

## Healing after feeling hopeless

**Karinna:** My name is Karinna and I was in the Marine Corps, and I was an Aviation Ordnance Systems Technician. Both my deployments were seven months long and the first one was, I was there for shock and awe, so I was there in March 2003. My second deployment was to Al-Qa'im, Iraq. I was a Sergeant, so I had power as it were. My peers took it upon themselves to basically just verbally beat the crap out of me on a daily basis and kind of tell me how worthless I was and how stupid I was and how I was dead weight.

Towards the end of my second enlistment, I got pregnant and that was what determined me getting out and everything and it was a pretty hard time for the simple fact that I was... the father left so I was kind of doing it by myself. Really, really harsh things were said to me in a public setting, so it was kind of like, kick her while she's down and all that stuff and I ended up placing my child for adoption. When that happened, it was a really, really, really hard time. I was dealing with postpartum depression. That's when things just started kinda building up, because during the pregnancy I got out, so I lost my paycheck and I lost my title, I lost my job. I no longer had that identity. And then my apartment lease was up so I no longer had my freedom, my independence, I had to move home and then a week after my child was born, she went home with her new family, so I lost that too. I went through like four or five different very serious things all at one time and I was expected to just get over it.

About six weeks after that, I was at such a low state that I had actually started to wish for death. I had started to drink heavily and smoke heavily and I really just tried to smoke my own self and basically kill myself that way because I was just like I couldn't do it any other way. I just tried to drink and smoke until I couldn't drink and smoke anymore and I became an insomniac. I think I got, in a three-week period of time, I think I got maybe four or five hours of sleep. I ended up calling the Sepulveda VA Clinic and I talked to the women's health and I told them what was going on and they sent me as an emergency consult to Greater LA and they got me in to see a Doctor. My first visit with her I think I just cried the entire hour. I didn't even talk to her, I just cried. I said who I was and I just cried. And it was good because nobody told me to be quiet, nobody told me to get over it, nobody judged me and that was the best part.

It's interesting when they tell you that you have severe depression because part of you is like "Well, no kidding." And then the other part of you is like, "Okay, this is what you have." Now that you got a name for it, that's when you can start working on it to make it better. That was very, very useful. And then throughout all of that time, what happened to me in the deployment never really surfaced, it just kind of took a back seat. It wasn't until I got into school that all of this resurfaced. It's just like this instant shut-down where I'm like "Oh my gosh, I'm in Iraq again. I'm done." And it's been to my detriment, I failed classes and I stopped caring and I'd get home and a little part of me cares, the rest of me is just so frustrated and overwhelmed with everything. I went back to the VA and I was like "Okay," I talked to the mental health nurse and I said "Okay, here's the deal. I'm always angry." She was really calm, she was just like "Okay, well I'm really glad that you called because these are serious things. These are serious markers, the beginning of something that could develop into something worse."

Now that I know what the triggers are, I'm learning different ways to approach certain subjects and to have a Counselor at the ready is really important because some people,



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myself included, if you don't have a support system, at home with family and stuff, that's something that's important, that's something you need.

I would have to say that now I'm probably about 180 degrees from where I was. I'm doing really well. My child is now four years old and we have an open adoption and it's really great. I'm learning to just keep everything in balance and try not to take on too much and clearing my full plate from things so that I can actually enjoy life and not just get through it. There's no reason to do it by yourself because you don't have all the answers, you don't.



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