

Love and Support

Mike: If you're a couple and you don't know why you're upset, the person on the other end, on the receiving end, is going to take it personally. That inability to really identify what's going on right now is because of something that happened in Kuwait City, is something that happened in Bosnia, "Oh, okay. Maybe we should break that down." My name's Mike, I served in the Marine Corps from 1981 to 2004.

Valerie: My name is Valerie. I'm a veteran of the United States Army, and I served from 1981 to 1984.

Mike: I just did Bosnia right before 9/11. Came back, went right out, came back, went right out again. So, I retired in '04 and then my son joined the Marine Corps, and he was consequently killed in action in Afghanistan in 2008. But all those things just came crashing down and I couldn't do it anymore. I found myself standing on a bridge about to jump off. I had had my last meal. I was done.

Valerie: The trauma that occurred, I was newly arrived at my duty station and it was something that really caught me off guard to be assaulted by someone who was a fellow soldier. I didn't talk about my trauma to anybody in nearly 40 years.

He has been instrumental in my mental health journey. I think he was one of the first people to suggest getting some help. I was in a place with him that I was safe, and it really was his prompting that helped me take that step. I couldn't have done it without his encouragement and support and love.

You noticed if I was hyper hypervigilant getting up in the middle of the night, looking out the window, which I was doing a lot. He would notice that and it gave us an opportunity to talk about what was going on with me. To be able to bring that to his attention and him listen, I think it's important for both of us. And then he's like, "Yeah, I should maybe make an appointment with my therapist or think about where this is coming from."

Mike: Even before we got help, we were in love. We were best friends. Still didn't understand why we did the things we did, but then we started getting help and it was like, "Wow. So, now this just makes this relationship better because now we understand."

Valerie: I think one of the biggest changes I've noticed with him getting treatment has been his ability to help other people. And I've had the privilege of watching people be changed by him sharing his story. I hear it time and again how he's made a difference in their lives. And I think seeking treatment helped him to be able to process all of his trauma.

I think what it's allowed me to do is be more open and that just benefits our relationship. Dancing, we just fell in love with it. It's like therapy for us. It's an outlet. It's fun. It's time



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together. We practice at home. We never even imagined that we'd be dancing in front of hundreds of people, but we have fun.

Mike: We have fun.

Valerie: We have fun.

Mike: You need to have that person that you can confide in. She has her best girlfriends. I got my boys and stuff, but at the end of the day, it's us. It's Mike and Val. And knowing that you have that, you can't unpack these things: the good, the bad, the in between. It's me and her against the world.



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