

## Managing depression and overcoming homelessness

**Sandra:** Hi, my name is Sandra and I was in the Navy, U.S. Navy from 1981 to 1991 and then I joined the National Guard in 2008 and got out in January of 2013. I was a Ship Serviceman. We handled the ships' activities onboard ship and then offshore, the commissary and all of the activities for the sailors offshore. I got pregnant and so the kid's father was in the military. He got out and went back to Baltimore. And so, I was between a rock and a hard place to make that decision whether or not I would stay or go with him to become a family. After I told my Petty Officer that I wanted to get out, he said, "Well, you need to think about that." He said, "I'm going to give you three days to think about it." But finally, when I thought about it, I just asked, "I said, I want to get out."

And then, I realized in hindsight, I was depressed often times, in the military, when you so busy doing what the military requires you to do, you lose yourself to some degree. You got rank; you this; you that; but on the other side of the coin, you got issues and you try to keep it under wrap. You don't want them to know. You go home at night and cry. You don't want them to know that because you have to put this uniform on and be so strong. I got out, went back to Baltimore, dealt with the children with the family and the family issue didn't work out, but I stayed with the kids and everything and I still wasn't satisfied with my life. I said, "Something is missing here." And I left, going to Bible College to Louisiana. When the president of the school asked me, "Did I want to come out to California to finish the school, I came out here.

As soon as I got here, I joined the National Guard. Once I got here, I was homeless. I didn't have a place to stay, and so I went to VA. My therapist ruled the PTSD out for in terms of me being on the ship, but he did as he took his diagnosis and took the intake, he found out that I was depressed. Looking back, things had fell in place as to why this, that and the other, X, Y, and Z. I began to understand. I said, "Wow." That's how I was making the certain choices that I was making from under the umbrella of being depressed. All I did was just work the program in terms of taking my medicine and going to therapy and talking to my therapist and doing the steps that we would do in our treatment plan and I got the housing through the HUD-VASH; that's a partnership with Section 8 and a partnership with the military, the HUD-VASH, Housing Assisted Living Program. It's for people that have mental health issues or that need to see a therapist. So, you have to have a therapist through this program to be able to be attached to the Section 8. So, it all goes together. Please, if you need help, do not hesitate. Give yourself a chance, just open up and go to the program. Don't worry about the labels because that program is there to help you and, "Wow," you know, the things that I learned from those years of getting therapy for my depression really helped me.



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