

AFTER ACTION

report



TRIED AND TRUE

AFTER ACTION

report

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



A common bond, by definition, is something that binds, fastens, or holds together, often signifying long and enduring affection. These relationships often serve as our personal inner glue.

Take one read of the story chronicling the experiences of Dawn Halfaker and Norbie Lara and you'll have a deep appreciation for that truth. Then go back and read the story again. This time let the impact of their friendship, sacrifice, and recovery fully grip you.

Their message is both powerful and encouraging.

The same can be said for the stories Justin Constantine shared at the 2011 Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner where he received the George C. Lang Award for Courage.

One of the night's more moving gestures came when Justin asked his wife, Dahlia, to join him on stage for moral support. Justin continued to speak and Dahlia stood along his side, holding Justin's hand and rubbing his arm, just as she did throughout his recovery.

Their image is both strong and affectionate.

Another image worth noting in this issue is that of Dave Nichols, Jeff Adams, and Manny Piña atop Windham Mountain in New York. The three certified adaptive ski instructors represent two different generations of wounded warriors who see their duty as motivating others the same way they have been moved.

Their bond is both immediate and enduring.

I hope the brave veterans featured on these pages will encourage you to reach out to the next wounded warrior.

Your impact will be both profound and timeless.

Sincerely,

Steve Nardizzi
Executive Director, Wounded Warrior Project™

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IN THE COMMUNITY



Wounded Warrior Project had a grand opening for its San Diego office March 25. Dan Nevins was on hand to receive a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition on behalf of WWP.



Wounded warrior Sam Har was among a group of servicemen who took part in a Welcome Home Dinner followed by Opening Day with the New York Yankees.



The second TRACK facility opened in San Antonio, Texas and offers participants a range of college classes and services customized to their needs. The K2 Cave is named after Kevin Keith, a Jacksonville TRACK student who passed away in 2010.

WWPROFILE:

JUSTIN CONSTANTINE

A Will to Live and Thrive

"Even though I try not to," admits Justin Constantine, "I still feel embarrassed and guilty about my injury."

A heartfelt confession can be difficult for a civilian to understand, especially coming from a Marine Corps major who's talking about being shot in the head. Perhaps it's his background as a lawyer that makes him so hard on himself. But it's a moment of truth for this Purple Heart recipient as he adjusts to life after his serious injury.

It happened in October 2006. Justin was on combat patrol near Habbaniyah, halfway between Fallujah and Ramadi, Iraq. The sniper's bullet hit him behind his left ear.

Justin was immediately treated at the field hospitals at Al Taqaddum Airbase and Balad Air Base in Iraq. Afterward, he spent four days at Germany's Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and almost five weeks at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland.

According to Justin, he is about 75 percent recovered and now receives treatment at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

But it has never stopped Justin's will to live and thrive. He credits a quote from Winston Churchill as one of his inspirations.

"Never, never, never, give up."

Justin is certainly living those words. He currently works for the FBI on a counterterrorism team, serves on a Congressional task force for wounded warriors, and is in the process of applying for graduate school. He also tries to get in as much golf as he can, and he especially enjoys spending quality time with his wife, Dahlia.

"She constantly encourages me and provided great comfort during some really rough times," says Justin.

Dahlia teaches elementary school in northern Virginia and plans to continue to pursue her PhD when the couple moves to Austin, Texas in a few years.

"She is currently teaching third grade and loves it," says Justin, with obvious pride. "She studied a lot about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to help me and her students, especially those from rough urban neighborhoods. She was a source of strength for me during my recovery and in helping me define my new normal. And she's especially skilled at educating people about the viewpoint of the caregiver and the challenges that come along with that unexpected reality."

Justin and Dahlia both participate in Wounded Warrior Project events, including WWP Restore.

"It made us think through a bunch of things," says Justin. "Knowing we are helping others definitely made it worthwhile. I'm also looking forward to participating in Soldier Ride."

With Dahlia's help – the person he calls "the perfect woman for me" – Justin says he concentrates on looking forward, not about the day he was shot.



Justin Constantine (far left) and his team in Iraq during 2006.



Main Entry: courage
Part of Speech: *noun*
Definition: boldness, braveness
Synonyms: bravery, daring, determination, endurance, fearlessness, gallantry, guts, spirit, valor

Defining Justin Constantine is a complex task. Certainly a thesaurus is a handy resource. Yet the best gauge comes from listening to the man.

The Marine stood on stage at the Waldorf=Astoria as the 2011 recipient of Wounded Warrior Project's George C. Lang Award for Courage, and spoke. Not about himself, mind you.

He didn't mention he saved another's life by moving him – at the last split second – out of harm's way. The bullet then penetrated Justin's own skull behind his left ear and exited through his mouth.

Justin lost all but four of his teeth, most of the vision in one of his eyes, and his upper and lower jaw. He suffered traumatic brain injury (TBI) and continues to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"I know there are a whole bunch of great Americans that we didn't bring back from Iraq and Afghanistan," Justin said. "When I come to events like this, which are happy and joyous and celebratory, I get really emotional. Maybe it's because I know I survived something I probably shouldn't have."

Justin then recalled meeting a squad of young Marines aged 19-20, whose routines consisted of going out on combat patrol, manning a gun or rifle, grabbing a few hours of sleep, and then doing it all over again.

"I remember watching, from the side, a lance corporal hugging his other buddy, another lance corporal, who was getting ready to go out on his deployment," Justin said. "At the time I thought, 'Wow. This is really heartfelt.' They were hugging each other like they might not see each other again. They had been there a little while. They had been there longer than I had. And they were right. They might not see each other again."

Two weeks later he attended the memorial service for six Marines from that same squad.

"I would do a lot better if Dahlia came up here with me," Justin said as he paused to ask his wife to join him on stage. "I have the benefit of having an amazing caregiver who was with me through thick and thin."



Justin Constantine received the George C. Lang Award for Courage from Steve Nardizzi, Wounded Warrior Project's executive director, at the 2011 Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner.

Dahlia was Justin's girlfriend at the time he was wounded. She left her PhD program at Cambridge University in England to care for him, and now the two share the bond of marriage.

"I wouldn't be having a successful recovery if it weren't for Dahlia," Justin said.

Justin also wanted to speak about Corpsman Grant and Lance Corporal Buehler who risked their lives for him. One ran out to perform an emergency tracheotomy on Justin after he was shot – despite the fact the sniper was still shooting. The other drove Justin to medical help down roadways notorious for their improvised explosive devices (IED) at the unheard-of speed of 75 mph (15 mph is typical).

Justin spoke with passion about his life-savers, his wife, and his fellow Marines. In closing he had a few words to say about himself.

"I feel kind of goofy up here," Justin said. "I'm flattered I received this award."

"It's a team effort."

Those few words went a long way toward defining Justin Constantine.

TOP 10 LIST

Top 10 examples of how Wounded Warrior Project programs have helped warriors, their families, and their caregivers adjust to life after injury.

- 1** Project Odyssey, an outdoor rehabilitative retreat that helps warriors overcome combat stress, presented one warrior with his first group activity after retiring from the Army. "It's hard to explain what it did for me," he said, "it made me feel I wasn't alone."
- 2** Connect, an online community where alumni, family, friends, and WWP staff offer support and information, allowed a warrior, who had served two tours in Iraq before suffering a spinal cord injury, to re-engage with other servicemen and women. "After hitting rock bottom, I was inspired to help others," he said. "I look forward to meeting my fellow WWP Alumni at future events."
- 3** The wife of a wounded warrior, who had faithfully tended to her spouse, was facing burnout. She attended a Caregiver Retreat, where she gained a fresh and improved perspective while also forming some important relationships. "The retreat was absolutely fantastic," she said, "... such an incredible blessing to all of us!"
- 4** A wounded warrior recalled lying in his hospital bed wondering if he'd ever be able to participate in athletics again. Following an adaptive sports snowboarding event he wonders how he ever doubted his abilities. "Wounded Warrior Project gets us out here to do these things to make us know there are activities we can still do."
- 5** WWP moved an injured soldier to Jacksonville and enrolled him in TRACK – the first education center in the nation designed for wounded warriors. The connection was immediate. "They told me, 'We will not forget you.' It saved my life."
- 6** Soldier Ride, an adaptive cycling event that allows warriors to reclaim their confidence and strength in a supportive environment, allowed a Marine, who lost his left leg and had experienced feelings of uselessness, a second chance. "I had an epiphany while I was riding. I've come full circle in what Soldier Ride has to offer. I can honestly say it saved me."
- 7** Warriors to Work provided career counseling and job placement assistance to help a Marine transition to the civilian workforce. "A lot of my problem finding a job was adjusting to life after four years in the military where you don't have to make any decisions," he said. "Warriors to Work was my helping hand"
- 8** WWP's Alumni program brings together servicemen and women from all across the country, allowing them to share their experiences with each other. "I can talk about it [with them] and they might be like, 'That's a bit more normal than you think' or 'That happens all the time.' And I'm not as concerned with it, or I'm not stressing out."
- 9** The Benefits Service program provided a wounded warrior and his family with much-needed information and peace of mind. "They sat down and talked ... for almost three hours," said the warrior. "They were just so helpful."
- 10** Among the first items to greet wounded warriors are WWP backpacks filled with comfort items. "At that moment, there probably wasn't a more significant gift that I've ever received," said a warrior. "And with the gift came a promise ... that if there was anything I ever needed, they were there for me."



ONE TOUGH MUDDER

How to Fight Yourself and Win

They say it's "probably the toughest event on the planet."

But there's no "probably" about it.

