Healing after the loss of a loved one

Interviewee1: I lost a really good friend out there; he was a Medic as well.

Interviewee2: My wife died seven and a half years ago after 50 years.

Interviewee3: Then I was like, "Mom, where's dad?" and she was like, "Uh" and she pulled me to the side right after my graduation, and she's like "Your dad has cancer." And so I was kind of dealing with that all the way up until my deployment and I would say two months before I went, he passed away. It was something that, I kinda had to put to the side for a minute and deal with on my own, but it got to be too much, too much and I ended up just breaking down when I went to Iraq.

Interviewee4: Probably one of the most significant was one of my really good friends was, they were out patrolling, and they hit a large IED and two of them were killed and they were both in the same Humvee. I listened to the whole thing like unfolding on the radio. Just listening to that whole thing unfold and feeling so incredibly helpless.

Interviewee5: I had a lot of anger in my life, and I didn't know how much my brother's death had affected me until years later.

Interviewee6: It was really hard for me. I blamed myself for a long time.

Interviewee7: At first, it was… you get back, you take your leave, no problems. Everything's great, you're just happy to be home. But then you get back and probably over the next two to three months, I just noticed that I had a lot of anger issues.

Interviewee8: I couldn't drive anywhere, I couldn't be around people. I didn't trust anybody. And I became an alcoholic. I drank constantly.

Interviewee5: I just went in shock when I was talking about my brother's death and found out later that it was a combination, a real toxic combination of grief and survivor's guilt.

Interviewee1: Trouble sleeping is… I'd sleep maybe four hours a day and it's just, you get used to seeing blood. You get used to seeing death but it just, losing somebody that's close to you is just too hard to get through.

Interviewee6: All I could do is think about "What if?" The questions everybody asks themselves, "What if I would've went out instead of him?"

Interviewee8: I think maybe seeing someone lose everything makes you feel like you've lost everything, too.

Interviewee7: And finally… so I decided, "Maybe I need to go to mental health and maybe I can figure out what's going on." Because I didn't really understand why I was so angry. And then I went to mental health, just talked with a Counselor, and sort of… I'd tell her my story and I'd just started bawling.

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Interviewee4: It was really tough to admit that there was things wrong, but once I finally went in, it definitely started getting me down that road of just being able to cope with life better.

Interviewee6: I got the help for my alcohol addiction and I got the mental health that I needed and they really helped me out as far as my sleep issues, how I felt about losing my friend, and the things that I didn't deal with then.

Interviewee2: I'd go to counseling once a month and when I get down there, I let all the stress out, everything that's happening.

Interviewee3: There's like a 150,000 pounds lifted off your shoulders and it's an amazing feeling. You feel lighter, you feel like "Okay, I can breathe again, I don't feel like I'm on a respirator. I can live my life. I can stop being so anxious."

Interviewee6: I'm able to get a good night's sleep now. When I do go into a place and I feel those feelings like I'm going back a little bit, I know what's coming on, I know how to relax myself and just step away from the situation.

Interviewee7: It's not anybody else's life that it's affecting, it's your life that it's affecting. So, just get out there and do it.

Interviewee5: Don't get cynical, keep your sense of wonder, join group activities, don't isolate.

Interviewee8: I got help and I'm better and I feel like a totally different person now that I got help, and I encourage every Vet that feels the same way to get help.

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