

Unsure at first then glad he saw a VA psychiatrist

Don: I've never been to a Psychiatrist, a Psychologist, and I was very worried about it. He put me at rest right away and he would bring things up that you'd never recognize, never realize that are happening. He'd say, "When you go to dinner with your wife, do you sit with your back to the wall?" "Yeah." "Do you know why you do that?" And then he'd explain it. He says, "When you go to a movie and you have to stand in line, do you always scan your perimeter?" "Yeah." And my wife would say "Oh my god, he doesn't stop looking."

Loud noises, never realized it cause I did loose my hearing in my right ear when I was in Vietnam, but now loud noises, claps or sudden bangs would startle me. Everybody gets startled, but I get startled and scared. I would actually shake. He'd bring those things out and he'd say, "Do you know why you reacted this way? Do you know how you reacted that way? Do you know why you sit with your back against the wall?" He says, "It's just self-preservation. In Vietnam you did that."

I remember sitting behind a sandbag wall and we got hit one night and I sat with my back to that thing because I knew what was coming, but I didn't know what was behind me. That was weird, but that's the first thing that came to my mind when he mentioned that.

He said, "In a fire you're looking all over the place, you're looking, you're observing. You want to survive." He says, "That survival instinct is what makes you react certain ways."

I didn't notice a lot of changes the first year, but my wife did. I slept better, but they also medicated me. I mean they gave me some medication to help with the depression and that PTSD reaction and that helped a lot too. That helped a lot. As I said, I wake up days depressed, but it goes away. I can deal with it. That's what he helped me do. To deal with it, to recognize it, look at it the way it really is. What is frightening you, what is making you angry?

I had two visits a week for over two years and every time on the way home, I felt, wow, this is amazing. I didn't know that every single time, I discovered something new about myself, about how I was living, how I was trying to cope with it and that shutting everybody else out wasn't helping anything.

I didn't have it nearly as bad as some guys had it, I mean my god, I feel guilty about that sometimes. Like, I should've suffered more, get that survivor syndrome, survivors' guilt. I didn't do enough, didn't work hard enough.

I wanted to go back a second, to extend, because I didn't think I was doing enough. I hear it from these young Vets today, they want to go back because they left their buddies there. They want to keep going. But I crashed landed in helicopters. We were attacked on LZs, and I came home without a scratch and my buddies didn't. A lot of guys didn't make it home and I was thinking a lot of these guys made it home alright but they're still in Vietnam and I didn't want to be them. I didn't want to be that person that didn't come home completely.



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So, I think since 9-11, especially since being treated by Dr. Kennedy, that an opportunity to heal a little bit and realize that whatever I did, good or bad, in the end was part of my life experience. And the good thing is that I did something for this country.

Don't suffer alone. You can't internalize this forever. If you do it will eat you from the inside out. You got to find that link with somebody or some group or something that'll make you let it go, that'll help you let it go. The VA is changed over the years since I came home from Vietnam. It's a much better place to go now. The treatment is there. You have to deal with it or it's going to take you, and your loved ones deserve better. So many of my friends have been divorced so many times. They can't keep relationships. They bottle it up. My wife was strong enough to yank it out of me.

The VA, their doing a good job, but there are other organizations out there. There are Veteran's groups. I joined the VFW because they were there, and they helped, and it worked out. I got involved, I do things, I'm hoping I help somebody else. Because if you ignore the problem, it will get worse. And I've seen too many friends drown in a bottle, taking drugs and they just disappear. You got to seek help. It is there and there's a lot of people that want to help Vets. It can turn your life around, cause it'll help you deal with the issues.



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