

# Surviving Another Form of Trauma: Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

PB

While I was serving in the Coast Guard in 2006, I was raped by a fellow shipmate. I reported the rape to the authorities in the Coast Guard, and my perpetrator confessed.

In August 2006, the Coast Guard informed me that I would be discharged. According to the Coast Guard, being a rape survivor made me ineligible for worldwide deployment. My perpetrator remains free.

For nine months, I fought the Coast Guard and tried to keep my job. I was a young woman in my early 20s. I knew that what was happening to me was not right. I felt powerless. I did not know how to fight the military. I was taught how to fight *with* them and *for* them, not *against* them.

I needed to share my anger, so I started an online blog. I told my story. Almost immediately I started receiving emails from military members and veterans. They wanted to share their story too. I received one email from an 18-year-old female who had just been raped 2 hours ago by a member



Look at the cartoon above. Discuss what people could do to foster respect between men and women in the military. Illustration by Ann Cleaves.

of her command. She was scared and had no one else to turn to. I received an email from a veteran who was raped more than ten years ago while serving in the Coast Guard, and I was the first person he ever told about the rape.

I did some research, and I discovered that one out of every three women in the military experiences sexual assault. (For civilian women the number is one out of six.) I knew then that I was in for the biggest battle of my life. I could not abandon my fellow brothers and sisters in uniform. Something has got to change.

To address MST, I started The Military Rape Crisis Center. We are the nation's largest support group for survivors of military sexual trauma.

Every man and woman who volunteers to serve their country should have the right to serve without fear of being sexually harassed or sexually assaulted. In addition, no one should be punished for reporting a crime that was done to them.

## Thinking More about MST

**Women make up 15% of the military.**

**Most soldiers who rape are older and of higher rank than their victims.**

**Military culture regularly denigrates women by calling recruits "pussy," "girl," "bitch," "lady," and "dyke."**

**80% of military rapes are never reported.**

**What do you think are some of the barriers to getting help for MST?**

**Sources:** <[www.servicewomen.org](http://www.servicewomen.org)>, "Why Soldiers Rape" by Helen Benedict, *In These Times*, 8-13-08. For another resource, check out "Melissa's Story" at <[doonesbury.com/strip/melissas\\_story.html](http://doonesbury.com/strip/melissas_story.html)>

PB is the executive director of the Military Rape Crisis Center. Find out more at <[www.stopmilitaryrape.org](http://www.stopmilitaryrape.org)>.