

Therapy to overcome the effects of sexual trauma

Joyce: Hi, my name is Joyce. I am an Army Veteran. I went in as a reservist in 1989 and then went active duty from there, served through 1993 in the Signal Corp. I enjoyed meeting people from all different places and then with some people there's a comradery there. There's something about becoming so close to individuals that you don't, you wouldn't normally get that close to and have the bond within the civilian world.

I had issues with Drill Sergeants and you're no one. These people are God. They're breaking you down. Inappropriate behaviors, you're on fire guard duty at night being called into the office and somebody's sitting there with their pants down. Then they make comments about your body and it just escalates from there. You're not the only one and at least at that time as woman and young girls, we didn't talk about it even to each other but then once I first got to Germany you have someone that's like your sponsor and this individual takes you around and for example, in Germany you have to learn how to ask where the bathroom is, a couple little basic things. You have to learn how to drive the vehicle and then I would start seeing him in the evening and it kind of became like a stalking kind of thing and then things escalated from there and one thing would happen. At one point he forced himself on me in my room.

The next day the Platoon Sergeant called me in, and he said to me, "we're sending you out and we're sending you to the artillery unit." So, he just kind of got me out of the situation. Things got better for me at that point as far as not being violently assaulted but that doesn't affect what's going on inside of you and so I started having more and more issues.

I was able to do my job, of course more and more drinking, still able to function but the nightmares, the being afraid, the not being able to be close to anyone, super hypervigilance all the time. You come with all these scenarios and in a millisecond of time you have it figured out. If he goes left, I can go right and get out that door. I can do this, that, and the other and so you're constantly stressed and it's all inside of you because you can't show it. It's almost scarier once you get out in the civilian world at least for me because knew what to expect of military men and how to kind of evaluate if I thought something like that was happening or going to happen.

In the civilian world behaviors are different, and there's nobody to talk to about anything at that point or that's what I thought at first because I thought nobody will understand. And, many, many, many years later I found my way to the VA and I was able to get that support that I needed.

The same year that my oldest was going away to college I had just had my youngest, and I thought at first I was kind of going through a postpartum thing. Nightmares again, really bad, not being able to sleep, feeling like there's somebody going to come in the house. Well, I got information about an all-women's post here in Cincinnati. So, I thought, well kind of more family friendly and we have a young one now, maybe that's something I want to become involved with and through those women, a lot of them worked with the VA or they were getting services through the VA, and I kind of got the feeling like maybe this is something I could do. I started going and I think I did a cognitive behavior therapy, that's what I chose.



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Once I was diagnosed, I was diagnosed with PTSD due to military sexual trauma, anxiety disorder, depression, once I decided that I was going to do that the outpatient therapy and that I was a candidate for it my initial intake was with a female and then they asked me, they said, "do you think that, would you prefer a female or a male?" And I said, "I don't know, like can I try being with a man and just see?" And, I think that was a wise decision for me. I was able to share with him the things that went through, but the great thing about it is I just had to put it out there for the first time and then we worked on skills, worked on coping skills.

I still have moments and times when I'm always going to have nightmares, I'm always going to have trouble falling asleep because I'm afraid of having a nightmare but I can manage that now. I'm able to be more comfortable around people and I don't feel that fear all the time. If you are a female, find other female soldiers. We come out and we get back to raising kids or at the laundry mat. I mean, you don't know if there's a woman Veteran and that's sad. We need to have the pride like other do.

So, I would say do what you can to find other female Veterans and the way to do that is get down to the VA. One of my favorite phrases and I don't know where I got this from, but I always say, it's not my dad's VA anymore, it's our VA.



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