

WOULD YOU
DIE
FOR ME

PATRICK IRISH

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Would You Die For Me

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Contents

Prologue	7
1 The Forerunning Season	9
2 Surviving the Winds of Change	29
3 Becoming Her Brother's Keeper	45
4 The Beast Within	65
5 Blind Vision	81
6 Where Does the Rainbow End?	101
7 Who Am I?	129
8 Drops of Dark Reign	167
9 Worlds Apart	209
10 A Violent Shade of Green	227
11 The Awakening	241

Prologue

Twenty-two years old, I stood in a place I had never been before, a broken body that seemed so frail and beyond repair. Glancing upward, between parted hair that hung from my head, only to see with eyes unable to glimpse any possible redemption. My posture told a thousand stories as my head sunk between my shoulders. Not even my tears could wipe away all the pain that had so easily intruded upon my life. My feet felt like concrete, and my voice cracked beyond recognition. I could no longer hold on as swelling drops of anguish slid down the side of my face. The beat of my own heart echoed as its remains shattered against my chest. It was at that moment I knew my life was in ruins. As I searched my soul for any remnant of my former self, I found only leftovers from a life so short-lived. What could God possibly want with that?

I would dare say that my story is like many others, told by a man that was brought to nothing and left with everything. I was lost, searching for a life that would fill the void deep inside. It all started years ago, living in a small house with my father, mother, and my sister Abigail. Sundays were just another Saturday and sleeping in came naturally. It was the family as I knew it and the hope of my future lay in their hands. Soon a division arose between my parents, and they severed their marital ties. Because I was a young boy, this caused me to make some most unfortunate decisions that would continually haunt me. Instead of reaching out, I reached inward to find a place where childhood dreams ended and darkness began.

It would be easy for me to blame my past problems on everyone around me and say that I was nothing more than a product of my environment, but even I knew the difference. As I grew, my problems grew with me. I no longer felt the protection of being

a child but rather the comfort of something evil from within. As a youth, my mind became distorted with demonic pledges and endless nightmares. I was hiding in the dark corners of the street, waiting for that fulfillment to satisfy my rage. Violence streamed through my veins as adrenaline found its way to a criminal mind. Waking in the morning, I wondered whose blood was on my shirt. I had hands that showed no mercy and a conscience that held no remorse.

I had a father that worked to support his family, a stepmother that didn't know who she was, and a secret that left me in a padded room with four white walls. I quickly found that insanity only made my sleep sweeter and the day longer. Hate had settled in early on, and suicide had become me. The core of my anger was a bottomless pit and the voices that spoke to me no longer made sense. I had traveled to the edge of hell and back only to find the true torment that awaited me. I was falling faster than I could catch myself, yet when all hope had failed and life was letting go, something most unexpected began to happen.

The amazing thing about time is that it holds so tight, but seems to always let go. It is uncontrollable, yet if managed, can give endless possibilities.

—Patrick Irish

1

The Forerunning Season

Early 1968, smoke filled the air, and the smell of napalm covered the trees. Fields of rice gave way to workers set in motion. The known were unknown, and the shadows of day were at hand. One man, amongst many others, traveled from bloody skies to sickened plains. He was painting the very footsteps of history. His name was John Michael Irish, known to many as Johnny. He had been taken from the freedom of youth and given to the horrors of war.

Standing five feet ten inches, medium build and reddish-blond hair, John Irish had recently survived the Battle of Hill 875 in Dak To, Vietnam. He was serving another tour with the 173rd Airborne Brigade as a flight medic.

“Take off at 1300 hours, boys!” The call had come through for another support run to drop off more men into heavy Vietcong territory. The sun was out in its fullest, and the heat of the day spared not a soul as John headed toward the band of four helicopters preparing to take off. “Irish, you’re up front with me, Jones is out sick,” said Lieutenant Anderson. Firmly grasping his helmet, Johnny sat wide-eyed as hopes of survival pierced the air. Switch after switch, engines started and rotors turning, liftoff.

“Never gets old,” said John with vibrations in his voice.

Grabbing some quick altitude and banking hard left, with the unmistakable sound of blades chopping through the air—**THUMP, THUMP, THUMP**— this fleet of Huey helicopters was heading toward the jungle tops. Piloting the way was Lieutenant

Anderson, a handsome young pilot, with short black hair and an eye for the sky. Having spent most of his time back in the States raising exotic birds, it was only fitting he was given the nickname Birdman. Always carrying a picture of his white cockatoo in his front pocket, he had fully earned his wings. The lieutenant and John had flown together many times, they knew each other's routine and just what to expect.

