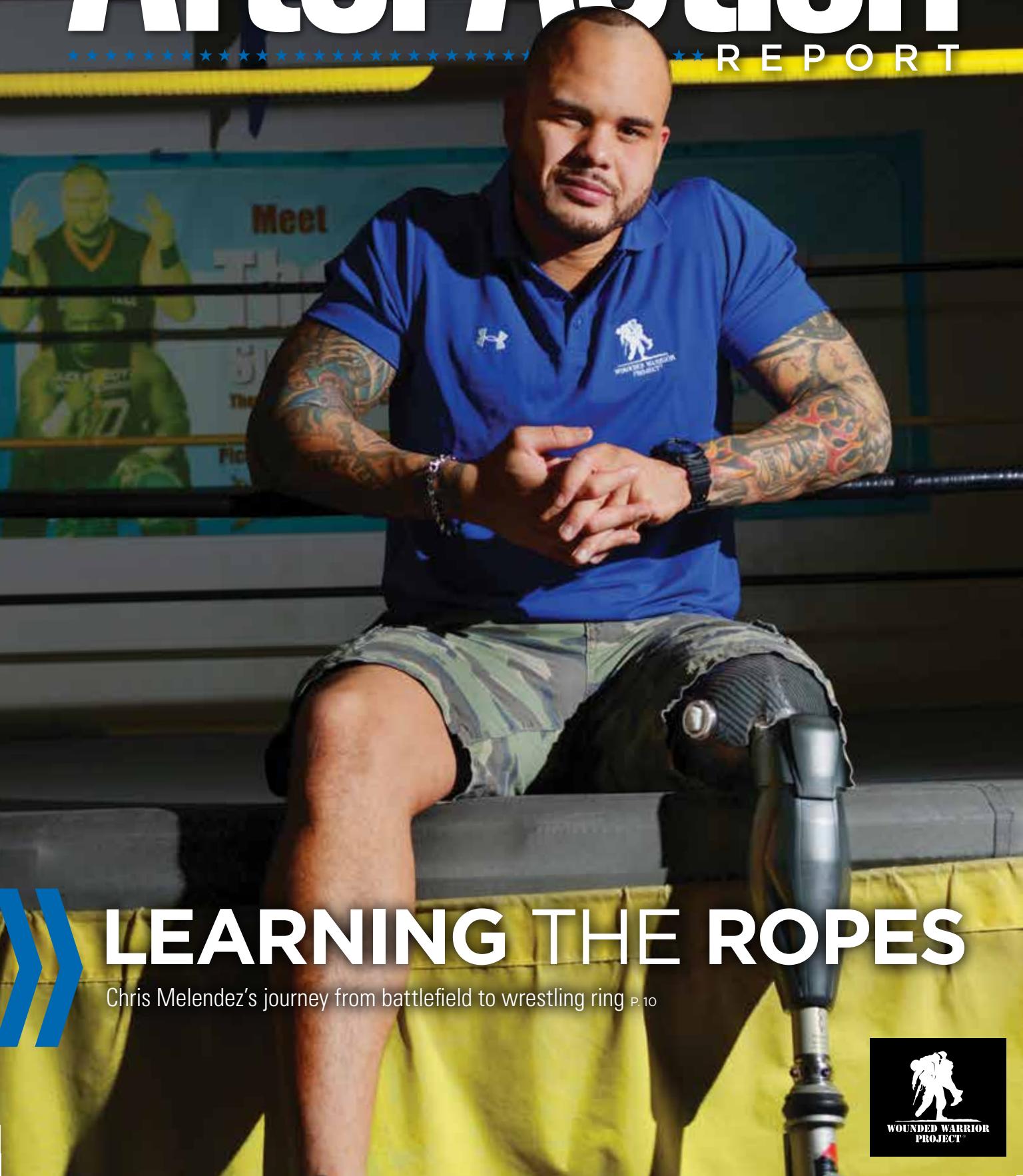


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AfterAction

SPRING 2015

REPORT



LEARNING THE ROPES

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MY FAMILY'S STORY

Bill Geiger was known as the life of the party before deployment, but he had a new nickname after his return: "Angry Bill."

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woundedwarriorproject.org

For more information about WWP and other veteran resources, email or call us today at resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org or 888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586).

GOT AN IDEA OR COMMENT?
editor@woundedwarriorproject.org



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Check it out: After Action Report is now interactive, with video, exclusive photos, and hyperlinks for instant communication. Visit woundedwarriorproject.org/AAR.

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CHASING DREAMS

Dear Alumnus: What dreams would you accomplish if you had no limitations? Where would you go? What would you do? Here's another question: What's stopping you from reaching that dream?

Chris Melendez, our featured warrior in this After Action Report, was 17 when he accomplished his first goal of joining the Army. Just like his father before him in Vietnam, Chris was in the thick of combat in Iraq, serving his country and preserving freedom. Everything changed on Sept. 29, 2006, when Chris sacrificed his left leg to a roadside bomb that exploded beneath his Humvee. Just like that, his Army career was over. Chris was furious, not so much about his injury, but because he felt he was abandoning his Army family. Before returning stateside, Chris swore from his hospital bed he would fight again.

That promise was eventually fulfilled, but not in uniform. Chris grew up watching wrestling on TV with his grandma. He was fascinated not just by the physicality, but by the way the wrestlers could send the audience into a frenzy with a single raised eyebrow. With no chance of returning back to active duty, Chris was ready to pursue a new direction in life.

Becoming a professional wrestler is a long, painful road with no guarantees, even for an able-bodied competitor. Chris didn't care; he only saw the dream. Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) connected him with a wrestling academy in Florida, and Chris won them over with his strong work ethic and dedication. He poured hours and hours over two years into the craft and was rewarded with a contract through Total Nonstop Action Wrestling, the

second-largest wrestling promotion company in the United States. He will never forget stepping into the arena for the first time to the crowd cheering, "USA, USA, USA!"

While wrestling might not be one of your interests, setting concrete goals like Chris may help you reach your own aspirations. For Chad Brumpton, a goal of creating a new life free of pain meant some tough choices (page 4). Acting classes through the New York City WWP office have given Bernadette Semple the confidence she needs to pursue a second career in politics (page 23). A passion for telecommunications acquired in the Signal Corps led Jeremy Cissell to create his communications business (page 3).

Dreams take hard work to reach, but they can be achieved with the right tools and ample motivation. Wounded Warrior Project is here to provide you both. Let's get started, together.

Sincerely,

Steven Nardizzi
Chief Executive Officer,
Wounded Warrior Project®



Justin Pelham and his daughter.

A NEW MISSION

Combat veteran **Justin Pelham** didn't expect to be intimidated by a china saucer.

But stepping out of his comfort zone was more than worth it when he saw the smile on his 5-year-old daughter's face at a princess tea hosted by Wounded Warrior Project.

"She thought it was the best thing," Justin says about the Chicago event. "All the little girls were holding hands and spinning around."

