

This week at VA

Episode # 12

James Davis- Air Force Veteran, Formerly homeless

Hosted by Tim Lawson

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] PSA:

Women 1: The words Veteran and homeless should never go together.

Narrator: Michelle Garcia served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Richard Stokely took the skills he learned in Vietnam and took them to use as a paramedic but when they left the service these Veteran's had problems with homelessness.

Man 1: Homelessness is the worst thing for anybody to be involved in.

Narrator: If you're a Veteran in need or you know a Veteran who is homeless or at risk of being homeless, call toll free 877-424-3838 or visit www.va.gov/homeless.

[00:00:30] Music

[00:00:39] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Timothy Lawson (TL): Hello everyone, I'm Timothy Lawson, your host for this week at VA. I hope everyone had a fun and safe New Year's. 2017 is now upon us and we are headed into episode twelve. If you haven't already, I suggest you subscribe to the podcast in iTunes; we will soon be in Stitcher, and I'm also interested in the other places you may be listening to your podcasts. If you use something other than iTunes or Stitcher, please email me at newmedia@va.gov, so I can add it to our distribution. Homelessness is a serious issue in America, and one that plagues our Veteran community. However, communities in our states have made strides to reduce homelessness amongst our Veterans. Since 2010, Veteran homelessness has been cut in half, and currently there are around 35 cities and communities that have effectively ended Veteran homelessness, including: Buffalo, Las Vegas, New Orleans, Houston and others. Effectively ending Veteran homelessness means that the leadership in those areas have put processes and resources in place to

immediately aid a Veteran who becomes homeless or is at risk of becoming homeless. You can contact your local government office or your local VA medical center to learn about what resources your community has put in place. The feature interview today is with Jim Davis. Jim currently serves as the Veterans' Outreach Specialist at Pathways to Housing DC. Jim served in the Airforce and went on to living a nomadic life of homelessness for nearly a decade. I visited Jim at his workplace so we could conduct this interview. The only room available was a small empty room, so the recording is going to sound a little hollow. Jim is going to describe how he ended up being homeless, how he moved on from that life, and how VA helped him recover. Enjoy.

[00:02:16] Music

[00:02:21] INTERVIEW:

TL: The Veteran's Outreach Specialist at Pathways to Housing of D.C. James Davis, or do you like to go by Jim?

James Davis (JD): Jim.

TL: Jim, every podcast, every interview, we go back to the same point in every Veteran's life, the decision to join the military. Let's go back to that. What year was it and what was your decision motivated from?

JD: It was 1981 and the one incident that made me want to go into the military was when Regan got shot. I remember standing at a gas station when they used to have televisions in gas stations, and Regan had just gotten shot. And after pumping my gas I was standing there in the gas station watching this all unfold, and I for some reason decided I wanted to go sign up, join the military. And I turned my car around, went to Knoxville, Tennessee. My dad was a 30-year Navy Veteran, and I decided to join the Air Force just to be different.

TL: [laughter] What was your occupation?

JD: I was site development, which is just a fancy term for land surveyor and draftsman. Back then we did everything by hand and everything. Worked after training, which was in Wichita Falls, I went, my first duty station was in Alamogordo, New Mexico which they have a lot of sand there. Then spent two years in Germany after I got out, I stayed in

Germany for an additional year. Worked for a German engineering firm over there. We did a lot of contract work for the military, for the Army, the Air Force over there. Then at the end of the first year I decided to come back to the states.

TL: Okay. We're here in D.C., have you been to the Washington Hilton, the location where he was shot?

JD: I've driven by it, yeah.

TL: Okay.

JD: Yeah, it's like every weekend, driving by it. You know, cause doing what I do, I'm in the field all the time.

TL: Yeah.

JD: So, I'm like, that's the one. That's the reason why I'm here.

TL: [laughter] Exactly. So how long were you in?

JD: I was in for four years, one month and one day.

TL: Okay. And what motivated you to separate?

