

Edinburgh Festival Fringe – SANCTUARY

HEARTBREAK STORIES BEHIND SOLDIERS' THANK-YOU NOTES

☒ An actress has written a play about the impact of war on women – after receiving heart-wrenching letters from soldiers in Iraq.

Susanne Sulby – whose father was in the US Marines – felt helpless after years of seeing conflicts on the news, so decided to send care packages to squaddies overseas she had never met

They responded with extreme gratitude and gave moving accounts of the toll war was taking on them. In one email, a battle-weary soldier said: “Even the youngest soldiers don’t look young any more.”

Their words form part of Sulby’s powerful one-woman show, *Sanctuary*, which examines the repetitive cycles of war, and the effect it has on three female characters: a mother bombarded by TV broadcasts of death, an emotionally detached correspondent, and a prisoner of war.

Sulby said: “I felt completely impotent in the face of the endless media coverage of a world plagued by horrors, so I decided to do something.

“I contacted a group called anysoldier.com that provides the names of servicemen wanting packages from home. I sent candy, board games, movies and toiletries, and would picture them opening their box and finding something they liked or missed from home.

“Much to my surprise, it was greatly appreciated by the soldiers. I was learning that every small thing I could add to

the goodness of the world makes a difference. I was beginning to have faith in humanity again and move toward my sanctuary.”

As well as the soldiers’ correspondence, Sulby uses video and First World War poetry to question the roles and responsibilities of individuals in wartime, and says the seeds of the play were sown during the Bosnian War of the mid-1990s.

“I couldn’t believe that after the tragedy of the Holocaust, the world could still tolerate ethnic cleansing,” she says. “I could not help wondering about the feelings of other women who were close to the conflicts I saw on television.

“A nagging feeling that ‘it could be me’ compelled me to write *Sanctuary*. By the luck of the draw, I ended up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, with the luxury of worrying about such trivial things as my skin and what kind of car I drove.”

Sulby hopes the play has a lasting legacy beyond its run at Edinburgh Fringe: “I would love for it to affect a shift in the lives of the audience. I would like to create a ripple effect. Women’s voices are needed in this world: not to drown out men, but for balance.

“The evolution for individuals might simply be to be kinder in their daily lives, to find their voice and use it. Action has magic, grace and power in it. I would say that the most important thing of all is to never give up on the power of love.”

- [*Sanctuary*](#), theSpace: Niddry Street, 17 – 29 August, 11am & 24 – 29 August, 1.25 pm

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