

Finding a catalyst for recovery

Mike: I have a reason to be here every day I wake up and make sure that I remember that. My name is Mike and I served in the Army. My grandfather served during World War II. My dad served in Vietnam. I just kind of grew up around that kind of stuff. My favorite movie growing up when I was a kid was The Green Beret with John Wayne.

Jacquelyn: My name is Jacquelyn and I am married to Mike. He was fixing a fence at the playground and I just thought, "That's the hottest guy ever. I'm going to marry him."

Mike: I was taking over a team from another team sergeant who was being reassigned to a new area. That's when the attack happened. A rocket hit not very far away from me. I was evacuated from the base I was at and they sent me to Walter Reed. As soon as I got to Walter Reed, I went right into surgery. When I was at Walter Reed, the main focus was not on my mental health there. I didn't see a mental health professional until after I was basically forced to, because I was in a bad spot.

Jacquelyn: I had noticed that he was forgetting things and he would get agitated very easily, and it felt like he was becoming more detached.

Mike: All of your senses are just ... they're overwhelmed by sight, sound, light, things that you can't control. I think for a while, I just didn't pay attention to it. But that really doesn't work. It's kind of a lie you tell yourself to make it seem like you're still in control of stuff, but you're really not.

Jacquelyn: It was very, very stressful. It affected my own health, and eventually, it affected his too because not dealing with stuff doesn't make problems go away.

Mike: I didn't know what to do for myself.

Jacquelyn: The longer it went on, I was like, "I really think that we need to see somebody about this, and because this stuff is not normal and we don't want to keep living like this."

Mike: I didn't receive the TBI and PTSD diagnosis until later. First time that I've actually got any behavioral health counseling and treatment was when I went to the WTU at Fort Belvoir. They almost overwhelm you with the treatment that you get. I mean, I was going to two, three appointments a day, five days a week. I had to do a speech therapy, vision therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and really the catalyst was actually art therapy.

People think that it's painting your feelings and playing with arts and crafts, but it's deeper than that. You're addressing pain and trauma. The therapists, they're not just the arts and craft supervisors, they're behavioral health professionals trained to see and read what you put on the canvas. I had done talk therapy before. I didn't like it. I was supposed to go into this place and talk to this strange person and I can tell them my deepest, darkest things. But in art therapy, I didn't have to talk. If something was bothering me, I just had to figure out how to say it in paint.



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Jacquelyn: It was cool to see his passion ignite again.

Mike: Once you realize that you have the ability to control your response over time, you become better at it. You can then channel that energy instead of being in a hypersensitive or hyper aware state all the time. You're using that energy to create something that is going to speak to other people.

Jacquelyn: After he had been in treatment for a while, I really started noticing that he was happier and he was able to engage more as a family, which was really great because he wasn't as distant. It felt like a fresh start as a family.

Mike: I'm able to live a better life than I would without it. I'm able to be a father. I'm able to be a husband. You seeking help is about yourself, but also, you seeking is about everyone around you that knows you, that wants you to be the best version of you, not for their sake, but so that you'll be happy.



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