

Adrenaline Junky

Being fed up with my dip-shit friends, and a family in denial, like I mentioned, I returned back to base before my 30 days of leave was up. I had my fill of civilian life in about a week.

Walking into the Headquarters' office at Camp Pendleton, California, and handing my orders to the clerk, I noticed a few Marines standing off to one side. One of them, a sergeant said, "Hey Marine! You got the balls to try out for Force Recon?" I looked over and asked, "What do I have to do?" He replied, "Just don't quit!"

My thoughts were very clear on this new opportunity, and my small green brain started to tingle with the thoughts of a chance for some excitement. Less than a month ago, I was hunting Charlie, and callin' in artillery strikes, and now in almost no time at all, I was already bored shitless with stateside duty. "So why not?" I thought.

Having the illusion I was in good shape, we began running up a hill, and then down the same hill, repeating this clever tactic until in fact, several Marines did drop out pukin'. They always wanted a few drop-outs in the first hour or two. And over the course of this continuing "test" of our moral fiber (which seemed never ending), and my initiation into the 5th Force Reconnaissance Company, I became "hooked" on the possibilities of the training ahead. Today, the new "buzz" words are Spec. Ops. This means Special Operations. And by the way, where do you think all those writers in Tinsel Town (Hollywood) get all the catchy little phrases to throw into their fantasy action movies? Yep! It's from all the Old Knuckle Draggers and their Young Pups, that's who. You know, the military.

"So what's the point of all this?" you say. The point is, that in a little over a year, I went through 52 weeks of schools and training, and "not one" of them ever came close to the adrenaline rush of combat. Scuba diving, jumping out of airplanes and helicopters, having submarines sink under you, rock climbing, and blowing shit up, just didn't do it.

"And the point still is?" What I'm saying here, is that adrenaline is as addictive as any drug, and you don't get it with a needle. You get it from being scared. The super "hit," comes from being in a life and death situation, and living. It's just that simple.

The more you think you might die, the more adrenaline pumps into your body. And for a short while, you feel stronger, faster and more alert each time it does. Ever wonder why people like the roller coaster, the "fairies" wheel, or the twirl and puke rides at the amusement park? Same-e-Same. The only difference is that you're pretty much assured you're gonna make it off the ride alive and in one piece.

The "Bottom Line" is Fear Equals Adrenaline. The more danger, the closer to death, the bigger the rush. Some people like horror movies to get a tiny adrenaline hit from being a bit frightened, a few Vets like combat movies to reconnect to the rush of battle. It's all the same, just varying degrees of intensity.

So now you're asking, "What's wrong with skydiving, scuba diving, rock climbing, or bungee cord jumping?" Well, there's nothing wrong with any "controlled" sport that has a degree of safety built into it for the doers and/or the lookyloos. You wouldn't normally go skydiving without a safety shoot, scuba

diving without a back up or buddy, or bungee jumping without a rubber-band strapped to your ass, would you?

When the need for adrenaline does become a problem is when you're driving 90+ MPH in heavy traffic, hunting "hunters" during their week to play Rambo, and putting unsuspecting citizens in danger just to get your fix. Been there, done that, and I regret to say, a lot more times than I care to talk about.

Like any addiction, adrenaline causes you to do things that you would normally not consider. It is a way of escaping and makes you feel more alive at the same time. However, the problems that develop for Veterans (or anyone) in these times of searching for a way to distance themselves from trauma-caused pain, is that you're dealing with more than one source of stress at the same time. And since I've lived through it, I'll explain this problem as I see it.

Let's suppose that in fact you're rollin' down the freeway on your motorcycle, clocking along at 90 mph, weaving in and out of traffic. You decide that by knocking on the driver's side window of a sporty little car, you'll surely impress the fine looking girl behind the wheel. But when this beautiful young lady shows how much she admires your bald head and combat boots by flipping you off, and yelling obscenities, you decide to go even faster, and be even more reckless. "That wasn't so bad," you think. You still have your bike and five bucks for a few burritos at Taco Bell, but you were rejected. Even that's not so bad. But the real problem is, that's not all you're dealing with in that moment.

What's happening here (and guess who was on the bike?) is that by riding the motorcycle recklessly to get a little rush of adrenalin, innocent people are being put in harm's way. On top of that, the rejection lowered the level of self-esteem even more, and added to the already high levels of stress to the Veteran.

You'll have to remember that Combat Warriors just returning from war are often "overwhelmed" by emotions they don't know how to handle. There is most likely guilt, the anguish of remorse, the pain of loss, survivor guilt, etc. Basically you're brain-fried, like if someone just clamped a microwave dish to your skull.

This is where it gets a little tricky for the Warrior, and a little dangerous for those caught in the blast radius. If your focus for the moment is getting a real good rush of adrenalin, and you know that the closer you get to death, the greater the rush, then you're pushing the envelope to get all you can. Trouble is, while you're doing 95+ in traffic, getting your hit, the other traumatic waves of emotions may decide to surface at the same time, and kick you right between the legs. If that happens, as it did to me, that telephone pole, concrete barrier, or oncoming semi-truck gets more and more tempting as a way to end the pain.

My choice always seemed to be to live, but on one occasion, I guess the Archangel Gabriel was riding on the back of my bike, because I "just" missed a car that didn't see me coming so fast. And there "just" happened to be an off-ramp, as I almost dropped the bike, but was able to gun it upright, pull off and into a nice green park that "just" happened to be there, before I shit my shorts. I've never believed in coincidence, and this finally drove the point home.

I got off the bike, and while shaking like I'd been in a freezer for an hour, sat on the grass, and wondered how I could have possibly made it through all that uninjured. I sure as hell got my rush of adrenalin, but I almost caused a major accident as well as killing myself in the process. That last

incident proved even too much for my slow-on-the-draw thinkin' to ignore. I never did that again. And I hope you'll learn from this example of what NOT to do.

By now, you're probably wondering, "So what's the solution?" And once again we ain't launchin' the Space Shuttle here. When you finally begin to like yourself for being a decent human being, who only acted like a Warrior is supposed to act, and you start to gain some self-worth (you know, self-esteem), you no longer need the "fix" of adrenalin. That's because the other traumatic problems are also becoming less of an issue. It's like an onion. The more layers you peel off, the smaller the whole onion gets, and the less gas it makes when you fire it down.

As you peel off each layer of traumatic stress, everything gets easier to deal with; you've lightened the load in your back pack. And if you haven't gotten the picture yet, most of your improvement is going to happen as you improve how you look at "you"! Now remember, I'm not a bull-shitter. It's gonna take some work, but like I keep sayin', you are not alone, and you sure as hell can make the grade.

Rest assured Warriors, if you read this book, and you're honest with yourself, and you still screw the pooch, it's your choice. You can do like I did in the past, and feel sorry for yourself for years, until your disability becomes your identity. Or you can do like I finally did, and take a chance on "sticking your head up under fire", then get on with your life. You decide if your tomorrow will be exciting and filled with promise, or the same dark nightmare you've been living in until now.

Surrender is not in our Creed! Improvise, Overcome and Adapt! Gut it out, until the new you, creates a new life, and just the way you want it!

Now, let's break camp, and move out to the next topic. We're among friendlies on this patrol, so be at ease. (But I've still got your 6 O'clock.)

From: "*The Warriors Guide to Insanity*" By Sgt. PTSD Brandi, U.S.M.C. Never Retired? www.sgtbrandi.com