

Wounded Warrior, Wounded Home

**Hope and Healing for Families
Living with PTSD and TBI**

Marshéle Carter Waddell
and Kelly K. Orr, PhD, ABPP



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2013 by Marshéle Carter Waddell and Kelly K. Orr

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Waddell, Marshéle Carter.

Wounded warrior, wounded home : hope and healing for families living with PTSD and TBI / Marshéle Carter Waddell and Kelly K. Orr, PhD, ABPP.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: "The wife of a combat veteran and a licensed counselor help families to cope and heal in the aftermath of a service member returning home with PTSD and TBI"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-8007-2156-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Post-traumatic stress disorder—Treatment—United States. 2. Brain damage—Patients—Family relationships—United States. 3. Families of military personnel—Mental health—United States. I. Orr, Kelly K. II. Title.

RC552.P67W28 2013

616.85'212—dc23

2012035796

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations identified kjv are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations identified THE MESSAGE are taken from *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified niv 1984 are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified nkjv are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The internet addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers in this book are accurate at the time of publication. They are provided as a resource. Baker Publishing Group does not endorse them or vouch for their content or permanence.

The information in this book is intended solely as an educational resource, not a tool to be used for medical diagnosis or treatment. The information presented is in no way a substitute for consultation with a personal health care professional. Readers should consult their personal health care professional before adopting any of the suggestions in this book or drawing inferences from the text. The authors and publisher specifically disclaim all responsibility for any liability, loss, or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the use of and/or application of any of the contents of this book.

Cover design: Tobias' Outwear for Books

Cover photo: © Linda Navarro

Marshele Carter Waddell, *Wounded Warrior, Wounded Home*
1. Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2. ©2013. Used by permission.

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



To Joshua Carter, Jordan Mae,
and Jenna Lynn who,
as children of a warrior,
have faithfully served and sacrificed
for this country since your birth.

—Marshéle Carter Waddell



To Kathleen Anne Orr
for her courage, prayers, perseverance,
and willingness to teach her warrior husband
over the past forty-four years
the artistry of loving.

—Kelly K. Orr, PhD

Contents

- Acknowledgments 13
- Introduction 17
-
1. Wounded Warrior, Wounded Home 29
 2. Living Grief: The Pain of the Shattered Dream 45
 3. Dealing with Delays, Detours, and Denied Entry 59
 4. Smelly Issues and the Fragrance of Forgiveness 75
 5. Weary, Worn Out, and Wondering Why 89
 6. It's His What It Is: Our New Normal 107
 7. New from the Inside Out: Breaking the Cycle of
Compassion Fatigue 117
 8. Faithful Body Parts and the Power of Friendship 131

9. Permission to Engage: Spiritual Warfare on the Home Front 147
10. The Savior's War Wounds: Our Hope 169
- Epilogue 181
- Appendix A: Traumatic Brain Injury and PTSD—What's the Difference? 183
- Appendix B: What Helps and What Hurts: A Word to Civics, Our Civilian Friends and Community, Who Truly Care 187
- Appendix C: Additional Resources 191
- Notes 195

Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank my husband, Mark, and our three adult children, Joshua, Jordan, and Jenna, for their willingness to let me publicly share personal glimpses of our family's journey through combat-related PTSD and TBI. I salute your courage, humility, and transparency, without which this book would not exist.

Thank you to my agent, Bill Jensen, who believed in this book concept, represented it with professionalism, and found a home for it at Revell Books. Thank you to our editor, Andrea Doering, for recognizing the enormous need for this resource and for skillfully refining a rough manuscript into a polished gem. Thank you to the entire team at Baker Publishing Group for trusting us with this project.

Thank you to my coauthor and friend, Kelly Orr, PhD, for his willingness and patience to invest his military and professional experience and clinical perspective into this project. Your partnership and input transformed testimonies into tools for recovery and hope.

Thank you to my twenty-five brave sisters on the home front who contributed to the research needed for this book by participating in ten difficult interviews in eight months. Your fearless honesty will give a long-awaited voice to millions of other women who are

Acknowledgments

passing through someplace dark and will remind them that they are not alone. I love each one of you.

I owe new kneepads to all of our prayer warriors. Thank you to my mother, Joyce Carter, Nancy Crabtree, James Scott, Julia Warton, DiAnna Steele, Judy Dunagan, Mark Bubeck, Kelly and Kathy Orr, Mari Pena, Nina Deeds, Doris and Stan Mincks, Suzanne Baldwin, Larry and Cassie Shafer, Bob and Kathleen Dees, Jack Aylesworth, Elaine Sellner, Rayetta Nathe, Victor and Susan Medina, Mechelle and Richard Thurston, Heather, Geoff and Matt Radler, Mark and Becky Walker, Mark Rader, Bob and Linda Swales, Pat Hobin, Jenny and Michael Sharpe, Penny Monetti, Jocelyn Green, Tanya Brown, Lorraine Pintus, Trudy Jerman, Lisa Holstein, and our twenty-five interviewees for approaching God's throne on our behalf and swinging your sword with accuracy.

Thank you for those who generously contributed content to this effort: Dr. Mark I. Bubeck, Patricia Smith, Judy Jordan, MD, Marilyn Lash, MSW, Shannon Wexelberg, John and Karen Blehm, Military Ministry Press, and New Hope Publishers.

