

Healing unseen wounds

Mary: I was in the Air Force. I was a Senior Airmen. My mother was a drill instructor in the Marines. My dad was a Navy Corpsman. Both Korean War Vet or Korean-era Vets, and it's just a family tradition. We give back. I have Desert Storm Syndrome. They didn't call it that back then, and so a lot of us went to different diagnoses. But I've been in and out of medical care in the VA system and I can tell you that I would not be sitting here today were it not for the great care that some of those people gave to me.

I went in for the physical first because I didn't even realize I had the mental. There was constant pain. You go in and out of fatigue. There's memory loss. It's very similar to PTSD, which I also had and didn't realize. Anger issues, a lot of sensitivity to chemicals in the environment.

I visited the mental health clinic several times. I was diagnosed with depression. Of course, this was before PTSD supposedly came about. They were just wonderful, the people that I talked to. Very supportive, very understanding.

I used to go grocery shopping at two AM in the morning because I did not want to be around people. And I've talked to many Veterans who are exactly the same way. Keeping your back to the wall. You've heard that many times. That was something that I didn't even realize that I was doing that. Crying at certain times of the year. I had triggers that I didn't realize I had. And once I identified those, life got so much easier. But it was educating myself and doing a lot of acceptance of the fact that I was wounded in other ways besides being shot.

Some day you're going to need help. Going to the VA, going to another Veteran, going to a Vet Center, there are great women healthcare providers at the VA. And I can say that because they were great for me. I'm amazed at how much better of a person I am, that coming through to the other side. You can get better and be a better person for it, but you have to reach out. You have to reach out for help. We cannot do this on our own.



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