

Veteran strength to reach recovery

Vernal: My name is Vernal. I'm a former US Marine. My primary MOS was 5811. I was Military Police. It was back in 1983, I believe it was, the POLARIS missile site in Goose Creek Naval Weapons Station here in Charleston. We had trenches raids. I'd go out and I surveyed, and I'd see it and I'd say, wow, my God. These guys can't drive these big LTBs. Man, someone's going to get hurt. I'd go back and I report my findings. And he says, "Sergeant, I'm the officer here. You get them men out there and you train them."

These guys have never driven. Going up here, so I'm riding up and down the platoon. Well, I circle around to come back up. By this time, this guy runs into one of the hugest oak trees that they have over there. The Naval Weapons Station, they was known for big oak trees. The top bounces off. It hits the Private. It goes into his chest. He falls back in the vehicle. I immediately respond to the incident. I call it in as I'm getting there. I get in and this guy is lying here. He says, "Sergeant, you promised me you wouldn't let nothing happen to me." And then dies in my arm. But I wouldn't leave.

I guess I kind of just went into a different mindset. They kept trying to get me out of the vehicle. I wouldn't get out of the vehicle. I'd never had a Marine die. This is peace time. I'm not in the conflict. And for years I dealt with that. After I got out of the military, I dealt with that with booze, alcohol. Ultimately, end up going through a divorce. I was always agitated and irritable, but I didn't know what I was dealing with.

I started smoking marijuana, heavily drinking, and I would take any type of pain medication I could. I'm having these dreams. I'm not sleeping well at night, you know. In 2000, a good buddy of mine I ran into, he says, "Man, what's wrong with you?" He says, "Man, you're always here. Every time I see you, you're at the bar. Man, you're drinking." I'm like, man, I'd dealing with something. He says, "Well, you was in the Marine Corps." He said, "Why don't you go to the VA hospital?"

So, in 2000 I go to the VA hospital in Philadelphia. But I was not getting the counseling type things I want. Then there again, partially I have to take my fault of the blame, when I had appointments set up and what not I didn't want to go. And that's the way it is. So, what happens to a lot of us, we have a certain type of pride that's instilled in us from serving in the military and looking at our age and looking at where we come from, where we're at. And a lot of time the Veteran, like me, I have to take the ownership of that, did not want to get the help once even I started going.

Because you got to realize I'm still battling alcohol at that time. I'm still taking pills and smoking pot. I was very numb. I was very agitated. My name kind of ostracized me. My mom said, "We don't want nothing to do with you, son, until you get yourself some type of help."

Then I moved up to Downingtown with a brother of mine, and I started going to Coatesville. Second VA hospital. And there they have a mental health facility there. And that's when they really began to tailor my problems. What is it? What are you dreaming about? Why is it? How frequently does it happen?

And so, as they began to peel back the onion, so to speak, the layers, and show we how to deal with it, they said, "Yeah, well, you do have PTSD. That's what it is." I'm thinking



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from what we heard about PTSD, somebody that's been in combat, you know, guerilla warfare, and that's what PTSD is. So, I had never identified with that. I'm thinking, woah, that was something severe.

They said, "No, there's different types of stages and different types of PTSD, post-traumatic stress traumas that you can get. And based on what you're going through, you severe. This is what you have."

What they taught me was that after they come in and do an assessment, they record each incident and they play it back. And they start peeling back things that I didn't even remember. Remembering dates, remembering names. They do it through such a systematic process, it works. But the Veteran has to be willing to do his part. He's got to show up for his appointments or her appointments. And they've got to do what's being required of them. You don't see it right up front. There's so much gray mass going on. But as the rainbow begins to come out, you begin to see a change in your life. You begin to see how you feel comfortable around people, how you can begin to trust people again. You can take people for their word.

If anyone knows how to see something through from beginning to end it's a Veteran. You learn that process from the day you enter boot camp and the day you graduated from boot camp and went into your MOS. There's people out there that want to help you. There's excellent programs. Get the help that's needed. It's there for you. Get the help that you need that you may be able to give back to someone else.



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