

When times get tough, you don't give up

Heidi: My name is Heidi. I was in the Navy for about five and a half years. I joined the Navy because I was anticipating adopting my little brother and sister. I could kind of see the family deteriorating a little bit and so at the time, I was working three jobs and going to school full time, but I didn't have any benefits to take care of kids. At that time they were pretty young so I didn't want to risk it, so I joined the military to support my family, basically.

When I first joined the military, I immediately worked with Mental Health. I met this amazing psychiatrist at Jacksonville and I was starting to work on a rape issue that I had from when I was 14, and so at the time I was 24, so it was ten years later. I was really kind of finding this place where the therapy was working and I was feeling good, and then poof. That had to be put on hold because that's when I found out that my mother had a heroin addiction and I had to make things go faster.

At that time and over the next year, I had been working to acquire the legal status to be able to get my little brother and sister and then deal with what was going on with my mom, but for the first time in my life I had these physical manifestations from the stress which I never experienced. I had migraines, I was always nauseous, throwing up, dropping weight like crazy, and not wanting to eat. I normally have insomnia issues, but this was really magnified and then when I did sleep, I was having really weird nightmares.

My mom passed away and so I had to go home and scoop up the kids and clean up the "estate", we'll call it. At that point, before I left, I checked in with the Command. As soon as I got back, I tried to organize my mental health care, and then as soon as I was able to, it took a while, but I had my little sister set up with Mental Health, as well.

One of the things about when you're in the military is that you have this not only sense of camaraderie, but a network that supports you and when you're a civilian and a Veteran, you kind of feel alone. But the VA has that continuing sort of support system that I think is fantastic.

Since I've discharged from the Navy I have been going to the VA as soon as I was available to do so. The Mental Health Clinic there is pretty comprehensive. I get care from Women's Health Clinic to Mental Health to a Primary Care Provider. If I'm sick I can just go in. Now with the VA they have that new system where you can actually email your doctor. It's amazing.

When times are tough, you don't just give up and feel sorry for yourself. You handle it and you go through the proper channels that are set in place for a reason. Mental Health Clinics aren't just there for weak people. They've been around for a while. They're there for people to work through their problems in a timely manner and handle things. I want people to see that strong, confident, and professional people can do these things and it doesn't lessen any of their character. It's a way to handle things in a professional way.



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