

## Exposure therapy to overcome painful memories

**Scott:** My name is Scott. I was in the Navy on a border ship at Pearl Harbor. I was a Quartermaster from 74 to 76. When I got out of the Navy, I started farming by myself or my dad and then when that didn't quite work out and then, the opportunity came to go to work over in Iraq. So I went over there in 2004. A couple of the camps, there was a lot of car bombs right at the start. You have to gear out and wear your helmet and stuff like everybody else. But after a while, it got a little just commonplace. I really didn't think about it. You could hear rounds coming at night and you didn't even get up and see what they were unless they were real close. Then I got kind of cold and if people got hurt, you just ignored it. When I got back home, I had that same feeling, pretty cold when I came back.

First time I came home, I had been over there six months and hadn't had a day off. When I came home, I stayed at my daughter's house and it was the first day of goose season or something and all I heard was gunshots and that just, and I was out of bed and on my feet in two seconds. I noticed every time I got home; it got a little harder to adjust to being there. You really didn't get adjusted until it was time to come back. I couldn't really talk to anybody because they wouldn't understand. They didn't want to hear. My kids didn't want to hear about it and all my friends were back over there, so I kind of isolated myself. I came back because I hurt my knee in December or in the fall of 2008. I came back to get knee surgery and while I was recovering, they downsized. My job was gone, so they didn't have a place for me anymore. That was kind of hard because one day you're working and doing something really worthwhile and the next day, you're nothing. It was kind of hard to adjust to. I did a lot of alcohol and things like that; just kind of vegetated for a while, stayed kind of isolated and tried to stay out of crowds.

I finally decided I better get help. And I went to the VA in Walla Walla, Washington and finally got help and I met a good counselor there and that helped and I met some really good people here in Boise that are helping. So, they just talk to me, they listen to your story and they kind of bring things out because I was having a recurring nightmare where I couldn't remember everything. Then, every time I'd talk to them, something else would come up and so finally, it all came out. It helped quite a bit to get the whole story out and they got me in some programs and got me in some more, I mean the three or four years I've been going there did a lot of counseling and a lot of Prolonged Exposure Therapy and a lot of different stuff.

That's where you go back and a traumatic event that's bothering you, you just go back and recall it and recall it and recall it and just keep repeating it, reliving it until it seems normal to you and you could deal with it then. You bring it down to a common level and you can deal with it, so it seemed to help quite a bit. I used to go twice a week for a couple of years for individual therapy then group therapy and it's all helped because you get around other people with the same problems. You just feel safe around them and you could let your guard down. If you need to talk to somebody, go talk to somebody. There is no stigma attached to it and it will help you cope in the long run and don't avoid it and deal with it. If you're having a lot of trouble, go to a different, try to go to a different place or have different thoughts or something to do, and find a really good support system.



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