



Alana

Years of Service 1977 - 1982
Iowa Falls, Iowa



VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System





My Life MY STORY



ALANA

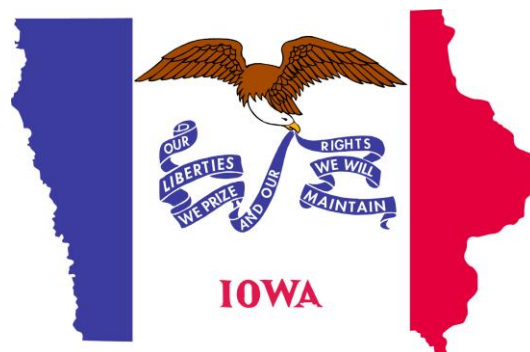


UNITED STATES NAVY

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The **purpose** of me telling my story is that I want people to **understand** me. These life experiences have made who you see here in front of you today. I spent a lot of time by myself. I don't mind being by myself; I love to travel, and I can do it alone. That's my salvation. Now, I can't do that. That's why I feel loss, loss, and more loss, forever loss—financial, home, and my cats.

I was born in July 1959 in Iowa. Truthfully, I felt I drew the short stick in life. I just felt that I was born with something that said, "You are going to have a lot of obstacles to overcome and deal with." At age fifty-eight, I have dealt with ten lifetimes' worth, and I am tired of it. I've always felt hindered in life.



I had Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde for a father. I never knew what his mood would be. Once, I had a paper route when I was a freshman. My mother always got up to help me deliver the papers. This one Sunday was Mother's Day. Mom and I worked it out so that she didn't have to help me that morning. I was going to deliver the papers on my bike and make several trips back and forth. I was going along my route, and my mom drives up. Dad was having a fit. He had sent mom after me because he thought I was going to ruin my bike. We had to take the bike home and then, we finished delivering the papers.

When we get home, we walk in, and my dad is reading my little sister a story. He precedes to back me in a corner. He had this big wooden cane, and he was holding it up over my head.

He's got me by my clothing and began shaking me back and forth. He banged his fist into my breastbone. It was hard to breathe for the next few days. He was mad that I had taken the bike.



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Dad did this stuff, and everyone was supposed to forget. I never forgot. I don't know why dad was so angry.

Both of my parents told me I had terrible handwriting. At my jobs, I would write very meticulously and slowly. That didn't float well at my jobs. Also, if I'm at the store and need to sign a check or a credit card receipt, people will be tapping their fingers and of course, that just makes me more nervous. This kind of thing severely handicapped me in working. I am fifty-eight years old and low income. People ask me why I don't go back to work. People tend to dismiss me; I don't know if they're rude or don't want to be bothered.

Dad also hated multi-tasking. I remember we were putting up the Christmas tree. It was a fake tree. We were getting the tree out, and dad said let's read the directions. This wasn't the first year to put up this tree. I am nervous by nature anyway, so I started putting ornaments on the branches that were on. Dad said loudly, "Oh no, let's not get rammy, don't get rammy." This meant, I guess, don't get in a hurry, or do one thing at a time.

I moved around a bit when I was small. From birth to third grade, we lived on a farm outside of Alden, Iowa. From fourth grade to seventh, we lived in Alexander, Iowa. I was the fat little kid. "Oh fatty, fatso." I got called that by my classmates; I was always upset by that. I spent a lot of time by myself. Mom finally divorced Dad in 1975, after leaving him three different times.

She moved up north to Iowa Falls. My mom and I are close, closer than d-a-d. She was a great mother. She helped me when dealing with dad. Besides his violent outburst and never knowing, he was a good provider and a good dad in that sense. We never went without.



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However, when I was fifteen, I made the decision to live with dad. I wanted to stay because I was just starting to make friends and fit in. I was going to Clarion High School.

During the weeks that mom and dad were breaking up and getting back together, I was missing school—two weeks out of three. We received a letter saying I need to do better in school. This was during the quarter that we were studying grammar. Grammar was always hard for me.

