

## Lee Woodruff Keynote Presentation

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**Lee Woodruff:** We're all warrior wives. We've wives who were willing to take the cards that have been dealt and love our men because we saw and knew what was inside and not worry about the package on the outside. I've met so many warrior wives in my journey in the last two and a half years since Bob was injured. It never ceases to amaze me the resiliency of the human spirit, the ability for families to heal together, the overwhelming power of love in healing a family and bringing a person back. When I told Bob he was flying back on a red eye from Seattle today, where I was today, he said you're not gonna talk about our sex life, are you? (Laughter) So can't talk about erections, can't talk about this, but I will say this. Our sex life is the sex life of anyone who has been married for twenty years, has four children and two careers and one of us is a morning person and the other one's a night person. So that's all I'm gonna say.  
(Applause)

We are well below the national average and we always were. But um there's always room for improvement so I'm....you know when Dave was talking and I have so many emotions about our Vietnam veterans because I was a girl on—well I guess I was probably in puberty but it was my friend's older brothers who were going off to war, and I saw how we treated those veterans when they came back. I saw how we dishonored them, I saw how we blamed them for the war. I was recently speaking at a veterans center in Ohio and one of the color guards told me that he was in a parade in New York when he came back from Vietnam and people threw rocks at him. It's so hard for me to imagine that today looking at people like Ted and people like VG who have given so much and are such honorable, honorable people.

It really shocks me, and when I talk I really need to remind everybody that what we really need to do together in this war is separate the war from the warrior. It doesn't matter what your politics are, it doesn't matter whether or not you thought that we should or shouldn't go into Iraq or what you think of President Bush. This is about treating those who have served with dignity when they return home and giving them the highest level of care that they deserve for their service to their country. (Applause) I think that for any of you who ever saw the movie Coming Home and there was one movie that seared in my brain forever. It's The Deer Hunter, and I remember as a young girl—I don't know quite year that came out in the 70s but I remember crying through that entire movie knowing that that was the fate of some of the brothers who died on my street, Pinedale Avenue in Del Mar, New York, outside of Albany.

I think one of the most sort of shocking things to me as young girl but one of the most amazing things was the wheelchair scene. Is it Kris Kristofferson. I should have done my homework before I came here. John Voigt, father of Angelina Jolie by the way. Who knew that little trivia fact? John Voigt and Jane Fonda? Do I have that right? Okay. I can picture the bodies. I don't quite have the faces. And it had never occurred to me how somebody with a disability would return and go back to their world, and

probably the thought of intimacy with somebody who had a disability was something I didn't think much about until that very searing scene which was bitter sweet and poignant and all the things that Dave talked about and BJ talked about in terms of facing yourself after you come home with a loss and a change and how is that person gonna love you?

As I tell my story a little bit I'll go through our moments, Bob's and mine, and the children. I'll start by just saying that we're a very, very blessed family. I still don't know why other than I think that Bob was spared for so many reasons. The biggest reason was to be able to cast a light by using his fifteen minutes of fame on our wounded veterans, particularly those with brain injuries who were returning and who most people in America had no idea were coming back in these kinds of numbers with these kinds of life changing injuries.

And frankly these people didn't survive in Vietnam. Dave is another walking miracle. I've had more physicians, many of them in the military, many in civilian, who said if this had happened in the civilian world he wouldn't be alive.

And if this had happened in Vietnam he never, with these kind of injuries he never would have made it out of country. Obviously that's an incredible medical advancement, that's amazing and much more advanced body armor as well. There are many reasons, but we are bringing people home in numbers with a diminished quality of life in some cases. For some of the mothers who probably thought they were sending their son out of the nest and ready to cash that 401K in and go to Jamaica like Chervon Phillips' mother or Nellie Makanjo, mother of José, both very severely brain injured service members who as mothers now are by their children's bedsides twenty-four seven. Not the retirement they had dreamed.

I had a chance to talk to Senator Dole while he was waiting to go on and we were talking a little bit about what our foundation is doing. Bob and I started a foundation to help traumatic brain injured service members. Our definition in our foundation of a brain injury encompasses not just the severe TBI but PTSD, combat stress, personality disorder. In my mind those are broken brains. I was having a little fun with him out there because I'm not sure he could completely hear me all the way, and I said you know new Rand study. Five million bucks they spent and they came back with statistics which we pretty much knew from our buddies at VA and DoD—15% to 30% of the 1.65 million who have cycled through Afghanistan, and Rand study confirmed I think it's 220,000 will come back with some form of a brain injury.

He was still sticking to his 2,500 to 3,000 figure of wounded including amputees. And I think it's time that we face up to the fact that we can't define an injury by something that's a laceration or a bullet hole or somebody who bears the scars that Bob do which as quite obvious and go around the side of his head as so many service members you've seen. So many of the injuries are so much more complex, and certainly today's conversation about issues of intimacy point to some of those finer points that are so difficult not only to voice but to quantify. It's hard to quantify damage in a human being.

I've argued for a long time that we need to be doing a baseline on our service members before they are deployed so that when they come back they don't have to fight as hard to say no,

but he wasn't like that before or he really enjoyed sex with me before and now it's like sleeping with my brother. I can't tell you how many times I've heard that from wives.

I feel like I'm sleeping next to my brother. There's nothing from him. When I put my hands on his body he doesn't respond. He rolls away. You talk to a twenty-four year old woman—I'm almost fifty so I'm fine with that in my bed, okay (laughter). I'm done with that—but you talk to a twenty-four year old woman whose just been married six months before her husband was deployed and that was not what she dreamed of when she walked down the aisle. She imagine a life full of laughter and children like Abbey and BJ were blessed to have. And what she didn't imagine is that she would be sleeping with her brother, that she would turn to an emotional flat husband who really had nothing more to give and couldn't understand why his life had ended sexually before he had really begun living.

