

LGBTQ+ Veterans living open, healthy lives

Monty: US Navy, 1974-1994. I knew that I was gay long before I joined the Navy, but you know, for my security clearance I wasn't about to say that I was gay. If I did you know then my chances of then getting in the Navy was zilch.

Cynthia: US Navy 1975-1984. The damage that society does to us is all on the inside you know. You learn never to trust anybody.

Ryan: US Army, 1997-2000. I served under 'Don't ask don't tell' and I wasn't out technically, and you know when I got in it was different though, it was still a little hard not being able to be open and honest with the people that I was working with.

Tim: US Marine Corps, 2008-2011. I put my personal needs and desires to the side to be the best Marine that I could be.

Tracey: US Army, US Army National Guard, US Army Reserve, 1991-2003. My so-called friends found out about me, that I am gay, and they kind of said, well you know what, we will go ahead and keep your secret a secret, but you know there are some things you have to do for us to do that. The guys that basically put me in that situation they should have been punished for using that blackmail against me. In my little bit of time, being gay was a bigger punishment than, you know, breaking the sexual harassment policy of the military.

Tim: When I got out it was like, the fear of this overwhelming weight that was constantly on me of getting found out and getting kicked out. So, to have that burden lifted off of me was an incredible breath of fresh air that lasted for about 2 days before I was like, wait a minute, what do I do now. Because all my brothers, I still couldn't tell them, I still couldn't tell them anything. I was ashamed to tell them; I was ashamed of myself. So, I immediately, and not purposely, walled them all off.

Ash: US Air Force, US Air Force Reserve, 2001-2012. And when you start to avoid everybody, you are at home, and it just cycles around, I guess, in your mind.

Millye: US Army, 1961. I would get depressed and wouldn't know why. I didn't know it was because I really wanted to be her. I would just feel as though now what am I going to do.

Ryan: I would just notice changes in my own behavior, you know, not doing things that I would typically know to do, sleeping a lot, just agitated, drinking more.

Tracey: I basically got to a point where, alright let's see what the VA is saying they can help, let's see what they can do. So we went ahead and tried it.

Cynthia: There is change since the 1950's, it's changed since the 1960's. You don't have to go to an unlicensed (pardon my language) moron to give you bad advice about how you feel and who you are. You can find sympathetic and supportive professionals



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and many of them are in the VA system. So, I am very grateful for what I have learned through the Veterans Administration Hospital System and also from the support I have gotten from people who aren't even in that role but are at the VA.

Ash: For me one of the benefits of counseling is that they are able to either, one, see things that I am not seeing, or they are able to, just through talking it out, I will then have an epiphany about, oh woah, okay, this is how this is tied together.

Monty: The counselor is there to not more than guide, but teach you and have you look at the world a different way. My counselor said its okay to be gay. Its okay because you are loved, right.

Millye: I use the VA for my one-on-one when I am feeling stressed and I need to talk to someone. It's not the trance portion, its mostly dealing with my learning how to forgive and move forward. I am attending the support group and I'm very much still involved every Tuesday, because there are a number of girls that are coming in and we all have different stories.

Ryan: I think a part of that, for me, has always been kind of talking and sharing what I am going through and being open with myself and others. Having that support group. But I feel great. I feel better than I have in years.

Ash: So, now I can be me. I can enjoy life, period. I know the direction in which I want to go, not where someone else is leading me. I can help the people that I want to help. I know that I don't have to do this alone.



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