

## You don't have to carry the pain alone

**Sue:** I'm Sue, I served in the United States Navy in 1971 and 72 in the Gulf of Tonkin. I always knew that there was something a little bit different because my thought process wasn't like the other boys. I had to pretend to be a guy and as I grew up, I called it wearing my man suit. I had to hide it all the time. When I was in the Service, I had to do the same thing.

On the night before my discharge, I was attacked by six men, knocked out, and I was raped and sodomized and left for dead, so that had a major effect on the rest of my life. Being hit in the back of the head and knocked out, and then the guilt associated with that because I thought because I was big I should've been able to protect myself and do something, but when you're attacked, you're attacked.

After I got out of the service I drank. I drank a lot. It helped me to disguise, it helped me to try to forget. I couldn't function anymore, I had no pride anymore, so it got to that point where I couldn't live. I didn't want to live.

In the early days of the VA we didn't have PTSD, it was a behavior problem. So, at that time the answer was Librium and so that actually helped me to not drink as much. I was already 14 years sober, but I still couldn't hold a job, I couldn't have any kind of a relationship. I mean, I didn't know what was wrong with me and I guess that's the point I got to, is that I can't live like this anymore and there's got to be some way. And a friend took me to the VA. That's when I was able to get help to start my new life.

I went to an in-house PTSD program and I also had a Therapist that I used to see and talk to about things once I started receiving the proper mental health care, which I got through the VA. If I didn't have the VA, I'd still be out there or dead. Once I was finally diagnosed with what was wrong with me, it took a while to get the proper balance of medication and certain kinds, that that frustration and that feeling finally went away.

I see my Psychiatrist every three months. I have access to my Social Worker who I talk to on a regular basis, and if I'm not doing good, I found out that VA had transgender support groups. We can talk about issues, different things that people are going through the fear of doing a lot of things. So, there's somebody available at any time. I am free, I'm happy... I'm free to be who I am, and it took a long time to get here. If you're tired of living like you're living, there is help. You don't have to have this pain, you don't have to carry this alone, you know, there's thousands of us out there. The help is there, and the VA has come a long, long way in helping.



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