



Charley

Years of Service 1981 - 2006
Reno, Nevada



VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System





MY LIFE MY STORY



Charley



United States Army

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I had to leave the military because I'd gotten sick. I didn't want to leave; I wasn't ready. I didn't get to serve all the time I wanted to serve. I had to find other ways to serve. Now, I volunteer.

I was born in California in August 1952. I have an older brother and sister and a younger brother. My parents moved to Sun Valley. I went to Sun Valley Elementary School, Trainer Junior High School and finally, Sparks High School till the end of my sophomore year. Then, I went to Hug High School as a junior and a senior. I was in the first graduating class at Hug in 1970.

I didn't realize how poor we were. We were extremely poor. The first house that I remember had a dirt floor. I didn't know having beans and potatoes everyday was not the norm. We had meat once a week, usually on Sunday and usually chicken.

My father had a very big family. I had an uncle, married to my dad's sister, who was a child molester. I was one of his victims for over nine years. I got smart and learned quickly how to take care of myself.

At fourteen, I was raped and nearly beaten to death by five boys in the park in downtown Reno. My father was one of those people who said, "This never happened." I came to terms with that. I won't say it didn't affect me, but I will say that there are no repercussions in my life. I dealt with both of those things. I worked through them with help from a lot of people and by being diligent with myself and not letting it get me down. Other than that, I think, my childhood was pretty good.

My parents divorced when I was thirteen. My mother left us. I left home at sixteen. My dad and I didn't see eye to eye. I had a boyfriend, and of course, I left with him. We got married and had a baby.

I divorced him and married again in 1972, and we left Reno and moved to Las Vegas. We lived there till 1978.



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We moved to Bend, Oregon where my aunt and uncle lived. My husband and I were having some trouble. We split up. He went back to Vegas, and I stayed in Bend. My aunt and uncle were there, and I had a great job. Some people I worked with talked me into going to Central Oregon Community College, COCC. At the time, I was twenty-seven years old and a project manager and the office manager for a construction company.



My second semester, I had a great counselor, a beatnik kind of guy. I thought he was really cool. He was always giving you things to think about; and one day, he gave us this test. It was the “What do you want to be when you grow up” test. They graphed the results, and mine had a line that went clear off the paper. It was as a military officer.

Three days later, I went down and joined the Army. I didn’t tell anybody until six days later, on Christmas Day. Then, I told my whole family. They weren’t very happy about it. I had an eleven-year old daughter at the time. She was wondering, “What does that mean, Mom?”

I was still in college. They put me in the Army Reserve and sent me to basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama. I went in on the Civilian Acquired Skills Program (CASP). I had worked as a secretary and bookkeeper for ten years. When I went to college, I had a lot of skills. I got a work study job in the president’s office. I was a secretary-clerk and did a lot of the minutes for the committees that met with the president and the scheduling for that office.

When I joined the Army, I had Reserve duty. Luckily, I could do it right there in Bend. The whole western region was called the 104th Training Division. They were all drill instructors; and yeah, I was going to be a DI. I was going to wear that hat, and I was going to have a whip.



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I am in the Army Reserves as the company clerk with the promise from the first sergeant that if I got through all the training everyone else does, eventually they would put me on the path to becoming a DI.



I moved to Albany, Oregon which neighbors Corvallis and transferred to Oregon State. After two days, I get a call from the ROTC; and they wanted me. “Are you kidding me; I don’t want to be an officer.” “Well, why don’t you just try it. You don’t have to contract until next semester.”

I went to OSU and did a dual major in psychology and business. I changed to business with a minor in psych. I really liked the ROTC program. Hindsight, I was going to become an officer.

I had an instructor who was just a dirt bag. He sounded like my father. I’d say, “Why don’t you just get out of the way and let me do what I can do.” I found that running helped me to let go of a lot of things. I could out-run anybody in the department including the Cadre.

The Professor of Military Science said, “We need to sign her up.” My instructor was a captain; and he didn’t want me there, didn’t like me there. I was older than he was. I stayed and was commissioned in June of 1984.



