

Tara describes Justin's nightmares and triggers

Tara: My name is Tara, and I'm married to Justin for almost four years. December 2nd of 2006, he called me and he woke me up at like 7 in the morning Minnesota time, and I could just tell instantly something was wrong and he just said, "There's been a terrible accident and one guy didn't make it and the other guy is not doing too well." He was calling to let me know they're going to be shutting the phones down and he just wanted me to know that I probably wouldn't hear from him for a while, but it would probably start showing up on the news. I mean, I'll never forget just where I was and how that felt. That was the first time that the unit had lost a guy, so it was a very powerful day that completely just altered things.

When he was home, there were little things that made him jump. My parents live off a dirt road, so when we'd go from the pavement to the dirt road he'd tense up and he'd kind of lean forward because driving tanks in Iraq he's very used to being alert to look for bombs and things that are out of the ordinary. So, it was like little things like that that I could tell were triggering things in him.

When we got married, he woke up a lot at night and he would just like kind of grab me and hold me close because he thought something was about to happen to me, so I would have to like wake him up and calm him down and, "We're fine. We're just in our bedroom." So, there were things like that. It probably took about six to nine months for some of those things to start going away, but it was just that post-traumatic stuff coming out. And loud noises, you know, if we go on a bike ride and there's construction nearby, he would jump thinking it was gun shots.

We're very blessed in the fact that we have a very strong relationship and none of it's ever been directed at me, but it's been one of those things where a little thing will just make him get, you know, the situation escalates a lot more than maybe it would for someone else, and he recognizes that and that just really frustrates him because he's like, "Why do I have to be upset about something so small." I had a lot of anxiety when he got home. Whenever he'd go on a trip or if he was driving home from class and I couldn't get ahold of him, I would start panicking. So, a lot of anxiety on my part is kind of the girlfriend then spouse who was at home kind of waiting for the phone calls and not knowing what was going to go on. It got to a point where even last year I went and saw a counselor, just three times; it didn't take a lot. I just needed help in identifying some of the things I felt going on inside of me, but it was a huge help. It just opened my eyes to why I was feeling some of the things I was feeling and how I could support him and work through it.

A lot of it too was just learning by experience. Through him coming home on leave and then when he came home permanently, there were things that as a now wife, I had to realize that I had to do to help him through this time and to help both of us. Like, when he got home, not just instantly being like, "Okay, you got to start picking up the slack. You have to do this, this, and this," and that's what I've heard from a lot of wives too, but kind of that transition time where you have to just allow both of us to just kind of get used to being around each other again. It's almost like you're re-learning each other's habits and how you do life, and so I think a big part is just not having high expectations and not expecting that spouse or husband or dad to jump right back into the chores and doing things around the house because it's a transition period and you really do need support.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

It took us a good year to realize I was impacted by a lot, he's impacted a lot more than we thought, and I mean there's a lot of great resources that can help you identify that and that's something I think we would've probably have done sooner. It's just connecting with people because I think that anyone can be supportive – your family, your friends – but what's always lacking is that connection with someone who is going through the exact same thing and until you can find that, you're not going to feel that sense of like, "Ahh, like you get it. You understand what I'm going through." And there's so many good programs and resources and groups that connect you to other wives, other family members going through it, and I just think that that is priceless.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION