

Moving past homelessness and depression

Lidia: My name is Lidia. I served in the United States Navy, and I served from 98 to 2006. I lost a very close friend of mine on the USS Cole bombing, and that was October the 12th of 2000, and we lost 17 sailors that day, and 39 of them were injured, and to see one of the most powerful ships on one of those boats on that platform, not in the water, but being dragged back to the United States, like it was injured. That was very traumatic.

So, September 11th happened. After we saw the airplanes hit, the television was cut off. Communications was gone. To me, experiencing that was like having a heart attack. A lot of the crew is my age, 19, not even 20 yet, you know. We're young. We just got out of high school, and this happens, but the thing that I needed help with coping the most was when we went overseas, when we actually deployed going towards Iraq. The things that we were picking up out of the water were human bodies. A lot of the things that happened I never talked about. A lot of the things that a lot of the shipmates on our boat, we didn't...we didn't talk about it. So, that's how we handled it.

When I first came to California, I had a job and a place to stay, and when I got here, the executive chef was fired, and there was no employment for me. A guy that I was going to give my security deposit to and stuff like that, he rented out the apartment. I didn't know what to do, right. I had nowhere to sleep, because I didn't know anything about shelters, right, and I found a shelter, and I could stay there, and I was sleeping literally on a cot, and I'm just thinking I just went from a queen size bed to a cot. I really thought me going to school, I wouldn't face homelessness, and the reason being homeless really affected me, because it introduced me to depression.

I still had the mentality I am victorious. I am an overcomer. I can overcome this. Dude, if I can be on a ship with 5,000 people and you know carry on life as it is and get out and graduate from college and get a great job and then move from California, I can do anything, but I could not get out of skid row. I got into a fight, and that was the day I said, "I am truly disgusted in my own self." That was the straw that broke the camel's back. That was the day I had said, "You know what, I am an educated, beautiful, single, strong woman. What the F am I fighting for? I am fighting for a better job. I am fighting for a better environment to live in." So, when I went to the VA that day to speak to a psychiatrist, I felt like I had to admit a lot of things that I was not ready to admit when I first got out, because I thought I was a macho mouse, and I thought I could handle everything.

Once you get to that point in your life, you just have to recognize that it is what it is. You know, you have to get help, and I was grateful that the downtown VA really helped us female Veterans, and now they're starting up programs just for us. I'm not saying that we're special or anything like that, but you know there is a difference how a man can take trauma versus a woman taking trauma, and to me, I am very impressed with what downtown is doing.

I say to my brothers and sisters out there, the VA's a very interesting system, but there is people that are so in there that are Veterans just like us that want to help, but they don't know. You have to come to them first. The quicker you get there, the better off you're



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going to be, and I really believe that the VA is really transforming to help us Veterans. I really believe that.



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