

Ways to heal after years of grief and depression

Ron: My name's Ron and I was in the Army. I was in Alaska and I was running a medical laboratory there.

Toward the end of my Army service, I had a chaplain come up to me and tell me my brother had passed, had been killed in Vietnam in a helicopter explosion. They weren't supposed to fly combat in the last month. But being a Medivac helicopter pilot, they needed him so badly they talked him into taking one last flight into the combat.

I got angry at the Army, the Government, for keeping him over there for two weeks and putting him on a combat mission with two weeks left. I got angry at the Vietnamese for shooting him down.

Of course, they gave me a leave of absence to come back home for his memorial service and funeral, and I didn't really want to go back, but everybody said, you got to go back, you know. So I did and I'm glad I did. But it was a hard time for me.

I had a lot of anger in my life. And I didn't know how much my brother's death had affected me till years later when I was studying in a graduate school of psychology. And in a group, we had group sessions, and I was, I just went in shock when I was talking about my brother's death and found out later that it was a combination, a real toxic combination, of grief and survivor's guilt.

The teacher, psychotherapist teacher, had somebody take me home with them, you know, because they were so concerned about me. And so that was the first experience I've had of how much it did affect me.

I was having problems with feeling depressed, suicidal and relationship problems. And then getting into a VA counsellor, who's been really wonderful, helped me with my pride, to regain my pride, and just getting out of isolation, being with people I like to be around. And I see that helping more than anything is getting out of isolation.

She prescribed me with the right medication, antidepressants, and anti-anxiety medications to help calm me down and sleep medications, and then I started doing more natural things to get over that. And that's more like doing things I love, like sailing, getting back on boats, and deep breathing, conscious breathing, and meditation, prayer.

My brother's death, as I said earlier, really affected me deeply. And every Memorial Day, I get a collage I did of him with his photograph in the middle, the wall, his name on the wall, and other images I put together in a collage, and I wrote about it. And that was very therapeutic.

I've been to all kind of counsellors and therapists and some of them recommended writing. Some of them recommended doing collages. Some of them do art therapy, group therapy. So I've been through... and VA offers all of it.

And, so, there's just so many different ways of doing therapy and being counselled. And they all help.



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