Justin was medically retired from the Army after sustaining multiple injuries in a roadside bomb blast in Iraq. The brush with death changed his view of the future and solidified his desire to raise a family.

Now, with two girls and two boys to raise, Justin takes advantage of every opportunity he gets to appreciate being a father — even if it means getting dainty with tea and cakes.

"I couldn't imagine not having them. They keep our days interesting," Justin says.

» Wounded Warrior Project has dozens of events going on around the country. Learn how to get involved on Page 25.



Warriors join other volunteers from Bank of America to build a home through Atlanta Habitat for Humanity.



WWP Alumna Shelby Hatch proudly displays a flag at the beginning of the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC.



WWP Alumni and supporters walk the streets of New York for the annual Veterans Day Parade.

SIGNAL STRENGTH

As a warrant officer in the U.S. Army Signal Corps, **Jeremy Cissell** oversaw the entire scope of a communications project: network engineers, server specialists, and cabling and infrastructure employees. Bringing all of those pieces under the same umbrella is what he did in the Army. Now, he does it in the civilian world.

In 2011, Jeremy and his partners started ISET, an information technology and telecommunications business located in Louisville, Kentucky. Using the Signal Corps as an example, Jeremy has created a business that does the work of several different contractors.

"We pick up customers because we can manage signal assets from top to bottom. We can do everything, because ISET is kind of like an entire Signal Corps company," Jeremy says.

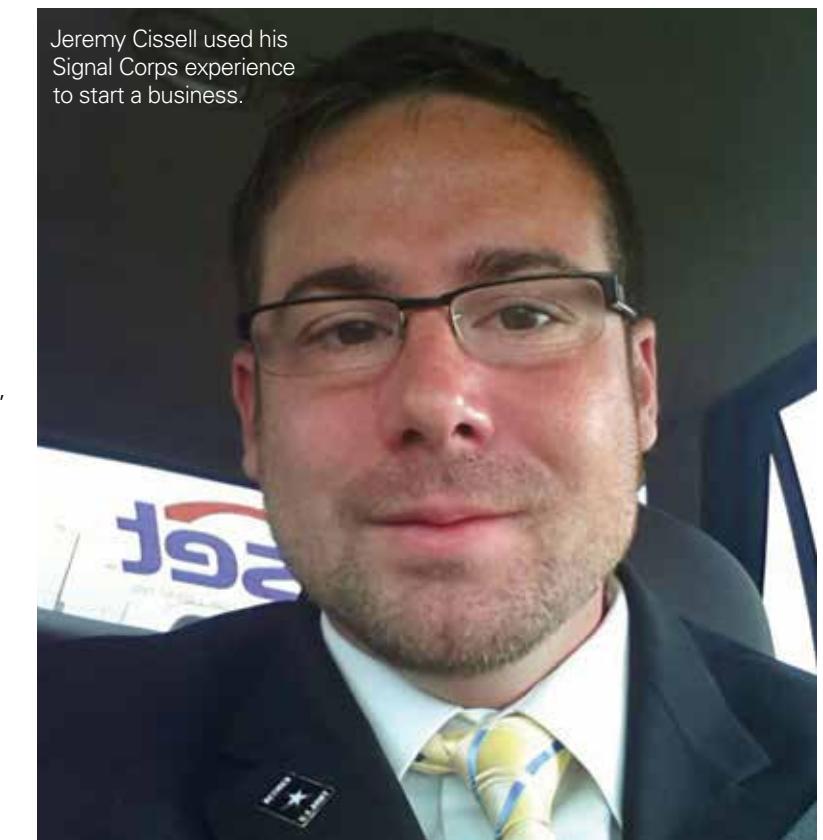
As an officer, Jeremy's days were often filled with the tedium of writing statement of work documents for contractors. Jeremy would list the contractors' tasks, he'd lay out the timeline for the project, and he'd add pricing details when necessary. He didn't know it at the time, but that seemingly mundane task was teaching him how to start a company and win clients.

"I took that into my own business and created a model based upon what companies want from their contractors," Jeremy says. "Most of the skills I learned in the military were what led me to this business. I knew if I could do it for the Army, I could do it for myself."

The strategy worked; ISET has been profitable since day one and has almost doubled in size over the past three years. Jeremy says a key to success for veterans is to learn from other entrepreneurs. Doing so helped him avoid the pitfalls that other first-time business owners come across. In his case, it was his uncle, Jeff Mattingly, who guided Jeremy through the sometimes-cumbersome process of starting a business. Jeff owned a company called Independent Telephone, and is now a co-owner of ISET.

"Coming from the military, you've got lots of skills you can use to create a company. Reach out to someone who is doing what you want to do and get as much knowledge as you can," Jeremy says.

Jeremy Cissell used his Signal Corps experience to start a business.



It also helped to take business classes at Indiana Wesleyan University, where Jeremy learned the basics of accounting, finance, and other skills required to run a successful company. Combined with the chores of building up a business, Jeremy's success took several years of 10-hour workdays, followed by school for two hours a night.

"You have to be really passionate about it," Jeremy says.