Thank you to Therese and Tom Moncrief for opening your guest home in Fort Worth to me, where I wrote many of these pages and found comfort in your timely friendship. Thank you to Larry and Cassie Shafer for a writer's hideaway with hot lattes and an inspiring view of Pike's Peak. Thank you to Kathy Orr who brought me hot echinacea tea, throat lozenges, and tissues like clockwork as we raced toward deadline during a February Colorado snowstorm. And thank you to all the strangers who put up with my clumsy elbows and keyboard-tapping fingers as I wrote most of this manuscript in seat 9D on many flights to and from retreats for wounded warriors' wives across the country.

Thank you to our readers in this generation and in the ones to come. Be encouraged.

I also want to acknowledge those who opposed me every step of the way. The persecution only fueled my perseverance. God has

Acknowledgments

and will continue to use the division and pain meant for harm and will transform it for our good. PS, I forgive you.

—Marshéle Carter Waddell



First, I want to thank my wife, Kathy, for her courage and perseverance in the face of multiple challenges. Your encouragement to pursue this project is but another example of your faith in my abilities that has often been stronger than my own. This book is a tribute to your belief that there are many ways for a warrior to show up to fight a battle.

I also want to thank Bill Jensen, for believing in this book concept and finding a home for it at Revell Books. Thank you, Andrea Doering, our editor, for listening to our ideas and making the manuscript into a cutting-edge resource. Thank you, Baker Publishing Group, for your trust and acceptance of this project.

Thank you to my coauthor and friend, Marshéle Carter Waddell, for her invitation and trust to partner in this project. Your transparency, candor, persistence, and energy are unparalleled. The words on these pages reflect the truth of your testimony that hope and strength are found in faith in a Faithful God.

I, too, want to thank the twenty-five amazing wounded warrior wives on the home front for their contribution to the research needed for this book. Your frank answers to difficult, and sometimes painful, questions are inspirations for countless others who share similar stories and who will gain strength and courage from your example. I am humbled by your courage.

Thank you to my Bible study group members, Kathy Orr, Rob and Sherry Sayers, Dean and Deena Mills, Danny and Irene Holt, Mike and Debbie Wermuth, Jim and Sarah Myers, Mike and Kris Davis. Thank you for being the prayer warriors you are and the unceasing intercession at God's throne as this book took shape.

Acknowledgments

To Dr. Mark I. Bubeck, Patricia Smith, Judy Jordan, MD, Marilyn Lash, MSW, Shannon Wexelberg, Military Ministry Press, and New Hope Publishers: thank you for your generosity in contributing to the content of this effort.

To the many men and women who over the years have so candidly shared their hopes and dreams, pains and disappointments, and along the way taught me the art of listening: thank you for your courage in letting me walk with you for a while.

To my children, Lori and Christian, Kristopher and Cheri, and the grandkids: Caleb, Samuel, Annalise, Ethan, Aaron, Noah, Isaiah, and Aubrey . . . Aslan's Apprentices . . . thank you for filling my days with sunshine and laughter!

To you, the reader, thank you for turning the pages of this book. Walk with us a while and be encouraged.

—Kelly K. Orr, PhD

Introduction

You will not fear . . . the pestilence that stalks
in the darkness.

Psalm 91:5–6

I hate what war did to my family. I hate what two wars did to the man I married and what a third threatens to do to our son. And, with the same measure of hatred, I loathe what war did to the rest of us who love these two men.

Martin Luther wrote, “If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write.” I accept that challenge and open my laptop and my heart in order to change the world for those who love a combat veteran and who live in the wake of the sword.

When my U.S. Navy SEAL husband returned from Iraq with only a broken leg, I praised God that he was home safe and sound. In the months that followed his homecoming, I sensed that his leg was the least of our concerns. Although he was recovering physically, his soul still walked with a limp. His unseen wounds caused by war zone experiences went unmentioned and untreated. Slowly but surely these invisible injuries infected our marriage, our children,

and our family life. He was home with us in body, but in his spirit a war still raged. From irritability and irrationality to nightmares and emotional paralysis, it became clear that my veteran husband was suffering from post-traumatic stress. For two years Mark denied any need for help and unintentionally led our family into a land of silent suffering.

For more than two decades our marriage had survived everything a special operations career could throw at us: frequent deployments, long separations for training and real world conflicts, serious injuries and surgeries, as well as multiple overseas family moves. The stress of my husband's job was nothing new for either of us. That may explain why my husband's frustrations and underlying anxieties caused me no new concerns at first. It was "all systems normal" and "steady as she goes," or so I thought. My first book and its companion Bible study were penned before I knew anything about the beast that would raise its ugly head when Mark returned from the frontlines.

I was not alone. As I prepared this book, I wanted others to share as well. Twenty-five women stepped forward and opened their lives to us. Here, and throughout the book, their thoughts and strategies will give insights—and a fellowship—as we journey toward hope and healing.

He was angry, depressed, and short fused.

He would throw himself into his work because that was where he was most comfortable and able to control his issues.

My son had nightmares and attempted suicide.

My husband would be talking and while in mid-sentence he would just stop and go blank in his eyes. After we shook him or nudged him while saying his name, he would finally return to reality and wonder what had happened.

He kept a light on and slept with a gun. He drank excessively. He even ran around in the woods and around the house wearing his BDUs, carrying his rifle at times.

I have friends more noble than I who bravely state that they are thankful for the war. That sounds absurd except to those who know either by faith or from experience that there is purpose in pain and a gift only found in grief. I don't doubt their sincerity for I know their hearts and I cherish their friendship. They can honestly say they are thankful for how the fallout at home that followed the fight overseas has resulted in a closer walk with God, a deeper faith in His goodness and the ability to embrace each moment with an attitude of gratitude.