Leading the pack and with only five minutes into flight and still clicks away from the landing zone, shots rang out from the jungle floor—*rat-tat-tat-tat-tat*.

"Man, I hate this part," said John.

Pulling back on the stick, Lieutenant Anderson said, "Well, let's just see if we can get above this." When it seemed they were clear and the only sound they heard was the comfort of their steel horse—PING, PING, PING—the pilot yelled, "Were taking fire, were taking fire!" Moments later and still doing their best to stay their course, the lieutenant looks over at John and says, "Irish, you're pale as a ghost! Are you hit?" Unbeknownst to John, a bullet had gone up through the lower front of the helicopter through a small Plexiglas window and lodged into his left shoulder.

"I don't know, but my arms..." John then began to come in and out of consciousness.

"Phillips! Get up here, Irish is passing out!" One of the medics reached up to check on him.

"I'm...I'm okay, Phillips, I just can't move my left arm."

"Let me see, Johnny,"

"Lieutenant, he's been shot! And he's losing a lot of blood from his shoulder!" The lieutenant didn't answer, "Lieutenant Anderson! I said he's losing a lot of blood, he's not going to—"

"I heard you, Phillips, I'm thinking!"

"Were almost there, we will have to patch him up on the ground and take him back with us." Grabbing a field dressing from his bag, Phillips pressed down and held pressure onto Irish's shoulder, "Hold on Johnny, hold on."

Would You Die For Me

“There’s the smoke grenade, I’m taking it down! Irish, are you still with us?” said the lieutenant.

Shivering, he said, “Yeah...body’s just getting cold.”

“Phillips, as soon as we land, get him in the back and get an IV in him.”

“Yes, sir!”

Rotors coming to a slow roar, two soldiers came running up to the Huey. One was a tall muscular staff sergeant and the other was a medium-built, slightly thin private, “Sir, I’m Staff Sergeant Guinn and this is Private Lozano, we are with Bravo Company.” Pointing with his finger, he said, “Were taking heavy fire just over those hills!” Lieutenant Anderson said, “I know, we just passed through it and one of my medics got shot! Do you have any docs out here?”

“Yeah, we’ve got a small makeshift hospital about two hundred yards west, deep in the bush. It’s not much, but we can help you get him there.”

Looking in the back, Lieutenant Anderson said, “Phillips, how’s he doing?” Having removed John’s shirt and stacking more dressings upon already blood-soaked wraps, he added “This bullet needs to come out, or he’s gonna bleed to death!”

“Then we carry him now! Staff Sergeant Guinn, radio ahead and tell them were heading their way.”

Speaking to the rest of the soldiers in the helicopter, Lieutenant Anderson said, “You, men, follow the other three units over those hills and give Bravo Company some back up!” “Phillips and I are taking Irish.” Getting John on a stretcher from the Huey, the four men carried him into the tree line and deep into the bush.

“It’s this way!” said Staff Sergeant Guinn.

Becoming a little winded, the lieutenant asked, “Staff Sergeant Guinn, how long have you boys been out here?”

“Almost two weeks. It was supposed to be a routine recon mission but turned into an onslaught about three days ago. We had been up and down this tree line multiple times and out of

nowhere, Vietcong were everywhere. Digging deep, we took out as many as possible and managed to push them back over the hill but lost our fair share of men in the process.”

Changing the subject, Lieutenant Anderson looked over at Private Lozano and said, “Private Lozano, right?”

“Yes, sir!”

“How long you been in Nam?” asked the lieutenant.

“I got here three weeks ago, sir, drafted straight out of high school.”

Smiling, the lieutenant said, “Newbie! I remember those days. Well, if I could give any advice, it would be to find a good reason to keep yourself alive.”

Private Lozano quickly replied, “Yes, sir! I have a very good reason, it’s my high school sweetheart, been dating since we were fifteen. Most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen, dark black hair, lovely smile. Plan on marrying her as soon as I get back!”

Lightly laughing, the lieutenant said, “Sounds like you got a keeper!” Looking over at Guinn, he said, “Staff Sergeant Guinn, how about you?”

Turning his head back slightly, he said, “I got seven weeks and three days left until I’m on that last flight home!”

Looking down at Staff Sergeant Guinn’s biceps, the lieutenant said, “With guns like that, I’m curious to know what you did before the war?”

“Oh, I played a little college football, but when the draft happened, I wanted to serve, so I volunteered.”

Phillips spoke up. “Man, that’s pretty commendable.”

Guinn said, “I didn’t think it was fair, me being in college and all, especially knowing our boys were laying down their lives over here.”

Lieutenant Anderson said, “What’s your plan when you get back, more football?”

Raising his eyebrows, Staff Sergeant Guinn said, “Sir, there’s a lot more to me than football. Having seen enough death to last

Would You Die For Me

a lifetime, I plan on finishing my degree and start saving some lives instead!”

After a bumpy but secure stretcher ride, they had managed to carry John to a small station of three tents. “It’s the one to the left,” said Staff Sergeant Guinn.

Going through the green rolled-back canvas door, one of the medics inside pointed saying, “Put him over there! Hey, Doc, we’ve got another wounded.”

As the lieutenant reassured Irish, he looked at the field doctor and said, “I’m Lieutenant Anderson with the 173rd, this is Irish, one of my flight medics that was shot on our way out here.”

Taking off some bloody gloves, he responded, “I’m Captain J. Wessels, let me take a look at him.”

Phillips spoke up, “Sir, he’s lost a lot of blood and has been coming in and out of consciousness since we took fire.”

“Let’s get these bandages off and see what we’ve got,” said the captain. Donning some new gloves, he peeled back everything and found the origin of the bleeding. Grabbing some instruments, he told the men around him, “Hold on to him! I need to see if I can reach the bullet.” Looking at John, he said, “Soldier, take a deep breath, now let it out.” With a small surgical instrument, Captain Wessels began to slowly spread apart the tissue.

With clenching teeth, Irish said, “Do you see it?” Blood was rushing out even faster now.

“There it is! I’ve...almost got it.” Clamping down onto the fractured steel bullet, he pulled it out through the skin and threw it into a small white pan. Doc Wessels immediately placed another dressing over the wound and looked at Phillips and said, “Hold pressure and let’s get him back to the chopper and over to the forward support hospital. He’s got some deep arterial bleeding I can’t fix out here.”

Beep...beep...beep, waking to the sound of his own heart beat on the monitor, John found himself in a hospital bed with a nurse

standing next to him. With blurred vision and a scratchy voice, he asked, "Where am I?"

"You're in the hospital and just waking up from surgery. Everything is fine, just rest," said the nurse.

With a deep sigh of relief, he drifted back off to sleep. John Irish soon made a full recovery and finished his tour in Vietnam and returned back the States fully decorated. Having served his country proudly, John Michael Irish did what many soldiers did when returning home, and that was simply try to forget all the pain, suffering, and death they had encountered in Vietnam. Moving forward in his civilian life, he was living in Provo, Utah, and had enrolled into college at Brigham Young University. He had also been working in a local hospital as an orderly to get himself through college.

One day at work, while walking down the hallway in his white uniform and transporting a patient, he looked over by the nurses' station and saw a young woman standing there. She was about five feet tall, petite build, very fair skin with long black hair. John was mesmerized, "Hello," he said as he was moving passed her. She turned around and wasn't even sure who he was talking to. Once John dropped off the patient to their room, he quickly headed back up to see if he could find out who that girl was.

Catching his breath, he asked the nurse at the nurses' station, "Who was that girl that was up here, and where did she go?"

Smirking, she said, "She was up here looking for a friend's room."

He smiled. "Well..."

"Room 317, Johnny, and don't tell anyone I told you!"

John quickly walked away from the desk and quietly yelled back, "You're my favorite nurse, Robin!"

Room 312, 313, 314, 315... The closer he got, the more he straightened up his uniform and made sure his hair was slicked over. Finally room 317...and the door was closed. Nervously standing there, John tried walking back and forth, but knew he couldn't hang out there all day. All of a sudden, the overhead

Would You Die For Me

intercom sounded, “John Irish to the ER. John Irish to the ER.” He had been called to help out with a combative patient in the emergency room. With a sigh of sadness, he looked at the door one more time and ran for the stairs.

Just a few feet from the ER John could hear, “Get off of me! I said, Get off of me!” John slams open the double doors to see a man standing six foot three, at least 250 pounds, throwing multiple staff members around the room.

“John, help them!” yelled out the charge nurse from the corner of the room. He then ran up behind the man, jumped and grabbed him around his neck. Reaching back, the man grabbed John by the top of his shoulders and flipped him over, screaming, “Leave me alone!” THUD. John was slammed straight on his back. As this drug-induced maniac reached down to pick John up by his upper body, three more people jumped on top of him, but not without him literally tearing Johnny’s uniform right off of him.