JD: I never went in with the intention of making it a career. I still even to this day firmly believe that everybody should at least spend at least one tour of duty in the military. I think it instills a lot of good, instills a good work ethic, gives you an opportunity to learn new skills, especially if you're fresh out of high school. See new parts of the world, I never would have seen Germany I don't think if I hadn't joined the military. Meet a lot of new people, one of the guys, we weren't stationed together but when I was working for the German engineering firm, we were roommates. He was in the Army; we're still friends to this day. He lives just a couple hours north of here up in Harrisonburg.

TL: What did you do when you first got out?

JD: Wow. When I first got out, I worked in a sausage factory.

TL: Okay

JD: Making meats and sausages and things like that. I went back to Alamogordo, New Mexico which was where my first duty station was because I had some friends there. I'm from East Tennessee which is a strong tourist area. I really didn't want to deal with that whole scene again, so I went back out west. Basically, for the next four or five years or so I just bummed around different jobs, and in 1987 I married. Wound up working at a bookstore in El Paso, Texas. Spent eight years there and then had a daughter while we were there in 1993. In 1995, we decided that we had enough of the desert south west, we didn't want to raise her there any longer. So, two years old, my then wife, myself, my daughter, moved back to my home in Surveille, Tennessee.

TL: Okay. So that was 95?

JD: That was 95, we moved from El Paso to Tennessee.

TL: Yeah.

JD: Then for the next couple years just did little odd jobs, in the space of two years I probably had four or five different jobs. In 97, my marriage fell apart. A lot of different things brought it about, it had been a long time coming. I walked out on a marriage. After being married for ten years you know, and sort of thinking your life was going to go one way and then all of a sudden realize okay, it's totally changed. I'm like, okay, what do I want to do now? 36 years old I felt like I had done what everybody else wanted me to do. I figured okay, I'm going to take a little time to do what I want to do. But I need some time to clear my head and not having an apartment or any place like that, I stayed at my dad's house for a couple weeks and then I got a seasonal job up in Lacon Lodge up in the Smokey's. Highest wilderness lodge east of the Smokey's, east of the Mississippi. It's about 66 hundred feet. Got paid right at minimum wage. Lived up there, had to walk up five mile hike one way. Did the winter care taker up there for one season, it was pretty spectacular. That was probably the start of my strange adventure into homelessness.

TL: Yeah. Before we get into your life as, with homelessness I wanted to go back to that transition from getting out of the military, all the way up until maybe you were confident your marriage wasn't going to last. What was your experience in searching for a purpose? Because I know that's something that a lot of Veteran's struggle with. When they transition out, they're in search of a renewed purpose.

JD: Yeah.

TL: And, some people find it with their first job, like our Secretary Bob McDonald found it a few years after his first job. Some people, it takes, you know, nearly a decade to finally find where they fit. How was that for you?

JD: My purpose wasn't related to job. My purpose was related to that time to the church. Part of the reason moved back to Alamogordo was there was a church I had gone to when I first had got there as my duty station. I left there when I went to Germany and that was one of the primary factors in moving back to Alamogordo, New Mexico, once I came back. So a lot of my spare time, which really was from time with the military up until 1997, a lot of it was centered around church. You know Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, you know, revival meetings, you know, I was basically told the church was my life. I tried to find my purpose within. I tried to find my destiny so to speak within the church. My then wife and myself we met in church, we had only known each other for about three months before we got married, so there wasn't a whole lot of getting to know each other, you know and things like that. Job was simply a way to pay the bills you know and never really had any job skills that I marketed or proceeded any further with. You know, I just took whatever came along, whatever suited my interest at that moment.

TL: A lot of Veteran's when they transition experience an emotional crisis at some point after their transition. I'm sure if you experienced one it was related to what you just described, but did you experience any sort of emotional crisis soon after your transition?

JD: No I really didn't, you know. I had a good time in the military. I enjoyed the experience, but I was ready to get along with what I considered to be real life.

TL: Yeah.

JD: You know. I did my four years and that was enough for me, so no. I had supported my family and you know, it's always hard leaving friends. For me, I loved Germany. I literally fell in love with Germany while I was there and it was hard leaving there because while I was there I did speak German pretty much exclusively so once I got back to that states it took a good 6-8 months to remember how to speak American.