I have read the work of subject-matter experts who gloss over the horrors of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), attempting to soothe the sting and silence the cry of a nation's soul by saying it's all good. They applaud the attainment of a sullen, resigned thankfulness as evidence of a full and admirable recovery. They even go so far as to rename it post-traumatic *growth*.

Well, it's *not* all good. There's a reason those who pass through this dark place call it hell on earth. And before anyone quotes Romans 8:28¹ to me, let me be the first to say that I believe with all my heart that God can transform for the greater good and for His glory anything that the enemy means for our harm.

Still, am I thankful for the war? Frankly, I'm not there yet. I aspire to offer the "hard *eucharisteo*" that Ann Voskamp so beautifully illustrates in her book *One Thousand Gifts*. She states, "The holy grail of joy is not in some exotic location or some emotional mountain peak experience. The joy wonder could be here! Here, in the messy, piercing ache of now, joy might be—unbelievably—possible!"² Giving thanks in all circumstances is very difficult when it involves pulling the shards and slivers of shattered dreams out of one's heart daily with no end to the confusion or chaos in sight.

He has trust issues, has trouble showing love, compassion, and empathy, and is very forgetful. It is hard to get him motivated. He has started drinking again, which frightens me.

Our whole family worried ourselves to death. We never knew what was going to happen next. I even had a nervous breakdown and lost my job.

My grandchildren never got to know their father, my son. They had to live without him for years while he was incarcerated for firing a gun in public in the middle of a flashback.

When a person is close to a vet with PTSD, it changes her whole world in a negative way. She feels she is always walking on eggshells. Life is completely unpredictable. She loses trust in her spouse. It can be one of the hardest things a family has to suffer.

I still wake up every morning hating what war did to my family. Plain and simple. I didn't ask for this. I don't like the stigma and struggle of it one bit, but I believe I'm moving in the general direction of being able to honestly say one day that war's aftermath on the home front delivered priceless treasures of tried and true character, that it forged and fortified my dearest relationships, and refined us all to an impenetrable, polished perfection.

It is a fragile hope of personal and family wholeness I hold with the utmost care. I cup it gingerly in my palm and lift it heavenward daily, asking God to continue to give it life and breath. I see God and His love in the smallest steps of progress. Even so, combat-related PTSD on the home front remains the ugliest and longest battle we who share this address have ever known.

He had angry outbursts, was unloving and disengaged from our family. He had recurring nightmares and experienced insomnia.

He was a changed man. He was very easily startled, hyper-vigilant, quick to anger, frustrated, and thought his life was ruined. He did not look at me the same, kept his distance from us, didn't sleep well, and kept saying he was fine.

He didn't want to seek help, refused to discuss communication issues. He didn't want affection and could not show affection.

I often don't feel I can fully count on him. He has had a difficult time taking anything seriously. He often blows off things that are important, like deadlines, appointments, and other commitments.

I have tried countless times to talk with him about his symptoms, but he refuses. He immediately closes his eyes, drops his head, and puts his hands up. He doesn't want to talk about it. He shuts down and wants to be left alone. How I miss the love we once shared.

I miss being able to talk about anything and everything. Now we have a long list of topics that cannot be discussed.

PTSD is not new. After the Civil War our nation called it soldier's heart. World War I and II vets knew it as shell shock and battle fatigue. After the Korean and Vietnam wars, exasperated experts lumped all the surfacing symptoms together and labeled it the Vietnam Syndrome. Only in 1994 did the American Psychiatric Association officially name and define what is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder.³ Currently, the Veterans Administration and the National Center for PTSD are hammering out yet another new definition, phrasing it as a "failure to recover."⁴

Some of the best contemporary descriptions I have found come from *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from*

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, by Edward Tick, PhD. “Veterans know that, having been to hell and back, they are different. We expect them to put war behind them and rejoin the ordinary flow of civilian life. But it is impossible for them to do so—and wrong of us to request it. When (a Viet Nam veteran) was asked when he left Viet Nam, he answered, ‘Last night. It will be that way till my soul leaves this old body.’ When the survivor cannot leave war’s expectations, values, and losses behind, it becomes the eternal present. This frozen war consciousness is the condition we call post-traumatic stress disorder.” And, “Though the affliction that today we call post-traumatic stress disorder has had many names over the centuries, it is always the result of the way war invades, wounds and transforms our spirit.”⁵

There is much talk about a “new normal” for returning veterans and their families. We know full well that the place we used to live is no longer on the map. We’ve tried to find it, but the inner, nasal GPS voice repeats “recalculating” as we try to navigate the post-combat, civilian landscape.

He was angry and short-tempered. He had no tolerance for anything, drove fast, listened to dark music, and talked war.

He was here physically, but still over there mentally.

He lied continually. He was secretive, sad, and had more than one nightmare nightly. He combined sleeping pills with alcohol. He lost weight. He was angry with God.

He would leave the house many times a day with no explanation.

He has developed a habit of not being completely truthful. He has pursued emotional and physical relationships outside of our marriage.

At social events and in public, he was on the lookout, always on guard watching the crowd.

He often cries in his sleep.

Wounded Warrior, Wounded Home is written for those whose lives are connected to the life and service of a combat veteran. The home front needs the hope found in the voices of real families living victoriously in the aftermath of war and the signature wounds of the present conflicts: post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. We, the spouses and family members who love and live with these combat veterans, navigate a road with unfamiliar dangers no one prepared us to face. Military marriages, extended families, churches, and entire communities come under stress when they can no longer find the sense of “normal” they had before.

