

THIS IS MY FIGHT SONG

For Some Veterans, the Real Battle Has Just Begun

“Have You Forgotten?”

Veteran PTSD – The Struggle for Peace

by Susan Heffner



Photo Credit: Susan Heffner

“The soldier, above all others, prays for peace, because it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war.”

~Douglas MacArthur, General, USA

How do you talk about ‘self’ when you were trained to be ‘selfless’?

How do you tell a tale when you don’t know the ending? How do you spin a story when it isn’t solely yours to tell? Especially if you’re the only one left to tell it?

How do you talk when you don’t know what to say? How do you speak when there are no words? How do you cry when you have no tears because you’ve learned so well to ‘lock it down’?

What do you do when you’re afraid to even utter a sound? When you’re so scared you can’t even breathe?

What if all hell broke loose, but there was no warning? That you had no time to do anything but react? That even if you did have time to think, the only thing you'd wonder is whether you'd still be alive after the next few seconds?

What if all you heard, and all you remember, were explosions and the sounds of battle? What if you looked around and saw your guys screaming? Or cut in half? Or held them 'til they breathed their last breath? *What about them? What about that?*

What if you'd given it your all, but it still wasn't good enough? That nothing you could do could save them? *YOUR* platoon!? *YOUR* men!?

How are you supposed to cope, to carry on, when you can't even come to grips with what happened? With *that* ending – the one where you came home, but many on your team didn't? Do you have any idea how that *feels!*?

How do I explain to you that I replay old battles in my head, over and over, like I can somehow make things right? Somehow make things whole? Like, somehow, we all got out alive? When no soldier truly gets out of *'there'* alive?

Or maybe you can explain to me why they're dead and I'm not? Tell me how I'm supposed to deal with *'survivor's guilt'*? To go on living, like the war never happened? To pretend or act like they never existed?

Like when I wake up in our bed screaming? And you're looking at me like I'm 50 shades of crazy? When I can't even put into words that I just relived, for the umpteenth time, my best friend taking a round in the face?

What am I supposed to do when I can't stop the nightmares? Or the *'daymares'*? When I can't look forward to tomorrow because I'm too busy remembering yesterday? Too busy watching my *'six'*? Or drinking one? Or two? Or three?

What if I said you're not the only one who notices the distance growing between us? The silence that festers like another open wound? How you cringe when I touch you, like I'm some kind of animal? When all I really need is to be cradled or rocked or held? To feel *human* again?

What if I knew our world, yours and mine, was imploding around us? What if I said I felt powerless to stop it? That I felt it was all my fault? That *everything* was all my fault? Would you listen? Would you hear?

What if I roared, "You've never walked in *my* shoes! Stepped where *I've* stepped! Seen what *I've* seen! Lived what *I've* been living!" Would you laugh? Cry? Run? Or would you die a little...like *I* do every day? Would you even see? *What about me?*

What about faith? And core Christian values? Like *'Thou shalt not kill'*? What if I told you I'm scared to death I'm going to Hell? That I've been through Hell? Been living in Hell? That I have never been more lost? Or afraid? That I sometimes fear not even my own God can save me? What about that? Would *you* know what to say? How to absolve *those* sins? Or would *you* wonder, too? Like *I* do?

Or would you spout the same BS? That *'sometimes life happens'*? Say it's not my fault? That I need to get past it? When you can't even look me in the eye? When I can't even look in yours because I can't stand to see the way you look at me? With the hurt, the distrust, the disgust?

What if I told you I'm a *'liar'*? Because I can't tell you where I've been? What I've done? Who I've known – the good, the bad and the ugly? But especially the great ones?

What if I said I wasn't even allowed to pay my last respects because of circumstances? Because I was still in battle? Or wounded in action? Or that I had to leave someone behind? A cardinal sin to a soldier!

How could I even *begin* to explain? How could *you* even begin to understand? How might you look at me then? Perhaps like I look at myself? How could you know what eats at me every damned time I look in the mirror? *Why would I want that for you!?*

You talk about our family and how I'm affecting it? What about the soldiers I left behind? The ones I lost? The ones I stopped talking about? Or never even mentioned? What about *them*? What about *their* families?

What if I admit I talk to them? Their ghosts? Try to apologize for *my* still being here? Or that sometimes, I swear I'm expecting an answer? A simple, *"It's okay, Bud! We're glad you made it! You fought hard for all of us. We know! Stop beating yourself up!! You gotta live, damnit!! Live for all of us!"*

But what if I can't!? Would they even recognize the person I've become? Because I don't! Would they kick my ass for what I'm doing to me? To us? To their memory? Their honor? Would they do any differently if *they*, and not *I*, had a second chance at life? Or would it eat away at them, too? Would they, sooner or later, find themselves lost in the drugs or the drink? Trying not to think...about *me*?

Can you tell me *where* I'm supposed to find *'peace'*? Or *how* I'm supposed to do that when all I believe is I should've gone down with my guys? That I'm not supposed to be here!? That I'm still trying to figure out why I am and they aren't!? That it isn't fair!?

You know how much I love you, but what if I divulged that, sometimes, I think you'd be better off without me? That I've put you through enough? That I never intended things to be like this? That I used to be a good person – before the war, and the ghosts, and the booze, and the drugs, and the never-ending memories consumed me?

What if I said there were so many times I desperately wanted to tell you what had happened to me, but I couldn't? What if I said that, despite that, I need your help *now*, more than *ever*? To understand, but not to judge? *Would you? Could you? Have you?*

You've always called me your *'rock,'* but what if now it's *me* who's struggling? Who's sinking? Who's angry? Empty? Bitter? Lost?

What if I told you how *I* feel? That *I* hurt? That *I* bleed? That *I* need? That although I was once a great soldier, this is one battle I can't fight on my own? A battle I can't win without *you*?

What if I admit...I'm *terrified!*? Will you pack up and leave? Will you quit on me? On us? Say, "*I don't*" instead of "*I do*"? Tell me, will you stand up and fight for *me*? Like *I* fought with *them*? Like *we* fought – *and died* – for *you*?

Or have 'YOU' already forgotten about 'US'?

[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.