

I don't look like I'm affected, but I am

Marylyn: I had been a nurse before I came there so I was used to illness, disease, death, all that kind of stuff. Not that you ever get so comfortable with it, but I remember the first casualties that came into the hospital because I worked in the medical intensive care unit, the MICU and I ran over to where the bodies came in. They were charbroiled basically. They had been burned and I remember that instant I said "I am going to die, I am going to die here." I was devastated.

I remember on many occasions I was enlisted, and I was E6 and the role of the E6s was to pull guard duty every other day. You were on for two hours, off for two hours. Well doing the nights the person that was on guard duty, if there were two people to a post one would come and get you and wake you up in your tent. Well I remember on many occasions when the person came to get me to wake me up in my tent I was asleep in my tent, they would come in and they are just supposed to tap you or make some kind of noise so you can get up and get on duty. Well that was a prime opportunity to be fondled and groped and then when you're out on a post, this happened to me numerous times, you are out on a post there is a roving sergeant of the guards or maybe some other people walking around for whatever reasons. Those were prime opportunities you know where you are basically in isolation and you know those were times when I was sexually harassed. I remember many of the incidences like they were just in the last 15 minutes and it is 20 years. I remember the faces, the words, the smells, the negative unwarranted, unsolicited touches. I remember all of that.

Coming back from Desert Storm I was raging, I was very, very angry and you have to put that anger somewhere, preferably somewhere, put it somewhere positive. I didn't know how to do that at that time. So it came out in all kind of bad ways. There were fights, just a lot of negative experiences and I had no idea where it was all coming from. I had no idea that I had post traumatic stress disorder. Actually I returned in 91 and it was 10 years later before I had a personal, traumatic event and all of the memories from my military service in Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm rushed back. I found myself at the VA hospital talking with a counselor who suggested I speak with a lady at a place called the Vet center. After a couple of sessions with this therapist who incidentally did save my life, she told me she said you have post traumatic stress disorder from your military experience and my initial response was "I don't have that, that's not me."

Well in hindsight, which is always 20/20 I was having symptoms since I returned from the desert. One of the things that I was doing is that I would...I did not talk to anyone that I served with. I had no connection with anyone. I had nothing to do with anything military and I never, ever mentioned anything about me being in the military or anything about my military service. That is a classic symptom of PTSD, the avoidance, the numbness. I don't look like I am affected by what happened to me when I was in the military, but the reality is I am and PTSD affects your relationships in every way. It affects relationships with friends, with romantic type relationships and it even affects the way you raise your children. It affects every aspect of your life. Usually negatively if you don't find a way to get some assistance and find out how it actually is affecting you.

I do encourage people to go out and find an organization that can help you. I think that that's the only hope you have is to make a connection with somebody or some organization because isolation withdrawal is not going to get you the end result that you need. You want to get back into life, you want to get back enjoying your life, the things



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that you like to do and being able to explore the new thing so find a good, good therapist that has training in military sexual trauma if that is what you need and stay with that therapist at least a year and really get gut level honest and tell that therapist what happened to you and work on strategies to work through that. This does not happen quickly. This can take a long time to find these entities and people and do the work, but it is well worth it.



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