

Military OneSource Podcast — A Wounded Warrior Family's Story of Perseverance

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast, I'm Bruce Moody. Each service in the military provides specialized wounded warrior programs designed to help their wounded, ill or injured service members as they transition either back to duty or to civilian life. Today our guests are from the Navy's Wounded Warrior program, and they have offered to share their stories, and all of us on the podcast are grateful for that. We're also going to get into the Navy's Wounded Warrior program, and what it's done for them. But what I want to mention is that what we're going to discuss today, although it's a Navy story, you're going to find versions of this within each of the services, so I really encourage you to stick around for today's conversation. I ask that you subscribe to our podcast because we cover a lot of topics to help military families as they're navigating military life. And especially for this one, we really ask that you share this podcast with somebody who needs it. Maybe the easiest way to share it is just ask people to go to their favorite podcast app or YouTube and search for Military OneSource. Pretty easy.

Lastly, in terms of housekeeping, we want to hear from you. If you have thoughts you want to share about what you've heard today, we have a link in the program notes. Alright, so with that, let's get into today's conversation. Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon and Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon, welcome to the podcast. It is an honor to have you with us.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Hello. Thank you for having us.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

Thank you. It's really nice being able to speak to you guys.

Bruce Moody:

Well, we had a conversation before we started today's recording, and you've offered to share your story. We're grateful for that. We're going to step back and let you guys share your story, and then we're going to bring in Tricia Loomis and Marcus Pace. Both of them are from the Navy Wounded Warrior program chapters that you're affiliated with. You guys are out in San Diego, am I right? San Diego?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Yes.

Bruce Moody:

Okay, okay. So again, I want to step back and let you guys share your story, which begins you've just joined the Navy, and take us up to the point where you're getting into the Wounded Warrior program and then we'll bring in Tricia and Marcus for the conversation.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Well, I mean, I joined did all the basic stuff, went to boot camp, went to A school; and then I ended up getting to my first command in San Diego on the CVN 72, the Abraham Lincoln, and I mean, that's where I met my wife, Liz. We started dating. We ended up getting married, and I mean, we were having fun. Liz ended up getting pregnant, and we were pregnant with our first son. We went through the process, ended up having our first boy. His name was Josiah Ryan Dixon, and-

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

He was born in October of 2023. He was considered premature at the time, so he had a short NICU stay where unfortunately, he did pass away. And during that time, me and Tyler decided to use our convalescent leave and his paternity leave at the time to go visit his family out in Arkansas. And on our way back, we...

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

We had gotten in an accident. It was raining out; and there was a construction zone that we came across, and it wasn't signed off or anything. There was no warnings of it or nothing. So, we ended up having a bunch of cars slide into our lane because their lane ended and whatnot. We got ran off the road. Got ran off the road, we were stuck in the mud for a while because it was raining really hard. We were waiting on a roadside assistance tow truck, but I mean, that was going to be a five hour wait. We were like, "Okay, well let's see what we can do to maybe get the car out." For some reason, I had happened to have some wood in the back of my car. Honestly, I can't really remember why, but I had some wood in the back of my car, so I tried getting out and wedging it

underneath some tires and trying to get the car unstuck and it wasn't working. We did that for probably an hour and a half.

And then at that point, I was completely just covered in mud. You would've thought I rolled around in the mud. But after that I was like, "Well, that's not working. I guess I'll just ... Because we were traveling, so I had clothes in the trunk and I was like, "I'm just going to go change real quick. We'll just wait for the tow truck and be on our way." But when I went to the trunk, I had opened it up and without even knowing I had gotten hit by a car, not even knowing it was coming or anything. Car had pinned me up against my trunk and hit my car so hard that it drug me under their car. And at that point, one of my legs had already been pretty much completely cut off, amputated; and then the other one was completely amputated; and we had some off-duty policemen come and some firemen came and whatnot, but the policeman had to help my wife tourniquet my legs with a ratchet strap and a belt, I think.

And we sat on the side of the road for an hour waiting on the ambulance to come because we were in the middle of Texas. We were in the middle of nowhere. So waited for that. The paramedics came and everything. They took me to the hospital. I was in the hospital in Texas for about two weeks, and then they flew me back out to San Diego where I'm stationed at to the Balboa Medical Center, and that's where I got the rest of my treatments done and everything and went under about 20, 22-ish surgeries, something like that. But that's where we originally connected with Wounded Warriors. And I mean, they helped us out through the entire process right from the start. As soon as I was discharged from the hospital, they were getting me connected with PT and they were getting me connected with different organizations. They're really good about keeping you connected.

