

## Strength to overcome PTSD and MST

**Sherri:** My name is Sherri. I served in the Army from 1985 until 2009. I was advanced party, so when we first got to Iraq, the warrant officer and I, we were in a convoy and just as we were entering to the FOB, a landmine went off. And so, I got out the vehicle at the time. At the time... I didn't know... I didn't realize I was dazed and I fell full front on the ground.

You don't know if you're going to be okay from the one minute to the next because you don't know when the FOB is going to be attacked. So, you kinda always in attack mode. I was in charge of a group of soldiers there. So, I also had the stress of making sure that my decisions did not put their lives in danger.

I was a Senior Non-Commission officer and I worked for a Sergeant Major and everyday he'd say something to me. Corner me, just inappropriate behavior. And I really didn't say anything, because when you complain as a woman in the service, people think that you're a troublemaker. You get labels. I didn't realize then that because of what happened, would lead to trigger other things that happened to me once I got home.

I got back and found myself staying in my bedroom. All dark. TV screen on. Curtains closed. I would interact with my daughter, but I knew something was wrong. As much as I loved her, I wasn't really the same. And I couldn't really show her how much I loved her, even though in my head, I knew. And so, the days went on, the months went on. My stomach was in knots. I didn't really understand that I was suffering from PTSD.

I couldn't really talk to anybody because I was Master Sergeant EA. I was still in charge, still stressful. And if you thought that something was wrong with you mentally, there was a still a stigma that if you went to get help, you were probably weak, so I didn't say anything.

I got back in February 2005 and it took me from February to October to where I just knew I couldn't take it anymore and I scheduled an appointment for myself. Not at my local clinic but at place called Wurzburg, which was a little over an hour away and I would go to the mental health counselor. And when I first went, I didn't really even think that I still had an illness. I thought I just needed somebody to talk too.

The first time I went, I just broke down and I knew something then was really wrong. And so, I went, and I saw a counselor from 2005 all the way up until I got out of the military in 2009.

What I get out of it was that it's okay, first of all too know that you went to war, and the war affected you. I didn't have to be so hooah or strong. I don't think I would've lasted those years left in the military without mental health.

Since I've been out of the service, going to the clinics in Germany were helpful as well. Now, that I'm here in the states, a whole new world has opened up with going to VA. I went just for a general appointment. I found out as well as having PTSD that some of the sexual harassment I encountered, how much it impacted me.

I didn't even realize that I harbored those feelings inside for so many years, so the programs that are available to Vets, incredible.



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Military taught me how to be stronger, how to have faith in myself, to trust my instincts, to fight when I needed to. It taught me how to be a leader and once I learned how to be a better leader, I learned how to be a better mother. I don't know if I would even be alive if I didn't go get help for myself.

So, go get help. Life is far worth living than not being here. I'm so glad I'm here.



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