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Kin Pulled Me From A Dark Place

By

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What happens when you spend your adult life in an organization where you could suffer grave consequences protecting a fellow teammate or somebody you don't know, and all of a sudden you leave that institution? It can play with your mind and send you to a very dark place!

As a young boy, all I knew and thought about was the military. My father was in the Royal Canadian Air Force for 30 years. I joined the Army Cadets at the age of 13 and as soon as I graduated from High School, I joined the Royal Canadian Navy where I spent 24 years serving my country. All I knew was the military way of life.

It is extremely difficult to describe the bond and comradery that you have with your shipmates other than it is strong and untold. Training side by side for a deployment that may include a humanitarian effort, a blockade at sea or be put in harm's way when bullets start to fly. I could write pages on different situations that would emphasize this but a couple quickly come to mind. Watching bombs landing in the former Yugoslavia, providing humanitarian aid to families after Hurricane Katrina, to rescuing shipmates from a helicopter after it crashed into the ocean. These experiences, as well as many others, are life changing and if you have not experienced such things it is hard to understand that special bond you develop with your shipmates.

What happens when you are in the prime of your life and you leave your shipmates by accepting a new job outside of the military? It can be emotionally devastating. I experienced it when I left the Royal Canadian Navy in June 2008 for a Public Service job. I was still working in a military environment but no longer deploying as I was now a civilian. This was a great move for my family as it made us financially secure and a significant more time at home. But it started me on a journey that I didn't anticipate.

The perception I portrayed to friends and family was everything was first-rate, however, inside I was struggling mentally. I was missing that strong comradery of deploying. I became extremely irritable, not sleeping, and eating less. It was like my world was closing in on me. The hardest piece I was struggling with was when my former teammates returned home from a long deployment. The feeling of returning home after being away for months was extremely addictive. It was like falling back in love with your wife all over again as you rediscovered each other. Missing this euphoria would begin to consume my thoughts weeks before a ship returned. I began to withdraw and it was as if my peripheral vision was closing inwards with darkness. My wife would see my mood change and would become concerned as the irritability returned with a vengeance. I never discussed this with her as I believed in my heart that she wouldn't understand unless you actually experienced being removed from your everyday life for months on end and then being injected back as if time never moved. As the darkness grew, I began to fantasize on past experiences and what my previous shipmates were experiencing their first few days of returning to their families. The darkness continued to grow as it began to overtake my reality.

As I continued to struggle in silence, a close friend of mine began to talk about our local Kinsmen club. Every chance he had he took the opportunity to tell me what they did in "Serving

the Community's Greatest Need". Looking back I am not sure if he was trying to recruit me because he could sense what I was going through as he was a veteran and saw the signs. He was very persistent and as a result after two years, I decided to join him at a meeting. I recall getting into the car heading to the first meeting. As we were talking, he slipped into the conversation that at the beginning of the meeting we were going to sing a song and don't be alarmed if somebody reaches out to take my hand.

Within the first hour of my first meeting, I knew I had found a new home. I rediscovered the comradery and fellowship that I had lost when I retired. I quickly saw this was a venue where I could use the leadership skills the military had taught me. The association also provided the opportunity for personal development such as leadership and public speaking to name a couple. I jumped in with both feet and quickly become a member. Within the eight months of becoming a member, I was heading to National Convention in Edmonton for the Founding Members Public Speaking Contest and shortly after that I was President of the club.

As I became more active in my club's executive and attending conventions, I started thinking less and less about the internal struggles that I was having. I stopped thinking about my friends returning home from deployments. My world began to expand again. Kin Canada finally gave me that outlet that I needed. My wife saw me getting more invigorated and passionate. She saw me smiling again. I eventually told her of the internal struggle that I had experienced. We talked about why I never told her and how part of me was lost until I became a member of Kin Canada.

There is no doubt that Kin Canada brought me back from going deeper and deeper into that dark place. As I sit here and type this story, I am not sure what would have happened. Would I have sought counselling or begin abusing substances? I can't answer that question. All I know is Kin Canada provided what I needed without knowing what I needed. For that, I say Thank You!