

Moving beyond MST and substance use

Mike: My name's Mike. I was in the United States Army. I served from January of '74 to February of '76. I was stationed in a Redeye platoon. We had to go to Frankfurt and actually to Rhein-Main. The first night there, I went downtown and just wanted to absorb the atmosphere. I had drank a few beers, and I wasn't feeling any pain, and when I got back to the barracks where we were at, I was attacked by a platoon sergeant, assaulted both physically and sexually, and then threatened with my life if I was to say anything to anybody. From where that happened in the restroom, I had to walk into where everybody was staying into this dorm room, and you know I just told them that I had been physically assaulted. And so, they encouraged me to report it to my first sergeant, and I was scared man, and I just transferred out. So then, I went to a line company, and that's when things started escalating as far as substance abuse and alcohol abuse.

When I got out in '76, I was just so happy to be away from the military it wasn't funny, but from that point on, I mean I was just balls to the wall. I'd get loaded in any and every way that was possible. I had tried a number of times to get sober, and I did succeed at getting sober to a certain extent, but I always had something that I hid. I took that understanding and knowledge and put it in the same box, that compartment that held the other [INAUDIBLE] that I didn't want anybody else to know about.

About 1980 or so is when I first went into treatment at the VA. I went to substance abuse treatment three times. So I didn't have a whole lot of success. I headed south and hooked up with the with the VA again, went to the outpatient treatment and was referred to an inpatient treatment in Eugene, Oregon. I actually got assigned a counselor and for the CBT, and that was for depression, and when we're going through that, I had to open that box up. I was um moved to a a different counselor. She was an alcohol and drug counselor that was doing the sexual therapy. Fortunately, that counselor was able to help me out and get on the, you know, the idea of understanding the fact that the substance abuse is what I used during the majority of my life to mask what was really bugging me.

Probably, the biggest milestone was when I sat down with her and went over the whole incident and wrote that down and submitted it to the VA to get things straightened out. That was a pretty big thing for me. Although it took a long time, I found that professional therapist were what I wanted to talk to, because they could understand. I have a much better understanding of why things are happening now, and I think...no, I don't think. I know I've learned how to ask for help.

One of the best things I ever heard from the VA was a drug counselor in Eugene say, "When you got a problem, you can't go around it. You can't pretend it doesn't exist and make a detour. You have to go right back through that problem and understand why it's a problem and also learn and find out what you can do to deal with that problem."



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**