Tough Mudder is the nation's fastest-growing and most-recognized endurance series. And they're a proud supporter of Wounded Warrior Project.

Each Tough Mudder event consists of a 10-12 mile trail run over uneven, hilly, and wet ground that includes 20-25 military-style obstacles.

"Tough Mudder is about experiencing a true sense of camaraderie that, sadly, is rarely seen outside of the military these days," says Will Dean, CEO of Tough Mudder. "To get over some of our obstacles, participants need the help of others. You've got to be a team player. Being a Tough Mudder is about making sure no one is left behind."

Those who are tough enough to finish the Tough Mudder course are those who eat stamina for breakfast, mental grit for lunch, and willpower for dinner.

People like Sergeant James (Eddie) Wright.

On April 7, 2004 in Fallujah, Iraq, Eddie was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) that blew off both his hands and severely damaged his left leg.

"I participated with two of my teammates who were with me and fought alongside me that day to repel the enemy ambush," says Eddie. "I like the Tough Mudder stance on teamwork and camaraderie as I have experienced firsthand the extreme sense of it all and together with my brothers live to fight another day."

With a unique crossover appeal for high-performing endurance athletes, fitness enthusiasts, risk-taking adrenaline junkies and conservative commoners alike, Tough Mudder is a one-day challenge of the human spirit through adversity and intensity.

"In November 2008, I was shot six times in Iraq," says William Greenwood. "I shattered one femur, broke the other, and had severe nerve damage in my right arm. The doctors told me I would never run again. When I heard about Tough Mudder, I knew it was the challenge I wanted to complete to prove to myself that nothing is going to keep me down."

Million Dollar Toughness

In April 2011, Tough Mudder surpassed the \$1-million mark in donations to Wounded Warrior Project.

"What started out as a grass-roots proud supporter event, has turned into a fruitful partnership," says Steve Nardizzi, Wounded Warrior Project's executive director. "Our mission of honoring and empowering wounded warriors is profoundly assisted when groups like Tough Mudder adopt our cause."

For more information about Tough Mudder, how to participate, and to learn about the next event nearest you, visit www.toughmudder.com.



Eight wounded warriors proudly pose with a Wounded Warrior Project flag during Tough Mudder's sold out Pennsylvania event.

JUSTICE SPEAKS:

A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

Editor's Note: Ten-year-old Jacob Justice entered his school's speech contest by writing about wounded warrior Christopher Lynch. Jacob looks to Christopher as a patriot and hero, and as someone he can relate to as the fifth-grader has limited vision in his left eye due to a cataract at birth.



Do you ever think about how many soldiers help us?

There are almost 3 million soldiers now. Well now it's time to help them. That is why I am speaking today, because the greatest casualty is being forgotten.

Soldiers fought for us, now we need to fight for them.

There is a foundation called Wounded Warrior Project. This foundation was started in Roanoke, Virginia, and has spread out around the United States. Their headquarters is in Jacksonville, Florida and there are more offices in California, Texas, New York, and Washington, DC.

Soldiers who have been wounded have received the Purple Heart award. The Purple Heart award is for being wounded in action against an enemy.

They fought for us, now we need to fight for them.

There is a man named Christopher Lynch. He was awarded the Purple Heart for being wounded in a suicide bombing. He and four other men took the impact of the explosion. Lynch was in the gunner seat of a Humvee when shrapnel was blown into his head, chest, and through his glasses and into his left temple making him blind in his left eye.

He fought for us, now we need to fight for him.

Wounded Warrior Project offers a program called TRACK. TRACK helps wounded soldiers get more education and training as they pursue a degree to help them find a career. TRACK basically puts soldiers back on track and into a job and a healthy life.

There is another program called Project Odyssey. This program helps soldiers heal by using recreation and nature to heal their spirits.

They fought for us, now we need to fight for them.

Now help wounded soldiers by helping America. Donate and be thankful.

They fought for us, now we fight for all them.



Jacob Justice, a fifth-grader at Ketterlinus Elementary School in St. Augustine, Florida, raised \$230 by biking in Soldier Ride Jacksonville.

TRIBUTE

A SOLDIER'S PERSPECTIVE



Editor's Note: Army Specialist Keith Nations did three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan before being medically retired. The Purple Heart recipient penned this personal tribute to his brothers and sisters in arms.

I speak only of what I have seen with my own eyes and felt in my own heart. I am proud to have served my country and I have done so with honor, courage, and integrity.

I would continue doing so but I was injured in my third improvised explosive device (IED) blast.

They call this a war of our generation, but older soldiers still volunteer to fight. It's not about the "generation." It's about standing up as one.

Brother to brother. Sister to sister.

We fight for what we believe in – the freedom of our great and beautiful country and the men and woman who have died in previous wars protecting that freedom. They are the true heroes, as are the warriors who died in this war of terrorism.

William Shakespeare wrote, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother." Any soldier who has served in this war on terrorism can honestly say, "We will never forget 9/11."

