

## Their lives improved after help for PTSD

**Mary:** My name is Mary and my husband, John, is a Vietnam Veteran. He was there '69 to '70. I really didn't know too much about his Vietnam experience until we started dating which was in early '76, and then he didn't talk too much about it. I started noticing things before we got married. He would have days where he'd be very withdrawn and wouldn't want to talk. I knew he was an alcoholic, but of course I thought, well we're in love and I'll make it all better. I'll take care of it.

We very seldom went as a family, although we did a few times, to the Fourth of July fireworks. He would just practically hit the dirt. A car backfiring, a noise on the street, if somebody slammed a door, just things that normally you wouldn't jump at.

We had gone for counseling a couple of times and every time that someone would say to him, or the Counselor would say to him, "Do you think you might be depressed?" He'd say, "No, absolutely not." One time he actually didn't answer, got up and walked out of the room. I think that's when I realized that this is really a bigger problem than I even thought or that I could deal with on my own. He was drinking all day which I didn't know. I know when he went to the VA, it was 30 some years after he'd gotten home from Vietnam. I don't believe he went to any private counseling until he went to the VA, and then he was able to talk about his feelings.

It was in 2004, after he had started going to the VA, that they diagnosed him with post-traumatic stress, and I think it was maybe kind of a relief to know that there was something outside that had brought all these things together. I think he's made great progress. There's still room to grow, but at least he's working on it now.

He mentioned that he wanted to write a book, and they said, "Well why don't you write this book?" So he hemmed and hawed and hemmed and hawed and started and stopped but he wrote it and it was the story of his experiences in Vietnam, but what he did was he used the letters that he wrote home, and that I think is the one thing that was the most cathartic of anything and I credit the VA with pushing him to do this because he got it all out. Our kids have read it and several other people have read it, family members and not family members, and that really I think started the recovery.

If somebody is wearing a Vietnam Veteran's hat, he'll go up and say, "Welcome home" and start talking to him. So he has loosened up a bit and now in the back of his car, he has his cap that says Vietnam Veteran, which I think is cool.

I think the important thing is that he got to realize that he wasn't the only one going through these feelings, and when you feel like you're alone and there's nobody to turn to and there's nobody that understands it just compounds the problem, but I think once you realize you're not alone and that there are lots and lots and lots of people going through the same thing that it's like, well maybe I can be better. Maybe I can get past this.



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