

THE AMERICAN VETERAN
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SEGMENT TITLE: JASON WELSH – TBI

JENNIFER BRADEN, HOST: WE WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU THE FIGHTING SPIRIT OF A YOUNG SOLDIER WHO SUFFERED TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY. POWERFUL BLASTS FROM NEW TYPES OF WEAPONS BEING USED BY INSURGENTS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN ARE INFLECTING MULTIPLE WOUNDS, INCLUDING PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN INJURIES TO THE BRAIN. V.A. IS RESPONDING TO THIS CHALLENGE WITH NEW TREATMENTS AND PROTOCOLS. SCOTT WALLACE REPORTS.

SCOTT WALLACE, REPORTER: JASON WELSH IS A VETERAN OF THE IRAQ WAR AND A SURVIVOR OF TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY. NOW AN OUTPATIENT AT THE VA MEDICAL CENTER IN MARTINSBURG, WEST VIRGINIA, JASON WORKS WITH A TEAM OF SPECIALISTS TO REBUILD HIS LIFE, ONE STEP AT A TIME. THOSE STEPS HAVE LED HIM BACK TO THE HOME OF HIS MOTHER BRENDA ADAMS IN THE EASTERN PANHANDLE OF WEST VIRGINIA.

BRENDA WELSH, JASONS MOM (LOOKING AT PHOTOGRAPH OF JASON IN COMBAT UNIFORM): IS THAT YOU?

JASON WELSH, PAITENT: NO, WALKER

BRENDA: SO YOU'RE REMEMBERING THEIR NAMES BETTER?

JASON: YEAH.

WALLACE: GROWING NUMBERS OF VETERANS LIKE JASON ARE RETURNING HOME WITH TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY, OR T.B.I, A LIFE-CHANGING EVENT THAT AFFECTS THE ENTIRE FAMILY.

LUCIELLE B. BECK, PHD, CHIEF CONSULTANT VHA REHAB SERVICES: SO THE CHALLENGE IS REALLY MANAGING ALL THE COMPLEX MEDICAL NEEDS THAT THE PERSON HAS IN ADDITION TO THE REHABILITATIVE NEEDS FROM THE BRAIN INJURY.

JASON (LOOKING AT PHOTOGRAPH): I'M UP TOP.

BRENDA: YOU'RE UP TOP?

WALLACE: JASON WELSH ARRIVED IN BAGHDAD EARLY IN 2004. INSURGENTS WERE STEPPING UP ROADSIDE ATTACKS WITH I.E.D.S -- IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES. HIS UNIT WAS ASSIGNED THE

DANGEROUS JOB OF CONVOY SECURITY. ON SEPTEMBER 4TH, 2004, JASON WAS THROWN FROM HIS HUMVEE WHILE PATROLLING A HIGHWAY IN CENTRAL IRAQ.

JASON: THERE WAS AN I.E.D, AND THE THING THAT MADE MY HUMMER DITCH OFF TO THE RIGHT WAS THE FACT THAT THE I.E.D. HAD BLOWN UP RIGHT AT THE BACK OF MY HUMMER.

WALLACE: A BUDDY IN ANOTHER VEHICLE CAME TO HIS RESCUE.

BRENDA: JASON'S HEAD WAS SWELLING SO BAD THAT HE HAD TO TAKE HIS HELMET OFF OF HIM. (POINTING TO SCAR ON JASPN'S HEAD) IT RUNS BACK HERE AND WAY BACK. THIS WHOLE PART OF HIS SKULL WAS OPEN. HE GRABBED JASON'S GUN AND HE FLAGGED DOWN AN IRAQI AMBULANCE.

WALLACE: FOUR DAYS LATER, JASON ARRIVED IN A COMA AT WALTER REED MEDICAL CENTER.

BRENDA: WHEN HE FIRST CAME HOME, HE WAS AN INVALID. HE WAS BEDRIDDEN. THEY TOLD ME THAT HE WOULDN'T MAKE IT.

WALLACE: JASON WOULD LIKE TO DRIVE THE TRUCK A FRIEND BOUGHT FOR HIM WHILE HE WAS IN IRAQ. BUT IT'S STILL JUST A DREAM.

BRENDA: (TO JASON, AS HE OPENS A TRUCK DOOR.) YOU GOT THAT DOOR OPEN, DIDN'T YA?

WALLACE: IT'S ONE OF THE MANY FRUSTRATIONS BRENDA FINDS HEART WRENCHING, BUT JASON REMAINS UPBEAT.

