

Pick yourself back up

Agatha: My name is Agatha, I served in the Army from 1998 to 2010. We got deployed as a unit, and then they separated us. We got detached into 82nd Airborne which is all men being in a building or a tent, the only female there and having someone just come in your tent or just knock on your door, I felt like, more like a target. You see men totally different because they can become these protectors and then they're not protecting you.

I didn't realize I was displaying hostility when I came back and my family was like, "What is wrong with you?" I was paranoid, I thought I was...if I walk out of my house, I was going to die. I just kept remembering being fired at, bombed at. Women don't talk about these things. I had to come back home and be somebody's mother, somebody's sister, someone's daughter. I went in trying to protect, being this feminist person and thinking that I can do it, and then came back home and I was broken.

In 2016 on the train, I started feeling really hot, like I was on fire. And I started screaming on the train, on the E-line. I asked the MTA person, "Please help me, I don't, I don't know what's going on with me because I feel like I'm burning up." And he was like, "Are you crazy? If you don't calm yourself down I'm going to have to call the cops and you're going to go to jail." And I said, "No, you don't understand, I feel like I can't breathe, I'm, I'm feeling like I'm dying inside." And it turns out that my heart went in complete AV block, third degree and I was actually dying, and I was in the hospital for 14 days and they gave me a heart pacemaker.

My son is the one, he had to like, snap me into reality. He was like, "You realize that you do things and say things that are not my mom." And he grabbed me and he said, "If you don't fix yourself, I'm going to leave you." Then I sought counseling further on with the VA 23rd Street. She listened and she suggested that I do more counseling with my son and then suggested that I do positive things. "You like writing, poems? Write me a poem. You like reading the Bible? Read the Bible to me. You want to cry? Cry it out, but then pick yourself back up again." I'm learning to cope through good support networks.

If you go to the VA and you say my name, people know me because I do a lot of community service and that kind of helps me heal. I even became a Chaplain. I like the fact that I'm listening to a Veteran. They sit at my desk and they just pour themselves out to me and I listen and when they walk out, "Thank you for listening to me," is what I hear. I feel better when I know that someone else, I've helped someone else get better. I represent the women that had to fake to be this okay woman. You've got to just let it out. You've got to talk to someone. Don't suppress it anymore, that's part of healing. We can survive together.



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