

All the Difference

Valerie: I was newly arrived at my duty station and I had always thought of military personnel as being honorable, and it was something that really caught me off guard to be assaulted by someone who was a fellow soldier. And yeah, I was in disbelief.

It affected my mental health in ways I didn't even realize at the time. A lot of self blame, wondering what did I do? And in the long run, it would affect me in ways that would just continue to last until I sought help.

My name is Valerie. I'm a veteran of the United States Army. My MOS was 05Bravo or radio operator, and I served from 1981 to 1984.

I joined the Army because I was brought up in a home where military service was just looked at with so much honor. My father was in the Army. My brother was in the Navy. My grandfather was killed on Okinawa in World War II. My time serving in the Army, it was just such a new experience. A young gal right out of high school, realizing how far away I was. The overall feeling of loneliness was a big impact on me. Symptoms that I've had through my life without recognizing what they were attached to was anger. A lot of upset. A lot of resentment. I didn't want who really knew me the best, my close family and my close friends to see that there was something different about me.

My husband really was instrumental in leading me towards getting help, professional help. He recognized some of the PTS symptoms I was exhibiting. And he spoke from experience in that he was already seeing a therapist at the Vet Center, and I had never even heard of the Vet Center, but he suggested I go. So my first experience with treatment at the Vet Center was remarkable. It was a male therapist and they were very conscientious of that, but he was so welcoming and so warming. And for the first time in my life, I recognized that I was not to blame. That there was hope. My counselor said, "Valerie, would you be interested in joining a women's group?" And my first reaction was, no. And then she said, "Well, why don't you try it out?" And here I am, almost two years later still going.

Women talking to women. There are things that you don't have to say, you know what it's like to be pregnant. You know what it's like to be sexually harassed. They strengthen that vulnerability. And through therapy, I have learned so many new tools, recognizing why I feel like I do. It's okay not to be perfect. It's okay to be a survivor. All of those combination of things have helped.

One of the other things that has been very helpful for me has been quiet time. Just sit and watch the birds dive into the ocean and catch fish. You can't help but come out and see this water and these mountains and feel better about yourself and feel better about your day. When I look back and think about how trauma affected my life, I wish I had found treatment sooner. Don't let it pile up. Don't let it



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build up. So I was just hoping to just encourage whoever sees this to get help. I encourage you, I beg you to do it for your own wellbeing. It's made all the difference in the world to me.



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