

## You need to do it for me

**Julie:** My name is Julie, and I'm married to Tim. He was in basic training and also in Vietnam while I was still back home in school. Early on when we were dating before we got married, he had a really strong startle reflex. If he was sleeping and I went to wake him up, I had to really be careful because being startled awake was not a good idea because it was very scary for him and it was scary for me, because it was such a strong reaction. But then after we got married, when I would be gone, whether I was going to a workshop overnight or just getting away for a weekend with the girls or something like that, I noticed that he was very tense about me leaving and when I came back, instead of feeling like, oh good you're back, he seemed angry with me that I'd been gone.

So we were struggling with figuring out what the problem was between us. So, we found a really good Counselor who did couple's therapy and I just felt like that was a big help. Because I really didn't have any idea that it had to do with Vietnam, I thought that he was being overly, I don't mean protective, almost controlling of me and my behavior and so instead of being worried about him, I just sort of got pissed off and said, "I'm going to go."

He was at school and the room next door was a biology lab and they were dissecting cats and something happened with the smell of the formaldehyde or whatever they were pickled in, it just brought back a flashback, and a flashback is not like a memory. It's not like a dream. You're actually physically where you were, and it doesn't matter that your surroundings look normal, it doesn't matter that he knew he was at school. In his brain, so that's the reality, he was actually in Vietnam probably in the dark, in the middle of the night in combat. I mean, that's where he really truly was. And so the School Counselor who was a really good guy and also a former Marine, called me at school, and said, "you need to come home. I just sent him home because he was having a flashback."

I still didn't quite get it until the day that it happened at home and we were watching some silly show on channel two about something and there was a scene where a person was in an operating room, and they were laying on the operating table and he was immediately right back to the night he was wounded and he was really truly there. All I could do was just sit by him and just keep saying, "you're safe, I'm here, you're safe. It's okay, you're going to be okay" and then eventually he came out of it, because you do, but, that's when then I realized that there was something much more serious than simple jealousy or anything else going on.

He didn't get help because he didn't really know what he needed and I didn't get any because I didn't know what I needed. The first time he went to the VA in 2000, he went and got a case manager. He went to see her a couple of times and she was great and really helpful, but then he didn't go anymore. And then that period I think between 2000 and 2008 was really hard. We were going to the VA, I'm sure he told you this story too, we went there to get a plaque and I said, "well maybe we could go see Kim while you're here and you could kind of get back into the system."

She wasn't there and they ushered us immediately, they were awesome, right in to see an intake nurse in the mental health section. He was really good. They really made sure that he didn't get off the hook. He didn't get out of the system, he didn't get away and not come back and that was really a miracle as far as I'm concerned because that started the whole ball rolling. I actually I was able to go in, I think it was once but it might have been twice, and meet with him and his Counselor who did the prolonged exposure



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE  
CONNECTION**

therapy with him and really talked to her about what was going with me and how that felt at home and she was really very good.

For a spouse, or a partner or a girlfriend or a husband of a female Veteran, just don't expect things to be the same and just be really supportive and if you have to, I would say, somewhere between nudging and nagging to say, "you know, I really love you and I know you're struggling and I know you think that maybe it's not very macho to say I need help, but I know you do and I do too." That's probably the best thing to say because you can say, "maybe you don't want to do this for yourself, but you need to do it for me and you need to do it for our kids" and just at least go and see what they've got because the VA is great, and the Veteran Centers are great and it doesn't make you weak, it doesn't make you flawed, it just means you're human and so, go get help because they're pretty cool people and they really will help you.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE**  
**CONNECTION**