

Deciding to take a chance on change

Hector: My name is Hector. I served in the Army for 18 years and I got out as a First Sergeant E8. I was deployed 13 times; things called Operations other than War, Conflict Operations, and Combat Operations. But then when it got down to the operation that really started triggering me was when I went into Kosovo in 1998 to 1999. Some of the things that I saw. I've been to a lot of places. I've seen poverty. I've seen hopelessness and helplessness. I've seen death and some of those things were already triggering me. When I saw innocent civilians being just like slaughtered and not being able to do anything about it, that's when I started questioning what I'm doing.

Trista: Early on, when I knew I'm in the military and he already had PTSD, everything was life or death. He trained as life and death because that's the way he survives and everything set him off. I mean, he was a crusty, cranky old guy who had seen too much death and too much combat and that's the way he lived his life and it used to be that everything set him off.

Hector: I'm supposed to know everything that's supposed to happen with me. I'm supposed to be mentally fit and morally straight; you know physically and strong and all these other things. I never failed my comrades. I always keep myself ready to go on a moment's notice and here I was. Once in a while, my hand would shake. I would be seeing demons is what I call it, demon chasing. I would wake up in the middle of night, sweats, but January 24, 2004, I was in a dissociative state when I faced off with eight Lakeville Police Officers here in Minnesota and I thought that I was facing off with an armed combatant.

Trista: Hector had a psychotic episode with his PTSD and an armed standoff with police.

Hector: In my mind, I was on an urbanized operation doing room clearing operations and when I finally started coming through and all this, I started realizing, either I've lost my mind or something else is going on here or maybe all of the above. It was when I was in jail actually that my lawyer who was retained came and visited me and said, Hector, there is one to two things going on here. I'm willing to take your case, but I need to know which one you are. You're either a person who needs help or you're a criminal. Which are you? I'm not a criminal, sir and I don't need help. He said, no, Hector, you don't get it. You're either a criminal or you're a person who needs help. Which is it? So, he forced me to say, I need help, and as I did over that next year, I got better. You know, I still had feelings of slight agoraphobia, not wanting to go out in public; thinking that, you know, everything is dangerous; helplessness; hopelessness. I had a lot of nightmares, but I was processing it finally. I was talking about it and somebody was normalizing it for me; telling me, what you went through is not normal and therefore, what you're going through now is normal.

Trista: The kids were really on edge most of the time because they knew that whatever his mood was when he came home from work and he walked in the door would dictate whether they'd have a good evening or a bad evening.

Hector: The blinds needed to be turned a specific way at a certain time. I mean, I would literally say, "Secure the house," and I taught the boys how to turn the blinds, where I want the blinds. I was still 0 to 100 mph.



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Trista: It used to be that everything set him off; things out of place, disorder, noise, crowds. We've come a long way and he's, you know, done mental health training. He's now a therapist himself, but it's something that, you know, he still has, and he still deals with.

Hector: The most well-rounded warrior eventually understands that this is a part of what happens when you do what you're going to do. Part of the Ranger Creed says, "Fully knowing the hazards of my chosen profession." You know, if we're going to live up to the creeds that we talk about, the values that we talk about, then that also means keeping yourself, you know, mentally strong. You have to go and exercise that part of your psyche. You have to go in and say, alright, if I'm gonna be the best warrior I can be, I have to have the courage to be able to go in and talk to somebody. The Veteran has to have the courage to step forward. The warrior has to say, I am courageous, and not let that stigma sit there and saying, you know, I'm a wimp because of this. No, you're gonna be a better person because of this.



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