

Overcoming PTSD and MST one day at a time

Tracey: My name is Tracey. I was an animal care specialist while I was in the military. We'd take care of the military working dogs. You could get stationed anywhere. I think I had the best duty assignment.

Maggie: My name is Maggie, and I am married to Tracey. I first met Tracey on the rugby pitch. She was playing for the other team.

Tracey: We met, we became good friends, and we ended up getting together and we've been together for, now for about six years. There's usually some type of stereotype about women in the military. You can be seen as being promiscuous or being kind of stuck-up and unavailable to everyone. Usually with that the rumors flying about, "Oh, this person isn't dating me or is not interested in me maybe because she's gay" but as long as I could do my job, I kept my nose clean, I was a hard worker and people knew I did above and beyond, I really wasn't bothered too much.

My MST, military sexual trauma, happened pretty early on in my military career. I was kind of blackmailed into a situation. My so-called friends found out that I'm gay and they said, "Well, you know what? We'll go ahead and keep your secret a secret, but there's some things you have to do for us." I'm not proud of what I did but it was kind of what I had to do. In 2002, 2003 we deployed to the Middle East. A lot of the times when we were going into Iraq on our missions a lot of things would happen at night. I'd say the first seven or eight months after I got home, I could not sleep at night. I would actually get in my car and just drive with the dog.

Maggie: Immediately when she came back from being deployed she had a very difficult time just transitioning. There would be times where she would be startled by something and kind of just wanted to go on her own and not really share what was happening.

Tracey: I noticed that I was a lot angrier. My anger was very quick to bubble over. I was having problems with being really jumpy around fireworks and things like that. You smell those same smells, see those same sights again, hear those louds booms again, you're feeling the earth basically rattling around you—you basically get taken back there.

Maggie: Tracey received some medical services at the VA, so that was important at a base level.

Tracey: Morning. I have an appointment this morning.

Maggie: Also her doctors were able to help connect her with a counselor that she was visiting with on a regular basis.

Tracey: In talking to counselors, they have told me that a lot of times if you are a victim of MST then you usually have a lower threshold to PTSD.

Speaker1: So how are you doing?

Tracey: Oh, not too bad, not too bad.

Speaker1: Yeah, that's good. That's definitely good.



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Tracey: Yeah, yeah.

Maggie: I think she was really able to talk through a few things with her counselor. I do worry less so now, now that some time has gone away, but for a while it was really hard to leave her for fear of what I might return to.

Tracey: Maggie listens to me, which is indescribable. She is a very strong woman. I'm very blessed to have her in my life.

Maggie: Hi.

Tracey: Hi Maggie, how are you?

Tracey: For me it's like a kind of ebb and flow. Some days are better than others, some days are pretty crappy, but you keep on going on. You have to keep on moving forward.

Maggie: When I first met Tracey, I knew that she had always intended on going back to school to finish her education.

Tracey: I was taking general education requirements at PCC and that's how I got into a Boots to Books program. The class basically takes all that military skill and knowledge that made you be a good Service Member in the military and use that in order to be the best you can be in your college career.

Maggie: It really helped her connect with other Veterans. It also just gave her a place to sort of share some of these experiences with other Veterans.

Tracey: There are so many programs that are out here for Veterans, but you have to take that first step and get help. That means going to the VA. It's your benefit. You earned it. You deserve it.

Maggie: Not everyone goes through the exact same things in the exact same way, but I don't think there's anyone who's completely unique in the struggles that they're having.

Tracey: What you're going through is not something that you need to be ashamed of. What you've experienced is something that is going to change you, but in order for you to get to where you need to be for you, you have to take that first step.



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