

A wounded Veteran learns to manage PTSD

Michael: My name's Michael, I'm a medically retired sergeant out of the Army. I started off in the Air Force in '99. Three weeks after I graduated, I was gone. I've been to Saudi Arabia four times, I think, Kuwait twice, Qatar once, Iraq three times, Afghanistan, and then once to Iraq with the Army, and that was Baghdad. Our job was just to kind of keep a presence in the area. I would do the radios during the day and I would go out on patrol with my guys at night.

We drove by this checkpoint, you know, like, Iraqi police checkpoint and there's supposed to be three guys. We only saw two, all right? And they didn't have no gear on, they didn't have their weapons, they weren't stopping cars like they were supposed to, so we got out, I pulled my—I found the best advantage point for my security position. Next thing I know I hear this loud explosion. I didn't fall down, I didn't black out, all right? But there was a very, very quick instance where everything was black, and the only thing I saw was my wife and my kids, you know, it was a flash. But something told me to grab the left side of my neck. So I put pressure. So I turned my head and I went like that, all right? And out of that, that's the exit wound, all right? And the blood just—I saw the blood spurting.

So I lost, like, forty percent of my jaw, all right? The bottom of it. It fractured the bone in three different places here. We really noticed an issue—I mean, I noticed it in Germany, right? Because I got my own room and I just had this...it was fear, pretty much just straight fear, and so I barricaded my door whenever I slept, you know, I'd put chairs and I put everything in front of the door so nobody could get in. That right there I knew something was not right, and when I came home, I wouldn't shower unless my wife was in the room. She had to be there. At night I would check multiple times, I mean, check the doors, make sure they were locked, make sure the garage door was locked. I would wake up and I would walk the perimeter of the building. And when I started seeing the doctors and stuff like that about it, you know, I noticed my memory—my long-term memory is good, but it was like I wouldn't remember family members' names, you know, I wouldn't remember to go to appointments, I wouldn't remember this, I wouldn't remember that. The PTSD was interfering with my sleep, you know, my anger outbursts, my hypervigilance, not remembering things here and there. I knew I had to go.

Luckily enough my nurse case manager was a certified psychiatrist, so I sat there, and I started talking with her. I realized the more and more I talk about it, the easier it is. I got returned back to active duty, all right? So then from there I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and then I started putting the gear back on, I started going out to the field, and then it started to hit me more and more, you know, it's not the fear, it's the anxiety, you know, the...anxiety doesn't even explain it. I mean, there is no word that I can give right now to explain the feeling you get, you know, after getting blown up and getting shot and going through everything that everybody who has been injured in one way or another, be it mentally or physically or emotionally, there's no way to explain it.

So I started seeing some people again. I went back and I went through their program, their TVI program, which...I saw occupational therapists, I saw physical therapists, I mean, I—visual. I mean, I went through everything. It helped me understand exactly what I needed to know. It helped me pinpoint more and more where my issues were.



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I've been to baseball games, which is amazing, because they've got the fireworks that shoot every time we hit a homerun or we score a point or whatever it may be. My anxiety kicks in, yes, but I'm able to manage it. My wife allows me to help manage it. She's my rock, going to the therapies, helping me stand back, look at the bigger picture and understand everything I have an issue with can be managed.



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