I think Dave hit on a really essential element of this journey and that was humor. You cannot undergo a journey like this without a sense of humor. We had so many moments, and I capture some of them in the book, but not nearly all of them, where you just have to laugh because otherwise you would cry. There were the moments that Bob pulled his stomach peg out. There were the moments that you know we would walk in and he was in his medically induced coma for thirty-six days and we were all calling him half-head over his bed as his skull was removed and his brain was swollen out of it like a popover. You have to look at the situation and you have to say to yourself I need to find a glimmer of hope, I need to find something in this journey that I can take away, that revives my spirit.

And the medical community is not set up to give you that at all, and I think that I've had so many conversations with families about the statistics that we all hear that are so front loaded when you walk in the hospital. The pronouncements that everybody's so quick to make, the percentages. He won't do this or he may be able to do this. I was told that Bob probably would never be able to work again. No one knew whether he could talk or not. It was interesting to hear Davey ask if—talk about Brenda and superimpose her needs for love on him because my question to Dr. Armanda who is an incredible neurosurgeon who works between Walter Reed and Bethesda, was will he love me? Will he be so altered and so damaged that he won't remember what we shared for the eighteen years at that point of our marriage and how much we love each other because to me that was the most important thing in the world.

It wasn't that he was anchor of World News or he'd taken over for Peter Jennings or that he spoke three languages.

It was that we had just the best relationship of anybody I knew as a couple, and we had all of the pieces intact, and sure we fought, and sure he leaves his dirty underwear on the floor and still does after his brain injury. Now he blames it on the brain injury which is even worse (laughter). But I would have done anything to keep that relationship intact. I think I talk about this in the documentary, and I'm sure I talk about it in the book. I haven't looked in the book in so long. But what Dr. Armanda said to me was that he'd never seen anybody come back with a brain injury who didn't love the people that they'd loved before.

And then what he told me after the book came out was that he went home to his wife Heidi and told her that I'd asked him this question and told her what he had told me. And she said, "you idiot, you have no idea whether or not that's true. Why did you tell her that?" Luckily I found that out many, many months later when I knew Bob did still love me but I'm glad that he lied to me at that moment in time. I loved Abbey's story about the nails, the fingernails. I have my own story like that, and it was that Bob had been named anchor and along with television come a lot of things that Bob Woodruff hated and still hates like pancake makeup so your five o'clock shadow is gone and like the fact that he has a unibrow so they have to kind of tame those brows and pluck them.

And when I walked in the room at Landstuhl and I saw not my husband but a Frankenstein monster lying naked on a table with just a sheet over his groin and fourteen centimeters of his skull removed with a brain swollen out of it in a way that I hadn't imagined the human brain could swell with the whole left side of his face basically sort of ripped off in those early days. I looked at his brows and my first thought was they have really done a nice job in that makeup room shaping those. And I just recently read a book. It's called *Your Mother, My Mother*. It's a book about nursing our elderly parents toward the end. It's about slow medicine, a concept I hadn't known much about but a lovely concept for eldercare.

And in the book the author talks about denial, and he said that actually denial is a wonderfully effective tool for the person in the middle of the maelstrom as long as all of the people around that person are not in denial. When I think about how I moved in those days that was exactly how it worked. I was like the queen bee in the hive, and I chose—and I write about this—I chose to be in the zone, and the zone was a place where I would only let certain information in. And everybody around me I know was talking to the doctors and finding out what they needed to know, perhaps acting like advance men for me. But in my mind the doctors didn't know my Bob and they didn't know how much he loved me. They didn't know how much he loved our four children, they didn't know how strong he was and how much he had to live for.

There was this factor that the doctors couldn't measure and that was the human spirit. And so my thought was that until Bob woke up from that coma and until we had a baseline, until we knew if he could talk, if he could think, if he could recognize us or remember us I was not gonna listen to anybody's pronouncements. That was a very useful tool for me. So I challenge all of you who are counseling patients or are dealing with them on the physiological/medical front. Do not rush to judgment. Use hope with your realism.

Everybody that's in a care giving situation needs to believe that they could have a miracle. They need to believe that their loved one might be that person who might be within that 10%. There is no reason to take a baseball bat and beat that out of that wife's heart in that first week or that second week.

My contention is that human beings are not only mostly smart when it comes to their loved ones but they're intuitive. If the situation is terminal, if the case looks like it's vegetative we will discover that on our terms. We will realize in week three or week four that this isn't breaking the way we thought it might be. We'll understand that things aren't going our way.

But how can anyone in that hospital possibly expect the person to be able to put the oxygen mask on the patient if they can't possibly put it back on themselves. So you need to talk to your patients and your caregivers about all kinds of things. You need to talk about the power of touch and the power of music and the power of family and the power perhaps of alternative medicine—power of massage. All these things come into play when you're healing.

I'm gonna go back really briefly. I'm sure some of you know Bob's story but I'll just encapsulate it because I feel like I've jumped ahead a little bit. He had been named co-anchor of World News with Elizabeth Fargas after Peter Jennings's death from lung cancer, and it was his I think 28th day or something on the job officially in the anchor chair. It was President Bushes State of the Union Address that was coming up so Bob had reported on the elections, the Hamas victory in Palestine and hopped on a plane and headed to Iraq where he was going to go into the field and this was the point of the war where the U.S. troops were gonna stand down and coalition forces were going to stand up. So it was really important that Bob take a look firsthand at how the coalition forces were doing and how the handover of power was doing.

This was his 9th time in Iraq. He was no stranger to covering wars. He'd covered the Kosovo conflict and on two hours after the Trade Centers were hit and toppled. We at that point in time were living in London.

