

Chapter 2.2 Life Post-service to 1999

This section is about Billy's posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and his various attempts to deal with his symptoms. He was treated by myself and a counselor at the Community Counseling Center.

Billy stayed in Germany another two months after Dahmer was no longer his roommate. He was transferred stateside, and after two years of service, was honorably discharged. He had severe PTSD.

The American Psychiatric Association notes that PTSD includes distressing symptoms of: (a) re-experiencing a trauma through nightmares and intrusive thoughts; (b) numbing by avoiding reminders of the trauma, or feeling aloof or unable to express loving feelings for others, and; (c) persistent symptoms of two or more of the following problems: sleep problems, irritability and angry outbursts, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle response with a duration of more than a month causing problems at work, in social interactions, and in other important areas of life. The condition is acute if it has lasted less than three months and chronic if it has lasted more than three months. The longer the symptoms continue, the more likely it is that they will remain fixed and difficult to dislodge. An example of how difficult it is to treat PTSD is that almost ten percent of returning Viet Nam veterans still had PTSD symptoms twenty years after they left Viet Nam. _ _ Billy had all of the listed symptoms. He had nightmares awakening with a panic attack. His nightmares were often of being beaten, and when he woke up, he felt as if he had been beaten. His whole body was in pain. He felt tired and exhausted all the time. He was afraid to go outside his house and stayed inside for months at a time. He felt like life was not worth living and had suicidal thoughts. He attempted suicide three times. In Germany he grabbed an M.P.'s revolver and put it to his head and pulled the trigger. The gun didn't fire. When living with his family after his discharge, he overdosed and had to be hospitalized. Another time he drove his car into a large tree. He was constantly vigilant, expecting that at any time Dahmer would appear and try to kill him. During this period of time, he drank heavily; he would get into fights at bars, and have feelings of rage.

In 1991 he passed out at a friend's house, and the friend's fifteen-year-old daughter took his car keys from his pocket and drove his car. She had a wreck and a person was killed. He was charged with negligent homicide and sentenced to a year in prison. He served his time at the local city jail and was made a trustee. He said that he felt safe from Dahmer while he was in jail and didn't have panic attacks then. While he was in jail, Dahmer was arrested. The media found out that Billy had been Dahmer's roommate in the Army, and without any warning, he was interviewed by the media. He had such shame and guilt about what Dahmer had done to him that he denied that anything unusual had happened. He described Dahmer as an ordinary guy. This is the article that

appeared in the Hot Springs Sentinel Record July 28, 1991.

Killer Friend Surprises Jailed Spa Man

A Hot Springs man who was once a close friend of confessed mass murderer Jeffrey Dahmer said Tuesday he “just couldn’t believe” the news of Dahmer’s crimes.

“It was unreal,” said Billy Joe Capshaw, presently serving a one-year sentence for negligent homicide in the Garland County Detention Center.

“He (Dahmer) was not the type of guy you would expect to see on the news.”

Dahmer and Capshaw served 18 months together in 1980-81 in Baumholder, Germany, where both were medics with the 2nd and 68th Armored Division, 8th Infantry of the U.S. Army.

Capshaw, a native of Hot Springs, said he was “probably the closest friend he (Dahmer) had there.

“He was very selective about who he associated with,” Capshaw said.

As of Tuesday, Dahmer had confessed to 17 murders.

Last week, Milwaukee authorities discovered the remains of 11 victims in Dahmer’s apartment.

Capshaw said there was nothing in Dahmer’s personality to indicate he was capable of the crimes he has confessed to or “believe me, I wouldn’t have socialized with him.”

He said he was not aware of Dahmer’s sexual preferences, but Dahmer “was violent” and “drunk all the time.”

“He loved alcohol, loved to drink.”

“It was pretty accepted there, though.”

When he wasn’t drinking, Capshaw said Dahmer was “as stable as any one of you here,” indicating the gathered reporters in the conference room of the detention center.

He described Dahmer as intelligent based on “his actions” and “the way he would read all the time.”

Capshaw said he was “not surprised” at how cooperate Dahmer has been with authorities, but couldn’t understand “how he could maintain it so long.”

“He was obviously not mentally stable.”

He ruled out the theory the crimes could have been the result of “alcohol blackouts.”

“I think he knew what he was doing

“How could he not?

“You have to come back to reality every once in a while.”

Asked if he thought Dahmer seemed proud of the murders,

Capshaw said, "No; I just think he got caught.

"When you've got 11 bodies in your house, you know something is wrong."

Capshaw said he was 18 years old when he served with Dahmer, who is three years older than he, and considered him a role model then.

"I looked up to him at the time.

"I've thought about him a lot over the years.

"I feel sorry for him."

Although he said Dahmer was violent, "a lot of guys get violent.

"You probably have a jerk in every 10."

He did admit to revelations about Dahmer have "shaken" his confidence in human nature.

Since he left the Army in 1981, he said he contacted Dahmer at his parents' house once, but "he acted cold and didn't want to talk.

"I never bothered to call him again after that."

Capshaw said he has no plans to try to contact Dahmer now.

"I don't think I would want to be incarcerated with him."

Sgt. Rodney Neighbors of the Garland County Sheriff's Department said Tuesday Capshaw came to the detention center May 20, after pleading guilty to a charge of negligent homicide.

He said the charge was reduced from a charge of manslaughter.

Capshaw, who was working nights at a local nursing home before his arrest, has been serving as a trustee of the Garland County landfill and could have his one-year sentence reduced to six months, Neighbors said.

