

## “Blood Stripe”

“Blood Stripe” escorts the viewer along the path of a female veteran suffering from PTSD. The silent, invisible, most severe wound carried home by veterans. “Barb said you were hurt. You’d never know it. You look fantastic.” The introduction to the silent suffering of our service members begins early on in the film taking the viewer on a gut wrenching journey through the pain of a female veteran. You learn at the start when Rusty tells his wife, “we need to get you to the VA” that even when a service member desires the much needed help, they are forced to wait. Time that many don’t have.

The film takes the watcher through the casualties of war which are not blatantly obvious-no missing limb, no assistive devices, just one shot of scarring on the main character’s back and her internal struggle. The viewer is guided through her story without the obvious disclosure of all of her experiences. This purposeful puzzle emphasizes the unknowns, the mysteries which surround the combat experience that civilians can never understand. The onlooker is given the opportunity to gather the pieces of this puzzle on their own throughout the film, realizing there still may be an element of not being able to understand the complicated trials of discharging from service along the path to reintegrating into a life the service member left behind.

The pain “Lioness” experiences is raw and real allowing the viewer to imagine, to feel the turmoil of what it’s like to bring home the war. The struggle for normalcy, the deep internal desire to find her place back in the civilian world, wherever that may be. The unrealistic expectations by others that she will come home and pick up where she left off. The film brilliantly shares the internal upheaval she experiences while the outside triggers flood her daily. What was once likely a mundane part of her life in which she never gave a second thought to prior to combat, food, sex, social interactions are no longer safe for her.

The film walks a delicate balance of sharing with the onlooker the mystery of “Lioness” without ever disclosing her civilian name, the struggle of her identity amplifies the burden of figuring out where she fits in this new world. The viewer is guided through her story of service slowly and quietly, much like her “lioness” name implies. She is a fiercely strong woman who utilizes her physical strength to escape her mental torture as she says, “Nobody ever drowned in sweat.”

When she seeks solace in a camp she attended as a child the audience has an expectation she will find some sort of peace. It's here that she finds brief moments of comfort in the lake, her occasional smile giving the viewer hope. Her character quickly aligns with another wounded soul highlighting two different worlds connected only by their own personal pain. Her pain continues to grow at an exhausting pace. Soon she's transformed into her "lioness" and the audience recognizes this strength, these skills that have served her well in combat. A strength that is no longer required when an individual returns home. How does someone walk between these worlds? "Out and back, out and back. Partly in this world, partly in the other but never home."

"Blood Stripe" shows the dark reality many service members shoulder on a daily basis, the agony, both physically and mentally that drain them. The intrusive images, the sounds of combat, the anger which fuel her instinct to protect herself is no longer needed in this new world. The film shares a powerful real story that many are unaware of beyond buzzwords like PTSD. "Blood Stripe" forces you to feel the anguish, to experience the anxiety of the unknown while sharing the "grit and perseverance" of a woman who will always be a "lioness."

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