I had a semester to finish. I would graduate in December; however in October, I received orders for Officers Basic Course. I had to be at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis January fourth.

I had been selected for the Adjutant General Corps, AG Corps. No, wait, what am I doing? I want to be a drill sergeant. Anyway, there were forty of us, two females. Ironically, the other female was the same age as I was, thirty-two years old; she was from Vermont, I was from Oregon; she was in the National Guard, I was in the Reserve.



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About halfway through Officer Basic Course (OBC), the other girl and I were called in and told we were number one and number two in the class; but they wouldn't tell us who was which. Oh, by the way, number one was going on active duty. We looked at each other like, "Hey, no, we are going home. Hell, we know how to fix this. Stop studying!" That didn't work.

When we came back from the field, I was told I was number one, and she was number two. We were both given active duty. They had never had anybody score as high as we had in the Adjutant General Corps.

I was stationed in wonderful downtown Kansas City, Missouri. My daughter, Tamara, was with me when I was in the Reserve. My last semester of college, she moved to California with my best friend Kathy. I had given Kathy legal custody since a single parent could not be in the military; but when I moved to Kansas City, Tamara came to live with me full time. She was still under the custody of Kathy, and it remained that way until she was eighteen.

It's January 1984, I was a second lieutenant, straight off the block. I had been enlisted for three and a half years and didn't have an idea how to be an officer. I knew how to work hard. I had orders to the recruiting battalion. I was the marketing and statistical analyst. I did research. I ended up putting together a program for the recruiting command. A year and a half later, I got a Meritorious Service Medal given to me by General Ono, the commander of the Recruiting Command. They use the same kind of lay out to market and get recruits to this day.

I had a horrible, horrible battalion commander. I was the only female in uniform. He treated me extremely disrespectfully. He had some very colorful adjectives that he used for me. Wait a minute! This is the Army, these are officers. I put up with him from 1984-88.



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When I got done with that assignment, I left the Army even though I loved what I did and the people I worked with and for. At that point, I had six and a half years in the Army.



I came home to Reno. I got a good job as a property manager. Four months later, I started getting phone calls from the National Guard. I had been in the Army all this time, and I had no idea what the National Guard was. I came up as an AG officer. They had a signal battalion here that hadn't had an S1 in almost a year. They were desperate for someone who could fix the battalion.

They didn't have AG positions in this state. They called me and called me. These people were relentless. I finally talked to them; and in April 1989, I joined the Nevada National Guard.

I took the S1 position as a first lieutenant. They told me this is a signal position, and I had to be a Signal Officer. "Are you kidding me? I am an AG officer. If you want a Signal Officer, hire a Signal Officer. You wanted an AG position, and I'm going to fix your battalion. You have no awards program, you have no promotions program, you have nothing here, and most of your people aren't deployable." They didn't have wills and no family care programs. They were a mess!

I fixed the program in about one and a half years with an amazing NCO that I hired. We won awards. This was one weekend a month, but I worked thirty hours a week as a traditional Guard member.

I hate what the VA does to Guard members. The VA has the audacity to say that these people aren't really military, that they aren't really retirees because they didn't serve in some capacity of active duty.



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Yet, they juggled a family, a military career, a job and maybe got three hours of sleep a night for twenty years while they covered your butt every time some state emergency came up.

I was a traditional Guard member from April 1989 through March 1990. Then, my position went full time AGR, Active Guard Reserve. You serve just like active duty. You fall under Title 32 (state status), not Title 10. Your retirement comes from the Army. I made Captain. The battalion commander said, he wanted me to go to Signal School.

I went off to beautiful Ft. Gordon, Georgia in the summertime, back in the South. What was I thinking? I was down there for four months. The Signal Corps is like the ATT of the Army. You can grow in the battalion. You can become S3, the training officer or the commander of one of the units. I made a deal, I wasn't stupid. When I went to OBC, I volunteered at the AIT Company as a platoon leader to get the experience. If you are going to make me be a signal officer to fill the readiness criteria, then I want a deal.



