

## You have to put yourself first

**Jennifer:** My name's Jennifer. I served in the United States Army active duty and then the United States Army Reserve. In basic training I was one of the women who was raped by her Drill Sergeant, and at the time I just didn't think about it. I thought it was my fault. I told a couple of the girls, it turned into me getting beat up by my platoon because they didn't believe me. I think there was a stigma always in coming forth as a woman because you didn't want to be part of the henhouse, is what the men would call it. You had to be tougher and pull your own weight.

Long story short, I graduated, I had no problems graduating and I moved on, but I pocketed that and it went into a black box and I didn't deal with it. I never really reflected on it or went back to it till many, many, many years later, after I left active duty, and that's where things started to fall apart. I think I lost that structure and that family, and I had all this open time and space and I didn't... had never told anybody or my husband, and so when I came out and told him about the incident there was a lot of misunderstanding, there was a lot of lack of belief, more like just kinda get over it.

I felt like because of how I looked that that was a problem, that that drew the wrong kind of attention and so I started to eat a lot, and so I gained a lot of weight. I think that that led me to realize I was sabotaging my own health to protect myself from being looked at by anybody, so that it wouldn't happen again. Things started to be kind of uncomfortable in my relationship with my husband, and I sought out therapy for that, and it sort of segued into looking deeper into what things I could be going through that may have been triggering me arguing, me being argumentative or yelling or not being positive or being just disrespectful or rude or hateful to him.

I went for marriage counseling to this Therapist, and she was great, and my husband chose not to go. He didn't feel that that was where we needed to solve our issues, and so as I worked through my frustration and she started to ask me about me, that's where it turned into not marriage counseling anymore, it turned into personal counseling to help me focus and see where I was hurting myself.

Talking helped because she asked the questions that I couldn't see needed to be asked, and she pressed me for answers. She wouldn't always allow me the space to regroup or come up with something that might be a little less painful for me. If I were crying she would press that point, whatever it is that we were working through, and if I went into a denial mode she would say stop putting up barriers, this is a safe place to tell me and to share and to come to terms with it.

After going through therapy and sticking with it, even when I thought maybe I didn't need it anymore, I found I did, and what it did with the medication is I started to look at the world differently and I started to look at things differently and instead of self-sabotaging myself, I started to make improvements. So, each day has been better. I no longer have nightmares and I don't have to see a Therapist as often anymore. I think the medication also helped. It didn't make the world all rainbows and puppies and unicorns, but it gave me a bottom to stand on and then it gave me something a little bit higher than the bottom to keep my head above water emotionally.

Before you put everybody first, the mission first, your team first, your Soldiers first, you didn't think about anything else. Now you're a Veteran. You have to put yourself first, you have to talk to somebody.



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