking amongst ourselves, somebody runs up and they're like, "Hey, we need everybody on the landing zone right now. Bring every medical piece of equipment you have." We get there, and these two Blackhawks come in. We start just grabbing guys so we can start triaging them. Everything was so hectic that nobody really knew what was going on.

Tina: Andrew had lost a lot of buddies. A lot of buddies had been injured, severely injured.



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Drew: I didn't take time to process it because I felt like, as an officer, my job was to be the lighthouse for everybody else to like keep their eyes on and know where they were and what they were supposed to do. And so I just went straight back to work.

Drew: It wasn't until about a month after I'd gotten out in 2019 that it hit me.

Tina: I'm a marriage and family therapist, and so I studied PTSD quite intensively. I did know that the PTSD had control over him. He tried to blame it on his childhood, that his father wasn't there and things like that.

Dennis: He had seen a lot of things that he never expected to see in his life, and I knew that. I knew he needed help, but we didn't know how to approach him to get help for him.

Drew: I pushed everybody away. I pushed my wife at the time away. I stopped talking to my family, and I just retreated inside myself.

Tina: I believe that he hit rock bottom. He was very scared that maybe he could take his life. It was a really dark time for our family.

Drew: I had no family around anymore, and that's when I realized I needed help. So my first visit to the vet center, I went in there, the counselor there at the vet center talked to me for two hours and kind of got me to a place where he felt like I was safe to leave. Meeting with the psychologist, she listened to me talk for about two minutes, and she was just like, "Yeah, you've got all the symptoms, depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder."

So when I went to CBT, a lot of it was learning how to deal with the stress that was already in my life. That opened up all kinds of doors for me. And it's allowed me to be more open and honest with people, which I thought previously that the best thing for me to do was just keep things inside and not tell people because I didn't want to burden people with my problems, and I realized that that actually pushes people away. And that you, if you are open with people, how you feel, then people can learn to relate to you.

Until I had kind of reconnected with my parents, there was going to be this hole in me that I wasn't going to be able to fill, and I hadn't really talked to my parents in about three years. So I called them and just asked them if I could come down sometime and talk to them.

Dennis: Andy came to our house. I believe that he always felt that I hadn't been the father that he wanted me to be.

Drew: And I had originally wanted to go down there and just kind of unload on him. I was like so angry about things. And I wanted to say, like, "You did this. You did that."

Tina: He did come to our house. And he said that, "I don't want you to get too excited. I'm only going to be here for a few hours. I'm going to say what I need to say, and then I'm going to leave."



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And I said, "Okay." I didn't care what he said. It had been so long since I'd seen him. So he got out, off of his chest, what he had to say, and then it was my husband's turn.

Dennis: I said, I don't know what happened to me. I don't know what caused it, but I had been a real jerk in my life up to that minute, because I never thought I had been affected by anything. But I realized, at that moment, on that day, that my life had not been as what I thought it was.

Drew: And he apologized to me. And then when he apologized, like that was it. It all just kind of melted away from me, and it was like I had this huge burden come off my shoulders.

Drew: Rebuilding my relationship with him has kind of reinforced the idea that I'm not alone, and that, all things being equal, like there's somebody else out there who has walked in the same shoes as me.

Tina: After Andrew started seeking treatment, it was 180 degrees.

Dennis: His whole personality has changed since he began receiving help from the VA. He's just relaxed, open. You can communicate. Now, my life with him is everything I always wanted it to be. It's actually more therapeutic for me than it is for him because I get to just sit back and enjoy being with my son and listening to him tell me about some of the experiences of his life.

Drew: Getting help brought me together with a lot of people that I had pushed away and got me outside. Staying active is important because an active body leads to an active mind, and it gives you something to focus on besides the world around you.

Tina: I cannot tell you how proud I am of the man that he has become.

Dennis: I was just thrilled and proud of it. I couldn't ask for anything better.

Tina: He was my son again. He was loving. He was affectionate. He was caring, considerate, sympathetic. It was a blessing. It really was a blessing. I had my son back.

Drew: Don't give up. Keep fighting. If you fight hard enough, you'll find somebody out there that will take your hand and help guide you to where you need to be.

Tina: If there are Service members out there that need treatment, I know it's difficult to do, but you have to let go of the stigma and seek help, for yourself and also for your family.

Dennis: Nothing but good could come out of it. Nothing but good.

Drew: There's plenty of people who've been in your shoes that want to help you get to a better place.



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