

A Marine's physical injury led to personal growth

Kionte: My name's Kionte. I served with the United States Marine Corps from 2007 to 2012. We were clearing out a building and there was an IED in the doorway and I think out of 13 people I was the last guy that walked into the building with my Junior Marine behind me. And I stepped on that IED. I awoke in a hospital where my left leg was fully wrapped, but my right leg was gone completely below the knee. And I was at Balboa Hospital where I was stationed and where I did my rehabilitation in there.

I felt regret because my guys were still out there and I was, you know, in the hospital and I couldn't do anything.

Once I was pushed to being out-patient is where depression kind of kicked in a little bit more for me, where I felt a little not myself, I guess. I started abusing my, my medication, my pain meds. I didn't really need it as much as I did before for the pain. It was very hard to find that glimmer of hope or light at that time.

One day, I was just in bed and just had to ask myself, you know, like, "What do I...?" like, "Why am I...?" Like, kind of asking myself, "Why am I here? Why am I still alive?" Talking to someone, I only had my one friend that I, I trusted, and it took awhile for us to kind of trust each other. I opened up to him, you know, every, like, vaguely, and slowly just continued to open up to him, and it felt good to be able to talk to someone and be able to have someone understand you to where, you know, if I talk to my friends, you know, they wouldn't be able to understand where I'm coming from.

I didn't really talk to a therapist until, like, the last year, to where I realized, you know, like maybe there's things for me to talk that I should probably talk about. My therapist kind of just allowed me to talk and she would ask me questions here and there. And after a certain while, I would just open up and I would just talk and talk and talk. And she would just listen.

I guess, for me, I had to just keep asking myself, every morning I would wake up, you know, like, "Why am I still alive?" It's like trying to find that purpose for me or myself at least.

Decided to ask myself, you know, like, "What makes me happy?" And I realized at that point, you know, making other people happy—making other people happy makes me happy. So I started to get into, like, Paralympic camps so that got me out of the room. It kind of started that mindset, or that slight change, of to where I'm, I could still do something with my life.

Being a part of, you know, active people encouraged me that to be more active. And when you see another amputee doing something that you thought you couldn't do, you're just like, "I want to do that, but better." And I've always wanted to be better and better because it's challenging myself because I thought I couldn't do any of these things. And now I'm doing many things I probably would have never done if I wasn't injured.

I've, you know, done motivational speaking, I've climbed the highest mountain in Antarctica. I've, you know, challenged myself, I've pushed myself, I've done all these things that I never would have thought have been possible, but making that first step of just from when I was in the hospital, making that step to where I was just like, "I don't



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want to be this way,” and making that change, I’ve been able to grow in a more positive direction. But it doesn’t negate that I have my down days. I still have my depression days. But I know how to control them. You know, I know how to work with them rather than work against them. And I feel that’s why I still continue to seek therapy, because I’ve found that it does help.



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