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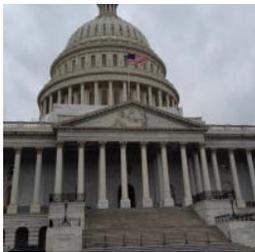
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“Lessons Learned From Marine Corps Deployments, Military Olympic Competitions, And Nomadic Journeys”

Home Blog March On “The Hill:” The Summit for Truth and Justice

## March On “The Hill:” The Summit for Truth and Justice

Posted by Sarah Plummer on 12 August in Semper Sarah |



*(Serving survivors by Just Rolling With It – An account of my experiences at the Service Women’s Action Network Summit for Truth and Justice as published by OutLoud Magazine, Columbus Ohio, August 2012. The original, unedited version of this piece, which includes various comments from readers, can be read [here](#))*

(Also, I appear at around 4minutes and 30 seconds into the ZDF German Public Media

Documentary <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek/kanaluebersicht/aktuellste/332#/beitrag/video/1652650/Vergewaltigungen-in-der-US-Armee>)

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Although I was raped nine years ago and rarely recall the event in my day to day life anymore, re-telling that story of the assault and its nearly six year-long aftermath is soul-draining.

I assume in this day and age, people have heard stories like ours, but perhaps they have not; and if they have not, then this was the day for them to put a face with a fact.

I heard the rain brushing the screens of the windows by my bed as the clock radio squawked at me at four in the morning. I lingered under the covers as a fuzzy version of NPR and the muffled precipitation conversed with one another. I rolled over, turned on the lamp, its dim light crawled out from under the lampshade to fill my half of the room, and I got out of bed.

“This is going to be a long day,” I thought.

I put on a bright blue dress and red scarf, knowing I would not blend in with the black, gray, and beige crowd that populated the city for which I was destined.

It was a short flight to Washington DC from Columbus Ohio.

I looked out the window like a little kid, enthralled with the Lego-land world below. Tracing the Potomac, I identified the historical landmarks of DC to my left and my old stomping grounds of Northern Virginia to my right, and directly below the belly of the aircraft the paved path snaked along the river border, as I gazed at the trails on which I logged so many miles over the years.

I deplaned with carry-on in tow, bought a metro ticket and jumped on the yellow line toward Gallery Place/China town and switched to the red line.

Emerging from the metro, I soaked in my surroundings during the five block walk to the Washington Court Hotel, site of Truth and Justice: The 2012 Summit on Military Sexual Violence organized by Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN).

For about six hours, I met other survivors and supporters, listened to panelists and distinguished speakers which included some of our nation's leaders, and had a brief interview with FOX News. We were served a nice lunch, after which we received cursory instructions on how best to approach our Senators and Representatives. Then, we were set lose to "attack the Hill."

It was an exhausting afternoon. We marched on marble floors from office to office, knocked on heavy wooden doors, and sat on fancy leather chairs to tell our years-old stories...over and over again. In between those closed door meetings, I spoke to a ZDF German TV news crew which spent their day following me; my story was one of many to be added to a documentary they were filming. I do not know if we made a difference in the mindset of the representatives, the congressmen, and their staff, but I hope, if nothing else, the Summit and the movement on the Hill provided survivors and advocates with a real voice for the first time in history and displayed the solidarity of the veteran community.

An already long, intense day got much longer and that much more intense when I was personally invited to a private screening of the documentary, *The Invisible War*, after the Summit. The film is an unapologetic, accurate, raw depiction of rape and sexual assault in the military.

I was surprised at what portions of the film affected me the most. Watching one of the victim's dad get choked up as he recalled his daughter's rape made me remember the letter my own father wrote me in 2001, imploring me not to join the Marines, guaranteeing me it would be an unhappy, unjust life. How could he know that although he described certain horrors in his note to me – descriptions of war tragedies and sexist treatment – that an even worse nightmare would happen to me in 2003, mere weeks before my Commissioning?

I cried at the thought of how my parents were first in disbelief and then heartbroken and furious when I told them about my assault and months later took a week of military leave to come crawling home to ask for their help in my survival. It hurt to realize that even now I still felt like a disappointment to them because of what had happened to me. I reflected upon how all members of my family have handled "it" differently at various points in time over the last nine years. Sometimes its remembrance incited rage from my family and friends, other times indifference, still other times utter pain, sadness, and a feeling of loss. I suppose that's fair, given that my own emotions had a similar fluctuation, as well. In the end, "it" had reared its ugly head on so many different occasions in the remaining years in which I served that I never quite got the aftermath of "it" under control until I left the service.

