My name is Marilyn Schoefer and I am the oldest out of three siblings. I was born into the military. My dad served twenty years in the Marine Corps. During that time, I would make friends when we got to a new duty station and then have to move again after only being in one place for no more than three years. I also got to spend three years overseas in Japan from April 1986 to March 1989. I graduated high school in Jacksonville North Carolina with Honors in June 1992 from Southwest High School. I then went on to Coastal Carolina Community College in the fall of 1992. I was going to major in Business Computer Programming. I couldn’t continue with college because I didn’t have the money to keep going. So I did the next best thing and decided to go into the Air Force. I was all set to leave for the Air Force in July of 1993. But on Mother’s Day 1993 my mother was tragically murdered and taken out of my life. I was 19 at the time. Between the time that my mom was killed and I was supposed to go into the Air Force, I got pregnant with my oldest daughter. Her father didn’t want to have anything to do with me while I was pregnant with her so I moved down here to Florida with my dad and brother. My daughter was born in February 1994. After trying to find a job and raise my daughter on my own with no help from her father, I decided to try and go into the Air Force again. I talked to an Air Force recruiter in January 1997. I had already given my dad plenary guardianship of my daughter so that I could go into the military. Well, the Air Force took eight months to tell me that I couldn’t go in because I was going in as a single parent. So the Air Force recruiter handed my file over the Navy recruiter and I was enlisted in the Navy in less than a week. I went to boot camp from September 1997 to November 1997 in Great Lakes IL. After I graduated from Boot Camp, I went to indoc for the school that I was going to do in the navy and met my current husband. We got married the end of February 1998 after I found out that I was pregnant with my son. I then had changed “A” schools from TechCore to Hospitalman (HM) “A” School where I was the first pregnant student to make it through the complete school. I graduated from HM “A” school when I was eight months pregnant. I then got stationed at the Naval Hospital Great Lakes satellite clinic USS Tranquility over at the Recruit Training Command (RTC). My son was born in October 1998 and he was a healthy boy. Then in December 1998, my two month old son spiked a really high fever for no reason. I took him the emergency room at the Naval Hospital and they performed a spinal tap on him. Then in May 1999, I had to a cone biopsy done because I had the start of cervical cancer and I almost bled to death with my son in the room with me when I went to the ER for passing the blood clot. My son then came down with Scarletina, Strep Throat, and another high fever when he was nine months old in July 1999. During all this time I was having a hard time dealing with my mom’s death and I started going off on the people that I worked with. My Leading Petty Officer sent me in to talk to a mental health doctor to see what was going on. I went in for the appointment only to be diagnosed with a personality disorder. I was put on medication to try and treat my condition. I got honorably discharged from the Navy in May 2000 after serving my country just less than three years. I then moved all of my household belongings, myself, my toddler son, a car, and a dog out to Bremerton, Washington where my husband was stationed on the USS Carl Vinson. I met a wonderful lady by the name of Erica and we became quick friends and are still best friends to this day. Since I have gotten out, I have applied for my VA Disability Benefits twice and have gotten turned down because I was told that what I was claiming was wrong with me was not in my medical records when I knew otherwise. In 2005, my husband admitted to sexually molesting a minor child and went to jail for it in November 2005. I had become a single parent since then raising my son by myself with help friends and family. In the summer of 2006, I was reunited with my daughter for two weeks. I then felt complete at that time because I had both of my kids with me for a short time. In January 2008, I became homeless with my son. I had to lose everything that I had. If it wasn’t for me reconnecting with my sister in December 2007, I would have ended up on the streets with my son. Her and husband bought plane tickets for both me and my son to fly out to Jacksonville, North Carolina where we stayed with them until November 2008. During that time, I got a job working at Rite Aid Pharmacies as a store associate and then later becoming a shift supervisor. I worked for Rite Aid just over three years from May 2008 to August 2011. In August 2009, I moved from North Carolina up to Virginia Beach, VA where my best friend and her family were stationed and stayed with her