

Counseling at VA helped turn his life around

John: I'm John. I served in the Army and my MOS was a Correctional Specialist which is a Military Policeman and a guard.

There was one incident and it happened off-post though, me and these two guys were swimming and my friend started to drown and I tried to save him and this was in the Big Piney River in Missouri and he kept pulling me under the water and pulling me under the water until finally you know, I couldn't help him anymore and he drowned, and then the State Police came and they said, You know, because you're military police you have to take him back to the base. And on our way driving back I remember I looked in the backseat and I seen him you know in the back there, and like it haunted me for like 25-30 years. I was only 19 years old and that was the first time I ever saw anybody die.

Back then, they didn't have all these doctors for post-traumatic stress. So, I just had to deal with it. I was drinking a lot to try to forget the problems you know, that I had with the guy drowning and it kept coming up in my head having nightmares. I had anger issues where I was arguing with my wife and then I had a lot of sleep issues where I couldn't sleep. I think that's part of why I drank and did drugs and all the things I did and getting in fights and all that. I hit rock bottom. I was fired from my job. They were foreclosing on my house and then I went to the Hines Hospital and got alcoholism and drug abuse treatment. I was in there for like a month and a half.

I'd stay sober for a while and then I'd relapse and relapse until like about 4 years ago. I got a DUI and then that's when I decided, you know all the trouble that it caused having the car impounded, all the money that I just stopped.

When I lost my job in 2008, I lost my hospital insurance so I started to go to the VA for my blood pressure medicine and talking to those people and telling them stories and they said maybe you should go to the mental health facility on the 6th floor. So, I started to go there and then they put me on the antidepressants and now I'm doing a lot better. It helps to talk about it and my wife even goes with me to the sessions and we talk to the therapist.

I sleep better, I'm getting along with my wife better. I'm eating better. I'm exercising now. I got my license back, my driver's license back, everything, you know everything's starting to go good. It's not like it was back when I served, that it's better now that they got more treatment for posttraumatic stress and that, and that you should get the help now. It's one of the benefits and you earned it. You earned it so why not take advantage of it.



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