

Jesse Zalk

Writing for the Sciences

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### PTSD and Me- The Story Of My Recovery

At this point, I was convinced I was stuck. It's funny how the country where I see advertisements for mental health resources daily is the same country that threw me out on the side of the road—especially considering everything I've done for it. My name is Tyreese Everdeen, and I'm a veteran. Just like thousands of other veterans, my life after being discharged was a nightmare- I returned from the battlefield in 2013, mentally broken and physically adrift. My time out in the frontlines left me shaken, the mere sight of anything potentially triggering causing me to shut down. I wanted to seek help, and I tried to get better, but it just seemed like everything was set up to strike me down. Due to my erratic mental state, finding a job (or any source of stable income) was essentially impossible. For a while, I was damn near homeless, my only crumbs of support coming from the couches of kind friends and monthly stimulus checks that couldn't cover rent anywhere. If this was the extent of my problems, I'd have no issue getting by. After all, you don't become a soldier without learning how to be resilient. However, my mental state rendered me a hopeless wreck. I tried it all, trust me; any therapist that would have me tried their best, but eventually they all gave up, and my inbox nearly flooded with apologetic emails and references. Once I dried up that resource, I tried medication. All Zoloft seemed to do was keep me up at night, making the gap between nightmares and day terrors minimalize as I forgot what it felt like to comfortably rest my eyes.

After weeks of insomnia, I began to give up hope. I no longer was trying to get out of this rut- I just accepted that this is the life of veterans in modern America. My only comfort in life

came from shared experiences- I would visit the post office to find my P.O box filled with letters from my comrades, and often leave with tears in my eyes. I wasn't alone, and as horrid as it felt to know these issues were common, there was some sick sense of comfort I felt from that shared suffering. However, it was one unassuming visit to UPS that changed my life forever. My friend Eric, a weapons expert that used to be my best friend out on the frontlines, sent me a package for my birthday. There was neither a card nor a cute box wrapped in a little bow; rather, there was a sealed envelope and a towering stack of printed scientific articles. He was always fascinated by the way the brain functioned- often during downtime, he would study different forms of brain function in people with mental illnesses or drug addictions and then explain various alternative treatments I'd never heard of before. I always thought he had a few screws loose, but he always had evidence to back up the wildest of his claims. This trend continued in a way that I never would've expected; the articles were about using Psilocybin as a method to treat depression and PTSD, and the envelope contained a long-winded note attached to a bag of the substance itself. I was so upset that I threw the package against the wall.

This is where my story begins to differ from most, and if you start to view me as insane from here on out, I don't blame you- I would too. After all, no amount of scientific evidence can immediately erase decades worth of intentional demonization and fear-mongering. At the moment, it felt like my good friend just sent me, at the lowest point of my life, a bag of heroin through the mail saying "try it out!". I threw away the box and continued throughout the day as normal, but no amount of birthday celebration could ease me to sleep. I was happy to be around friends, sure, but I still felt broken. I believe it was around 4:30 in the morning when I decided that I'd had enough. I rummaged through the trash and pulled out the package Eric had sent me; he was a smart, law-abiding man, and I figured that he wouldn't send me something illegal if he

wasn't confident in it being worth the risk. After all, I've tried everything- what do I have to lose? I sat down on the couch I'd been crashing on for weeks and dimmed the lamp, hoping not to wake up my friend who so generously let me stay for so long. I read the articles with an open mind, and what I found was fascinating. Psilocybin quickly seemed to become more of a medicine than a drug in my mind as the evidence began to stack up. I read about mice that were treated with the substance and ended up dealing with trauma in the same way humans would with PTSD, and the number of reported successes in using it to treat depression and PTSD in humans was unprecedented to me. My perception of "Shrooms" being a drug to make lazy 20-year-olds see walls move was flipped on its head, and I couldn't believe that these studies were so looked down upon. I figured it was worth a shot- I followed the instructions my friend gave me. I fixed myself a cup of coffee and walked to somewhere serene and peaceful. As the sun rose over the trees, I broke the law for the first time in my life, and everything changed.

The "trip" itself wasn't that important to me. I didn't see anything shift or move, which is funny considering how that's all I've been told to expect. What I felt was what really mattered- for the first time since I was a child, I felt my mind in a state of clarity. It was so easy to rationalize my thoughts, calm my anxieties, and love myself and the world around me. I saw a deeper beauty in nature than I've ever felt before, almost to an overwhelming degree. I didn't laugh, smile, or say anything. All I did was weep. For hours and hours on end, tears streamed down my face faster than they ever have before. I would purposefully step on branches and leaves, the rumblings of which used to terrify me, but they now calm me down. I was surprised, as it felt like the soberest I've been in years. Eventually, the overwhelming feeling went away, but the mental clarity remained. I re-entered my neighborhood and noticed how the bustling noises of suburbia no longer seem to fill up my brain with painful memories, but rather provide a

subtle backdrop as I went on with my day. The issue wasn't removed- my past and the trauma surrounding it is and always will be a part of me. However, all it took was one dosage to be able to cope with it like I never had before. I was able to find a job, properly reconnect with friends and family through group therapy, and most importantly, have peace with myself.

Despite all of these benefits, I've never been able to properly discuss them with anyone. I knew that nobody would understand- they'd be happy with the results, but deep down I couldn't stand being viewed as a psycho by the ones closest to me. I'm writing this hoping to remove the stigma surrounding Psilocybin- not for my friends and family, but for people just like me. If I knew this was an option, I would have saved myself from so much pain and suffering that could've been avoided, and I know the same goes for my friends from the force. I can only hope that someday, Psilocybin is viewed for what it is and not for how it used to be perceived.