

# 2013 *What Matters?* Competition

## YEAR 11/12 RUNNER UP

### James Nash, Coonabarabran High School

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#### *Battle on the Home Front*

Some of my earliest and happiest memories are of my Dad and me. He was always full of life and laughter; his motto, *"if you can't laugh at yourself who can you laugh at?"* Dad was my rock; when I fell and cut my knee, when I was feeling down, he would always cheer me up.

When I was ten Dad joined the army. He said it was *"just for show"*; he would never be called into active service. Then war broke out. Dad said he was going to a place called Afghanistan to fight against Al Qaeda. Strange words, faraway places, none of it seemed real...

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Mum and I are celebrating, we've just heard that Dad is coming home, it's been four years and I had begun to think Dad would never come back. Mum had always told me he would but I could see her worry; whenever Dad called she would go to her room and lock the door. She would stay in there for hours and come out shaky and frail. It doesn't matter now though, Dad will be back and he will get her right again, everything will be okay.

I'm worried about my Dad. He's been back for a week now and it's nothing like I thought it would be. I could see something was wrong, there were stress lines on his face that looked like they were drawn with a scalpel.

It got worse when I came home from school on Monday; I pushed open the front door and walked down the hall when I heard sobbing from the office. I looked through the door,

*"Dad"...*

I called hesitantly. I could see him on the floor, curled into a ball, his clothes crumpled. He was sobbing, tears running down his face in a flood. I sprinted over to him,

*"Dad, are you okay?"*

This is a stupid question, of course he isn't okay, and anyone can see that. I bend down and hug him.

*"Dad its okay there's nothing to hurt you here".*

This is so wrong why am I here comforting my father, how many other children do this? Slowly he composes himself; I stay and wrap my arms around him. We don't move for what seems hours but couldn't have been more than ten minutes.

I get Dad on his feet and walk him to his room. I'm only just holding it together, my fear for my Dad threatens to break through and come out in a rush of tears, screaming and anger. I lay him down on

his bed, turn and run to the sanctuary of my room and I don't fight the flood any longer. I'm still lying on my floor hours later when Mum comes home.

I jump up and run to her.

*"Mum, I'm so worried for Dad, he's going crazy, I don't know what to do".*

I see the worry etched into her face and immediately regret my bluntness.

*"I know, don't worry we'll get him treatment, we will get him better...."*

I'm still thinking about Dad hours later and realise that war isn't a thousand kilometres away, it isn't in some far away land and it doesn't end when a soldier returns home. I think about this and wonder about the other families with returned soldiers; how they are fighting a silent war against completely different and far worse foes than terrorists.

War doesn't end when the soldier returns home. A new one simply begins and it starts when a returned soldier doesn't receive the compassionate treatment they need to address the scars of combat.