Countless warriors spend days at a time out on missions protecting innocent civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq while trying to stabilize the two countries. At the same time we work hard to defend our own country from terrorists aimed at killing hard-working Americans.

And we do all of this while insurgents actively try to kill us. We are tired, sore, worn out, and, in some cases, injured. Yet we relentlessly and selflessly push forward for a greater cause.

There is no shame in a soldier crying. I have cried many times. I have seen atrocities during my combat deployments I wish no one else would ever have to witness.

Thoughts play and re-play during my sleepless nights. Thoughts of my fallen brothers and sisters who will never come home to hug their wives or husbands, play with their children, have barbecues, or be with friends to love, laugh, and even cry.

They are the true heroes. These brave men and women were, are, and always will be in our hearts and minds.

They are not just a name on a wall or a grave with military markers of honor to us. They are our friends, our brothers, our sisters.

They are soldiers.



Keith Nations participated in Project Odyssey at Sunny Knolls Farm in Cobleskill, New York in 2010.

TRIED AND TRUE

By Jay Huling

"But as Dawn kept trying to motivate me, I realized I wasn't alone. And when she started doing those one-armed push-ups, I was inspired. And I wanted to be like her."



Norbie Lara with two guards in Baqubah, Iraq in May 2004.

When you're lying in a hospital bed, your brain shut down by a medically induced coma, the days pass uneventfully with little to distinguish one from another.

Except for the nightmares.

For two months, Staff Sergeant Norberto "Norbie" Lara knew those nightmares intimately.

"A lot of them were of me being in the Humvee and getting blown up again," Norbie recalls. "I could feel it all, hear it all. And my senses overwhelmed by the smells in the vehicle – the unforgettable mixture of burnt flesh and gunpowder."

And he remembers trying to escape from the Humvee so he could engage the enemy. But Norbie couldn't reach for the door.

Because his arm was missing.

He then called out, "Ma'am, are you all right?" Norbie doesn't remember hearing a response from Captain Halfaker.

Can You Wander into Someone Else's Nightmare?


Army Captain Dawn Halfaker – also in a medically induced coma – woke up from the same nightmare: the Humvee hit by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), the blinding flash, the smells, and the screams.

And from her bed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) in Washington, DC, Dawn made a surprising discovery similar to the one Norbie would soon experience.

This was no dream. And she was still alive.

"I remember seeing my parents, and that wasn't normal," says Dawn. "I still thought I was in Iraq. I basically woke up in the moment I left which was me in a panic that medics were trying to amputate my arm. But I was confused because I didn't know why my parents would be in Iraq."

But then Dawn looked over and saw the white bandage where her arm used to be.



Her dad told her the somber news she dreaded: “You know they had to take your arm. You know it’s already gone.”

Dawn says she was practically beside herself when she learned what had happened – knowing her life would forever be changed.

“I went into denial. I decided if I didn’t look at this side or if I just didn’t acknowledge it maybe reality wouldn’t set in. I told my mom to cover up all the mirrors because I didn’t want to see it. I didn’t want to accept it.”

Dawn knew one thing for certain: She wanted to live. But as she contemplated her own future, depressed at what she considered a diminished stature, Dawn was panged by a deep — almost physical — question.

“Where’s Norbie?”

Because one of her last memories was lying in the dirt, medics frantically treating her, and hearing Norbie – at peace with himself and his impending death – say to those medics: “Tell my kids I love them.”

June 19, 2004. The 293rd Military Police Company, 3rd Infantry Division, Baqubah, Iraq

Those treating Norbie on scene were emphatic with their response: “You’ll tell them yourself.”

But Norbie couldn’t breathe, and with the extent of his injuries, he didn’t want to live. And he told his soldiers who surrounded him he was ready to die.

Pain, disfigurement, loss, and fear cast a shadow on both Norbie and Dawn’s will to move forward. It’s just one of their many shared experiences.

That morning their mission started under familiar auspices. Dawn was platoon leader; Norbie, squad leader. Their task was to roll out in one of four Humvees on combat patrol. At 4 am the routine mission was dramatically interrupted by a barrage of small-arms fire and RPGs. One grenade pierced and penetrated the firewall of their vehicle, sliced off Norbie’s arm, and exploded next to Dawn.

The explosion also ripped shrapnel through Norbie’s body, lacerating his liver and causing severe lung damage. And it left Dawn’s right arm hanging by sinews, broke five ribs, shattered her shoulder blade, and bruised her lung.