Seven people and two shots of medications later, they finally took him to the ground and strapped him to a gurney. Standing up and dusting himself off, John turned to the charge nurse and said, “Connie, what in the world was that all about?”

“Sorry, John, we were running out of bodies, and this guy came in with a gash in his foot. And did I mention he was high on PCP? So when Doctor Autrey tried examining him, the man went crazy!”

Looking at his uniform top and tugging at the ripped pocket in front, John said, “Well, so much for my jacket, I think I’ll head over to get a cup of coffee, if you don’t mind.”

On his way out the door, Nurse Connie yelled, “Johnny, I didn’t even ask, are you okay?”

Turning his head back to answer, he smiled and said, “I’ll live, I’ve been through worse.”

Heading down the hallway to the vending machines, John walked up to the coffee dispenser, dug out some change from his pocket, and watched as his cup dropped down and begin

to fill with black coffee. Holding his left hand to his back and stretching, he heard a soft voice from behind him.

“Rough day?”

As if fate could have not been more polite, John turned around to see the young woman from room 317.

Fumbling his words, he said, “Oh...yeah...I was, I mean yes, but—” Then putting his hand out and smiling from ear to ear, he said, “Where are my manners, I’m sorry, my name’s John Irish, but most everyone calls me Johnny...and you are?”

Shaking his hand, she said, “Hi, I’m Laura, Laura Evans. I believe I saw you earlier with a patient upstairs.”

“Yeah, I’m usually all over the hospital.” Raising his eyebrows in interest, John carefully asked, “So, is it miss or missus?”

Smiling, Laura said, “Just miss.”

“Well then Miss Laura, could I offer you a cup of coffee?”

Blushing, she said, “Actually...that would be nice.”

The two then sat down on a little lounge across from the vending machines and spent some time getting to know each other.

The year was 1970 and after months of dating, John and Laura decided to tie the knot. Now Laura had been previously married for a short time and had a daughter from her first marriage. Her name was Abigail and she was just two years old at the time of their wedding. Shortly afterward, John legally adopted Abigail and took her in as his own. Finishing up some classes at the college, John decided the best thing for his family would be for him to reenlist into the army.

Wasn’t long before he was given his first duty station. Sauerkraut and sausage, they were going to Germany. John, Laura, and little Abigail had packed up, hopped on a long flight, and headed overseas. Upon arrival, the first plan of action was to get checked in and then head over to a small home just off post. It was through an elderly couple who John had met through some prior connections to heading to Germany. After some directional confusion of roads, they finally made it. Getting out of the car,

Would You Die For Me

John picked up Abigail as they walked up to the little two-story stone-colored cottage. It had green vines running up the front and sides of the house, with wooden hinge shutters next to the four windows.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK—the door opens. “Mr. Kraus?”

With a warm smile and a German accent, the elderly man says, “Yes, and you must be Mr. Irish from America? And look at your beautiful family.”

Holding Abigail up even a couple inches higher with his arms, John said, “Yes, sir, this is my wife, Laura, and our daughter Abigail.”

“Well come in, come in, but please call me Olof.”

Walking inside, John and Laura saw a humble home, with German décor on the walls and old hardwood floors.

Walking out from the kitchen and into the living room, a woman said, “Hello, I am Asta. I was just finishing up some cakes for after dinner.”

“Hello,” said John and Laura. “Your home is beautiful, Asta,” said Laura.

“Oh, come sit down, and take a rest, I am sure it was a long trip. And who is this darling angel in your arms?” asked Asta.

Looking at Abigail, John said, “This is Abigail, who we also call Abby. Can you tell Mrs. Kraus hi?”

Abigail then lifted her little hand and with the softest voice said, “Hi.”

“Isn’t she gorgeous,” said Asta. Smiling, she added, “Oh my, I completely forgot, let me take you to your rooms and let you get settled in, dinner is almost ready. I am sure Mr. Kraus will help you get your bags from your car, won’t you, Mr. Kraus?”

Smiling back, John said, “Oh no, you won’t. I’ve got it.”

After getting unpacked, John lay down on the bed. “Well, honey, what do you think so far?”

Lying down next to him, she said, “What do I think? I think I love you, Mr. Irish.”

John smiled and said, "Well, I suppose someone's got to."

Lightly hitting him on the shoulder, Laura said, "What does that mean!"

Just then, Mrs. Kraus spoke up from the middle of the stairs, "John, Laura, dinner is ready."

Rubbing his hands over his face, John took a deep breath and sat up. "Come on, let's see what real German food tastes like."

Later that night as everyone was tucked in bed and vastly off to sleep, John stood, looking out the bedroom window.

