

THIS IS MY FIGHT SONG

For Some Veterans, the Real Battle Has Just Begun

“What About Me?”

Spousal PTSD – The Struggle for Light

by Susan Heffner



“The Beauty of Light”

Photo Credit: Susan Heffner

*“When you anxiously await
to emerge from deep darkness,
you will realize the beauty of light”*

*~Debasish Mridha, physician, writer,
philosopher, philanthropist*

Whenever I write, I’ve always composed my ending first. After all, as a writer, I do my summation and then prove its points. Inherently simple.

But how do you tell a tale when you don’t know the ending? What do you say when you don’t know what to say? Especially when it’s always been about ‘you’?

Well, *what about me?*

What about my hopes? My dreams? My sacrifices? What about those? What about all the nights I held you close while you cried? Or thrashed? Or spoke in strange languages? What about that?

What about all those times I didn't, couldn't, know what had happened to you, but desperately tried to help and understand? What about when I watched you 'secretly' drink and ignore, implode, the world around you? Our world? Yours and mine? What about us?

What about the silence that grew, not just around me, but between us? The lack of comfort, camaraderie, intimacy? What about those shortcomings? What about the critical components to a marriage? What about them?

What about the anger that festered, the cynicism that brewed, the distrust? What about the utter helplessness I felt? *What about me?*

I've often wondered, what about the soldiers who got left behind? *Your* guys? The ones who *didn't* make it home? The ones who'd give *anything* to walk in *your* boots? To be with *their* families, *their* loved ones? Those who would probably kick your ass if they could because of what you're doing now? What you've become? What would they say about the road you're on? That well-worn path to self-destruction? What about them?

What would they do if *they* had a second chance? The chance that *you* have? Would they throw it away like *you*? Get lost in the drink so they couldn't think...about *you*? Would they cower and shrink, imprison themselves in a past destined to repeat itself? Or would they stand tall and fight? Tell me, if the situation were reversed, what would they do?

What would you think if I divulged that sometimes I talk to them? That I pose the same questions to whatever spirits might linger here, in this hell-hole? Those, who like any soldier, were taught that *'no man gets left behind'*? Is that purely on a linear plane? Or could that imply something more abject? What about that?

What if they could move on to a far, greater glory—and peace—but *you* are the one holding not only *me* but *them* back? Keeping *them* here because *they* feel afraid, or more likely, sadness for you, for us, for what you've become? What we've become? What about that?

What if our family and friends knew the truth: that I've been fighting just as hard for *me* as for *you*? What if they understood the aftermath, the day-to-day struggle? The feelings of hopelessness? How easy it would be to lose my *own* way? To stop fighting? To quit? Just like you? How many could even *walk* in our shoes? What might they think?

What is the measure of a man? Or a spouse? Or a soldier? What is the measure of the truest friend or family member? What are their limits? Of their understanding? Compassion? Tolerance? What if they turned their backs on you? On me? What if? *What if...?*

What if there were no yesterday, no tomorrow, just today? That's how it is, really. Each of us is the sum of our time here, and some 'times' cannot be erased. Or changed. Or forgotten. But what if they could?

What if you accepted that sometimes 'life' happens? That we are all powerless to alter a course of events? Would you be any less, or any more, content with the outcome? Would it change your destiny? Mine? What if our paths diverged? Where would you be?

What if I roared that, just like you, no one has walked in *my* shoes? Stepped where *I've* stepped? Seen what *I've* seen? Lived what *I've* been living? Would you laugh? Cry? Or would you die a little...like *I* do every day? Would you even see? *What about me?*

What if you finally understood that not everything is about *you*? Or revolves around *you*? Left to your own devices, would your universe cease to exist? Would your world stop turning? Your heart stop beating? Like mine did? What about that? Or can't you stomach the thought?

What if *I* decided to quit? Just like you? Just like that? Not that *I* would, but it would be so much easier to say, "*I don't*" than "*I do*." Yet, those vows resonate strongly within me, an unbreakable bond! Does the same still hold true for you? Or do the older oaths you once took hold stronger? Tell me, *please*, where do you stand?

What if I said I believe you have a *gift*, that you answered the call to duty where others couldn't, or wouldn't? And because of your *gift*, along with other vets like yourself, *many* lives were saved? What if I told you how *proud* I am of your service? Your sacrifice? That I see all too well the penance you've imposed on yourself? A penance you have also unwittingly imposed on those who love you? Like me! Would you see? Would you not hear?

What if there were a million questions, but no answers? Would you stop questioning and blaming yourself? Would you finally step up? Climb out of the abyss and exit from this self-imposed exile and finally revel in the light? Would you?

What if you reconnoitered and regained your purpose? What if you noticed that *I* was left in the black, in the trenches? That *I* couldn't find *my* way out because *I'd* tunneled down there to save *you!*? But then felt I could no longer even save myself? Would you scale back down to save *me*? To pull *me* from an abyss of your own making? Or would you leave *me* there to die?

I've always known, *believed*, you are stronger than you think you are! I thought I was, too. And I'm so proud to finally see you reach for the hands that were always there, to let them pull you to safety. To become, once again, the rock you were before. But what if I'm still doing 'clean-up,' picking up the pieces of a life—of two lives—slowly trying to put them back together, like a puzzle. Would you notice?

What if now, it's *me* who's struggling? Who's angry? Bitter? What if I told you how *I* feel? That *I* hurt? That *I* bleed? That *I* need? *What about me?*

What about dreams *I* had that will never be realized? Or time *we* lost that can never be replaced? What if I admit...I'm *terrified!*? Will you crawl back into your foxhole and quit? Or will you stand up and fight for *me*? Like *you* fought for *them*? Like *I* fought for *you*?

Tell me, please: "*What about me!?*"

[TO BE CONTINUED....]

"EAR – Express, Address, Resolve." Please contact me at Susan.Heffner.ForTheVets@gmail.com with your feedback, your stories or anything else you'd like to share. Together, we *will* make a difference.