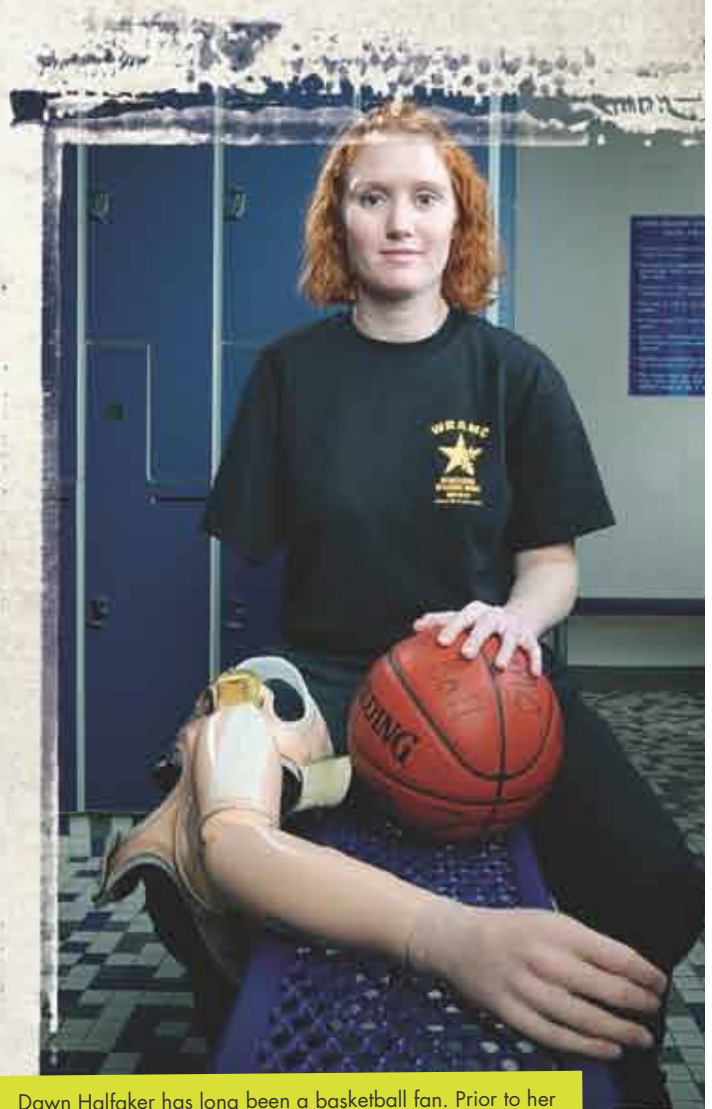
Norbie heard Dawn yell, “Get out of the kill zone!” And, miraculously, even with such extensive vehicle damage, the driver was able to follow her order.

When the driver finally got them to the forward operating base, Norbie’s breaths were getting ever shallower. He says a medic told him she would breathe for him, and then she put a respirator over his mouth.

“I remember closing my eyes,” says Norbie. “I thought that was going to be my last breath I breathed on earth. And I drifted off.”

Not Ready to Quit Life

At Germany’s Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, doctors harbored doubts of their own. So Norbie’s family was flown over to tell him goodbye.



Dawn Halfaker has long been a basketball fan. Prior to her injury she starred as a guard on Army’s Division I team.

But Norbie, hell bent on dying, kept on living.

“So I got stable enough, and they shipped me over to Walter Reed where I finally came out of my coma after two months. I had lost a lot of weight. I couldn’t talk. I was heavily sedated. And I had a brain injury. And I thought to myself, man, I really don’t want to live like this.”

It took months before Norbie could even sit up in bed without being winded.

“Physical therapists would come into my room after a while, and I hated them at first because they started making me do stuff – and I really didn’t want to do anything.”

But WRAMC housed another recovering patient who had been waiting for Norbie, looking for him, and asking about his well-being for months.

And she wasn’t about to see him quit.

“Norbie’s recovery took a little longer than mine,” says Dawn. “He was much more severely injured. He had a lot of internal injuries. His

lungs were damaged a little bit worse than mine. When he finally started to come to – I’d go see him every day.”

Dawn says she noticed the occasional look of bewilderment on Norbie’s face as he saw her walking around, recovering, and working on her rehabilitation.

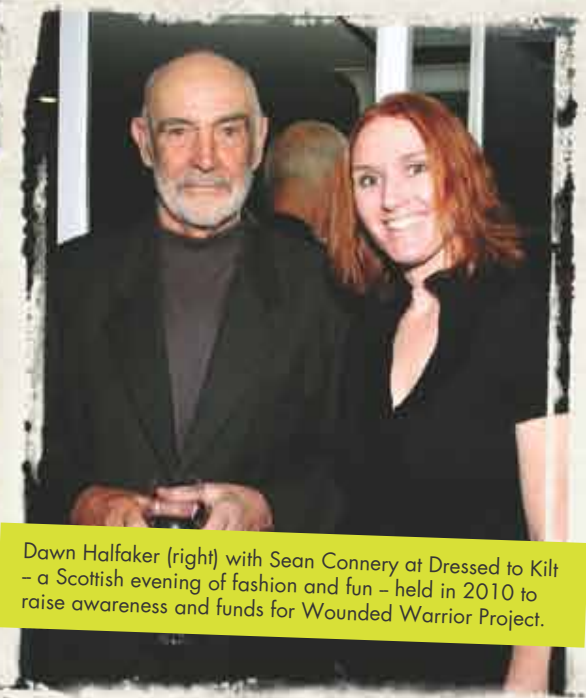
“He’s a competitive guy. He’s a great athlete. He was my best squad leader. We used to work out together before we deployed. I loved it when he led PT (physical training) because he was always challenging me.”

