

Gathering the strength to get back on track

Lisa: I am Lisa and I served in the Army, started in the National Guard and then went active duty. I was stationed here in Arkansas in the National Guard and at Fort Irwin. I was lacking a lot of discipline when I joined. It gave me the focus where I needed at the time. I was raped by my sergeant. Not my direct sergeant in my platoon but a sergeant within my company. I had reported CID, followed it all the way up. He was convicted, he did finally plead guilty and was convicted. It really changed my life in the military. You know, I think, I think we got to the point where using our resources was so negatively frowned upon, especially for women in the military. We want to serve, we want to, you know, help our country but there's still a large group of men and women also in our nation and especially in our military branches who "Oh no, you've got to suck it up and deal with it."

After the attack I was diagnosed through the VA with PTSD with anxiety. Walking to my car from the grocery store was almost a panic attack every single time. A knock on the door scared me. An unfamiliar sound was just crushing, you know, I would still find myself balled up in a—floor in the corner, I'd just...it was horrible. Got out of the service, actually went to stay with my mom for a little bit. I couldn't go anywhere or do anything without my mom, so if my mom didn't want to go out, I didn't go out. If she didn't want to go grocery shopping, I didn't go grocery shopping, basically a hermit, and my mom came to me and, you know, we decided I just—you know, there are systems in place and why don't you just go check it out?

I moved to Florida when I married my husband from Minnesota and they had just opened a VA outpatient clinic right outside of Eglin Air Force Base. It was geared toward PTSD with anxiety, but just learning how...why I responded the way I responded to certain situations and certain stimuli, you know, the way the brain works, was quite helpful, and it was more—that counseling was more educational counseling, so when I did have a trigger I knew, you know, so I could say it's there and I could rationally go, "Okay, Lisa, stop. This is—we need to readjust our brain, we need to readjust the way we think." I can control my emotions. That does—that's not to say that there's not still occasions, but it's never as bad as it was. I can recognize what my emotions are and why they are the way they are, and I don't have to fall apart.

For the first time in almost five and a half, six years I'm starting to feel like Lisa. To go so long not knowing who you are and then to one day wake up and feel like yourself. When you're looking for a counselor you may have one bad experience, you know, not every counselor is made for you. You know, you've just got to keep on going and every time you take that step towards getting help, even if it didn't work that time okay, you're still taking a step. You in and of yourself are becoming a stronger person because you can say "I'm going to go." There's somebody made for you to help you. Go get the help, you're going to see it—you are going to be so much stronger than you ever thought you were going to be. You thought you were strong in the military? You ain't experienced nothing. You haven't experienced anything until you come out and you can look back and you can say "Oh my word, look at me now." And it's a great feeling. It's a wonderful feeling.



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