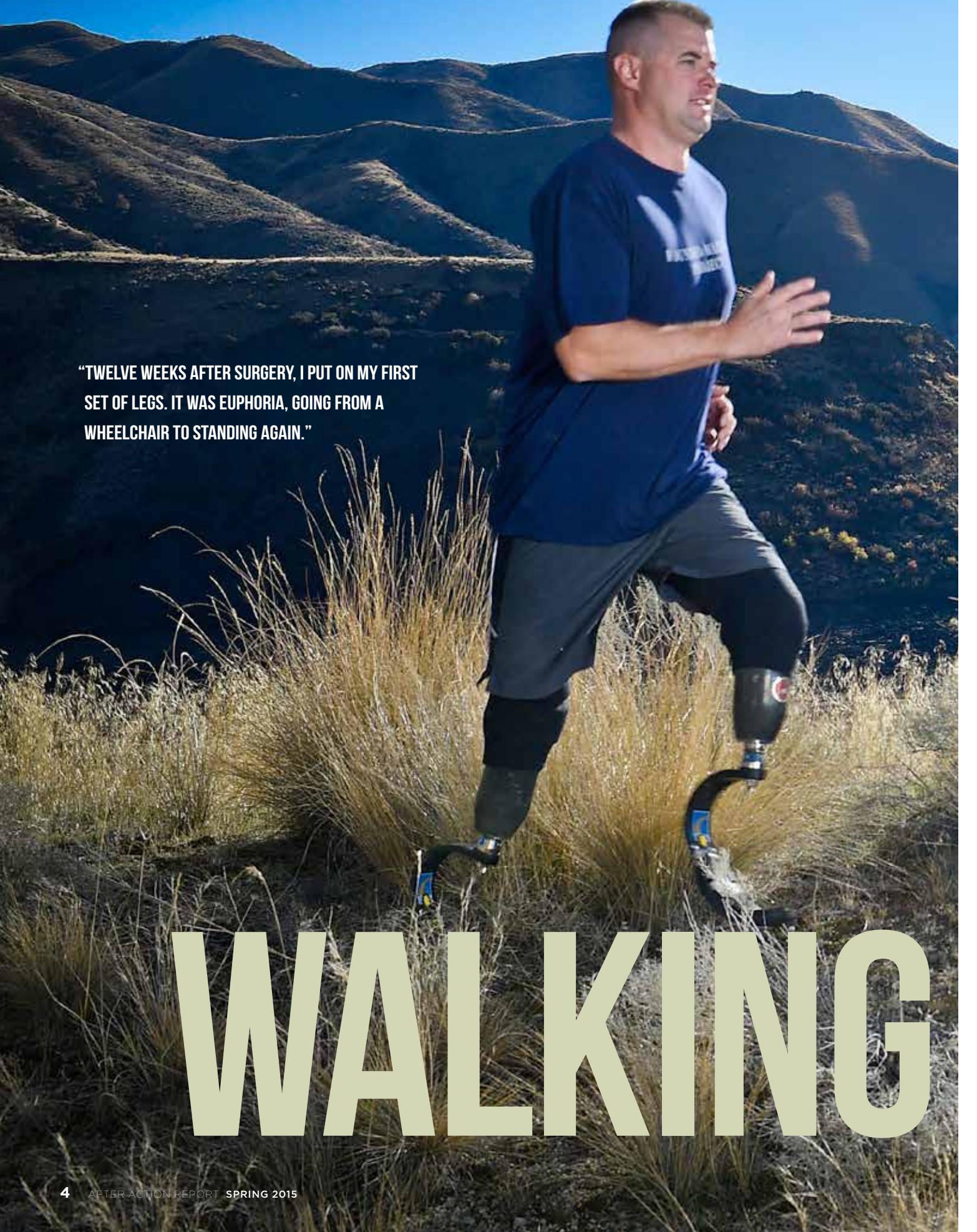
When Jeremy left the Army in 2012, the future didn't look as bright as it does today. After 14 years of active duty, he was medically retired due to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Nightmares, anxiety, and depression had haunted him since his first deployment in 2003 and were compounded over three additional deployments. Jeremy became sullen and isolated from those around him, and it got worse after he left the military altogether.

But with help from the Army's transition program and the goal of starting ISET, Jeremy was able to find a path through all of the pain and confusion. The work, while often long and tiresome, focuses his attention on something positive, he says.

"It gets me out of the house, it keeps me from worrying about other things, and it focuses me on helping other people because I'm in charge of them," Jeremy says. "It takes the burden away from being about me, and gets me to think, 'What do I need to do for my guys today?'"

WALKING A NEW PATH

"TWELVE WEEKS AFTER SURGERY, I PUT ON MY FIRST SET OF LEGS. IT WAS EUPHORIA, GOING FROM A WHEELCHAIR TO STANDING AGAIN."



CHAD BRUMPTON HAD ONE GOAL WHEN HE WAS INJURED ON MOTHER'S DAY OF 2005 ALONG THE BANKS OF IRAQ'S EUPHRATES RIVER.

"My goal in recovery was to go back to the way everything was before," Chad says about the years that followed the bomb blast that tore apart his tank.

Chad's body was brutally punished by the blast, especially his legs, but he deliberately shortened what should have been an 18-month recovery to about seven months. He medically retired from the Marine Corps and immediately started a job as a probation officer in his native Idaho.

Chad had achieved his goal of returning to normal life. But it came with a price.

"It wasn't a good quality of life," Chad acknowledges now. "I had to take some pretty heavy narcotics just to get out of bed and it affected not just my health but my PTSD as well."

Chad finally faced reality in 2008: his old life was effectively over. But instead of mourning, he viewed it as a celebration.

"I was ready to get off all the pain medication and start doing things the way I used to do," Chad says.

Chad's fresh start began with the amputation of both legs below the knee, which would eventually allow him to live with less pain and quit the prescription drugs that clouded his mind. The decision was a year in the making, and it took even longer to truly become ambulatory. But Chad clearly remembers his first day on his new legs.

"Twelve weeks after surgery, I put on my first set of legs," Chad says. "It was euphoria, going from a wheelchair to standing again."



Chad with his wife and son.

military. But as the lone probation officer for the rural Idaho county where he lived, Chad was burdened by the workload and long hours.

Chad decided to quit his job and take a year to rest, recover, and search for a new career. His search led him to building artificial limbs and the prosthetist who fitted Chad for his legs agreed to train him. As an amputee, Chad can not only build custom prosthetics, but also encourage clients and share firsthand knowledge with them. He views this new career as an opportunity to pay it forward to those who helped him.

"There is a lot of pain, both physical and mental, that goes into learning how to walk again," Chad says. "I had support from other amputees who really helped me make my decision, accept it, and know things are going to be okay."



The last piece of Chad's recovery was to gain control over his PTSD. Wounded Warrior Project introduced him to other veterans with similar challenges and gave him a chance to share his story on a broad scale. Talking about his experiences and putting his story out in the public made a huge impact on his recovery.

"I think there's a lot of therapy through talking with other veterans, and that's a therapy that WWP provided," Chad says.

Chad works in a prosthetics studio.

WORKING SMARTER



Michael Iwaniusz still surprises himself with what he can do.

Today, he can bench press 185 pounds, bike 25 miles in a Soldier Ride®, and drive a golf ball farther than he ever could before. Not only is he active and 100 pounds lighter, but Michael is able to do it all without aggravating his injuries. It wasn't an easy path, however.

Michael spent five days in a coma in 2005 after a hit-and-run driver pulled into his lane of traffic as he was driving to his home in Michigan. He had spent the previous month in California, training for his deployment to Afghanistan, and he was eager to see his family and friends. Michael spoke to his mother on the phone and hung up just seconds before the SUV cut him off. Then everything went black.

"From what witnesses said, I rolled over seven to 10 times," Michael says. "My vehicle came to rest on the median, up against the interstate sign."

When he awoke from the coma, Michael couldn't walk or turn his head. He was confined to a bed for a year because of spinal damage, and in the months ahead, he gained more than 100 pounds. Michael tried hard to lose the weight. He'd walk miles on an elliptical machine, and he had some success. But then he'd aggravate his injuries, or some other complication would come up, and his extra weight would return. With his physician urging him to drop the weight or face serious heart problems, Michael was at a loss for what to do. He needed help, but he avoided calling Wounded Warrior Project because he incorrectly assumed his injury, which happened in Michigan, excluded him from its programs.

It wasn't until he had a chance conversation with a disabled veteran in a hospital waiting room that he reconsidered that call. The veteran urged Michael to call because his problems sounded like something WWP would be able to help with. At home, Michael plugged his information into the WWP website and was shocked to learn the vet was right; he was eligible. It makes no difference if an injury occurs in country or stateside; WWP programs are open to all wounded veterans.

"I was dumbfounded," Michael says. "I should have been in this program much sooner."

Not long afterward, Michael met with a WWP Physical Health & Wellness coordinator who found a local CrossFit gym where Michael could strengthen his body without aggravating his injuries.

"I learned more in that short weekend about my physical health than I had in all the years before," Michael says.

Within a few weeks, Michael began to see results. CrossFit was making him healthier and introducing him to people with similar fitness goals. He and the other gym members have formed a bond similar to the camaraderie he had in the military. Michael experienced another health setback in the spring that forced him to forego CrossFit, but he has returned to free weights and cardio exercise. He also stays fit by riding around his neighborhood on a recumbent bicycle.

His family is proud of his dedication to losing the weight, and he feels a sense of accomplishment from meeting his goals. Michael ran a Tough Mudder last year in Michigan, and he's looking forward to doing another soon. For veterans struggling with their own injuries and weight issues, Michael's advice is simple: work hard, keep fighting, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

"Get involved, get motivated, and set goals every day. But above all, get started before it's too late," Michael says.

»GOING STRONG

Michael uses a variety of exercises to keep his body fit, both in the gym and on his recumbent bicycle (left).



THE END OF EXCUSES

Expert coaching and encouragement at a Physical Health & Wellness Expo gave Shatee Sally the motivation she needed to get fit again.



» In addition to hands-on learning, warriors spent class time learning how to get back in shape and sampling healthy dishes.

S

hatee Sally is out of excuses.

She had plenty of reasons not to work out, most of them due to a training injury during her time with the Army that caused back pain for eight years. Doctors told her everything she wouldn't be able to do, and Shatee listened.

"When the military limits you, you start limiting yourself," Shatee says.

Shatee did her best to stay fit after military separation by walking, and she tried a number of diets. But it wasn't enough to stop her weight gain, and the failures only added to her anxiety. It's a tough transition, Shatee says, going from being in the best shape of your life to living with all of these physical and psychological changes.

"I was looking for a life-changing experience," Shatee says.

That experience started with The Post, a weekly email newsletter that informs Wounded Warrior Project Alumni, families, and caregivers about events and job opportunities in their areas. Among the events going on in her area was an upcoming Physical Health & Wellness Expo in St. Louis, Missouri. Shatee was excited when she was accepted to the event, but even more so when she and other warriors discovered the expo would be held at the training facility for the National Football League's (NFL) St. Louis Rams.

"It was way more than I imagined it would be," Shatee says.



The day started with a motivational talk and classroom instruction on how to work around injuries. That immediately led to practical application. For Shatee, a fall that fractured her hips had led to limited activity and strain on her legs. Walking was the most exercise she had done for years, and she had avoided stairs and running. The first time she started using those leg muscles again, the pain was bad enough to make her come close to quitting. But the instructors showed her how to alleviate and reduce the pain through the use of foam rollers. She also learned exercises that allowed her to work around her painful injuries but achieve the same positive physical effects.

"It was really mind-blowing for us," Shatee says. "They were very diligent and ready to work alongside you."

Equally important were diet and nutrition. Shatee discovered her choice to skip meals was actually slowing down her metabolism and making it harder to lose weight. An in-depth menu and nutrition chart taught Shatee how to make smarter choices and how to plan her meals and trips to the grocery store.

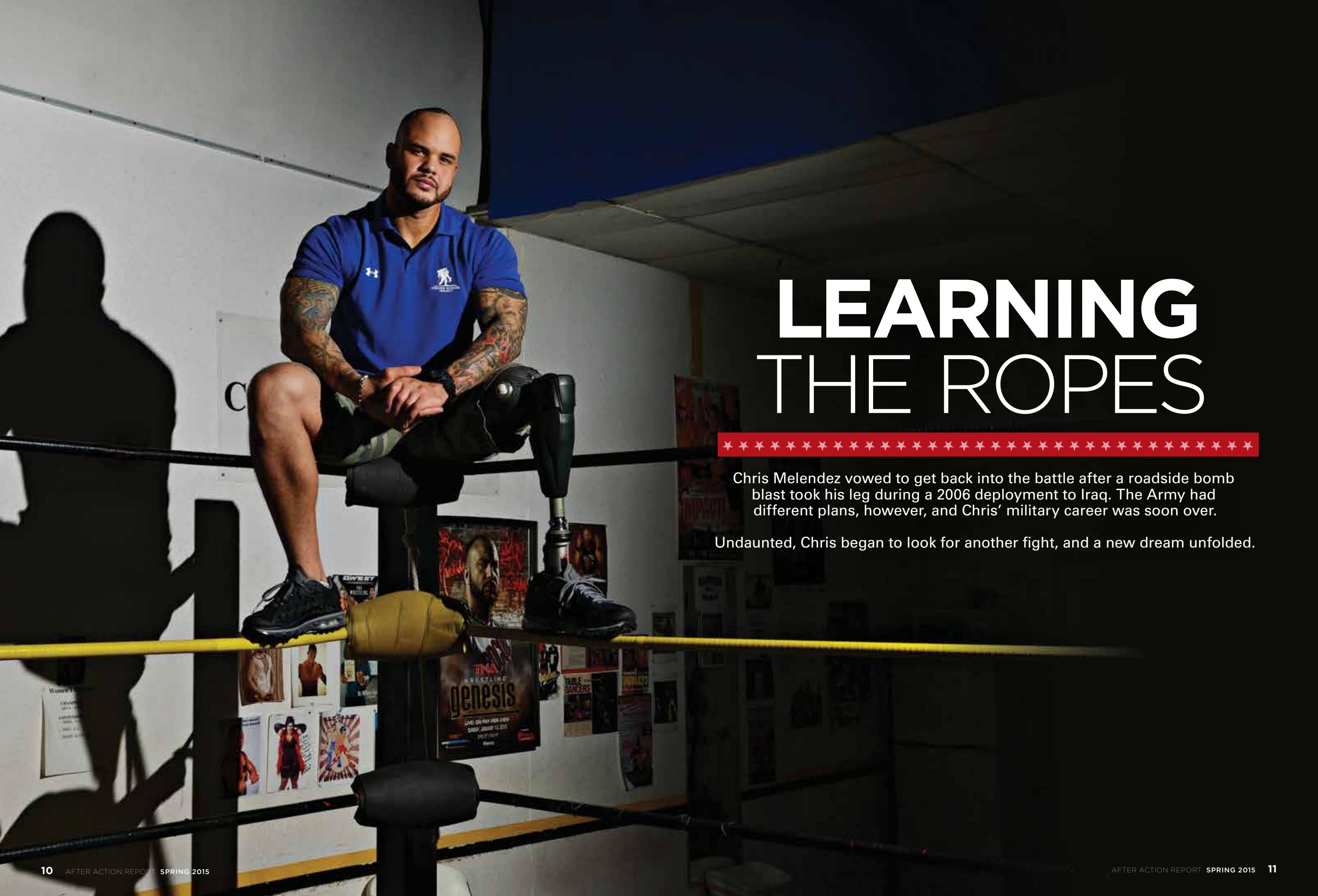
Months later, Shatee is still using class materials to plan meals, along with a weekly workout list to keep her motivated. She's dropped the weight that started her journey to the expo, but she's also noticed positive changes in her sleep habits and anxiety levels. That's led her to spend more time in public and contributed to an overall sense of well-being.

