

Spouse support and strength

Barbara: My name is Barbara and I am the very proud wife of Jeff. When I first met him I knew that he was a Vietnam Veteran, but I didn't know a lot about him. He was just, I think at that point three years clean and sober and really starting to deal with his experiences from the war.

If it is a Vietnam era Veteran they have been dealing with this for a long-time and the spouse certainly, that spouse might not have any idea what PTSD is or combat stress and why is my husband doing these strange thing like not wanting to go out into crowds, or not enjoying the 4th of July because of the sounds of the fireworks. Not wanting to go to a movie theatre. You know just simple everyday things like that, that you don't realize can have an impact on combat Veterans.

The ones that haven't reached out yet are just so shut down, it is really hard and it has been so many years now, it is just very hard for them to kind of rise up and talk about their experience or their feelings. They probably don't even recognize their feelings. They just don't know how to make that first step and that is where I think the VA can be so helpful especially with a program like this where it is going to be very easy to make that first step to try to make a connection. It will change their lives and hopefully in a very positive way and make their life easier.

So just reaching out, finding somebody to talk to that has similar experiences just like any other problem in life, if you can talk to somebody that has already gone down the path and can shine a flashlight on that path and say okay well this is how you step here and then step your left foot here and then the right there... it is going to be much easier. I think it can be incredibly helpful to the Veterans, male, female and their spouses, their families too because the families are tremendously impacted.

Jack is such a giving person, he just wants to give and give and give. When the opportunity came for him to go to Naval Medical Center, San Diego, Balboa and start working with the Marines coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan he already had a great perspective on the experience but now he had even stepped it up several more levels. As soon as the younger Marines met him, it was almost love at first sight. They just instantly bonded and it has been just a really great experience for Jack to have them in his life.

Then he and I both joined the Medivac team which means that you go and you meet the Medivac's when they arrive at Balboa hospital. That is pretty intense and Jack was so great with it because; especially when it was a Marine being Medivac'd in. It was great for them to just see somebody that they felt very comfortable with and at ease with to kind of help guide them through that process.

He started holding little groups with the Marines and he kept coming home and saying they keep asking me what they should be doing with their wives. And I said yeah that is probably a big problem; but from that we started a spouse support group at Balboa. So I just became more and more comfortable when I initially met with the younger wives, they were in their 20s, I am in my 60s. There was, like Jack found with the younger Marines, there is not that much difference between the experiences that we are sharing. We had a great bond.



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The spouses that are determined to make it work, especially now when we are dealing with so many double amputees and even triple amputees; the wives are amazing, amazing people and they essentially give up their entire lives just to provide for their husbands and their families. A lot of them have to quit working because they have to be with their husband 24/7. When their husbands are first injured it is just very, very intense. Then they go through a phase where the husband starts to heal and gets more independent and it is like sending your kid to kindergarten, it is like oh he doesn't need me anymore. There are many, many different stages that they go through. It is a horrific situation that they are in but at the same time the closeness, the love that is shared, there is a lot of positive. The friends that they make they bond with the other wives and they become lifetime friends.

So, there is a lot of beauty in it too. It was hard for me initially but then over after a year or so and I saw the Medivac coming in or I would see a new family arriving with the husband very, very injured; but then I got to see the healing process to where that Marine was back on his feet again and that the family coming together and functioning again, I knew there was a light at the end of the tunnel, that things were probably going to get much better for them and they would be successful.



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