

Treatment for TBI improved David's life

David: My name is David. I served from 1984 to 1988 in the Army reserve as a Military Policeman. Then the Navy came calling with nuclear power and I did that from '88 until 1999. I got out for a couple years and tried the civilian world and then September 11th happened. September 12th I was in the Army recruiting office and after that I wound up going to OCS the next year, earned a commission, got to lead soldiers; Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait until I retired last year, 2013.

November 2004, we had gone on a mission, escort mission. On the way back, we got attacked with an IED, somewhere between Bakuba and Balad Ruz. I don't remember a lot of it to tell you the truth. I remember just about everything else about the mission except this few minutes. But after that we continued the mission and went on and me being me, being the Platoon Leader, we were close enough to the end of our deployment I wasn't about to go to the aid station or get sent away.

I had the ringing in the ears and that kind of stuff and some headaches, that kind of stuff. But really after I got home, it's when I started working during the day and the fluorescent lights. The fluorescent lights just bring on these killer headaches, it's like a trigger or something now. And some short-term memory loss. I went almost 9 years just dealing with it, you know. People would come into my office at work, the lights were always off. I just didn't tell anybody, I figured I could deal with this. And I did for a long time. And over time it kind of got worse I guess, you know, the headaches got more intense. I was just mad at everybody, you know. And I didn't understand what was wrong with me, you know. And I made it hard on my family, wound up getting divorced after 20 years. It was my fault, it really was. It's hard to say that but it was my fault.

My mistake was not communicating with my wife effectively. I didn't give her a chance to help. I sat in my study in my little room, my little ten by ten room and that's where I stayed. Life was going on out in the living room without me, just like life had gone on while I was on deployment, and it just made me madder.

After I retired and the VA did their evaluations, they came back and said "Yeah, you've got TBI." That's what really got me going to the TBI clinic here at the VA medical center. My treatment regimen for TBI is, we're controlling it right now with medication. My primary method of dealing with the memory loss, and it helped some, is a cell phone of all things. You know, you got a calendar, you've got a little note thing in there, you can set reminders to do this. And I'll say I have a 15-year-old daughter that loves to remind me of things. But that's one way, I mean, sometimes you got to write yourself a note. For the last couple of months especially, symptoms have been almost negligible. The occasional headache but nothing where I'm going to hide in a dark room or anything like that and her goal for me was like "We want you to have headache-free days." And for the first time in years I've actually had a lot of those lately.

Just having someone on your side and knowing what to do helps a lot. We like to say a lot of times "Getting help helps." And it not only helps you, it helps those around you that care about you. I would say what you need to do is communicate with your family, and if you don't want to start there find someone, whether it's a VA counselor or a Pastor, a civilian counselor, whatever. Someone you can trust and someone you can talk to. You can heal over time, because the same woman I divorced, we got married again last year so the family can be restored. So, there is hope.



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