He took a plane to Afghanistan. Was diverted to Pakistan and spent the next nine weeks there and then also was embedded in 2003. So he was not somebody who was a novice to these situations. What happened to Bob is what happens to our service members every single day. Riding down a road that was supposedly safe and swept for IEDs there was a remote controlled device packed with rocks and about twenty feet away as he was in the tank and happened to be up at that point in time.

The IED blew off and hundreds of rocks shot into the left side of Bob's face and head. The concussive force cracked his skull. One of the rocks sheared his helmet off and it just happened to hit the chin strap. That may have actually saved his life because that was the rock that passed after cracking the bottom of his jaw, passed all the way across his throat and came to rest but did not perforate the carotid artery on the other side. That was one of the first amazing miracles of Bob's injury. I recently was in Ohio not so long ago and we were talking to physicians at one of the rehab centers there, and one of the docs had been in the hospital when Bob came and he told me something I didn't know which was that written next to Bob's chart was the word "expected" which is as you all probably know means expected to die.

And they told me they weren't sure. They couldn't tell if the rock was actually—had perforated and was just holding itself against the artery like a finger in a dyke, and they weren't even sure they could transport him—which they did and with the unbelievable medical military medical care which I know you all know that was really the first line of defense for Bob was the alacrity with which everybody operated, the amazing precision. I can't say enough about military medicine. I laugh I think when I give speeches in front of people who are part of

the military. I always say my very first thought--because I was in Disney World at the time with four children when I got the phone call--my very first thought was oh my gosh, we have to get him out of the hands of the U.S. government. They botch everything including my taxes. What are they gonna do with his head?

But of course that was the absolute wrong. Not being a military person, not coming from a military background and assuming that all of the best medicine resided in cities like Washington and New York that was my very first response and it couldn't have been more wrong. That was driven home to me when I was here in Washington staying at a friend's house when the children would come down and Bob was in a medically induced coma for 36 days and the children would come down on weekends to see him. So it was a very big dance to kind of figure out when was it right for them to see their dad and you know how can we keep them entertained on weekends without making this seem like a funeral every time they come down?

I walked outside of my friend's house one of the weekends and there was a little shrine on the sidewalk. It was a flower and a candle and I said what--what is this? What happened? She said that is such a sad story. That was the New York Times bureau chief here in Washington and he was retired and he walked outside. Some boys came by with a baseball bat and hit him on the head. They got fourteen dollars out of his wallet. Another neighbor luckily came by soon thereafter, called an ambulance. But it was a human error and he didn't go to a level four trauma center so they took him to an ER where they assessed him as drunk because as most of you know a TBI can often present as somebody who is just off and perhaps has had too much to drink and he died when they got him in on the operating table, and I thought okay, here's my husband in a third-world country, in the middle of a war zone, and they got his skull off within forty-seven minutes and that's from...

That's coming out of a complex gun fight where medics landed the helicopter after they were given the order not to land. They turned the radio down. We've since had the opportunity to meet these young men and women who were in Portland at the time. Pretty amazing stuff. These are the people that are serving our country. These are the brave young men and women who are serving. They got him to Baghdad, they assessed him as critical, they got him to Balad where in the hospital made of tents and generators and people operating in body armor, 47 minutes, his skull was off.

Well I don't have to tell you what the diagnosis was, and at first I wouldn't go--I wouldn't learn anything about a brain injury, and what I kept saying when the doctors would try to talk to me about it I kept say go macro, go macro. I am not ready to hear this. I need my time and my space. But it was day 35 and Bob was not waking up. He was not responding to commands. He was not able to open his eyes, squeeze my hand, none of that. So I was off sort of hunting around for nursing homes which I was told would really be the next step because in order to do therapy as you know you need to be able to do two hours of therapy at least a day to go to a rehab facility. So it was time to learn more about a brain injury. I asked the neuron-psychologist at the time okay, give it to me. Tell me everything I need to know.

It was probably a somewhat masochistic way to find out about brain injury, perhaps only less

masochistic than going on Google which would have frankly been incredibly frightening and I don't recommend that. But what I heard was a really amazing litany of things. And what I love about Chris Fasher is when he asked me to speak he sent me excerpts from the book that I could use as talking points. So I didn't have to do the homework on this. So let me just read what Chris has highlighted in yellow for me here. He's a guy, incredible guy. "When many patients first wake up or even afterward they can be easily angered and rattle off strings of expletives. Abnormal behavior might simply become part of what Bob's therapists would teach me to call the 'new normal'", a term that I came to hate by the way and still do.

"With most brain injuries the filter in our heads that we use to get along in society slips and people lose their inhibitions in ways both shocking and painful for their loved ones". One woman I spoke with after Bob's injury confided in me that her husband was masturbating continually in the hospital in front of other people. His inhibitions were gone and she was unclear what do I do with this? Is this gonna happen for the rest of his life? My thought was am I ever gonna be able to go to a cocktail party with Bob? Is he gonna be whipping things out in the grocery aisle with the lettuce? I mean this could be an issue.

Then there was the horrible story of the Marine's wife who had to be put in a safe house because her husband, her high school sweetheart, had tried to strangle her in her sleep for the third time after his head injury in Iraq—a closed head wound by the way, probably one of the people that might not fall in Senator Dole's figure of 3,000. "My voice began rising and I tried to control it". I'm sorry, that was a different part which I won't have time to go into. "I remember lying down with Bob, and I did lie down with Bob. He had eight tubes coming out of his body and they had warned me that he could be angry and agitated. In fact the neuro-psychologist had told me because he was becoming more agitated that I probably shouldn't get too close, that he might swing at me.