"It's allowed me to gain a piece of my life back that I thought was lost," Shatee says.

Shatee strongly encourages any warriors looking for better health to get involved with the Physical Health & Wellness programs offered by WWP.

"This experience gives you hope. These other warriors understand exactly what you're going through," Shatee says.

» [Click to watch a video of the expo.](#)



LEARNING THE ROPES

Chris Melendez vowed to get back into the battle after a roadside bomb blast took his leg during a 2006 deployment to Iraq. The Army had different plans, however, and Chris' military career was soon over.

Undaunted, Chris began to look for another fight, and a new dream unfolded.



FAMILY IS AS MUCH A PART OF CHRIS' RECOVERY AS WRESTLING.

Chris Melendez was determined to fight again. He even scribbled that pledge on a piece of paper while recovering in Germany with his jaw wired shut and his left leg gone after a bomb blast in Iraq.

Years later, Chris kept his promise, but not with the same enemy he fought in the infantry. His next opponent was a 170-pound wrestler named DJ Z with a bleach-blond mohawk and a signature headlock.

It was a significant milestone for Chris, who had lost one childhood dream of serving his country only to replace it with another dream: becoming a professional wrestler.

When he climbed into the ring for his first match in August, he saluted the thousands of fans and closed his eyes as they thanked him for his service. Years of hard work were validated as the crowd chanted, "USA, USA, USA!"

"It was a surreal experience," Chris says. "It didn't seem real. It was the exact moment I dreamed about my whole life."

Chris was born in New York City's Spanish Harlem, where his love for wrestling began in his grandmother's living room. His grandmother was a diehard fan, and Chris remembers sitting in her lap as she yelled and cursed at the TV, a cigarette dangling from her lips.

"My grandmother was a rough customer," Chris says. "As far back as I can remember, we'd watch wrestling together. My father wasn't a huge fan. He liked to talk trash, saying it was just a bunch of men fighting in their underwear. She would kick him out of the house for it. Literally kick him out."

The sport was also an outlet to escape the troubles in his neighborhood, where gunfire and gang activity were daily occurrences on most street corners. Chris and his friends organized backyard wrestling matches, and the boys would try to replicate moves they saw on TV. They crafted championship belts out of cardboard and formed different wrestling organizations within the neighborhood.

"There were some serious fights over those pieces of cardboard," he says. "It's what sort of took me out of what was happening in the neighborhood around me."

At 17, Chris was ready to begin chasing his first dream of joining the Army. His father served in the infantry in Vietnam, and Chris grew up planning on following that tradition. He quit high school

early, later earning his GED, and enlisted in 2004. After completing basic training, Chris deployed to Iraq as an infantryman, where he mostly conducted night patrols. The missions required him to be on constant alert, as improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were often planted in his unit's patrol routes. Chris was also responsible for searching civilian homes for contraband.

The Army came first, but a wrestling career was always in the back of his mind. Talking about wrestling with other fans in his unit was a distraction from the gunfire he saw every day. Chris deployed with his favorite wrestling magazines in tow and reread the articles until he almost had them memorized. Along with his dream to serve in the military, Chris set a goal to become one of the athletes he grew up admiring.

WHILE LOOKING AROUND FOR HIS UNIT MEMBERS AND PATTING DOWN HIS BODY FOR INJURIES, CHRIS SAW HIS LEG RESTING A FEW FEET AWAY AND KNEW HIS LIFE WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE.

Over time, Chris came to expect the IED blasts his unit would encounter during patrols and learned how to mentally recover and move on. But an explosion on September 29, 2006, would change his life forever. It was his day off, but Chris volunteered to go out into the field on a mission. A few minutes into the patrol, his Humvee hit an IED. At first Chris thought it was the typical explosion his unit had encountered and recovered from dozens of times before. But while looking around for his unit members and patting down his body for injuries, Chris saw his leg resting a few feet away and knew life was about to change.

"I remember sitting there at that moment and thinking, 'There is nothing I can do to change this,'" Chris says.

Chris was flown to Germany for treatment and then to San Antonio, Texas, where he stayed for eight months. Along with losing his left leg, Chris had multiple fractures, several tendons severed in his left arm, and a broken jaw. But the physical recovery was never a concern for Chris.

"I was more angry than I was hurt," Chris says. "I wanted to go to work. I didn't want to leave my unit. At that time, there was no way you could tell me that I wasn't going back."

Chris endured months of physical therapy at the medical center, and was comforted by the fellow servicemen around him. But once he was removed from that military environment and moved

back to Harlem, he had to accept that the Army was a thing of the past. At home, Chris dealt with insomnia and panic attacks and did not seek treatment for what he now recognizes as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"Once I was dropped into civilian life, I realized the way I looked at things changed," he says. "I lacked tolerance, I didn't like things that were disorganized, certain sounds bothered me, I didn't like sleeping in open areas, and my back had to be against a wall."

He rented an apartment in Harlem, but never spent a single night there. The anxiety when he was alone became overwhelming, and he had to stay with friends or family to feel secure. A small gym in Brooklyn became another outlet for Chris. He always stayed physically fit, and now he wanted to see what his changed body could handle.

Even as he experienced these changes, his dream of being a wrestler stayed in the back of his mind. In 2009, his job search led him to Wounded Warrior Project and the organization helped



CHRIS IS DECLARED WINNER.

him find work on film sets. The job paid the bills, but it didn't bring him any closer to his wrestling goal. In 2011, Chris decided to stop talking about his dream and take action. WWP reached out to Total Nonstop Action Wrestling (TNA) wrestler Ken Anderson, who put Chris in touch with TNA stars Mark "Bully Ray" LoMonaco and Devon "Brother Devon" Hughes, one of the most successful tag teams in professional wrestling.

Chris and Bully Ray met up at a wrestling event in New York, where they talked about Chris' goals. He later met with Devon at a competition in Melbourne, Florida, where Chris made it clear his injury would never get in the way of his dreams.

He made a strong enough impression for Bully Ray and Devon to offer Chris free training if he relocated to Florida and committed himself to the sport. Four weeks later, Chris was on his way. Training at Team 3D Academy was almost like basic training all over again. He worked out from 11:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. every day, and learned how to endure the physical pain from the beatings in the ring. Because of his injuries, Chris had to make some adjustments in his workouts. Lifting weights to build cosmetic muscle was a challenge, for instance, because he can't rotate his left wrist.

