

LAURA NITSCHKE



I entered the Army after high school, although entering the military was not on my radar until another senior girl at my high school introduced me to the idea. As it turned out, I served, she didn't.

My grandfather was the only person in my family that I knew that had ever been in the military. I actually took to it very well and was considering it as a career until sometime during basic training I was sexually assaulted by one of the men in my company.

I started into a spiral and attempted suicide at my permanent duty station. I then told my future first husband what had happened and he tried to help me. He did help keep me going so that I held it together long enough to ETS with an honorable discharge.

I continued to struggle with depression and yet managed to have two beautiful children before our relationship ended in divorce. I was a single mom for 2 very young children until one day 8 years later. I held many different jobs over the years and nothing more than 4 years. I continued to struggle. We had a child together and I struggled very much with all of the pain and frustration of raising three children juggling the dynamics of father/stepfather/exhusband. I looked for answers in the medical and church community and none were addressing the root problem until a friend I met at the VA gave me a business card and told me that HWH held free retreats for veterans who were having difficulty with issues related to their service.

So I went to a retreat in Wisconsin and was blown away by the care and concern of all the staff that were there to help me heal. They helped me with my healing while they continued receiving help on their own journeys! During that retreat I talked about the assault and realized that it wasn't my only issue. They helped me understand that I needed to go back to my original traumas when I was 9. I had internalized my feelings for over 47 years! I had no idea how to talk about things that bothered me and really felt that no one had the time it would take to unpack all the things that I had never addressed and wasn't even sure were relevant. I am still on that healing journey.

It took me two years to go back to staff, and I haven't stopped, even though I travel from Indiana to Wisconsin! I have also been a participant in Taking it Lightly and then Walking in the Light (offered by the Center for Creative Learning) which were both transformational.

After staffing many retreats, I moved into leadership and am now supervising retreats. Healing Warrior Hearts continues to have a deep impact on my life.