

A combat Veteran overcomes many challenges after an IED blast

Marcus: My name is Marcus. I'm in the Marine Corps, or was in the Marine Corps. And I served both in Iraq and Afghanistan. I joined the Marine Corps to do essentially one thing and that was to go fight. I joined at the age of 17, just out of high school. I went home and I told my mom that I wanted to join the Marine Corps, that I was going to become a Marine.

And so, within the Native American culture, I believe that or actually see that not a lot of them give the initial support of being in the military. And a lot of that might come from, you know, the pass down of historic events that Native Americans and the U.S. Government have had in the past.

So, to be a part of the Marine Corps in this day and age was definitely a big step for my family. I've done 3 deployments to Iraq. And so, that was 2006, 2007, 2008. I did reenlistment then and I went to a Marine unit in Camp Pendleton and did a deployment to Korea and Afghanistan.

On October 9th in 2010, I stepped on a 25-pound pressure plated IED. That resulted in the loss of my left leg above the knee. My life in every aspect had to be adapted. Now, I was no longer, you know, physically healthy. I was an amputee.

You know, there was a level of depression from when I initially got injured. And my thought process with depression was that it was because people just weren't strong enough to handle, you know, trauma. And then I went through a depression and I could not help what my body was doing. I went to the mental healthcare professionals and I said, "Hey, this is what my daily lifestyle is looking like right now. And I need you to sort of help me figure out what I need to do to get out of this."

For me, myself, it was difficult because I had never gone through therapy. I didn't know exactly what it was we were supposed to talk about. There was definitely a lot of denial about the level of stress that I was going through in dealing with a lot of the things that I had endured while being a Marine. I mean, it was almost like a full-time second job trying to go back and not necessarily undo what happened to myself, but to try to just put it in a different perspective that, you know I wasn't going to be able to change anything but I could live with it and have that progression of life.

It has been about seven years since I lost my leg in Afghanistan. And that transitional time, even seven years sounds like an ample amount of time, but seven years to me has been a series of moments in my transition. So, maintaining my marriage is definitely moments in my transition.

Being Native American, there's sort of this taboo mindset that Native Americans couldn't handle alcohol. There was a lot of people who would joke with me about it. Like, oh, he's Native American. He can't handle drinking. But I think there were a lot of things that I wasn't being taught how to deal with internally about my experiences in the Marine Corps and a lot of the deployments that I had done. Drinking sort of was just like an outlet for me that became too much of an outlet.

I met my wife in the first year as a Marine. When it came to drinking, you know she was like, "Hey, if we live together, if we start a family, there's a side of this that needs to stop



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or slow down a bit so you can pay attention to you know fulfilling the needs of being a dad, the needs of being a husband.”

So, there was a little bit of struggle there. But I went to the resources that were there and available and said that I had an issue. Those programs were put in place to try to catch people before they got to the point where they can't take back some of the mistakes that they would make.

As my lifestyle changed and I became more involved in my marriage, as I became more involved at being a dad, she wanted me to understand how to improve that as well. Marriage counseling was definitely a good thing. I don't push that on people like it's something they need to do, but it's a good resource. It's a good outlet.

The change I think is a steady progress for myself. I've gone back a number of times to just try to you know get tune ups or get some realignments. All the stuff that I was given before through mental health, through substance abuse programs, through marital counseling, it had meaning. It had purpose in my life. You actually go through you know some type of reconstruction that help you take your experiences, your workplace, your marriage, your relationship with your kids and the rest of your family and your friends, all of those experiences help you just become better at those things.



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