Billy quit drinking after he was given his sentence. He took training and was certified as emergency medical technician. He was able to work off and on from 1992 to 1997, and his best year was in 1994. His total income listed by Social Security since he was discharged from the service in 1982 was \$65,000. His symptoms made it difficult for him to be able to work. He had frequent panic attacks; he was hypervigilant and constantly tense; he had nightmares almost every night and was sleep deprived. What made it difficult for him to keep working were fellow workers teasing him about his association with Dahmer.

I first treated Billy in January of 1994 for symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He had seen his primary care physician and had been taking an antidepressant, Trazadone, and an antianxiety drug, Xanax, and I continued that medication. Billy was seen for therapy and medication at Community Counseling Center from January, 1994, to January, 1999. I saw him for eighteen medication management visits of fifteen minutes each, sixty-three group therapy sessions of ninety minutes each and four individual therapy sessions of an hour each. A licensed professional counselor also saw him regularly for much of that time. I wish I could report that he benefited from all this time and effort that was spent. However, it is difficult to find evidence to support this conclusion. He was

working when I first started seeing him, but he was not able to continue working. In 1999 he still suffered from nightmares, flashbacks, panic attacks, hyperalertness, and a numbing of his emotional responses.

Billy applied for disability from the Veterans Administration (VA). He first was given 10 percent, then 80 percent and finally in December of 1998, he was awarded 100 percent disability. Up to that time, he had Medicaid and this was paying for his treatment. However, after receiving 100 percent disability, his income level made him ineligible for Medicaid. When I saw him in January of 1999, he was discouraged about his treatment. He had been cooperative and had put forth a lot of effort to improve his situation. However, at that point he wondered if all his effort was pointless. He was discouraged because he had been working with rehabilitation services to attend college. However, they said that with his degree of disability, he would not be able to handle college. He felt that now that he had 100 percent disability, no one wanted to help him. He said, "Maybe I should just give up trying and accept that this is how my life is going to be. It seems like all the effort I have put forth has not helped and maybe made things worse." I felt I had nothing to offer him at that point. I couldn't disagree with him. He stopped coming to the Community Counseling Center after that and went to the VA for medication and counseling.

I saw Billy for group therapy and for four individual therapy sessions. Although there was not a marked change in his symptoms, he said that I had helped him more than anyone else and he felt safe and comfortable seeing me. These individual sessions are not relevant to his subsequent therapy, but might be interesting.

My first individual therapy session with Billy was in April 1994. I used hypnosis, but this was difficult because he was so tense. As I suggested that he could become more relaxed each time he breathed out, he had a clinched fist. I utilized this tension in his fist by saying that the more tension he felt in his hand, the more the rest of his body could relax. It took about thirty minutes before he relaxed enough to close his eyes. When the time was up and I gave suggestions to come back to this present time and place, he was reluctant to do so and I had to repeat the suggestion. He was quite pleased with the degree of relaxation he had achieved.

When I saw him a week later, I asked him to remember the tension in his fist as a way of recreating the trance state. He achieved a relaxed, comfortable state and I asked him to keep that relaxed feeling while seeing a movie of what had happened to him in Germany with Dahmer. I was silent while he was seeing the movie. After about ten minutes I decided to ask him what was going on. He said that the movie had no end—it kept recycling. I knew that I needed to intervene in some way, so I chose to deal with his shame and guilt. He blamed his younger seventeen-year-old self for allowing Dahmer to have done this to him. He dealt with some guilt issues and had some resolution of the guilt. Looking back at the decision I made then, I think the movie going on and on without end was related

to the belief that Dahmer had instilled in him—namely that “You will never be free of me.” At that time, I was not sufficiently aware of the importance of that belief.

About a year later, I decided to schedule an individual session with Billy for the purpose of using a hypnotic technique that had worked very well for a problem that I had experienced. I had had some symptoms similar to PTSD and had received considerable help with hypnosis; I decided to use the same procedure with Billy. In 1953, during my last year of medical school, I developed bulbar polio. My paralysis was from the neck up. I was not able to swallow, and when I vomited, I choked on the vomitus and was unable to breathe for what seemed to be an hour but was probably a minute or two. Muscles paralyzed by poliovirus sometimes go into spasm. My vocal cords are partially paralyzed and often go into spasm. When I have a laryngeal spasm, I can't get any air in or out for a period of a minute or so. For a period of years, whenever this laryngeal spasm occurred, I would go into a panic and feel like I was going to die. For a several years after my polio, I would awaken with a laryngeal spasm frequently at night. I saw Steve Lankton for help with this. During the session, I went into a deep hypnotic trance, and he suggested that I float out of my body and go back in time. In this relaxed trance state, I saw myself going through those really bad choking spells. My wife was present and said that Steve also took me back to when I was a child and had trouble breathing when I had whooping cough, and even back to when I was born with the umbilical cord around my neck. I don't remember this part of the trance. What is important is that when I have a laryngeal spasm now, I get somewhat anxious but don't go into a panic. Because this worked so well for me, I thought I would use a similar technique with Billy.

I spent some time suggesting that as he breathed out, he could let the tension go out with his breath. I suggested that he remember pleasant memories from his childhood. His body relaxed and his breathing slowed. After about 30 minutes, I suggested that he could feel himself float out of his body and float back in time. I asked him to float back over the experiences in Germany. However, he became anxious and quickly came out of the trance. The procedure did not work for him.