

## Breaking the Ice

**Steph:** Hiding whether you're lesbian, gay, or a transgender individual is really hard when you're in a very structured environment like the military is. You're always kind of looking over your shoulder like who knows, or who's going to expose me? And that created in itself its own mental anguish. My name is Steph and I was in the US Navy 1972 to 1978. On active duty, I was a dental prosthetic technician. All of a sudden I'm into this very module environment and so I had to purposely hide myself.

When I got out, took me quite a while to get over that. I want to disengage myself from everything around me. I was starting to get anxious, starting to go down the road into depression. My relationship of 16 and a half years was unraveling because I had a different sort of transition going on. Best choice I could do is go seek therapy.

Going into the VA is welcoming. It was warm. Individual therapy helped me to learn some coping mechanisms, get my mind off of what's causing the depression. I worked with the VA rep who we located a job at a prestigious dental lab in San Diego. And I got my job there. I went through a full transition in 2005 and they were real supportive and real great. They're part of my support system, someone who I can go to when I need to just reach out and be able to talk.

It helps a lot because I've been more engaged in life. I do a lot of hiking. I do photography. I love movies. I volunteer at the veterans park here in Albuquerque. Those type of things allow me to focus my mind on something that is a positive reinforcement for me. I was going down a road that was not going to end well. If you need help in some way, don't be afraid to reach out to the VA. It's extremely important to make that decision for yourself.



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