

## A trusted therapist helped heal many wounds

**Bobby:** My name is Bobby. I'm a retired army master sergeant of 17 years. I served in the military police corps, did two tours in Iraq. I was wounded on August 21, 2006. There was a suicide truck bomb with about 200 tanks of propane. It was drove to the front gate of our entry-control point to the location and there was a suicide bomber who self-detonated it. I was severely wounded. I sustained burns to 40% of my upper body and that pretty much ended my army career. I think the hardest thing was that I was still on active duty, and it was difficult for me to grasp the fact that I was the one wounded and trying to figure out like where my purpose was in the army, in the service, and there was nobody to really answer those questions. That, you know, culminated by dealing with my family and being able to adapt, you know, to my situation as well as trying to decide what I was going to do with my future.

For my recovery, I think it was probably easier than some of the people because I had physical wounds that kind of distracted me. You know, 60% of my time was spent taking care of my physical wounds. Having the physical wounds to tell me and remind that, you know, I was injured was helpful. But also between that and, you know, daily distractions of trying to get the military to help us, as wounded soldiers to help us recover, as well as trying to figure out what I was going to do kind of took a lot out of me. That was probably the hardest part of my life, at least my entire adult life of trying to deal with, you know, the emotional impact of that on me as well as, you know, how it was affecting my family because I had two small kids.

I think that the biggest step was knowing that I needed the help. There's all the precursors going to it like, you know, breaking down and being depressed and, you know, having emotional fits that you just can't control, things like that, you know, and then rage and things, but the biggest thing was knowing and accepting the fact that I needed help and then being able to go get the help. If my wife hadn't of drug me to the hospital, I probably wouldn't have made it, because I was pretty much at the lowest the point that I probably could in my entire life. And once she brought me to the hospital, I found somebody that I could trust, you know, in the mental health field. The biggest thing was trusting the person I was talking to. I started with individual counseling and I had a great therapist from the start. When I was going through the individual therapy, my wife was kind of getting educated on what to expect, you know, what they thought to expect. So, while she was getting educated, she would educate my son and my daughter, and, you know, they had certain things that they would expect, "Ok, this is why dad's doing this," or, "this is why dad's doing that," even though I couldn't still get the concept of the whole thing. There were certain triggers. I mean, there still are triggers now after five years that I find myself getting caught up on sometimes, you know. It gets better, but it never goes away. So, it's one of those things you have to work at every day.

The first big thing is dealing and learning to be a civilian yourself and not a soldier anymore, and then the second thing is trying to integrate into the civilian workforce. I think the biggest problem or heartache right now is that our experience and our abilities don't relate to a resume, and civilians rely on the resume and they rely on college degrees, and some of them don't take the time to realize that military personnel have more life experience and ability and skill then somebody, you know, maybe with a four year degree that has no workforce experience or no worldly experience. So, that's one of the biggest hurdles is trying to explain that to people and getting the opportunity in the door. I mean, even civilians have problems trying to get their foot in the door for an



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interview, but for a soldier it's 10 times harder, because if you ask a guy who's only been in the army a couple of years how to explain what he did in the army to a civilian, you know, perspective, it's almost impossible.

There's a lot of guys out there who speak and advocate on a soldier's behalf, whether they're on active duty or they're veterans. I've even found talking to guys from Vietnam is helpful for me and for them, regardless of how old they are, how young they are; if they've been to combat, they can relate to what I went through, you know, and they can relate to how I feel because they obviously have the same emotions. The most important thing probably is to just not be afraid to talk about it. You know, you've got to be willing if you're going to go get the help and find the help, be willing to talk about things that make you uncomfortable. The most important thing is to admit that you have a problem that you can't fix and to ask for help. I fired five counselors before, just because their style didn't work, but I didn't give up. I knew that there had to be somebody out there that could relate to me as well as help me out in my recovery, and I think the biggest thing is just once you say you want help is not to give up. You know, use the soldier mentality and don't quit when you're trying to, you know, get better and make yourself better, because it's going to benefit you in the long run.



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