I thought no, he's not. I—one of our jokes was that I was the horse whisperer because I could come in and I would get my face down really close to his ear and talk to him and soothe him, and you all I'm sure have seen someone in a coma, in a medically induced coma. It's not the lily crossed with the hands over the chest like the movies. It's an incredibly disturbing thing. Bob was strong as an ox when he was injured. He continually tried to get up out of bed. His eyes were open, but there were no lights on behind them. There was no connection to anything. He would continually try to pull his tubes out when we were not there. He was restrained with wrist restraints and he had to have a corpsman by his bed at all times. Corpsmen were amazing, amazing people.

We tried to keep family around him as much as we could. We played music. We took the DVDs of our life and brought them in on a DVD player so he could hear his children's voices. At one point in time, two and a half weeks into Bob's coma, it was time for my children to see their dad, and that was probably the most difficult thing I have ever done. More difficult than walking into that room for the first time because I can relate to Abbey too. I didn't want any prep. I wasn't gonna faint. I understood their concern in Landstuhl when I got to Landstuhl, but all I wanted to do was see my husband. I wanted to lay eyes on him, and if I could start with the fact that he was alive that would be enough for me at that moment in time. I would

take anything else as gravy.

So as I said it was about two and a half weeks and my daughter Katherine, who was at the time was twelve years old and is very close to her father, was the first one to come in. I think a big part of what has to happen in a hospital, and I have to say at Bethesda Naval they were wonderful about this, is dignity. I would always continually try to shut that curtain in the ICU. I hated the fact that the family jewels were on display at all times because no one can keep those gowns on in a brain injury. They're constantly up around your neck. I was continually shutting the curtain and asking the nurses to keep it closed.

One of the greatest acts of love and kindness from the nurses was they figured out a way to cut boxers so that Bob despite all the tubes coming out of his front and back and his groin was able to have a modicum of dignity, and I loved them for that. There is a little group in Ohio that our foundation just cut a \$40,000 check to. It's called "Sew Much Comfort", S-E-W. It's a bunch of self-proclaimed grannies who have figured out how to take T-shirts and boxer shorts and rip the seams and put Velcro in. It started with cancer patients but it's moved on to help the men and women at Walter Reed and Bethesda, and there was a very high ranking official who was at Bethesda whose wife and I have spoken on numerous occasions and he's actually a doctor.

When she and I were talking—I'm sure like to say like Abbey, like myself, we have been so honored to serve as the person to talk to others who are coming in the footsteps after us to be able to provide counsel for those. So she and I like many other wives have had many conversations, and I said could I send you I said to her, here we are. Like we don't have young husbands you know and here they are displayed for the world in the ICU. This was very disturbing to me. She said oh, I'm so glad you said that. It's so hard to see my husband naked in front of all of the young nurses and the young doctors and the people that he used to command. And I said let me send you some T-shirts and shorts. And I got a call, an e-mail from her about two weeks later, and she said the clothing arrived and my husband is wearing it and I can't thank you enough. You've given us both back a little bit of dignity in a place that is intent on stripping you of every ounce of it.

So it's those little things. It's those tiny acts of kindness that one can offer that make such a difference along the journey. When I brought my daughter into the room I brought her around to Bob's good side and she bent down, after she sucked in her breath and saw her father which was not a pretty site, and she said daddy, let's play the kissing game. And the kissing game was their game that they would play because I stopped being able to do math homework in about third grade, believe it or not. It's because I'm blond I think. And I would say call your dad wherever he is, in Syria or Africa or Afghanistan, and she would call him with the beauty of satellite phones they'd work out their math problem and they would kiss into the receiver.

The first person to give up, to stop kissing, was the loser. So of course he always let her win. So she bent down to his good cheek and began to kiss him. This was about two and half weeks into the—into his coma. And about twenty seconds later a tear came out of his good eye and it was the first time that we thought

he's in there, that he hears us somewhere, and maybe this'll be okay. You know maybe he's gonna pull through this. I'll never forget what the nurse said to me. She said something I will always remember. She said you know it's that connection that a parent has to it's child. It's the kisses and the midnight cuddles and the reading and the snuggles, and if someone's gonna reach a person it's gonna be their child.

I thought that was a really beautiful thing. I also thought okay I've been here for two and a half weeks. What am I, sliced liver? We do kind of tease ourselves about that one. I give him a hard time. It became really difficult to see my husband the way that he was. I wanted intimacy. I wanted to be with him. I wanted him to kiss me. I wanted him to wake up. I didn't know whether he would remember how to do any of this, and I remember distinctly toward the end I decided to ignore the neuro-psychologist's orders to stay away from him. He had swung at a service member, and I'll never forget what the neuron-psychologist said. She said well at least he hasn't bitten someone.

When I called in from the nursing home that I was touring up at Johns Hopkins my sister said he just bit someone. I'm laughing now but that was another serious low point because that to me as she said was sort of a brain stem reaction. That was just not good, that he was getting more violent. It was that night that I kicked off my shoes and I climbed in the tiny bed with him and I wish I'd known that there were double beds too because that was pretty tough to do with bedrails and eight tubes. I tried to move his tubes around so that I didn't lie on them. I laid my arm carefully over his chest and I nestled my head next to him balancing against the bedrail. Wow, I haven't read this in so long.

I've been on the road for a year and a half telling this story, and I think that when you tell your story over and over again I was so amazed at Davey because I am burned out of telling my story, and I'm going away for the summer to our wonderful place in the Adirondacks where we all heal, and I'm gonna re-charge my battery because it is so important to tell your story. But every time I tell my story I put myself right back in all that world of hurt, and I've decided that that's not always such a good thing. Then I go home and I look at Bob and I think oh, but you're better. You're good, we got through that. We still have our challenges but look at you. You're walking and you're here.

I think for everybody that tells their story, and Sarah you're working so hard and you're such an amazing woman. But I hope you get to take a break too because it's been a long time that we've been telling our stories, isn't it? I thought about Doctor M's words about agitation and physical violence and they rang in my head. She'd warned me not to get too close in case he became angry at me in his confusion but I saw no violence or malice in my husband's eyes, just unending sadness and fear. I loved him more than I could imagine. Damn the doctors and their predictions and cautions I thought. I was unafraid. This was my husband, and somewhere inside that broken head he knew me. He loved me too but he was so scared and confused, and for the next two hours I whispered to him softly pulling him back down every time he sat up.

He didn't say a word the entire time, and sometimes he would roll onto his stomach and then get up on his knees mumbling. I snuggled him and I urged him to sleep, but his eyes kept

opening with a startled look as if he was terrified. By 7:30 a.m. I was exhausted. I had to get back to the kids. Feeling defeated and low I slipped out of Bob's room and back to the hotel wondering what would become of our small family. One of the few moments alone together in those early days I had a bizarre thought. I thought about all the couples who had been in this situation—the car accident, the war, the factory, the sudden fall off the roof, the head injury's game. How many of those husbands had decided maybe they didn't really love their wives long before the moment that changed them forever?

How many couples were simply going through the motions? It occurred to me that while some of those wives might never envy me per se maybe some of them could have used a little brain injury to jolt their husbands back to reality. This is where the sense of humor comes in, guys. Maybe there was a husband straying or one who was just a little too fond of the Barka Lounger and the remote control. A little brush with death might help remind him exactly what they did mean to each other. Get those little priorities straightened out. Tragedy had the potential for real opportunity in a foundering marriage. But here was the baffling thing. I couldn't for the life of me figure it out why this had happened to me and Bob.

We had had our share of big bumps in the road, but for the most part we were a couple who appreciated what we had. I wondered many times what it would be like to sit out a lonely vigil at your husband's bed all the while infuriated over his transgressions with the little trollop he'd met at the office. I was grateful to feel only love, the pure white heat of emotion that cleanly burns out other feelings be they anger, guilt or even rage. I saw so many and have seen and met so many young wives who I don't think are gonna stick it out, and I've talked to their mothers-in-laws. They come to my talks. They come to visit with me, and the mothers of the brain injured sons say she's got nothing that's keeping her here. There's no children, there's no intimacy, there's nothing that's keeping them together.

It's exactly what Abbey and BJ described. She wants to go out to the bar. She's a young woman. She doesn't want to throw away her life taking care of this person. I had the benefit of a huge foundation of marriage. It's—I don't have time to go into it here but Bob and I had done so many things together. We document them a bit in the book. We'd traveled, we'd lived overseas, we had lived with absolutely nothing, I had worked all my life and supported his desire to switch from being a lawyer to a starving journalist. We were a team, and I worry so much for the marriages and the couples who like Abbey are sort of told it'll come back when especially at that vital point in your life, in those early years of your marriage where you just can't kind of wait to get that person home and take their clothes off.

What it must be like to turn to someone who has absolutely no ability to give that back on the intimacy front. I don't recall anybody addressing the issue of sexuality with us. I do know that Bob was on and still is on anti-seizure medication. His dosage has been lowered but I was told that in the early days that would definitely put a damper on sexuality and desire. Bob was on so many medications in the early days that I realized that that was part of it. I will tell a tale out of school as long as nobody tells Bob, and I remember that we were home from the—we must have been home from the in-patient. He was still missing his skull which would not be replaced until Memorial Day of that year. So he was injured at the end of January, and

he would have to wear a helmet and live without a skull for that many months.

I loved him so much and I missed him so much and I wanted so much to connect with him in such a visceral way that I essentially jumped his bones to use a term that I would have used in the 70s when I was growing up. He was still a frail person, but it was that lack of communication as much as Abbey and BJ say you have to talk about it. Sometimes I think you just have to do it. And that's exactly what I did that night. I took the bull by the horns. I wanted to show Bob how much I was still attracted to him and how much I missed him, and I had to be careful and I worried about his head. But I will tell you that it will probably in my dying days when I think back on all the highlights of our marriage, it'll probably be in my top twenty, that moment.

Did we roll around like Demie Moore and whomever in one of those movies? No, we couldn't roll with that head. But we found other ways to tell each other that we loved each other. I think that you can communicate and talk until you're blue in the face. But I think sometimes it is just a hand laid on a chest or it's just a look that you can give somebody. There are so many wonderful non-verbal ways that after so many years of marriage you can tell somebody you love them, and certainly Bob and I talk and we communicate all the time. But I think sometimes so much more is said without words than not. So I urge you when you're counseling your patients or talking to people to channel both ways and talk about it both ways.

I will also share with you something else that I think is valuable. I've had to do a lot of armchair psychology. I tried to go to grief counseling which was suggested to me, and I guess complicated grief is what it's called, and I hated it. It was Thursday at nine o'clock. I had to go cry somewhere, and maybe I'd woken up on Thursday and I was having a good day. It was nine o'clock and I had to go pay \$120 dollars and sit there and cry. My issues weren't that I'd married the wrong guy or that my husband was a jerk. My issues were that my husband had been gravely injured, and I had no idea where this was gonna end up because this was the slowest, most incremental, most tortuous injury you could give somebody.

I finally just stopped seeing her I think after three times and two boxes of Kleenex, and I went to Bob's neuron-psychologist who was at Mt. Sinai at the time and I said Mary, I want to talk to you because I don't need all kinds of therapy about what's wrong with my marriage or how I was beaten as a child. I said I need to know how Bob is doing. She said something that was a huge compliment to me. She said I normally wouldn't counsel both a husband and wife, but you two seem so much in lockstep and I can't see that you have any other issues and he loves you and you love him so I will talk to you separately. What she would do was one of the most valuable things in this entire journey for me. She was able to take a writing sample of Bob's from two weeks prior and then a writing sample from that week and say Lee, read these two, and I could see this one's more cogent than this one.

