

## Find relief through treatment and therapy

**Rachel:** My name is Rachel and I was Louisiana National Guard – Army. I served in the Gulf War in Saudi Arabia at the Port Dammam. When I joined in 1988 it was peace time and we knew when we signed up that it was a possibility. At the time it was a very slim possibility, but it is always there and it is always in the back of your head. Once you put on that uniform you are part of something that is way bigger than you are. Homesick doesn't come close to the culture shock and the separation, anxiety that you feel when you get to a place that doesn't make any sense. It doesn't match up with your world view at all. Women are treated very differently in Saudi Arabia than they are in America.

It is not just war for combating those people that don't believe and think like us that are across the border to the north, it is also a battle inside our unit. There is real camaraderie but at the same time being female in huge groups of men where you could go a week without seeing another female. There was a barracks that was hit and 23 soldiers were killed. I saw that missile go over my head and hit them further down the road. So yeah, not an easy place to be.

Coming back was an equal cultural shock, lots of nightmares. I walked in my sleep, talked in my sleep, every afternoon in the summer time we would have these thunderstorms that would roll in. The first time that happened I was with my mom and we were going through some of my things and trying to get things organized and the next thing I remember she was going "it is okay baby, it is alright." I was curled up on the floor and I am rocking because there was the boom of the thunder coming back to our world.

Just walking into a department store is utter terror. You are really concerned all the time about your personal safety and about the safety of your family and your friends and it was really, really scary. I did a lot of couch hopping when I got back. I couldn't stay in my house. It wasn't set up in a way that I could feel safe where I could watch the doors, too many windows, it just was not conducive to being alone.

Somehow I managed to push it all down and pack it away somewhere in the back of my head and it stayed there for a long time. I believed that the disability was there for guys that lost a leg or an arm, but I talked to some other vets and talked to some other people and I had a counselor at that time and she said you really should. So I went in and we talked and we increased my number of days that I saw her and visited with her and she also recommended that I see a psychiatrist. I went and saw my psychiatrist and now I have some wonderful medicine that allows me to sleep for 6 to 7 hours in a row and not have nightmares. I still see my counselor about once every three months or so, but it is on an at need basis.

Actually being home and being comfortable where you are and who you are and what you are doing is an amazing feeling. Some of us need help to get there. Don't wait, 20 years is too long to go with sleepless nights. You don't have to. We have many organizations that are out there that are very, very supportive of your situation.



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