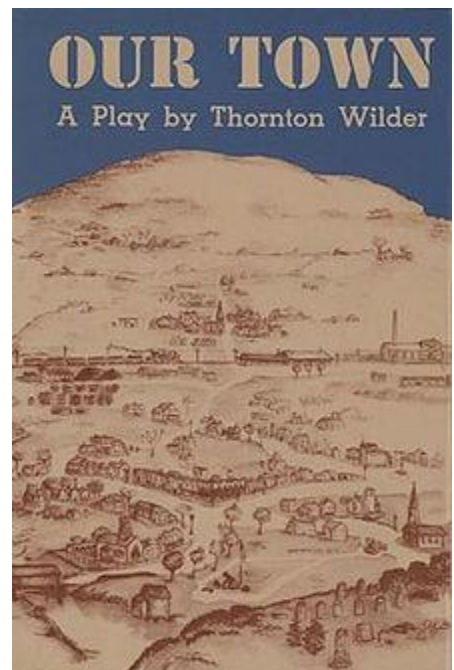
Mom decided to show a united front with dad and said, “You need to do better in school.” I felt like a bug squashed in the window. I couldn’t tell them that missing school was why I was failing.

I had this teacher, Mrs. Young. I adored her, adored her. I was a sophomore in high school, and she is the American Lit teacher. Mrs. Young had started teaching late in life. She really saved my emotional health during this time of the divorce.

I could go to school and see Mrs. Young. She was like my second mom since my mom was living up north. I really wanted my mom to meet Mrs. Young.

The door opened when Mrs. Young, the director of our drama club, was directing Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*.

My grandmother and mom would come to my events. I was in band, choirs, and drama club. They came to see the play. My dad also came. He saw me introducing them. This was the risk factor. We went home, and he began to berate me. He said, “Mrs. Young didn’t want to meet your mother,” over and over.



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I didn't dare tell dad about how highly I thought of Mrs. Young and how I had dreamed of mom and her meeting.

I graduated from high school in 1977. I joined the Navy's delayed entry program. I joined the Navy because of their slogan, "It's Not Just a Job, It's an Adventure."

My weight has always been an issue. When I was a sophomore, dad said I weighed too much; so, I said, "Let me join Weight Watchers!" I joined Weight Watchers and lost the weight, 130 pounds. I kept the weight off as a senior but then, I joined the Navy, and I started going to the chow hall. Ugh! I like food. I was cut lose in the chow hall, yeah doggie. They made the hometown buffet, free. I love a buffet. I picked up some weight in boot camp.

My military time was a mellow time of my life. I went to boot camp in Orlando, Florida and then A school in Meridian, Mississippi. My first duty station was Naples, Italy, Command Fleet Air Mediterranean.

I arrived in April 1978 and left in April 1980. I was too young to appreciate Italy. I met my husband, Alan, in Italy.



We were married in 1979 by the mayor of Bagnoli in a civil ceremony.

Alan was stationed AFSOUTH, NATO, Allied Forces Southern Europe. He got out in April 1979.



I was a storekeeper; I worked in the fuel office. We ordered the fuel for the carriers and other naval ships. We ordered it to the fuel ports that were over there.



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It was an office job, secretary. I worked with Rita; she was an Italian national, civil service. She would order the fuel via a message. I typed up the messages. I wasn't thrilled about office work. I thought I would be out in the warehouses or something. The Iranian Hostage Crisis was happening during this time.

This was my first exposure to terrorist issues, being that I was from small town Iowa. As Americans, we were told not to go out alone; so, we didn't go out, and I got pregnant. We bought a t-shirt that said, "Made in Italy" for our baby.

I got orders to NAS Cecil Field for two years. Aaron was born in August 1980. I worked in the Serv Mart there on base for a year. Then, I went over to the Aviation Support Division and worked in the office, filing. That was a very unstimulating job. I took a stand and let them know how mushed my brain had gotten.

It worked, and they transferred me to the Pre-Expended Bin section. It was a small section that had the tiny little diodes and parts that cost up to \$250 each. We ordered for the squadrons. I enjoyed this. It was small and compact and still a warehouse.

My regret about the military is I didn't get my Good Conduct Medal. I so looked forward to getting that one red hash mark and my Good Conduct Medal. I was in over four years.

I got marked down on uniform evaluation due to my weight. I wasn't a disciplinary problem; I didn't have any Captain's Mast or NJP.

I just didn't get high enough marks to get a medal. That's what I was told. I discharged in August 1982.