"Hun, what are you thinking?" said Laura.

"Oh, nothing really, just staring into the darkness." Turning around and walking toward the bed, he said "Come on, let's get some sleep. I saw a little bistro on the way in. I want to take you to tomorrow."

"Good night, Johnny."

"Good night, Laura...and, Laura?"

"Yes?"

Smiling, he said, "I love you too, Mrs. Irish."

Time soon went on and along with it came some most unexpected news.

"So you haven't told him yet?" asked Mrs. Kraus.

"No, I just found out this morning at my doctor's appointment. I've been rehearsing it all day, but I'm not really sure how to tell him."

Mrs. Kraus said, "What's to figure out? Just tell him, my dear." Hearing John's car drive up on the cobblestone driveway, Laura said, "He's here, he's here! Come here, Abby, let's stand by the door and wait for him to walk in." Anxiously standing only a few feet from the door, Laura nervously held on to Abigail's hand. Slowly walking away, Asta says, "I'll be in the kitchen, I believe this calls for some apple strudel!"

One twist of the doorknob and the old wood door began to creak open. Stepping inside, he looked at Laura and Abigail and hesitantly said, "What's...going on?"

Would You Die For Me

“Honey, I...umm...I’m...”

“You’re...what, Laura?”

Uncontrollably ecstatic, Laura blurted out, “I’m pregnant!”

“Are you sure? How far along are you?” asked John.

“Yes, I’m positive, I went to the doctor this morning. I’m four weeks.”

With his mouth wide open, John said while looking at Abigail, “I’m gonna be a daddy again!” He then picked up Abigail by under her arms and swung her around the room and laid her on the floor and tickled her saying, “You’re going to have a little brother or a sister.” Slowly standing back up, he looked at Laura, wrapped his arms around her, kissed her on the lips, and said, “Were going to have a baby!”

Before they knew it, eight months had passed and, along with it, the due date. A matter of fact, almost two weeks past due, it was now Friday afternoon, November 3, 1972, and Laura had decided to go for a short walk a couple houses down and ponder on the fact they still hadn’t decided on a name yet. “Kevin, Jason...oh, I don’t know?” And then it hit her, “Arlynn, his first name will be Arlynn, I’ve always liked that name.” Then in the midst of searching for names, Laura felt a gush of water run down her leg, “Um, Johnny, Johnny!”

Hearing his wife’s voice, he came running out of the house. “My water just broke!” Juggling to see if he had his car keys on him, he yelled “Get in the car, I’ll grab your stuff!”

Laura asked, “What about Abby?”

“Mrs. Kraus has her, just get in the car!”

Moments later—*vroom*—they took off in their little yellow VW bug. Clenching John’s thigh, Laura yelled, “John Irish... DRIVE FASTER!”

“Laura, you’re digging into my leg!”

“I can’t help it! This boy is not waiting!” Making what seemed to be good time on a small two-way street and only minutes away

from the hospital, almost there, John yells out, “Manure!” They were stuck behind a slow moving manure truck.

BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, BEEEEEP. “Get out of the way!” yelled John.

Breathing heavy, Laura said, “John, were not gonna make it!” Moments later, the manure truck turned right onto a dirt road. Shifting down a gear, John hit the gas and zoomed all the way down the road and right up into the emergency room front door. Slamming on the brakes, he jumped out, ran inside, and shouted, “My wife’s in the car, and she’s having a baby!”

“Stretcher!” yelled out an ER nurse.

John started running back to the car while two men were right behind him pushing a gurney. Racing to the car, John opened her door, and they all helped to get Laura onto the stretcher.

After a quick ride down the hallway and straight into one of the ER rooms, Laura rapidly delivered a very plump and healthy little boy. And that little boy was me. Looking at me, she smiled and said, “Arlynn Patrick Irish. His name is Arlynn Patrick Irish.” Taking a deep sigh of relief, my father could not have looked as proud as he did that day. With tears filling his eyes and a soft tremble in his voice, he quietly whispered the words, “I have a son, I really have a son.” Leaning down to kiss his wife on her forehead, he said, “You did it, babe, I love you.” Smiling while trying to catch her breath, she said, “I love you too.”

Days later, we were all back home together, my father, mother, and my sister Abigail. We continued living with Mr. and Mrs. Kraus for a couple more months but then moved into our own rental house. And as with any family, each day presented its own set of challenges, laughs, moments of curiosity, and simple mischief. And I was definitely no exception from eating all day long to eventually climbing the stairs—I was all boy. My mother, whom I would come to mimic in many ways, was a music lover to the core, especially when it came to Elvis Presley and the Bee Gees. Countless hours I would spend, wearing a set of headphones, almost as big as my head, plugged into the radio. And if that

Would You Die For Me

wasn't it, my parents would often find me in the kitchen, having pulled out all the pots and pans and playing what seemed to be my personal version of the Bongos.

