

Support is available and treatment works

Harlan: My name is Harlan. I served in the United States Army. I was with the 591st Military Police. I was a clean-cut, All-American kid and yet when it was time for me to go, I was drafted in that first lottery draft. And I had no problem. I just went and I was glad I served my country.

I went through training and I ended up in Fort Bliss. And my unit was supposed to go overseas, but for some reason it never happened. It was very hot down there. I started drinking a lot. It was a whole new world for me having never been out of Brooklyn.

I think way back then I was lost more than anything else because I had some issues before I went in the Military. So, by the time I got out, I was drinking heavily.

In 2004, after a 21-year career in nursing, it was hard for me to get out of bed every morning. I was lethargic. I had anhedonia, which means I had no pleasure from anything that I did. I already had a substance abuse problem, and I had suicidal ideation. And I had a little bit of a plan to turn around, and walk in front of a car.

My wife at the time said, "I had enough," She left. Then I couldn't make the house payment. And then I got the car repossessed. So, it was a progression and all of a sudden, I found myself out in the streets with nowhere to go. That's when I went to the VA.

While I was homeless, the requirement is that you went to a group called Willingness, at the VA. They want to see how willing you really were to get help. And I had to wait 11 days where I would take a bus from the VA back to a shelter every night to stay. I guess I really wanted treatment at that point because I finally had reached the point where I said, "You know what, I'm going to stay clean until I can get into this program." And I did.

The Psychiatrist told me I had long-term chronic depression. And he said, "You've had this for years." And I was really shocked to know that. I didn't know. That's why I started medicating. That's why I didn't get very much joy out of life. So, it kind of opened up the doorway for the first time in my life to say, "Oh, that's what it is."

At that point, they told me I suffered from PTSD. And I said, "How could I... I was never in combat, how could I have post-traumatic?" Well, it doesn't have to be the Military. It happened way back when in my childhood. I went over into the PTSD group, and I found that there were some other guys in there that didn't have combat experience. And then I got to listen to the guys that did go through it, and my heart went out to them. And you know, they accepted me. I was a fellow Military guy, and that's the way they looked at me.

How my life has changed? I go to the gym five days a week. I'm going to be 67 years old in a couple of months. I'm in better shape than when I was 30 years ago. I have no desire to use. I've very active in the NA community, which they were the conduit to get me there. I actually was able to deal with the death of my wife. This VA, I don't know how to say... and I know that all the VAs are becoming this way today. They are always there with open arms to help you. They fed me for a while. They put me into sober living for a while. I owe a debt of gratitude that I shall never be able to repay.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

If any of what I'm talking about today helps any of the guys that are my age or in my age or even younger, you know what, don't be scared of the VA. It's a great place to go, and they will help you if you want. But you gotta reach out.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION