

1967-1969 Marines / I-Corps / Da Nang /1st Recon /

Walked point

1st guy out into the clearing, not knowing what was on the other side. 1st guy into the brush, not knowing what was waiting for him there. Called suicide missions

Buddy killed next to him (Booker T. Washington)

It was an inside job – another Marine.

Another buddy he had joined up with was on hill #55. My husband saw it being attacked and called in artillery fire on the attackers. It was denied because the 'mail plane' was due to come in.

His friend didn't make it.

3 kids by bridge

His team walked through a village that had just been bombed. There were three little kids, dead, by a bridge. They went out into the jungle and secured the area. Three days later they returned, and the little children were still there, bloated in the hot sun. He still can't get over that.

Claymore mine explosion

He was very close to a claymore mine that exploded. He has suffered ringing and hearing loss ever since. Now, at 51 it is worse than ever. (2001)

Exposed to Agent Orange

His unit cleared areas of debris after spraying had killed the trees and vines.

Bodies stacked like cord-wood in the back of a very large transport van.

Had an out-of-body experience while in the jungle

He saw a lone gook walking up the path toward his unit. Being point man it was his decision what to do. His teammates wanted him to 'shoot the s.o.b.' He was physically -- not in any way mentally -- but physically and instantly back in boot camp standing before the sergeant who was saying to him (months earlier), "I don't know why I am saying this, but if you ever get into a situation where there is one lone guy walking toward you, don't shoot. Take him prisoner instead." He was then instantly back on the trail and told his guys that, 'No, they would take him prisoner instead.' It was later found out that was a very hot area, crawling with NVA USO

When it was your turn to go out, you passed the rec hall. It was weird, he tells me, going into battle while there were a hundred other guys listening to music, laughing, having fun, drinking beers or going to the USO; knowing that you and/or your entire team might not be back. And then it was your turn for fun while some other 'poor sucker' got his.

When we were first married, I followed my father's example and began making up a budget. His response was, "No one's gonna tell me what to do. I had enough of that in the Marines." My definition of raging: Face turned blood red, ugly red jugular veins standing out on his neck, eyes bloodshot and bulging, screaming, extreme cursing, hitting and kicking, irrational thoughts and behavior

Temper-Violent

Our home for over 30 years - a war zone

A photographer friend visited our house once and saw the painting we had hanging over the fireplace. It was a scene of the battle of Trafalgar, where the English, French and Spanish ships all were firing at the same time. He commented that most people had family portraits hanging over the fireplace. Our teenage daughter flatly responded, "This is our family portrait."

Holes in the walls from fists and kicks

One wall had so many holes it was torn down to "open up the space".

The first time he hit me was in the 1st week of our marriage. I had a kidney infection and was in excruciating pain. He couldn't get me to stop crying by cajoling and yelling, so he must have figured he would knock it out of me. I had just turned 16.

I can't even begin to recount all the episodes of violence. If something didn't go the way he wanted it to, he would throw something/smash something/swear every word in the book. Usually what he threw ended up crashing against someone in the vicinity. I took a hammer in the leg one night while he was trying to make a coffee table. Crying for help from family usually brought repercussions on them and me

Screaming fits.

Early in our marriage he was trying to do some remodeling in our bathroom. The piece wouldn't fit and he jumped up on the bathroom door and began to scream and rage while kicking his feet into the door. That same year our infant son suffered with a skin condition that made him cry a lot. I heard him screaming at the baby-@13 months old at the time- to 'shut up, shut up' and I ran into the nursery to see him raise a fist to slug the baby. I was 8-9 months pregnant with our third at the time, but I jumped on his back and he turned the rage from the baby to me. When he first had found out I was pregnant with that third child, he hit me and screamed, "You're getting an abortion!!" Later that day, he was very happy to be a daddy all over again.

When our kids were younger, we were all afraid (scared to death) of him. He would fly into a rage with no provocation and continue until we were all beaten down in spirit and usually in body, too.

We could hear his car or truck or motorcycle coming from a mile away and knew it was him from the anger in the motor's revolutions (I am quaking inside as I remember and write this – written early in 2001) and we would all hide under the stairs, with the dog. When he walked in the door and called out, we would know if it was safe to come out of hiding or not by the tone in his voice.

He over punished; smashing toys that weren't put away. He stomped our daughter's little "kitchenette" to garbage when he discovered there were "dirty dishes" in the sink that had not been put away. He bounced our little son's head off the floor like a basketball for some trite thing while shaking him violently. Our youngest son came home with a treasured camera and was delightedly playing with it when some infraction caused my husband to 'fly off the handle', smash the camera, and then stomp it right in front of our son. The kids would have to stand in the corner, feet spread out, hands behind back, until he was satisfied-sometimes extremely long times. He demanded military respect, and the kids responded with 'Yessir' when he spoke, yelled, screamed, or whatever. He never saw their quaking fear, or if he did, it only maddened him more. He told the kids, "If you don't do such and such, I'll beat your mom," to make them obey. He once tried to drown me.

Bars and drinking

He went into bars to pick fights. I went looking for him and found his truck in a bad section of town. There were several bars. I looked for him in the first one and almost didn't make it out without being accosted. I asked a police officer on the beat to go into the next bar. He was reluctant to enter the bar. When he went in and tapped my husband with his nightstick, my husband swung around, ready to fight the police until he knew I was looking for him and was outside. The officer was unsure if he should leave me alone with my husband.

He forced me to drink with him because he wanted me to be "fun." When I wanted to stay home and be 'mommy' to my kids, we would beat me up, get me drinking and take me out anyway. I drink now to escape and forget (2001).

I would come home and find him raging at the kids. One time when I jumped in-between them and his rage turned to me, we wound up struggling on the floor where a hamper had been broken in the chaos. Brads were sticking up and he tried to grind my face onto them. Another time while jumping in the middle, we fought our way down the hall to the bedroom because I wanted to get him out of the kid's sight and behind a door. After a few good slugs to my face, he reached into

the dresser drawer, pulled out a gun, pointed it at my head and said, "Die, you bitch." The sound of the hammer clicking, to me, was as if the gun had gone off. I felt I died right there, and have not regained the ability to hold emotional love in my heart-even for my grandkids (2001). It's like there is a concrete wall there. It's devastating. I feel like an empty wasteland. If suicide is a by-product of Vietnam, then data should include vet's wives and children too. He himself has put a shotgun in his mouth and cried while holding the trigger. It was a souvenir gun and round from Nam. He finally wound up shooting the round out the back window because he said he couldn't do that to his family.

I had a cat he wouldn't let indoors, and wouldn't let me spend money feeding her, so she stayed outdoors and got pregnant. Hungry, with kittens, she was killing a rabbit which was squealing. He picked up his machete and hacked her up. She survived, mangled -- me and the kids too.

(Emotionally)

Jekyll/Hyde

Up/down, up/down, up/down cycles. Then remorse and periods of spendthrift wooing to smooth things over, promises of change and a definite move in that direction, and the cycle begins again.

Sleep / Nightmares / DaymaresKids by the bridge

Initially, his sleep included horrible dreams with a lot of yelling and fitfulness. After about 20 years he began to share with me some of the things he had experienced in Nam. One of his recurring nightmare/daymares was of clearing out a tunnel. He fired into it, and then looked inside. It was just a family trying to stay safe. He still doesn't know or can't acknowledge if this really happened.

Irrational

He would call me at my job and be raging over something. Everyone near me could hear him. I was asked that he not call me any more. He called my supervisor, yelled at her and I was fired. He was always fearful that I would make enough money to be able to support myself and leave him, so he had to sabotage everything I tried to do. I was once offered a job for a large company that had travel and vehicle benefits with great pay. They had flown into town just to interview me. He told them HE would take the job, I could stay home. When they saw his control, they withdrew the offer.

Panic Attacks

He can't stand to be in closed places. He'll say, "I gotta get outa here, NOW," and then force his way out of wherever he is. He broke the brand-new MRI at the hospital when he forcefully pulled himself out of that tunnel in a panic.

He won't be in crowds.

He felt like he had to be outside, watching. He would stalk the neighborhood. I would get calls from neighbors like, "Your husband is looking in my window again." Or calls from the police like, "We have your husband, again." His need to be watching from hiding took him to porn; another devastation to me personally.

I grew up in a family that never once had police knock on the front door. Life with him saw police sometimes two or three times a month. After one of the incidents where I jumped in between my husband and the kids, I secretly packed up the kids, reported to the reluctant police what had happened and left for my mother's. He was picked up, arrested and jailed. He beguilingly wooed my mom into telling me that he was really sorry and that my place was with my husband. He had only spent a few hours in jail when I wound up going to a grocery store 20 miles away that was open all night to get bail money. He was really p*** that it took me so long when I got to the jail at dawn, but settled down and became nice until his court date. In court I was asked if things had settled down or whether I wanted charges to be upheld. He had been nice for the last two weeks-on that upside swing-so, I was feeling maybe things would be getting

better. That ended when he took my left arm and twisted it in back of me right before the judge and snarled in my ear, "Drop the charges, bitch, or you're dead." I was trying to get someone to see what he was doing and put a stop to it-I couldn't open my mouth without severe repercussions. No one did.

It's funny. With the very present DCFS nowadays, one tends to forget that most law enforcers would turn a deaf ear years ago. They just didn't like getting involved in 'domestic' squabbles. I would turn him in - they would let him out - a 'good old boy' kind of gesture. He would then turn on me and the kids. I tried leaving him dozens of times. Again, the wooing and then violence followed when he gained the upper hand.

Watching the door

Even now, 32 (2001) years after he was discharged, he still watches everything going on and needs to be free from encumbrances just in case he needs to fight. He'll shake my hand off of his arm and demand, "Give me room, I may need to move fast." Once, a while back at a New Years Eve party, some huge football player slob was celebrating with his football buddies and was smoking a cigar. This guy was about 6' 6" and about 280 pounds. His smoke was bothering me and I asked him to blow it in another direction. He blew it directly into my face which caused instant choking on my part. My 5' 8" husband demanded what happened. I was afraid to tell him. He took off like a bullet, and went directly for this guy's chest with a double palm strike. He actually had to hit upward, the guy was so big. By the time it was over, he had cowed all five of them and they offered to buy him a drink.

Doesn't trust anybody, he has to control things.

His personality changes whenever he is around something that gives him memory of Vietnam. It sometimes takes days for him to straighten out again.

Memory loss and focus

He has difficulty remembering things that he has to do, and then completing them. He generally starts out going in the right direction but loses focus and stops his task. Or, he will go to the store to buy something and have to go back to the same store two or three more times to get the things he initially went after.

Cat in heat drives him insane. Screams and breaks things. Rants until I get her out of earshot. He says it sounds like his buddy that died next to him and that NOBODY understands what that sound does to him. When he is raging like this-I love my cat-I feel like picking her up and strangling her. Or, running her over with the car. Or stabbing her with a knife. Anything to get him to stop. Anything.

Perforated eardrum

Constant whee-ing in his ears caused by a claymore mine that exploded in front of him. Sudden drop in volume will cause the whee-ing to intensify and kinda flips him out. Silence does the same thing.

Fireworks

He refuses to go to fireworks, especially the ones at the beginning and end that are loud BOOMS. If we have to go, he "crawls inside" and becomes morbid for a couple of days. For me, my hopes and dreams are gone. He destroys everything I have tried to accomplish because he fears I'll leave him when I am successful. His need to be in control is suffocating. I have no friends-all those relationships eventually destroyed by him, too. Continues to be unpredictable Still can be nice and then wham, he goes into an episode with slight or no provocation.

On the flip side

He's an o.k. grandpa. Grandkids can always go back to mom and dad when they need to settle down, so Papa is always happy around them.

PART II

The man is totally insane -- acid tongue, defaming language, angry vapid spewing of epithets one minute and then later in the same day sweet and sugary to the point of nausea to cover the bitterness welling within his victim.

He is one huge narcissistic machine. Manipulating each moment, not recognizing or allowing any response to his narcissism, but ever on the attack – nothing is his fault; there is an excuse for EVERYTHING he does and his excuses are vociferated loudly and angrily.

If he is 'UP' he EXPECTS anyone near him to be the same way. If he is 'DOWN', woe to the one who must hear his tirade and responds in any manner – it is an invitation for attack.

If expected to join in serving others, it is either with obvious anger and displeasure grotesquely etched on his visage, or with the 'finding' of something pressing to do instead.

He promise to fulfill chores or obligations, only to pass the promise date and when reminded of the obligation, angrily spews reasons why he could not fulfill the promise.

A thief – stealing precious moments with grandchildren all for himself by causing emotional damage to me

King of porn and lies

I'm done

PART III (2012)

Silver Lining

9/11 did a number on my recon vet. In Nam, he fought the enemy to protect his home and family and values (no matter what Cronkite said!). 9/11 brought the horrors of war to our sacred soil. Those 3 kids beside the bridge could soon be 3

(or 13) of our grandkids. He didn't know how to fight something so elusive and pre-meditated in our homeland when it appeared that the leaders of the country were in on the deception, too.

Mike struggled for about 3 days in a state of anxiety and anger and then 'The Miracle' happened. He did the only thing he could. He turned to God as the only Rock-Solid unmovable, uninvadable haven. Said 3 words. 'I give up.'

He gave up his fight against God, relinquished control of his life over to Him (surrendered to the only Rock) and began reading the 'Basic Information Before Leaving Earth'. He began daily pouring over scripture, searching for answers – and finding them!

No force in the universe could change my husband, except an act of God. He once told me that he knew he was so evil that he 'must be the devil himself', and that 'there was no hope for him'. It took 10 years for the transformation, during which his character was being reshaped. Those years were hills and valleys of another sort.

But this year, I actually asked him to re-marry me, his change was so complete! We re-said our vows April 29th, 2012, 27 days before our 41st Wedding Anniversary.

The changes in my husband are stunning! I had never known a heart full of love toward this man of my dreams (once nightmares). Now – I get it! I get what all the ooey-gooey love songs are about! I'm not dreaming, longing for my knight on a white horse to rescue me from the evil slave master.

Mike is able to love me, because he knows that HE is loved, unconditionally by God. I, in turn, am able to feel that love and respond. He is taking care of bills and home repairs. He is never out in the bars, attends church weekly and loves the people there. He is a better grandpa and actually went to each of our 3 adult kids and apologized for his actions and behavior while they were growing up and is taking time to show love to each one. Talk about diametric opposites!

It is like a triangle with Mike and me on the bottom corners and God at the top. Since 2001, the closer we each get to God, the closer we are to one another.

I hope our story encourages your heart, dear vet wives.

Hang on – God is not through with you, or your veteran husband – ever.
From a wife – on the other side