As I grew, so did our family. My parents had recently adopted a full-grown German shepherd named Brisco. And as if I wasn't enough of a challenge, getting the dog to eat was even more so. Coming home one day from work and after countless attempts at feeding Brisco, my dad had bought seven different types of dog food. Hands full and walking in the front door, "Hun, I'm home." My mother coming down the stairs, "Did you get the dog food?" "Ya, I'm gonna put it behind the couch on separate plates." So my dad grabbed seven paper plates from the kitchen, loaded each one up with a different type of dog food and carefully placed them behind our couch. Snapping his fingers together and yelling out, "Brisco...Brisco, come here boy!" Brisco soon made it around to the back of the couch, and wouldn't you know it, I was crawling right behind him.

There was some sort of pecking order in the home, Brisco just sat there, while I took the lead. Heading for the first plate, my mother reached down and started picking me up. "He's fine Laura, put him down, let's see what he'll do?" said my father. So my mom put me back down and off I went. Going from one plate to another, eating one morsel at a time, like a human conveyer belt. Strangely, as I went along, so did Brisco right behind me. My parents soon found a dog food Brisco liked, and as for me, I suppose it was only fitting they had nicknamed me "Butterball."

My dad's tour was soon over in Germany and he had received new orders for Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. The year was 1975 and I was almost three years old. We were living the Army life and to be honest, it seemed life was good. My parents were still like two teenagers, madly in love with each other. But like any road in life, sometimes there's a sharp curve, just around the bend. My mother had recently been seeing a doctor for some medical issues for a couple months, and he had put her on some

pain medications. But coming home one day from work, my father decided to look for something in their bedroom closet. What he found instead, was a shoe box full of empty prescription bottles from various doctors. Taking a few minutes to think this through, he knew my mother had been not feeling well, but it was obvious, something else was going on.

From back in the closet, “Hey Hun, where ya at?” said John. “In the kitchen, what’s up?” Picking up the shoe box, he slowly walked into the kitchen, “Laura, what’s this?” Looking at the shoebox and stumbling her words, “Oh...those are old Johnny. It’s nothing, I threw most of those away because they made my stomach sick.” Knowing his wife, he put the shoe box on the counter, walked closer to her, lightly put his hands on both her shoulders and said, “Hun, what’s going on? It’s me Johnny, you know I love you.” She said, “I told you Johnny, it’s nothing. They were prescriptions I had gotten from a few different doctors that were trying to help me. After trying one pill and seeing it made me sick, I threw the rest of the bottle out, that’s why there were so many bottles. Now let me get dinner going, I know you must be starving!” My father knew she had been having some serious mood swings the last few months, but thought it was due to her not feeling well.

After dinner, they both sat down, had a cup of coffee and my dad began talking to my mom in hopes that she would open up. But she persisted to reinforce her story to my father. Now being the logical man that he was, none of her story fully added up. But being her husband and so in love with her at the same time, made this even more difficult. He finally gave her the benefit of the doubt and said, “Okay Laura, but let’s stick to just one doctor at a time and I want to be involved in your healing process.” Getting up from the couch and picking up their coffee cups she said, “Of Course John, like I said, it was nothing.” Watching her walk back into the kitchen, he had hoped he was wrong.

Would You Die For Me

Two years had soon gone by and with it, my mother it seemed, was growing ever so slowly disconnected from the family. Becoming more secretive about her medication endeavors, to why she was coming home so late, became the topic at hand. But my dad was very patient with her and had been counting down the days for a new assignment, hoping a change of scenery would bring new hope. Eventually receiving those new orders for Ft Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina, they set off for a new city and with it, came a new traveling position within the Army.

It was 1977 and I was five years old. We had arrived in Fayetteville and my father began getting oriented to his new job. Now even though this new job called for him to be out in different states from time to time, it was better pay and room for advancement in the Army. After getting settled in and buying their first house together, things seemed to go back to somewhat normal for everyone. My dad would go to work, while my mother stayed home and Abigail and I went to school. Days soon turned into months and before we knew it, a year had gone by.