And you'd have days in the roller coaster. I hated the roller coaster analogy. Actually we wrote analogies for the docs at Bethesda because I was so tired of it's a marathon, not a sprint. It's a roller coaster. Come on Sarah, what are some of the other ones? Um, I've

forgotten, I've banished them from my—the new normal. But she actually was able to concretely show me how Bob was improving, and that was one of the most valuable things as a counselor that she could possibly give to me. And I knew it was slow, and I knew it was painfully slow, and we would play the limber the brain game in Bethesda, and that was which would have been worse for Bob Woodruff? To have lost a limb or to have had a brain injury?

As active as he is there wasn't one brother, one family member who didn't say that a brain injury would possibly be the worst thing that you could give somebody and that there were so many times that I had wished that someone had taken Bob's legs or taken his arms. You can't wish that on somebody. You can't know how somebody would turn out if that had happened. But I'm here to tell you that a brain injury is absolutely the worst thing I believe that can happen to a loved one because you're taking that person.

You're taking that thing that you've fallen in love with, that spirit away, and you're immutably changing it in the way that you can't possibly know the outcome of for years. That is a form of torture.

So no one's gonna tell Bob that I did to that making love story, right? I'm in big trouble when I get back. Alright. Chris, I'm gonna wrap this up in a second so people can ask questions because that's always the most valuable part. I will say this, the initial information—I did a lot of research once Bob was awake and healing, and I did a lot of reading. I read everything I could get my hands on. I don't think anybody really knows the divorce rate for a brain injury, but I know it's much higher and lately I've read statistics that are as close to 80%. I would have to believe that that is right.

Again, Bob and I were spared, and Bob is essentially—Bob's issues are aphasia. Definitely some short term memory issues and fatigue. Beyond that he's essentially the same person. His personality is the same, his—you know his intimacy is the same whether or not we're able to get anything done at ten o'clock at night. He is—his sense of humor is the same. His cognition is absolutely been affected but that's all coming back. He reads much slower than he used to. Interestingly enough when he woke up, and I'm skipping over that part, but then you'll just have to read the book, he was speaking Spanish and French because languages that you learn apparently before the age of six or after the age of six rather are housed in a different part of your brain.

So those languages were not as damaged. Bob's is a left temporal lobe injury, a very specific injury. It was not a penetrating brain injury. But of course he had the con—all the concussive effects of a brain injury. I've talked to many wives about this issue, and Bob would tell you that one of his residual issues is he's probably quicker to anger than he was before. He always got angry before and quick—and sometimes more depression than before. He always got depressed before, one or two days. He would just call them his blue period. I called it male PMS. And he still has that, and I think it's about in the same proportion. He would have a trigger point when he got angry about something. That isn't vastly different than it is now but it's a little bit different. It is different.

We just yesterday were arguing about something and I wanted him to do something and he told me how busy he was which is really not something you say to a mother of four who has a career and has been on the road for a year and a half raising money for the wounded soldiers. So it ballooned into a really great fight which I believe all couples need to have every now and then. I called him back later and he said I'm just— I'm sorry. It's just me. I'm different and these are my issues now and I need to deal with them. I said you know what I need you to do. I need you to deal with them with somebody else because—and he said Lee, I don't think I understand what you've been through.

I can't possibly understand what you've been through in the last two years, and I said you can't, and what you don't understand is the level of PTSD that I have because any time you start to get a little bit angry I hear that neuron-psychologist in my head he's gonna hit you, he'll do this, he could be angry, he'll be depressed and I see that person lying on the bed with a head swollen out of his skull, with the eye swollen shut who I was sure was deaf and blind, and I see the person who was so broken who they told me would probably never work again. And so the minute you get a little bit angry my mind goes oh God, okay, how are we gonna do this, how we gonna control this?

I said so you can no longer lay that stuff with me. We used to be able to do that. We used to be able to lie there in bed and talk about everything, and we can still talk about 99% of it but that 1% of it—your fears, your worries, the places where you feel inadequate—I don't think I can hear that anymore. You're gonna need to go back to Mary and set up some regular appointments with her and put all that stuff with her. I said you're gonna need to go back to your therapist. He thought I was talking about cognitive stuff. He said no, you're really the best therapist for that stuff. You're a great writer and if I'm giving a speech I give it to you and you help—you make the sentences better which is always what we've done in our marriage.

I said I'm not talking about the writing exercises and the cognitive stuff. I'm talking about your emotions because in order for me to heal, for us to heal as a couple, for me to find you sexy, for me to want you and for me to respect you I need to still be able to see you as that person that I so respect for who you are, as that person that's in control, that's strong, that's male, that virile, that's all those things that the pheromones that we're laced with attract us toward. If you're scared I don't think I can hear that anymore. This is a revelation I just had about two days ago, and this is a revelation I pass to you because that may not be the message that you're giving couples in therapy, and maybe the wife who was in such lockstep with her husband felt like they can always try to work everything out.

But I'm here to say that somewhere in there that wife is gonna drown, and somewhere in there that wife may lose love for that husband if she continues to be the nursemaid and continues to be the catchall and the repository for every single emotion. You can't invalidate—is that a word—you can't discount the caregiver's PTSD. We wives have seen it all at a time when they were incapacitated, knocked out, in a coma. They will never understand what the family's go through and thank God because I used to say to myself if Bob could us now. If he could see what he's done to this little family he would feel like killing himself. I

don't ever want Bob to know exactly how black it was. No one ever needs to go back to that place.