TL: [laughter] right? So your marriage, you walked out of a marriage. You said it was a long time coming. What do you think was the barrier between you realizing your marriage wasn't going to last and your final, your decision to finally going to walk out?

JD: I think it had a lot to do with the values that were distilled into me by my parents. My mom and dad were married for over 30 years, you know. Also the values that were distilled in me in the church. I was told that you aren't supposed to divorce. If a man and wife gets married it's supposed to be forever. But I saw the emotional abuse I was going through. I knew, my then wife wasn't happy in the relationship. I wasn't happy. The final night we were together there was physical violence committed against me and that was when I decided to leave. When I experienced violence. I'm not a violent person; I'm not an angry person. So I know when it's time to cut my losses and run.

TL: Sure.

JD: You know, I took what was mine and left. There was never any arguments over possessions with the exception of the child and that got worked out over time.

TL: Yeah. So then let's go back to, where was the cabin you were talking about, the lodge?

JD: That was in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park.

TL: Yeah, there we go. You said that was sort of your start into your life into homelessness? Your life in homelessness is very unique,

JD: Yep.

TL: In that most people are, have stories of living on the streets or living somewhere in a suburban area, community, whatever it may be. You lived in the woods.

JD: Yep.

TL: Did you just one day wander off and never come back? Like how'd that happen?

JD: No. During this process when I was working at Lacon Lodge, trying to sort of regain my direction, you know figure out what the next move in my life was going to be. One of the guys I worked with up there, he was the same age as I was. He had done different things in the outdoor community, such as trail construction. He had done, ridge running, which is, for example on the Appalachian Trail, he had monitored a piece of the trail, usually, typically anywhere from 30 to 50 miles worth of trail, and every night he'd just spend the night in a different place, just picking up trash, educating people, leave no trace. He had worked in other lodges up in New Hampshire for example, up in Massachusetts, and I thought, hmm that sounds like fun. I had been brought up like I said in a middle class household. My dad was a 30-year Navy Veteran, had never been told what homelessness was, never knew anything about homelessness. Even at that point when I made that conscious decision to literally walk away from everything, I had no clue that years later, I would recognize it to be what it is, which is being homeless.

TL: Sure.

JD: I just pictured it as another way of living my life. Another different, a different reality.

TL: I have a handful of questions.

JD: Okay.

TL: About the way you maintained your life.

JD: Okay.

TL: 'Cause you said, it's about ten years right?

JD: Yeah. It was about ten years, from 1997, actually until 1999. During that time I probably had, I'd look at my resume. Probably about ten or twelve different seasonal jobs, that's how I got my money. Sometimes they would pay ten dollars a day, a place to stay and last for you know, six months. Other times I might get 7.50 an hour, last for three months. It, but they were all seasonal jobs, depending on what came with it, there might be like a cabin I'd stay in or quite often I'd sleep in a vehicle I'd have at the time. Sleeping in my tent, during that time I had two-three vehicles and I think I paid more for my tent than I did for all of my vehicles combined. So, you know, sort of just a wide range of things I would do to get a little bit of cash, but once I got the cash, I was done

with the job, I'd take off, I'd go hiking or I'd go to Florida during the winter, camp out with the hippies. Just whatever I found to do, it was spur of the moment and wherever the wind blew me is where I wound up pretty much. One year, I wound up in Montana.

TL: [laughter] What was your, did you, you said you went up in Montana. Did you get there and just go stake out a great place to go live in the woods for a while?

JD: No, I actually heard about a group of hippies called "The Rainbow Family" and when I walked away from my marriage and decided okay, I want to do my things for a while. I decided to let my hair down, I had spent the early formative years, you know, my early twenties in the church, very straight laced. I thought okay, it's time to see what I missed and if any of its worth it. So I went to the rainbow gathering, the national rainbow gathering out in Montana. Went out there with a friend who I knew from the hiking community. He had an RV, he just wanted someone to drive. So I drove from East Tennessee to Montana in an RV. It's not fun, I don't recommend it. I spent six weeks out there. Really, it was probably some of the most interesting period of my life, because I felt like I was doing something that was totally out of character.

TL: Yeah.

