

Healing after MST to move forward with life

Matthew: My name is Matthew. I served in the U.S. Navy between 1991 and 1996. I worked in the Seabees as a Construction Worker. We built a lot of buildings on bases. We also did a lot of work out in communities. I was assigned a battalion. As I was on my way up to my room, a couple gentleman asked if I wanted to hang out that night and I thought "This is cool, I don't really know anybody, this will be a chance to get to know somebody." Well, it turned out that they were planning a hazing-type event, and it just turned into more than that. There was a lot of drinking involved. There was a hazing incident where they indoctrinated me into the battalion, but then also later on there I was held hostage, I was beaten, and I was raped.

After that, my thoughts with starting a new career and all the excitement was gone. I didn't know quite what to do because I knew if I would say something, it would definitely end my career as I knew it. So, I held onto a lot of what happened. But I did eventually, through stress, I reported the hazing incident to the battalion, and when I did that, the gentleman was disciplined. I struggled for a long time while in the Service, trying to deal with what happened. I got myself into a lot of trouble. I self-medicated quite a bit with alcohol. But once I did leave the Military, I thought leaving the Military was going to solve all my problems. But of course that's not what happened.

I continued living the way I was in the Military, trying to deal with these issues through drinking and that kind of thing. The problem was is I lost all trust in people. It was very hard for me to connect with people. That deteriorated all my relationships. Guilt, I had a very hard time with guilt. I was isolated in my parent's basement. I had no contact with people, hardly any with my parents. So, in a way this did protect me from being victimized again. But it did horrible things to my life. I wasn't able to leave my home.

I got to a point in my life where I decided that I had to do something different. I thought about suicide. I thought about what I really wanted in my life, and I decided that I was going to give the VA a try and try to push through these issues. So, that's when I got out in 1996 and about 2000 I started actively seeking help. I saw a VA Psychologist and there was no way I was gonna talk about my military sexual trauma, but he did recognize symptoms of PTSD and that's where I really started working on myself. I did have some shortfalls and it was very hard at the beginning, but once I started believing that these people were trying to help me and I started trusting them, that's when things really started to look up for me.

What I love about individual counseling now is I work with a gentleman, he's a Doctor, Psychologist. He's also encouraged me so much to grow in my life. I think I did a lot of great work in the psychotherapy groups. You make goals and you commit to goals and you're kind of held responsible by the rest of the group. I was able to talk about these Military, this Military sexual trauma. And, not only that, I was able to work with those issues, which was extremely hard because I'd spent so many years trying to suppress these thoughts and emotions. It was a feeling of relief. It was also a feeling of "This happened to me, but it doesn't define me." For a long time, I thought of myself of three things, a Military Veteran, someone that had been... that had suffered a Military sexual trauma, and someone that was diagnosed with PTSD. But, once I started working with this and accepted this, I started to think of myself outside the box, and a lot larger than I ever had before. Now I'm in school, studying to be a Social Worker. I'm married, I own



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a home. I'm very satisfied with my life and I'm happy. I am so happy that I went to the VA and got some help.



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