Bruce Moody:

I can't imagine how profoundly and quickly both of your lives changed.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Oh, yeah. I mean, for us, it was literally one day we were like, "Oh, my goodness, our kid is finally here." And then with the snap of a finger, it was like, "Oh, my goodness, what the hell just happened?"

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, and I do have to say it's not always easy and it's a bit awkward to be sharing it on a podcast, so I really appreciate you sticking with the program and being with us to share what you've been through. And of course, a lot happened. Everything is new at that point, and you're going through a lot. What did it feel like? What was this new course of life like for you?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

I mean, it was very hard at first. I'm not going to sugarcoat it. It was horrible at first.

Bruce Moody:

You don't have to sugarcoat it. That's the thing. I mean, it's not about putting a shine on this. You had a completely new set of life goals.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Well, yeah. As long as I always wanted, I wanted to join the military. I finally joined. I had uncles, and my dad was in the Army. They all did really good in the military. I had uncles who were retired chiefs in the military and whatnot, so my whole plan was always, I'm going to join the military. I'm going to get my retirement done, do my 20 years. I mean, that was my only goal, and with the snap of a finger, it was like, okay, well, I'm just not able to serve anymore.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, I'm a retired Navy chief, and it's interesting. You have to just realize how tenuous life is, that things can change immediately and through nothing that you've done, and suddenly you have a new path. So, we have with us, Tricia Loomis and Marcus Pace. Why don't you each introduce yourself and then we'll continue the conversation.

Marcus Pace:

Hello, my name is Marcus Pace. I am the regional program director for the Navy Region Southwest Navy Wounded Warrior program.

Bruce Moody:

So, Navy Region Southwest, that would include San Diego?

Marcus Pace:

Yes, sir.

Bruce Moody:

Okay, great, great. And Tricia?

Tricia Loomis:

My name is Tricia Loomis. I am what's called the recovery care coordinator, and one of the things that we do at Navy Wounded Warrior, is that we provide comprehensive non-medical care coordination for the seriously wounded, ill and injured sailors and Coast

Guardsmen, while we support their families and their caregivers. We guide them through, create a comprehensive recovery plan and for all of their nonmedical needs throughout the process of their individual recovery, rehabilitation, and eventually their reintegration. Nonmedical care can include things like assisting with important administrative aspects of their daily living, pay, entitlements, orders, bedside travel, housing, so-

Bruce Moody:

And so, you're working with Liz quite a bit. You're working with Liz, who's both a spouse-

Tricia Loomis:

Oh, yeah.

Bruce Moody:

Sounds like I've just made a major understatement.

Tricia Loomis:

No, yes, absolutely because we include the family and family; what we define at Navy Wounded Warrior is whoever is important to you, who is important to your care, your recovery, so that's who we define as family. And of course, when I say Tyler, I mean, Tyler and Liz.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. So, Tyler and Liz, what was it like getting into the Wounded Warrior program, discovering what they were doing for you and acclimating to that?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

I think at first, I was doing a lot of coordinating with Tricia and Marcus while Tyler was still in the hospital. It was actually really nice, to say the least, to have that support that you don't really realize you need. So they really helped me when it came to getting Tyler a new wheelchair and just everyday things that you don't realize you would need in that situation of keeping him involved in groups and just settings, like Tricia took us to our first wheelchair basketball tournament, which was, I think, really eye-opening for Tyler to realize that there is such a big community of disabled veterans and just that they still can have a meaningful life outside of just this life-changing situation that they're in.

Bruce Moody:

Okay, so basketball. How much time are we talking about between the accident and playing basketball?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

Tyler never played basketball, but he-

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

I had gone to their games and their practices and whatnot and hung out with them and got connected with people and talked with people and-

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

I would say it was pretty soon after, maybe two months.

Bruce Moody:

Wow.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

Yeah, Tricia was really good at getting us involved really early on and just-

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Tricia stays on top of it.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, I'm getting the impression. The list of things that you have to concern you with is suddenly all brand new, so they're helping you figure out all your logistical challenges while also looking after your emotional wellbeing.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

Yes, definitely.

