

*Team: Tito/ICO Hampton, Mine is not a very complicated story I don't think, I've had my fare share of ups and downs but have always found some humor in my current situation. First off my name is Higinio Fuentes III (Tito) and I was a cop in the Air Force for 13 years and 26 days. My last years I was a CAST (Combat Airman Skill Training) instructor and I used my deployment experience to teach people going downrange what to do and how to survive. When I was in i had a total of 4 deployments to Iraq and 1 to Afghanistan, my favorite ribbons are my campaign ribbons and my Air Force combat action ribbon. I guess all of this started in 2004-2005 when I volunteered to do convoys throughout Iraq. I was part of the 1058th GTC out of Camp Speicher, Tikrit Iraq and had the joy of traveling all throughout Iraq and seeing things that no one back home would ever get the chance to see. With all the changes and the action and the bullets and explosions I didn't know it then but a change had started to take place in my mind. I was becoming angrier and I didn't want to leave no matter how much I talked about home with my friends I started to see Iraq as my new home and when I left that first time I became homesick for a place that was never my home. When I came back I was different, I left a happy go lucky guy and came back with the spark in my eyes gone and a new way of looking at life in general. I didn't sleep and when I did it was for 30 minute intervals and that made me highly irritated. I turned to drinking to take some of the edge off of life and when I tried to get help the Air Force people told me that I would have to go elsewhere because they couldn't help me with my problems. Very soon after coming back I drove to my next duty station and 6 months later I was back in my second home, this time working with OSI and CID and other various organizations and myself along with a good friend of mine provided security for the agents and helped locate and destroy weapon caches throughout the Ah Nasiriyah area with out home base being Talil. After this deployment I found that I came back more depressed than anything because I was able to put a face to the people that just 8 months ago I was engaging in their vehicles. I saw the children that were so hungry that they would eat the cardboard from the boxes of food that we would bring their families. After that I went to Camp Bucca Iraq, and it was there that I left the last of my humanity, my spirituality, and above all my sanity. I saw things there that other people would do to each other that made me believe that God was just an idea that someone had drawn up to make their travels throughout this world less lonely. When i came back from that I was just a shell of the person that I was before. I worked ate and occasionally slept. I no longer had sympathy or empathy for others which, in a way, helped make me a better cop because when you no longer have feelings they can't get in the way of your judgment when it comes to certain crimes. A year and a half later I was in Afghanistan where I helped keep the base secure. After all of this I decided that I would like to teach and got a job as an instructor in San Antonio Texas. Throughout this time I didn't know how to transition, I didn't know how to do without my deployments and I became depressed. The fact that my ex-wife hadn't been faithful to me and tried to blame me and my deployments for it didn't help. Eventually my mental status started to deteriorate, I heard things that weren't there, I saw things that weren't there and I was constantly on guard. I eventually moved out of my house, which was for the better because no one likes to put a key in the door of a place that used to be home and just hear the empty sound of the lock tumblers opening the door to a loveless house. While I was in my new apartment I had another job and worked from 5 in the morning until 12 at night. When I was in my apartment I made it a prison for myself, I wouldn't leave if i didn't have to, i thought it was funny that I had spent so many years putting people behind bars and the whole time I was unaware of the prison that I had been making for myself. I was also told during this time that I had been placed on a list of individuals that would be forced out because of overmanning issues. I found out really quick that the military was very good at making a monster and keeping us caged until they needed us. They*

*trained us to hunt the boogey men of the world by teaching us how to act and think like them. We had become a consequence a punishment that would bring violence to those that wanted to harm our family. They would feed us and tell us we did well and then have us put that monster back in its cage. what people don't understand though is that monster only stays sleeping for so long, we drank, we took prescribed drugs and street drugs to silence the monster. Some of my friends including myself attempted suicide more than once and some succeeded. We could no longer contain the monster in its cage and the only answer at the time was to kill the host because for a sheepdog to take the lives of his flock is unacceptable and we didn't want any innocent people to die by our fangs. During this time I had also began seeing the lady I'm with now and we realized that our demons played well with each other. I was in and out of group therapies and outpatient programs, I did a little time in the mental hospital twice, and met a lot of new people so to say. It was during this time that I met a woman that was raising pitbulls to be emotional therapy dogs and that's where I met my service dog now, ICO. He has given me a way to fix my anxiety and live my life from day to day. He travels with me and I have been told that he acts better than most children. I was lucky enough to find my way to the Working Dogs for Vets program and through them they have helped me and ICO be a good team in our day to day lives. I cannot thank them enough for giving me a piece of my life back, what they do is amazing, they are my heroes*