

THE 22 PROJECT

October 09, 2015

My name is Sarah Yuengling I served in Fallujah Iraq 2004 to 2005 as a Navy Nurse. My dad died a few days after I arrived in Fallujah I was not able to go home. A couple of days later I was in the hospital standing over a patient with two corpsman when a rocket landed next to the barriers. No one was physically hurt but small little slivers of the concrete fell from the wall and my patient screamed “ my ears my ears”. It was a loud noise and I was really numb in side but also had no fear because I believed my dad was there in spirit at that time protecting me. On the way back home in Kuwait I fell on the tarmac on my left side and injured my hand. I went to many surgeries and was on and off pain meds. I got out of the Navy in 2009 had one more surgery then went back to work again. I was on sleeping medications until recent.

When I got out of the military I isolated myself because I had no emotion. I just shut down. I realized that I needed something so I joined the Wounded Warriors programs and they helped me so much and brought me back to feeling my emotions again. I sought care at the VA because I could not sleep had some nightmares and affects that still haunt me like I feel scared at night I wake up at every little noise I hear. Loud noises feel like it goes right into my brain and it is actually feels painful. The loud noises from gun shots or fireworks causes a fight or flight feeling go thru my entire body. It is like a gush of blood rushing from my feet up to my head. I also have a poor memory recall at times. I have tried medication, cognitive behavioral treatment, group and Individual treat to help with my Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Military Sexual Trauma.

Last year Veterans day I realized I needed help. I was at a celebration for veterans when they had 21 gun salute. I was with a co-worker when I blacked out. I remember hearing one gunshot but not anymore. My co-worker said there were 7 shots. I realized yes I am a nurse but I have to ask for help because I knew something was wrong with my brain. I asked the VA to help me get hyperbaric chamber treatments because of the noises. They said they did not have any data that this would help. So I sought out an outside organization. I was accepted by the Healing Heroes Network to get 40 hyperbaric chamber treatments. One day when I was at treatment I met a wife of a veteran and she told me about The 22 Project, that they funded a brain scan for her husband and the chamber treatment. I contacted Alex, The 22 Project founder and we spoke. I wanted to get information to help other veterans. He said he could help me and let’s do a brain scan on you and have you see the doctor with them. So I did the results did show TBI and the doctor explained everything to me. This helped me because I knew something was wrong and I wanted to get better.

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Since my 40 treatments the frequency of my fight flight or freeze episodes is significantly reduced, my ringing in the ears at night have also been reduced, I am off all sleeping medication. I could not fall asleep at night. I am now able to fall asleep but still cannot sleep completely through the night. Loud noises still hurt but I have to say that is reduced in intensity as well. I went back to VA recently so I could get TBI treatment the doctor said yes you have TBI he put a consult in the clinic and I was denied because I did not meet their criteria. Because of the constant struggle being a veteran at the VA and trying to find appropriate care I am happy to spread the word of all the help Healing Heroes and The 22 Project have done for me and others. I would like to go to Washington DC to ask for help for veterans so veterans can get the help they need.

I am truly grateful for the help I received. I feel my mind has cleared up and I am not in a fog anymore.

Thanks you so much.

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