

## **Veteran's Affairs**

### **Letting go of the sights and sounds of combat**

**Sidney:** My name is Sidney, Sid for short. I am an army man. I served in Vietnam in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division.

I remember walking through a forest kind of jungle and all of a sudden the smell hits you. You know the smell of death. If you have ever smelled the corpse of a rotting animal, it's slightly different if you smell a rotting human corpse, and I never will forget walking through that jungle and finally getting to see this smell. For me everything changed. That body I saw there was not there by accident. It was to affect me psychologically in my mind and it did.

They processed us home, and there was no debriefing and the guys that you were with all became a survival family. We all dressed the same, we all ate the same, it becomes a cohesiveness and then it's ended. You come back home, and you say okay what do I do now. There is nobody there, that's in your world. Your family, but they are not in your world because you are still in that world. You are still in that other world.

It was strange, because at the time you don't realize that you are in two worlds. Part of me is still in the jungle with the smells and the sounds and the hearing and the guys that we were around.

I was guaranteed a job at my old job when I was drafted, so I went back there and signed up and they said yes come on in and they gave me a job and I just went through the motions. So, my wife (eventually became my wife) she insisted that we move because she had already gone to college and I hadn't. She wanted to move to some place and continue her college and she wanted me to go with her.

I quit a job that I had been at for 7 years whatever from before being drafted and returned. So, I worked as a security guard at the same time I was trying to go to school and soon realized I couldn't make it work. I could not make the thing because everything was coming back now. So, I had to let something go. I let it go, I stopped going to school, the pressure you know. I never drank, I have never done any real alcohol or whatever like that, but I was introduced to pot so I started, what do you call it, self-medicating.

I left my wife, not physically, we were living together. What I had established as a studio, I spent all of my time in the studio. I would go to work as a security guard and come back to my studio because I didn't know how to be married any longer. She was trying and I stopped learning how to try.

I don't know how I even discovered that there was help at the VA and so I can't remember what took me there but eventually I got there. They gave me valium on prescription that I renewed over time. I would come back to talk to that particular psychiatrist and there was nothing accomplished. Nothing was going anywhere, I started to have problems with other health issues so eventually I got to the VA and back to seeking counseling and through that I discovered better medication, better counseling. I got to sit down and talk with somebody and eventually I found out about the 12-Step Program.



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I belong to a 12-Step PTSD group. We meet every Wednesday at the VA hospital. There is a place in war that once you go into it and you invest in, it doesn't go away. It's not going anywhere. So, what has happened is we have learned to try to live with it.

But I recommend to all the guys that are still suffering from PTSD, attach yourself to something. You have got to have something so you can be in combat again. You have got to join an organization that helps you, so we are back in war again and we are planning, but we are not planning a war, now we are planning survival.



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