

Treatment and support led David to a fuller life

David: I served in the Army. I started in 1966. I retired officially in '91. I was part of a recon team. I was with MACV-SOG, second tour and Special Operations Crew, and we used to cross the fence. We watched the trail, we monitored the trail, we set out mines, we wire-tapped, we did different things and were small teams; and one time I had been wounded but not Medevacked to the states, I was in the hospital in Vietnam, and my team went out and never came back. I still miss my team. I get lonely at different times and yeah, survivors' guilt. You know, I should have been there. If I had been there, it would have been different.

I did not socialize well at all with men or women when I came back. I couldn't joke around. Everything was too serious, you know. I could go to work and I could work, no problem. You give me a mission; I knew how to do it. I'd fill out the mission. As soon as I was out of that element, I didn't know what I was doing. I just couldn't do anything right; you know, I couldn't make up my mind what I wanted to eat. You know, and it was crazy. I couldn't make up my mind which way I wanted to go sometimes. You know, I'd get in the car, where was I going? I don't know. So, I got to where I was carrying a day planner. "I am going here." And then I'd go out to the car, where am I going? I don't know. I'd open up the day planner.

There are so many symptoms. The biggest one's that affected me where sleep, inability to sleep, drinking to blackout, arguing with anybody. I come from of a family, I have five sister's and a brother, well actually two brothers. And I told them all to stay away from me. I blamed them for my problems. Not being smart enough to realize I'm the problem.

When I went to the North Chicago VA, now their program was set for PTSD. They explained what it isn't and what it is. And what I found out is it's a disorder, it's not an insanity; it's a disorder and it is treatable. Well, first thing is, they medicated me, and they got my mood stabilized, and when it started to stabilize, I started to think and then I tried more things. I started going to church and I met a Priest who was a 1943 graduate at West Point who had been a Priest and then gone back in at 45 and gone to jump school to go to Vietnam. So, we talked, and I got a lot out of him because he was a Veteran, he was Airborne, too, so, we had a lot of good conversation.

Between AA and the counseling, I got and the instructions, education I got about PTSD, and the VA and the AA together make my program. I'm no hero but it improved my life. I have a significant other. I've had her for 11 years, and I'm happy in the truest sense of the definition. I never thought I could be happy. You know, if you told me back in my PTSD days that this could happen, I can't repeat what I would have told you.

I want other veterans who don't know what the VA can offer to know what the VA offers. There's nothing wrong and there's nothing weak about asking for help. And if they say that you need some psychological counseling, take it and cooperate with them. You know, if they say you need medicine, ask them about it. Take it. If you don't want to you don't have to, it's your choice. But I found out I needed it and I took it and at first I thought it meant that I was a coward or I was a weakling, and then I found out that no, it actually takes a strong person to ask for help.



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