

Veterans talking to Veterans are gonna open up

Mike: My name is Mike. I served in the United States Army for a little over three years. I was deployed to Iraq in 2005. I would say the biggest thing obviously that impacted me in the military was being injured and losing my arm. We were hit by a roadside bomb or IED, and fortunately, no one in my vehicle died.

After I got injured, I did all of my rehab at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and I was there for a little over a year. It was a big transition coming back from the military and just not knowing where certain resources were. Like just simple medical care to go to the VA, I knew to go to the VA, but I didn't know how to set up the appointments. I didn't know of a lot of different resources. I really didn't have anything except my family. I came back and moved in with my mom for a little bit. I was just trying to do the normal thing.

Just being in large crowds initially bothered me. I didn't like it, especially going to school. It's something that I think slowly went away as time passed on. But in general, I just think unless you're around Veterans, people don't understand you like the Veterans will who have been through similar experiences. I think one of the biggest things coming back is just realizing that you're not in a combat zone. And it can be tough.

You think something as simple as just driving down the road and seeing a piece of trash or a bag or something that alerts you to that, a normal person would think nothing of it and just see it as that trash. But myself, I remember when I came back, probably four or five months after I returned home, I was driving, and I seen a pizza box in the road. And I knew that logical me was telling me, 'hey, it's a pizza box', but somewhere in my mind was still thinking it could be a bomb. So, I completely avoided the pizza box. I mean, I went an opposite way just to avoid that pizza box. Even though I knew it was, something told me don't go by it.

Fortunately, I had a lot of friends that went through similar experiences. I would go out with them and get to converse with fellow Veterans. And that, I think, was a huge process in healing. Just being around other Veterans, you get to share stories. You get to share information. If something's bothering you that your family doesn't understand, that other Veteran does. And I think that is key because Veterans, especially a withdrawn Veteran, is a lot more likely to open up to a fellow Veteran.

When I initially got injured, in my hospital room, being at Walter Reed we always had celebrities and guest visitors would come through just to cheer up and boost morale and stuff like that. But I was withdrawn when I was in my room. I didn't like people coming in unless I knew them, or they were staff I knew. I didn't want to talk to people. And it would be a celebrity, or the President occasionally rolled through and he would want to talk to people, and I didn't want to talk to them. I guess it was more like a spectacle. They were coming to just kind of look and see, and I didn't like that.

One of the guys that I met at Walter Reed was a fellow Veteran who came to my hospital bed just to talk to me. And I had no problem opening up and talking to him. He had a similar injury. He went through the same kind of stuff. He would just come in and just make small talk. I had no problem talking to him.

I would say to a returning Veteran the most single important thing would be just take advantage of the resources that are out there. A lot of us come back and we just try to



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do it on our own. And sometimes guys go back, and they're not involved with organizations, so they're not around other Veterans. I would just say absolutely take advantage of every resource out there. There are so many resources now with the VA and non-profits that it's kind of silly to not take advantage of those.



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