WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT®

ANDREA BRINN SAWYER

Championing the Cause of the Caregiver

Andrea Sawyer will never forget the day she sat with her husband in a psychiatrist's office and listened to his plan to kill himself. Her husband served in Iraq with the US Army Mortuary Affairs, using his mortuary skills to bring peace to the families of fallen warriors.

However, as Andrea witnessed firsthand, it was her husband who was in need of peace. His combat experiences left him suffering from severe migraines, light sensitivity, an endocrine disorder, intestinal bleeding, and a liver issue. However, those injuries aren't even the worst of what he faces. He also suffers from chronic and severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Her husband medically retired from the Army in 2008, and less than a month later, he was declared 100-percent permanently and totally disabled by the Department of Veterans Affairs. But his retirement was simply another beginning for Andrea, who serves as his caregiver.

"The sacrifices a caregiver must make are often a trial by fire," says Andrea. "We have given up our jobs and substantial loss of household income. We have seen our health decline. We have given up time with our children, and our marriages have changed as we adapt to the different challenges injuries have brought into our lives."

Andrea became an advocate while helping her husband find treatment. She participated in the Department of Defense Wounded Warrior Best Practices symposium in 2008, the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program 2008 as a consumer advocate for PTSD, and the Wounded Warrior Project Caregiver Summit 2009, which lobbied for caregiver legislation on Capitol Hill. Andrea and her husband are subjects in "Living with PTSD" a special report series by the Military Times papers to educate the public, service members, and veterans and their families about cronic, severe PTSD and its signs, symptoms, treatment options, effects on relationships and long-term outlooks.