"I HAVE SEEN GUYS WHO WERE HUNGRY, BUT NOT LIKE CHRIS," DEVON SAYS. "TO HAVE THE TYPE OF GUTS TO COME INTO A SPORT LIKE THIS WITH ONE LEG AND STILL TELL ME HE'S GOING TO MAKE IT NO MATTER WHAT, IT JUST SHOWED ME DETERMINATION I'D NEVER SEEN."

"The training was tough, but as far as quitting, no, that was never in my mind," Chris says. "The most difficult part to me was figuring out how to tell the story. You can't just get in the ring and jump around. So when you combine the physical pain with having to learn how to perform, it's not easy."

Devon said Chris' dedication and talent shown at the academy made them realize he was special. Not only did he have a story to tell, he had near superhuman ability.

"A normal human being can not endure the blows we take, so to have a guy with one leg doing the things he was doing, carrying somebody 220 or 250 pounds and balancing all that weight on one leg, is a feat right there," Devon says.

After almost two years at the academy, Chris was offered a multiyear contract with TNA, something he calls "a one in a million" chance for aspiring athletes.

» Click to watch a video of Chris' debut in the ring.



CHRIS, HIS FIANCÉE, SARA, AND THEIR SON.

"Performing for the crowd and just being in that ring is something I wanted my whole life," Chris says. "To finally have made it is a dream come true. Now I want to keep going with it and get as far as I can go."

As a professional, Chris has become the very athlete he used to watch while sitting in his grandmother's lap as a child. He performs in nationally televised matches every week and has created a character, "Sarge Melendez." Devon says Chris' story as a wounded veteran only adds to his no-nonsense, in-your-face fighting style in the ring that fans love to watch.

"Chris went through a bomb and survived it, so if he can walk away from that, imagine what he can do in the ring," Devon says. "He has a story to tell. He turns up better than most people I know with two legs."

The patriotic chanting that greeted Chris in his first match has become a regular part of his performances, and his prosthetic has become almost an iconic image. It thrills fans as a symbol of his service to the country, and it surprises those who falsely assume it makes Chris weak and vulnerable.

"I think people are more supportive of me because I'm a veteran," Chris says. "For others, deep down inside, they kind of question, 'Oh man, is this guy going to get pummeled?' I actually enjoy that, because that's never the case. It's actually quite the opposite."

Although Chris planned for a longer career in the military, he says he views his injury not as a liability, but as an opportunity to pursue his other passion in life. He's also hoping to inspire other veterans to chase their dreams in spite of the obstacles in their way.

In the midst of it all, Chris has accomplished another life goal: becoming a father. Chris says his son, born in June, is another reminder of the beauty in life, even when times get difficult. He says seeing himself in his son and building a family with his fiancee has been one of his most rewarding accomplishments so far, and he hopes other veterans — those injured physically or mentally — can learn from him that life goes on.

"I want to instill hope in other guys and help them realize you can overcome whatever you've gone through," Chris says. "It's not easy, it's hard, but you have to work. And in the end, the hard work pays off."

WWP IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Wounded Warrior Project teammates in Houston are out of this world! The Houston Space Cowboys, as they are known, are always looking for new and innovative ways to reach Alumni and their families. They recently hosted a unique event at the office that brought together Alumni and employees from the Department of Veterans Affairs to start new claims and review pending claims. Although the Houston office has its serious side, they do like to have fun. Catch them on the right day and you'll find yourself in a Nerf war or a spontaneous all-staff sing-along.



LOCATION:
2200 Space Park Drive
Suite 100
Houston, TX 77058
PHONE:
832.536.3098



HOMEWORK

According to our 2014 Alumni Survey, the top five most commonly experienced injuries or health problems are: sleep disorders; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); back, neck, and shoulder problems; depression; and anxiety.

Homework is a new feature that will bring you home remedies you can try to address one of these issues. In this issue, we'll tackle back, neck, and shoulder pain.



FOAM ROLLERS:

Foam rollers are an excellent tool for releasing some of the tension and pain in your upper body. You can find them at sporting goods stores, or use a substitute like a baseball. Keep in mind that everything in the body is connected, so pay attention to pain in your feet, knees, and pelvis, too.

Here's how to get started:



NECK:

Sit straight in a chair and apply pressure to your comfort level to the neck using a foam roller or smaller massage stick.



SHOULDERS & UPPER BACK

Place the foam roller on the floor and lie on it so that it extends the length of your spine. Keep your body straight by picturing a glass of water on your stomach that you don't want to spill. Start moving side-to-side slowly until you gain balance and can increase the range of motion.

This information is intended for your general knowledge and is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment for specific medical conditions. Before trying any home remedy for an injury or medical condition, you should consult your physician.

★ RECIPE ★

One way to achieve a big goal like losing weight is to break it into small parts. Celebrating milestones as you progress toward that target weight will keep you motivated and give you something to look forward to. Here's a sweet treat to try the next time you're ready to enjoy your success.



DOUBLE PEANUT BUTTER AND MILK CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

Prep Time: 10 Minutes **Cook Time:** 12 – 14 Minutes

- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter or margarine, softened
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup REESE'S Creamy Peanut Butter
- 1 egg
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1-1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup HERSHEY'S Milk Chocolate Chips
- 1 cup REESE'S Peanut Butter Chips

Directions:

- 1) Heat oven to 350°F.
- 2) Beat butter, sugar, and peanut butter in medium bowl until creamy. Add egg and vanilla; beat well. Stir together flour, baking soda, and salt; add to butter mixture, blending well. Stir in milk chocolate chips and peanut butter chips. Drop by rounded teaspoons onto ungreased cookie sheets.
- 3) Bake 12 to 14 minutes or until light golden brown around the edges. Cool 1 minute on cookie sheet. Remove to wire rack; cool completely. Makes about 36 cookies.



« Computer classes give Tiffany Green independence.

Over the following months and then years, Yancy continued to withdraw and isolate himself as he coped with PTSD. Tiffany was dedicated to helping him, but she wasn't even sure what she was dealing with. Yancy would not open up and would grow upset if she even mentioned to friends that he was prior military.

"I wanted a sense of normalcy, but that's not what I got," Tiffany says.

Then, in 2011, they were greeted outside a hospital door by a Wounded Warrior Project teammate. They registered with WWP and soon after experienced their first event: an Alumni Summit. The Alumni Summit was an eye-opening experience for Yancy and Tiffany. Both found support in fellow warriors and caregivers and were encouraged to know they were not alone in their relationship challenges. The Alumni team led Yancy to enroll in a Project Odyssey®, and Tiffany discovered Transition Training Academy™ (TTA).

BACK IN THE GAME

Not too long ago, **Tiffany Green** felt her life was spiraling out of control. She had given up a rewarding career as a musical entertainer and actress to care full time for her husband, a former Marine living with serious post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The independence and creative freedom she enjoyed was replaced by days spent indoors, broken up only by hours in a hospital waiting room.

"I felt like I was losing so much of who I am," Tiffany says.

It's certainly not where Tiffany pictured herself after marrying Yancy Green. The couple met at a karaoke bar in Phoenix, Arizona where Tiffany was performing. The two developed a relationship that blossomed in the form of letters and care packages as Yancy served in Iraq. By the time he came home, Yancy had already asked Tiffany's mother for permission to marry her. They were married in Las Vegas, surrounded by Yancy's fellow Marines in full dress uniform. It was a happy moment, but it came crashing down all too soon.

"He didn't really want to talk to me after the wedding," Tiffany says. "He just closed up. I thought it was something I had done."

[» Click to learn more about TTA.](#)

"She was more than a teacher; she became my rock," Tiffany says.

Tiffany continues to excel at TTA and is looking forward to beginning the computer-building phase soon. She's also gained a new understanding of her husband through WWP and is eager to continue building a life with him.

"I will always be behind my husband," Tiffany says. "We've made progress, and I love him even more now that he's started talking about these issues. To me, that makes him the strongest person I know."



Bill Geiger and his children near their Florida home.

Coming Back To Life

Bill Geiger was a different man when he returned to civilian life after two deployments with the Army.

The self-confidence he once displayed was eroded by deployments as a military policeman to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and Camp Bucca, Iraq. But you would have never known it. He looked like,

walked like, and talked like the old Bill, the one everyone called "the life of the party." Inside, however, he was fighting a new war.

"I knew something was wrong with him the first time I hugged him after his demobilization from Cuba in 2002," says Sara Geiger, Bill's wife.

Family is the focal point of Bill Geiger's ongoing recovery from PTSD.



"His joy for life was gone. He was replaced by a short-tempered recluse."

Bill's assessment of himself is even harsher.

"The extrovert became the introvert, and the introvert was a jerk," says Bill. "I earned a new nickname: Angry Bill. My first instinct was to retreat from the world; my second, to explode."

Bill learned to mask from his co-workers his anger, depression, and coiled-up emotions, but Sara was living on his pent-up roller coaster. She had her own emotions to control in response to Bill's actions, and their children also had to walk on eggshells around him.

"At first, Bill didn't even realize he was angry. He was completely insensitive to feelings," Sara says. "But the kids and I had not gone to war. We still had our feelings."

Bill became skilled at faking a calm demeanor until he could take off the facade at home.

"How do you describe a man who yells at you because you dropped a bread crumb on the floor?" Bill asks of himself.

Sara's thoughts about "what could have been" troubled her. Just three hours after Bill proposed on Christmas Day, 2001, he got the call that he was to be deployed. Suddenly, instead of a long engagement, there was a quick wedding ... and he was gone.

It was a different Bill who left to serve his country. The one who returned had undergone a profound metamorphosis. Sara and Bill say it took God's intervention to turn their lives around, and it started with an email Sara wrote to her pastor.

The email said, in part, "If I had known Bill was going to be like this, I never would have married him."

Sara accidentally left her Internet browser open, and Bill later saw the email. But it triggered something unexpected. Instead of Angry Bill reacting with his usual rage, Master Sergeant William Vaughn Geiger took charge and responded with, "I surrender."

"I wasn't going to lose my wife," says Bill. "I knew I needed help to learn how to fix this thing."

He sought help through a Vet Center and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and eventually found Wounded Warrior Project. His first event with WWP was an Alumni Summit.

"As I saw each warrior help one another, I was constantly reminded of my dad," says Bill. "Throughout his life, he served as a medic in the Army, a Baptist preacher, and a sheriff. He was all about helping others, and I realized that's how I want to be, too."

"Bill came back to life when he got involved with WWP," adds Sara.

He agrees: "The warriors put you at peace because you don't have to explain anything to them. They automatically know — because they've lived it."

When Bill sums it all up, he simply falls back on his faith.

"My faith in God, my family's amazing support, and the blessing of WWP have all helped me survive through the darkest times."

As he struggled to make sense of his post-traumatic stress disorder, Bill Geiger penned this short poem:

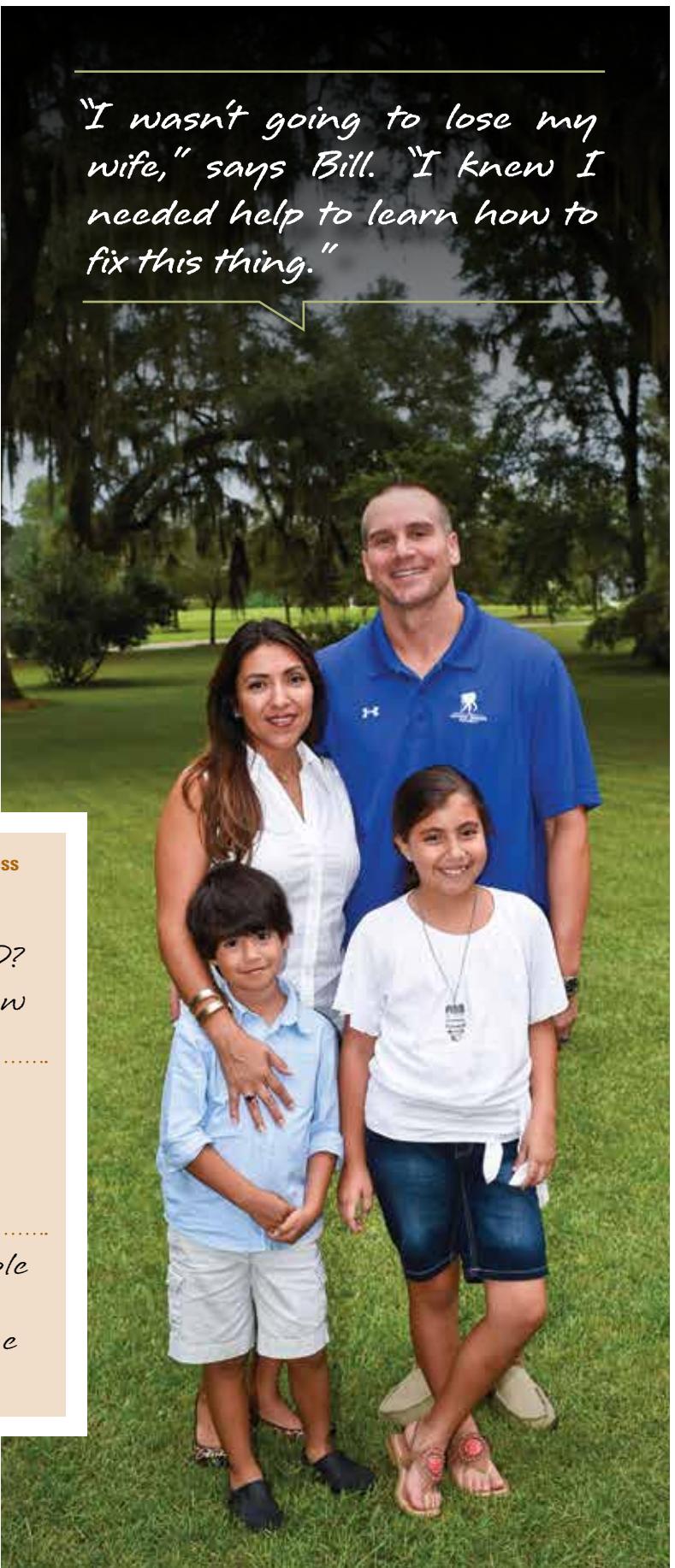
*What is it like to live with PTSD?
It is hard to describe, but I know
you would not want to be me.*

*What brings it on is what I ask
people in the know.
All they can tell me is that the
symptoms come and go.*

*You ask if it is hard on the people
around me.
Just look into their eyes and the
answer you will see.*

Wounded Warrior Project
gave Bill the tools he
needed to rebuild his family. »

"I wasn't going to lose my wife," says Bill. "I knew I needed help to learn how to fix this thing."