Bruce Moody:

So, what did that look like sitting down with you and going over all of the various programs and resources for you and Tyler?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

I mean, at first, truthfully, it was a little overwhelming because you would never realize that there's so many different programs that you could join, and at a certain point it was like, "Oh, my goodness, which one do I pick?", because there's so many of them. They have archery and shooting and golfing and basketball, and I mean the list goes on.

Bruce Moody:

So, how do you end up choosing one activity from another?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

I mean, really it just goes off of personal preferences of which one you want to do.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

Do you have prior interests with it and things like that? But there's a lot of really great organizations that Tricia was able to plug us into to help us, whether it was being able to have family come in, visit Tyler through Hero Miles and just helping us just overall.

Bruce Moody:

This is a journey that you're both on. I wonder if you have specific areas that you would point to as some of the hardest parts and maybe some of the parts along the way that surprised you the most?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

I think for myself also being an active-duty service member, I didn't realize how much I would have to worry about going back to work and doing all these things while I was trying to care for Tyler and obviously taking him to and from doctor's appointments, to and from PT and all these things he needs to get done. And I think Wounded Warrior — Tricia — she knew a lot of the routes I needed to take, a lot of documentation that I needed and she helped me get that from his doctors and his providers to be able to get me almost like a work exemption while still remaining active duty, so I would be able to care for Tyler and not have to worry about having the Navy as my first thought.

Bruce Moody:

Tricia and Marcus, either of you, with your side of this process, what are you thinking as you are seeing a young couple in a totally new world with a ton of questions and not even knowing half of them? What do you see as needing to do with them at that point in their lives?

Marcus Pace:

I think initially in getting a case, and Tyler and Liz will tell you, when I first met them, my first thing is to encourage them; and I know it's a dark season in their life, to encourage them that I've been in this business for a number of years, and the joy that we get is seeing them from a place of despair, and we get to go with them on this journey to doing great things. And so initially upon seeing them, that's what I told Tyler is that "I know it looks dark right now, but I can testify, if you will, that we are going to go on this

journey and you're going to go and still do great things. Life is not over." And then we start to address whatever needs that they have; the most important needs that he and his wife may have at the time, and we get to work.

Bruce Moody:

Marcus, when you're sitting down and having your initial conversations with Tyler and Liz and you're encouraging them, is it because you've seen other people who have been in this situation and have found a new life?

Marcus Pace:

Yes, that's exactly why. We see this daily of circumstances like this where, like I said, it's just traumatic situations that families go through, and they think that there's nothing that they'll be able to do and we can see or have seen these families go on and be extremely successful post-EAOS. And furthermore, the people who are in this job, it's not just a job, it's more of a calling, if you will, that you are able to really say the right words and do the right things at those particular moments.

Bruce Moody:

I'm curious about the community of Wounded Warriors. What are they doing? How are they engaging each other and what do they have to offer each other?

Marcus Pace:

Well, the first thing is we are not a command. The Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment is a command. We are different from that in that we are a program which we provide non-medical resources to service members who, most are on limited duty or in a medical board process, but they remain at their parent commands. So, they're still actively employed and doing certain things, but we take advantage of like we did, or Tricia did with Tyler, is getting him out amongst people who are in similar situations; so they can speak life into his circumstance to know that, "Hey, there's other things you're going to be able to do." And like Liz said, that life's not over for you just because this traumatic thing has happened. So, we use these adaptive sports and other organizations to rally around these members in the immediate to show them that.

Bruce Moody:

Tyler, your family has traveled thousands of miles to be with you, and you've had support from programs like Hero Miles and Navy Wounded Warrior. What did it do to make a difference in your recovery?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Oh, it helped out tremendously. I mean, we don't have very much family out here. The family we do have — they live far away, so it's hard to get assistance. But with Wounded Warriors and them being able to get my family out here; and whether they were staying with us at our place or they were getting a hotel, they were able to come out here nonstop and help me and Liz emotionally and physically. I mean, they helped us just adjust. Wounded Warriors was able to get them out so much that they were able to help us adjust to this new life and figure out what we need to do, and where we need to go and get a new routine.

Bruce Moody:

Well, where do you want to go? What sort of goals are you setting for yourself?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Well, as of right now, the only goals right now is Liz is pregnant again.

