

## Tinnitus From a Spouse's Perspective

In sickness and in health is a promise I made to my husband twelve years ago. However, I can honestly say that I made that vow in ignorance. Because, until the person you love is suffering, one can never truly understand what that means. When my husband Paul developed a chronic case of Tinnitus (ringing in the ears), it was the beginning of a whole new journey that would put our vows to the ultimate test.

I could not see, hear, or feel what Paul was suffering from. He did not have any visible symptoms like a missing limb, bleeding, broken bones, labored breathing, or any other physical proof whatsoever that he was in a state of chronic suffering. I knew that there was a foreign sound raping his mind but, I did not and could not have a true understanding it. I felt helpless as his life experience spiraled steadily downward in fear, pain, and emotional distress. My hands were tied and I felt disempowered to do anything about it.

Up until tinnitus, we had been happily married and partners in life and business. My immediate reaction to this new challenge was to step up to the plate and be the rescuer. When Paul would dive into an emotional void of darkness, I'd find some buttons to push to remind him that all was not lost and there was still hope. I became the emotional cheerleader in the struggle. That's all I knew how to do but, that never seemed to be enough. It caused me have feelings of self-doubt, powerlessness, fear, anger, and utter disdain for Tinnitus.

Did I want to give up? You bet! Many times I thought and truly believed that the Tinnitus was bigger than him, and me. I saw Tinnitus as the conqueror and that it had turned my husband into some different kind of stranger that I couldn't possibly love.

The man who I knew and had loved had disappeared into a constant state of depression and victimization. I would live out many painful days watching him, observing him while all the while silently pondering the decision to either stay and fight or get up and leave. But, somehow something kept me there. Through his pain and rage and through his suffering, he would show me undeniable love. And, when I did entertain the thoughts of leaving I would witness brief moments of this love which would somehow shine through his suffering.

What I didn't realize at the time is that the man I had lost to Tinnitus had to surrender to his illness and he had to die. I hated losing him and my heart was aching with fear, anxiety and loss. But at the same moment, I was witnessing something truly miraculous. A new man was being born.

As he changed, I changed. As he grew into awareness, so did I. I was entering into a completely new state of being that I had never known before. Certainly, the man I married was gone, but the man that grew out of suffering was a man that I would grow to love in a more authentic way than I ever thought possible.

I learned what "in sickness and in health" truly meant. I learned the true meaning of partnership; one based on personal and spiritual growth. Tinnitus forced us onto this new journey. And, even though it was often very uncomfortable and seemingly impossible, it was slowly bringing us a very beautiful place in our lives.

Tinnitus helped us graduate from romantic love to authentic love. And, it served to introduce us to the concept that we were in this partnership to help one another through our own personal development. Paul became a man that I truly admire, respect and am very proud of.

But, I too grew in many ways, and am very proud and honored to be me in this partnership. In sickness and in health may have meant very little to me at first and, if I had to do it all over again, I'd be keeping a closer eye on the prize; true happiness.

If you can fight your way to the other side of the suffering caused by tinnitus, if you can do the hard work and if you can trust the process, you will truly find your heart's desire. I did.

## About the Author

Nancy Houle is the wife of Paul Tobey a professional concert pianist who suffered from [chronic tinnitus](#) for over 7 years. He found a path to recovery and authored a Self Help Book for [Ringing In the Ears](#) and [Ringing in Ears](#).