My husband suffered quietly and I, in my naïveté, ignored the signs for way too long. Society, the government, and the VA systematically ignored PTSD in the '60s and '70s. It left the combat vets with the unspoken message “Just get over it.” When he first came home from Vietnam, he spoke freely of the country and the people, not necessarily about the battles, but as time wore on and people began to shun him, he stopped talking. Then people stopped asking and avoided the issue. Then he began to stuff it and went twenty years or more without wanting to talk about it at all.

I have the privilege of co-authoring this book with my friend and mentor, Kelly Orr, PhD, a clinical psychologist and Vietnam veteran. *Wounded Warrior, Wounded Home* is a combination of research and vetted stories about today’s military spouses, parents, children, and grandparents—heroes on the home front who deal with the fallout of PTSD and TBI (traumatic brain injury). The story of my own special operations family’s journey of faith

through multiple combat deployments, which resulted in severe and chronic post-traumatic stress and extensive, multiple, moderate traumatic brain injuries, is the narrative thread that weaves together a book of hope and healing.

I believe the aftermath of war is a battle fought *and won* on the home front. We, the spouses, children, family, and friends of United States service members, urgently need to understand the warrior's heart and to arm ourselves with the biblical truth necessary to heal from combat-related stress at home.

When a veteran suffers from post-traumatic stress and/or traumatic brain injury, every member of his or her immediate family experiences the effects and, in many cases, suffers what is known as secondary acute stress. This secondary traumatic stress resembles the universal and potentially complicated process of grief. Spouses, parents, and children of warriors pass through phases of shock and confusion, hurt, anger, guilt, fatigue, fear, and finally, acceptance.

Even with faith, courage, and the discernment to apply God's promises to a very dark situation, the results of war can be emotionally scarred homes, major depression, addictive behavior, substance abuse, divorce, or suicide. However, with accurate biblical guidance, targeted prayer, professional Christ-honoring counseling and resources, informed community and church support, these same individuals and families can find hope, healing, and wholeness.

I believe a better PTSD is possible. At the start, PTSD is a viral "pestilence that stalks in the darkness" and as a result every member of the veteran's family experiences the "pain of the shattered dream." However, each of us reaches a fork in the road, a place where we must decide whether to stay stuck or to press forward toward the light. I have decided not to let this portion of my journey be the end of my joy. I remind myself frequently that this shadowed part of the path is not my permanent address. To me, PTSD has come to mean we are "passing through someplace dark." I believe

that PTSD, plus the power of God, can become something much different: “peace in the shadow of the Divine,” a place where our Wounded Healer waits with outstretched arms.

It is my prayer that *Wounded Warrior, Wounded Home* will guide you in constructing your own plan for physical, emotional, and spiritual wholeness, will honor you for your personal sacrifice and service to your nation, and will inspire you to re-engage in compassionate service in your community as a part of your own healing.

While I can’t yet say I’m thankful for the war, I can say I’m thankful that I’m not alone. There are millions of us whose lives are connected to a combat veteran. To date, 1.5 million troops have fulfilled 3 million deployment billets to Iraq and Afghanistan. Most service members have served at least two and some as many as nine combat tours of duty. This operational tempo translates to exponential demands on the home front and compounded effects of war on the warrior. Between 30 and 40 percent of returning veterans today show symptoms of PTSD or report conditions of TBI.⁶ TRICARE, the military health care provider, reports that troops and their family members make and keep 100 thousand appointments for mental health care daily.⁷

Since 2000, traumatic brain injury has been diagnosed in about 180,000 service members, the Pentagon says. But some advocates for patients say thousands more have suffered undiagnosed brain injuries. A RAND study in 2008 estimated the total number of service members with TBI to be about 320,000.⁸

Each service member’s war experiences and injuries *directly impact at least three and as many as ten immediate family members and friends*. This means that at least 4.5 million and as many as 15 million close family members and friends are deeply impacted by combat stress, PTSD, and/or TBI from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan alone. This figure does not include the lingering effects of war on the families of World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, or the first Persian Gulf War veterans.

History tells us that you and I aren't odd, crazy, or the anomaly. In fact, post-combat deployment experiences on the home front are the rule rather than the exception. "Scholars have determined that during the 5,600 years of written history, 14,600 wars have been waged, that is two or three wars for every year." This doesn't take into consideration the countless battles and wars that didn't have a decisive outcome that could be determined by the experts. The number of family members who have loved and lived with history's combat veterans is immeasurable. It would be simpler to count those who have not had direct military experience. In other words, there are more folks who understand and can relate to our challenges than folks who blink back at us with nothing to say or offer. Based on recorded history, we who have been directly or indirectly touched by war and its aftermath are not alone—not now, not ever.

He can't seem to concentrate or focus. He easily switches from one activity to another. He will rake leaves for ten minutes, then go to the garden to pull weeds, then leaves that to take on another "necessity." Even when he sits in his chair to read, something else will come to his mind and he'll jump up.

His driving is erratic. He swerves to avoid something in the road that most people would simply drive over.

He has been hospitalized for suicidal ideation and an actual attempt.

When he gets really angry, I can see fear in his eyes.

Our sons learned early on to ask, "Is this a good day or a bad day, Daddy?"

The bravest people I know are the women who agreed to share their stories with us for the purposes of this book. They are people

like you, who are on a similar journey from combat stress toward individual and family wholeness. We are grateful for their courage and transparency. We also appreciate the generous input of various credentialed professionals and organizations that contributed to the accuracy of the clinical content.