Then, something in the video caught my attention, and pulled me out of my inner thoughts and back to present. Somehow, for the first time, that very night in May, as I watched the glowing blue screen before me, I realized I had never met another female Marine who'd been raped, too. But the documentary included the accounts of two female Marine Officers who were viciously assaulted at the Marine Barracks at 8th and I. On some level of course I knew I could not have been the only one, but it is not like it is something people openly discuss, so I never knew of a real-life, tangible example of a comparable story. But on a Tuesday evening, in Washington DC, there it was, blue and white light flicking its fingers toward me, touching me, telling me there were others.

The Summit in the morning, the afternoon on the Hill, and the evening watching the documentary were worthwhile and admirable events and efforts, but I felt one disappointment in it all: for most of the survivors, there seemed to be no resolution.

We were all at different points in our pilgrimage toward healing, but on a whole, it seemed like victims were still basically being left to fend for themselves. In many cases, sadly, that is true; but in many cases it is not, and I just wish there had been a little more depicted about the healing side of things. There are groups out there providing alternative health and wellness options for disabled veterans, for survivors of rape and assault, and for those battling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In everything I participated in that day, that point – of hope – seemed a little lost in the shuffle.

So, on that note, for what it is worth, I am here to say there are ways to move past it. I am, for instance, the Director of Yoga for Combat Athletes for the non-profit group Semper Fidelis Health and Wellness, and teach free yoga classes to veterans, because I believe yoga is a cornerstone for this particular type of healing.

Yes, as victims it was not fair what happened to you, but you can reclaim your life as your own again. Seek out other options on your own. You simply have to in order to save your own life.

What is it worth to sit back, disgruntled that an institution continues to fail you time and again? They failed you once by mishandling your rape, assault, or harassment charges, right? What makes you think they are suddenly going to do right by you now?

Who is the most motivated person you know?

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## MOST COMMENTED ARTICLES

FEBRUARY 12, 2013

NBC News Hears "Yoga Saved My Life"  
Directly from Sarah

JULY 16, 2012

Stephen Covey Passes Away, and Sarah Talks about Life, Mountain-Biking, and Resilience

SEPTEMBER 19, 2012

FORD Fusion Documentary

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"Action expresses priorities." Mahatma Gandhi

3 hours ago near Denver, CO



**Semper Sarah via Sarah Teddy**

Super duper stoked to have Sarah Teddy of Yoga with Teddy & Sarah Brown of Sarah Brown Yoga & Fitness as teachers on week 2 of the COSTA RICA Just

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Hopefully, they will one day, and that is the purpose of these summits, meetings, and efforts in advocacy, but in the meantime, I encourage you to move forward with your life.

Consider this “tough love” coming from someone who gets it. The tragedy I experienced is what has led me to pursue my dreams with such passion. It is what inspired me to become a Motivational Speaker, Yoga Instructor, Health and Life Coach, and Author through my company SemperSarah.com. Because for me, realizing I had to do it myself was what made things click and started the deeper healing. Realizing I had to *semper* (always) be myself – thus, the company name, Semper Sarah – is what pushed me along on my route to survival.

No one is going to do it for you, even if you have an amazingly supportive spouse, family, or friends. I spent years wishing people would do something more for me, believing they *should* be doing more for me, until it clicked that in some ways, it almost did not matter what anyone did for me because ultimately true healing would only come from within me.

Only you can heal you, and believe me, you CAN. What you need is already within you, you simply need to look there. Whatever helps you “look” there is different for everyone.

Is this healing, this going within, as simple as the sentences I just typed? No, of course it is not. But why not start trying? What do you have to lose? Try yoga. Try running. Join a recreational sports team. Meditate. Eat better. Drink less alcohol. Buy a dog. Join a scrap booking group. Try painting. Write poetry. Spend more time outside. Do one, do some, do a combo of these things or something else altogether, but please, survivors, begin to move, metaphorically and literally, forward. *Just roll with it.*™

Begin to live knowing that you have survived, and knowing you can *thrive*.

*With love, compassion, and respect,*

Sarah founder of [www.SemperSarah.com](http://www.SemperSarah.com) Speaker, coach, author, advocate, and entrepreneur

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1979.  
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The Army.

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