

## Finally, someone besides me knows

**Melissa:** My name is Melissa. I served in the Army National Guard. I served from 2000 to 2008. When I was in Iraq, I could be wrong in the ratio, but this is how it felt; it was about 100 men to one woman. It doesn't matter what the woman looks like, all the guys are hitting on you constantly.

Unfortunately I suffered military sexual trauma and that has played a huge aspect in the rest of my life. Somebody else in my unit had suffered a military sexual trauma as well and she reported it. I chose not to report mine because I saw what she went through. She got taken off of her duty, she was put on a different duty, her weapon was taken away, she was ridiculed by other soldiers like "it didn't happen, you put yourself in this position", so why say anything at all.

When I first got back I didn't say anything to anybody. My now husband and I were kind of engaged at the time. It played a really big affect when I did come home, I didn't want him to be anywhere near me, I didn't want him to touch me, but I couldn't explain to him why, but I was also having a lot of trouble really just getting back into society, not sleeping, anger issues, just because I was not dealing with anything, I was just bottling it all up. I started to get depressed, I am not worth anything, I don't think I feel anything anymore. I don't feel happy, I don't feel sad. I am not feeling like I feel pain. I am not feeling like I feel anything. It was kind of a combination of me and my husband. I couldn't take it anymore, I wasn't sleeping, I was frustrated. He was like "this isn't you, what is going on, do you need to go talk to somebody, do you need to go get help" and finally I just said, "Yes I do."

I basically rolled into VA on a Friday at 4:30 and I was like I need to see somebody I can't, I like had a full mental breakdown. I talked with somebody, they got me an appointment I think the next week with a different mental health specialist. They put me on some medication, an anti-depressant and anti-anxiety. Talking to somebody who is professionally trained to kind of help understand more is great. I did not open up about the military sexual trauma at that point. I just talked about the not sleeping and some of the other issues. When I started to feel really comfortable then I opened up about that. It was like a weight was lifted, like oh my God finally somebody else knows beside me. I really started to feel comfortable with okay it happened, we're fixing it, I can start to move on from this.

I think it was at about the year mark I opened up to my husband about what had actually happened and it started to make more sense to him so he has become very, very supportive over the years even though he does not understand it, he has never been through it, now that he sees what the VA and all the other organizations can do for me he has no problem stepping up and saying, "Hey my wife is struggling right now, she needs help."

You have to find what works best for you and trying different things is going to be what helps you do that. My advice to somebody who has gone through something similar like this that hasn't said anything yet, would be 1) You have a voice, just because you haven't said anything yet doesn't mean you can't. Just find your voice and say something to help you get it off your chest and get the secret out there so you are not holding that in and making yourself feel like you're holding it.



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