



MY LIFE, MY STORY

GABRIELLE



UNITED STATES NAVY

1984-1992



Giving Back with Gratitude

Gabrielle

I was born in the Berkshires and grew up in a small town in Western Massachusetts. It was a very quiet town and it was nice to grow up there. When I was six, I had my appendix out. I remember it was very painful. That same summer we moved across the state, to Milford MA for my father's job. Both he and my mother were in sales-food service. Growing up I had three sisters and I was in the middle. It was challenging sometimes. My younger sister Valerie had her friends, my older sister Lisa had her friends. And there wasn't very much left over for me. I was introverted; I spent a lot of time alone. My maternal grandparents lived in upstate NY and my paternal grandmother lived in Boston, so not too far away. I really loved my grandmother on my mother's side -her name was Esther Paro. She was Irish-Scottish, and the most kind, warm loving woman I have ever met, she died in 1991. I loved my family and my sisters very much. I stayed in Milford up until the time I went into the Navy when I was 18. I was a terrible student-well, I have to be honest!-My favorite subject was French. I loved French, but French didn't love me back; I almost failed it. While I was in high school, I worked at a nursing home and continued that after I graduated, until I joined the Navy.



Gabrielle

My father was in the Army for three years-that was after the Korean war-he didn't talk about it hardly at all. He was the one that suggested I join the military. My first thought, was they were trying to get rid of me. But of course I knew they weren't. He actually suggested the Coast Guard, but my ASVAB wasn't high enough and the Navy was next best.

I was in the Navy for eight years. I started aboard a USNS ship. It was white, not the gray like you usually think of. It was run by civilians-Military Sea Lift command. I took care of HSL Launchers-smaller boats. I was aboard ship for 15 months. We were overseas-deployed in the South China Sea. Then I was stationed at Cubi Point in the Philippines with air traffic control. That was the school I wanted to go to-I did Tower and Radar.



After I finished school I was stationed right back in the Philippines. I originally wanted to go to California, but it didn't work out. The Philippines was OK, but I was young 21, or 22 and I thought I'd have a lot more fun in the States, with more people my own age. Then I was at Diego Garcia Naval Base in the Indian Ocean for a year.



When I was overseas, I would try and get out and move around and get to know the local people, but most of the time you're doing the work. I loved Singapore-that was a stop we used to make on ship. It was such a clean city.



Gabrielle



Diego Garcia was isolated and arduous duty, so after that, you could go wherever you wanted. I finished my tour of duty in Jacksonville, FL and it was time to move on. When I got out of the Navy I went to college. I was 25 or 26. I loved school. I think I appreciated it more. I stayed in Florida. It was a cheaper cost of living. I studied legal

assisting/paralegal. After I graduated I immediately got a job as a legal assistant, but the girl who was supposed to train me didn't. After that I got into multilevel marketing-Equinox-for two years, that didn't make much money and I got into clerical work for a few years. That was good. Then, around 2004 I started having symptoms of PTSD and had to be hospitalized. I'm the victim of MST-it seems like just about everyone is, most people any way. My family came down and got me and brought me back up here and I've been here ever since. It was great coming back, to be around my family, and all the support.

I went back to work and decided I wasn't great at secretarial work. I tried retail and I really liked it. I worked at Chanel at Macy's and then at L'Occitane for 9 months-it was a huge success, I loved it. I started in September of 2005, and in May of 2006 I had huge symptoms of my mental illness. One night I locked up the store one day with the lights on and didn't count the drawer. At least I gave the keys to the manager's sister. I was just in this breakdown.



Gabrielle

Life now is a lot of time on the phone with friends, watching TV, listening to the radio. I enjoy that. I lead a Vet to Vet peer support group. I started with the group in 2006 after I got a consult to attend. I love it. There are stories, not exactly like mine, but parts that are similar. Through leading the group, along the way I learned that it's not about you, it's about the other people in the group. When I run a group, I start with the ground rules, do a check in and after that, let them start



talking, let them have the floor. I only jump in when there's a need. I give people space to talk. That's why they're there.

I'm proud that I graduated from junior college with an AS in Legal Assisting. I never thought I'd be able to do that. Looking back, would I do anything different? No. My hope for the future, is to see more of the same. Just more groups-I love the groups. I'm not hoping for any big ship to come in for me. I think that's already happened.

**“I just thank God for all the blessings
I’ve been given. I truly have been blessed.
I’m grateful for everything I’ve been given,
And I try to give back to others to
show that gratitude.”**