

Learning how to adjust with help from VA

Stephanie: Hello, I'm Stephanie. I was in the Navy. I was an officer, Surface Warfare Officer. So, I served on ships, specifically amphibious ships with Marines. I was in four-and-a-half years. During that time, I did three deployments; one to Afghanistan and two to Iraq.

There isn't supposed to be sexual harassment. It's not supposed to be a part of the environment. Some of it's understandable being that men are at sea for months and there aren't many women. I guess I would say the attention is excusable; I wouldn't necessarily excuse the behavior and the comments. Joking around, okay, that's fine, but, you know, sometimes certain, you know, men in positions of power would say things and that's a little more awkward when you're a junior officer, and it's not like you can quit your job, you know. You're owned by the government so it makes the stakes a little different and it's not like you're going to go report it or, you know, there's that kind of pressure of, "Okay, well, I have this person that's putting this pressure on me and I don't want to look bad." I think women are, by some men, looked at as a weakness in the military, so, or drama. So, it's like you don't want to be the woman that's making drama; you don't want to be the weak link in this, you know, well-ironed machine. Even if it's justified, so I think a lot of it, just women let it go.

It was scary going from being in the military to being a civilian, because, you know, you've been in this one way of life for however long, four-and-a-half years in my case, and everything's set. I mean, you're owned, so you're not used to having freedom, you know?

So, then all of a sudden, you can do whatever you want but you don't have the security either. I mean, nobody has 100% medical coverage; that's the biggest thing. You know, you go to the doctor when you're in the navy and everything, you know, there's no bill and that's not what it's like in the civilian world. And also, I mean, I guess adjusting and deciding what I wanted to do with my life and how I was going to do it. The hard part is I think sometimes civilians that haven't been in the military, I guess civilians that aren't Veterans, they don't have the same appreciation for what they have or maybe the same sense of urgency. People are very on top of things in the military. You know, they're early to things, and they are dressed in such a way and there's hair standards and uniform standards and the civilian life is not that way; it's a lot more loose. So, it's an adjustment for sure.

I would say the hard thing for me was my general anxiety, and I think that came from being under stress 24/7 when you're on deployment, you know, you really don't get a break. There's no day off because you live at work. So, going from being in the military and then having to build my own life from scratch, that was, you know, a source of anxiety and that got worse. The generalized anxiety I guess manifested in panic attacks, you know, just real anxious feelings and not being able to focus, because the anxiety is so strong that your focus is, "I'm anxious." And you can't anything done when you're thinking, "I'm anxious, I'm anxious," you know, so you need something to kind of curb that so you can get on with your life. When I felt like I needed help, I went to the VA. I would say that if you feel alone that you should go and get help and not be alone, and at the VA, they don't receive you as somebody with a condition, you know, they just receive you as a person. I would say to anybody that is thinking about getting help that they deserve it, you know, that's something that they've earned as a Veteran. I know some



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

Veterans that avoid the VA because they don't think they deserve it. They're like, "Well, I didn't lose my legs so I should leave that for other people," but there are other disabilities that affect you and especially if it's, you know, you made a sacrifice to be in the military and if something changed you or affected you, that's going to affect you for the rest of your life, then you certainly deserve help, and the VA is a great place with a lot of resources and you should take advantage of it.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION