

COMBAT STRESS 100

LEARNING RESOURCE 2b PTSD & MENTAL HEALTH

PTSD Diaries

**written & voiced by students from
St Thomas More Language College**

MELANIE

Diary

Today was parent's evening, something I was looking forward to because after always going with my mum, I could finally be reunited with my family as a whole, just like before. I must admit it was difficult when my dad was away in Afghanistan but as a distraction I focused more on my education and grades - although some may assume it was to not have my problems as a burden to my mum but instead part of me just wanted to make my parents proud.

Unfortunately, this time, neither of my parents could attend, as my dad was struggling to adjust to the environment and my mum had to look after him because there was no one else at home to assist him.

Once I got there, it felt awkward, like I was a stranger looking in at the rest of the families but to make matters worse, every time a person would approach they would act casual but I could see it in their eyes – they pitied me. Let me tell you, I was more than glad to leave straight away after I had seen all of my teachers, even if it meant going back home to my dysfunctional lifestyle.

It was getting late, I could tell my mum was tired, so I took up the task of wishing dad a good night rest; when I put the covers over him I couldn't help to think of the time when it was the other way around and he would either sing me a lullaby or read me a story to send me off to sleep. Every night, I would wish on a star, that things would get back to normal sometime soon; it didn't matter how long it took...that was my one wish...

About writing my diary

For my diary extract, I tended to relate to how it would feel from a teenager's perspective, based on the movies I have watched about the aftermath of war. I chose a real life situation - which was parent's evening - because it's seen as our proudest moment towards our parents. So I wrote about how it would feel if there were no parents there, meaning no pride, or even when our parents are slightly disappointed; there would just be emptiness or a lingering feeling of loneliness. I put those emotions from pen to paper and just emphasised how important a parent's praise is, or acceptance is, towards teenagers. My idea was to compare the contrast between how a teenager would feel during that experience and that even when someone is smiling on the outside they can easily just be suffering on the inside.

VICTORIA

Diary

Dear Diary,

It's been a week since dad has been diagnosed with PTSD from his war experiences and I feel like even identifying the problem didn't help. At first when he came home, he would always just sit alone staring into space with a stern look, it was very scary because you wouldn't know if what you do or say would trigger him. Mom said that we should take it slow with him as war is a very traumatic experience and it can change a person. Naturally I understood that this could be the cause so it would be normal for dad not to speak as much or make a joke but sometimes I feel that it would make him feel better if he talked to someone. I miss my dad, I mean even though he's here and alive, it doesn't feel like he's here. It's like living with a stranger. Somedays I watch him stand in frustration shouting at the world or out of nowhere screaming, "NO, NO DAVE BUDDY DON'T LEAVE ME" and it's hard for me to see him like this as I have little understanding or capability to help him. Since his PTSD diagnosis, we've all been taking it step by step to retrieve the person I once knew was my dad and even know the journey to recovery may take forever. I just want to see my dad feel safe and loved.

** There is no audio recording to accompany this paragraph*

About writing my diary

How I structured my diary entry was based on my past knowledge of learning about the conditions and how living during WW1 and 2 was especially how it changed people. I remember learning how war was a traumatising, scary and depressing time for many and families were separated as loved ones went to fight leaving never knowing if they would make it or not. The reason why I decided to write my diary entry based on a family whose dad was a veteran who was still mentally unstable and a changed person from war, was because I thought the situation would be relatable to some of the interviews we watched working with David and Simon. Also because I thought the people reading my entry might feel relieved or thankful that younger generations like me are learning to try and understand how they feel in these situations as I have no experience but I am acknowledging how important it is to help veterans.

CHRISTINA

Diary

Dear Diary,

It's December 8th. The same day dad got drafted for the war. Years ago today, his life changed forever.

I remember being too young to understand back then, no one really explained it to me. I had to connect the dots myself from overhearing conversations.

When Dad returned, Mum addressed his situation to the family, I couldn't face the truth. I was still in denial. I wish she had told me earlier, Maybe things would have been different. I miss being able to speak to him about my day, but I'm in constant fear I'll accidentally say the wrong thing and trigger a flashback or nightmare, so I've learnt it's best to say nothing at all.

Last week, I even heard screaming late at night. I wanted to believe it as a spider on the wall or a loud laugh, but it had been forever since Dad had laughed. To think It could've been a spider knowing what he'd faced during the war made it so much harder to hide from reality. I'm not even sure he remembers it was today, you can never tell with him.

About writing my diary

I used the traditional diary entry form at the start by using the date to guide me and then drifted off by discussing the feelings anyone in this situation would come across.

I sat at my desk and visualized what it would be like in the other room if this story was a reality. I tried my best to include researched information on PTSD to make the story as accurate as possible

I thought about what the father in the story is afraid of, the flashbacks, the memories, the reminders, and what I'm afraid of, spiders and insects, and through some sense connected the similar reactions. The rest of the story came together when I continued to imagine what my life would be like if I was the character in this story.

SOPHYA

Diary

Dear diary,

I don't know who my dad is anymore. I miss who he was. I miss his laughter filling up the room. I miss our long chats and long walks and all the games we used to play. Nothing's fun anymore. Since he came back, I feel like I don't really know him. He's now become this stranger that I once knew so well.

Today it was just the two of us in the house - I was in my room and he was in the kitchen. Everything was fine, then all of a sudden, I heard this loud noise. He was shouting, and when I went to see what was wrong, I could see that he was crying. I don't think I've ever seen my dad cry, and yeah, it hurts that he doesn't feel comfortable to tell me or mum that he's in pain, or that he's hurting inside. I hate seeing him upset; it almost just feels like I've failed him. I've failed to be there for him when he needs me, but when I am there, I never know how to help. These memories are just so engraved in his mind, and are triggered by the slightest of things. I wish I could just make it all go away.

He truly is a great dad, however, he's not really a dad anymore. I've sort of had to step up, because of his state of mind, and because he doesn't know how to interact with others anymore. We were so close, and now we both just so distant, and I really miss that. It's so weird, I don't even know how to properly talk to him anymore. Our interactions haven't been very pleasant lately. He doesn't know how to deal with his feelings, so he often ends up lashing out at me or at mum. I know he doesn't mean it, and I know he loves me, but it hurts so much when he shouts at me, or when I hear him shouting at mum. Sometimes it just feels like I can't get anything right, and all I wanna do is start crying because I can't deal with it any longer - all this shouting and horrible communication between the three of us. It gets so frustrating at times. I kinda wanna blame dad for all of this, but I know it's not his fault. He needs the help, but he keeps refusing it.

I wish we were all normal. I wish we were some perfect family. I don't like lying and pretending all the time. I wanna tell mum, and I wanna tell dad that I'm hurting and it's painful for me to watch him go through all this, but I feel paralysed, and I don't wanna add to their problems. I want everything to be ok again. I want everyone to be happy and for us all to be a happy family again.

About writing my diary

My diary entry is from the perspective of a child whose dad has PTSD. Their relationship has become quite damaged as there is little to no communication between the family, and their connection is just not the same anymore. I came to write my diary entry this way, after I had researched particularly how children's lives are affected when their parent has PTSD, and how they may respond to their parent's actions and attitudes. As well as that, I pictured how it must feel if my dad had PTSD, and how I may cope with that. Me and my dad are quite close, so I wrote the diary entry as almost the opposite of that - a relationship that is struggling. I also wanted it to seem more like a flow of words and a release of thoughts and feelings, rather than structuring it in a particular way.