

Tessa felt out of place in the civilian world

Tessa: My name is Tessa. I served in the Army and I only did two years because I was medically pushed out, and I did not deploy because of it, unfortunately. Like, my unit was about to go into like the practice training and my doctor pulled me into his office and said, "You're not going." So, that was a, yeah, it was a big letdown. Guilt and I was ashamed and there's kind of a stigma put on people who, especially females, who for whatever reason, it doesn't even matter, don't get deployed. There's also that aspect. You know, the Army kind of gives you a little bit of prep work. "Okay, you're going to feel like this when you get out. You're going to feel like this when you get out." I didn't really think it would apply to me as much because I'd only been gone for two years. I had not done a full stint. Plus, I hadn't seen action which was a big deal for me. I was like, "There's not going to be anything wrong with me. Like, I didn't see anything crazy." I didn't really think it would affect me at all.

Being all of a sudden thrown back into the life that I had and the life that was, it's really hard to put into words, but it was different in a big way. When I went home for vacation, I thought, it was like, "Okay, well, I just have to act normal for a week and then I can go back and everything will be okay." But once I was out and I didn't have that other life to fall back on, it was a good six months before I was normal. All my close friends that were in the Army with me, I'd just seen them go off to Afghanistan. Knowing the depth of that sacrifice and just how deep everything goes in the Army. That I think was the worst thing because I'm looking at my friends in the civilian world and there just like, "What do you want to do today? You know, let's stay in bed all day or let's go get a movie and let's do this or go to do that." Like, they have no, and it's not their fault. They have no way of knowing the sacrifices that the people in the Army and the people in the service make. But it's just so hard to try to connect with them once you know what you know, and it's almost kind of annoying in a way too, like seeing your friends just be so carefree when you know that your friends are in Afghanistan right now like literally being bombed or taking care of somebody that just had their leg blown off so it's a big difference.

I was fortunate that I had my husband and he knew if you have somebody else in the military that you're still friends with or you still communicate with, that's going to be a big help for you. I had my husband who, he was there with me in Alaska. He knew what I went through. He had obviously been through it himself, so he was definitely my big support. He deployed in 2006, and the way his contract worked out, he was actually getting out right when I found out that I'm not deploying.

I definitely saw a big difference with him getting out just with social situations, but he also unfortunately has some PTSD. It's still really awkward for him to be around people he used to be friends with and his family. But with the PTSD, I don't think he noticed it as much until I kind of brought it up to him one day, because as a medic I've been trained to like what signs and symptoms to look for or whatever. So, I noticed that as he was like driving through the road. He sees everything in the road – every little piece of grass, every little piece of this, everything that is in our path or around our path. Because in Iraq, especially in the early when he went, everything could be an IED, everything. So, he avoids potholes and anything that looks like a dark area in the road, he'll avoid it.



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