

Healing and Giving Back

Rick: My name's Rick. Served in the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne, Vietnam 1968-69. It was really hard for me to transition into regular life again. I had no clue what was going on in my life, didn't know my feelings, my reactions. I camouflaged all the pain and suffering and so I turned to other stuff to get rid of those feelings. I started getting into drugs and isolating myself. Wouldn't want to talk to family, wouldn't want to talk to anybody. Then when I had my breakdown, that's when I finally knew I had something wrong with me. My kids called me and said, "Dad, there's always something wrong with you, you're always hyper, you always look out the window, you always duck down when you hear a backfire or something, loud noises. You have a bad temper, you always screaming, yelling." They kinda opened my eyes up and I knew then I needed help.

Being with a lot of Veterans and having this group therapy, it helped me a lot because I know I wasn't alone. We all were dealing with these mental issues. It brought a lot of positive stuff in my life. My Counselor told me to take up a sax because I played clarinet when I was in junior high school and I've always wanted to play a sax in my life, and that was the best thing that happened to me. I play the saxophone now and whenever I need to get away, I just get on my horn and man, that's healing through my whole body. I even play it for the Veterans sometimes at the VFW halls. It's a good feeling to really share something that you really enjoy in life.

It's a Navy and Marine town here in San Diego and they don't have anything for the Army personnel, so I started a Wounded Warrior Program to encourage the Army guys that we're there for them. And so, we'd throw barbecues for them and we'd have businesses donate gifts for 'em. We're there constantly doing this for their mental health, to help 'em in their situations. I think giving back is one of the parts where it helps you heal.

I'm just an all-around different person now since I got the help. I have to say, my kids, they really know this difference about pops. They call me "Pops." And so, they're really proud of me. And it makes me proud to know that, hey, that I've changed a lot and they can see it. Man, that's the best thing is having that love of your family, there's nothing better than that. I've learned to live with myself and be in peace with myself and to enjoy life now. You've got to step out of that little negative attitude and think positive and just go for it, because life is too short.



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