

AROUND THE SWAMP

January 31, 2021 V.14

We are making a change with the ATS. Every other publication we will be featuring a HIM's 4H's and hopefully, a was/now story. As a member of the group, it's important to share your story. You never know when your story might help the next guy. And it's great to get to know each other a bit more.

Houdini's 4H's

History

Remembering a loving family...

My younger childhood was filled with joy and peace with two loving parents and one-half brother. My father(who was handicap) burnt burgers on the grill while my mother cleaned our messy house daily. Of course, my brother and I played our butts off any time we could until the street lights came on. Throughout time it started to become more stressed and less of a joy because of my parents' fighting all the time. Then it came to a halt just after my 8th birthday when my mother and father decided to divorce.

The years of confusion and healing... In the first several years I was a bit confused about why my parents divorced. But I met someone that had the same experience I did and she helped me understand it better. I didn't think it was ever my fault, yet it bothered me why I didn't know "why" it happened.

In the years to come spending time with my father wasn't easy for me because we were so much alike and he couldn't do what other dads could. So I avoided living there as much as possible. I know it was shallow and cruel. Spending time with mom was

easier until she married my stepfather. Which I had a deep resentment for. He wasn't my dad. Therefore he was worthless to me. So living anywhere was now a challenge. That's when it all began... My teen/young adult years were rough. Some of it self-inflicted, some not. I was an only child between my parents, but now with the split family, I was the middle child of 5 and the black sheep. At least I felt that way. I made some very bad decisions with drugs/alcohol and how I acted towards my family and friends. I lost friends over the years because of it. I Didn't know why I did the things I did then. I didn't care then either. Fast forward...

I met my wife at a country bar(which I said I would not marry a woman I met in a bar). I quit drinking and drugs. She and her family have taught me so much over the years. I have two kids of my own who I am damn proud of. A career in something I love to do. I had a better relationship with my father when I realized he did more for me than most when it came to being a father who is handicapped. (I lost him in 2014) I also have a great relationship with my mother and stepfather. And I am part of an amazing group of men that challenge me every day to be a better person. Because of F3 and the men I've had the privilege of speaking with; I sought help with things of my past that I couldn't let go of in my mind. The things I did were absolutely horrifying to me and I had to get answers as to why I did them and why I felt the way I did. With help, I've forgiven myself for the past that I clung to so tightly. I also opened my

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mind to mental illness and now believe it is very real. But I'm not alone in the fight. Now I strive to be there for anyone else who is trying to manage theirs.

Heroes

Like many kids, my first thought of a hero would be my father. He didn't save the world, but he definitely made an impression on mine. You see my dad was an aviation mechanic in the U.S. Navy. His father had ALS for 5 years until in his 3rd year(after his wife left him) his mom and others wrote to the government to have my dad come home from the navy to be with his dying father. It took 4 months, but he got to serve his dad his last three meals until he passed. Then at 25 y.o. he made a decision that made him handicapped for life. He didn't let it beat him though. He owned it and progressed forward like nothing ever happened. He went on to start a security business that rivaled the big dogs in the 80s. He was featured in business weekly and another couple of security mags. That was when his partner and friend of 20 years stole everything from him and left with all the money leaving my father with nothing. That didn't stop him from progressing forward. Being one of the most mentally tough people I ever met. He went on to get a college degree in business finance; got a great job; married my mother; and was one of the greatest dads ever. He tried his best to teach me that my success shouldn't be materialistic and about me. It should be how I help others succeed.

Heartbreak

I'll keep this one short. Lol

My dream was to be a marine and an electrician. Of course, my dad told me to be a navy man. (it was the same to me at the time)

So I verbally committed to the armed forces. Took my ASVAB (did pretty good too) and went on to take my physical in Detroit. So at 2 am they woke us up and we did our thang.

At 7 am I fell asleep and was awoken 2hours later by my recruiter to sign "the dotted line" only to have my chest on fire and not being able to breathe. Later that day I found out my lung had spontaneously collapsed. After it was (re-inflated) I called my recruiter as gritty as a schoolgirl telling him I'm ready to get it done in the marines. That day (Oct 20th, 1998) my dream was shattered. He said I could no longer continue the process to be a marine because I was more of a liability now and they wouldn't take me.

Hopes

That my kids are proud of their pops.
That someday U.S. citizens find peace and love for their fellow man regardless of beliefs.

That F3 grows and continues to be a light for those sad clowns in the dark.

That the Steelers win another super bowl. Lol

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Was/Now Story by Jake "Jennay" Whittmer

The first I heard of F3 was from a coworker who told me a story about how he went on a "ruck" (I had no idea what this meant at the time) which began Saturday morning around 3 AM and continuing through the night into the morning. I couldn't fathom wanting to get up that early on a Saturday for a workout – especially not for that length of time. It seemed unreasonable to me that you would waste a Friday night and Saturday morning for this. My idea of a perfect Friday night was coming home from work and cracking open a few beers while I relaxed on the couch with the family, so I told myself.

Looking back, after experiencing F3, I now realize my idea of a perfect Friday night was a far cry different than the scenario I described above. In reality, what I was doing over and over on Friday night was coming home from work, cracking open beer after beer after beer (usually until I switched to a liquor drink or two before bed) while I sat on my ass and watched the TV or scrolled through my phone while my family was in the same room.

It's funny how your mind can portray a scenario in your head in a way that allows you to view your behavior as acceptable. I had somehow morphed my actions into something that, in my mind, I could tolerate; something that actually seemed respectable. My behavior was in fact not respectable, and moreover, in no way even acceptable. I now have a new perception of who I am as a man and

what I want to be to my family. I've traded in drinks until after midnight on Friday nights in exchange for getting up before 5 AM on Saturdays to join these rucks which include physical exercise and uplifting conversation.

Since regularly participating in the events of F3, I've made a significant change to this area of my life as well as others. I used to be so focused on myself that I legitimately did not hear my wife speaking to me as I concentrated on my own thoughts. I've traded this mindset in for one that actively engages my wife on how I can show her how much I love her. Lately, I've seen a complete 180 degree shift in the strength of our marriage, and we now spend our time together enjoying each other's company rather than getting into arguments.

Apart from the improvement in my effort to be present in my marriage and in my family, the biggest change I've experienced since joining F3 has been a renewed interest in my faith. I once was heavily involved in my church community and actively participated in regular prayer, devotion, and reflection on readings from the Bible. All of these things underwent an abrupt extinction in my life on July 15, 2006 when my mother passed away from cancer. She was the foundation for my faith and the one responsible for giving me the mindset of selflessness. It didn't matter what was going on in her life if someone needed her, she would be there.

I remember one experience as a 17-year-old in high school that still sticks with me today. In that memory, I had to carry her from our van to the

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house. She was in her 5th and final year battling the cancer and undergoing chemotherapy treatments to reduce the size of a second mass that returned and was recently detected. As a result of the chemotherapy, her body had grown weak, and at one point, unable to support her weight, she fell and cracked her hip and dislocated a disc in her lower back pinching a nerve. Also as a result of the chemo, she was unable to undergo surgery which is why I had to carry her into the house. As I was carrying her in my arms to the door, I remember thinking my physical strength is what she relies on to get through her day. If I slip and fall, if I trip, if I falter in any way, I will literally and figuratively let her down. It was at this moment, when I was thinking about how helpless and hopeless she must feel, that she looked up at me and asked if we could go to her friend's house later in the afternoon. She further explained that her friend was having a hard time with a struggle in her marriage and that she wanted to go over to help her deal with it over a conversation and provide support.

The gravity of this statement has not weighed on me before in the same way as I write the words now on this page. She was in her final year battling cancer. She was unable to walk and in constant pain with a pinched nerve in her back. She had every right in the world to focus on herself and yet, her main focus was helping and supporting her friend. I will never have the chance to ask her how she had so much courage to focus on others at a time like this, but I will strive to be more like this every day. F3 has renewed my awareness of this mindset

that has been rooted so deeply in my past and waiting to emerge after being buried for so long. F3 has been the shovel flag that dug up the seed that was planted all those years ago. It will also be the vehicle by which it is carried out and spread in the community.

There is not a doubt in my mind that we, as like-minded individuals, can have a truly awesome impact on our communities. The selfless mindset is one that I will continue to develop and share with others and do good for those around me. I know she would be proud.

MARK YOUR CALENDERS:

Check out the Q calendars and get signed up to lead a beatdown!

Check out the Habitat for Humanity info under the "FloRuck Service Pledge" event in the mumble chatter thread. Sign up for a date!

Feb 20th: Quarterly Ruck, check out all the detail in the GroupMe mumble chatter thread.

Start times: 5:00 8 mile ruck, 8:00 Beatdown, 9:00 5.5 mile ruck, 11:00 2nd F @ Village Idiot

March 19th: F3Blackswamp Freed to Bleed Blood Drive, March