

Developing Good Form

Matthew: There's a lot of pride that comes along with being a Marine. I earned that title. It's one of the greatest fighting forces on the planet. Going from that, knowing what my body was capable of, knowing that I could do anything to being my body was the thing that was betraying me. That was hard. My name is Matthew. My branch was the Marine Corps. My MOS is 0651 and my years of service were 2010 till 2014.

After bootcamp and after com school, I got stationed in Okinawa, Japan. I was supposed to deploy from the island, but that wasn't the case. When I was first diagnosed with cancer, I can literally say I just felt like there's a shadow. They did an ultrasound and I found out I had tumors through my stomach. The day after I had surgery, they performed a left orchiectomy. I was medically retired from the military and it was really easy to fall into a depression. I could go and get a quick high, and that practice just led me down the path to homelessness.

I worked with the VA and I got involved with the Aurora Veterans Homeless Shelter and I was put up there for a little while and I utilized all the resources available. After leaving I kind of realized the opportunity to get better was there, I just had to take it. They have the community care program, but I got the biggest pain relief through acupuncture and massage therapy and chiropractors.

Recently, I've been meeting with a therapist every week and just talking. I'll probably continue to utilize that. With the VA, everyone's coming from a different background. The struggle varies so much from person to person, but that helped to just know that I wasn't completely alone. What it meant for me to sit and talk to other veterans, I feel like they support me just as much. I tell them what I'm doing in life and they get just as excited for me. They're brothers, they're family. It was the attitude a hundred percent. As soon as I decided that I wasn't going to feel bad about seeking therapy or treatment and I was going to use everything offered, I started to improve. I could experience better in life and I deserve at least that. So, I've been putting in the effort.

I still receive treatment today to the point where I feel like I can compete in fencing now. I like fencing because I appreciate how much it demands, gets me fired on every cylinder. I feel like I've grown a lot just as a person being involved in the sport and the community. Since I've been receiving treatment and actively engaged in it, the interactions that I have with people are getting better. The opportunities that are coming are getting better. I feel like I'm actually capable of rising to the occasion more than I ever had before in life. It kind of took that rock bottom wake up call to get there.



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But since I've moved out here, I've been able to find community and friends and just reconnect a lot more than I ever have before. Established my own sense of humanity again. That was something that I needed.



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