

WILL'S STORY

HELP for
HEROES

For eight years, the Royal Navy was the family Will had never had. After a chaotic and unhappy childhood, the chance to make close friends and have adventures on land and sea was the best thing that had ever happened to him.

"I didn't have an ideal upbringing, and I never really felt I belonged anywhere. I felt isolated from a young age.

"I'd moved from one bedsit to another since I was 15. For the next few years after that, I went downhill. When I got to 21, I decided I needed to do something productive with my life. It was either prison, dead, or the Forces. So, I joined the Royal Navy.

"Being in the Navy, you were part of a team, part of a family. I finally felt like I belonged."

THE WILDERNESS

When Will's military career was suddenly taken away from him, his world fell apart.

"I injured my back on a training exercise on Dartmoor, and that led to my medical discharge. It was a case of, 'Hand your kit in. There's the gate. Goodbye.'

"I was alone in the world again. Completely lost. I didn't have a clue what to do. The isolation I felt after the Navy was like welcoming back an old friend.

"I got into the mindset of, 'The world's against me. There's no help. There's no hope.' It was soul destroying."

Will became homeless, sleeping on friends' sofas. Unable to settle in a job.

His injuries and his overall physical health worsened, and he ended up needing to use a wheelchair. But Will's house wasn't accessible.

"I physically couldn't leave the house and I didn't want to. I was lost and empty and didn't know what to do with my life. I felt totally isolated and alone."

'I TOLD MYSELF NOBODY CARED'

Christmas was a particularly tough time.

"Waking up alone on Christmas Day, unsure whether I'd see anyone was hard. Sitting there by myself, waiting for 4pm when my children would pop round. Eating cheese on toast instead of a Christmas dinner. No cards, no gifts, no one to talk to. It was a horrible experience.

"I told myself that nobody cared. And then I started saying to myself 'What's the point of being here?' I started thinking that perhaps society would be better off without me."



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'A WHOLE NEW WORLD HAS OPENED UP FOR ME'

Will now has carers seven days a week as he has several serious health conditions.

"I've recently been diagnosed with functional neurological disorder. I'm developing tremors, and I fall a lot when I'm not in my wheelchair. I've broken bones. I have double incontinence, heart disease, type two diabetes, osteoarthritis, a degenerative spine and trouble regulating my body temperature."

Knowing that we help veterans with their physical and mental health, and welfare needs, one of Will's carers suggested he get in touch with Help for Heroes.

"I contacted them, not expecting much. Then I was given my first caseworker, Jennie, who was absolutely awesome.

"The Charity arranged for a ramp to be fitted at my house. I'd waited four years for that ramp, and it wasn't until Help for Heroes got involved that it happened.

"They helped me get an electric wheelchair, because I can't use a manual wheelchair for more than 10 minutes. They've even given me a cost-of-living grant so I can afford to power the electric wheelchair.

"I can now go to the shops on my own. They also organised a membership at my local leisure centre, so I can swim, which is so good for my joints and muscles.

"A whole new world has opened up for me. I've got a new lease of life and a sense of purpose again."

'EVERYONE IS INCLUDED'

After some encouragement from his children, Will took part in one of our multi-sports taster weekends. They're free and are a chance for veterans and family members of all physical abilities to get active, have fun and make friends.

"Before the first event, I was bricking it. Because I was in a wheelchair, I didn't think I could take part, but I ended up doing wheelchair rugby, powerlifting, wheelchair basketball and boccia. The activities are all adapted and there's no stigma. What's important is being together. Everyone is included.

"I didn't realise how much I needed contact with other veterans who understand what I've been through.

"The difference in me when I come home from one of these events is massive. I've got a spring in my step and a smile plastered on my face."

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'BEING THERE FOR MY FAMILY'

Will says the support he's had from our Hidden Wounds counselling team has saved his relationship with his kids, who now live with him.

"This Charity has made me realise I'm not a bad Dad. My children are 17 and 15 and there were times I thought I was a failure. I found it difficult to get out of a downward spiral when I slipped into depression.

"I've learned to recognise the signs when it comes to anger and frustration, how to deal with those feelings, and how to talk about them with the kids. We're a lot more open now."



'JUST PICK UP THE PHONE'

Will's message to other veterans who need support is simple. "This Charity has given me things to look forward to. They've given me my self-confidence and self-worth back. They can do the same for you. Just pick up the phone or email them.

"It's hard asking for help – I get it. I've been there. But they want to help, so don't be too proud to ask for the support you need and deserve. With Help for Heroes, there's light at the end of the tunnel."

TELL A VETERAN THEY'RE NOT FORGOTTEN

Thousands of veterans will spend Christmas lonely and isolated. Veterans who risked their lives for our safety and security. We're asking you to write a message of support on our online message wall, to show veterans like Will they're not forgotten.

[SEND A MESSAGE](#)