JD: But you know, I didn't know where I was going to be laying my head at night. I didn't even know for sure if I was going to make it to Montana. Or make it back to Tennessee or where ever I was going afterwards. But somehow things always seemed to click. It was also while I was in Montana with my first experiment with some heavy drugs. Primarily LSD. That was, that was that trip. Then I came back to Houston,

TL: Sure.

JD: Resumed doing the things I do here in the east, from Maine to Florida.

TL: Yeah. Have you hiked the Appalachian Trail in its entirety?

JD: I've done all but 300 miles.

TL: Okay.

JD: Because I'm a southern boy I've done from Springer to Harper's Ferry three times.

TL: Okay.

JD: I like the south.

TL: Sure. So this started in 1997?

JD: Yes. It actually ended in 2009.

TL: 2009?

JD: Yep.

TL: So what was, did you just decide one day, almost like a Forest Gump that was running that decided well I'm going to go home now. What prompted your wandering out of the woods and coming back to civilization?

JD: So in 2007 I gotten to that point where like, okay let's see if I can settle down for a minute. You know, I was pushing fifty and it was getting old.

TL: Yeah.

JD: I was ready for a bed. I was, we were actually building some trail in the New River gorge in Fayetteville, West Virginia. And I thought okay, now it's time to settle down. I was introduced to a gentleman who owned 300 acres on the Gauley River in West Virginia and he was building some high value rental cabins and he offered me a position and I took it. I worked for him for about a year and a half and for about the first six months I worked for him I lived in a tent in a white water rafting campground. When you go someplace, walk into a new town where you don't have any money, don't know a whole lot of people, it's hard to find an apartment. I had my tent; I was comfortable in my tent. That was my home, you know. So I spent six months in the white water campground because it was cheap. Eventually, winter set in, they closed down the campground and sort of helped keep me inside for at least the winter. What I did for in addition to working for this gentleman full time, was during the evenings I was working as a care taker of a hospital in the New River gorge. So at least I had a place inside, where I could keep my stuff and lay my head down at night.

TL: Yeah.

JD: There wasn't a financial benefit to it. Just I'd watch the place and they'd provide me with a place to lay down at night.

TL: I'm sorry. Going back to your life in homelessness, were you content for most of it? Would you say that you identified as content? Were you anxious? What was your, what was the baseline of your emotions throughout this experience?

JD: It's hard to say if there was a baseline. Because depending on where I was, my emotions could range from pure ecstasy to severe depressions, like why am I out here? Why am I doing this? How can I get out of this? This is getting old. It's nice when it's a sunshiny day and 80 degrees and you're standing on top of a mountain. But when it's 32 degrees and it's rainy and it's cold and windy, you know, everything you got is wet, it gets old.

TL: Ten years, I spend ten hours in the wilderness and that's a challenge for me. You know, I can't imagine living the better part of a decade like that.

JD: Yep.

TL: What's something that you got from it? Looking back on it, and we'll get to sort of how you got to where you are now at Pathways, but briefly looking back on it, what's something you got from that experience that you're benefiting from it now?

JD: Okay, I sort of got it through reverse psychology or whatever because when I was living in the woods the thing I valued most was my privacy. I felt as if I didn't need anybody else, I didn't want anybody else. Knowing the things that I went through and knowing what I know now, the thing that I value most is the friendship of other people. I am a social person, I do need that social interaction. It keeps my mind straight and it's nice when things go horribly wrong, it's nice to have someone to bounce ideas off of or say, 'Hey I'm having a hard time'. It's nice to have another person to talk to.

TL: Yeah. So you have this job, this, you work at the hostel. You have to use these opportunities that are coming up, helping you slowly get out of

this lifestyle. What brings you from there to where you are now working and living in D.C.? Bring us through that segment of your life.

JD:

So in 2007, like I said I was working for this gentleman in West Virginia. In 2008 the Great Depression hit and as a result he lost a lot of his funding, had to cut back on his construction plans and therefore staff. I was dealing with child support issues, a lot of things. I didn't have a vehicle, I didn't have a car. I had very little interaction with other people with the exception of those at work. I just really started into this downward spiral where even the slightest little thing got magnified. It was like woe was me. In early 2008 literally my world came crashing down around me. The only way I can describe it is I emotionally lost control. Went to the VA in Beckley, West Virginia and checked myself in. I was told that I was a walking stroke because of my blood pressure. Through subsequent series of events I was diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder. Couple weeks later I checked myself into the mental health ward at Salem VA in (inaudible) Roanoke. Spent three days there and that was sort of the process of starting me back, let's see if we can get things back in order. So while in the back of my mind I was ready to get things back, trying to get my life back together, the other part of me was saying okay, I've been here for two years, the economy is going bad, it's time to move on. I found another job, another seasonal job up in New Hampshire and Maine. I worked for Appalachian Mountain Club for six months. The end of that six months I suddenly found myself with no money in my pocket, nowhere to go, you know no place to go to, no job and I was literally tired of living the way I've been living for the previous twelve years. So a friend of mine, the gentleman I'd went to Montana with, he was a Vietnam Vet, utilized the VA in Johnson City, Tennessee quite a bit and he told me about the (inaudible) program down there. That they had a great homeless program. So I drove back to Tennessee from Maine and went and applied for a spot at the Dom in Johnson City and within a week I was a new patient at the VA hospital there being treated for homelessness, it was the primary reason I was there but also for mental health and substance abuse. You know, my main thing was alcohol, pot. Not that I was a raging drunk or had gotten in any kind of legal trouble but even just a little bit when you're dealing with something that as pervasive as depression, even just a little bit of something just magnifies that depression a little more.

TL:

When you went to the VA in Beckley, what prompted that? How did you know to go to VA?

JD: I had gotten into a verbal altercation with somebody that I worked with and I'm normally a pretty chill guy and I was physically shaking I was so upset. I couldn't stop shaking, my emotions were totally disconnected from my brain I guess is the best way to put it. I was unable to control those emotions and I knew something was up, something was wrong. So that was when I went to Beckley.

TL: Johnson City?

JD: Yep.

TL: Where is your progression past that? Bring us to coming out of that.

JD: So I spent a year there and it sort of interesting because the first day, well not the first day but within the first week I was there I started seeing a psychiatrist and the first words out of my mouth was 'life sucks'. I had had a plan for getting out of it, getting out of everything all together. I hated guns, hated knives, but I could take some pills pretty easily and go right to sleep and never wake up. I told my psychiatrist that day, life sucks. Through that next year I would see him every week and we worked on a distraction plan which eventually become today a hobby that I love, which is photography. We sort of came up with a plan as to looking for employment, stable employment that would keep me going. But it was just a time of healing for me. It was also interesting because I saw people going through the same things that I was going through. They were homeless, they were suffering from depression or some other form of mental illness, substance abuse. They were just normal people, it was great talking to them. It's like we came from all different walks of life you know, but the thing we had in common was the military, we were brothers bound by our service in the military. Just like, you never leave a brother alone on the battlefield, you never leave a brother alone in the hospital if they were having problems. After a year I found a job with the national park service, (inaudible) national park working in trails and I thought this is my dream job. I'm actually getting good money. I signed a lease for my own apartment when I got to (inaudible). I was doing what I'd done for twelve years previously and finally getting paid for it. But sometimes your dream job can be your nightmare because I found it increasingly difficult at 50 to go up and down the mountains, and my body literally gave up. I realized I could no longer do it any longer. So at the end of the first year I left. Decided I had to reinvent myself because I didn't have any job skills. Digging dirt isn't a marketable skill.

TL: [laughter]

JD: I didn't have a college degree, so it was a little scary. I wound up and for three months I was unemployed trying to figure out what to do. I was in the red, my landlord was very gracious and worked with me on, you know he says, 'If you got rent great. If not, great don't worry about it, with what you're going through.' So for three months I tried to sort of analyze which direction I go. I could have easily gone back to Johnson City, back to the VA hospital but the economy was still trying to recover at that point. I knew I'd be back in the same position I was at before. Really, honestly didn't want to go there. I had some friends in D.C. I called and I said, 'Hey I'm thinking about coming' 'Come on!' you know, and I had looked at the job market, looked at the unemployment level, at that rate D.C. had one of the lowest employment rates in the states. So I made the jump to move up here, I found another seasonal job at Arlington National Cemetery doing grounds keeping there. Worked there for a few weeks and then got a seasonal job with the VA with the National Cemetery Service at Cole Pepper National Cemetery.

TL: Okay

JD: And I finished off the season down there as a landscaper. What it did, it gave me some time to figure out, okay what did I want to do and put out some applications, re-work my resume. Once that job ended, I really started putting out my resume in different places. This is in the fall of, actually winter of 2012 around the October, November, December time frame of 2012. Put in my application at several different places and I got a job offer with Amtrak. I interviewed and I had gotten approved, and I was scheduled to go to training on January 7th of 2013. The day after I was given that job, the day after I was offered that job I was looking in Craigslist still looking for work because I wasn't sure if I wanted to do something physical like that, and I saw job advertisement for a Veteran's outreach specialist for this placed called "Pathways to Housing" in Washington D.C. and I read the job description about working with formerly homeless and homeless Veteran's and I'm like hmm. But I never had any social work, I had no idea how to, I didn't think there was a possibility. So I said, 'Why not, I'll give it a shot.' So rather than market myself based on my job history which is pretty sketchy up at that point, I decided to market myself based on my skills and the fact that I had been a homeless Veteran, the fact that I do know what these guys are going through, I'd been there done that. I came here and interviewed and I started here the same day that I was supposed to start at the Amtrak. I told them, 'Sorry, I've got

another job.' It wasn't as much money working here but I felt that the long term reward would be much greater. It's proven to be so. First two years I was here I worked for a program under contract from the Veteran's administration called "Supportive services for Veteran families". We were subcontracted for another non-profit here in D.C. After two years we lost that grant. I'm now working for our Veteran's housing first team. We work with 50 Veterans who have been awarded (inaudible) vouchers. I'm actually worked as a peer specialist and I'm in the process of getting my certification.

TL: That's very cool. So let's talk about working with homeless Veterans. Tell me about, let's first identify what's one of the challenges in either reaching out to Veterans or getting them into your program, working with them, what's a challenge that you've noticed?

JD: The biggest challenge that I think personally is establishing trust with them. They've been almost as many cases for 20-25-30 years, they've been promised so many different things and none of those promises have been fulfilled. They have a deep, deep level of distrust for anything government including the VA so a lot of times the hardest part is just building the level of trust, building the level of rapport. You know, we can meet someone say, 'Hey, we're going to get you housed.' They say, 'Fine. Prove it.' They want, they don't want to hear our words they want to see our actions. Sometimes, a lot of times, the hardest thing is building the level of trust. Once we, once they find out that I've been where they're at, that I've been homeless, that helps establish a deep level of trust because I've been through what they're going through or I've felt the things that they feel. It's given me sort of an edge in working with some of the population that we work with.

TL: So on the other side I imagine it's when you get that trust, but where is the reward? When do you go home feeling fulfilled?

JD: When I see somebody who has made a positive change in their life, you know. I've seen people who've first come in our program who had no money, had no income. It's great seeing them get off the street, getting their own place and they're like, 'Wow this is mine?' You know? It's great seeing their faces when we hand them the keys to their own apartment. It's great seeing a person start to plan for their future when they've had no money, when they even start getting just a little bit every month now. It's great seeing that. I just know that every day when I leave here I've made a difference in someone's life one way or another.

TL: Yeah. I know a man in D.C., a Veteran who is homeless, I feel guilty calling him my friend, not because I don't believe that him and I are friends but I feel guilty knowing that I have someone I would call a friend that's homeless. But I know that he is connected with Pathways. I just spoke to him last week. Actually when I saw him, I hadn't seen him in months. When I saw him, I ran up to him asking how he was doing and the first thing I was going to do was tell him about Pathways to Housing and he told me he has an apartment and that he got it through Pathways to Housing.

JD: Cool.

