

Managing anxiety and overcoming challenges

Valencia: I'm Valencia and I served in the United States Navy from September 25, 1987 until March 17, 1994. I was an Electrician Mate. I enjoyed the comradery, the teamwork.

Hurricane Hugo was a very traumatic experience for me. It was just that, you know, I felt so helpless and hopeless. Still around August or September, I still get this anxious feeling and this overwhelming. The next year, I would just fly off the handle. It was like I was just on pins and needles. I believe in 1992 that I had an episode like that and I went to the primary care doctor and was prescribed medication for it and they gave me a test, a psych test. I don't know how many pages long with lots of questions, but out of fear of possibly being discharged from the Navy, I didn't put down that I was also having suicidal ideations and this whatever it was that caused me to be so anxious and be so volatile.

I got out in March of 1994 and each year went through that. In 1996, I had a hysterectomy and that was in June and in August/September, I'm going through this again and I tell the people, "Hey, this isn't PMS." That's what I was diagnosed with in the Navy. "But this isn't PMS, because I no longer have a womb or anything, nothing to create that hormonal fluctuation." I finally went to see someone down in Waco. Waco was our VA Regional Office. Hurricane Hugo still fresh in my mind and I'm talking about it and crying. I was just uncontrollably crying, just the thought of it and having to talk about it and even my husband was, you know, vouching for me as well and they changed the diagnosis to anxiety disorder.

In 2005, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and subsequently I had surgeries and then chemotherapy. The chemotherapy caused cognitive dysfunction. It was really bad. Trying to hold conversations with people, I'd lose track of what I was saying and forget what I was talking about, couldn't think of the words, you know, that I was accustomed to knowing and so that caused me to become depressed. I just didn't want to be here anymore. I said, "Nothing's really alive, you know. All these negative thoughts going through my head constantly and, you know, I can't take that anymore." And I had decided I was either going to my mom's and dad's house which was on the way to the VA Hospital or I was going to the VA Hospital and I passed the street to get off where they are and ended up just getting off at the next one and knew I had to take myself and tell them, you know, "I need help." And while I was in the hospital, I was in the hospital almost a month and when I got out, I had an individual therapist and I really started talking about a lot of things that, you know, were weighing heavy on me.

I feel that it helps me to be in a place where I'm hearing about other people. I also feel I have something that I can contribute to someone else possibly and to me, you know, that has kind of, you know, been my, I guess, guiding force as far as how I'm learning to deal with people and having relationships that are good relationships that work. I always try to encourage any Veteran that I see, that I talk to, "Please go and apply for your benefits so you can get what you have worked so hard for. You owe it to yourself; you know. They're here for you."



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