

I just wanted to muscle through my problems

Heather: My name is Heather. I served in the Air Force and I was stationed at Lackland Air Force Base from 1994 to 1998. I went up to Washington and I auditioned and won a role as a singer in the band at Lackland so then I had to contact a recruiter and I had to go through basic training and everything just like everybody else did. We probably get a bad rap and people think “oh it is not like I really served” but so many of the things that are true for anyone else who is serving in the military are true for us. We travel a lot.

Our whole lifestyle is controlled by the military. Many of us lived on base. My job might be singing, that might not seem as important as you know standing on a front line, right. I still have to be prepared to make the sacrifices that any military member would have to make.

I left because I had a baby. I got pregnant when I was about 3 years in. She was born in March, then I separated, then my husband separated from the military and then we moved to Louisiana and I was no longer working. Our lives changed, we bought a house, everything...a lot of stresses in my life at that time.

Before I even got out of the Air Force I had started really struggling with anxiety attacks and sleeplessness and fears and was eventually diagnosed with post partum depression so I was dealing with all of that. At the time I was still able to access medical services as a family member and saw a psychologist and they're the ones who told me that what I had was post-partum depression.

They prescribed to me initially was like a course of classes in anxiety management and I took those and I felt like they were useful tips but I ultimately felt that my anxiety was kind of overwhelming. I could use the techniques they gave me and I had a lot of skills to manage my anxiety, but it was taking up my whole day. It was taking all of my energy just to keep from having a panic attack and I couldn't sleep. I just could not sleep at all. Then I moved away, so I took the classes and I thought they were helpful, but I really would've wanted to followup with the psychologist who I saw and said listen I need more help.

I moved away to a place where I didn't really have access anymore or I thought that I didn't have access. And I then struggled for a long time. My husband was away, because he stayed in the National Guard, so he would be gone one weekend a month and during the summer he would go on tours with the National Guard Band and wouldn't be around. It was always worse when he wasn't around. And that's one of the things that I came to realize was that a lot of my anxiety was about feeling like I had to do everything by myself. That I couldn't...that there was nobody, like that I had no support system.

When you come out it's ... like I found it a little difficult I think to relate to non-military women. Because they seemed, oh I don't know they seemed concerned with things that seemed trivial to me. I had schooled myself and it's funny to say this being in the band, I mean I didn't see combat, right; but the culture of the military teaches you to be tough. There is a mental and physical toughness to my attitude that I think was shaped by being in the military that meant I wanted to muscle through my problems. I felt very



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isolated. If I could have connected back up with some people like that who shared some of the issues that I was facing.

I actually do think that I suffered longer than I needed to because I didn't seek help. The 21st Century soldier, the mentally, physically tough super woman I can do anything. We need help and just talking to a psychologist, encouraging you to reach out to your family. Whoever is there for you, whatever your support system is you don't have to do it by yourself.



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