I'm also thankful to know God is in control. The best news is that we serve a Savior who sympathizes with us and stands near to help us. Jesus invited the disciple who doubted to touch His hands and side. The nail prints in His hands and the scar under His heart were wounds of warfare in the ultimate battle He fought for our souls. Jesus said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."¹⁰ His words were an invitation to believe, to trust the only one whose battle wounds can heal those of all others. Jesus extends the same invitation today to scarred warriors and their families: to reach out in faith and touch the Christ who bore in His body on the cross all the injuries we cause one another, both seen and unseen.

Jesus knows a warrior's heart and can make it whole again. He also recognizes the cry of the warrior's family. Our Warrior, who was wounded for our ultimate protection and freedom, has promised to present us perfect, complete, and spot free to our heavenly Father one day.¹¹

I hate what war did and still does to my family. Yet I am committed to finding the growth, the good, and the hidden gifts that God alone can reveal over time. I invite you to travel with me on a road toward a new PTSD: Peace in the shadow of the Divine.



Wounded Warrior, Wounded Home

The Wound

Do you see it?
It's there, right here.
People don't get it. What do they think we do?
Do they even have a clue?
I doubt it.

Sometimes I think they're the lucky ones.
I know that's not really true but
You see theirs; people get theirs.

Here it is again.
You still can't see it?
It's the misplaced anger
The harsh look
The tense-fired reply
The unbridled rage
The rigid stance

The misunderstanding
The lack of compassion
The blind eye to . . .

It's easier for them.
They're finished with all of this.
They can look down and remember
Without pain.

My pain is endless
My pain will never be finished.

Does it get better?
Better than what?
I've endured this pain for years.
It becomes more difficult each time because
It mixes with the past
The past anger, the past hurts,
The past rejections, the past pains
It's all so complicated
The dream, where did it go?

The shrapnel pierced the helmet.
The IED pierced the armor.
The bullet pierced the head.
A family mourns.
A father is dead.

You still don't see it? Amazing.
I give up.
So fresh. So obvious.
To me.
It's the wound in my heart.

Judy S. Jordan, MD

No one sees the worry that weighs my heart down today; but it's there. The vital organ designed to pump life through my body is reduced to a sad sack of stones today. It hangs so low

inside my chest that it tugs on my lungs and makes breathing no longer involuntary.

No one sees the lead in my legs either, but it's there. I am not *running* errands today; I am trudging, inching, slugging my way around town trying to check a few boxes off my to-do list, which because of my heavy heart and leaden legs has become an I-can't-put-these-things-off-any-longer-must-do list.

No one sees the grief growing in my gut or the sorrow sprawling across my soul or the panicked emotions that claw at my inner self.

We took our son to the airport yesterday. My husband, our youngest daughter, and I walked him as far as security where we had to say our goodbyes. I thought that no one would see this either. The TSA employee at the entrance to the line must have seen the tension across my brow. She must have noticed how I hugged my son differently, how I kissed his cheek repeatedly with intention, how I handed him a sealed handwritten letter and reluctantly pulled myself away. She tried to comfort me by telling me that my son would be home for Christmas break before I knew it.

My husband politely told her he was going to war, not to college. She responded with a loud "Oh, Jesus!" that only a middle-aged African American woman can belt out. She quickly followed her exclamation with an announcement, "In the name of Jesus, he will come home safely!" The dozen travelers in line around my son looked our direction. Her proclamation silenced the zipping and unzipping of carry-ons and stilled the slipping off of shoes and belts for a few surreal seconds. I could tell by their expressions and the eye contact a few of them bravely made with me that all of our varied lives, backgrounds, and travel plans were not as important as this intersection of clarity.

My son was the only one who did not look in our direction. He marched on smartly through security, put his shoes on and slipped his belt back through its loops. Then he turned toward us, lifted his opened hand in a motionless wave of goodbye and paused. He

didn't tear up. He didn't smile. He lowered his hand, turned, and joined the travelers flowing through the Dallas/Fort Worth terminals.

That's when I heard it. That's when I heard the sound of the son-shaped piece of me being torn from the fabric of my heart. No one else heard the rend. No one else saw the fissure. I stood there, lost and looking for the faith to put one foot in front of the other to walk upright out of the airport.

I headed back to the car arm in arm with my daughter Jenna. We wiped away hot tears, walking beside my husband, Mark, a disabled combat veteran of the wars in the Balkans and Iraq. His face was tight. Few know the fear and feelings of a veteran father who must send his only son into a war his generation didn't finish. We drove home in an awkward silence as Fort Worth awakened to a typically quiet Sunday morning.

"You never know what's really going on in people's cars, do you." Mark's comment stirred the quiet. I wondered what was going on in my husband's head as we followed the curling cloverleaf highway that split to the left. A pickup truck with too much testosterone cut us off. We swerved. Mark laid on his horn. I closed my eyes and defaulted to the Lamaze breathing techniques I learned twenty-five years ago. I remembered how Joshua's first deployment to Afghanistan just last year had triggered my husband's post-traumatic stress disorder before, during, and after our son's eight-month stint. The nightmares and flashbacks of events from his own deployments to Operation Iraqi Freedom mixed with a father's love for his son were a dangerous combination for an entire year.

We weaved our way through a sleepy Fort Worth, taking the potholed side roads back to the house. The trek reminded me of the best definition I've heard for traumatic brain injury¹: the "interstate" is closed and the "driver" must find detours and shortcuts to arrive at the destination.

