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**That's What Freedom Costs**

**Kathreyn Harris;**

**With Introduction and Closing By: Russ Murphy**



*Last June, I wrote a story for Power Source Magazine about one of America's amazing heroes, Shilo Harris. Shilo was wounded in Iraq in 2007 and suffered severe burns over much of his body. He is one of the most incredible people that I've ever met. He plans to join us during Inspirational Country Music Week in October. You will LOVE meeting him. What an inspiration.*

*For this article, I wanted to feature the writing of Kathreyn Harris, Shilo's wife. I wanted you to hear what it is like to be a family member of a soldier and to have a better understanding of some of the trials that they go through.*

*Kathreyn's experience is so moving that I cried several times as I read her story. I hope you enjoy her article and that it gives us all a renewed appreciation for the high cost of freedom.*

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Everyone has a defining moment in their life. Many of us look back and realize that we have several. For me, those moments were becoming a Christian, becoming a wife, becoming a mother, and becoming a Wounded Warrior Wife. The title of wife is one that I proudly accepted knowing the responsibilities that were laid out for me by the Lord. Shilo and I had been married a year when he joined the Army. At that point, I became not only a wife, but a military wife. Being a military wife brings many emotions. You are proud, knowing that your husband is doing a job that affects everyone in our country, as well as people across the globe. This is something that you must hold on to because it is what sustains you through so many of the trials. You feel fear. Fear is a feeling that you must respect, but you must not allow it to take over. As a military wife, the fear is always there. You know that one day you could receive that call, but the pride keeps that fear at bay.

My life was forever changed when I became a Wounded Warrior Wife. My husband had been deployed to Iraq from Fort Drum in New York. Then, on Tuesday, February 20, 2007, I received a phone call from our Rear Detachment telling me that Shilo had been seriously injured the day before. The only thing the Lieutenant could tell me was that on February 19, Shilo's HMMWV (hum-v) had been hit by an improvised explosive device (IED) and that he had been burned (I later learned that three of the soldiers with Shilo were killed during the explosion). Shilo was in a medically-induced coma at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. I was told the military was making every effort to bring Shilo stateside, but he was very sick. When I was able to visit with the Rear Detachment Commander face to face, I found out that Shilo had 3rd degree full-thickness burns on 35% of his body and a C7 neck fracture. Upon hearing this, I knew that my husband was in very bad shape. From Monday to Thursday, the medical teams had tried to get Shilo ready for transport, but he was too weak. I was told I was flying to Germany.

I was given only seven hours notice and had to figure out what to do with my three year old daughter, Elizabeth, and Shilo's teenage son, Josh. I left those two children, not knowing when I'd see them again. Josh understood, but Elizabeth did not; I can still hear her screaming as I left the house. That sound still haunts me to this day ... more than three years later.

I flew out on Thursday. (Shilo's parents were scheduled to fly out on Friday.) That flight was the loneliest and lowest point for me. As a military wife, it is "known" that if you go to Landstuhl, things are really bad. When I arrived at the airport on Friday, I realized there was a mix-up; no one was there to pick me up. I waited for about an hour and finally was able to get a ride. Once I made it to the hospital, I was greeted by the 10th Mountain Casualty Liaison. He and the Chaplain sat down to describe what I would see when I went into Shilo's ICU room. I can tell you that regardless of how much they tried, there was no way to prepare me for what I was about to see. I know that the Lord had me in His hands that day. As I walked into the ICU, I was greeted by a team of medical professionals that under normal conditions would not have seen family members. These folks were doing their best to remain positive for me, but the prognosis for his survival was very guarded. I knew the Lord had our path laid out, and that He alone knew the plan. I was standing next to the man I married, looking at him and taking in how hurt he was. He had tubes everywhere. His head was swollen to the size of a basketball, and his face was charred black. His hands were swollen so much that his palms were about four inches thick. By the time I made it to his bedside, he had become septic and had double pneumonia. I can honestly say at this point I should have been terrified, but I wasn't. Some people say I was in shock, but I know that the Lord was holding me.

That Friday was a long one. I stayed with Shilo all day and most of the night. I stayed by his bed watching him sleep, wondering if he even knew I was there. I couldn't help but wonder what he was thinking and dreaming about. I couldn't help but wonder if he would still be the man I married when he woke up. The nurses working with Shilo reassured me that he knew I was there because his vital signs would improve when I talked to him. I learned to watch for these improvements and would encourage him, which helped with his breathing and heart rate.

On Saturday, his parents arrived in Germany. I remember trying to prepare them for what they would see when they saw Shilo... It was incredibly difficult. I was describing all of these horrible injuries, telling them about their oldest child and only son. We walked into his room together and stood there, trying to take everything in. I recall watching them, and I'm sure at that point they were looking at their baby, having his life and childhood flash before their eyes. I know, as a parent, we all feel helpless when our kids hurt, and Shilo's injuries were far worse than anything any of us could have imagined.

We took turns spending time with him, making sure one of us was always by his side. Saturday evening, I stayed with him. He had not been having good neurological responses, which really concerned the doctors. So, they made the decision to stop the pain medication and the medications that were keeping him sedated. The doctors asked if I wanted to be in the room during this, warning me that it would be difficult to see. I chose to stay by his side. It took about four hours for the meds to leave his system. I recall him kicking and trying to move his arms. He was in a panic. I remember coming nose to nose with him. His eyes were open, and when our eyes connected, he calmed down. This felt like an eternity, but in reality, it was maybe a minute, if that long. Looking into Shilo's eyes, I saw so much ... fear, pain and anger. The only way I know to describe what I saw, is to say that I saw hell in his eyes.