

He's a Different Person Now

Tony: So, my wife, Kacie, is the best thing that ever happened to me. She helped get me sober, she supported me through me getting my bachelor's degree in nursing, and she's supporting me now while I'm going to Nurse Practitioner School.

My name is Tony. I was U.S. Army from 2003 to 2011. Infantry, 11B20 infantry. So, transitioning out, that was a nightmare. I was having panic attacks and I think nature is the natural anti-depressant. My wife and I really like outdoorsy-type stuff. I'm big into fishing, primarily stripers.

Kacie: I'm Kacie. I've been Tony's wife - we've been married for just about four years, I think. We've been together for maybe 5 1/2? I don't know. We're not good at keeping track of it.

Tony: The first tour was hell on wheels, basically. It's the kind of stuff that people write books about. It was Samara in 2005, and I was right when the IED threats started popping up. There was some definite loss of life on both sides, but we were really lucky because there was an incident that happened that they could have, and probably should have killed all of us. If their plan came to fruition, it would have taken out the entire building and all the people inside.

I don't think that I was ever really thinking that it couldn't happen to me. I knew exactly what could happen. And I also knew that if that bullet was coming for me, then that was it.

Living for seven years or any amount of time with a regimented timeline, this is where you're going in this uniform. And then going from that to, like, what do I do now? And down time is what sucks.

I had drunk before the service, I drank during the service and I really started to drink heavily after the first tour. I used it as a crutch. I used it as an escape. I was black-out drunk one time, and when I over-did it, on Saint Paddy's Day, was when the OUI happened.

At that point, that was the last straw. I was ready to change, and I was ready to own it. And I was ready to stop. Like, "this is enough." And then, Kacie saying, "No more. "If anything like this every happens again, I'm out." That's fair. Let's do that and stop. I went for help at the vet center, which is great. They helped me, as well. They do my counseling for the program that I'm in and everything.

Kacie: Oh my God, it was huge change. I mean, he just, I can't say he's not the same person he was, but all the best parts of him have come out even better.

Tony: They diagnosed me with moderate to severe PTSD, and then I went through CBT, which is cognitive behavior therapy. It's about identifying the ways the trauma has made you think differently, in an irrational sense. It's very intense. There's homework involved and you have to relive everything, but it really does help.



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Kacie: And then at some point in there, bulbs just started to light up for him, and he became so relaxed, so go with the flow and easy-going. It was hard sometimes just to get him to go out to a movie in the afternoon. We'd talk about going in the morning, and then by the time the afternoon rolled around, he wouldn't want to do it. And now it was, he was up for anything. And it seems really silly, but one of the other things I noticed is we went to an ice cream shop or a gelato shop, and normally he gets one flavor and that's it. And he's like, "I don't know. I think I'll get a couple this time." And he had this whole, it was just this different side of him. It was so relaxed and more open to everything. That I hadn't seen before.

Tony: Why I wanted to hike the Appalachian Trail is because I'm kind of an adrenaline junky and it was just the biggest challenge that I could think of. To hike the AT it took me just under five months. Like, a day under five months. It was transcendent. You find peace, somehow.

Kacie: That laid the foundation, and the groundwork for it. It really helped going through the various treatments that he went through. It certainly improved the situation a lot, but the hike, I won't even say it was the cherry on top because it was much more than that. I think that, as much progress as he had made without the hike, he would not be where he is right now.

Tony: I'm not the same person. I'm not the same person at all. I'm more open to new experiences. I'm more trusting of people. I'm more accepting of people, and I don't believe anyone is better than anyone else. We're just on different journeys.

So, what I would say to other veterans is know that there are people here to support you, in that, people do care about you. If you need help, there's modalities here to support you getting your help.

Kacie: We've gotten to a point where we've seen how much help that these programs and at the vet center can provide. And we've also seen, coming from him, and coming from others, how much hesitancy there is on the parts of the vet. And so you just, you keep reminding them that it's there, it's an opportunity and there are multiple ways to get started on that treatment. You don't just have to sit across a couch from a single person and spill your life story. There are other ways to go about it and to find your zen, I guess it is.

Tony: There are things that you can do, and organizations that you can go to that will help you. You got to want it.

Kacie: I've told him many times how proud I am of him. Not just for doing the AT, but for doing the treatment, for going through with the treatment when it was so hard, and he didn't want to do it anymore, and he wanted to leave. Like I said, he's a different person in a lot of ways than he used to be.



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