

Written by By Richard Kontz
Friday, 03 August 2018 03:10



Continuing a 7-part special by Richard F. Kontz on a Vietnam Vet he met while running the Bread of Life Christian Bookstore in 2015 through mid-2011.

After Don explained what had happened to him in his first experience with military duty serving on the carrier during the Vietnam conflict, I now knew why he went to the VA for counseling and also why he was on medical disability.

Don also said this is where he became addicted to Alcohol – being the one main way he could cope with his job and also smoking pot to mellow. He said “A lot of the guys would drink a little, smoke a little then go find a woman to sleep with. He said for him sleeping with other women did not help; besides he said he was married and he felt it was wrong. He said mainly he became a “loner” and just kept to himself.

One of the things Don also did was to immerse himself in martial arts training and hand to hand combat. He said this was one way he found he could get rid of all his pent-up emotions and anger. He said he learned how to kill a man with his bare hands and he said sometimes he was so into it that several times he had to be pulled off of his comrades during training. He said he was so angry and he said, “sometimes I basically lost it.” He said, “I just wanted to do my time and get out.”

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I will say this – I never had to serve in the military – and some of my high school classmates did go and serve in Vietnam. And, when they came back they were messed up. And, like Don a lot of them didn't know how to process things, they drank too much when they came back and had a lot of anger. Many lost their wives and families in the process and couldn't hold a job for any length of time.

By now we had been sitting in the restaurant for two hours. I asked Don if he had to go. He said "No, I don't have any appointment this afternoon – but Rich if you have to go let's go." I thought to myself "WWJD." So, I said: "Don, I have to ask you – I hope you don't get mad." Don looking at me with those sad, searching eyes, said: "Go ahead Rich, ask me anything".

So, I said to Don: "You mentioned before you had been in prison – what did you do?"

Don glanced around the restaurant then he said: "I was convicted for murder and I served 11 years." He continued: "Well, that is what they say. I don't really know whether I did it or not, I was drunk at the time and – don't get me wrong Rich I am not trying to make excuses or anything, but I don't remember – I might have and I might not have – I don't really know."

Apparently after Don got out of the military he went back home to his wife and children and it didn't work out. His wife finally left him and filed for divorce. Don said: "I didn't fight it – I know I was messed up and I know they are probably better off without me." He said this with no emotion, more just as a "matter of fact".

After his divorce his drinking got worse and he said he went to Albuquerque and just lived on the streets and rolled other drunks or would steal or panhandle for money. He said he knew every "flop house" and "soup kitchen" in Albuquerque. He said he did a lot of bad things there – he said one time he lost his temper with this guy outside of a bar started to cuss him out and calling him all kinds of names and pushing him around. Don said he took him down and the man pulled out a knife and so Don disarmed him and cut his neck. Don said: "Rich I don't know if I killed him or not - I left him on the street bleeding and holding his neck and he was just moaning.

So, after that incident Don decided he needed to leave Albuquerque for fear that the police might arrest him for what he did and he left and went to Farmington, NM.

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In Farmington, Don tried to start fresh and he said he tried to get work and no one would hire him – given his appearance and the fact that he was “just another street person.” He said right away he found out about all the right places to go for a “free meal, or to sleep or to get a shower.” He said he really tried but things once again just weren’t working out for him.

So, he started into his heavy drinking again. He said one night he and some guys and one woman were drinking down by the river. He said he just wanted to get drunk and be alone. He said the guys started to bother the lady and he told them to leave her alone. After some time, he said he moved a little way from them and he passed out and when he awoke he was in jail.

He said apparently, what happened was these guys took turns with the woman and then they said she went to find him for protection. When they all awoke the next day, the woman was dead and they told the police Don did it. Don was convicted and sentenced to serve a lengthy jail term. Don said: “Man, Rich - why would they say that - but, then again, I don’t really know - I passed out or blacked out or something.”

He said he had spent a lot of time thinking about that and he finally decided: “you know what Don you can’t change the past, you have to go forward.” He said: “I served my time.”

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