

Coping with pain and overcoming depression

Shaunne: I was a specialist in the Army, and I served in Korea and Fort Bragg. Before I got out, they kept telling me, you need to go to the VA, you need to do this, you need to do that. And I'm thinking, okay. But I did what I was told, and I went to my local County Service Officer. I was just following directions and then I get this notice back telling me that I'm 50% disabled and I'm thinking, I don't feel disabled. But, then I read through it and I realized kind of more what the VA was saying, whether I can do anything, whether I was disabled, but things happen while you're on active duty. You're not quite 100% anymore. It was multiple joint issues, asthma, and my back.

I could only sleep for a short amount of time simply because just laying made me ache, and I'd go through spells where it hurt to sit, it hurt to lay, it hurt to stand and so I just kind of alternate. Basically because I had the issues with the multiple joint issues and that was causing constant pain, it led to depression. You really feel like you just, the only word I can think of is worthless. You can't do anything right, nothing in your life is working right. Everybody keeps saying, "oh just snap out of it." But it's not just snap out of it because you don't see that light at the end of the tunnel. It seems like this is where you are. This is where you're stuck forever.

I was trying to continue to move on of course, because I had my son and I was a single parent, but many days I just wished I could stay in bed for the entire day and just block out the rest of the world. I realized something wasn't right. There wasn't just any snap out of it. I wanted to have a normal life. I wanted to be able to feel and understand why I feel the way I feel.

Believe it or not, it was a long time before I actually went to the VA simply because of my son. I knew that what I was feeling wasn't right so, I almost felt like I was going crazy, and I was afraid that they would take my son for admitting to some issue. So, it was a long time before I went but then after I started going I realized, okay, that's why things were happening as they were, that's why I felt the way I did about things. It made it a lot easier because then once I could recognize what was making me feel that way, then I can talk myself down off the ledge to where, when I started having those feelings I can reach back into reality and say, okay, no this is what's really going on.

It's made life easier. I guess the biggest of it was trying to find out the cause. Boiling it down to, I hadn't been in war, they went through all those other things, but it was just the change in my life having to deal with my physical issues and not being able to do as much as I did while I was on active duty. I felt like I was kind of half of a person. You didn't feel like you really measured up. It wears on your mind of what you can do and then if you're married you wonder how much of a burden you're being on the other person.

I talk to Veterans every day. I help them apply for the disability benefits through the VA. I hear about a lot of them who have terrible issues. They might have served during peace time, but that doesn't stop the pain that they're in every day. That doesn't stop the fact that they can't pick up their child. It's not just those wartime Veterans. It's not just those that have seen combat because, like I said, myself, I've never seen a day of combat but I still have issues. You want to tell people that even though you're having this issue, even if things come up, you can get past it. There's, you're not by yourself. Like I said, I always feel like that man out on the island and that's just not so. There are



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so many different people who are going through the exact same thing. You learn how to live life. Because before was, I would sit in the house because I was afraid to do anything, but now life is good.



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