

Moving past trauma with VA support

Jodie: Hi, I'm Jodie. I served in the Marine Corp in Desert Storm era. I was stationed in Okinawa, Japan. My job was administrative. I wanted to join the Marine Corp, because actually my first boyfriend went in the marines, and my uncle was a Vietnam Veteran. I was stationed in Camp Lejeune first, and then I took off 30 days, and my first tour of duty was in Okinawa on Camp Hansen. Unfortunately, I was brutally attacked, sexually assaulted by two fellow Marines that were in my company, one in whom I was befriended and trusted. The process immediately started. The Marine Corp actually did take full authority of the situation, investigated it thoroughly, and I feel like you know now, I have my justice. Actually, the night of the rape when I was in the hospital, they just transferred me to a counselor and to a social worker. I started receiving help before I departed, but shortly after that, I chose to get out.

It was only in 2004, because of another Veteran, that I filed a claim for the PTSD, because I realized I couldn't hold down a job. I still could not adapt to society when it came to employment. And so, I started reaching out for mental health help in the county I was living in, but I could not seem to get rid of the anxiety and the dreams and just the desire to want to be in the military but not being in it anymore. So, I reached out, and I got help from them, and as my claim progressed, then I started going to the VA Hospital.

When I went to the VA Hospital in Huntington, West Virginia, they immediately saw that I had PTSD and bipolar. I have been in the MST program, group counseling twice. It helped me identify, because it was all women actually, and I learned a lot, and I learned that I wasn't the only one that had endured such a traumatic event, and it was easier to share you know and have compassion for each other. Group had taught us to care for ourself. I've always had individual therapy. I just went through a PTSD program, and it's like a 16-week treatment plan where you discuss the traumatic event with your counselor or your psychologist, and you relive it until you realize that you're not living in that moment any longer.

I went to a base, and I realized that I still had some anxieties. I did have some flashbacks when I would see the artillery, but it was a different reaction this time, and I can tell that the groups and the therapy that I have received from the VA have truly helped, because I knew where I was in the moment even though I was still having some mild symptoms, but it's nothing compared to what I used to deal with before I was on medication and before I received all this treatment. The symptoms that I used to experience was withdrawal. I would have anxiety really bad, cold sweats, very bad nightmares, inconsistent sleep, flashbacks if I would hear like certain gunshots, things like that. Now between dealing with it and being on the medication, I really don't have any symptoms to be honest with you. I have some mild disruptions at times, but it's very manageable.

Being bipolar has been very difficult for me. I didn't believe in the medications, but I would have so many ups and so many downs that it was hard to manage my life. I would go to counseling, but I would become dependent upon counseling, because bipolars will become manic, and then we'll skip out of treatment for three months at a time, and then we'll be so adamant and involved, but during those times and the medication, it has balanced me out.



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MST is something that a lot of people hide. I found through my counseling and through the MST that I went through the group that I went through, that it's something that we have to live with. Something that happened to us, but it wasn't because of us. It wasn't because of me. I did not provoke it. I did not deserve it, but for many years, I lived with the guilt and the shame, the anxiety, the worrying. It was a power and control of authority misabused, and once you accept that and realize that, it's easier to let go. So, I wish more people would be more apt to accept the fact that it does happen and talk about it, because talking about it only releases the grief and the forgiveness that you need to give to that person.

The last five years, I have been married to my third husband. He's a Veteran as well. He's prior Navy, and he has helped me tremendously when it comes to dealing with my PTSD. He understands. He understands the military. He understands what we have been through. So, he has been very helpful in my treatment. I enjoy being a Veteran, and if I could reach out to any other Veteran out there that has experienced military sexual trauma or has PTSD in general, I suggest you go to your local VA Medical Center and reach out for help, because they are there, and they care.



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