



**“TRUE STRENGTH
IS NOT TRYING TO
DO EVERYTHING
YOURSELF; IT’S
BEING ABLE TO ASK
FOR HELP WHEN
YOU NEED IT.”**

Growing up in Boston as the son of Dominican immigrants, Juan Valdez knows the value of hard work, determination, and loyalty — traits that served him well when he joined the U.S. Marine Corps. “I wanted to give back to the country that had given my family so much,” remembers Juan. “And I wasn’t very good at baseball, so as a Dominican kid, I had to find something else I’d be good at!”

It turns out Juan found exactly that – he was very good at being a Marine. Over the course of his near-decade of service, Juan was involved in 900+ combat operations over four deployments – including two to Iraq and one to Afghanistan. And believe it or not, two of those deployments came after Juan had already been critically wounded by an enemy sniper.

“Even as I was lying in a hospital bed, I knew I had to get back to my Marines,” says Juan. “I wasn’t done. I didn’t care what the doctors said — I was going to rehab, recover, and get back out there. So that’s what I did.” But when Juan returned to service, things weren’t quite the same. During his final deployment to Afghanistan, he’d have to bend over every few minutes to swing his arm and shoulder around to regain feeling. The rigorous tempo of the Marines started to become too much, and shortly after that deployment his unit decided to medically retire him.

Losing his identity as a service member — combined with his physical wounds, grief from losing fellow Marines, and all the bloodshed he witnessed over four deployments — left Juan with complex post-traumatic stress. But as a “tough Marine”, Juan thought he could manage it all himself. He enrolled in college to learn political science and ended up working on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. From the outside, it looked like he had it all figured out. But inside, he was angry, his relationships weren’t working, and he knew he needed to make a change.

Thankfully, he found Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP). “Soldier Ride changed the way I view my body, helping me realize I could still do hard things,” says Juan. “Warriors to Work helped me continue my career while also helping veterans. And Warrior Care Network changed my mind – helping me process what I’d been through so I could be happy and be the Dad my kids deserve.”

Today, Juan's mindset is completely different. He's a positive light of hope and humor, and "angry Juan" is gone forever. He still acknowledges that recovery is a bit of a roller coaster, but thanks to the strong support system he's built with other warriors and help from WWP, there are far more good days than bad. One of the things that keeps him going is having a selfless purpose — to help other warriors and their families by sharing his story as a keynote speaker and storyteller.

