

## **I started to feel like I wasn't so alone**

**Stephen:** My name is Stephen. I am a U.S. Army veteran. I was a patriot missile system operator and system mechanic. I served in the first Gulf War and I returned a second time for another deployment.

One night I was actually sitting on our outpost and some enemy soldiers starting shooting at me. Basically, I dove into the ground and I called in for backup and we wound up capturing the guy.

I thought I was dealing with it fairly well for a while and I actually came home and I started having issues with my ex-wife. I was living extremely dangerously on the edge where I would hope I would die, like the way I drove or I would ride a motorcycle at 125 miles an hour. I would isolate, I would cry, I would sleep for days, I would be up for days. I became a Meth addict. I guess the reasoning behind it was that it made me engage with people, I could actually talk to people because I isolated. I went through divorce. That addiction issue got me arrested. I went to jail. Most of my traumatic event was at night, so I figured I could just stay up and protect myself, or keep watch, or whatever. I was here in the United States, but I felt like I was back at war.

I went in to the VA and I was quite suicidal. I finally realized that I had issues and I went and I told them I felt like I was going to hurt somebody or myself and they checked me in. As I got to meet other vets with PTSD I realized that we had similar faults, similar traits, we view the same things and I started to feel like I wasn't so alone. Eventually I found some really, really excellent people that helped me deep inside, help me with my nightmares, help me with my anger episodes, my depression, my anxiety.

The cognitive processing therapy for me, initially it was kind of a shock to my system. They try to give you a different perspective where you are not thinking everything in the world is a threat. I included myself in recreational therapy which included chair exercise, yoga. I currently am still playing in a music ensemble. Playing guitar really helps a lot.

When you start looking at you future instead of how you are going to die, or how this is all going to end, it is kind of a good thing. The people that I have met in these therapies, sometimes you share your deepest, darkest secrets, and when you are done those are my best friends. So the VA is like this seed and once you get that seed in your heart, it just starts sprouting.



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