

You owe it to the guys who didn't come back

Mike: My name is Mike. I just got done spending eight years in the United States Marine Corps. I was a Sergeant and a Military Police Officer. I'm of the mind that everyone who comes back from these scenarios has got some kind of PTSD or they're some kind of psychological casualty, however you want to characterize it.

I didn't necessarily know how to act around a large group of people. I'd put on the best face that I could, and I think a lot of folks thought that it was a fairly smooth transition, but life is so much different over there and the stakes are so much higher for everything you're doing every single day that it makes you nervous to even be around your loved ones or even just friends.

Driving is an issue when you first get back. Any little piece of garbage over in Iraq for a period of time could explode and blow up and kill you or your friends, and guys who have seen or heard or been in the vicinity of something like that happening when you see garbage on the side of the roadway here, it doesn't change anything.

I used to swerve under overpasses because there was a tactic at the time when I was in Fallujah where anybody from a young kid to a teenager or young adult were throwing explosives or other objects off of bridges. So, what we would do is swerve kind of back and forth to try to avoid or at least lead them to lead that we were trying to get out of the way of anything that was being thrown. So, you get so used to it, it's like second nature.

You almost feel like folks are kind of apathetic about what's going on and that's not good, and it makes you sad. It makes you angry, it makes you antisocial. I just went and I got an apartment for the summer down in Iowa which is kind of away from where my family and a good portion of my friends were and spent a lot of time by myself. I didn't want to be seen as being so much different than the person I was before I left that people didn't want to spend time around me. So, I thought some time away would allow me to mend that and it doesn't really.

The thing about it is that you can't ever really run away from that stuff. I mean, you can try to work it, you can try to drink it out, you can try to do whatever, but it'll catch up to you eventually.

I remember one night I just sat there and talked to my parents at the dinner table. I was just over there having dinner with them, and this is actually kind of a couple of heavy nights of drinking, I just said, "you guys I think I need to talk to somebody. I don't want to be one of those folks that waited until it was too late and then things are totally spun out of control."

It's tough to say this out loud. It's tough for a Marine to say this out loud, but yeah, I was nervous. I mean I was anxious about going to get help and so I wanted to do an over the phone interview at least at first, and then they actually linked me up with a psychotherapist.

For about once every couple of weeks for a month and half or so, we sat, we kind of talked about these issues. I talked about the fact that I was angry. I was angry about my lot in life at the moment. That I was mad about the trail of how things were happening overseas through the media. I was angry that I wasn't with my buddies. I was mad because I felt like when I was in the Marine Corps when I was deployed



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overseas, that I was really doing something that mattered, and I didn't feel like that anymore. I felt worthless. I mean I really felt useless. I was sitting there going to law school classes and when I asked myself the question at the end of the day, why was I doing that, I couldn't answer the question, and that was depressing.

I think probably the number one takeaway that I got from my counseling was just, you've got to manage your expectations for what you want other people to do, or say or think because they've got their lives, that's what they know and expecting them to act beyond that is not necessarily a bad thing. You can try to influence it but, it's not all that realistic.

Identifying that you have a problem is the biggest step. For the guys who couldn't come back, you owe it to them to get your stuff fixed. You owe it to them, because they're not here with their families and so you owe it to them to live well, to the best that you can because if you don't, you're dishonoring their memory. They don't want you to be sitting around having these issues and not trying to do anything about it. Just because you leave the combat zone doesn't mean that your war is over. It's not, it's an ongoing process.



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