I blinked back the realization that the coming year might be a messy rerun, not only for Mark, but for the entire circle of our

family and close friends who have endured the dirty bombs of PTSD and TBI on our home front for nearly a decade.

PTSD and TBI are acronyms that weren't included in the Militairese 101 syllabus that Uncle Sam issued to new military spouses in the early '80s. Combined with his two broken legs, broken back, neck, nose, and blown-out ear drum, these two war wounds were the deciding factors that maxed out my husband's 100 percent disability rating at the time of his retirement. (When I share this list of service-related injuries and conditions, he frequently reminds me not to leave out the hemorrhoids.)

PTSD and TBI are the signature wounds of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are referred to as the invisible wounds of war. However, just because something is invisible doesn't mean it isn't there. And its existence can have a profound impact on the quality of our lives.

We depend on many things every day that our eyes cannot see: air that fills our lungs, gravity that keeps our feet, cars, and buildings anchored to the ground, and music that lifts our spirits. If we could see the electromagnetic activity that makes our smart phones smart, our heads would swim.

One might conclude that, in the case of air, gravity, and cyberspace, invisibility is a gracious act of the Creator, a loving selectivity that reduces the visual stimuli we must navigate every day. But what about the dark side of invisibility? What about the unseen dangers and dilemmas that our eyes cannot detect like salmonella, E.coli, and carbon monoxide? If we could see the microbes that float and piggyback their way into our nostrils and mouths from everyday activities, we probably would wear latex gloves and face masks 24/7 and never drive through for a burger again.

Technically, germs aren't invisible at all. More accurately, they are *inconspicuous*. Like PTSD and TBI, they are *invisible* only in that they are not readily seen by those not trained or equipped to detect them. They are *inconspicuous* because they are concealed.

Time and proximity to the traumatized survivor remove the camouflage. Eventually, these invisible wounds are “seen” by those of us who love and live with our veterans. The damage on deep, hidden levels bubbles to the surface and becomes evident.

Pain of the Shattered Dream

While he was still on active duty my husband’s invisible wounds continued to whisper. After several more combat deployments, his wounds were hemorrhaging and demanding to be seen and treated. Mark was diagnosed with chronic and severe PTSD, and a few years later more tests confirmed that Mark had incurred multiple and extensive traumatic brain injuries from his combat service. In some respects, it helped to know what we were dealing with as a couple and as a family. Finding the name for a cluster of disturbing symptoms is always a relief of sorts to the one who suffers and for his closest family and friends. It gave us an initial fresh dose of hope that we could find a way to make things better. Yet the comfort of the diagnosis was bittersweet; we were still faced with shattered dreams.

In his book *Shattered Dreams*, Larry Crabb boldly states what we all have thought on occasion but kept to ourselves. “Sometimes God seems like the least responsive friend I have. . . . My real problem with God becomes apparent when long-held and deeply cherished dreams are shattered and He does nothing. And these are good dreams, not dreams of riches or fame, but dreams of decent health for those I love and for good relationships among family and friends. . . . Live long enough, and dreams important to you will shatter. Some will remain shattered. God will not glue together the pieces of every Humpty Dumpty who takes a great fall in your life.”² Crabb spends the next nineteen chapters explaining that until we learn to see things rightly, “things” being God and the dreams He allows to shatter, we will stay stuck in a dark place

faced with the greatest temptation of all, the temptation to lose hope in God.

I began to see things rightly at my first counseling appointment. Mark and I both knew that something was terribly wrong on the home front, but were not able to find the source of the problem on our own. I suggested that we go to counseling to find some answers. At the time, he was serving as the Director of Operations at Naval Special Warfare Group TWO, training, manning, and deploying and redeploying hundreds of SEALs to two war fronts between his own multiple deployments. His schedule was bursting at the seams, and he was adamant that the problem was mine, not ours, and certainly not his. I knew that if I didn't find some help soon, my own sanity and our marriage and home life would implode. I was in a dark place, faced with the greatest temptation of all, the temptation to lose hope in God. I walked into my first counseling session not sure what I would find, a bit embarrassed to have sunk so low that I needed mental health care, but desperate for any help.

I had dreaded the exhausting process of bringing a total stranger up to speed on my life. We were years deep into this mess. We had wandered so long inside this maze that I was convinced no one could ever find us. Yet somehow I knew that if I didn't allow the wounds to be reopened, irrigated, scraped, and allowed to regenerate new life that the injuries would turn gangrenous and we'd be done. I explained to my newfound "best friend" that not only had my husband changed since returning from combat, but that I, too, had changed. I told her that I was worried about myself and concerned for my own sanity. I described to her my constant confusion, my jumpiness, my short fuse, my difficulty sleeping, and my bouts with uncontrollable sobbing.

With a quivering chin, I timidly whispered, "Is PTSD contagious?"

She sighed and sent a sympathetic, knowing smile in my direction. I fully expected her to find humor in my naïve question and to reassure me that PTSD was certainly not infectious.

“Yes, you could say that PTSD is contagious.” Her answer made me lightheaded. “Everyone who lives with a traumatized person is affected and can begin to speak and behave in ways that mirror his words and actions.”

I swallowed hard.

“You are experiencing what’s called acute stress, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue.”³

I was a doe in the headlights. “How long have I got, Doc?”

