

Helping others was tough until Bill found support

Bill: My name is Bill. I was in the United States Navy from March 1973 to August 1977. I served as a Medic aboard the USS Meyerkord as a Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class and we were off the coast of Vietnam. One of the rescues was a ship that was going down and there were several injuries on the ship and I had to deal with that.

I have still, at times, if I see a really, really bloody, gory movie, usually within the next two days, I will wake up at least once in the middle of the night, just a cold sweat and to this day, I do not watch Vietnam era movies.

When I left the Service, I ended leaving through San Francisco and any time any Military people were in the airport there, they were not dealt with nicely and they threw stuff at us and spit at us when we left. And here we are in our dress uniforms and they're doing that. That was hard to deal with. Probably even worse, I went back to school, the same college I left in Western Michigan. And I came back and for some reason, I was evil and I just... I quit school. That was my solution.

It was pretty traumatic to lose all your friends while in the service and I mean, they just stopped. You were gone. The other issue was for probably the first two years after I got out of the service, I found work, working in a hospital in an emergency room and every time we had a nasty accident, I was working there and the next day, I wasn't sleeping. I just didn't want to talk to anybody about it. I drove truck and once I met my wife, I decided that maybe I should go back to school. I went to another college and they had a block time program to get VA benefits. They had somebody on staff actually assigned to work people through that. So, it made a big difference.

I actually got my BA and my master's paid through the GI Bill and that was a good thing. The college I was at, they had a transition group for older adults. It was really designed for anybody that was older and they had a six-week program, met weekly as a group and then went to individual counselors. But the one-on-one that really helped, because they set it up that way I was able to get out a lot of the garbage, especially the frustration of dealing with people after coming back from Vietnam. It wasn't the Vietnam experience that hurt the most, it was the coming back into the world so to speak and everybody shunning you. That hurt a lot more.

And I could honestly say, I was doing some volunteer work, and this is 30 years after I left the service and somebody finally said, "Thank you for your service." 30 years after I got out. I mean, I got tremendous satisfaction out of helping others with disaster response services and anybody can do that. And having gone through training in the Military, I would be part of a team. It really blends itself well to getting involved. And so, you're taking the focus off your problem and helping somebody else. That's a tremendous boost right there for yourself. It's often said that it's not the people you're volunteering to help that get the most good, it's you.



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