

She could tell that I was a different person

Patrick: My name is Patrick. I was in the United States Army. I served from 2002 until 2015. My whole life I'd been geared towards being in the military. My father had been a drill sergeant in World War II. So, I had that military bearing built into me. We were in Mosul in 2004, 2005, Al-Qaeda and Iraq. They tried to overthrow all of the military bases and all of the Iraqi Police Force. Their methods were to just try to like pick at you and wait until you drop your guard and then hit you when you were complacent.

It really wears you down, to keep that level of heightened security constantly. It just kind of, it's tough to do for 12 months. It's not something that's natural. It's not our natural thing to feel. After my third deployment to Afghanistan, when I came back it was a real shock to the system. I couldn't turn off that deployment mentality anymore where I'm constantly searching for a threat. I'd have to sit in a way where I had to see the exits. I had to have my back to a wall. Like a random wire hanging down would cause me to become very agitated. If the rug was slightly not correct, like there was a little poof in the rug, because that was common, that meant there was usually an IED under there so. There was just too many of those life stressors happening at once that they say make you a risk. They were all just kind of hitting me at once.

It was really affecting my relations with my wife. I couldn't relax. So, you can't have a good relationship with a person if you can't let yourself, your guard down. I was quick to anger. I was quick to walk away from a situation. I didn't talk to her as much. Our communication went down to like, to very little, and also I just kind of threw myself at work. So, I was at work all day just to avoid the situation. So, she could tell that I was just a different person. I was different than when we married.

We moved to Los Angeles. We moved here specially because Long Beach has one of the higher rated VA systems and they had a really great TBI clinic that diagnosed the PTSD and the TBI. The TBI was because I had a vehicle accident in Afghanistan and that caused me to have a lot of memory issues. It was important for them to explain to me the difference between treat issues that are dealing with PTSD versus the TBI issues and the tools that you need to deal with them are different. One of the things that they really do well there is a lot of guys have, it's not uncommon to have erectile dysfunction as a result of TBI because of the way it affects you. It's one thing to take a drug to solve it, but it's another to deal with the kind of like almost shame or the problems you have in your relationship where you're like look, we're just not connecting that way anymore. They have a therapist who that's all she does. She deals with helping the Veteran and the spouse understand that this is a normal thing.

They never said, "hey, you're going to be fine." They would say, "no, this is going to be something you need to work through and there are the tools we can help you work through it." So, if I feel that tightness in my chest, just take a couple of deep breaths and then also if it's something with my spouse, I explain to her what's going on. So, it's not something that escalates.

So, without the help I don't know how well I could've made it through all that chaos. Asking for help is sometimes the hardest thing to do, but there's so many people who've been through it and want to help people get to a better place and, if you just make just a little bit of an effort you'd be amazed at how many hands will reach out and help you up.



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