

# Numerous Nightmares

## Living with my Husband's PTSD

*Debbie Autrey*

My husband is a disabled Vietnam veteran. He served from 1969 to 1971. During his service, a grenade launcher went off and my husband sustained shrapnel in his chest. He still has three pieces of shrapnel in his body – two that are close to his spine and one that is close to his heart. They will be there forever. He spent three months in the hospital before we found out about the shrapnel. He didn't tell us because he didn't want anyone to worry.

In addition to physical problems, my husband experienced a lot of stress. The first day that my husband arrived back in Fort Smith, a fire alarm went off and he hit the ground. He was over at his sister's a few days later when an old truck went by. It backfired all the way down the street. He looked at his sister and said, "That is gun shots." She told him, "No, it's not. That's just an old truck. It comes by everyday, and it does the same thing." Next thing my husband knew, his family was trying to convince him to come out from under the table.

There have been numerous nightmares over the years. One night I was asleep and was awakened by a thump on the floor. After noticing my husband wasn't in bed, I turned on the lamp and all I could see was the top of his head bobbing beside the bed. When I asked him what he was doing, he said, "I'm sorry I had a nightmare and was looking for a place to hide."

Three years ago, someone in the neighborhood shot off a firecracker. My husband turned white as a sheet and jumped up out of his chair shaking. I kept telling him that it was okay, but I still had to lead him into the house. I thought he was going to faint. We have never been to watch a fireworks display because of the noise and the crowds. Our sons missed out with us. There are so many things I could tell you, but it would make a

book if I wrote it all.

My husband was finally diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) about six years ago. He does well

on some days. I wish the Vietnam War had never happened, not to mention the wars that are going on now in Iraq and Afghanistan. May God bless all soldiers, veterans, and their families.



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### Symptoms of PTSD

**Re-experiencing:** Bad memories of a traumatic event can come back at any time. People may feel the same fear and horror they did when the event took place. Sometimes there's a trigger: a sound, sight, or smell that causes them to have a stress reaction or to relive the event. For instance, many veterans react to burning scents or loud noises with anxiety or anger.

**Avoidance and Numbing:** People with PTSD will try hard to avoid things that might remind them of the traumatic event they endured. These include crowded places, situations (like shopping malls) where there are too many choices, or certain types of terrain. They also may shut down (or use numbness) to prevent feeling pain and fear.

**Source:** <[www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)>