

## Taking steps to improve memory helped her husband

**Kristen:** Hi, I'm Kristen. I'm the wife of Damon. He is a two-time war Veteran. He's been to Iraq and Afghanistan. He is still in the Army National Guard, and he has about nine more years till he retires, but I'm pretty sure he's going to continue on.

We met and he deployed to Iraq a couple of months after we met, I think. And then we talked almost every day when he was in Iraq and then when he came back, we had our first real official date. And then, we dated for a little while and then he went to Afghanistan.

I come from a Military family, so both my grandfathers were Military, my dad was Military. I have a respect for the life, I think. I knew what I was getting into. At least, in my head, I thought I knew. But it's not anything that you can prepare for. It's something that you almost go in seat-of-your-pants. So, you just have to go with what's going to happen.

When he decided to go back to Afghanistan, he volunteered for both deployments, and so it was also a little bit different because we had an opportunity to talk about them before it happened. So for Afghanistan, when he volunteered, the first thing he asked me was am I okay with it? And yeah, that's what he signed up to do. That's what he likes to do, especially because the guys he was going with were some of the guys he went to Iraq with. And so, I knew that that brotherhood was something that you couldn't break. He wouldn't want them to go without him, and he wouldn't want to go without them. And so, I knew that 100% I had to support it, and I did.

When he came back, it was very interesting. First of all, we've never lived together before when he came back, so he had a couple of different things that we were adjusting to. Not only were we adjusting to him getting back to regular civilian life as much as possible, but also interacting every single second, whereas he was gone for so long and all I was getting was phone calls, really, and the occasional Skype.

And so, coming back, it was very interesting to watch him sort of decompartmentalize his thoughts, his memories. I saw a couple of differences. I saw him tuning out. So you would be talking to him and all of a sudden, you'd lose him a little bit.

And then I realized that he wasn't remembering things. And so I started getting a little concerned. The first couple of things were simple, like his keys or asking him to pick something up and he completely forgets it, or you know, we'd have plans and he completely forgets those. At first, I was okay with it and I was just thinking, oh he's got a lot on his mind. But then it started to get increasingly worse.

When I expressed my concern, he immediately also felt the same way. And he didn't know if I was picking up on it or not. And he almost felt like he was out of control a little bit, like he couldn't remember things, he wasn't in the same state of mind. He just felt like he wasn't himself, I guess was the basis of it. And that's when he went to the VA.

We went in and I explained it and the doctor, he blew my mind a little bit. He knew exactly what I was saying, because it's so hard to articulate that someone just, their memory is not the same, or they're not taking in things the same way. That, for me,



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE  
CONNECTION**

going there was interesting because I got to see it from a different perspective. And we got to work through it together and it wasn't judgmental. It was just helpful.

We found that even just knowing what was going on and knowing that it was something that happened to other people, it automatically helped us. We had a little heightened awareness of what was happening, and so I wasn't as quick to judge or I wasn't that upset if he wasn't paying attention to me or paying attention to what I was saying, because that was the thing, I had just thought he wasn't listening, pretty much. And I let that slide a little bit. So I gave a little and he actively tried a little more to remember things, and he'd try different techniques that the counsellor had told him. So, writing down things, just simple techniques that you just don't think of when you're right in the mix of it all. It's just, it's a lot better and it's better because we knew we could work through it together and we weren't the only ones going through it.

If I was to give one piece of advice to other Military spouses, it would be if the times are tough when they come back, you have to remember that it's still the same person. They've just experienced some things and grown in a different way that you haven't. And so really understanding where they have come from and what they've done is the key, and to cut them a little slack for that because it's something that in the civilian world we don't have to go through. So, even just the stresses that they were exposed to is different and it's going to affect them differently. But deep down, it's still the same person. So, you can't give up on them, regardless of what happens.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE  
CONNECTION**