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Service Women's Action Network

December 7, 2011



Dear Supporters,

I am writing today to tell you about a promising young Marine and the event that changed her forever. This is her story in her own words.

I know why other women don't want to tell....because you cannot imagine (before it happens) that it COULD ever happen to a self-sufficient woman like you....a strong person like you...a Marine, for crying out loud. Less than two years before, I'd put everything in my 20-year-old existence of a life on the line in order to pursue the calling to be a Marine. Physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, I had bullwhipped myself toward growth and success. I went from being able to do zero pull ups to fourteen, I went from not being able to climb a rope once with no gear on to being able to climb it several times back to back with combat boots and wearing a flic and a flack, I went from being a totally flustered fire team leader to calling commands and cadence as platoon commander.

Therefore, when "it" happened to me two months before my twenty-second birthday, my natural conclusion immediately after the event was that it was my fault. Somehow it was easier to blame myself, punish myself, commit to knowing I needed to change something about myself, than to say I'd been sexually assaulted, let alone raped. I perceived myself as a successful go-getter, a work in progress, so this was merely a matter of a mistake that needed correcting in order to keep climbing my internal ladder. I'd been drinking that evening, so it must have been a simple case of alcohol-induced judgment impairment. Thus, I imposed a quick fix - I resolved to cut back on drinking and turn up the heat on my self-discipline regimens.

I talked to my best male friend, a fellow Marine Corps ROTC midshipman, the next day. I told him I was all for taking the blame, admitting it was my screw up, I should have reacted faster, I should have stopped it, something, anything...but I conceded, "I hate to say this, but I think it... could've actually been..." and I whispered the word, "rape." His reply still echoes in my memories today. "Sarah, c'mon, that's not rape," he said. "Rape is when you're tackled in a dark alley by a stranger who forces himself on you."

Days passed. But something still hung there. I ruminated over the proceedings of the night, the sequence of events, looking for clues as to how it could have happened, where I stumbled, where I could place more concrete culpability on myself and move forward under the pretense of self-blame.

Take Action

Donate now to end sexual violence in the U.S. military - make a donation [here](#).

Read Sarah's full blog post [here](#).

The fact that it was a fellow Marine Corps Officer in training made it unreal.

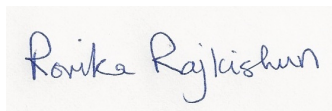
Sarah's story is all too common. The DOD estimates there were 19,000 sexual assaults in the military last year alone. That is more than 52 a day. Service members who are sexually brutalized in the military often have to effectively choose between their career and seeking justice for the crimes committed against them. Despite the DOD's "restricted" reporting option that allows survivors to anonymously report incidents of rape and sexual assault in order to receive medical care, confidentiality is rarely preserved. Survivors often find that they face retaliation and career jeopardy **even when** they report anonymously. The survivors who do report experiences of rape or sexual assault rarely receive justice because discretion is allocated to military commanders, bringing less than 21% of alleged perpetrators to court-martial; even fewer are convicted or sentenced to prison.

SWAN takes a multi-pronged approach to helping survivors. Compassionate peer support and guidance is available from an experienced woman veteran caseworker (along with social service and legal referrals) through our [Legal and Peer Support Helpline](#). SWAN approaches systemic change to a male-dominated military and veterans service network with gender-specific [policy and advocacy work](#) paired with [media and public outreach](#). SWAN seeks to hold perpetrators and the systems that perpetuate sexual violence accountable for their actions, thereby addressing the root causes of sexual violence and [advancing the rights of sexual violence survivors](#) in accessing judicial redress and veterans' benefits.

What we have accomplished has been because of our partnership with **YOU**. Your support is critical to our work. As you think of your year-end giving, please consider making a donation to SWAN. Every dollar counts. Without your support, we cannot provide services to people like Sarah or accomplish long lasting systemic changes.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. To read Sarah's full story, please read her post on SWAN's blog [About Face](#).

Sincerely,



Rovika Rajkishun
Director

Development

Please consider making a gift to help SWAN end gender discrimination and sexual violence in the military!



About Us

SWAN is a human rights organization founded and led by women veterans. SWAN's vision is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and the freedom to serve in uniform without threat of harassment, discrimination, intimidation or assault. SWAN also seeks to reform veterans' services on a national scale to guarantee equal access to quality health care, benefits and resources for women veterans and their families. You can find the Service Women's Action Network on our [homepage](#), on [Twitter](#) or on [Facebook](#).

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