One morning, while feeling particularly down, I curled up on the couch and just sat there thinking. I realized that I was letting my husband’s mood be the pendulum for how I would feel that day. It was like I couldn’t even be myself. If my husband was angry and withdrawn, I had trouble focusing on anything I needed to do that day. If I felt unloved by him, I felt like I must have done something wrong and that it was somehow my fault.

I found myself completely spacing out and not able to focus on a single task. I was so overwhelmed I couldn’t think straight.

I was driving one day and swerved to miss a fast-food bag. I’ve always had some issues with being hypervigilant, even before I met my husband, but after being together for a while, I found myself taking on his behaviors, especially with driving.

I try to avoid being by myself.

The anxiety I felt was fed by the overwhelming feelings of helplessness, fearfulness, and preoccupation with trauma. It caused me to experience breathing difficulties, numbness, appetite changes. I lost thirty pounds in the first year. I couldn’t sleep. I withdrew. I couldn’t think straight or make a simple

decision. I lost all self-esteem and experienced a roller coaster of anger and rage.

On my son's birthday I reminded myself all day to call him as I was working feverishly to finish my final assignment in a very difficult college course. I was so exhausted after finishing my assignment, I fell asleep. I forgot! What kind of mother doesn't call her son? I felt like the worst mother in the world. When I realize I have forgotten something, it makes me feel less of a person, messed up from the stress I did NOT ask for. I have to constantly ask myself, what am I doing? What am I supposed to be doing? God, help, please. Help me remember the little things and the big things.

I was driving down the road one day, my mind racing over a thousand different things, and I realized that I was having a difficult time breathing. I just couldn't seem to take a deep breath. I felt lightheaded.

Before our first session ended, my counselor reassured me that trauma was not terminal; however, if left untreated it could wreak havoc on our marriage, our children, our mental and physical health, and most importantly our faith.

I would have preferred that my husband join me in counseling so that together we could find answers and healing. For his own reasons, which I now respect, he was not ready. So I flew solo and continued weekly counseling for two years. Occasionally, on the days Mark knew I had been to an appointment, he would say, "So, did your counselor tell you to divorce me yet?"

The opposite was true. My counselor helped me to see our situation objectively. She assured me that I was not losing my mind. She gave me the tools I needed to interact at home in healthy, life-giving ways. She prayed with me, asking God to give me the courage to put the biblical counsel into practice.

I didn't want to just put a bandage on the problem. Given the choice between merely minimizing the impact of PTSD on our family versus trusting God in agreement with other believers for protection of our hearts and home, I chose the miraculous over the minimal.

The guidance and information I gleaned from several years of individual counseling formed a foundation on which I could more confidently stand. From this foundation, I opened my heart and extended my hands and began sharing our story. A sisterhood around the world was awakened as one by one, women whose lives are connected to a combat veteran began to respond.

One of the most difficult aspects of walking through someplace dark has been my feelings of being isolated and alone. I almost feel crippled in some ways because it has been very difficult to reach out for help and counsel. I am afraid others will judge us if and when I share. There have even been times when my husband or I have shared with others intimate details of some of our struggles and no one seemed to want to walk with us on our journey. We feel rejected in a way.

Running Toward Running Away

After multiple combat deployments to the Balkans in the late '90s and to Iraq from 2003 to 2006, my husband announced he was done. He made the decision in February to retire and by April we were civilians for the first time in more than twenty years. He didn't have to say it, but I knew from several years of observing him that he was trying desperately to leave behind the military, the wars, and their unrelenting pain for him and for our family. The nightmares, night sweats, and insomnia were the first clues. Then one margarita became two or three. Fits of rage and disproportionate anger triggered by a household with three teens were red flags. Disturbing

reactions to certain sights and smells that derailed long-awaited family outings and vacations sounded alarms on the home front. His words and actions contradicted the love I knew he had for us. I knew that his behavior sprang from the indescribable memories that threatened to take his mind and spirit captive.

His were not the words and actions of the man I had married twenty-two years earlier. A certain darkness had crept over him, over our family, over the sweetness and safety of our home, all of which we had dedicated to the Lord with all of our hearts at the outset. That shadow was heavy with the stench and palpable darkness of war and its aftermath.

He couldn't drive fast enough. He couldn't get Virginia Beach and, more specifically, Naval Special Warfare out of his rearview mirror soon enough. In July our family of five left the white sands of Virginia Beach and rocketed across West Virginia, the southernmost tips of Indiana and Illinois, and into Kansas. Our rising high school senior sweat through the fever spikes of mononucleosis in the backseat and our Sheltie, the only eager one in the vehicle, panted with bad breath at my side. In strained silence, we traveled through the Appalachians, slipped through the arches at sunset in St. Louis, and killed swarms of yellow grasshoppers with our windshield for what seemed an eternity through the cornfields of Kansas. The accumulated anxieties of several years hounded us all the way to the border of Colorado.

We stopped at the Colorado state border. A pathetic, rickety sign with faded letters announced: Welcome to Colorful Colorado. Drained and pale from traveling mach speed in the dead of summer, the kids and I looked at one another. *Colorful?* The sky was milky, overcast, gray. The fields were covered in dead brown knee-high grass. There wasn't a green tree in sight. *Colorful?*

The state's welcome sign mocked and stung my heart. It added insult to injury. Our hearts longed for light, ached for vivid colors, for any signs of life outwardly and inwardly. After taking a few

awkward pictures, we piled back into the Suburban. My husband floored it across the eastern plains of Colorado toward our new home, Colorado Springs.

