

## Overcoming an opioid addiction with VA support

**Jerry:** My name is Jerry. I was a Veteran from the U.S. Airforce. I served in 1960-1964. I was honorably discharged at that time.

Towards the end of 2011, I was at my doctor's appointment and he says, "I'd like for you to see a cardiologist soon." I went in the first of December and they did my heart surgery and then everything started going crazy. January, I developed a full set, full onset of shingles, which was probably the worst pain I've ever had. It was supposed to last for a couple of weeks. It lasted well over a month and, like I say, the pain was excruciating. It was, just, all I could do was sit in a chair, watch TV, and cry. They changed my meds at that time from Valium to oxycodone, and that was lights out for me. I'd wake up in the morning, take my oxycodone and wash it down with vodka, and then from then on, it's sort of fuzzy. I got addicted to the oxycodone and, started standing up and falling over. At that point, my significant other and my two sons said, "You need help, dad." So, they got me a private facility.

When I got out, I relapsed almost immediately. I didn't have the oxycodone, but I was going back to the vodka and so forth. A neighbor suggested I go to a facility in Mesa. After 90 days there, the first day I relapsed again. I had to stay away five days before I came back for another 90 days, same story, different day. The day I got out there, I relapsed again, ended up in the hospital. Called my significant other, my life partner, actually we've been together for 30 years, called her and she says, "Don't, don't come back until you're well." So, I didn't sleep; I just had thoughts of suicide.

I was on the bus, riding from North Phoenix, down 7<sup>th</sup> Street. The bus stopped at a bus stop right outside the VA, and I looked over and I said, "I've got to be in there." I got off the bus, went into emergency, talked to a counselor, and about an hour later I was up on D5, which was the psych ward, and I spent 21 days up there. After that, the program went to 90 days outpatient treatment, which was with groups down at the VA, different groups on different focuses of addiction and alcoholism. And realized that it's a disease and it's treatable and, treat the sympt-, treat the disease, learn the coping skills, know when they're going to happen or what triggers you and adjust your behavior accordingly, and that was a tremendous help for me.

My partner says, she called me, and she says, "I think you're ready." So, I went back to her place and we've been together since then, for the last probably two years, and we've been getting counseling together. The counseling progressed to a point to where she really didn't feel, and this is a VA counselor, she felt that we'd progressed to the point and most of our issues were dependent upon, or working on communication between the two of us, and that was sorely needed and we adopted some techniques and things to help be kinder, gentler people when we interacted if you know what I mean?

To be where I am today, as far as my attitude towards alcohol, it's not even in my mind, just be, whereas before, every day I couldn't wait until 5 or 6 o'clock to start, to, to either have a drink of scotch or a drink of wine or something like that. There is help out there and you can get by it.



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