

My life has gotten so much more livable

Patrick: My name is Patrick, and I was in the Army. I'm retired. I served almost 28 years. I moved up from Combat Medic to Nurse, and I learned to be a Surgeon. In 2006, I ended up in Afghanistan. We were rocketed a lot. I got attacked like every night. It messes with your head to be bombed and shelled every night. You don't get a lot of sleep, but then for the final six months, I was with the Special Forces team. The things that I saw literally, the casualties and the deaths. Sometimes, you're treating the enemy. I mean, we had Taliban blindfolded and handcuffed, but we treated their wounds just like we treated the guy who's right next to them, the Special Forces guy who he tried to kill. So that's kind of tough. That messes with you like, "Should I give this guy the same care?"

And so, I have that, as well as just the blood and the gore of everything. Sticking your hands in people, trying to save their lives, and hold them together and what not, but it doesn't affect you right then and there. You know, you're doing what you need to do. You're trained. You're making the mission happen. You're saving lives. It didn't really hit me until after the deployment, when I came home. If I hear the news, and I hear of another Soldier being killed, I sat in the dark, and I drank, and your brain has nothing else to do but remember it, and I was mad. I was angry. I was mad at the government, mad at the Army, mad at the world, yelling and crying and then I got the phone call, "I'm from the Department of the Army. I'm calling about your son." Fortunately, he was okay. He was shot in the leg, but it's still obviously, you can see how it affects me, I just realized that I just couldn't do it on my own. As a medical professional, older guy, I was in my 40s. It's not like I was gonna fix it. I couldn't. I need help.

I went to the VA, and I did some group therapy. It's funny, because I sat in the groups, and I'm like, "Wow, you guys had it so much harder in Vietnam," and they're like, "No, you guys had it so much harder now," and I'm like, "Well, I guess it's all your perspective, so." Yeah, it's good to have that support. People who have been through it. Everybody has their own experiences and their reactions. And so, it's good that the group was able to talk about different aspects of the trauma that they experienced, and how they cope with it. It was good. It was worth it. I wish I would have done it sooner. Why did I sit there in the dark drinking being angry, when there was somebody there that could help me?

I'm so much better now. I'm like a different person. My concentration is better, my temper is better, I don't have as many again flashbacks if you will, nightmares, my life has just gotten so much more livable. I'm so much happier than I was in that place; night and day. Go to the VA, talk to the mental health professionals, because they definitely will help you. You don't have to isolate yourself, because there are other people who are happy to help. You've earned it. You served, so go and get your care. Make new friends, and find a new life.



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