

## I couldn't get the images out of my head

**Xavier:** My name is Xavier, United States Marine Corp. I served in '82 to '86, '88 to '91 during the Gulf War, and 2000 to 2006 OEF/OIF. As far as my father was concerned, he was an alcoholic. He used to fight with my mom all the time and, when I left, I got out of high school early to just get away from that, so I tried to join the Marine Corp. and I was accepted. And when I went in, I went in with no idea of what I was going to get into. And boy, that rocked my world and being yelled at and trying to do what you're being taught to do and breaking you down from being an individual to becoming one mind as a unit because I didn't realize what they're trying to prepare you for and what ideally your job is as a Marine is to kill.

I did get in trouble the first time for, you know, smoking marijuana, but fortunately I had the opportunity to take this Amnesty Program that the colonel in my unit had offered to people that saying, hey, before we catch you and you ruin your career, you know, you've got this one out and we'll let it go. So, I took it. I'd say it was probably about 1994 when I had already escalated my drug use to hard illicit drugs where, I was addicted badly and I was getting to my bottom. I started using heroin because by that time, I got back from the Gulf and, I just couldn't get the images out of my head. I was isolated away from my family, my friends. My work history wasn't really good. I was in and out of jobs, getting fired. Blaming everybody else but myself and looking at what I was doing. You know, I was wandering aimlessly and looking back on it, hindsight 20/20, I was really trying to kill myself. I wanted to overdose. I hit rock bottom probably, I'd say about 1997. I was out of the military completely and so I went to a civilian entity that helped me out directly thereafter because I really wanted the help. Augmenting and supplementing that with outpatient therapy through the VA, I was able to overcome that demon.

I would see a therapist once a week. I would talk about my issues. I realized that unless I shed light on it, it's always going to be this evil monster. And I took the ID and the concept that's like, okay look, I faced my enemy with my fear. I overcame my enemy, did my job. Now my enemy is myself and I face my fear and I've shed light on it and I'm conquering it. I have to deal with that as best I can by going to the VA, going to the VFW, going to groups, getting my therapy every week, you know, every month, whatever the maintenance is until I overcome it. And I love it because these people have become my family. They become not only my friends, they're my family. You know, they're a vested interest in keeping me alive and beating this disease.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE**  
**CONNECTION**