When I got out, we moved back to Stockton, California. Alan's family lived there. His mother, Carole, never really liked me. She viewed me as poor, white trash. She was all about money, and she destroyed our family.



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We had to stay with her the first few months when we arrived. We went on welfare when we first got there. She made a big deal about it. We had to have all holidays at her house. She would cook all kinds of food, all homemade; the woman could cook!

I would tell the kids not to eat too many goodies, wait for the good food. She would say, "Just let them eat it." The kids would get crazy on sugar. If I tried to calm them down, she would get mad and say, "You don't discipline your kids enough." I couldn't win. She was very critical of my mothering skills. My husband ignored it, and we fought about her a lot. My oldest son, Aaron, and I don't have a relationship because of her.



My youngest son, Austin, was born eight years after Aaron in 1989. Austin is autistic. I took the crappy jobs, so I could be home at night if needed and take care of the boys.

I was tired of working in the office at age forty. I decided I wanted to drive truck. I got my class A license. I spent a lot of money for the license. I thought, I could drive truck and get out and see something. I did it briefly; I didn't really like it.

Since I spent the money for the truck driving school, I took a job driving bus with the San Joaquin Regional Transit District. I toughed it out, and that is the pension that I have now. I had other driving jobs prior to this.

The job I absolutely loved was driving the airport shuttle service. I got to meet people coming and going from all over the United States and the world. I lived vicariously through them, lived the adventure. I started in 2000, but they closed their door in 2001.



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In 2006, I went to help take care of my mom in Iowa. When I got home, I found out that my husband had filed for divorce.

It's not that I didn't want the divorce; the marriage wasn't a marriage. I liked the perks of marriage, filing taxes, and such. It was just the timing of it that sucked.

We had one home, with two mortgages. The home we bought in November 1993 was the one and only home we bought in our entire lives, either one of us. We were also only married one time to each other. We divorced, but we never separated or lived apart till he died in April 2013.

My husband, Alan, died after twenty-eight plus years together. He was sixty-two years old and died just like that. Because we were divorced, I got none of his pension after twenty-eight years of marriage. My sons got some, but I had to fight for that.

The mortgages were always paid, always. It was a nice farmhouse. I had inherited the debt of the two mortgages because my name was on the mortgage. I went through a lot trying to keep the house. I finally sold the house and walked away with a small amount of cash. However, I left all the household belongings. I couldn't get any help.

I'm not in contact with Aaron, but he lives in Alameda, California. He also served in the Navy. Austin is living in Stockton, California. We are in contact. Austin calls every now and then. We are closer now than before.

Austin wasn't diagnosed with Autism till he was twenty years old; before they called it oppositional definite disorder. When he was ten, he kicked my rear-view mirror off in my van because he was mad.

Once, we were at Circuit City, he was doing something, and I had to escort him out. He was grabbing and hitting.



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People would be looking; oh, I hated being misunderstood. Those people didn't know that I was dealing with a ticking time-bomb.

I couldn't get help. The government said that he was too violent to put in a group home. It was like living with dad again. Austin was very violent, and he beat me severely. My weight helped me; it was my armor. He would be pounding on my back, pounding me like a punching bag. He pummeled me three times like that. People had to pull him off. He punched me once in the face, hit my glasses. My face was bruised and purple. It hurt for a long time. The docs thought he probably broke something. Austin has a vague recollection of this. The police would come out, but I didn't press charges.

The jobs I worked had terrible attendance policies; if you were sick, you still were expected to come to work. It was hard working with the different wounds. I often worked split shifts, double or triple splits, maybe a lucky straight shift; it was crazy.

I had to start all over. I don't have much money, just my pension, \$751.40 a month after taxes. I went to live with some friends in Oregon, but now, I'm here in Fallon. I'm living in a trailer that is either a hot box or a deep freeze. I call the crisis line a lot. I just need someone to talk to.

I don't have good rapport with doctors, no, no, no. I want my providers to not judge the book by its cover. I'm fat. My weight is my armor. I'm ok with my weight, but the judgments of my weight are what I don't like. I was told by my doctor that I have high cholesterol, and the data says that those numbers make you susceptible to having a heart attack. I told him, "If I have a heart attack, that is the least of my concerns. If I have a heart attack tomorrow and croak, I'm not worried about it."

"I'm not afraid of dying; I'm afraid of not living."

