

Recognizing he needed help was hard for her husband

Nicole: My husband was in for eight years and he was a Combat Engineer. During the Iraqi War of the 2003 era, there was no need for Combat Engineers. So, they pretty much turned all those guys into Infantrymen. They were kicking down doors and everything just like the rest of the infantry guys and he didn't tell me any of these stories, of course, until after he got back.

The one I think that haunts him the most is when he got injured. He was getting ready to go out into a convoy and he usually rode the same place all the time and then this particular time, he just decided he didn't want to ride there and he chose another vehicle and the convoy was attacked and the seat that he would have been in was totally obliterated. The vehicle that he was in, the gunner's turret received a mortar round and his gunner was burned pretty badly. He was sprayed with shrapnel and everything and being that he was married to a medic, he's a combat lifesaver and he did his thing and I'm surprised because he hates blood, like really hates blood, but he did it. He's like, "I was taking care of people," and he didn't even realize he was injured until he had gotten back to the aid station with the guys who were really severely burned and that just is with him. He has survivors' guilt that has really impacted our life and our marriage a lot. It's a constant battle to remind him that, "You are here for a reason. Whatever power you believe in, you're here and so it's in vain if you don't live." But it's very hard for him to do that.

My husband really dealt with classic PTSD symptoms. When he got back from Iraq, he pulled guard on the window every thunderstorm for about a year. Just trying to find each other again and you're dealing with your own stuff and you don't want the family to see what you're dealing with, so you try to deal with it by yourself, but then, "Oh, it's just." I'm so surprised actually that we are still married. I really am. I'm like, "Wow," because we have really had to deal with some things.

Now you have to go reach inside of him. He can be in the house for a day or two and if you don't go find him, you won't even know he's in there. He's very quiet, very withdrawn. It's like he intentionally doesn't enjoy life. It's like he's sitting on the outside looking in. It kind of hurts sometimes because you don't know if it's, "Okay is he not enjoying us or the family or what?" He's not a violent person. It's kind of like totally the opposite. It's like you have to go and find him. Sometimes it's almost as if he's just waiting for the end or something. I'm like, "Dude, you're 35. You've got a long ways to go for that." He just I don't know. There's so much sadness inside of him. My older two kids, they kind of feel like they lost a friend because he used to do so much with them, very awesome stepfather and it's like, they would go to him before they'd go to me for a lot of things. They just kind of feel like they lost their friend. My youngest daughter, our daughter together, when I deployed to Afghanistan, she was here with him alone and when I got back she was like, "Momma, it's like he wasn't even here," and she was only like eight at the time and she's like, "Daddy never talked to me. He just sit on the computer all day." I finally said to him that, "You've got to talk." It's not something that he was at all willing to do. I think things got bad enough for him where he did feel like, "Okay, I'm gonna do it and try it." And he did for a while. We ended up in marriage counseling for a while. But he still just struggling so I just kind of have to make up where I can.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

The VA has the Iraqi Veterans in a certain register and they started calling, "You okay? You're fine? You can come see us anytime." And, and that was great so with me bugging him and the phone calls and the letters, this is kind of how I got him to start going in and he actually would speak highly of his Doctor. He liked that she listened. He started realizing that he's not the only person of the thousands of people who've deployed. You are not weird for how you feel or not special or not some type of person that just can't get over it. It really opened up some doors so that then we could talk and our marriage counseling started getting a little bit better because then he felt like he had the words to express some of the things that were going on within himself. It's definitely a work in progress because he spent so many years just totally ignoring it. It's just been in the last 18 months that he's actually started to acknowledge that it's okay to seek some help outside of himself and outside of even the family to get a grip on what he feels and how he's going to deal with it.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**