

Don't Quit: Poem for Domestic Abuse Survivors

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The poem, 'Don't Quit,' by John Greenleaf Whittier (also often attributed to Edgar Albert Guest) offers a powerful message of resilience that can be especially meaningful for survivors of domestic abuse as they navigate their daily struggles.

Don't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a fellow turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out.

Don't give up though the pace seems slow –
You may succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than
It seems to a faint and faltering man;
Often the struggler has given up
When he might have captured the victor's cup;
And he learned too late when the night came down,
How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out –
The silver tint in the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It might be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit –
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

For all the sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"

~John Greenleaf Whittier
(1807 - 1892)

My interpretation of the poem

I remember how deeply the poem moved me when I first read it. My stepmother sent it to me during one of the most challenging periods in my recovery from domestic abuse. I've turned to the poem seeking hope many times during darker moments, along with the poem ["If" by Rudyard Kipling](#). Reading it to the end can still bring a tear to my eye due to its significance in my journey to recovery.

The key message behind 'Don't Quit', as a poem for domestic abuse survivors, aligns with developing mental strength. This inner resilience is crucial for long-term healing and growth. Survivors can find inspiration to keep moving forward by internalising the poem's messages of perseverance. This is

especially important when faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

The poem acknowledges that *“things go wrong”* and that life has *“twists and turns”*. It validates the difficult experiences that survivors of domestic abuse face. The line *“Rest if you must, but don’t you quit”* advocates taking breaks when overwhelmed, while still encouraging survivors to persevere, which is crucial for maintaining hope and energy on the long road to recovery.

It’s when things seem worst that you must not quit...

The words *“Often the goal is nearer than / It seems to a faint and faltering man”* offer hope. They remind survivors that freedom and safety may be closer than they realise. The lines *“So stick to the fight when you’re hardest hit, – / It’s when things seem worst that you must not quit”* are particularly powerful. They encourage domestic abuse survivors to hold onto hope and continue seeking help.

The final stanza contains a stark warning: *“For all the sad words of tongue or pen, / The saddest are these: ‘It might have been!’”* This serves as a stark reminder not to let present circumstances dictate your future. “It might have been” may feel like a heavy burden. It can remind you of dreams deferred, lost time, and opportunities. However, you can use it as a catalyst for change and fuel your determination to break free.

The path ahead may seem daunting, but remember your strength. You’ve already shown immense resilience in enduring the abuse you’ve experienced. That same strength will carry you forward. Your life is not defined by what “might have been”, but by what can be. Your story is not over; you’re still writing it. Every day you survive is a victory. Every small step you take towards freedom and healing is an achievement.

Don't let "It might have been" become the refrain of your life. Hold onto hope and reach out for support. Keep moving forward. A life free from abuse is not just a possibility—it's your right. Don't quit; your best chapters are yet to come.

Help for victims

You are not alone, don't suffer in silence. For confidential help, male victims of domestic abuse should call Freephone 0808 800 1170 (will not show on your bills), or 01823 334 244 (for those with inclusive minutes). Further information is available on [ManKind's website](#).