

Sharing inspiration after reaching out for help

Gino: My name is Gino and I served in the United States Marine Corps from 1996 to 2004. I was

deployed with the 15th marine expeditionary unit pre-9/11. Then 911 happened-- my birthday by the way. And then I was sent to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom.

Immediately coming home, I felt relieved and I felt like--I felt like everything was okay and my wife immediately noticed .a change in my demeanor. My, uh, I was very distant with everything and I was very reserved. Before I left I was very outgoing and very you know emotional and you know kind of person wear my emotions on my sleeve. You know I always knew what kind of mood I was in and now I was very quiet. She couldn't tell if I was angry or sad or happy because it was just the same all the time you know

In Afghanistan, I didn't sleep for a long time. You know, we were constantly on alert and the violence you so you go into a mode of vigilance. That is just- that's, that's survival so that doesn't go away. When you leave, your mind is still you know you've had this this fear and it's been it's been set and now you have to do this to survive.

So it didn't go away. I started working and that's when--when I got back into a work environment-- is when I started to notice things were not right. I started to feel the effects of anxiety and I didn't know what anxiety was or what that meant. I just knew I wasn't feeling right and I--I felt like I was having a heart attack. I couldn't breathe and so I drove myself to the VA. Immediately they told me, you know you're fine. There's nothing. You're not having a heart attack and--and they said we think you're having a panic attack.

I was kind of desperate for something at that moment, so I volunteered to see, to seek mental health treatment so I was in and out of the VA. I wasn't sticking with the treatment though. I was kind of like going in for my appointment, being prescribed a medication and then kind of not really running that medication's course.

Then, at the end of it, I needed something different. This isn't working and so that happened for about four years until-- until rage started to come in the picture. And that's when I really started to kind of lose faith in myself and a lot of the shame and the guilt really started to kind of take over inside. Rage pushed me to the limit and where I was like I need to-- I need to seek other avenues about this, but I wound up back in the VA hospital again.

The best treatment I received or the most effective treatment was behavioral therapy with a psychologist. I had a year-long treatment plan with her where I came once a week and she taught me a lot about being present and doing things like breathing, controlling my breathing, and meditation and being in nature and just being aware of where you're at. It kind of, she kind of defined a lot of the things that the textbook things that were that were my triggers and my responses. You know when you're in service you have brothers and sisters that you depend on for your life and you develop really intense bonds almost like a family. Then you get out and you're



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alone. You don't have that family anymore and you don't have those people around you that went through what you went through.

So, this is where all that's neat. We need to be there for each other because that's how we survive to combat, that's how we survived being in service. We had each other's back over there for each other so the VA hospital is not only a good tool for medical advice but it's a good tool for getting that brotherhood.

It's a process and it's a journey, it's a journey of learning how to cope, learning how to face and learning how to overcome. All of the things that I've experienced with my treatment have given me knowledge to be able to do that. We're all the same. We've all served. We're all, we all should be proud of that. We should be proud, not to have PTSD, but proud that there're other people out there that have overcome it and show others that you can overcome this and that we're there to help you walk.



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