As normal as she appeared to be, she never seemed to be quite herself after San Antonio. It's hard to say what she got a hold of, or rather, what got a hold of her. Of course there was still the occasional mood swings and fumbling of words, but she usually chalked it up to, "It's that time of the month" or "I didn't sleep very well last night." Never the less, my father stood by her side with love and did his best to keep an eye on things. It wasn't until one night, it seemed things began to catch up with her.

It was Saturday and my dad was in and out of the house all day cleaning while my mom was off visiting a friend. Come evening, she returned home and they both set off for bed. While lying there, my father turned to my mother and said, "Laura, some guy kept calling for you all day and when I asked for his name, he said he'd call back and then hung up. Do you know who he is, because he obviously seems to know you?" Acting irritated, she says, "Those darn salesman from Sears! I was looking at a new fridge

the other day and I told the guy I had to think it over. I'll call him back on Monday." Raising his eyebrows, my dad said, "Strange, I didn't know we needed a new fridge. Laura, my trip to Arizona is coming up and that's for an extended three months. I need to know everything is okay with you and our children before I go?" My mother then sat up in bed, turned on her nightstand lamp and said, "Johnny, listen to me, I love you with all my heart and would never do anything to hurt you or our children. Everything will be fine, I promise."

My father was stuck between providing for his family and saving it at the same time. He really didn't have a choice about going to Arizona, it was part of his job. Laura had agreed to take over the bills and pay everything from home, so my dad could concentrate on work. My father would be living in the barracks, so food and everything was included. He only needed to keep a little bit of spending money each month. Not to mention, Abigail was almost ten years old at the time and was a wonderful little helper. My father figured, three months, truly my mother could handle three months. So holding onto her promise, he soon set out for Yuma, Arizona.

Calling home every day to every other day, things seemed to be fine. It wasn't until about one month had passed, on a Friday night, my sister woke to the sound of multiple people talking in the living room. Getting out of her bed, she quietly walked down the hallway and slowly peeked around the corner. What she saw, was two guys and another girl bending over, snorting a white powder off the living room coffee table. "Abigail! What are you doing awake?" Yelled my mother. Nervously she responded "I, I heard some noises and..." One of the guys interrupted her, while patting the seat next to him, said, "Hi Abigail, I'm Gary, come sit over here next to me. It's okay I won't bite." Abigail stood there, looking at my mother, "Mom?" "Just go back to bed Abby." Said my mother. Abigail said, "Does Dad know these people are here?" Standing up, my mother yelled, "Go back to bed, now!"

Would You Die For Me

That next morning, I woke up and went to my mom and dad's room to ask my mother for breakfast. She wasn't there, so I woke up Abigail. After getting up and turning on some cartoons for me, she went into the kitchen to make me some breakfast. Just then, the front door opened, it was my mom. Running toward her, I hugged her, saying "Mom! Where were you?" Abigail coming out of the kitchen, seeing my mother still dressed up in blue jeans and a low cut top, Abigail grabbed my hand and said, "Patrick, come eat your breakfast." My mom looked at us and immediately went to her room and fell asleep until the afternoon.

Finally waking up around two o'clock, my mom walked into Abigail's bedroom, sat on her bed and said, "Abby, I'm sorry about last night, it was just some friends of mine that stopped by for a few minutes." Abigail asked, "But mom, what were you all doing?" "Nothing Sweetie, you were really tired and probably don't remember much." Abigail then asked, "Does Dad know them?" "No Abby, but let's not bother your father over it. He is out of town and needs to focus on work. But I promise, it won't happen again, okay?" With an uncertain feeling inside, Abigail said, "Um, okay mom." Nothing was ever mentioned to my father about anything. A matter of fact, when he did call, we were never left alone on the phone with him again.

As much as I'd like to say, that was the only time that happened, it didn't. It soon turned into different people coming in and out of the house at all times of the night. It was like we had a revolving front door. Along with furniture starting to disappear, the phone was always ringing, from debt collectors to people constantly asking, "Is Laura there?" But it was one final day, there was a knock at the front door. Opening the door, it was a man in a brown suit and a blue tie, holding a packet of papers, my mother said, "Can I help you?" He asked, "Are you Mrs. Irish?" "Yes, I am." Handing her a packet of papers, he said, "I'm Mr. Ross, a representative from the bank. After many attempts to contact you for lack of mortgage payments, your house is now

going into foreclosure. You have until the end of this month to be out, thank you.”