until February 2011. At that time, my son and I were staying in hotel after hotel. It then started getting hard for me to pay the weekly rate to keep us in one hotel, so I put my son into a boys homeless shelter just so that I wouldn’t get into trouble for having him on the streets with me. Then in August 2011, I moved back down here to Citrus County to hopefully be with family but it turned out that even my family down here didn’t want us staying with them. So my brother picked me and son up from the greyhound station here in Crystal River and dropped us off at the Mission In Citrus Homeless Shelters in Crystal River. Since we have been at the shelter I have seen my son go from a kid that would lash out and hit other people to being a calm kid. We go to church every Sunday at the Crystal River United Methodist Church where my son is active in their Youth Group. He does go to CREST where he went from getting “Ds” and “Fs” on his report card to get almost straight “As”. I am also working on getting my VA disability for the third time and getting further with it this time than I have in the past. I now have a copy of my medical records and what I am claiming is in there. So they can’t turn my down this time. I am now back on my meds and being seen up at the Lecanto VA clinic. I am very thankful for everything that the Mission In Citrus has done for me and my son because if it hasn’t been for Jim or the other people at the shelter, I don’t know where I would be now. Thank you and God Bless!!

September 9, 2013: This is an update as to what has happened to me since I last wrote this. I have been approved by the VA for being 30% disabled because of the hysterectomy I had while I was on active duty. I started getting my VA disability back in October 2012 when I received a huge settlement check. The way this all came about was when my son and I walked from the shelter to Bicentennial Park the beginning of October 2012 so that he could see the Travelling Vietnam Wall Memorial for the first time. It just so happened that there was the Women’s Veteran Coordinator for the state of Florida there that Saturday. So I sat down and talked to her about trying to make connections for our other homeless veterans so they could be able to get their VA disability as well. It just so happened that I mentioned to her that I was homeless and a Veteran. She had me fill some paperwork out to expedite my VA disability claim. I then got a call from her the Tuesday after I talked to her at the Park telling me that my hysterectomy part of my claim was approved before I even talked to her. That was the best news I could have gotten at that time. It was then a week later that I got a check in the mail for almost $40,000. When I first looked at the check, I thought that it only said $4000. Jim immediately took me down to the bank so I could deposit it into my account. On the way to the bank, I took a second look at the check and had to count the number of numbers before the decimal point before it dawned on me that there were five numbers instead of four. Another reason I was so happy was because I was able to give my son who had turned 14 at that time the best birthday he had ever had. I also donated some of the money to the Mission to keep it running. And then in December on my birthday, I was handed the keys to a RV that was donated to the Mission for me and my son to live in on the property. We officially moved into the RV on Christmas Eve and we are still living in it. A lot of people have asked me why I didn’t leave when I got the check and I tell them that I have made a lifetime commitment to the Mission In Citrus and since my son is autistic I can’t just pick up and move and throw a wrench into his life because if I did leave and take him away from the one place that has been steady in his life for the last couple of years, he would make my life a total pain. So now we have our own little area in the back of the property and we both are happier than we have been in the past. I am still working on the rest of my VA disability claim as we speak. As for my son, he is now going to be turning 15 in just over a month. He still goes to CREST and is in the ninth grade. He is still doing good in school.

May 3, 2014: I have received the rest of my VA disability and I am now 50% disabled according to the VA on October 4, 2013. Since then my son and I have been working on trying to get our RV running and have succeeded. On May 1st of this year we have officially moved off the property of the Mission In Citrus Homeless Shelters up to Dan’s Clam Stand. We are very grateful to Jim and the Mission for helping us while we stayed there. If it wasn’t for Jim, I don’t think we would’ve ever been able to get back on our feet and be a family once again. Even though I am not living at the Mission any longer, I am still dedicating my life and time to keep helping those who need the help so that they will one day too be able to get back on their feet.