

I never thought I'd be where I am now

Doug: My name is Doug. I served in the Army and Army Reserve. I served over in Iraq from 2010 through 2011.

When I deployed, I went with a bridge building unit. I was a gunner in the turret also charged with responsibilities of security, I was in the Lieutenant's truck. With all of the armor that you are wearing, you are very heavy and bouncing around in the vehicle, whether it was from driving or swerving, bombs, whatever it may be, it does a number on your back.

When I returned my back was in a lot of pain. I was working jobs as a prison guard. There is a lot of moving around, a lot of walking around, and it was painful on my back. I was going to the VA, doing physical therapy 2 to 3 times a week. I took the anti-inflammatories and medications they had prescribed. It just wasn't helping, it wasn't doing anything. Without being super biased in medications, a prescribed medication, I ended up taking a medication that was far too powerful then what I needed and I shouldn't have done that obviously, but I felt desperate at that time for some kind of pain relief.

When I was using the pain medications I actually ended up getting a divorce. I was embarrassed of my use of it. I was sneaking around. I was spending so much money on these things and eventually she got tired of it. I went to a private doctor. In less than month he had decided to make a procedure called radiofrequency ablation, which was a quick 20 minute procedure and it took care of 90% of my pain I would say. After that procedure was done I said, "Great, I don't need any more pain medications." I threw them away, the next day I got incredibly sick and I realized that obviously I have a dependency issue if I am getting this sick off of it. I tried cold-turkey going through the withdrawals, and I couldn't do it. So I continued taking the medications.

My relationship with my parents, they were very supportive of me, but at the same time, I was asking them for money just to cover rent. They asked where all of the money goes and I would make up some story to tell them about where the money goes, and they knew where it was going.

I called up my old roommate from Iraq and I talked to him, because I knew we had a very close bond because you get that bond when you are overseas with somebody. He came to visit me and he said, "You know Doug, you have a problem, you realize that?" At first, I didn't acknowledge it, but once I saw it and I saw it was a problem and I realized how it was affecting me, I said, "You know, you're right." When it was hurting just me I could handle that. I could suffer through it, I could push through it, but when it was hurting other people that didn't deserve to be hurt that's when I said, I have got to do something.

Eventually he encouraged me to reach out to family or friends closer, somebody that could be around to help me get the need in my community, and that is exactly what I did. It took about another 6 months, but I was able to find a private doctor that did the Suboxone program that I was able to get into. The Suboxone program is wonderful, there is no doubt that it saved my life. Suboxone is a drug that comes in a little dissolvable strip like those old breath strips. You put it under your tongue, it has a narcotic in it, so your body gets the narcotic that it craves, but at the same time it has a



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chemical that sticks to your opiate receptors to not let that narcotic in, so you won't get any feelings of euphoria or pain relieve.

The counseling I get from the VA, the family support is just phenomenal, and I have it. It is one of those things I was very lucky to have from my parents, my brothers and my finance. They know everything I have done, everything I have been through, which is hard to admit to but once you do, then it is a big weight off your shoulders. Life is just moving up and up for me now, it is at a place that I never thought it would be. Three years ago, two years ago even, I never thought I would be where I am now.



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