

I wish I had gone sooner

Carla: My name is Carla. I served in the US Navy from 1980 to 1987. I was stationed at Bermuda, New Orleans, Oceania and Norfolk, Virginia. I took care of all the enlisted records and did education and training. I also made ID cards for active duty and dependents.

I joined the Navy because I wanted to travel, and I thought it would be a good way to advance. I loved meeting all the different people. I made some great friends when I was in the military.

There was a lot of sexual harassment going on, even in 1980 when it was supposed to be the new Navy. Someone who was superior in rank to me, we attended an event. I got very inebriated and this person took advantage of me. And I had to see this person almost every day. So, it was very difficult for me. I was embarrassed. I was ashamed. I didn't understand. I thought maybe it was my fault that the person took advantage of me.

When I got out of the Navy, I became a military wife. I wanted to trust people, but I didn't, especially men. I didn't go out by myself. If I drank, I stayed home because I was too afraid of other people. I'd have panic attacks. My ability to cope with stress was very limited. And still, you know, I didn't seek help. I was still ashamed.

It made it difficult to hold down a job. My relationships suffered as a result. It had an affect on everything; my children, my family, my employment because my ability to cope with any stress was very limited. I had spiraled down into a dark depression. I found myself isolating myself from my friends and family. And it wasn't working. I was having suicidal thoughts.

I woke up one day and I was just...I didn't think I could take it anymore, and there were only two options. Either seek help or commit suicide. I decided to seek help, and I'm glad I did.

I went to the VA. They decided, I decided too, that I needed the inpatient to get my medications right and to get some counseling that I needed right away. So, I stayed there for a week. And talked to counselors, talked to social workers.

It's worked out very well for me. I go to group counseling once a week. I see a therapist and psychiatrist for my medication. Everyone's very helpful.

I like the individual therapy because I can say things that I can't necessarily say in group therapy. But I really like the group therapy because it's all women and a lot of us have similar circumstances. And we're friends now, and we keep in contact. I don't isolate myself anymore. I try to get out. Now, I won't tell you that I'm cured, but I'm in a much better position than I was back in 2011.

I have reconnected with family and friends. I am not employed, but I am looking for work. My anxiety is a lot better. I don't have the panic attacks...I still have a few, but not like I did before. I am living on my own. I wish I would've went sooner after I'd been discharged instead of waiting for so long and suffering for so long because now I'm in a much better place than I was before.



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Anyone who has physical or mental problems and is a Veteran should seek help from the VA. They're very helpful, very understanding. They have a women's clinic. They have therapy just for women, therapists just for women. And they understand women's issues. It's meant the world to me. And I take one day at a time and the VA is responsible for my survival.



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