

Veteran's Affairs

Life gets better once you get help

Thomas: My name is Thomas. I served in the United States Air Force 1970-1973, as part of the Vietnam Era Veteran. I served briefly in Thailand. People in the Military were very much looked down on and the Vietnam War was looked down on, especially in the North and it became very difficult. I tried to live up in Massachusetts for a while and it became impossible.

My experiences in the military had, unbeknownst to me at the time, caused some severe problems. I had been seen by a psychiatrist while I was in the military after I had my injury and it was a continuing, ongoing thing that I was treated in the military for depression. This problem of depression and the anxiety that went with it, and the other issues that evolved from military life and transitioning into civilian life, showed up in very strange ways. You don't know about it and you are not looking for them unless you know what to look for, so you just kind of shrug it off.

I went from having normal sleep when I was in college and before military life, I would sleep a good 8-10 hours at night and have a normal restful sleep without waking up. After military life, I would get about 4-6 hours sleep, and I thought that this was normal. I thought that it was just kind of what happens. It wasn't until almost 12 years ago that I started seeing a psychiatrist and he said no this is normal if you have got depression.

I was married for 5 years to a very lovely woman. We had issues going back and forth, we cared about each other very much, but the fact of the matter is part of the anxiety was always there. Its going to have negative consequences and it did. Eventually she wasn't happy with her lifestyle because of trying to deal with me all the time and I was not a happy camper.

My second wife, we had 3 children and it more-or-less went the same way. Unless you get professional help with it, and begin to realize and see what's wrong, you are going to continue on this pathway and scratch your head. There was a period also after school when I was working for businesses, I was a corporate lawyer, alcohol plays a big role in corporate politics and for somebody that has either depression or a psychological problem, alcohol is the one thing they should stay away from. But it is usually the one thing they get drawn to, because it subconsciously eases the pain that you feel inside, and you don't know why you are feeling it. You don't even know that you are feeling it sometimes.

The depression was manifesting itself in a lot of different ways and it was affecting my ability to work, and it was affecting my relationships within the company. I finally went to the VA in 2003 and it was because I had been working with Veterans and saw the other Veterans that were having problems, were getting help, and it was working. VA was working you know. It was a real success story on some of these Veterans who would get into the system and get their health benefits and move on with their lives.

I have seen an improvement to the work, others have seen it. My ex wife sees me now and she sees me as a completely different person. My children, especially my son, there was a time in his life when he wanted nothing to do with me and now he is my best friend. I would say since 2008 when I started seeing the psychiatrist that I am seeing **Thomas:** now, life has been a lot better. So, it is another success story for VA, it really is. It is important that people do understand that you can be an average everyday citizen



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and after combat, have a problem that needs outreach, that needs correction, that needs therapy and you can continue on with your life. You can improve your life. Life will get better.



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