

A VETERAN'S STORY

RELIEF AFTER DECADES OF SUFFERING

Eugene has always lived in Lackawanna County. He served in the Navy and saw two deployments to Vietnam. When he returned home there were no emotional symptoms, except perhaps the guilt imposed by a country that didn't appreciate her veterans. But as the years passed the memories of friends killed, explosions, and being on the edge of ambush took their inevitable toll. First the nightmares came, then the need to withdraw, increasing to the point that Eugene would come home from work and lock himself in his room until the next morning. As the decades rolled on the symptoms got worse. Eugene's wife tells of waking up to Eugene's hands around her throat when he was lost in a nightmare. As his symptoms intensified, his relationships suffered, his anger grew, and acting out that anger seemed a very short step away.

Eugene finally took action during the 1990's. Over the past twenty years he faithfully met with mental health professionals at the Veteran's Center and at the VA hospital in Wilkes-Barre. A doctor at the VA said that Eugene had one of the worst cases of PTSD they had ever seen. Eugene tried every remedy they offered and attended every group meeting. At first there was validation that he wasn't the only Veteran seeing these symptoms. He learned that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was recognized as a serious and widespread disorder. But after twenty years of treatment the nightmares and anger continued, impacting his relationship with his children and his work. He became hyper-vigilant and had to sit in specific spots in restaurants to combat the stress of being in public.

In late 2015 Eugene attended the opening ceremonies for Equines for Freedom (EFF). He heard about their use of horses combined with Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) to combat the effects of PTSD and he committed to trying this new therapy. During the first several sessions with the EFF psychologist and equine specialist Eugene felt awkward and a little suspect. It took a couple months of weekly visits, but Eugene noticed that his therapy horse was helping him identify trigger events while the therapist helped him work through his memories.

In February of 2016 Eugene was discharged from the EFF program. After decades of suffering the nightmares are totally gone. He no longer locks himself in his room. As he tells his story he exudes the confidence of a hero who has overcome the toughest obstacle. He laments the years lost, especially his damaged relationship with his children. His wife, who valiantly stayed with him, is amazed at the difference. Although he initially questioned the use of the horse, he now is a firm believer in how much the horse in conjunction with EMDR created an atmosphere for healing. He now has a life he never thought possible. He wants to tell his story to help other veterans find their way to EFF. Best of all, as Eugene sat beaming, he stated, "I finally have my smile back."

Eugene is not his real name. Many veterans, like Eugene, are suffering in silence. Equines for Freedom is fully confidential and provides therapy free of charge to any veteran. This is accomplished through generous donations from individuals and corporations, and through significant effort in conducting over two dozen fundraisers each year. Equines For Freedom is located near Clarks Summit, PA in Newton Township and is a 501c(3) corporation. For more information, and to donate, please visit our webpage at www.EquinesForFreedom.org.