

Finding tools to manage bipolar and live well

Randy: My name is Randy and I served in the military during Vietnam. I was an electronics technician and going through part of the nuclear power program. I enjoyed the training. I enjoyed the comradery and it was a mission culture that you see on the black and white movies, but you got to experience it, some people couldn't handle it.

One of the mental conflicts was I was suicidal near the end of my term. I had, had to fight for, I had to stand up for what was supposed to be a part of my contract in nuclear power school and being in the military and that eventually led to me leaving and triggering things that have followed me all my life, mental conflicts.

When you leave home, whether it's military or not, and you come back home something has changed and in the military it can be a hell of a lot in peace time and even worse in war time. You have to have help, or you just get, you'll beat yourself up, and as a civilian I beat myself up to the point I wanted to kill myself again.

I got civilian help until I couldn't afford it anymore and then the VA system was doing some kind of registering. They're saying we have to know how many people we got out there, and I said, "Well damn, I can go to the VA." I thought you had to be you know, wounded or have your 20 years in. So, I signed up for it and it was the smartest thing I ever did.

Bipolar mental illness in hindsight with my life was a workaholic, type A personality, and a go to guy. Man, I got through college without any problem. I can handle those long days out at sea, but there came a point and I really don't know when it is, I can see it, the day in my mind, but I don't know what triggered it. I just get in the car and drive for days and not know where I was.

There are two sides to this, there is depressive and manic side. You have to find out what works the mania, you have to find out what works the depressive and how much of it. So it is such a trial and error. You have to find the right medicine that helps give your body the stability to handle life. If you can handle life then you get therapy.

I found the right team at the VA Hospital. They got my records and they know what they are dealing with and I know what I am dealing with. I know what works for me. I have the right medicine and I go to depression support groups and I do cognitive therapy. There is no easy first step.

I have not seen any, I have not heard anybody talk about it. You just going to have to jump in the pool no matter what the temperature of the water is. You have got to stay with the program.



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