

## Without VA, I don't know where he would be today

**Justina:** My name is Justina and my relation to Michael is I'm his wife. We didn't get married until after he was injured. It was kinda like when he got injured it was this slap of reality of how much we really meant to each other and it became much more serious. When I got the phone call I actually talked to his mom and she was the one that told me that I needed to get over there and that she needed to talk to me. She told me that he was injured, but he was alive.

At first we were actually told that he was not only losing his right arm but also his right leg, but they were able to save his leg. Then when I got to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, that was when I got to see him and it was just his arm. He had a really bad shrapnel wound to his leg as well.

I was scared. The first moment that I actually walked down the hallway to his room to see him for the first time since his injury, I broke down and started crying in the hallway. I didn't know what to expect when I walked into the room. But when I walked into the room he was awake and he was watching television and he looked at me and said, "Hi babe" and I knew everything was gonna be okay. I knew it was gonna be a challenge for him because he was right-handed, and so for him to have to learn to do everything with his left hand now was gonna be a challenge. But he succeeded in everything he's done so far.

One of his biggest things was when he came home obviously, pretty obvious him missing a right arm, so when he would be out in public, a lot of people would stare and that was something that bothered him a lot. Unfortunately I never noticed it until he finally said something to me and that's when I started to realize it. That was something really difficult for him to overcome was to be comfortable in his own skin again. Like it's obvious he's missing his right arm and so it's something that he's learned to deal with over time.

He's had several dreams, I know that where he's woken up out of them because he was breathing so hard and just kind of reliving the moment of when it happened. But I would say mainly like with his posttraumatic stress disorder, he'll be driving down the road, and he'll see a bag on the side of the road, and he'll get over two or three lanes if he can to avoid driving by that bag, and he instantly thinks of an IED when he sees it.

He's always been open to friends and family about everything that he's experienced. He's gotten emotional with me a few times, a handful of times, where he'll talk about the experience and what he went through and that feeling that he had and what crossed his mind and how he began praying immediately when it happened. It's really tough to sit there and listen to that story, but at the same time, it's something that he needs to do. It's therapeutic for him to definitely talk about it. He talks to so many other Veterans all the time and that's something that's really good not only for himself but for others, because they get their story out, they can relate to one another, they know what they both have gone through or what they've all gone through.

He goes to the VA quite frequently, actually. I know he does take advantage of several of the things that they offer there. I know he's met several people actually from the VA that he's actually been in contact and stays in contact with that he's able to talk to



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whenever he can't talk to me. I know the VA's definitely been a big help and without the VA I don't really know where he would be today. He's had so much help through them.

There is help out there and whether they think that there's something wrong or there's not, to definitely look into it because there more than likely is something there. People are here to listen, and to talk, and to give advice. Definitely take advantage of that.



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