

Wounded Warrior Transitional Housing Changes a Life



Marine Corps Corporal Eduardo Panyagua's service to his country was cut short in 2013 after he was injured in Afghanistan. Following inpatient care at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Eduardo and his service dog, Max, needed a place to live close by for medical appointments, while awaiting his medical discharge, and while his wife, Donna, finished her studies at Yale graduate school. "Vinson Hall provided me a home when Walter Reed couldn't," says Eduardo.

With the help of Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation's newly launched Wounded Warrior Transitional Housing Fund, Eduardo was able to live in a rent-subsidized apartment at Vinson Hall Retirement Community. He spent four months as part of the community, playing pool volleyball and going on outings. But it was the residents that made the biggest difference in his life. "Some of my fellow residents became family to

me," says Eduardo. "I never had to worry about dining alone. I was honored to break bread with veterans from across the generations."

One of them was VHRC resident Colonel Glenn Bratcher, whom Eduardo calls "Big Brother." "We developed a close bond because we're both Marines," says Glenn. The two Marines would eat dinner together – Eduardo often cooked – and talk a lot. "I'm especially thankful to Colonel Glenn Bratcher," says Eduardo. "He is still a close friend and mentor." As Glenn explains, the Wounded Warrior program at VHRC is not just about providing wounded soldiers a place to live during their recovery, "it's about embracing them and welcoming them – at a time when they need a little extra care."

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In 2014, after medical retirement from the Marines, it was time for Eduardo to move on to the next chapter in his life. He joined Donna in Connecticut, attended community college and then a transitioning program for military veterans at Yale, and ultimately earned a business certificate at Georgetown University through its Dog Tag Fellowship program for veterans. After Donna's graduation, which Glenn attended, the couple embarked on diplomatic tours to the Dominican Republic, the Philippines and Qatar, where they now live. They also welcomed a baby daughter, Lanna, to their family.

Eduardo still keeps in contact with Glenn, "regardless of what country I find myself in," he says. He is grateful to the Wounded Warrior Transitional Housing Fund for making it possible for him to live at VHRC. "At Vinson Hall, I received an instant family of support during one of the most important times of my life," says Eduardo, who appreciates "the welcoming environment and safe space it provided for my recovery. I hope my story helps shine a light on how amazing Vinson Hall was and is."

