

## You're just talking, but it helps tremendously

**Tony:** My name's Tony. I served in the Minnesota Army National Guard for 11 years and I deployed one time to Baghdad and Iraq in 2004/2005. A month in, February 21<sup>st</sup>, we lost three of our guys, and they died in an IED explosion and that would have been the toughest thing obviously that I dealt with.

We got back in middle of December and I lived with three of the guys... two of the guys I was overseas with. So that helped me tremendously, I think, in readjusting because you had that... you could come home at night and still be around the guys, you know, and it wasn't just like an instant break from what it was like over there. You had people that understood you, but I also lived with my girlfriend and that relationship went down the tubes and, you know, dealing with other people, I got frustrated easily.

You know, I'm used to everyone knowing what's going on and, you know, if someone tells you to do something, everyone one around you understands that they know how to do it. So, when there were instructions given or we're goin on a trip or something, I just kind of assumed that everyone around me was ready to go and knew what they were doing and if something got held up, I'd get real frustrated and I was agitated real easily by things like that.

When I'm driving, I get real agitated and really get goin. If I'm behind a semi or something and I can't get around him and I don't have a wide field of view in front of me, I'll start to kinda... I can feel myself turning on.

The day that we lost our three guys, it was "They're gone, well too bad, we have a job to do." You know, we have to... we took a day or two to kinda mourn the loss and then it was right back to it. So when I got home, if something big happened, it was like, "Well okay that happened, well now we have to deal with it." You know, I think part of that is good in that, you know, I'm able to deal with big situations and not let 'em affect me that bad so I can move on with a clear head, but at the same time, the other people around me, my family, my friends can't do that, so they want to dwell on it longer and I don't let them or I show no emotion, you know. And that's where the troubles really began.

Eventually, after I had burned enough bridges and upset enough people, I started to look back and say, "Wait a minute, you know, the lowest common denominator here is me. All these issues I'm having are... they're me, not other people."

I wanted a situation where I could talk and go over my issues. I got into talk to the Vet Center Counselor and that's exactly what I was looking for. I'd meet with Tim like once a week over a cup of coffee at the UND Bookstore, and we'd just sit there and talk. And he'd slowly bring out, you know, what my problems were and what my issues were and I opened right up. It just helped so much just to go in and talk to someone and just kinda, you know... I'd say what was on my mind and then he could take it and like kind of explain to me why something happened or why my body reacts this way, and then what I could do to help. You know, if I get into a situation where I feel something coming on, I can do this, this, or this and kinda keep it under control.

There's no one that comes back that's not affected some way, shape or form, and I think it's important for people to understand that when they come back that it's the only thing



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that's normal about coming back is having something wrong, because everyone's going to have something whether it's big or small, there's gonna be some change.

The thing that's helped me the most is realizing that you need to be honest with yourself in order to be honest with anyone else. You really need to take a look deep inside yourself and put away your pride and just look at everything and say, you know, "What is it that's causing these problems?" You know, you've seen people hurt, blown up, killed, whatever, you've been away from home, you've been living in the military, you've been told what to wear. You come back and all these things are different. You've got all these decisions to make and your mind's in overload.

You need to look at that and say, "Okay, this is normal. I'm normal, this happens to everyone that comes back. I need to seek help because there's help out there."



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