TL: So I was very relieved to hear that. If someone listening right now, you know VA has its hotline for homeless Veterans or soon to be homeless Veterans. I'm going to give that out after the interview but maybe if a Veteran isn't comfortable with VA. There's a lot of trust there, lot of trust issues there but someone knows a Veteran, they pass by the same person on the street maybe you know every week, every day on the way to work, what's, how can the average person help with. You know, I know a lot of people have reservations about tossing change into a cup or about other ways or requests we see on these signs. But I know a lot of people want to make a difference in the lives of homeless persons if they walk by, especially Veterans. What can the average person do or say or guide that person, that homeless Veteran to benefit them?

JD: Just sit down, talk to them, talk to them, listen to them. A lot of people don't want to engage with other homeless individuals because of the stigma that's involved. If you sit down and talk with these people they are just like you and I. A lot of times they just want someone to talk to, you know. I would say that is the biggest thing, be open to talk to them. Don't, you can give them money but it's that personal human interaction that people crave, that people desire. When it's cold outside, give them a cup of coffee.

TL: Yeah.

JD: Just be a friend to them, be that friend that they don't have because a lot of these people that are in that position don't have anybody they can trust.

TL: This is one of my favorite questions to ask people and I'm going to ask it to you in two ways. Looking back at your four years in the military, what skills what disciplines, skills, trades, talents, did you get in the military that both contributes to your success now and that also contributed to you being able to maintain your life the way you did when you were homeless?

JD: Let me answer the second part first.

TL: Yeah.

JD: Because that's the easiest.

TL: Yeah I went the other way around with that.

JD: Just being able to be independent, knowing that everything you need is on your back, you know. When you're doing, I never went to battle but if we had I realize everything I would have needed would be on my back. You had to be very self-sustained. When I was homeless I carried everything in my backpack, everything that I needed was on my back. The phrase was everything I wanted was in the next town. I think so far as what's benefitting me most today is respect. Treat others with the same respect that you want to be treated. I learned that in the military, I learned that from my family, my dad who was ex-military and it's carried with me today. You got to learn to respect each other.

TL: Jim I really appreciate you taking the time to chat with me. Thank you for your service, not only in the military but how you are serving our Veterans now. I'm eager to work with Pathways in the future. I know, VA has a strong connection with Pathways in the way we help Veterans get off the streets and in housing. I love the housing first method and really grateful to see the great work that you guys are doing.

JD: There's a lot of resources available not only in D.C. but nationwide for Veterans. Regardless if they're homeless, dealing with mental or substance/health issues. Just reach out you know. Check with your local VA, your local Vet Center, any number of Veteran service providers like VFW, Disabled American Veterans, Iraq-Afghanistan Alliance. There's all kind of non-profits and agencies, there's all kind of help out there for Veterans. Just need to be willing to reach out and ask for it or help connect them with that assistance, if you're a friend or family member.

[00:40:59] Music

[00:41:04] PSA

Kids: I pledge allegiance to the Flag...

Man 1: We grew up together, we believed in something bigger than ourselves. The military took me to one side of the world and her to the other. And even though she was always the strong one, when we caught up years later, I found out she had fallen on some hard times. It was her call to make but doing it together made all the difference.

Narrator: For Veterans who are homeless or on the brink of homelessness call 877-424-3838.

[00:41:32] Music

[00:41:36] CLOSING MONOLOGUE

TL: As you've heard in the PSAs and in the interview, VA aids homeless or at-risk Veterans. If you call the number 1-877-424-3838, you'll reach a representative that will get you information and help connect you to a VA medical center and a case manager closest to you. They will then be able to get you in touch with the benefits you've earned. Today's Veteran of the Day is Christopher Ford. Chris served in the Airforce for 20 years. He deployed in support of Southern Watch Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is now the CEO of National Association of Veterans Serving Organizations. For his full write-up and to learn how you can submit your own Veteran of the Day, visit blogs.va.gov. That wraps up episode 12. I want to thank you all for listening. I know there are options out there for entertainment, so I appreciate you spending your time here with me. If you have any feedback or questions and like to have them answered on the show, please Tweet them to us using [#VAPodcast](https://twitter.com/VAPodcast) or emailing us newmedia@va.gov. Be sure to follow us on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/DeptVetAffairs) [Link to Instagram Account] at DeptVetAffairs for photos from our community. I'm Timothy Lawson, signing off.

[00:42:42] Music out