

Becoming sober turned his life around

John: My name is John and I served in the United States Coast Guard. I served from '74 to just about 1980, I extended a year. Back in '74, when I was a senior in high school, I got a draft notice. Prior to going into the Coast Guard, I was having an issue with drinking, I did a lot of that. I didn't know it at the time but I was fast becoming an alcoholic. I went to Alameda to Boot Camp and of course this was all new to me. I'm 18 years old and it's quite an adventure. I kind of notice the people that I knew, my friends, they didn't get like me. I was drinking hard and heavy. I got a bad name for myself pretty quickly on. I was told by the Master Chief, Anna, an Officer while I was in the military that I need to deal with that problem with alcohol, said it's getting you in trouble, and I just didn't stop doing it. I don't even know how I made it through to be honest with you, but I did.

As far as after the Coast Guard, it continued. It destroyed my first marriage. I got into, well I lost a good job that I had just started, floor covering, and I kind of lost that job because of my drinking. I was introduced back in 1982 to a program called Alcoholics Anonymous. It was in that program that I learned something that has forever changed my life. I was challenged to look to see where I was wrong in all situations in my life, not the other guy. I wasn't pointing my finger anymore, I was just looking to see where I was wrong and I started doing that and it just lifted a huge load off of me because what caused me to continue to drink was thinking about my past.

When I finally came to that point where I surrendered I actually went through a depression but I was sober at the time. I didn't go through a depression when I was drinking. I actually went through it while I was sober and I remember vaguely the feelings that I was going through. I wanted people to feel sorry for me. I remember that, I remember I always wanted that, but I was alienating people from me and so it is kind of ironic how that happens as you want people – you want to get attention to your woes, your depression, but no one wants to be around you. It was a real bad, vicious cycle I was in, but at my time there was nobody dealing with depression that I knew, in fact they were really just recognizing it as an issue.

I needed to talk about my depression and my alcoholism and how it was affecting other people. I needed to talk about it. If I held that stuff in it just ate me up and usually it led to something seriously bad. I did a little counseling with an Assistant Pastor for just a little bit. Then the treatment centers, which if treatment centers don't specifically help you, they at least give you a lot of information so that you know what step or direction to go in, so that was kind of nice.

I started wanting to help people. I got out of myself so much that I was, I wouldn't say happy, joyous and free, but I was real close to that. I felt good, I considered others instead of myself. This is all directly from letting all that go and instead of always wanting to get or blame, or always receive and point my finger at society and everyone else is the reason I am miserable. I was the reason I was miserable, and I had to change. When I did then the world looked completely different

I have been sober for 17 years and got a good family, wonderful son. I feel like if there are Vets that are struggling with depression or traumatic things that happen to them in the military, and I know some do, I think there is a way to find relief to that. I would recommend to any young person coming out of the military to check in to talk about it,



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you know. Even if you don't get a solution you are going to come out whoever you talk to, you are going to come out of there feeling just a little bit better.



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