

A father struggles with hard times and unemployment

by Tony in California

My name is Anthony, and I was injured while serving in the Gulf of Oman. I served with VFA-97, on board the USS Kitty Hawk CV-63. The reason for this message is very complex, but I will try to summarize. You see, I was discharged from the Navy back in 1995 with a very small severance pay of \$5000. Before deployment I met a young lady close to my base. We fell madly in love and couldn't get enough of each other. That was back in 1993. We got married and started our family.

I attempted to adjust my career path accordingly but failed numerous times. Over the past 13 years I have worked my ass off in the restaurant industry and even partnered in a franchise opportunity. Through every moment of pain and suffering, I endured. Restaurant operations was not what I wanted for myself, and certainly not my family. I worked on Christmas, Thanksgiving, and numerous birthdays. I can never get those precious days back with my children. Three years ago, I had enough. I tried to kill myself. Fortunately, the Palo Alto VA chaplains office was open that day, and I thought before I did what I was planning on doing, let's see what a man of God might have to say about it. A few hours later, I found myself a patient at the hospital.

Four and half months later, I was discharged from the VA and went home to my family. Not good. They had just got back on their feet after my deserting them. My children were mad, happy, emotional, confused, and in tears when I saw them again. My wife, (I could only imagine what had been going on in her head) hugged me and told me how much she loves me. This was two and a half years ago. I have not been able to return to work, and we have had the most insane struggles financially. Homeless or not homeless, food or no food, were the lights still going to be on tomorrow? I didn't know and my wife was in a constant panic mode. Eventually, she just started staying in bed all day, and I just sat in my garage all day, all night.

The VA put me on 15 different medications, and I couldn't even keep a conversation with my wife, let alone go out and find a job. I barely left the house, only to attend my physical rehabilitation appointments from the VA.

Today, we don't have a home phone number anymore because of bill collectors, and the phone company wanted to be paid for their services. The gas company is scheduled to disconnect my services this week sometime. Southern Cal Edison is shortly behind them. My wife drives my children to school and to the doctor with no insurance because it lapsed. (she doesn't know that yet) Now what? I sit here thinking, I need to separate myself from here. I need to get my emotions together. I need to get my life together. I need to do something, but what? I can't abandon my children when the gas is going to be disconnected again, as well as the power.