

## A spouse's story of support and recovery

**Susan:** I'm Susan. I'm a Veteran. I served in the United States Army from 1977 to 1981. I'm now the proud wife of a retired military army man and been married 35 years. As a Veteran, you know, I learned very quickly what I could and couldn't do in the service. I knew who I could talk to and who I couldn't talk to. I knew what my chain of command was, and sometimes as an army wife, you don't know what the chain of command is.

Earlier in my army-wife career, my husband was stationed in a place called Panama. He was gone for almost two years, and so trying to raise a family by myself in a foreign country was really, really difficult because the stress of him being gone and what he was facing was really hard. In the later years, when Desert Storm, Desert Shield happened, again, we didn't have Family Readiness groups and so everybody tried to be as cohesive as they could and we all tried to pull together. It was really, really hard because the wives back home, they were expecting mass casualties, not just some deaths, and so they didn't have enough post chaplains to do the death notifications and so they asked some of the sergeant major's wives, first sergeant's wives, some of the colonel's wives to be part of that group, and so we had to go through training and learn how to come and tell you that your husband or wife had died. And I will tell you, I don't know how other people are, but I'm really good in a tight pinch, but after it's over with, I fall apart. That's when I decompress. And so once my husband arrived home and he was safe and sound, even though he was a different person and mentally, physically, emotionally, he was completely different, that's when I fell apart. So, he had to be a rock whether he wanted to be or not, and so as soon as he got home, I went to get some help.

I got to the Vet center and I got to talk to them about whatever was bothering me and come to find out, I had some depression. Come to find out, I had some PTSD issues, and then once my husband was able to be home for a while, he found out from his own family that he had changed. His demeanor had changed, going out in public changed, where he sat in a restaurant, where he wouldn't sit, if there was a crowd. I mean, everything about him changed, to the point where the girls, our children, were like, "What's wrong with daddy? Why does he look different? Why does he sound different? Why does he jump when there's a noise? Why doesn't he sleep at night? Why is he going to bed so late?" You know? "Why does he seem so grumpy?" There were just lots of manifestations that at first we thought were readjustment problems, but we found out they were PTSD. I had to package my suggestion to take counseling in a very delicate way. First of all, not to offend him, not to blame him, not to cause him to feel like there was something wrong with him; that there was something wrong with us. For some reason, we couldn't be that cohesive unit like we used to be and so maybe we just need a little help. We came together with couples counseling and we both found out that we weren't very good effective listeners. We were always in charge, and so we had to pull back and we had to listen and we had to learn what the other person needed, and so now we react to each other differently and we treat each other with a lot more kindness, a lot more respect. Don't be afraid to ask for the help because the help is really important.



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