To Dawn, Norbie seemed increasingly dejected. She tried to motivate him, telling him she wasn’t walking out of Walter Reed until he does. She reminded him they were a team and relied on each other to get through this experience together.

She reminisced about another RPG incident – this one a dud – that landed in the mess hall. While others were scurrying away from the spinning rocket, Norbie dove on Dawn to protect her.



Norbie Lara takes his inspiring story around the country as a Warriors Speak spokesperson.



Dawn Halfaker (right) with Sean Connery at Dressed to Kilt – a Scottish evening of fashion and fun – held in 2010 to raise awareness and funds for Wounded Warrior Project.

The story managed to crack a smile on his face. But Norbie was still fighting depression, still feeling trapped in a body he didn't recognize.

The Turning Point Toward Norbie's New Normal

Remembering how Norbie would always smoke her in PT, Dawn decided there was only one thing she could do to motivate him.

"I got down on the floor of his hospital room," says Dawn, "and started doing one-armed push-ups."

That got his attention.

"I felt like I was alone," says Norbie. "But as Dawn kept trying to motivate me, I realized I wasn't alone. And when she started doing those one-armed push-ups, I was inspired. And I wanted to be like her."

It was a turning of the tide for Norbie. He stopped feeling animosity toward his physical therapists and started working on his recovery. It was hard, perhaps harder than anything he had ever done.

"I was dependent on oxygen, and I was fed through a feeding tube. It was a difficult process. But now I was fighting. After a while, I wasn't depending on the oxygen anymore. I was able to eat, able to sit up, get out of bed, walk, and eventually run – which was a big milestone for me because I didn't think I would ever run again."

More importantly, both Dawn and Norbie had stepped beyond the brink of death and firmly entrenched themselves in their will to live and recover.

They were eventually discharged from WRAMC.

"That was where I did start to feel alone," says Dawn. "Back home, nobody else was missing an arm. Nobody else had gone through what I went through."

Except for Norbie.

"For me, it was difficult going out in public," reveals Norbie. "I'm missing my arm, and people stare, and it was hard to be in crowds. But I knew I could always identify with Dawn. I even taught her what to do with the sleeve hanging down where her arm used to be."

"You owe it to yourself to choose a bigger, fuller, richer life."

Fighting the Good Fight

Dawn and Norbie's recovery was nothing less than an unmitigated triumph that can be shared by every warrior dealing with recovery issues . . . from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to traumatic brain injury (TBI) to loss of limbs, burns, and every physical and mental injury wounded warriors experience.

Their experiences serve as a paradigm for reaching out, relying on each other, and accepting your new mission of recovery.

"Losing my arm was the greatest thing that ever happened to me," says Norbie. "I'm stronger, happier, and have experienced the common bond of friendship I would have never known otherwise."

Dawn and Norbie now move forward full steam ahead in their passion to help other wounded warriors. Dawn serves as Vice President of Wounded Warrior Project's Board of Directors. Norbie serves as a WWP spokesperson for Warriors Speak.

"My battlefield mission is over, but now I have another mission," says Norbie. "There are people coming home that I can help. And down the road, when they get better, they'll get charged with the same mission to help others too, all the way down the line until the last person comes home."

"Everyone has a choice," says Dawn. "You owe it to yourself to choose a bigger, fuller, richer life. That doesn't mean things get easy. You just keep moving on."

But they still remember those events of June 19.

"Usually, when the date rolls around, I forget it's my Alive Day," says Dawn. "But then Norbie will send me a text message. I'll take a couple minutes to reflect and remind myself that I'm alive and life is good."

RIDE ON

The inaugural Soldier Ride Jacksonville took place April 9, 2011 with the start-finish line resting in the shadow of Wounded Warrior Project's new headquarters.

More than 30 wounded warriors took part in the nearly 33-and-a-half mile cycling event, and over 270 additional cyclists turned out en force to ride alongside the service personnel.

Hundreds of community members, social groups, and businesses lined the roads with smiling faces, flags, signs, and even entire cheering sections as these athletes completed a physically, emotionally, and mentally challenging test of endurance.



Soldier Ride Jacksonville kicked off with the singing of the National Anthem, an opportunity in which every attendee took a few moments to reflect on the sacrifices made by America's servicemen and women.

