

A connection changed his life for the better

Alan: My name is Alan. I was in the Navy 1963 to '69. I served with the Marine Corps for 2 years and 7 months as a Navy corpsman. I had served my active duty time and they discharged me directly. I didn't get to serve in any bases in the country. Nobody ever mentioned the VA services. I didn't know what I was entitled to. Like there is today, there was no transition period where you learn all this stuff. I didn't know what to expect when I got back. I had heard different things, different stories. It was just okay, you were there. You did your job. It's over. Forget it. Go work. And that's kind of the attitude my whole family had.

The first 2 jobs, they didn't want to know if I was a Veteran or not. There was a question on there, and he said, "Well, you don't have to answer that." I said, "I'll answer it. I am. Yes." He said, "No, we're not going to put that down."

I was married before I went to Vietnam. When I got back, again, my whole family didn't ask. They didn't want to know. I needed to talk about things, and they didn't want to listen. My ex-wife got tired of me bringing the subject up. It really broke down, first break down, and my wife left me then. I started drinking heavily. I wouldn't go to work. Just fell out of society.

Major depression was one of them. That caused a lot of anxiety. I would have intrusive thoughts, horrible nightmares. I always had a problem sleeping. That was one thing. I would wake up at 2 o'clock in the morning regardless of what time I went to bed. At that time, there was no help where I was. The vet centers hadn't started yet. The VA was 80 miles away. There was an Airforce base there that I went for a psychiatric evaluation. He said, "You're okay." He gave me some medicine and he said, "You're okay."

I left Maine after the first breakdown, after some treatment there by private psychiatrist. I said maybe a change of scenery would be good, so I came to Florida. It wasn't good. As a matter of fact, it was worse because of so much sand around. There are so many sandbags. You look at the ravines and you'll see sandbags. And that always triggered something with me.

My second wife was an alcoholic. And I think because I was drinking, I found that to be good. My first wife didn't drink, and she always got mad at me for drinking. So, we kind of had a team there for a while. It last like 4 months.

I thought it out. I planned it out how I was going to kill myself. And I tried. I tried a couple of times. When I went to Sarasota, the reason they put me in the hospital down there was because I walked in front of a truck. Fortunately, I was only hit very lightly. And they said, "this guy is not right." And so, they put me in the hospital there.

The private hospital didn't do much except treat the symptoms. The social worker at the hospital was a civilian. She called the VA at Bay Pines and they had one bed left. I went through the PTSD stress unit at Bay Pines. At that point, I think it was an 8-week period and that's where most of the groups took place and individual therapy.

I was granted 100% disability in '94. My whole life changed then. But I started volunteering at that point. I know a lot of Marines. I know a couple officers, lieutenant colonels that things bother them, and they had to seek treatment. Do it now. Don't hide.



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Don't drink. You're not going to be able to deal with it by yourself. Just talk. Go in and talk about it. From there it's going to evolve into other things. Whatever they offer you, take it. You will get something out of it.



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