

## **I've never been happier**

**Stephanie:** Hi. My name is Stephanie. I was in the United States Navy from 1974 through 1977. I knew I was different from a very young age. I really didn't know who I really was until I was about 17 years old. I went to a drive-in movie one night, and they had the autobiography of Christine Jorgensen on at the drive-in that night, who was supposed to be the first transgender woman in history. When I saw that movie, I knew that was me. But for years living in the South, especially then at that time, there was no care for that or anything. So I kept it suppressed for I don't know how many years.

We were deployed three different times while I was in service and everything and I enjoyed my time in the service. I got back out here in '77, really didn't have really any mental issues until about '85. At that time, I was working security, and I wore a sidearm. I went out to the dining area where we have a counter, sat down there, took out my sidearm, loaded one round in it trying to make it look like it was an accident even though it wasn't, and I shot myself. Fortunately, I did no internal damage. They took me to a hospital not far from where I lived. Because I said it was an accident, they let me go home.

But I knew I needed help, so I started going to the V.A. I had heard about a doctor at the V.A. who treats transgender veterans, reached out to him, started going to his support group there. He helped me get an endocrinologist, then a psychiatrist, then a psychologist also.

And I owe, I feel, my life to every one of those doctors at the V.A. I talked to my primary care doctor I have on the outside, and she told me to talk to an endocrinologist about the hormones. What made me talk to her then? I don't know.

I said, "If there is any way you can help me start hormones, I'm wanting to."

And she said, "If you want to, I can."

So, she did.

One of the outside psychiatrists I was seeing at the time, I had told her about me. She knew I was a veteran. She told me about a doctor over at the V.A., saying he ran a support group for transgender veterans who are transitioning or maybe already transitioned, you know?

So I reached out to him, got an appointment with him. We met and really liked each other, and I started going there. Since I did my transition 6 years ago, I've never been happier with what I am. This, to me, is the biggest step I've ever taken in my life, and I love what I'm doing for myself now. I'm being me for the first time. I know so many trans people who have committed suicide and stuff because of stuff like this, you know?

They're afraid to transition. It gets to the point, you've got to decide, do you want to be you, or do you want to be dead? Being you is better. So, please, if you're a veteran and you're trans or whatever, reach out to the V.A., please. I'd appreciate it.



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