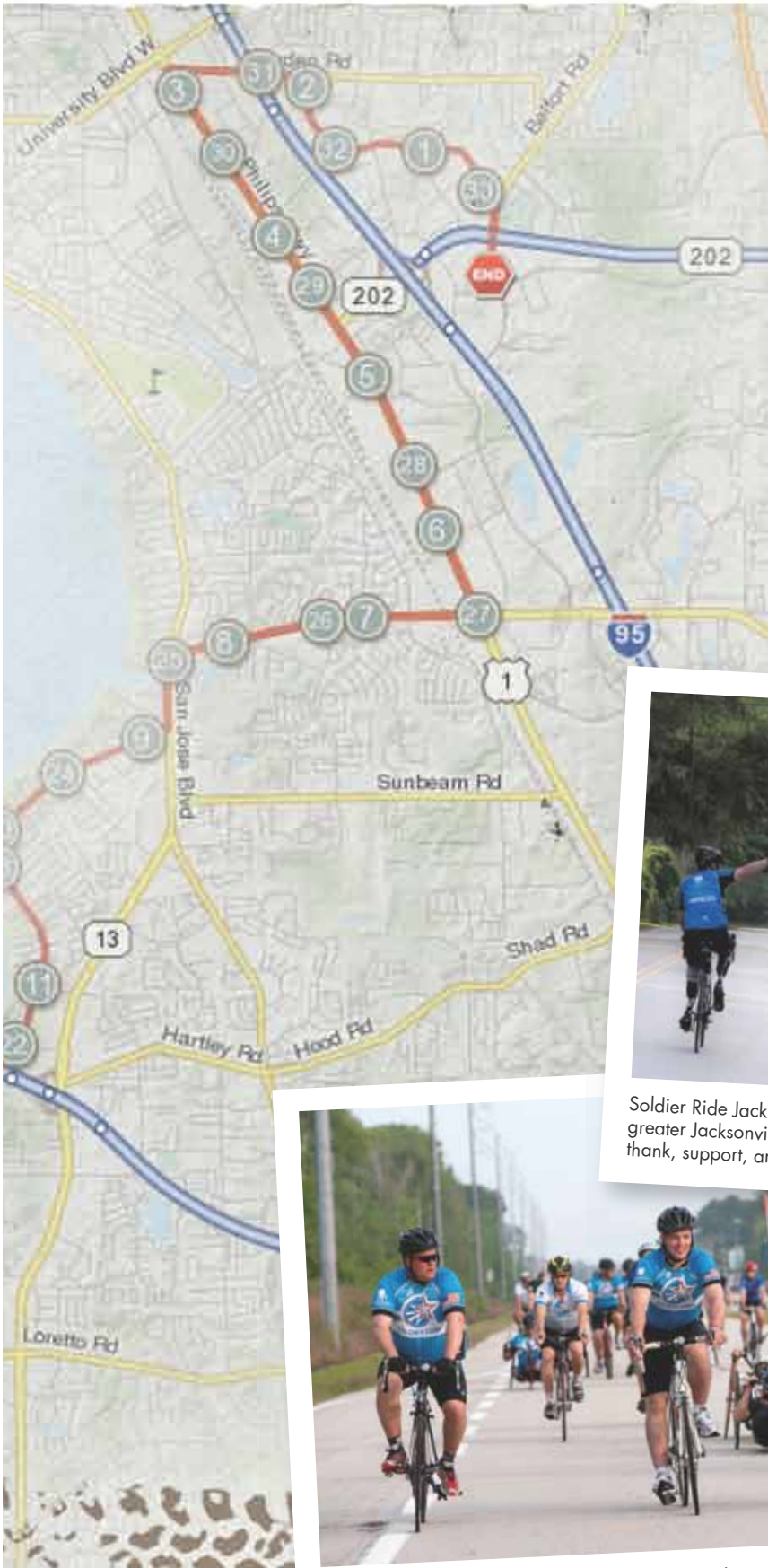


Chris Willard made the trip to Jacksonville, Florida from San Antonio, Texas to participate in Soldier Ride, where he began the day with tremendous support from his family.



Brent 'Hoss' Hendrix paces a group of fellow warriors with his hand cycle along the Soldier Ride route.





Jesse Townsend extended a hand to thank some community well-wishers as he made his way down the home stretch and toward the finish line.



Soldier Ride Jacksonville covered more than 33 miles around the greater Jacksonville area, allowing communities the opportunity to thank, support, and encourage riders along the way.



Thomas Garner (left), Jesse Townsend (center), and Stephen Siwulec (right) shared stories, laughs, and friendship as they led a group of cyclists during Soldier Ride Jacksonville.

MOUNTAIN WARRIORS

By Daniel Barnes

“As an amputee, you tend to fall into movement patterns and sport forces you to break those patterns and push new limits.”

Jeff Adams was stateside for barely 30 days following the loss of his leg when Wounded Warrior Project representatives visited him at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

“They told me they wanted me to come ski,” Jeff recalled. “Snow ski.”



