

People can't see the wounds we brought home

Marilyn: I'm Marilyn, I was in US Army, the Pennsylvania National Guard. I served in Ramadi, Iraq in 2005/2006 and was medically retired last February, I was a medic. And it meant seeing the absolute worst of what war has to offer. It was a soldier, his name was Bill, and he was in a Bradley and the Bradley hit an IED and he was the only survivor of it. When he came in to us, he was in very critical condition, and he passed while he was there.

Coming home was tough. I'd say the first six months that I was home, I wanted to go back. As horrible as it was while we were there, it just...you had more of a sense of purpose. I didn't want to go out, I didn't want to go anywhere. I didn't want to have to associate with anybody because nobody understood me, nobody got me at that point when I came home.

The big eye-opener for me was my dad was a Vietnam Vet who when he came home, never received any help. He self-medicated with alcohol and became an alcoholic because he never dealt with his issues and he still never helped himself, but he was aware enough that when I came home, one of the first things he said to me was, "Go get yourself signed up at the VA." And then unfortunately, our first Veteran's Day together, as combat Veterans I took my dad to the hospital. And they admitted him and six days later he passed away from cirrhosis, and for the longest time I was angry with him. You know, I always felt like I was competing for his love with that bottle, and then I realized when I came home, why it was so much easier. I started to kind of fall into that same pattern, always drinking, drinking so much that...it wasn't like I was drinking every single day, but when I did drink, I drank a lot and then I wouldn't remember.

One day I realized like, wow, I am walking down that same path and if I don't do something now, I'm going to have that same future. I went and saw the counselor for, it was a psychologist at the VA and did the prolonged exposure therapy. I think we did about ten weeks, and every week, it was a standing appointment every Friday for an hour and a half. I would go in and meet with the psychologist and then I would just tell the story, and I would tell it two or three times while recording it.

In between Friday to Friday, I would listen to those recordings and I'd have to listen to it like two times a day, try to do it in different surroundings just to associate other things with those stories rather than just listening to it in my living room where I feel really safe.

It was almost like I could physically feel a change and I came in and then we started making those little discoveries, like, "Oh well this is why this is happening and this is how you associate it to that," and then I'd get through the whole story and be able to tell the whole story without breaking down and crying and visualizing that scenario without being visibly shaking or crying or sweating or getting angry, cause a lot of times if something were to trigger a memory, I'd get very angry, very irritable.

People can't see the wounds we brought home from Iraq. But we're going through it and there's no shame in us going through it. I had my buddy's back when I was in Iraq, there's no reason for me not to have it just because we're home and we're not serving anymore. We still have to keep an eye out on each other and always have each other's six.



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