

Encouragement from others to live well again

Jennett: My name is Jennett. I served in the U.S. Army in Fort Stewart, Georgia. I enlisted July of 2001, and I ended in July of 2004, so I did three years active duty. We deployed in September 2002 to Kuwait, a peacekeeping mission, but it turned into Iraq about six months later. It was just difficult being 19 in a different country when you've never been out of the country; that was difficult and I didn't want to believe that we were actually going to go to war.

My father died while I was deployed, while we were actually in Iraq. So everything just changed. When he passed, I went back to the States and I ended up going through that whole procedure, with the funeral and everything like that. And I was just so frustrated, like, the whole world just was different. You're in a another country for so many months, almost a year, and you're used to carrying a weapon with you every day, you have a helmet, you have all this gear, and now I'm riding in a car with just regular clothes on and I feel naked.

I went back to my unit. One of our headquarters had gotten blown up and the way that the plane flew so low that it shook everything and then this explosion and we don't know what's going on, just that chaotic feeling. I guess my chain of command saw a difference in me, so I ended up seeing a counselor when I came back. Just kind of went through the motions again. But the following year, I didn't reenlist and I got out and I ended up coming home and I was really all about trying to get benefits, get into school and things like that. I knew things had changed, but I didn't think about it like that. I was having panic attacks. I had a panic attack when I was still in the military, but I didn't put it together like that. Friends I had before, they didn't understand. You don't understand if it's like the Fourth of July and you set off a firecracker that's really loud and I just go jetting down a street like for two blocks and everyone is laughing at me. But, to me, it's an explosion; it's not just a firecracker.

When I came home in 2004 and I got hooked up with the VA, they diagnosed me with a major depressive disorder, and I was like, "Nothing's wrong with me." But really, the panic attacks, I would have them periodically and my employer, they couldn't understand it and they were, I was about to get in trouble for it. You know what I mean? So I ended up going to the VA. I was going to a women's group and it was a little discouraging. Well, I'm kind of a quiet person around people I don't know, especially talking about my issues or whatever. So I ended up speaking to the lady who was over the group and I was like, "I'd rather just talk to someone one-on-one," so I ended up doing that. I ended up seeing a psychologist, because I didn't really want to take medication. The therapy I would say has helped me. It's really nice to talk to someone who's not trying to judge you or tell you just a quick fix because there isn't a quick fix. The VA, they actually helped. You know what I mean? I didn't see how serious it was when I first got out, because I didn't want to admit it, but going back now, now I see what they were saying. You can just feel so alone and it doesn't have to get to that point.



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