

Brett found the support he needed at his VA

Brett: My name is Brett, I served in OIF 2, Iraq 2003 through 2005. I thought I had dealt very well with my year in Iraq. It took a while for me to realize I had turned off all my emotions. The only way I can say it is my brain opened up and said these are all the things you experienced and it flooded my system. I knew I was having trouble. I was angry, but I've maintained my Reserve status and deployed again to Afghanistan and this was 2012. My problems got worse. I took a major, had a major injury in March of 2012 and so some of the injuries I had had in Iraq were furthered.

There's a lot of symptoms that Soldiers have from their experiences. Mine personally, the first one I realized was when my civilian company, I'm back, they want to take me to lunch, but it's a very crowded place and my anxiety level immediately went through the roof. It's called hypervigilance. I was becoming aware of everything in that restaurant, everything in that group setting. I ended up with nightmares. I didn't mind the nightmares so much, but the problem was for me was the daydreams, let's call them flashbacks. Flashbacks driving down the street. Yes, I'm in a safe place, but I am seeing what I used to see in Iraq, I'm reliving, and my mind is going, is racing.

My wife said to me "you are spiraling out of control, and I need you to either leave or get help." And I think that was a whole can of fresh water, cold, being thrown in your face, because I knew I had problems, but I didn't realize the volcano that my wife had started feeling like she was living with, and so I started getting help.

I had a Counselor at the VA that worked with me one day a week. I had that for four years, before it went to a once a month. Going once a month and sitting down with someone who's not judgmental, who understands what I'm feeling, going through, living with in life, living with is the key, it's a big help for me. In fact, I've included recreation therapy counseling, I go to wood carving and, with other Vets, it's all around other Vets and we also have outings where we go on hikes. If someone needs to talk in that group, there's no pressure, there's no stress, and we get to enjoy nature together and learn how everyone in the group individually is learning to live with their issue and all of these men help me in my journey, if you will.

I would encourage anyone to get counseling. I would encourage anyone to get their benefits at the VA. Fear can debilitate you, and there's only one way to handle fear, and that is to hit it head on. You either get busy living or you get busy dying, and you're doing one or the other, so, while your breathing, get busy living.



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