BRENDA: I SRUGGLE WITH WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM.

JASON: SHE STRUGGLES WITH IT, AND I'M JUST LIVING THROUGH IT, TRYING TO MAKE IT TO THE NEXT DAY.

CLERK, MARTINSBURG, WV VAMC: HI, JASON, HOW ARE YOU?

JASON: I'M FINE. HOW ABOUT YOU?

CLERK: I'M FINE, THANK YOU.

WALLACE: IN PREVIOUS CONFLICTS, SOLDIERS WITH SEVERE INJURIES LIKE JASON'S WOULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED.

STEPHANIE O'CONNOR, PHYSICAL THERAPIST MARTINSBURG, WV
VAMC: YOU WERE AT YOUR GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE FOR HER
BIRTHDAY?

JASON: YEAH

WALLACE: V.A. IS CREATING SPECIALTY CARE TEAMS OF DOCTORS,
NURSES AND THERAPISTS TO PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE CARE TO
PATIENTS WITH T.B.I.

O'CONNOR: ALL THE WAY, ALL THE WAY, ALL THE WAY. YOU'VE GOT IT!

WALLACE: TEAM MEMBERS HERE IN MARTINSBURG SAY JASON'S
PROGRESS HAS BEEN REMARKABLE.

O'CONNOR: WE DID CORE STABILIZATION TO GET HIS TRUNK BECAUSE
HE COULD HARDLY SIT UP STRAIGHT AS YOU CAN SEE, HE CAN NOW DO
PUSH-UPS

CYNTHIA R PORTREY, SPEECH LANGUAGE THERAPIST MARTINSBURG,
WV VAMC: LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN GIVE US A GOOD AHhh. UP TO 80 (ON
AN AUDIO DECIBEL MONITOR)!

JASON: AHHHHHHH!

PORTREY: VERY GOOD! NOW COUNT LIKE THAT FOR ME.

WALLACE: HE'S LEARNING HOW TO SPEAK AGAIN TOO.

PORTREY: WHEN JASON FIRST CAME IN, HE WAS ONLY TALKING AT
HARDLY A STAGE WHISPER. SO THE GOAL WAS TO INCREASE HIS
VOLUME THROUGH THERAPY, AND GETTING HIM TO BE MORE AWARE
OF BREATHING AND PHONATING, AND HE'S PROGRESSED VERY NICELY.

WALLACE: HE DOES FORGET APPOINTMENTS. IT'S ONE OF THE MANY
COMPLICATIONS CARE PROVIDERS NEED TO BE AWARE OF WHEN
DEALING WITH T. B. I.

BECK: A TBI PATIENT MAY HAVE MEMORY LOSS EVEN MISS
APPOINTMENTS THAT ARE SCHEDULED, MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS,
SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY CANNOT REMEMBER.

JASON: WELL IS IT HARD? YEAH, IT'S HARD. BUT AM I GOING TO
SUCCEED? YES.

JULIA HUDSON, RECREATIONAL THERAPIST, MARTINSBURG, WV VAMC:
(TO JASON, AS HE USES EXERCISE EQUIPMENT) OKAY, COME ON BACK.

WALLACE: BUT SLOWLY HE'S RECUPERATING HIS STRENGTH AND
MAKING FRIENDS.

HUDSON: HE'S AN EXAMPLE TO VERY VETERAN HERE BECAUSE NOT
EVERYBODY HAS THAT KIND OF SPIRIT. AND FOR HIM TO WALK AROUND
LIKE THAT IS INSPIRATIONAL, AND I THINK HE HELPS THE OTHER
VETERANS.

VETERAN: HE STILL DOES HIS CRAZY THINGS. HE'S STILL JASON.
LAUGHTER

WALLACE: AFTER ALL HE'S BEEN THROUGH, JASON WELSH EAGERLY
AWAITS THE NEXT CHALLENGE, WHATEVER IT MAY BE.

JASON: I JUST KEEP THINKING ABOUT TOMORROW, AND THE DAY
AFTER AND THE DAY AFTER, AND SO FORTH.

BRADEN: V.A. NOW HAS 21 POLYTRAUMA SITES AROUND THE COUNTRY
TO HANDLE COMPLEX INJURIES LIKE T. B. I. THE DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIR IS NOW TRAINING ALL PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS
AND MENTAL HEALTH STAFF IN HOW TO RECOGNIZE TRAUMATIC BRAIN
INJURY AND DEVISE A TREATMENT PLAN.

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