

**PAUL HOLMES  
VETERAN: ARMY**



*As Mr. Holmes became more and more isolated from his wife and coworkers, his alcohol use led to drug use...he calls this the beginning of his downfall.*

## **NO MATTER HOW LONG AND HARD THE STRUGGLE, IT CAN GET BETTER**

---

In 1977, Paul Holmes was a 17-year-old kid from Miami Florida “looking for excitement.” A scarce job market in Florida and a call from Uncle Sam fulfilled that excitement . . . at least for the moment. Stationed in Colorado, Mr. Holmes served in the U.S. Army for 4 years, where he began working in the warehouse but after a year and half was transferred to the company supply unit to be a truck driver. He explained: “I never got along with my supervisors, any of them . . . my supervisor was a heavy drinker, and so was I . . . our personalities clashed. Driving trucks and making my deliveries, all the while as I was drinking, was the way I was while I was in the military.” By 1981, the Army lost its allure and imposed stricter rules, so Mr. Holmes decided not to reenlist.

---

He moved back to Miami, a choice he now regrets, and bounced around from fast-food job to fast-food job. “I considered myself a functional drinker,” Mr. Holmes stated, “because I could get up and go to work.” The emotional problems from his past soon became more prominent in his adult years. He eventually met his future wife, got married, and moved to Atlanta; there his depression escalated. “I climbed the career ladder at Kentucky Fried Chicken and became the manager, but my alcoholism and depression became my downfall,” he explained. As Mr. Holmes became more and more isolated from his wife and coworkers, his alcohol use led to drug use. Mr. Holmes experimented with marijuana and cocaine, and he calls this the beginning of his downfall.

Mr. Holmes’s wife left him, and in 1988 he moved back to Miami. Mr. Holmes began using crack cocaine and harder drugs, and within the first 30 days of his return to his hometown and family, he was arrested. His life escalated downward, and he had little connection to family members. In 1988, Mr. Holmes became homeless, so he decided to see whether his wife would take him back. She did for a short time, but in 1990 Mr. Holmes was arrested for armed robbery and was incarcerated in Georgia. This was the last straw for Mr. Holmes’s wife, and she left for Virginia with her mother. Mr. Holmes served in Georgia for 7 years and upon his release he decided to head back down, once more, to Miami. He was on parole and his mother decided to give him another

chance, allowing him to move back in with her. Three months later, Mr. Holmes fell back right into drug use. “I tried going to a few programs, but I would stay for a few months and then just leave. I tried to find spiritual comfort, but I felt like I was just too far gone.” After numerous parole violations and a frustrated parole officer, Mr. Holmes was sent back to Georgia. He found his wife once more for a short time, but one too many parole violations landed him back in prison.

### Tragedy Strikes

In 2004, Mr. Holmes gave up crack cocaine but was still drinking. “I got a job at the Waffle House, the Steak and Shake, and started cleaning windows on the side. I felt like I was beginning to get myself together and then my wife passed away.” After her death, Mr. Holmes stopped paying bills, stopped taking care of himself, and kept on drinking. His depression was so severe that his step daughters had him committed to a crisis ward in 2008, where he stayed for 1 year. Despite entering numerous programs, the cycle of relapse and homelessness persisted.

Mr. Holmes’s homelessness continued, and in 2010, he became involved with a group of guys who traveled back and forth from Atlanta to Nashville to cash bogus checks. More than \$6,200 worth of fake checks were cashed until one day a police officer stopped him for routine check and Mr. Holmes ended up getting arrested and sent to jail in Nashville. While he was in prison, Mr. Holmes met a representative from Operation Stand

Down (OSD), and as part of parole, he was sentenced to move into one of its transitional residences. However, there weren’t any beds available, so he started drinking again. “I bounced around from one transitional housing facility to another, and finally in December of 2011 I moved into OSD housing and stayed clean for 1 year.” His counselors helped him realize that relapse is inevitable while he kept complaining and feeling angry about anything and everything. “I finally realized I have nothing to complain about. I’m grateful for the things I do have, and I take my medication regularly. Getting a job was tough with two violent felonies; no one wanted to hire me.” The HVRP program at OSD provided computer classes, assisted Mr. Holmes with obtaining his birth certificate and Social Security card, and provided a safe and sober living environment.

### Perseverance Leads to Success

Mr. Holmes is currently working at the Home Cooking restaurant. “I never gave up, even though things went bad in my life. I had people around me helping me. I couldn’t have done it without OSD.” “I got a raise within 6 months, and then a quarterly bonus. My boss thinks highly of my work and I appreciate this. I have a girlfriend now, and I’m rediscovering those feelings and this part of my life for the first time since my wife passed away,” he explained. In addition to his employment, Mr. Holmes regularly visits OSD and performs volunteer work. He stated that he “just needs to give back to them.”

### “It Does Get Better”

Mr. Holmes advice to other veterans who are struggling is this: “Never give up and keep trying. Surround yourself with people to help keep you motivated. Get a sponsor and know that even though relapse is part of the recovery process, don’t give up and wallow in it. It does get better!”

# NVTAC

National Veterans Technical Assistance Center

View more NVTAC success stories at [NVTAC.org](http://NVTAC.org)