

Overcoming two decades of combat stress

David: My name is David. I was in the Army, helicopter pilot, in the Vietnam era. I came back from Vietnam and went to a flight school as an instructor. I was with a lot of Vietnam returnees, Vietnam Veterans. Being in a military environment was a much easier transition than some of the other guys had.

I was angry that the country was so against us. I was very proud of what I had done. We got back to Travis Air Force Base, and we were in a prison bus with screening on the windows, and I'm thinking, "What is this all about?" and we drove off the base into the main road highway and the protestors were lined up throwing things at the bus. In Vietnam, we were sheltered from that. We knew a little bit about what was going on, but didn't know to the extent. I was 21 years old and didn't understand why. It was tough, it was hard to deal with.

My wife, um, she was my age, she was young and did not want to hear about trauma, did not want to hear about the problems I was dealing with. No one was really talking about their problems. No one was talking about trauma, told a lot of war stories, that got better as the years went on, but nobody talked about their things they were dealing with, including me. I still have the anger, I still had the addictions.

I was a thrill junkie. I was just constantly looking for that adrenaline rush, that I experienced in uh, in Vietnam. It was tough cause I tried to live two lives, at home, trying to raise a family and go to church and have a social life. I was totally unsettled, totally angry and then would look forward to the other life, and getting back on the edge.

I had a lot of nightmares in the beginning, the first 20 years. Had a lot of trouble sleeping, was very uncomfortable, was very unsettled in my marriage. It ended, after 18 years, 17/18 years, just mostly because of me. I didn't realize that I needed help and neither did she.

It was probably 20, 25 years after, after Vietnam that the addiction was not slowing down as much as I kind of hoped it would. As I got older, and the kids got older, I knew that I was taking too many chances. I figured, for their sake, I need to be doing something else and get out of this environment otherwise, I might not be around as long as I would like to be. The VA was still an unknown out there. You knew what it was, you heard about it, but you didn't really know too much about it or what it did.

I got involved with the Vietnam Veteran's group in Raleigh, North Carolina and a couple of them had recommended I go see one of the therapists, VA person, and I went to see her. She was young. Was not a Veteran, and I'm figuring, this is not going to work, and I found out that she was full of insight and her specialty was also PTSD with combat Veterans, so she knew a whole lot more than ever I expected her to know, and that was a tremendous help. She really showed me about them, the current things that I was dealing with. She showed me how to work through them and analyze them in the proper sense.

We started a group of other people in aviation that were experiencing a lot of the same things and that was very helpful. Just listening to other guys with the same problems, with the same thoughts, with the same issues. I'm saying, "I'm not alone." There are



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other people that are thinking these same thoughts and have these same nightmares and night sweats and it's an illness, and it can be cured.

The care that I get, I'll say pretty outstanding. Relationships are better, my anxieties are less, my anger is less, a lot less. I'm able to deal with things a lot better. It has tremendously helped me, and if it helps me, I would like the people that are out there, to get help too. The VA now, it's out there to help us.



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