Bruce Moody:

Oh, congratulations.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

Thank you.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

So, baby is due in June. So, the goals right now is get baby home; get baby healthy, safe and keep working on getting my prosthetics.

Bruce Moody:

That's wonderful. So, dare I say, there's optimism in your future.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Yes. Yes, definitely.

Bruce Moody:

And so, what does it feel like to go from the accident to a point in your life where you have optimism? You have a baby on the way, you have family, and you have a community of people to help you with your next stages. What does that feel like?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Truthfully, it feels amazing. I mean, I'm sure you can ask Marcus or Tricia or Liz or anyone who was around me when the accident first happened. I was not a very happy person. I tend to be a very big jokester and laugh around and whatnot, but at that moment in time, I was not a happy person at all. But at this point, I mean, we've gone a year some change now and yes, it sucks, but life does move on and we have good things going for us and it definitely gets better.

Bruce Moody:

Tricia and Marcus, how does that resonate with you? Is that par for the course or is it special in and of itself? What does it feel like to you guys?

Tricia Loomis:

Oh, it feels amazing. Marcus, he mentioned being joyful. It's just such a joy to be around them. They are just incredible. That was one of the things that when I first met them at bedside, that I noticed is that one, they're so young and they've had this horrific thing happened. It's one of the darkest times in their lives, but yet they're surrounded by their friends. They had several friends that were in the hospital room with them and their love. You get to see that, experience their journey along with them, beside them, helping guide them.

For us at Navy Wounded Warrior, here in Navy Region Southwest, we are pretty much all veterans or family members of veterans. And so, it's deeply personal for us and meaningful to be able to provide some advocacy and some support and assistance while they're going through their situation. And we're so proud of them too. We are extremely proud of ... Like Tyler said, he wasn't in the best space when he was in the hospital. And just to see the smile on his face when he got his own first wheelchair, I mean, that just meant the world to us. I think we were all in tears. And with Liz, the news of the baby. I mean, we're like proud aunties and uncles over here.

Bruce Moody:

Lovely.

Tricia Loomis:

Yeah, beautiful.

Bruce Moody:

Everybody on the podcast is just so thrilled to have you on the program. We're so grateful. We just want to say thank you. Liz and Tyler, I want to give you the last word, and I'm not even sure what I want to ask you to say except to say that I just encourage

you to share your thoughts with, well, if you were to talk to a young couple in any service, if you were to talk to a young couple in the military, looking forward to a life in the service and making goals, what would you say to them?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Well, for starters, I would definitely say, I mean, I would compare it to mine and Liz's situation. We had met, and we had started dating. We had dated for a couple months and then got married and everyone was saying that it just wasn't going to work out and you guys aren't thinking and whatnot, but we knew what we wanted. So, if you're a young couple that's in the military and people are telling you that, I would definitely say block all that negative energy out.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

I would say it's definitely possible. Before everything happened, we were a dual military station near each other. I feel like sometimes it's scary knowing that you guys are going to be on deployment at the same time in completely different areas and things like that, but it's a commitment, as it is any relationship even outside of the military. And you can definitely make it work. And if God forbid you're ever in a situation like ours, it definitely gets better and you have so many resources that can help you and guide you, like how it guided and helped Tyler and I.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

If you're someone that, God forbid, gets put in a situation like I did, I would not skip out on Wounded Warriors. I definitely had doubts about it because I didn't really think there was anything that could help out my situation, but they have completely proved me wrong.

Bruce Moody:

Your perspective on life and your perspective to dealing with changes in life is so powerful, and I hope that people are listening and they can think of somebody to share this conversation with. I really encourage that. So, to that, I just want to say everybody, thank you for being on the podcast. Again, we're all grateful for you sharing your stories and your time. Thank you for being with us today.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Dixon:

Of course. Thank you.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Liz Dixon:

Yeah, thank you guys so much for having us and allowing us to share our story and experience through your podcast.

Bruce Moody:

Our pleasure. And Tricia and Marcus, also thank you for the work that you do, and thank you for being with us today.

Marcus Pace:

Yes, thank you for the opportunity.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Tricia Loomis:

Thank you.

Bruce Moody:

Alright, thank you so much everybody. And we want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. Again, we have a link in the program notes. We always like to hear from you. If you want to share your thoughts about what you heard today, if you have any questions, use that link and send us a message. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts, which includes YouTube, and please do because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody, thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.