

## Know that there is help out there

**Panayiota:** My name is Panayiota. I served in the Coast Guard from 2005 till 2007. I was stationed in Burlington, Vermont and Boston, Massachusetts. I joined the Coast Guard cause I liked the job description. I grew up on boats and I just knew I wanted to be out at sea as a career.

Where I was serving at Station Burlington, Vermont, a fellow Shipmate of mine, he beat me and raped me. I reported it my Command who told me that I was pretty much at fault for what happened. They decided it was all a misunderstanding and that I had to continue working with my rapist. Eventually, I was transferred to Station South Portland, Maine. I was there on TD-Y for two weeks where I had the opportunity to report the rape again, and the Chief in South Portland, he followed protocol. He called legal and medical and got me help by sending me down to Boston, Massachusetts. They eventually discharged me from service for reasons of having problems adjusting to the rape.

A lot of my friends I had before the Coast Guard, I didn't even want to tell them. You know, I told my best friend but my other friends, I was just like, I didn't want to even tell anyone I was raped because everyone's like, "Oh yeah, how's the Coast Guard?" You know, you're so excited to like, you know, you're looking forward to enlisting. That's all you talked about for like a whole year, you know, and I can't just tell them I failed. So, I just kind of, you know, pulled away from any people I knew in the past.

I met my husband when I was transferred to Boston. It was pretty much in the middle of processing of me to get discharged. He was there pretty much from like the beginning. He's as supportive as he could be. You know, you wake up with nightmares and he's right there behind me and trying to comfort me. I felt like it was easier not to sleep then to sleep and get awakened by nightmares, so I would just force myself not to go to sleep. So, I had to force myself to stay awake as much as could, as many days as I could until I completely crashed and crashed and sleep. And I would get constant flashbacks. I was extremely angry, extremely... I did feel extremely hopeless.

While on active duty, I went to the VA to get help. The counselor that I originally saw there, like, he was just as amazing counselor. He was able to help me. I was on active duty, so I was just going in every week, telling him like, "This is what my Command told me this week. This is what my shipmates are doing to me." So, it was great having somebody who's... I guess he was like on my side and he was helping me and telling me that it's not your fault.

After I left the Coast Guard, I continued going to the Boston VA. Eventually, I moved over to the Boston Vet Center. I still go weekly to the Vet Center. I'm still, you know, I'm diagnosed with PTSD as a result of military sexual trauma. He, you know, just weekly counseling has been extremely helpful.

The best advice I could give someone is to go at your own pace and go do what feels right at that present time. MST and PTSD is an extremely personal issue and you have to find someone that you can actually connect with, and it's okay if you go through like five different therapists until you find that one. I feel all survivors should try what helps them and know that there is help out there.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE  
CONNECTION**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE**  
**CONNECTION**