

Having that clinic feels like family

Sonny: Sonny, United States Coast Guard from 1977 to 1998. Coming out of high school going straight to the Coast Guard, I really didn't get a sense of what civilian life was like, all my whole entire life for 21 years was the Coast Guard, so the transition with names, culture, even today, at 52 years old I still look at my general manager as the Commanding Officer. You always have to do this, how do you put the pieces of the puzzle together, how do you take your military life and transition to civilian life and it's about a matter of I don't work at a large resort, I work at a large base. I don't have guests that work at my resort, I have a lot of Captains and Admirals that come and go every day.

I retired in '98, I lost my leg in 2001. I was already in the VA system and so the VA was, "You're one of us and yeah you lost a limb and here we are to help you." My biggest challenge has always been what they call phantom limb pain, and going through that and what I thought was great with the VA is their clinics that they have to try to figure out what phantom limb pain is, have a better understanding of it and how to deal with it without drugs. So, I turned to the VA for that, went to a lot of their clinics and classes and all of their studies to try to figure out how to deal with that phantom limb pain, which I think every amputee in the world deals with it in one way, shape, or form another, it's just how do you deal with it.

To be able to be helped out by the VA in their own clinics and I go to Long Beach right now and I get to see the same faces all the time and hear the same practitioners and they get the greatest, latest, state of the art stuff and they really work with you. It made me feel special but also gave me the opportunity to be whole again, which is kinda hard. People look at me and think that I lost my leg in the war, it was just a stupid motorcycle accident, but yet because I was in the VA system and because I was already 50 percent disabled, it was just they were there to take care of me and they take great care of me, and I get to experiment with new clinics, new different type of prosthesis, different feet, different ways of sockets and different suspension systems. It's like cutting edge, which was really neat. One hundred percent everything I do is through the VA. All my physicals, all my annual physicals, everything I do is through the VA. Having that clinic and support group and being able to relate to that, it was nice. That's it feels like family.

Be open and honest to what you have, reach out, talk to people. Don't ever give up, don't wallow in your sorrows. You're not gonna to get anywhere, you'll drown. We all have gone through that, but I think it's important to say, "You know what? I'm not alone, I'm not the only one missing a limb or two limbs, I'm not the only one suffering from post-traumatic stress" whether it was in the war or whether it was a motorcycle or whether what or you lose a young man when you're trying to rescue him at ten years old and he's dead in your arms, I think we all deal with, especially after 9-11, you see so many people, civilians and firefighters and policemen who are still dealing, construction workers who are still dealing with post-traumatic stress and the most important thing we could do is support one another and just talk it through and don't wallow in our sorrows. Take what is given to you and flush it out and move forward. It's a gift, life's a gift and you have to cherish every minute of it.



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