

‘Don’t Hold Yourself Back!’

Navy veteran Ricki Hughes knew after seeing a fellow shipmate struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress that he wanted to help veterans overcome obstacles

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Navy veteran Ricki Hughes, 40, lives in Gilbert, Arizona, with his wife, Latoya Walker, and their 15-year-old child. Hughes served four years as an aviation boatswain’s mate handler and spent time as a military police officer. Seeing the events of 9/11 inspired him to enlist. He is grateful for the opportunity to serve and for the lessons gained.

“My experiences taught me the importance of discipline, clear communication and working well with others under pressure,” Hughes said.

On a website for veteran resources, Hughes discovered the VFW’s “Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship.” He thanks the VFW and Sport Clips for helping to fund his education.

“This scholarship has been a game changer for me and my family. It’s allowed me to focus on my studies and pursue my dream career without the overwhelming burden of student loan debt,” he said.

Hughes attends Grand Canyon University and is pursuing a master’s degree in social work. After graduation, he hopes to become a social worker at the VA. As a veteran, Hughes understands the unique challenges service members face when reintegrating into civilian life.

“In this role, I would directly assist veterans, their families and spouses by providing essential social services. I want to combine my academic knowledge with my personal experiences to give back to the veteran community and offer the support they deserve,” he said.

For other veterans looking to pursue their education, Hughes emphasizes that there are many resources that can help. He encourages them to take advantage of the GI Bill and other benefits they have earned through their service.

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“To my fellow veterans out there, if you’ve been thinking about going back to school, don’t hold yourself back!” he said.

Hughes recalls the moment he realized his purpose. After seeing a fellow shipmate struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress, he knew he wanted to help veterans overcome obstacles. He thanks the VFW for helping to make that possible.

“Seeing my shipmate’s struggles motivated me to pursue a career where I can help veterans navigate challenges and build a fulfilling life after service,” Hughes said. “This scholarship is a huge step toward achieving that goal, and I’m incredibly grateful for the opportunity.”

[Learn more](#) about the VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship."