

VA resources can provide hope and healing

Diane: My name is Diane, and I am a US Air Force Veteran. I served from 1980 to 1981. I went in on a guaranteed job basis and I was a personnel specialist. I had gotten my discharge earlier than I had hoped for. I didn't think after a year they'd be saying okay, you're done. And they explained that it wasn't anything that I did. It was based on the Air Force needs. And that it was a totally honorable discharge and that I was eligible to receive care at the VA.

When I left my Air Force husband, as I refer to him, I had remarried quite quickly and so did he. My friend had introduced me to my second husband. He was never in the military, but we were the same age and we had children the same age. He moved it along quite quickly. I wasn't real ultra-comfortable with that, but I went along with it.

Right after we were married, he started beating me. It was a very hard environment for me to even understand, let alone be in. The situation never got better. I got more and more humiliated and I just started hiding away like I was afraid to leave the house. I don't really dwell on those memories now because they're distant, but they did have their effects. It changed the rest of my life.

I would start having panic attacks, and I didn't know what those were. I didn't know how to deal with them, and they were horrible. My heart felt like it was racing down the street and my body was here. And I couldn't get it to stop, so I started drinking.

I started getting myself in more trouble after that. I lost my job, and that was in February 2007. I ran out of unemployment in September of that year and became homeless. I had nowhere to go. My friends would let me stay on their couches or their floors or in their abandoned houses. The drinking began again. The depression became much worse again. I just lived from day to day drinking and moving. I'd stay at one person's house and they would get rid of me. I just stayed drunk the entire time so that I didn't feel anything. I didn't want to feel anything. I was incapable of feeling anything. I just wanted to be numb.

Somehow, I think it was an ambulance actually, took me to the VA hospital at that point. I didn't know that the programs they were about to put me in were even available at that time. But it turned into a life-saving experience.

Once I got there, it was like an immediate effect. Once you're over that first 48-hour period, they had me in counseling. They had vocational, residential talking about all these things that I never had the opportunity to discuss with anybody or the whys of what happened to me and how I feel now. I had a psychiatrist, psychologist, a trauma counselor and an alcohol counselor.

It was the trauma counselor that really, really helped me. She did a cognitive behavior therapy with me. It's a working therapy. It's hands-on experience. She began to show me ways that thinking more positively and even just changing words a little bit or thinking just slightly that not everyone is like that. It's not the rest of my life is going to be bad. It was just in the past. This part of my life didn't go exactly the way I wanted it to, but I have the whole future ahead.



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I know there are a lot of women out there that have domestic abuse situations. At the VA that I belong to, they're very sensitive to women's issues. And talking with them on a day to day basis, connecting with other people in this program was paramount in my recovery and the people's around me recovery. The women, the men, all of us together.



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