They had a detachment company and a line company. There hadn't been a female commander of the line company. I said, I want command of that company. I became the first female to command the 321st Signal Company in 1990. We converted them from a standard "pony express" signal unit to a light tropo unit with the dishes and all the good stuff. I had thirty-five million dollars' worth of equipment.

I left the S1 position and became the Training Officer of the battalion. The Guard decided they needed personnel help, so I was transferred to state headquarters as the Deputy G1. In 1993, I was promoted to major; then three years later, I went back to a battalion and G3 of Troop Command in Reno.



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The Command asked me to take the position at UNR, a new program in 1998. The first guard member at UNR did a memorandum of understanding with the state to help ease the issue of getting Regular Army people into the ROTC program. They had a shortage of officers and made this deal with the state that the XO position would be a Guard member.

My husband and I divorced in 1999. After 9/11 happened, I got a call from a friend of mine in state headquarters who said, "We need your help." I was a mobilization expert from my time during Desert Storm. I had mobilized troops, including troops from Nevada. Cadet Command had a ruling that stated you couldn't leave a position in the Cadre in the middle of the school year. This was the middle of November.

February 2002, I began working both jobs, UNR and State Headquarters; and I was also teaching someone from State Headquarters how to do my job. I became the Mobilization and Readiness Officer, officially in Carson City in May 2002. I had made the 05 list in January. When I went to State Headquarters, I was in a 05 position. They had until September third to give me that promotion. I got it on September third.

I was the Mobilization and Readiness Officer for the state. That meant I looked at the units and developed them for the future of the state. I negotiated with the National Guard Bureau on how to restructure and set them up in the state. I mobilized 68% of the state from May 2002 through January 2006. I didn't have a day off during that time. January 20, 2006 was my last day at work. I had thirteen bleeding ulcers. I worked somewhere about eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. I traveled close to a million miles, mobilizing troops, training troops, and going to Washington, DC.



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I served on readiness and mobilization committees. In 2006, I was out. I had served with the Guard seventeen years. My combined years are twenty-four years, five months and twelve days.

In 1998 when my husband and I split up, I had this realization that I knew absolutely no one who wasn't in a uniform. I literally had a meltdown one Saturday and just grabbed the phone book and dropped



it open on the coffee table. It fell open to the yellow pages that said ballroom dancing. I went to my first ballroom lesson that night. I have never stopped. For me, it is the most wonderful thing in the world to be out there on the dance floor and to give other people that same feeling. Ballroom dancing takes me back to the military time, to when I would see a young troop go from this to this to this. You see this progression, and people get happy. They get really happy when they dance. Now, I have wonderful friends, amazing people.

In 2006 after I retired, I started my own business as a dance teacher. I didn't make any money off what I was doing. My CPA keeps telling me this is not a business; it is a hobby. Well, ok, it's a really expensive hobby.

Up until two years ago, I put in sixty plus hours a week doing things for Veterans. I worked a lot for the Association of the US Army. I worked a lot for the Governor's office.



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I do a lot for legislation, a variety of things in Senator Heller's office. I serve on several committees here at the VA and the Nevada Department of Veteran's Services.



I got married again four years ago. I drag my poor husband to everything. Thank God, he loves it. He's a Marine. He was in the Navy six and a half years and the Marines for eight and a half years. He got out because they were going to send him to DI school, and he didn't want to go. I was like, "Oh, my God, that is all I wanted to do, to be a DI." Isn't that crazy?

I love my health care here at the VA. I have been involved with the Women's Health Care Program and have sat on that committee for the last twelve years. I am the only volunteer outside the hospital that sits on that committee. I have watched it grow from nothing to a decent program.

I understand the VA community, unlike some. I see why there are ups and downs and problems in maintaining programs. Women get upset because they have to go outside for a mammogram. Well, mammogram equipment is very expensive and not something we can allot that kind of money for at this small facility. I don't, however, understand cutting back the only GYN we have on staff. That doesn't make sense to me. I think, we need more attention to women. Not that the programs aren't there, or the thoughts aren't there; they are. We just need to keep working on them.