But I can no longer be the therapist that I was before his injury. So I urge you to urge patients that long after the healing is done, long after the out-patient therapy is over, that person still needs to be able to put those fears and their worries and their weaknesses, an extra layer of it at least, in some professional hands. Well, what do we need? We need to be able to talk about these issues, and this conference is a wonderful step for this. We need a strong collaboration of public and private. Bob and I are truly advocating for that through our foundation. We firmly believe that families heal together. That as wonderful as the VA is it's not always the answer for brain injuries because brain injuries are long term heals, and if my husband's sent to Richmond and I live in Iowa and I work at Wal-Mart and have three children. Why should I be forced to make that choice? To go by his bedside and be his cheerleader or to leave my children with whom and quit my job?

Every single wife I met at NMC had to leave their job. I think there was only one or two wives or mother's whose jobs were able to give them leave because of course this turns into a long—longer than two week [sic]. It's like Abbey saying, "oh, pack some warm things. You're coming for a week". It's not a week with a brain injury. It's years or it's a lifetime. Those families need to be given access to private facilities so that the mother's can do what I did which was drive every day to Mt. Sinai with my children sometimes, not at other times, spend the night next to him in a cot that they wheeled up next to his hospital bed and fall asleep holding his hand.

You can't heal without love. You can't heal without touch. You can't heal without family. And woe to the 19, 20, 21 year old service members that I saw in Bethesda without family members that weren't able to come. What happens to them on the journey of rehab? What happens to them when they get to the VA? Who is holding their hand at night? Who is horse whispering in their ear love you, never leave you, you're safe with me? That was my mantra. We need to give these service members everything because they have given to us. There's that wonderful inscription in Iwo Jima: "They gave of themselves today so that you could have your tomorrows". That is never more relevant than in the case of a brain injury.

I'm gonna end with my story of healing which is my story of my daughter Nora who is eight now. She's a twin. She's my—she's the runt of the litter. She's hearing impaired and she wears hearing aids and she's the sweetest little person in the world. She was—it was a year after Bob's injury and I knew that on the news that night there was gonna be a story about how it had been a year since Bob Woodruff was injured. I told the older children because I knew that they might hear about it in school or see it but I chose not to tell the twins who were six at the time. Little kids have ears and so somewhere along the line they must have heard me on the phone with somebody.

It was a sad day. I believe the body has a memory, a physical memory. It was the day he'd been injured, and I just woke up feeling lousy. I really wasn't talking on the phone. I didn't want to talk to anybody. I was gonna just sort of take care of myself that day. It had been a

long day. I can't remember where Bob was but he wasn't there. I was tucking them in and little Nora began to cry and I said Nora, what's wrong? And she said I'm just so sad about daddy. And I said well why are you sad? Dad's doing great. And she said well he used to have a perfect body and now he has scars all over his back. He took a bunch of rocks that shattered his scapula. And he face has all this red stuff on the side and all these scars.

Now his hair sticks straight up. Now his head is kind of an oval. And I thought they did a really good reconstruction job on his skull. And she said and he doesn't always have all the words. And I said Nora, he's getting all the words. He's getting better every day. You can watch the words come back and this is gonna keep going in this direction. She looked up at me the way little kids do with just their whole black and white outlook and she said but mommy, I think this daddy loves me even more. And so if that's the takeaway, families heal, families are resilient. But families need to heal together. Families need to talk about it, there needs to be condor. If humor's your thing use it. It's an incredible tool. If I didn't laugh I would be crying.

You know what, miracles do happen. People heal in amazing ways. Look at Abbey and BJ. What an amazing couple. I met a young man at BMC, Trepid Center for Fallen Heroes—Aaron Mencken. I don't know if you guys know Aaron, amazing guy. I was down there visiting the center. Got a chance to see Merlin German who came to a fund raiser that we had last year. Merlin passed away a couple of weeks ago. He was a miracle that he survived that long after his burns. But Aaron touched my heart. Bob had done a story on Aaron. He had just gotten a new nose. Aaron has endured I don't know how many surgeries, and Aaron is one of the brightest and happiest people I have ever met who has come out of this war.

He pulled out of his pocket with his hands that have definitely undergone changes with the burns his wallet to show me his most beautiful daughter. I want to say Tiffany, and I'm not sure that's the right name now. He looked at me with a big smile and he said we got another one coming in three months. I thought, Aaron, if anybody needs to worry about intimacy after an injury like this all they need to do is look at you because you are the picture of resilience after war and after a horrible, horrible disfiguration. It's sort of like—I guess in a way it's like being married to Bob who I know is a handsome man and I have many women tell me that.

But after twenty years you stop seeing that. What you see and what you love is the person inside. When you spend five minutes with Aaron you don't see those scars and burns anymore. You see the spirit inside. So thank you for listening today. I want to leave plenty of time for questions. So I hope that I've shared some nuggets of wisdom. I kind of strayed off your—the points that you wanted me to talk about, Chris. But I gave you some new ones which are off the record, correct? (Applause) Okay, nothing's off limits.

**Questioner:** How did the experience of writing about traumatic brain injuries come together?

**Lee Woodruff:** The writing of the book was incredibly cathartic. It was part of my therapy. I have always been a writer. I've always written when things got tough. Many of the passages in that book had been written far earlier. When we were in China together as a young couple, that was written back then. When Nora's deafness was discovered that was written back then.

So the book was kind of—we could cut and paste the back parts of our life. I began to keep a journal in the hospital because I prayed that Bob would wake up and when he woke up he would as a journalist want to know everything that happened, and for any of you that have spent any time in an ICU you know it goes 9,900 miles an hour and I knew I would remember nothing.

