

VA programs helped her husband and family

Renae: Hi, my name is Renae. I'm the spouse of an Iraq War and Afghanistan War Veteran. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan three different tours. He was 82nd Airborne All-American Chorus. He was also a Forward Observer, a FiSTer as they call them.

The first deployment was really hard because we had just found out I was pregnant, and he was pretty much gone for the whole pregnancy. He got home just in time. It was within two weeks of our son being born. It was hard to not know where he was sometimes or to get a phone call for maybe ten or 15 minutes and then he had to go. It's not easy when you want to talk to him, and you want to see him and you can't. It's kind of an indescribable thing unless you know somebody that's been through the same thing.

He was in a tower. They were doing guard duty. There was him and another soldier, an Army Sergeant that was in there with him. And I guess there was someone set up in the sand and they didn't realize that he was there until the missile went off. And it blew out the bottom of the tower. They estimated that he fell 25-30 feet down, completely down. There was a stone spiral staircase that they think that John hit his head on. They think that was the main part of the TBI.

The first weeks he was home, he was quiet. Loud sounds, sudden noise would get him nervous. He'd even actually be breathing heavy because of it. Any kind of thing that sounded like a gunshot, anything that sounded like an explosion. He could go from being normal to being really upset and really irritated about things very quickly.

I noticed the big thing was he drank a lot after he got back. The first two weeks home he was sleeping good, but I think some of that was because he was drinking so much it was making him really tired. The hard thing I think that a lot of spouses have to deal with is they don't know how to handle when your husband drinks a bunch. What do you do? How do you handle it when they go drinking heavily? How do you say it in a way that doesn't make them feel like they're doing something really wrong and bad, but you get the point across?

The biggest part of the alcohol abuse was when he was being secretive about it. He was drinking daily, and he would hide it around the house. When you have two small children, you have a five-year-old and a three-year-old and daddy's hiding alcohol around the house, you just can't have that. That was a big push for me to have him go talk to somebody. Because you have to protect him and get him to talk about what he needs to talk about, but you also have to protect your children too.

Luckily, with my in-laws being understanding and both of them being previous military, they kind of helped me get him steered in the right direction. The VA, the program that they had for alcohol and drug abuse was very helpful. They were able to help kind of show him that there were other outlets besides the bottom of a bottle. There were other outlets. Talking about it, I think, was a big help to him. It helps him realize that he wasn't alone with the way he was dealing with things and the way he was trying to handle the stress and the pain and everything that he was feeling.

There were group treatments. They did two times a week group treatment with him. Anytime he needs them, he's actually able to call and get VA counseling really any day



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of the week. Having a line of communication to know that he can tell me about these things, we have that. He does talk about some of it, but when he really opens up it's to people who have walked in his shoes, that have been where he's been and kind of have seen some of the things that he had to deal with when he was deployed and everything. He's been able to do some of that, and that's been very helpful. I've seen a change in him.

He's definitely more family oriented. He's been able to be a little bit more open and honest. He has not been sneaking and hiding things. He's been finding other outlets to get some of the energy out of him. Some of the times when he would be sitting around and having a beer, he's out playing with the kids.

There are several resources available through the VA, through the military. Several exterior sources, even local churches around the military post had family counseling. If you don't know how to handle it, don't just walk away.



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