

**DANIELLE “DEE” ROGERS
VETERAN: MARINES**



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FROM TRAUMA TO TRIUMPH—A VETERAN PUTS DOWN ROOTS

Danielle “Dee” Rogers describes herself as a “tough girl,” who at age 17—heavily tattooed and standing just 5-feet tall—asked her mother to sign a waiver so she could join the Marines. She sailed through training to become a radio operator and was meritoriously promoted, graduating at the top of her class. But the trauma Ms. Rogers had experienced at home dogged her in the military, where she was one of only a handful of female Marines. She says she was ostracized and experienced sexism, leading her to go AWOL multiple times to escape her environment.

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There is little about the next 10 years that Ms. Rogers remembers. She says she drank heavily, camped out, and began riding trains. She worked from time to time, but describes her life as a “roller coaster.” She befriended someone who wanted to take a cross-country road trip and ended up on the coast of Oregon, far from her home in New Jersey.

A Wakeup Call

In Seaside, Oregon, Ms. Rogers’s luck began to change. She encountered a policeman—a fellow veteran—who referred her to the Portland Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for help. Ms. Rogers was ready to go. Her mother, also a heavy drinker, had recently died, and Ms. Rogers says that was her “wakeup call.” She didn’t want to die sick and alone.

At the VA, Ms. Rogers received help detoxing from alcohol. She also received counseling and was connected to housing through a collaborative partnership between the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs. Some of her fellow veterans told her about a job club held at Partners in Careers, a job training and workforce agency based in Vancouver, Washington. Partners in Careers receives funds from the U.S. Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP).

Ms. Rogers attended the job club every Tuesday, where she says, "We would talk about our struggles and receive job leads." Her HVRP counselor helped her complete the requirements to earn a child care license, because Ms. Rogers was interested in working with children. Through the HVRP's ride-to-work program, staff got her a bicycle for transportation.

Growing Vegetables and a Healthier Life

In the meantime, one of the staff members at Partners in Careers referred Ms. Rogers to its new Roots to Road program, a 6-month program designed to help

jobless and/or formerly homeless veterans learn agricultural skills so they can find employment. As one of the original participants, Ms. Rogers was eventually hired to help coordinate the program. She told a reporter for *The Oregonian*, which featured the Roots to Road program, "It has completely cleared my head. It's so satisfying to put things in the ground and see them grow."

Giving Back to Her New Family

Now that she is working with fellow veterans, Ms. Rogers believes it's very important to give back. She says of the participants in the Roots to Road program, "You need to give them room to breathe. There's still a lot of stigma attached to being a veteran." She acknowledges that being a supervisor is challenging, but adds, "I try to remember I'm helping someone."

Though she goes by the nickname "Dee," Ms. Rogers is particularly pleased that her given first name, Danielle, means "God is my judge." Always one to keep her own counsel, Ms. Rogers has nonetheless finally found the family she was seeking all along.

The Building Blocks of Confidence, Structure, and Accomplishment

Ms. Rogers credits becoming sober and getting a job, along with the healthy relationships she built through the HVRP program, with turning her life around. Now, she says, "I have more confidence. I have structure I didn't have before and a sense of accomplishment." She notes that the HVRP staff treated her like anyone else. They didn't let her outward appearance or tough demeanor color their thinking.

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