

His Veteran friends told him he needed help

Tucker: My name is Tucker. I was an Army, First Lieutenant Infantry Airborne, and I served as an advisor to a five-man team in the Mekong Delta in 1969. Well, I was fortunate and unfortunate depending upon how you want to look at it. I was badly wounded. I was pronounced dead on a mission with Mercenaries. I was the only man on that mission that could speak English, so if I passed out then we all died, and I stayed alive for an hour and I got us extracted and then I gave it up. I spent about six months in the hospital, and it wasn't a lot of track records for someone with my injuries because generally they die. So, the doctors said, "Maybe five years, we don't know."

Because I came back on a stretcher, I wasn't thrust into society one day in the Delta and the next day on the block. I was able to assimilate back in slowly, but I knew what was happening to a lot of other Veterans; experiencing disapproval and taunts and being spat at, etc. So, I moved to New York. I went to school and I got a job on a soap opera and they wouldn't let me go to school and work. Jeff Goldblum got a play; I got a soap opera and they kicked us both out and I went on with my life. I loved acting. I was alive and very successful. I had an Emmy nomination, Cleo nomination. I was on all three networks every week in New York. It was... I had absurd success and I did rather well for seven or eight years and a number of events coalesced, and my wheels slowly began to come off and I became very depressed and self-destructive. And it wasn't until the late 80s, bear in mind I was in acting school in 1970. It wasn't until the late 80s, some of my Veteran friends said, "You need to ask for help." And that's when I realized, "Yeah, you are in trouble." I was a very unhappy person. I had very low self-esteem. I really... I learned that what I had was survivor guilt. I really didn't think I deserved to be here and have the success that I was enjoying because a lot of people I cared about and respected didn't get to come home and since I was good at what I did, I began to self-destruct and subvert that success.

So, I learned about PTSD and I learned about Anniversary Syndrome. My license plate and a lot of other things in my life say "9/14, September 14." That was the day I was pronounced dead and brought back to life, and for years a month or so before that date, I would start smelling the jungle. I could smell the death. I could feel something really bad is coming and generally on September 14, I was locked in the room with the lights off sobbing and the next day was like I'd shed my skin, like a snake. I was just whole and free again. So, I thought of it as my annual PMS. I thought maybe I was going nuts but, you know, what was I gonna do? But I learned about these things.

Therapy is such an important process. It's very hard to shrink yourself. Your mind is so nimble. You really can't, you know, you can't get in there between, but sometimes we can see our problems in someone else. So, therapy is a very useful process for a lot of guys and it's called post-traumatic stress, because I did well for eight, nine years before I really started to circle the train. We've got a lot of kids coming home that present with problems immediately or in a month or two or in a year or two, but it's there and it affects their relationships with their parents and their wives and their children. Their work situation, you know, they get stressed, something triggers something, they smell something or hear something or remember something and until that's processed, it's going to be very hard to have real quality of life.

After combat, life is kind of black and white. Combat is technicolor. It's absolute, be here now and that immediacy is intoxicating. It's addictive. Now you become an



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adrenaline junky. And for me, acting sort of replaced that kind of need to be immediate. When the curtain goes up and the man says, "Speed," and the camera's rolling, it's right now. It's live. And that's what combat is, it is live. Michael Herr who wrote *Dispatches* articulated a truism and it's about the duality of war. I could say to people, "This is the most wretched, appalling, disgusting, depraved time of my life," and there's no question that it was, but it was also the most exquisite time of my life. And both of those things are equally true, and it was okay to say one of them was true, but the second one, you were not going to get a lot of agreement or approval. So, I was in conflict about that because I knew intuitively it was so. So many of our soldiers were deployed multiple times and you develop instincts often. When you have to think about something, you may be dead. You react and that's more often than not what keeps you alive and yet those instincts which are right on in a combat zone, are really not cool in a civilian context.

There is no silver bullet for PTSD. It's a condition you can learn to live with. It's a condition you can learn to mitigate the power of control over you that it has and whether that's through therapy or antidepressants or any combination of things, essentially it comes down to being able to forgive yourself.

For six or seven years, I was in denial and I mean my signs were pretty obvious. I was crashing my motorcycle and I was doing a lot, an absurd amount of alcohol and drugs. I was trying to alter my reality, my consciousness because my consciousness was not very attractive. There's a lot of different ways you can try to destroy yourself. So, addiction is one sign of trouble, but you may be clear, "Boy, I'm out of control here. I maybe ought to talk to somebody." The help may not be readily available. It may not be obvious. You may not want to be judged. You may be fearful that it's gonna affect your family or your work situation, but the truth of it is, it can only be a positive.



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