

I still have a purpose

Susan: When you're laughing, I think it's helpful for stress, it's helpful for your depression. Humor is wonderful. My name is Susan. I was in the Navy, and I was in from December of 1985 to December of 2006.

My recruiting experience was what got me deployed to Afghanistan, to work with Afghan National Police. They were wanting to integrate women into their police, which, actually, the General and the Lieutenant Colonel were pretty excited when I showed up as a female, because they wanted to show that example to Afghan women that, we need you, too.

I have major depression and PTSD. Trying to adjust to being a civilian, being back in the States, it was not good. It felt strange to go outside without a bunch of gear on. I got quite a few speeding tickets my first year or two after I got off active duty, because I just was used to very aggressive driving. You've got to stay away from vehicles, watch that garbage bag on the side of the road, anything funky in the road, you've got to drive around that.

About 18 months after I retired, I experienced sudden onset hearing loss, total hearing loss in the left ear. It changed my perception. I felt very vulnerable. I felt very unsafe. I couldn't tell where sounds were coming from. Everything sounded differently, everything was louder or just, it almost hurt to listen to some things. Then I started to develop a lot of rage and anger from that, and I realized that something's not right.

The Vet Center just, with all that you needed was your DD214 to show that you were in one of these campaigns, you were in. So I called up and said, "I'd like to come see someone," and I got in probably in two days. VAs have acupuncture. They have all different kinds of groups.

Groups were awesome because that solidified to me that I'm not the only one. It's not just me that has these experiences, and when people talk about the things they're going, it's like, "Oh, my gosh, I have that, too." They've recovered from it or they're working on it, so it gives you hope that that's possible. It's always good to be with other Veterans. Even if I'm in a group, if I'm feeling good, I might be able to help somebody else, and helping somebody else helps me.

Stand-up is something I've always wanted to do. There's a program, is called the Armed Services Arts Partnership, and they are using the arts to help veterans heal. So I did my debut at the DC Improv and it was awesome. It was big bucket list item for me, and I want to keep doing it because there's so much material out there. I feel so at home up there, and just making people laugh is something that makes me feel good. It really boosts me up.

My husband, at the time, he picked me up at the airport when I was coming back from Afghanistan, and he said, "I have a surprise for you." So I'm thinking surprise party, spa weekend, something really awesome. He took me to an Afghan restaurant.

I'm so much stronger than I was. What I have in my life now, as a civilian again, and finding that there is a purpose for me now. I think that's the hardest thing for veterans, as well, "I don't have a purpose now. I had such a big role in defending the country, and now I'm picking up dog poop in



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my yard. There's no reason I should be here. I can't do anything anymore." But I think it's realizing that there's so many more things left in life for us to do. Connect with someone at the VA. Find out what's there for you. You really don't have anything to lose by checking into it and seeing what they can do for you.



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