

Finding ways to heal after military sexual trauma

Karin: My names Karin and I was in the United States Navy from 1986 to almost 1992. My first incident of MST, which there was three was my Recruiter. I was 17 years old and he seduced me and the second incident, we were on deployment to Naval Air Station, Fallon, Nevada for training and I was at a casino off base and a man, a civilian try to abduct me and get me into his truck and sexually assaulted me, and then the third MST incident was right before I got out in January of 1990. We were on deployment again to Marine Corp Air Station Yuma, Arizona and two Marines broke into my barracks room and sexually assaulted me and I chased them down the hallway, and they ran out and I called 911 and they were caught right outside my barracks, and they were like, oh.

I was still active duty. I drank a lot. I was married at the time, so my first marriage failed. I didn't know what was happening. I became suicidal, and they sent me to sick call when I was suicidal. I was still suicidal for weeks and I really didn't understand the disconnect I was having between myself and people and people that I worked with and things like that so, they sent me to mental health and I had three visits and they said I was fine and a couple months later I was due to get out of my contract and so I got my Honorable discharge and got married again to a police officer and failed miserably.

I didn't want anybody to touch me, man or woman, not even hey how you doing from a coworker, anything like that. It would just make me jump. All loud noises, anything that was unexpected. I didn't like anybody coming up behind me. No sex drive. No friends really, nobody that I could really pour my heart out to if I wanted to. Didn't really want to tell my family. They had all their own issues and I just withdrew. I worked a lot of overtime. I worked a lot. I just stayed at work, nose to the grindstone, earning overtime. Looking back now, I see why I made those choices. I didn't know why I was making those choices then.

My second marriage, we ended up going for marriage counseling and they were interviewing he and I as to our pasts and childhood and things like that and it all just came bubbling up. She had asked if I'd ever been sexually assaulted as a child, had I ever been sexually assaulted as an adult and I went into individual counseling at that time with a civilian provider. I was working for the city and that started my continual road to recovery.

I read a newspaper article that all Veterans were entitled to healthcare for MST (Military Sexual Trauma) and I wasn't a service connected disabled Veteran at the time. I was working and I was like, I'll try for that, they should know what to do because this regular counseling outside wasn't really getting to the meat of things and so I called up the VA and they told me what forms to fill out and mail them in. They did a screening for PTSD and military sexual trauma and it was all positive for me and I started cognitive processing therapy with an MST Specialist. It wasn't easy and we would stop and start several times, I'd have regular appointments and then it would be too overwhelming and too much and I wouldn't go back for a couple months and I wouldn't do the homework, and then I'd go back again until finally last year I had to stop working. My symptoms were too much. I stopped working for the police department and I was able to go inpatient for 8 weeks.

We had a women's group for just women's issues, relationship issues and things like that. We had a mixed PTSD group which was combat trauma and personal trauma. I am



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very glad that I went. I am by no means cured, but I have options where I didn't know what those options were before I went in the hospital. My husband now happens to also suffer from PTSD, not military related. So, he is very supportive. I'm very blessed and very lucky to have somebody in my life that understands. I didn't learn that how common a problem it was until I got into therapy. I did feel completely alone. I did feel like the only person on the planet that this happened to. There's so much more attention on it now. There's so much more peer-to-peer support out there. It's more readily available. It's there, all you have to do is ask.



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