



Suicide Prevention and the Veteran Community

Craig's story

Craig (42) is sitting in his GP's consulting room, having made an appointment to request a repeat prescription for his pain meds. Unexpectedly, he reveals to the GP that the other night he found himself in his parents' shed in his uniform, after one too many drinks, playing with his father's shot gun and the idea of using it on himself.

Craig moved back to his parents' farm, outside Toowoomba, five months ago, after his long term girlfriend, Renee, kicked him out of the apartment they shared in Townsville.

Craig and Renee's relationship broke down following his medical discharge from the Army. Craig was in the Army for ten years working as a transport engineer in the infantry, and joined with Renee's encouragement. In his early 30s after the bitter break down of his 12 year relationship with childhood sweetheart Amy, he met Renee, who encouraged him to break the cycle of casual, unskilled labouring jobs he'd held all his adult life by joining the Army. Renee's younger brother, who was in the infantry, spoke highly of the military experience from the work to the camaraderie – and from day one Craig wasn't disappointed with his decision to join.

Craig loved being in the Army; the skills he was learning, the mates he was making, his new sense of purpose and the world he was seeing. Craig didn't have fond memories of his 20s. His relationship with Amy had been turbulent

challenged by his drinking and financial difficulties. When Amy left him, he hit rock bottom, culminating in him taking an overdose of Panadol and Aspirin. It was a cry for help and immediately afterwards he was grateful, he hadn't taken anything stronger.

In comparison, Craig's 30s were a breeze. He met Renee when he was still raw and emotional from the break up with Amy. Their connection was immediate and he moved into Renee's apartment after only a couple of months. Renee understood Army life and she handled the long absences when he was on deployment in Afghanistan well. Meanwhile, Craig loved the thrill of deployments, but equally he looked forward to coming home when things were fresh and exciting between him and Renee. In his last deployment, about two years ago, the jack holding up a truck he was working on collapsed and shattered his knee.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) were great following the accident. They did everything they could to help him, including organising and covering all his medical and rehabilitation requirements. However his knee never reclaimed its full functioning, and to his bitter disappointment, he was medically discharged nine months ago. Craig felt like it wasn't only his knee, but also his dreams and his future that had been shattered.

Craig felt like a 'loser'. He couldn't throw the feeling that he was only half the man he used to be. His world closed in on him. It was like he felt safer when he had been on deployment or in the

barracks than he did now at home. He applied for a few jobs but was knocked back from all of them. The constant pain in his knee wore him down and he relied heavily on pain meds to cope. He found himself drinking to pass the time. Sometimes he'd just sit in the apartment all day, in his uniform, drinking and waiting for Renee to come home.

It didn't take Renee long to kick him out, giving him an ultimatum to stop wasting time feeling sorry for himself and find work. He couldn't believe that she'd kicked him out. Renee was all he had and now with nowhere to live, and a body that was tired and in constant pain, he felt his only option was to move back to his parents' farm, a place he hadn't been back to since he left school.

His parents were elderly and grappling with various age related health issues, but they still maintained the farm. They kept different hours to Craig, getting up before dawn and going to bed early. He couldn't bring himself to tell them about his discharge from the Army, nor about him and Renee, instead claiming he had chosen to come home to give them a much needed helping hand. However, rather than helping out, Craig spent most days sleeping in late, pottering around, lost in a fog of self-hatred and regret. The only things that took the edge off were his pain meds and alcohol.

Craig spent five months like this; in his own head space, drinking to kill the time, ruminating about how useless he was, no help to his parents, unemployable, with chronic pain in a body that felt old beyond its years, alone with no future prospects. He started to think that maybe the world would be a better place without him. What sort of man was a burden at 42? A loser, that's who.

Craig was both scared and relieved when he found his father's shotgun one day a couple of weeks ago. Scared, because it took him back to that place many years ago, when he took an overdose of Panadol and Aspirin after his breakup with Amy. He imagined how different

things would have been if he'd just done the job properly relieved because he had a second chance to do it properly this time.

Now Craig woke up most mornings strangely excited. He had a plan, a way out, he hadn't felt this free in a long time. He just needed some more pain meds to even him out. So he made an appointment to see the local GP, the same one he'd seen throughout his childhood but hadn't seen for over 20 years.

There was something about the GP, he's not sure what, but when Craig finds himself sitting in the consulting room he feels an unexpected urge to share what happened in the shed with the gun.

He doesn't feel like he needs or wants help, or in fact that help would even change things, but in the back of his mind he has a nagging thought, that if he does go through with his plan, at least the GP will be able to fill in the gaps for his Mum and Dad. It's the least they deserve.