

Support to move past MST and hopelessness

Nadine: My name is Nadine. I served in the United States Coast Guard from 1980 to 2006. My experiences with sexual harassment kind of started really early in my career. I won't forget it because it was my Senior Chief and I wasn't able to get a certain award with the group. So, he took me in his office and when he gave me my award, he actually touched my breast. It was just him and me, so I couldn't report it. Who's going to believe me? I basically had to suffer in silence.

The next incident that was significant was on one of my ships. I had gone to the Chief's Mess to deliver a pizza because we were having pizza night, and I was bent over the table cutting the pizza and he pretended to have sex with me. I was just so angry, hurt and felt betrayed because my Chief was in there too. And they all thought it was hilarious. And I think it was a few short months after that I tried to commit suicide. I figured that the situation was never going to change, and nothing was every gonna to be better.

I got diagnosed with bipolar right after, or right before I got discharged from the Coast Guard. They had a hard time diagnosing that because they saw the depression. In fact, that was one of the diagnosis I got first, was major depression. What they didn't see was mania. They didn't see me acting like an Energizer Bunny until one of my hospitalizations. So, they changed my medication, and it was like night and day difference. And that was like the beginning of my recovery because they finally got the proper diagnosis, along with the PTSD, is that I was bipolar.

Right after I was getting out, they started a new system where you got your VA claim done at the same time as your processing out. So, I got hooked up with the right people, got my VA claim. And while she was doing my VA claim she said, "There's a real good counselor at the Vet Center." She said, "I really think you should see her."

It was individual sessions at first, and since I was still real suicidal at that time it was sometimes twice a week. I went and saw her on an individual basis. And then we had the group. The group at that time had like ten women in it, and it was really cool because we all felt empowered because there was other women like us. And there's more work being done like cognitive behavioral therapy and actually helping you change your mindsets and your thinking.

Cognitive behavioral therapy basically teaches you how to change your thinking patterns. You have your stuck points and it changes you from getting stuck in those and trying to think of a different way to embrace it. And it's helped me a whole lot. I no longer see myself as a victim. I'm a survivor and I've survived all these things for a reason, and it could be just so I could share my story with other Veterans.

I owe it all to the doctors, my civilian psychiatrist and the Vet Center. I recommend Vet Centers. That's the best place I've gotten counseling and stuff like that. But if there's a VA Hospital near you, go. Go to the emergency room. Don't walk, run. Save your life. I was lucky I got to save mine.



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