Jeff Adams skiing moguls at Wounded Warrior Project's Ski Weekend at Windham Mountain Resort in New York.

“I said, ‘Hell, I don’t know what kind of drugs they’re giving ya’ll, but they’re a helluva lot better than mine if you think you’re taking a southern boy from Baton Rouge who just lost his leg and teaching him to ski.”

That was November 2004. Two months later Jeff was at New York’s Windham Mountain Resort where he met Dave Nichols, a certified adaptive ski instructor who lost both of his legs from the knee down in the Vietnam War.

Two years later Jeff received his ski instructor certification on that same mountain.

Every January now Dave instructs at Wounded Warrior Project’s Ski Weekend at Windham Mountain Resort. This year was no different as Dave teamed up with Jeff and Manny Piña. Both Jeff and Manny served in Iraq and are now single leg, above-the-knee amputees. Much like Dave, Jeff’s life changed when an improvised explosive device was detonated at close range while on patrol in south Baghdad. Manny lost his leg when a car sideswiped him on his motorcycle just one month after returning from Iraq.

All are now certified adaptive ski instructors, but carving down powdery trails wasn’t always in the cards for Jeff or Manny. Jeff was born and



Dave Nichols (left), Jeff Adams (center), and Manny Piña (right) atop the ski trail as they map out their next run.

raised in steamy Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Manny along the sunny shores of Puerto Rico.

It was Wounded Warrior Project that introduced them to the sport that they are now so passionate about. Both make the yearly trek to Windham Mountain to meet up with Dave and their fellow wounded warriors.

Manny had never heard of WWP ski events until he received an email invitation in 2007 to attend an event in Breckenridge, Colorado. Not knowing what to expect, he told his wife, Dana, that he would give it a try. With Dana's encouragement, he set off for the Rockies.

"I think what changed my life was they gave me a ski instructor who lost his leg in Iraq and was a one-legged skier," Manny recalls. "If he had been a two-legged skier, I would have had so many excuses to give up, but when I first saw him I said, 'Shoot, whatever he says, I have to do and can't complain.'"

Dave, Manny, and Jeff all agree skiing, and sports in general, played an integral role in their rehabilitation process.

"As an amputee, you tend to fall into movement patterns and sport forces you to break those patterns and push new limits. It also keeps you in shape, which is very important for an amputee," says Dave.

Jeff and Manny now see it as their duty to motivate others the same way veterans like Dave Nichols did for them.

"One of the reasons I wanted to become an instructor was because I learned and got my inspiration, my health, and my healing from Vietnam veterans," says Jeff. "So I'm going to come back and teach another military vet how to ski."

Dave admits working with young wounded warriors can be challenging. That is far outweighed, he said, by watching them overcome the odds and, as a result, form a timeless bond.

"These young men and women still have a very gladiator-like mentality and it hurts to see them get frustrated," says Dave. "But the sense of camaraderie and purpose that follows is the most rewarding of all."

TECH TALK

Servicemen and women – perhaps above any other group of individuals – best understand the significance and value of the bonds they make.

Sometimes those bonds are made in childhood. Other times they are forged on the battlefield. Regardless of where they have their origins, they are always strong.

WWP Connect helps further and strengthen many of your core bonds. The exclusive online community was created for you and allows alumni, caregivers, and WWP staff to share information, support, and resources such as program and event information, videos, photos, blogs, and other updates.

WWP Connect is also the gateway to other WWP online programs, including:

*My Care Crew – A private community that connects caregivers and wounded warriors with family, friends, and community volunteers who assist with errands and needs during both the initial and long-term rehabilitative process.

*Web Advocate – This cutting-edge technology allows you to learn about and identify what benefits you have earned. Armed with the knowledge you gain from the site, you can address your benefits and compensation concerns with WWP counselors and be better informed when working with the VA.



Web Advocate's simple interface allows you to easily determine which benefits you have earned so you are well informed when working with the VA.

*Restore – This anonymous website is accessible only to WWP alumni and offers resources and self-help strategies as you battle the invisible wounds of war such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or combat and operational stress.

WWP Connect will be adding additional features this year so stay connected by visiting connect.woundedwarriorproject.org.

If you don't have a username and password or can't log in send an email to us at connectadmin@woundedwarriorproject.org and we'll help you get connected.

FREEZE FRAME



Wounded Warrior Josh Krueger (left) and his wife, Jill (right), attended the Academy of Country Music awards in Las Vegas where they met Shawna and Keifer Thompson of Thompson Square.



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A L U M N I

Enter to Win

Submit a photo of yourself wearing WWP logo apparel. The most interesting pictures will be featured in our electronic newsletter and in the After Action Report. At the end of the year, alumni will vote for the best picture to win. Good Luck!

Submit your photos to alumni@woundedwarriorproject.org

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Wounded Warrior Project's sixth annual Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner brought together a distinguished group of warriors, their families, and supporters.