

Addressing trauma leads to better quality of life

Renee: Hello, my name is Renee. I served in the United States Army from 1985 to 1991, and my job was a 74 Delta computer operator. When I originally got into the service and I went to my first area right after basic training I was sexually assaulted by a higher-up, and it kind of turned me against the military, so to speak, because it was, like, the old boys thing, they pushed it under the carpet, they waited until I went home on vacation because I did press charges, and the case was dismissed, and this person who assaulted me was able to continue there. Later on I found out that he had assaulted someone else but they caught him, and all they did was just give him a slap on the wrist and move him to another base.

I never really thought about getting out of the service because I was gung-ho about the service and I knew that this was an individual who have issues and problems and I wasn't going to let that sway me from what I wanted to do, but I had a lot of anger, a lot of resentment, a lot of issues. I was having problems sleeping, I would wake up sweating and nightmares and all types of things, just—and if I heard about anyone else being attacked or molested I'd really, you know, maybe even start trembling or it's like—I just had such a rage inside of me that I wanted to get this guy, you know, like, nothing was done to him, I want to get him, you know.

I started drinking heavily, and a lot of the other soldiers were drinking also, so...and I maintained and hid it really well, and I did that for a couple of years when I was at Germany, and then I left Germany when my mother passed and I got out of the service in '91, and that's when I started getting help.

I found out about a program at one of the VA centers that they had for posttraumatic stress, and specifically had a flyer that addressed women in the service who had been assaulted, and, you know, you could come and talk openly, and I called them up and I went to the first meeting. I was able to sit and talk with other veterans who had gone through the same situation with similar experiences and we were able to vent and really release a lot of the anger, talk about it and write about it and cry if you wanted to or yell or just, you know, do whatever you wanted to do just so you could get help.

So I went to approximately about four or five meetings and then I stopped going. I thought that I could really deal with it, deal with the issues myself. I thought, "Okay, this is good enough, I've had enough and I could deal with it," but then I realized later on that I hadn't really finished dealing with it, and I still needed help.

A couple years went past, and then I was going to the VA on a regular basis, you know, seeing my primary care, and she was astute enough to realize that I was going through depression. I wanted a better quality of life, and I wanted to deal with the anger and I wanted to put things behind me, and it took realizing that I needed medication to help me to get there. I'm in a much better place than I was before, and it is thanks to the VA, it really is.

With anger and depression, the way I deal with it now is because the therapist gave me the tools and told me what I needed to do to alleviate these things, so now I walk, I take deep breaths, I practice imagery, you know, imagine something beautiful, something that I like to channel the anger. Whatever issue you may have, get the help that you need. If



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

you have access to the VA it's an excellent service, it's free for veterans, go and take advantage of it. Just do what you need to do so you can have a better quality of life.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION