

The more I talk to people the better I feel

Bennie: My name is Bennie, I've spent 23 years in the Air Force from 1967 through May of 1990, and I was in the fire service, fire protection branch for all those years and went from a firefighter up to the assistant chief area in the fire department there.

My first assignment I served at Maxwell Air Force Base for a year and from there I went to Vietnam, Tan Son Nhut for about a year, left Tan Son Nhut and I was assigned to a little base in Indiana called Bunker Hill, at that time Grissom Air Force Base. What I really loved about it was the camaraderie with the different people there on the base.

One of the problems that I had over the past 20, 40 years now, I had flashbacks, I'd have hot sweats and I'd scream at my wife and I'd do all these crazy things, but in my case, like in a lot of people's cases, I had to suppress that stuff. Forty years I suppressed that, I kept it in, even my wife had no clue, and then once I retired, went back to the fire service again, I'm still around these missiles and satellites and all this kind of stuff and cold sweats at night and going through my little process.

I couldn't tell anybody about that, until my friend said, "Hey, somethings got to happen." And when I realized that I needed to get it out, because I was about ready to explode, I went to the Vet Center. I really began to get weekly counseling from my doctors, and I said to myself, "You know what?" I had a big instance on incident on my job one day and I was about ready to really pop. Thank God I didn't do that. I said "You know what? I'm going to retire. I'd better stop now, I'd better stop, retire, get full time counseling before I do something wrong." So I did. I did, and they helped me come up with a plan on what to do after you retire. It was like, whew. The Veteran counselor, he knew how I felt and it was a big, big, big release.

After about a year of psychiatrically counseling and everything, she said "Okay, Bennie, you need to start writing your story," so I began to write a little bit, and I'm not a good writer, so I was assigned a Psychologist through the VA, to sit down and help me write my story, and as of today I can honestly say that the more I talk to people, family, friends other Vets, the better I feel, the more healing there is, and I can honestly say within last, oh, less than two years I began to feel free, really, really free, and what I mean by feeling free is I'm driving down the road and somebody comes down and gives me the finger, big deal, or I'm in a conversation and somebody says something that really would tee me off years ago, big deal, don't sweat the small stuff. I'm at that point now, and I love it.

My anger, my sleepless nights, my headaches that I get sometimes, they are all controlled right now through the medication that I take and they're controlled by me, I think. I'm able to catch myself now in what I say and some things I may do or how I may feel. I think as Veterans you have to take that first step. If you've got drug problems or mental problems, family problems, whatever, you have to take that first step and go to the VA, and you've got to follow up with the doctors, you've got to follow with your claims, you have to do that. Once you take that first step and you've learned about the VA system, how it works, you'll feel comfortable. Seek out the help. Don't wait like I did until I was almost 55.



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