

The army was the best & the worst opportunity for my son. He was the ideal soldier. He received the Draper Armor Leadership Award (the highest award given in boot camp) out of his company of 90 men. He also received many other awards. The army taught him obedience, structure and leadership. On the detrimental side, the army taught him about death. It was kill or be killed. They say the smell of burnt flesh is the worst & my son smelled a lot of this, because they would bring the dead bodies to his camp. Guerillas at night would be constantly firing at their camp. I know my son had to shoot someone, but he never talks about this. He was over to Iraq when they didn't have showers yet & would have to wash with baby wipes. He would be bitten up from head to toe with sand fleas. He was not able to get in touch with us, because at that time they hadn't gotten the computers up and running to converse by e-mail. He would be able to call us once in a while and write letters.

He wrote, "I write to you today with my head hung low. One of us has perished." He wrote about an episode where one of the men in his company over in Iraq was cleaning his pistol. It accidentally went off and shot his battle buddy through the heart. My son stated in a letter to us, to pray for the company and both families. He also stated, "One minute you are on top of the world living it up, and the next second you are in heaven." He stated, "We buried two in July with the tank fire and now we bury one more."

In another letter, he wrote to us, that it was becoming a daily thing that they would take the hummers and go around the towns giving candy and food out. He stated there was this little girl about 5 years old. She was standing away from the road a little bit waving. They stopped the hummer and gave her a little pooh bear. He stated it was the greatest thing, and she was so happy. He stated she smiled and went running and jumping to show her mom. He said it made him feel really good about being there. It made him more appreciative what he had in the states a lot more.

The hyper-alertness (hyper-adrenaline) 24/7 wears on a person. Then when he came back to civilization, it was hard for him to relax. Some men/women cannot come back & lead a normal life. Can you learn to relax after being in that mode for one year? He became very depressed 3 months after he arrived home. I told him that I felt he had PTSD & made an appointment for him to see a Psychologist up in St. Cloud. He grew very angry, frustrated & depressed. He has been dealing with PTSD for 6 years now.

Some days I miss my son; who could sit still when I was talking with him; who could remember that I invited him two days ago for supper tonight; who felt safe in his own home; who could go with us to events like graduation; who started a new life when he got back and within less than a year was divorced because of his PTSD; who could enjoy himself & not doubt the decisions he makes. But I may never have that son again for part of him was taken when he went to Iraq. Right now he is a lost soul trying to find his way through life & trying to find the part of him that was left behind.

At times I mourn for the part of my son that was once there. The hardest thing is to be a mother & watch your son go through this. I want the best for my son, but he is so busy

dealing with the signs & symptoms of his PTSD that it is hard for him to lead a normal life. He did turn to alcohol to help him deal with this, but he knows this just covers his pain up & does not solve anything. He is trying to go to school, but he has a hard time concentrating on his school work. With the help of Ona, the social worker in Montevideo, he is trying to deal & develop some coping strategies and to learn to live with his PTSD.

PTSD not only affects the son/daughter that comes home from the military, but it affects the whole family. Many servicemen are coming home wounded; physically, emotionally, and/or mentally. Many are hurting on the inside. Many men & women will never be the same. Many service people are coming home and getting a divorce and/or using drugs & alcohol to deal with their feelings & emotions from what they have seen and done in Iraq. The government owes these men & women who fought for our country & for peace. They need to help them try to get back on their feet again. I love my son & I hate to see him going through this.

So if you see a man or women who has risked their life in Iraq or any of the wars, shake their hand & say, "Thank you!" That is the least we can do.