Flat, flat, flat. Where were the grand Rocky Mountains? Where were the rolling foothills with waving wildflowers to welcome us like the ones in our Colorado calendar? I was getting worried that perhaps Mark had taken a wrong turn in his hurry to leave a quarter-century of service and sacrifice behind him.

For hours, I watched for mountain peaks to erupt on the western horizon. I imagined Colorado Springs would be flowing with . . . well, springs. Surely there would be springs of clear mountain water bubbling and giggling over smooth boulders through wide meadows of lush green grass, where we could dip our toes into refreshing waters surrounded by the heavenly grandeur of the Rockies.

More than this, we longed for springs of hope where we could find refreshment and renewal of strength for the journey, for springs of healing where we could wash the invisible wounds of war from our minds and spirits. Finally, as we crested the high plains of northeastern Colorado Springs, Pikes Peak and all her sisters, snow-dusted even in July, came into view. The mile-long wall of formidable, breathtaking summits punctured the earth's surface in the west. But the mountains did not offer the hoped-for refreshment. Later that day, after we had checked into our extended-stay hotel, I took my Sheltie out in the field. I let him off his leash and I sat on the hard ground. I was accompanied only by several scrawny, thirsty black-eyed Susans, bent over to the ground by the cutting wind. I pulled the hood of my sweatshirt up over my head, drew my knees to my chest, and had a stare-down with the Front Range. I looked up at her and she glared down at me.

The tears found their way from deep inside my wounded heart and spilled down my cheeks. I rested my forehead on my knees and sobbed. My dog nuzzled his way under my arm and into my embrace, sensing my need for company and comfort.

I embraced him and found the will to look again at the Front Range. How could something so treacherous, so inhospitable, be so attractive, I wondered. Likewise, could anything of beauty be found in this harsh, inhospitable environment of trauma and combat stress? I whispered a prayer to God, asking Him where He was in all of this.

Military life had not been easy even in peacetime. And yet we had learned its rhythms and had adapted to its demands for more than two decades. Even through real-world operations and several wars, our family had managed . . . until now. We were now facing new challenges that seemed insurmountable. I asked God if this was the end of the road for my marriage, for our family, for my hopes, and even for my faith.

Cold Shadows and Living Water

It was in Colorado Springs, at the referral of our new family doctor, that we finally sought counseling as a couple. Kelly Orr, PhD, a Christian psychologist and Vietnam veteran, equipped us to see the darkness of PTSD in a different light. In the safety of several sessions, we saw the first hint that perhaps, just maybe, God was up to something good in our lives. Even though it looked like the dead end for our dreams, God, through our own times in His Word and through the counsel of Christian medical professionals, let us know that He would be faithful to keep us as the apple of His eye, that He would hide us in the shadow of His wings.⁴ Dr. Orr reassured me that as I prepared the way for the Lord, made straight paths for Him, that every valley would be filled in, every mountain and hill would be made low. The crooked roads would become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind would see God's salvation.⁵ It was in Dr. Orr's office, in the loving counsel and compassion of one who had "been there," that I got my first sip of hope from the springs of Living Water. I had found strength for the journey that still loomed ahead of us.

I finally knew that even as I passed through the valley of the shadow of death, I could do so without fear because the living God was with me no matter what. All He asked was that I trust Him daily. Three years and many “aha” moments later, I asked Dr. Orr if he would consider coauthoring a book with me to encourage and equip family members of combat veterans to see their situation and themselves rightly as he helped me to do. His hesitant yes both humbled and honored me. We have penned this book in tandem, believing God wants military families to know that what looks like the end of the road is really an opportunity for Him to work, for the invisible God to be revealed, and for His enemies to be crushed under the feet of our faith in Him.

God’s tender love and nearness expressed through His people and His Word have changed the way I view PTSD and its effect on families. He continues to correct the way I see war’s aftermath on the home front. I saw things more clearly on a recent trip to Washington, DC. While there, we decided to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, known as The Wall, before sunset.

The designer of The Wall, Maya Ying Lin, purposely chose black granite for the memorial’s stone mirrorlike surface when it is polished. It reflects the images of the surrounding shade trees, grassy hills, and proud monuments. What she may or may not have intended is how it changed the way I see things. As I strolled with my daughter past panel after panel filled with individual sacrifices, I saw myself. A mirror image of myself stared back at me from behind the engraved names. My reflection was superimposed over and behind and between hundreds of names. As I strolled, my life touched theirs and theirs mine from one end of The Wall to the other. Their service and their sacrifice were not solo. Nor did their lives and loss touch only the men with whom they fought. Their lives were part of my reflection and therefore part of me. My daughter and I stood there, the spouse and daughter of a combat veteran, reflected by, swallowed by, and

sent by The Wall, to give voice to the countless casualties of war that still live.

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you noticed any changes in your service member's behavior or personality or habits since his/her return from war? If so, what changes have you noticed?
2. Describe one or two incidents or scenarios that *first* alerted you to changes in your service member.
3. Do you feel comfortable talking openly with your service member about his/her symptoms or struggles? If not, why?
4. Has he/she sought professional medical help or counseling services for PTSD concerns? If not, why not?
5. Would you describe your service member's symptoms as mild, moderate, or severe?
6. In your opinion, is your service member's condition improving since his/her return? If not, please explain.
7. In your own words, how does a vet's post-traumatic stress symptoms affect his/her spouse, children, and extended family members?
8. What has been the most difficult aspect of this challenge for you (feeling isolated and alone, lack of reliable information or resources, anger, sadness, fear, feeling unsafe, domestic violence, self-medicating or substance abuse, addictive behavior, helplessness, etc.)?