My mom tried riding it out for a couple of weeks, but knew my dad would be returning home soon. Only days away from returning, my father got called in emergently into his Company Commander’s office. Knock, knock “Come in.” Standing there curious, my father said, “Sir you called for me?” “Sergeant Irish, I just got off the phone with the police department in Fayetteville, North Carolina. They told me that your daughter had gone to the neighbors this morning and said they had no food in the house and your wife has been gone for two days.” Feeling like his heart had dropped into his stomach, John said, “Are my kids okay?” “Yes, they’re at the neighbors. I’ve already got your flight leaving in one hour, get to the barracks, grab your bags and get on that flight!”

It must have been the longest ride of his life, flying in the back of a military plane, “How could she do this to our kids? Why, why did I ever believe her?” Clenching his fists, “When I find her...” So many thoughts passed through his mind. He was beyond angry, yet this was the love of his life, the mother to his children. He had forgiven her in the past, even to things she wouldn’t admit. He had hoped they could work past these issues and be the couple they were in the beginning. “This was not supposed to happen...” Finally, a yell from the cockpit, “Landing in fifteen minutes!” Palms sweaty and nerves shot, my father soon landed and grabbed a cab home.

Going home, he walked straight over to the neighbors next door. Abigail looking out the front window, saw my father and ran out to him crying, “Daddy! Mom got into some guys car two days ago and said she’d be right back. She never came home?” Holding Abigail for a moment, they then went walked back into the neighbor’s house together, got me and went over to our house. Opening the door, he stood there staring. All the furniture, including the TV was gone, sold by my mother for drugs. A

Would You Die For Me

stack of bills on the counter and on top, the foreclosure packet. Picking it up to read, he slowly walked into the kitchen, opened the fridge, then the cabinets, one after another. It was empty, it was all empty. He immediately grabbed his keys, put Abigail and I in the car and took us to get something to eat.

We then went over to the bank in hopes of salvaging our house, but to no avail, it was too late. My father went to withdraw some money at the counter, "Ma'am, let me get fifty dollars cash please." "I'm sorry Mr. Irish, you don't have that much in your account." He asked, "How much do I have?" With a sigh, the bank teller told him, "Nothing Sir, you have nothing in your account. I thought you knew, your wife was in here three days ago and withdrew everything. Said something about you were all going on a trip soon?" Taking in a deep breath and letting it out, he asked, "And my kid's college fund in the separate account?" "I'm sorry Sir, she withdrew that too." This was not only financially devastating to my father, but also emotionally. His mother, our grandma had left Abigail and me her life savings before she passed, so that would could go to college one day. It wasn't much, but it was all she had and the last thing she did for her Son John, before she left this world.

Once leaving the bank, we went back home, so my father could figure things out. And if not to make things even worse, we only had two days left before we would be evicted. That night, my dad made a pallet of blankets in the living room for Abigail and me. He then went to his room, shut the door and knelt down on the carpet and began to quietly cry. After some time, he got up, walked back out into the living room and laid down next to me, until he fell asleep. It was that night, I believe something changed inside of him. That he was no longer a husband to his wife, but strictly a protector to his children. Come morning time, he looked at Abigail and me and said, "I'll be back in a little bit, I need to go on post." He set out for Ft. Bragg to get a small pay advancement to cover us for a while.

Having returned home and knowing we had to be out of the house by tomorrow, he packed up all our stuff. He also packed up my mom's stuff in two small suitcases and left them by the door, in case she came home. Oddly enough, that night around nine o'clock at night, the front door key turned, but my dad had also set the deadbolt. Then there was a knock on the door. "Who is it?" My dad sternly asked. "It's Laura." My dad unlocked the door, opened it up, grabbed her two suitcases and threw them on the front porch. "John, sorry, I was..." "Laura, leave right now!" He then slammed the door and went back inside with us.

It was obvious, things would never be the same again. We left our house that next day and stayed in a motel for about a month. It was during that time, my father filed for a divorce down at the courthouse. The custody hearing was set within a few weeks. The day of, my mother never showed and my father was given full custody of Abigail and I. Eventually, our money started running out and we ended up in the Salvation Army for a few days. Even in the midst of all the turmoil, my dad was supposed to go out of town again for the Army. Having explained everything to his superiors, it was apparent, he could no longer perform his current job in the Military. After some tough decisions and quick paper work, he was given one more check and an honorable discharge from the Army.

Having made some prior connections in Arizona, my dad decided to pack up what we had to our name and head west. In all that had happened to us, my dad seemed to pull the fragments together and do what came naturally, survive. That is why, these were the years of the forerunners and the times of silent travail. All that was before me was only a portion of discord that would one day find means to cross my path. It would start a road of empty promises and broken dreams that knew no mercy and felt no remorse. The life I would hope to one day live had now been altered forever.