

Going through traumatic loss then finding support

Robert: Hi, I'm Robert. I was in the Marine Corps. I turned out to be a comm center man, went to school up in San Diego and then from there was stationed down in Camp Lejeune. Something happened during training that I saw that kind of messed me up a little bit. We had gone through Phase One down in Parris Island, and now we were on the, doing on the, on they called the A-frame, the apparatus, it was like railroad ties you had to climb up, and my bunkmate, he was going up on the A-frame and going over the top he slipped and probably fell about 10 feet, 12 feet and cracked his head right open on one of the railroad ties.

I mean, I continued through boot camp, went home, went out to comm school out in California and I had to take emergency leave from Camp Lejeune. My mother was dying, so approximately 6 months after boot camp there I am holding my mother in my arms. She dies in my arms. So two traumatic events within six months, you know, a buddy and my mother. It was horrible.

I couldn't sleep. I was, I'd close my eyes and I'd see my buddy's head splitting wide open again in front of me. Waking up, you know, walking down the street, flashbacks of the same thing. Was sitting there talking with my son or my daughters and all of a sudden they're saying to me "Dad, you're zoning out, where are you?" You know. I had no recollection of any of that, and then I'd snap out of it, you know, I was just carrying a normal conversation with my kids, I didn't realize where I was going, where my thoughts were, and I didn't know what to do at the beginning and my brother, who was a combat vet from 'Nam said to me, "You know, you need to go talk to somebody," so then I knew, you know, I may have a problem down the road with, you know, remembering that stuff that happened right in front of me. So I put my hand right in my back pocket and pushed myself over to the VA over in Causeway Street.

I didn't know what to expect, but I was pleasantly surprised about how they helped me out. I got referrals to see different people, they had me on medications to calm me down, which worked, but then I, you know, relapsed and started having all these thoughts in my head again, of taking overdoses. I've tried to commit suicide a couple of times, but I realize that's not the way to go. I have three kids and that's another reason why I chose not to carry out my plan.

Yeah, as it turned out I'm—I'm still seeing the same person I originally saw. She said, "You definitely have symptoms of PTSD because of the nightmares and the flashbacks and, you know, the night sweats." We'd done group therapies, we talked I talked with other guys that dealt with death and stuff, you know, that have contemplated suicide. She was real good. She got me on the straight and narrow, now she got me, I'm on mood stabilizers and now it's working very well, and over the course of the years, you know, talking with other Veterans and being in group therapy with other Vets and, you know, the psychologists and stuff, things started to work out a little better because I was able to talk to people.

Nobody was gonna help me but me, so then I realized the VA was, you know, they were there for me and I'm still there, but I don't have the nightmares anymore, for some reason. I'm sleeping a lot better, you know, I've gotten ahold of my life. It's taken a long



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time but I did. Just even taking a walk by myself, I can do that without having any worries about, you know, having something hit me that's was coming from the past.

My two daughters and my son, my relationship right now couldn't be any better. They're so proud of me for, you know, having the, you know, having the gall and the gumption to go help myself. Don't wait like I did. You know, it makes things worse. Once you realize you've got a problem, you know, seek help right away, or try to seek help right away. Go to your VA or your other doctors or whatever, you know, the treatment's out there for you, it's available to you, you know, you deserve it, you know, take advantage of it.



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