

## Overcoming anxiety and hopelessness with support

**Mike:** My name is Mike. I was in the Marine Corps. I got out in '05, medically discharged. I served in Pendleton and Lejeune. I was in the wing in Japan. I started to have some mental health issues at that time. I eventually was transferred to Camp Pendleton in group. I was dealing with panic attacks, that was probably the major issue. Anxiety in a more general sense or general anxiety disorder as it's known, and I was acting out, trying to alleviate the anxiety at times. That might involve, cutting my arm. That might involve hitting myself against something. It was the idea of some tension that needed to be released. It was seen as suicidal behavior, basically, so eventually that's why they were looking to get me out.

I actually went back to California to live with a few other friends who had recently left the service as well, and I was hoping to start college. I was using the Montgomery GI Bill and that took me through a semester and I really couldn't afford much past that because the cost was just prohibitive. So then I was out of school for a while and I was just working. I saw students, walking around doing their thing and I just had this sense of, quite simply, hatred. It was thinking that they don't understand anything. They don't know what it's like to have to bust your butt to go to college, to pay your rent in order to have somewhere to sleep at night, etcetera. And this sense of kind of misanthropy was becoming so intense at times that it was causing me to become even more anxious and act out and do the cutting and everything else. And, at some point, it kind of morphed into this sense of, "It's not them, it's me," and that's when I started feeling somewhat suicidal. I recall, having just basically thought of how I could simply, buy a gun very easily. I was thinking, "Okay, I've come up with a plan as to how to go about this and that's not a good thing." So, then I knew that something had to change.

I did some intake with the, with an outpatient clinic, where my family lives up in Lehigh Valley. I received a diagnosis of major depression and generalized anxiety disorder. I used individual sessions. A variety of different treatment methods were used. Cognitive behavioral is a popular one, but sometimes it was just breathing exercise, learning how to pause when you're becoming anxious, and nipping it in the butt. So, breathing exercises, visualizing something relaxing, and sometimes it wasn't really structured in any way; it was just talking. And now, my life is better mainly because I understand how to stop when situations get intense. I know how to back up from a situation, maybe an argument.

I think the major way that I've improved since, since I got out, was in realizing, first of all, that it's not unique, and also that it is something that you can manage. So, I think that, that knowing that I wasn't unique and knowing that I could actually make things better, it could improve as long as I kept at it. If you know that you have a problem, if you know that perhaps you get panic attacks and that's causing you problems, it's making it harder to function, no matter who you are, no matter if you've been out for 30 years, if you're still in, if you're just coming out right now, you can get past it, and it's your responsibility to yourself to do that.



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