When Old Dragons Visit

TRAUMA AND THE BOND

> *Some storms in a relationship began years before the relationship did.*

Trauma does not stay in the past. It echoes. A war, an assault, a violent home, a childhood where the people who were supposed to protect you were the danger. Experiences like these permanently reset a person's alarm system. If one of you carries trauma, some of your hardest nights were never really about the two of you. They were an old dragon walking through the door wearing the face of the present.

For the partner of a survivor, this is confusing and painful. The reactions seem out of proportion. Closeness itself can sometimes set them off. It is easy to take the wall or the fire personally. But a nervous system that learned danger can come from loving hands will keep testing this love, not because it wants to hurt you, but because it is trying, finally, to be safe.

The good news runs deep. The safest place to heal is in the arms of someone who loves you and stays steady. Patient, non-judging presence that can see the dragon without fighting the survivor teaches the nervous system, one experience at a time, what words alone cannot: the war is over. This kind of healing deserves a therapist alongside it. The relationship is not a substitute for trauma treatment, but it is one of its greatest allies.

NAME THE DRAGON TOGETHER

1. In a calm moment, not mid-storm, give the thing that visits a name you both can use. The Dragon. The Shadow. Whatever fits.
2. Survivor, as much as feels safe: “When the dragon's here, I need ___ and not ___.”
3. Partner, ask: “How will I know it's the dragon and not us?” Then listen.
4. Agree on one small anchor for those moments: a word, an agreed touch, or just sitting close.
5. Afterward, once it has passed, say it together: “That was the dragon. We got through it. Together.”

WHEN IT’S HARD

If you are the partner of a survivor and sometimes feel alone with something bigger than you, you are right, and it was never meant to rest on you alone. Trauma work belongs in the therapy room. Your job is to accompany, not to cure. People who accompany need support too. Take it without guilt.

TO SIT WITH

Looking back, which of the storms between you started long before you met?

What would change if, the next time the dragon shows up, you could remember: this isn't us, this is something that happened to them?

OUR INTENTION THIS WEEK

Something small you can both actually do this week.

WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY,

Dr. Mark Gregory Karris