

Discovering how to belong again after deployment

Joe: My friends call me Joe. I was in the Army from 1966 to 1970. I was with the 101st Airborne, 82nd Airborne and I was in Vietnam for 69 and 70 with 198th Light Infantry. I had 47 jumps.

One of the things about being Native American is that they think you can track. They watch too God-damn many movies. They think you can track; you can see things that they can't see; you could hear better and they call you, "Chief." I told them right out, "Hey, I'm not a Chief." I said, "That's a leader." I'm one of the skins that follows. But they automatically think that you should be on point because you can see things that they can't see. I told them it was a bunch of baloney, but I'll walk point for you guys. So, I walked point for them.

When I got back, it wasn't like I belonged here anymore. You know, there was no, I couldn't feel. Like when I left, I felt like I was at home. I didn't have that home-feeling anymore. It was really different. There were a lot of fights. It took me a little while to realize that, "Hey, you know, you can't beat up everybody and you didn't always win anyway, so." But I kind of adjusted after a while. I didn't realize I was screwed up until after I quit drinking. Once I quit drinking, then I realized how screwed up I was and try to on over to the Vet Center.

I think I went there about ten years after that and it really helped because of all the guys sitting there were all veterans and they were all going through the same shit I was going through and when we get done there, I think we were there for two hours. We would get done and go sit in a coffee shop and have a piece of pie and a cup of coffee and talk some more. That really helped. After that, then I started trying to help some of my friends that are going through the same thing that I was going through.

The facilitator we had, his name was Dr. Boswell and what was neat about him was that he was in Nam too. So, he come back and went to school and got his degree then he worked with the vets and he would sit there and listen to us talk and if we got kind of off the main topic of oh, we were supposed to be doing that night. He'd say, "Cut the bullshit. Come on, let's back to where we were supposed to be." And it was kind of nice, you know, because the dealing with him, he knew where you were coming from. He would put you back on track and I think a lot of guys didn't realize they were screwed up because they're still using alcohol.

Working with skins is a hell of a lot harder than working with Caucasians because they have their own little world that they go into and you know, they look at everybody like, "Hey, you're not really here to help me." And it's kind of nice, now they've got a couple Service Officers that are skins and that helps. If you think that you need help, go out. They're not going to laugh at you because you're... What it was is you were afraid of people going laugh at you or make like a stigmatism like you were weak and you're really not weak.

A lot of shit happened to you that tears at you, leaves a scar on your soul and I always thought, you know, that to be able to stand there and talk with somebody, it helps you. It's like a release. It makes you feel a little bit better about yourself and you realize that you're aren't the only one feeling like that.



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