

## I was fighting a war of my own

**CJ SCARLET:** I'm CJ Scarlet and I served in the US Marine Corp for 5 years back in the early 1980s as a matter of fact. I was in the very first platoon of women that had in combat training. My dad had been a Marine, was a retired Marine and my twin brother was a Marine and there was no way that I was going to let the guys in my family show me up, I mean if they were going to be good Marines, I was going to be an exemplary Marine within a year and a half I was a sergeant, so I was promoted very quickly.

Some of the issues that I had faced early in my Marine Corps career started to come up. I had been raped by my recruiter and had not ever told anybody and not ever dealt with that, but it was daily harassment by this officer who really did not women in his Marine Corp, that wore me down. I came into Marine Corp, Molly Marine, honor graduate of my platoon and went out with a whimper.

I was on the Governors advisory commission on military affairs here in North Carolina. And I was holding a meeting with some of the leaders from the advisory commissioner talking about how to get grant money to do brochures for women who had been sexually assaulted in the military. I started telling these funny stories about the sexual harassment that I endured on a daily basis. I looked at the peoples faces and they were horrified. I though these stores aren't funny.

And I went home and everything just sort of fell apart. I got referred to a mental health program, a group they had here in Raleigh, North Carolina for women Veterans. I was offered both group and individual counseling. And at first I was extremely nervous about going and the reason I felt like I was betraying the miliary. I felt like I was betraying the Marine Corp by sharing these stories. And it took me a good two years into the counseling to come to the place where I could accept that what happened to me was not only wrong and did not deserve to happen to me, but that it was okay for me to disclose this, to talk about this, to make this, to let other people know what had happened to me and to share it in a group setting. What I finally came to realize was that the people, not the Marine Corp, some of the individuals in the Marine Corp had betrayed me. And cnce I could grasp that and separate my duty to the Marine corp to my duty to myself and letting the people who had done these things, putting the responsibility on them rather than trying to carry it all myself, then I was able to start working through my issues and start taking advantage of the help that was offered to me. Again, it took a couple of years for the counselor to help me to appreciate that I was fighting a war of my own.

It was the first time anybody had ever said to me not well suck it up Marine, but that should never have happened to you and It's not your fault. You have to own what happened to you first before you can move on. You can't just suck it up and say I'm going to pretend like this never happened. You can't just do this on your own. This is a journey you're on and when you can go along with half of somebody who sees the path more clearly than you can or sees it at all where you can't see it because things look so dark, it makes all the difference in the world. When I couldn't get mad for myself, when I was so disassociated from what had occurred to me, from what had happened to me, but I couldn't get angry about it. I didn't have any feelings around it, being in the group setting and hearing other people's stories helps you to feel the emotions for them. Then you start going wait a second that sounds a lot like my story. And if her story is like my story and it's not her fault then what does that say about my story. Maybe it's not my fault either. You can't hold your trauma in you fist like this because things will start



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leaking out. Anger will start leaking out. Tears will start leaking out at inappropriate places and toward inappropriate people and what therapy does, what the counseling does, what the group therapy and individual therapy do is they coax you into opening your hand. I am no longer defined by as the victim of my circumstance. I'm no longer defined as a victim period. These are now things that happened to me a long time ago and I have perspective. I never in my wildest dreams dreamed I could be as happy as I have become. I attribute it to the counseling. The VA wants to help. They want to do the right thing and they're offering a service to you and it's free, and it's available and it's accessible and it's confidential. If you had the courage to go through military training and devote your life to your country and be willing to die for your country, you have the courage to do this. You're strong enough to do this.



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