So I began at first to do it for him, and then I realized I was doing it for me to make sense of my day, to find some order. I wrote dialog down. I wrote humorous things down. We looked for signs in everything. There was a white deer at the Chinese embassy. That was a good sign that Bob would heal. My wedding ring cracked. That was a bad sign. What did that mean? I just kept track of it all and I think for me it was a place, it was the only place in my day that I had any control. It was Dr. Armanda who said to me in the hall of the ICU one day, he said Lee I understand you're a writer. Somebody needs to write a book about this because there are thousands of these young men and women cycling through the halls here in Walter Reed and nobody in America has any idea.

I took that to heart. I thought about that, and I tell Dr. Armanda he's the reason. He's the main reason. Bob and I didn't need to write a book for us. We didn't need to tell our life story. What we kept hearing from people is nobody even knows what TBI means and nobody understands that it's out there. So that was an honor. That has been an honor to speak for the service members.

**Questioner:** Thank you so much for telling the story.

**Lee Woodruff:** You just liked the sex part.

**Questioner:** Thank you, thank you, thank you. Yeah, I did. (Laughter). Sex therapists over here, two sex therapists over here.

**Lee Woodruff:** We'll talk privately.

**Questioner:** You used a very powerful term, warrior wives. Have you met warrior husbands along the way?

**Lee Woodruff:** Much fewer. I have to say that my experiences have mostly been with wives. I don't know what the statistics are on men injured versus women. I know that it's dramatically skewed toward men. But the people that happened to be in NMMC while I was there or at BAMS (ph.) when I was visiting there or the VA hospitals that I visited they all have been for whatever reason injured men. Bob has met husbands who are the caregivers. I've met care giving husbands in other walks of life with brain injuries outside of the war. But when I say warrior wives I'm not using it in a military sense. I'm using it in the advocate sense that you've got to go to battle, you've got to question everything. You've got to be the person who is saying really, does he really get that medication because the shift just changed and is this the right thing? It's an exhausting and mind-numbing job but it's one done out of love. You know that. Yeah, I'm not telling you

what you don't know.

**Questioner:** There's lots of information coming out right now about wounded female veterans particularly as they're returning to their parenting roles. But they're often returning alone. So I'm looking for stories about warrior husbands and warrior men. I'd love to hear them.

**Lee Woodruff:** Those are noble stories because I've often said that men aren't—and this is not a knock against men—but men aren't socialized to be caregivers the way women are. And as I watched a good friend of ours wife who just died from a very rare form of cancer and I watched her husband become the caregiver and take this really noble mantle on to do this I saw the awkwardness with which he first undertook this role. Is it okay to leave my job at three o'clock and go home and see her and relieve the nurse? I think it's not something our society has typically cast men in, and yet they rise to the occasion as beautifully as women do. They need more support.

**Questioner:** Lee, thank you for a wonderful keynote address. Now I definitely see why you were asked to be the keynote speaker. In my program this is going to be—your book is gonna be required reading for all of the families because I think it really will mean a lot to them because you've been there, done it, and I don't think any of us think that there's anybody else who ought to play you in the movie. We won't need Angelina Jolie. It'll be Lee.

**Lee Woodruff:** Wow.

**Questioner:** But I think you should tell them what Bob's first words were to you when he woke up.

**Lee Woodruff:** He woke up. I sort of skipped over this part. But he woke up very dramatically in a non-typical fashion for this kind of an injury. He just was wide awake on the lowest moment of my journey, on the 36th day when I was realizing I didn't like the facility in Johns Hopkins only because the proximity wasn't gonna work for us. My family was falling apart. We needed to be together. I needed to find a place in New York so that we could see him and I could be with the children. I walked in that day after having said a prayer that night to God to pray that Bob would wake up, and to Bob which I essentially was honey, there's nothing more I can do for you. You are out of the acute phase.

You have to do this. Our family is falling apart, and he was wide awake. He'd been awake since three-thirty. The corpsman said I think he's speaking Chinese and French, and I think he's doing a broadcast because he keeps saying Bob Woodruff, ABC News which I would really like to have a tape of. I walked in the door with my jaw dropping and he just looked at me and said "sweetie, where've you been?" Just like I'd gone out for coffee. There's so many moments of humor. Bear with me. I'll just tell you two of the funny stories. I do—it was interesting and painful to hear Dave talk about the mirror because I remember the first time that we gave Bob the mirror. He found it under the hospital table.

We had tried to hide it, and he had sort of felt around at his head, but to look in the mirror and see all the shrapnel on his face and to see that he was missing part of his head and to try to explain that someone who is awake on day two of a traumatic brain injury was a really very difficult thing, and we had been told don't give him all the information. You know he will freak out and all these things will happen. We got some really kind of funny information. We were not allowed to refer to it as a helmet because that might evoke images of war so we all had to call it a hat. So we would all say okay, you need to put your hat on now and he'd look and go that's not a hat. But he couldn't come up with the word helmet because of his aphasia.

But some of the words—the story I'll tell you is that he was starving when he woke up as I'm sure any of you who've been there—that gross, brown liquid dripping into your stomach—and he was—passed all the swallow tests with flying colors. I don't understand why but this rock that truly was the size of a marble passed across all the valuable real estate—vocal cords, trachea, esophagus—without damaging anything. The damage that it did was in his teeth which he is still suffering from. But I'm like your teeth, forget it. I don't even want to hear you complaining. You don't even know what we went through.

He woke up and he wanted something to eat. He said I want one of those uhhhhhhh. So we said sandwich and he said no. I gave him a piece of paper to draw it, and it was a horrible drawing. It looked like a hamburger. I said hamburger. He said no. I said okay, well you know what is it? He went (chicken sounds). I go chicken, you want a chicken sandwich. He goes no. He goes (sound with mouth). I go egg. You want an egg and bacon sandwich. He said yes, yes. So this is how we communicated for the first little while. (Applause)

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