

I wasn't alone in this process

Hal: My name is Hal. I served in the Marine Corps in Vietnam from February of 1966 until right after the end of Tet in March of '68. When I came back, I got stationed in Chicago and I was training Marine Corps reserves. All I did was work at the base and work at night and drink. That's all I did for the rest of my time in the Corps. But the last six months they were doing something called Project Transition. You could train in anything that you wanted to train in because the Marine Corps was paying you and it didn't cost the people who were training you. I decided that I was going to train as a stockbroker. This guy would have never hired me except for the fact that the Marine Corps was paying me. And so, I got licensed as a stockbroker.

And then I got out of the Corps and I told him, "It's been fun, but I'm leaving. I'm going to California to go to school." He said, "I don't get it." And I looked at him and I said, "You know what, Bob, I gotta go find out what all those fucking hippies are smiling about. Cause I haven't seen anything to smile about in the last 4 years."

Every winter starting in like September, I would start down into depression and I would bottom out about Christmas time. I would run away to San Francisco and live in a welfare hotel. And I ended up on the streets in 1985, moneyless, jobless, carless and I had some people with guns looking for me over a bad dope deal. And so, I thought, you know what, if I quit getting loaded probably something will change. So, I walked into my first Narcotics Anonymous meeting on April Fool's Day 1985. I stayed clean, but the depression didn't change.

I thought about going to the VA. And it was the wintertime and I was totally bottomed out. I was there for about 24 hours walking around and sitting in the waiting room, you know, just walking around. This little tiny gal caught on that I was there, and she came over to me and she said, "What's up?" I started doing a weekly combat Vets group with her and psychiatric interns. I did that for about three and a half years. The nature of my depression changed. Part of that was due to meds and part of that was due to the fact that I quit getting loaded.

I got a job in Florida. I put together a program for South Palm Beach County Mental Health. I ran this program for about two years and then I bottomed out in depression again. And I tried to kill myself.

So, I ended up in a psych unit out in the Everglades. They said, "You need to go to the PTSD program." They had a 90-day inpatient PTSD program at the VA in Miami. And so, I did this 90-day inpatient program. I've learned how to deal with my depression, and I've learned how to deal with my rage and my anger.

I've been involved at the VA since 1989. I still have a combat Vets group, a current time group that meets every two weeks. Getting involved in the VA put me back in touch with other combat Vets. That's a huge part of normalizing who I was and realizing that I wasn't alone in this process.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**