

‘Stop Doubting Yourself’

Fearful of ending up in an unfulfilling nine-to-five job, veteran Corey Phillips used a VFW Help A Hero scholarship to go back to school

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“How am I going to pay for this? Is it even worth it? Will I have time? How will I find work when I’m done?”

Those questions and more flooded Corey Phillips’ mind as he contemplated going to college after service.

Today, Phillips, 31, and his wife Sarah live in Saltville, Virginia, with their four children, one “angry” cat, a “less than intelligent” black lab and six baby chicks.

“Needless to say, my household remains in a constant state of controlled chaos,” he joked. “I guess gray hair is better than no hair.”

In addition to raising a family, Phillips is earning his bachelor’s degree in creative writing, with a specialization in fiction, from [Southern New Hampshire University](#). It was not a straight path that led him here.

In 2008, while the economy was struggling, Phillips was enrolled in a trade school. Fearful of ending up in an unfulfilling nine-to-five job, and concerned about bigger issues, he made the decision to enlist.

“Efforts in the Middle East were ongoing. Plus, at 18, any young adult struggles with finding himself. Joining the military was not simply a last resort,” Phillips said. “It was a matter of patriotic duty and the call to be part of something more than just myself.”

Throughout seven years of service, Phillips faced several “eye-opening experiences,” survived some of the “most challenging and grueling moments of his life” and even met his wife.

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After being honorably discharged in 2015, Phillips attended technical training programs and learned multiple trades. Still searching for direction, he decided to pursue a college degree. With his tuition assistance running out, he needed help.

“Since 2014, I kept tabs on the VFW and how it supports veterans any way it can,” he recalled. “Eventually, I caught wind of the scholarship, and the rest is history.”

Phillips describes the VFW "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" as a “gamechanger.” Continuing education can be overwhelming. For him, the aid offered more than monetary support.

“It’s not just financial relief,” he said. “It’s more like knowing somebody is actually listening. But they’re not only listening; it’s like they’re silently rooting you on from the shadows.”

Phillips encourages anyone transitioning out of the military to face new challenges head on. Realizing that organizations, like the VFW, exist to help veterans is important, too.

“You’ll question why you feel you don’t belong anywhere; why it seems nobody is listening,” he continued. “People may not understand, and you’ll wonder what you’re supposed to do or if you’ll ever find your way.

“Coming from someone who’s been in those shoes; just stop. Stop questioning things. Stop doubting yourself,” he urged. “If you’re searching to find yourself, place or purpose beyond the uniform — just keep searching. There are people willing to listen and help.”

Despite being “only a C-average student” in high school, Phillips has maintained a 4.0 GPA in college and plans to pursue a graduate degree in the future. He credits this transformation to a few things: support from the VFW, finding his place in creative writing and his military mindset.

“Thanks to our experiences while serving, military personnel have a specific outlook on many things in life,” he explained, “it may not necessarily put us at the top of every pedestal, but most of us strive to remain at the front of the pack. With that military mindset, we’re unstoppable.”