

After a tragedy, Gary turned his life around

Gary: Hi, I'm Gary, a combat engineer in the Army from 1972 to 1992. My first time in combat was in Salvador, lost a good friend and I didn't even realize how that affected me until I got back with my family.

My work performance never dropped, there's work and then there was my family, but when I worked, I used work as my medication. I'm at work at five in the morning, at work at five, and I'm coming home at eight and that was my work. When I came home, I drank beer, and this squashed the memories. I couldn't get that door to close or to hold it closed.

I had a Platoon Sergeant commit suicide. That threw me back into a combat mode and that's when I realized I had a problem. I had an issue at the house and to stay out of trouble, I lived in the barracks for a little while and that's when I stopped drinking beer and I went to AA and haven't drank since. I used the 12-step process for AA to hold down the PTSD and that's wrong, that is wrong. I realized later on after I retired that you need to talk about, not just the thing that's causing the problem, but here's what I'm doing, how do I fix it, and once I got out of the military I went to Vet Centers.

One of my first Counselors, saw him every, you know once a week, once every other week when they come down a lot. We can talk about what it's doing and how to fix it from an anger issue, to being emotional to your children, being able to relate to your kids or your wife. At the Vet Centers they give you tools to work with it. You got the breathing techniques when you feel you're getting anxious or getting upset and there's steps. There's workbooks that I went through. I mean, it's like I was back in school and one of the first things they told me, you don't have to talk about what's bothering you, let's talk about how we could make you a better person or deal with those issues. You got to stay with it. You gotta keep your mind open and you gotta say, it's going to be better in the long run and it really is going to be better in the long run.

I'll tell anybody. I was a terrible father, terrible, and I was never there for them, but I'm an outstanding grandfather because I learned the problems that I had as being a father and I've changed it 180 degrees. It isn't easy but it's worth it. It's worth every penny, every second to get into that VA system. It really is, especially in the Vet Centers, that's the safe haven of all havens.



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