

# Maybe PTSD Really is just for those at War

You state a password as you enter the secure area. Beds are lined up as far as the eye can see. Half of the critically ill are unidentifiable save for the temporary handwritten name posted just overhead. Germs are the new enemy so visitation brings heavy restrictions. You remove your watch and wedding band, painstakingly scrape underneath fingernails, stomp on foot pedals for soap and water, then smear antibacterial gel clear up to your elbows.

Voices barely rise above a whisper among family, medical staff, and the chaplain. The surprisingly slow pace serves as a reminder that your loved one will be here for months - if he survives. It's hardly quiet in this desperate place though. In fact, you hear erratic beeping and urgent alarms ringing in your ears long after you've gone.

Adrenaline spikes as another machine sounds. Someone has stopped breathing again. An expedient glance at flashing & pulsating machines then a sigh of relief (and guilt) that it's someone else's turn to face their worst fears.

The disposable yellow gowns mean there's big trouble brewing so avoid eye contact with them over there. Just thank your lucky stars, and our Father up above, that you have had even one more day together. And then thoughts wander to tomorrow....the day that you may touch him for the first time. That is...if tomorrow's nurse keeps today's nurse's promise.

There is no speculation on discharge, because of unexpected setbacks (like staph infections) so time is passed comparing his status to others'. Three blood transfusions seemed awfully dire until their son's body rejected the feeding and that one had bleeding in his brain.

High points occur when you shed your own wheelchair (gloriously standing up without losing consciousness), lay your hands on your loved one (if they can tolerate it), and when you are actually present when the doctor makes his daily visit (not always a simple endeavor).

Milestones include breathing without machines, eating without tubes, and regulating body temperature without intervention. Upon these achievements, his bed moves closer & closer to the door marked for "exit". And then as suddenly as this all began, his discharge has been approved.

Tears are shed in appreciation for the staff as the road anxiously pulls you away. You nervously tell your spouse to "slow way down!" as you gaze over at life's most precious gift.

Your tiny baby boy is finally coming home after three months in the neonatal intensive care unit. He has survived the battles and won the war. What a miraculous day!

*Author, Babs Garrett Haller, is the mother of premature twins, Jack and Kate. Jack was delivered at 24 weeks following an umbilical cord accident and died. Kate, born two weeks later, spent 59 days in the NICU. From age 4, she has required occupational and vision therapy. Babs is passionate about supporting families affected by loss and prematurity, raising funds for prevention research, and serving as an awareness ambassador. Babs is proud to have been the first staff member of [Hand to Hold](#). View a [video](#) about her experience or click here to [email](#) her.*