SERVICE WITH A SMILE

READY TO SERVE AGAIN?

Wounded Warrior Project is collaborating with another nonprofit called Team Rubicon, which deploys veterans as emergency response teams to natural disasters. These response teams provide a variety of services, from clearing debris to working with local volunteers. Team Rubicon also offers local service projects and social events so teams can stay connected outside of emergency situations.

Here's what one warrior has to say about her experience with Team Rubicon:

Aimee Sherrod compares a field operation with Team Rubicon to "the good part of a deployment."

"You feel the adrenaline and you're working together as a team," Aimee says. "It's fulfilling the service you always feel like you're missing out on."

Aimee felt that unmet need soon after she was medically retired from the Air Force. Her military service was a family tradition dating back to the Revolutionary War and it gave her purpose. Several deployments as an aircraft inspector took their toll, however, and medical issues eventually forced her out of the service.

Aimee started a new life as a stay-at-home mom, but that drive to serve never went away. That's why she was excited to discover Team Rubicon, which sent her on her first deployment to Augusta, Georgia, after an ice storm. Aimee says she was

nervous at first because she couldn't do as much because of her medical issues, but she was accepted with open arms.

"Everyone is open and welcoming right away," Aimee says.

Aimee has since deployed two other times for disaster relief, and it's always a rewarding experience.

"It makes you feel really good to know you can meet people's needs," Aimee says.

If you'd like to get involved, visit teamrubiconusa.org to enroll, then visit the Roll Call page to see what's available in your region.

Apply to join Team Rubicon's Clay Hunt Fellows Program. This 12-month program provides extensive experience and development in emergency management and leadership. Over the course of the program, participants complete 100-plus hours of training, deploy on field operations, and submit a capstone project that will improve an aspect of Team Rubicon's field or program operations.



BACK IN THE ACT

Before her injury, Bernadette Semple would have said her position as a Navy commander gave her all the poise and confidence she needed for a second career in politics.

But her post-service dreams were seemingly derailed by an overseas injury that left her with a fractured spine and traumatic brain injury (TBI). More worrisome was the possibility that the stress of politics would set back her recovery.

"Politics was always something I wanted to do, but I was concerned after I got injured whether I would be able to handle it emotionally," Bernadette says.

Then she heard about a series of acting classes being offered out of the Wounded Warrior Project New York office. It sounded like the perfect opportunity to regain her confidence, and Bernadette was soon immersed in the teachings of accomplished actor and



instructor Dan Grimaldi. Dan, best known for his role on the HBO series "The Sopranos," was a private instructor for 10 years and formally taught acting at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute in New York. He began teaching the acting classes to warriors two years ago.

"I approached this as a true acting class ... not something that would just keep you entertained," Dan explains. "I never expected anyone to become an actor, but I know it is helpful in a lot of ways. The sense of confidence you get by standing in front of the group — it's not just public speaking. The warriors discover things about themselves in the process."

Dan walks the warriors through a series of relaxation, concentration, and imagination exercises once a week for the class's 10-week duration. The relaxation exercises, Dan notes, are key to natural acting, but the calming effects last long after the warriors go home. Bernadette agrees.

"Acting class was kind of like respite. It kept me focused on what I needed to do. The breathing exercises, the exercises to calm yourself down and to be aware are key for people with TBI too. You can execute those strategies to help yourself," Bernadette says.

Over the course of the class, the group of warriors went from strangers to trusted acting partners. Within the series of exercises Dan prescribes, warriors must step outside their comfort zone, whether it is acting out emotions in a poem or convincing everyone in the room they're really sipping an invisible cup of coffee.

"We have to create all of this stuff to be real," Dan explains. "We try to create reality where none exists. We try to be true. They go through these exercises, some of which they hate, but they have so much fun."

Acting also opens up a safe place for warriors to express themselves. Through acting, participants are allowed to explore parts of themselves, memories, and emotions in a secure environment. It also forces warriors to live in the moment, and Bernadette has begun to employ that mindfulness whenever she frets about the past and the uncertainty of the future. Best of all, she has found her confidence again.

"I think going through this class and what we were taught was just so important," Bernadette explains. She's still pursuing politics, but this time carrying with her the techniques and skills she learned from the acting class. "The acting class really helped prepare for a fast-paced environment and dealing with a lot of people," she says.

Bernadette has nothing but positive things to say about her instructor.

"When you get the opportunity to learn from a professional, like we had, words can't express how much it helped me," Bernadette says. "People saw the change in me, how relaxed and how focused I was, and I think a lot of it had to do with that class."

Like Bernadette, Dan finds the classes to be reciprocal in respect and appreciation.

"They [the warriors] make me grateful for my own training and for my life. I am overwhelmed by their commitment to doing something that is difficult without regard for awards."

Dan plans to continue teaching acting to warriors in the New York office in the spring of 2015.

INTERESTED IN FINDING OPPORTUNITIES LIKE THE ACTING CLASS?

The Post is your source. This weekly e-newsletter is designed to provide warriors and family members like you with the most updated information about our growing number of programs, as well as events taking place weekly in your area. Beyond program and event information, The Post also contains the latest job listings and hiring events in your area.



WE CONSIDER WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT OFFICES TO BE SERVICE CENTERS, DEDICATED TO PROVIDING YOU THE TOOLS YOU NEED TO SUCCEED, AS WELL AS OPPORTUNITIES TO INTERACT WITH OTHER WARRIOR. FIND YOUR LOCAL SERVICE CENTER ON PAGE 25 AND DROP BY TODAY.

GET CONNECTED »

Looking for opportunities to engage with veterans in your area? Check your inbox for the weekly issue of The Post, an interactive email from Wounded Warrior Project highlighting events specifically in your region. Not only does The Post keep you up to date on events, but it also lists local job opportunities.

If you're not registered as an Alumnus or receiving The Post, contact the Resource Center at 888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org.



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Warriors recently participated in a workout at Under Armour headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland.

Enjoyed this issue? Pass it on to someone you feel could benefit from Wounded Warrior Project programs and encourage him or her to register at alumni.woundedwarriorproject.org.

You can also share After Action Report electronically at woundedwarriorproject.org/AAR.