

## **Life can be the one you choose for yourself**

**Ruth:** When I come here to Acadia, literally, I can lose myself for fourteen hours a day. It has its own magic.

I'm Ruth, I was in the Navy in 1986 and 1987. I started out as an aerographer's mate or weather guesser and then I crossed over and became a DT or HM, hospital corpsman when I got out. In high school, I decided I wanted to go to the military. We were very poor so I didn't have the opportunity for college and I chose the Navy.

After my service school, I was stationed overseas in the Azores, Portugal. As many people know I was sexually assaulted over there and in the 80s that was a time when they didn't want to acknowledge that sexual assault was happening.

So, I lived with 23 years of compounded injuries from untreated sexual assault and I told my husband obviously at the time and he accepted it, his family never accepted it, my siblings never accepted it. They actually asked me what I was wearing when I was raped and they asked me what I did to deserve it. And my first relationship with my first husband Jim pretty much terminated and I had to be on my own for a while. I was homeless, I was living in my van figuring out who I was.

**Butch:** I met Ruth working for Blueberry Company. She was tallying up boxes, while I was raking blueberries.

We got a chance to spend a lot of time together at that point, and I had discovered that she had been living homeless and I said, well, you don't have to do that. So, we took care of that.

**Ruth:** We got together and I was really rough around the edges and he looked at me and he said, "I know the battle is still going on for you." He says, "But I'm not the enemy." Some of the things is she started shying away from busy places. She didn't want to be around that many people.

Sometimes amplified reactions to things, which is, again, something that's normal for somebody with PTSD. Aside from the self-doubt, a lot of anger, a lot of sleeplessness, a lot of flashbacks. I've always had a problem with my weight. After I was assaulted I became anorexic.

**Butch:** And it came along to the point where I said "you know you're a veteran, they should be able to do something. Go Get help. That's what it's there for."

**Ruth:** And when I went to White River Junction in Vermont, I met an incredible psychiatrist. He says, "You're dealing with untreated PTSD."

So the biggest takeaway was to trust myself, to learn how to trust myself, trust my instincts. I call them my spidey senses. So, when the hairs on my neck raise up, I have to stop and think and



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breathe and then I go into observation mode. Am I safe? What's going on here? What is the trigger?

Stopping to realize that not everybody is my enemy. Realizing that, you know, people do have good points they do have bad points, nobody is perfect.

**Butch:** Understand that there are going to be things that are different. Understand that they're not about you. They're about what's happened and how strong that veteran is to overcome them.

**Ruth:** Having my family out here has meant so much to me. They are such a fantastic support and having my daughter and having my husband gives me a reason so when I can't see the good, I focus on them and I remember that they are my reason now, they are my mission. So that's how I keep going.

I think the biggest advice that I could give to veterans who've endured MST, is to realize that they were just empowered. You can't let that time define the rest of your life. You have got to realize that the life ahead is the life that you're going to choose for yourself. And when a person goes through therapy is when they find what works for them and they apply themselves and they don't look to be a victim or look at the negative of everything.

This really neat thing happens, instead of being a survivor, they then become a thriver and they can start helping other people in their journey. We can literally heal ourselves if we start working with people who know how to tap into our minds and how to help us develop that healing path. So, believe in yourself, don't live in the past, and find something to look forward to everyday and then make it happen.



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