

Things have gotten a lot, lot better

Kevin: My name is Kevin. I was in the Air Force. I joined right out of high school 1979. I was an Avionics Technician and I spent my whole tour at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

In the military everything is very set; very scheduled. Everything is written down for the most part. Everything is done in order chronologically. Then you get out into the civilian world and a lot of that doesn't happen. So, I think that may have started my troubles with integrating.

I had an important job so I felt, I wouldn't say mission critical but, it was important that the jets worked well. Then all of a sudden my biggest concern was driving around Denver making sure apartment doors were locked as a security guard. So, that was quite a step down. Things weren't quite as exciting or as enjoyable as I felt they should have been. I did start drinking. I started smoking weed like crazy to cope.

I'd always known there was something not quite right and I was reading on an article about depression and I saw the symptoms listed out. I went, oh, wow. I was talking to a friend of mine saying, "I believe I have this condition but I can't go to the VA because I'm not retired or a combat Veteran." which was my assumption at the time. That's how you got to use the VA and he said, "No, you can absolutely use the VA. You were honorably discharged." and so I went in and thank God I got diagnosed and started seeing professionals.

It's trite and cliché to say but it does have to come from within, your desire to stop. People could suggest it, but you have to stop it. And for me it wasn't to feel better it was to feel nothing; to deaden. And I had a huge cocaine problem for a while. The latest run was pain pills and fortunately the VA has a methadone program that you go to and in some cases, they pay for. Where you're monitored; they keep an eye on you. They know what you're doing so that was a God send.

It's very important that you find be it a doctor or psychologist. It depends on where you go in the VA. As a substance abuser I go through what's called SATP, the substance abuse treatment program and all of your psychiatric care is done through that. If substance abuse is not a problem then you just go to the mental health wing but it's crucial that you find a doctor or a therapist that you can work with.

First of all, if you need to be in a shelter swallow your pride and go because that's where the resources begin. You go into the shelter and all shelters in my experience, I've only been to two thank God, they have a VA rep there who deals just with the Vets. It's called a GPD program. The VA pays the shelter to put us up. So, you start to learn about your resources, subsidized housing, mental health, discounted bus passes. There's a certificate program where you can learn a skill and get the piece of paper that says you have the skill.

The most difficult thing when you quit doing drugs or alcohol is all of a sudden you have to fill the day with something. You go, "Oh, I'm lost. I'm not going to drink beer today so, gosh, what do I do?" So, I'm looking at adding other hobbies and as well as re-energizing some older ones like writing. The breakthrough for me was to go to the VA and make use of what they have to offer. So, things have gotten a lot, lot better.



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