

Dealing with physical and emotional wounds

Bryan: My name is Bryan. I served in the Army for three years. I was deployed to Iraq in 2004. I joined when I was 18. I didn't know I was gonna be deployed because the unit I joined, I got to choose where I wanted to go. So, I went to Germany because I wanted to see Europe and stuff and then, you know, the Iraq War started. I wasn't ready for it. I mean the first five days that we were there, I had one of my friends get killed and it was just like, you know, reality sunk in extremely fast that this was a very, very dangerous place and we are gonna be there for a long time and you know, I made it. Miraculously, I made it through it, but I got hit in my leg. I had one bullet went in the back of my leg by my calf. They determined that I was able to return to duty because it didn't hit my bones and it wasn't serious enough. So, they actually kept me in Iraq.

When I got back home, it was, you know, things were awesome for a couple of months. You know, everyone wants to buy you drinks. Everyone wants to take you out. You're like a little like celebrity almost. They're so glad you're home. You're their hero. The family, everyone loves you. So, you ride this wave of like emotions for a few months and then, you know, after a little while, it starts to go away. And then, you're just kind of left like, okay, what am I gonna do with my life now? And I just, I really had no clue. I felt like I had lived an entire lifetime, you know, in that year and in those three years that I was in the military that I really just didn't want to do anything else. I just felt just mentally exhausted.

I was never really satisfied with like what I was doing. I always had to be like moving. You know, I could never just sit still because when I would just sit there alone, like I would think about all the stuff that happened. It was just anger and just frustration, you know, because people, you know, I couldn't really tell them what had happened. I couldn't really tell them exactly how it was because they would just never understand it. I started to have a lot of trouble sleeping. Some nights I had you know horrific nightmares; ones that were so graphic. They were so realistic that I thought that I was really there.

I started to isolate myself because all of my anger issues and just, you know, it was hard for me to really relate to people, so I would say things that were offensive to them or you know, I would just get angry and just like verbally break them down and people just stopped, they just didn't want to hang out with me anymore. I was angry. I was just so negative. There were some points where like I just didn't know if I even wanted to really live anymore. It was just, you know, if this is how it's gonna be, then what the hell is the point? You know, like why did I even survive?

I was in the VA Hospital one day and I was just having a bad day, you know. I was in the hospital. I was trying to make an appointment for my leg and I just flipped. You know, I started flipping out on her and I went on this rant about everything and she just kind of waited for me to finish and, you know, when I was done. She was like, well, I'm looking at your paperwork here and you know, you were in the Infantry in Iraq. You know, you're a Purple Heart Veteran. She's like, you know, I think you might have some residual issues. And I was like, yeah, you know, my leg hurts that's why I'm here. And she's like, I don't mean physical. And, you know, she had started to show me stuff like about PTSD. She started to show me like the informational packets and she started to tell me about it. So, having that actual like diagnosis and that direction to move in was, I think, that's what really saved me, you know, to this day. I saw a psychiatrist. I was



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

prescribed a sleeping medications to help, you know, even out my sleep and just every time I went, you know, I would get advice and I would get different ways and things to do to deal with how I felt at that time and, you know, in those moments. So, I would go home and I would pretty much focus everything on that, what I learned, you know, in those sessions and what I was advised to do. It gave me a better set of tools to really be able to deal with life and, you know, it gave me my confidence back. I was thinking, like more positively. I was thinking about what I could do; you know, setting goals for myself. There comes a point where you can't do it on your own anymore. To go and get help and to realistically analyze yourself and like face that within yourself is more of a strength than it is a weakness.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION