



AFTER ACTION

2011 ★ VOLUME 4 ★ ★ ★ ★ R E P O R T



GRAND SLAM
HUNT

BREEZY **POINT**



FAMILY LIFELINE



**WOUNDED WARRIOR
PROJECT®**

WOUNDEDWARRIORPROJECT.ORG

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ON THE COVER: Tom and April Marcum enjoy some holiday family fun with their sons Jared (14) and Gabe (11). Photo by Mark Cubbedge.

★★★★★ EXECUTIVE MESSAGE



FAMILY is the lifeline

Dear Alumni,
The holidays are a busy rush of activities and festivities, and the true meaning of the season can easily get lost in the mix.
For some, the time with family is the highlight of the year. For others, including some of our Wounded Warriors, the holidays aren't as much of a celebration of family and friends. So I want to encourage you to give the gift of a phone call to a buddy or Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) friend you met at an Alumni event or Family Support retreat. Make the time to pick up the phone and spend a few minutes re-connecting. Both of you will be glad you did.

After all, family can be defined by a single, selfless act: being there when needed.
Tom Marcum, one of the subjects of this issue's cover story, said it best: "Family is our lifeline."
Wounded Warrior Project firmly believes that, too. We are both humbled and honored to serve as extended family for so many warriors, spouses, parents, brothers, sisters, and children throughout the year.
The WWP family will continue to be here for you when needed.
To reinforce the role family plays in our everyday lives, WWP staff will be emailing and calling our Alumni and family members throughout December.
Now would be a good time to update your contact information by emailing alumni@woundedwarriorproject.org.
We wish you and your family a happy holiday season and look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Steve Nardizzi

Steve Nardizzi
Executive Director, Wounded Warrior Project™



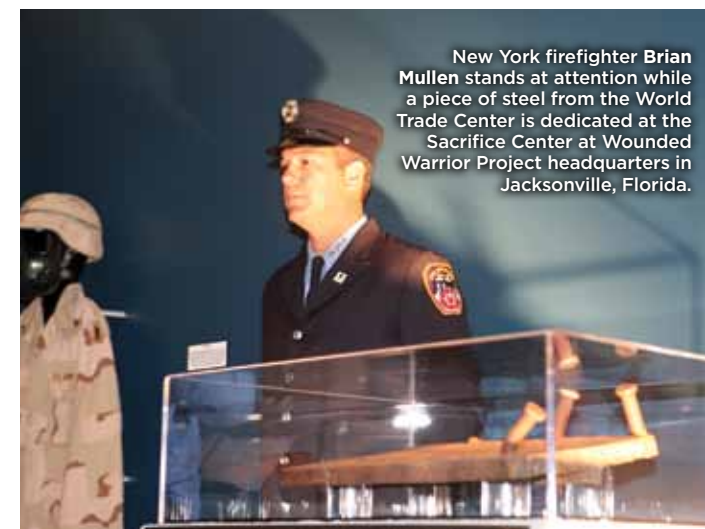
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GOT AN IDEA OR COMMENT?
editor@woundedwarriorproject.org



New York firefighter Brian Mullen stands at attention while a piece of steel from the World Trade Center is dedicated at the Sacrifice Center at Wounded Warrior Project headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida.



Wounded Warrior Project Alumni William Fettes and Medal of Honor recipient Dakota Meyer attended the St. Louis Rams at New York Giants Monday Night Football game Sept. 19.



Miss New York Kaitlin Monte participated in the seventh annual BGC Charity Day on Sept. 11, 2011. BGC partners donated 100 percent of its revenues that day to charities including Wounded Warrior Project.



Wounded Warriors John Alvarez and J.D. Greer shared a smile during the Southeast Alumni Summit at the TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.



Wounded Warriors were on hand in Cary, North Carolina to accept this check from Kangaroo Express as a donation from its 'Salute Our Troops' campaign.

FOREVER BROTHERS

After three tours and more than 70 surgeries, Corporal Anthony Villarreal is now serving injured service members he calls his brothers—with inspiration provided by Shakespeare's Henry V.



“Henry V” Act IV, Scene III – King Henry, in disguise, rallies his troops before the Battle of Agincourt with these famous words: “For he today that sheds his blood with me shall forever be my brother.”

CORPORAL ANTHONY VILLARREAL cites that quote as his favorite. It’s a personal drama he’s lived during three tours of duty – two in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. And those inspiring words continually gained meaning for Anthony when he returned from Afghanistan and endured more than 70 surgeries.

“My recovery and rehab was long and painful,” says Anthony. “Having skin grafts, where they take a piece of your good skin and place it on an area that was burned, is physically and emotionally stressful. But my family helped me through it all.”

The injury happened to Anthony on June 20, 2008 in Afghanistan’s Helmand province – three and a half months into his third deployment. Anthony was leading a supply convoy when an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated.

“There was a big flash and a loud bang. I crawled out of the vehicle as another Marine came to my rescue and dragged me off. That’s when a rocket in the back of the vehicle exploded.”

Three of Anthony’s “brothers” were with him in the vehicle. Two Marines were severely injured, and a Navy doctor was killed.

“I didn’t know what was going on,” says Anthony. “At some point I was placed into a drug-induced coma. I woke up three and a half months later at Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in San Antonio, Texas.”

Anthony says waking up from the coma was “a very emotional experience” because he didn’t believe he had survived the explosion.

“My wife and my family were there

at my side. But I had had surgery to replace my eyelids, so it was hard for me to look. I was just trying to remember all the faces and recognize everyone’s voice.”

Anthony received third degree burns over 60 percent of his body. Surgeons also amputated his right hand and left fingers. And the muscle and nerve damage he sustained caused Anthony to be unable to lift the ankle and toes of his right foot – a condition doctors call “foot drop.”

“I spent two years at BAMC. When I got out, I struggled with the looks I’d get from everybody. You know, people staring. Sometimes children would see me – this person who’d been burned – and they would get scared. Getting over the fear of people’s reaction to me was a big thing for me going back into civilian life.”

Today, with courage comparable to King Henry, Anthony steps front and center in a very public way as a member of the National Campaign Team for Wounded Warrior Project.

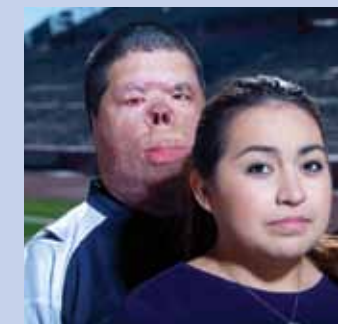
“I want to help Wounded Warriors in their recovery process. And I want to give insight to civilians that these warriors are out there. Ask us and we’ll tell you our story. We’re so much more than something to stare at.”

Helping his fellow service members is a mission Anthony also carries with him in his private life. Each June 20 since the incident, he calls the guys – those who shed blood with him – to reflect on their “Alive Day.”

“And then I call the mother of the guy who was killed, and I talk with her. We talk about his life. And we really just leave it at that. He will forever be my brother.”

ANTHONY VILLARREAL

Q&A



What’s your favorite song of all time? “One” by Metallica

What do you want to be remembered for? My willingness to succeed in life.

Name one thing not many people know about you. I played the violin in orchestra.

What are three goals on your life’s to-do list? Graduate college, own my restaurant, and to have a huge family.

If you could have three wishes granted, what would they be? My first wish would be for everyone to be taken care of; second would be to have a long and happy life; and my third wish would be to have a giant house.

Who inspired you most during your recovery and rehabilitation? My loving wife and family.

What are your favorite hobbies? Watching sports, playing computer games, and reading military history.

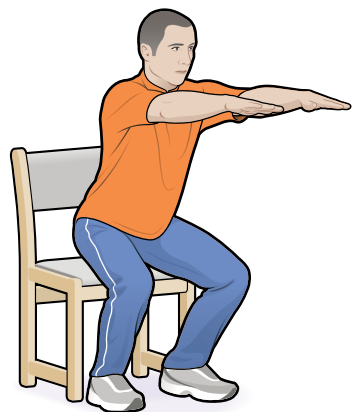
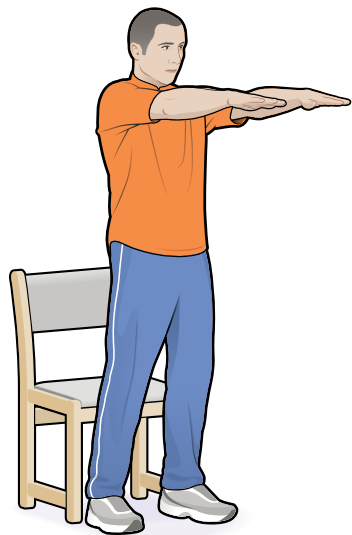
If you could have any super power, what would it be? Shoot lasers from my hand.

How did you feel when you received your Purple Heart? I felt like I had finished my job.

figuring out FOOD LABELS

Using the Nutrition Facts to Your Healthy Advantage

UP AND ACTIVE: home-based exercise



Fit Facts

Exercise: Body weight squat

Muscles Worked: Quadriceps and gluteals

Frequency: Beginners can perform this exercise daily by doing 1-3 sets of between 8-15 repetitions. As you progress begin holding weights and perform the exercise every other day.

Two things the holiday season brings with it: plenty of food and New Year's resolutions.

While Boot Camp Kitchen (page 5) is addressing the former, this column will tackle the latter by making sure Wounded Warriors are UP and ACTIVE. Just because the winter is upon us doesn't mean you can postpone that new getting fit resolution until spring arrives.

The following body weight squat exercise can be done as a family activity in the comfort of your own home! Stay focused, grasshoppers, and prepare to engage in a healthy and active lifestyle.

Starting Position:

Stand tall, with your feet shoulder width apart, 12-18 inches directly in front of a chair. With your chest up and shoulders back extend your arms fully in front of you.

Downward Phase:

Descend by flexing at the knees and hips, only squatting as low as you are comfortable. Maintain a flat back with your head and eyes forward. Avoid leaning forward by finding a focus point (like the TV)

with your eyes. Keep your heels on the floor and maintain balance by raising your arms straight in front of you as you descend. Once your bum has touched the chair, or you have accomplished a comfortable squat position, you have completed the downward phase of the exercise.

Upward Phase:

Once your bum touches the chair do not sit and begin to watch the TV! Rise back up pressing through your feet while extending your knees and hips simultaneously until you reach a full standing position. You have now completed a full squat. Clap it up for yourself!

Key Points:

- Head and eyes straight forward
- Flat back
- Avoid leaning forward, keep chest up and shoulders back
- Do not allow the knees to move in front of the feet
- Avoid lifting heels off of the floor
- Do not sit and watch the TV

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE HEALTHIER CHOICES on your next trip to the market, it's a good idea to get to know the Nutrition Facts label. This essential guide gives you detailed information about the nutrient content of packaged products—information that can help you determine if a food or beverage aligns with your diet or is appropriate for you if you have health conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Developed by the U.S. Food and Drug

Administration (FDA), the label also lets you compare similar products to decide which one is best for you and your family.

Whether you want to watch your calorie intake or are concerned about sodium, fats, or carbohydrates, learning to read the Nutrition Facts label accurately can help you make informed choices to support a healthy diet. So here's a quick tutorial to help you understand the information on the label:

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 3 oz. (85g)			
Amount Per Serving		As Served	
Calories 38		Calories from Fat 0	
		% Daily Value	
Total Fat 0g		0%	
Saturated Fat 0g		0%	
Cholesterol 0g		0%	
Sodium 0g		2%	
Total Carbohydrate 0g		3%	
Dietary Fiber 0g		8%	
Sugars 0g			
Protein 0g			
Vitamin A 270%	Vitamin C 10%		
Calcium 2%	Iron 0%		
Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:			
	Calories	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	30g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Serving Size: Serving sizes are listed in standard measurements such as cups or pieces. Similar foods usually have similar serving sizes so you can compare them more easily. The label also includes servings per container to help you calculate the calories and nutrients in the entire package. Be sure to check the serving size against how much you actually eat. If a serving is 16 crackers and you eat 32, that also doubles the calories, fat, and nutrients you're consuming.

Calories: The figure listed represents the number of calories in one serving of food. The label also shows how many calories come from fat. In this example, 0 of the 38 calories come from fat. You can use this information to evaluate similar products and choose the one that is lower in either calories or fat, or in both calories and fat.

Nutrients: At a minimum, the product must list the amount of total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, sugars, protein, vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron that are in one serving. This can help you track whether you're getting all the nutrients you need in a day—or if you're getting too many.

- Limit these nutrients
- Get more of these nutrients

Footnote: The footnote at the bottom of the label is a reminder that the Percent Daily Value is based on a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet. If there's enough space on the product package, the footnote will also include a list of selected nutrient values for both 2,000- and 2,500-calorie-a-day diets. Many people may need fewer than 2,000 calories, while others may need 2,500 calories or more. So think of 2,000 calories a day as a general reference point.

Information printed with permission from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.



The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) is a program provider for WWP. For more information on the CIA, visit ciachef.edu.

THE

Family

THAT

RECOVERS TOGETHER..."

The story you are about to read will give you hope you may not have realized you had.

It's about a select group of people just like you who found strength in weakness ... courage through fear ... life after almost certain death. It's about the role family plays in the psychological relief and physical recovery of warriors wounded in action.

Even for those who believe they have no family.

Jana, Megan, and Jim Mylott

JIM MYLOTT THOUGHT HIS MOM WAS DEAD

But there she was, standing on the side of the road in Iraq, calling to him:

"Jimmy, get out of the truck! Jimmy, get out of the truck!"

That was July 2003. Jim's mother had passed away two years earlier.

"When I saw her and heard her calling my name, I knew I was about to die," says Jim, an Army staff sergeant assigned to security with the Military Police. "I've always believed your family comes to meet you when you die. It's hard to convey the peace I felt."

That peace was a stark contrast between what Jim had just experienced: the life of his team leader slipping out of his hands.

"Our checkpoint had just been rammed by a truck bomb," remembers Jim. "We were crushed inside our truck, which toppled over, sand shooting everywhere, dirt and debris raining down all around us."

Jim looked down and saw a hand. It seemed lifeless, but then it moved.

"My team leader was buried, pinned between two vehicles," says Jim. "I frantically tried to help, chucking back dirt to where I could see the crown of his head. But all the dirt kept caving in. Then he reached out and grabbed my hand, and I felt his grip get looser and looser."



And I knew he had passed. For that moment, for that hero – my brother in arms – I was his family.”

That’s when Jim says he lowered his head and simply waited to die. But his mother wouldn’t let him.

“In my next moment of consciousness, I was lying in a puddle of water. Members of my team were helping me. These are also my brothers who I will forever view as family.”

Jim suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and severe nerve damage. He was taken to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and eventually spent 18 months at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

But he says his real recovery didn’t start until he was released from the hospital and sent to Fort Dix.

That’s where he met Jana.

“I want you to do more than live. I want you to thrive.”

Jim says she found him broken. Jana says she refused to “put up with any of his crap.”

She explains: “Jim’s TBI left him with a stutter, which was much worse to Jim than it was in actuality. He’d carry a notepad with him and write down what he wanted to say to you and have you read it.”

Jana remembers meeting Jim in the chow hall. Jim recalls the story this way. “She blocked my path and wouldn’t let me pass, so I was forced to chit-chat with her.”

It wasn’t long before Jana told Jim to put away his notepad, stop getting flustered, think about what he wanted to say, and say it.

So Jim did just that and asked, “Would you like to have dinner with me sometime?”

Now it was Jana’s turn to be flustered – it took her a week before she said yes. Four months later they were engaged.

TAKE TIME TO GET TO KNOW THE NEW ME.

“My son Ian was 13 when I got hurt, and tragically my memory loss has taken away a lot of those years from me,” says Jim. “But he’s constantly helping trigger memories. And once I get a memory back, it’s here to stay. There’s a personality change with TBI. My son refers to it as the old dad and the new dad. It’s the new man that people need to have a relationship with.”

Jim’s family helped him accomplish things doctors told him would never happen.

They said he’d never walk again ... he does. Then they said he’d never walk without the help of a cane ... he does. And then they said he’d never walk without a limp ... he does.

“My daughter Megan is the best physical therapist I could have ever had. She runs me in circles. Disability is only a disability if you let it disable you.”

Jim claims he often doesn’t feel brave. But the support of his immediate family and his extended Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) family helps him through tough times.

“WWP has shown me I can still be productive,” says Jim, who has utilized the WWP Warriors to Work program. “My experience in the med hold units after Walter Reed was a very negative

Jim considers his daughter Megan to be the best physical therapist he’s ever had.

one — with toxic leaders who made us feel like we were broken toys that no one wants to play with. When I signed into the med hold unit I was greeted by the first sergeant and all he said was, ‘Welcome to the island of misfit toys!’ WWP proved to me that I’m not useless, and I can contribute to society.”

It’s those kinds of stresses Tom and April Marcum say they relieve through faith, family, and humor.

Tom and April met in the third grade, and they were married in 1993 shortly after high school.

Between 2006-2008, Tom suffered TBI, hearing loss, vision problems, and PTSD as a result of four separate mortar explosions. The entire Marcum family’s world changed. April took a leave of absence from her job as a kindergarten teacher to care for Tom. Her days were consumed with doctor appointments, therapy, home healthcare, and then tending to their children after school. For 18 months April was a constant nurse, driver, and maid.

“I missed the help my husband gave me with the kids and errands,” April says. “And some time to myself. I don’t like to admit this, but I think I was close to a breaking point in my own emotional health.”

That’s when April called Wounded Warrior Project and attended a Spouse Retreat.

“I got to the hotel and just being in such a calming, beautiful place was refreshing,” she says. “The first day I took a two-hour-long nap – something I had not done since the injury. It was bliss!”

April says she was both grateful and relieved to meet other women at the retreat who shared her experiences and feelings. Many of those women had been in similar situations as April, only for a longer period of time. They freely shared advice and knowledge they had gleaned from walking the same difficult road.

“I made some deep, emotional connections with several women. It was just the right thing at just the right time. I came home ready to get back into the fight again. I was re-energized

Tom spent part of his recovery process at the polytrauma unit in Tampa’s James A. Haley Veterans Hospital. Every Christmas he writes encouraging letters to those who follow in his footsteps there, regardless of the fact he has never met any of those wounded service members.

and happy when I came home.”
MY FAMILY IS MY ROCK.

“They helped me adapt and overcome,” says Tom. “When life handed me lemons, they made lemonade.”

April says it was their faith that helped them all find peace during times that were not peaceful.

“Our situation – anyone’s situation – didn’t come as a surprise to God,” she says. “The dark days are a lot like the weather. You can’t do anything about it. You simply have to hunker down and get through it. This too shall pass, and the sun will rise again.”

Tom adds: “Family can be blood relatives, friends, or your military brothers and sisters. You put your life in their hands, and they put their life in your hands.”

In a twist of irony, April says they rarely spent the holidays together before Tom’s injury because he was always deployed.

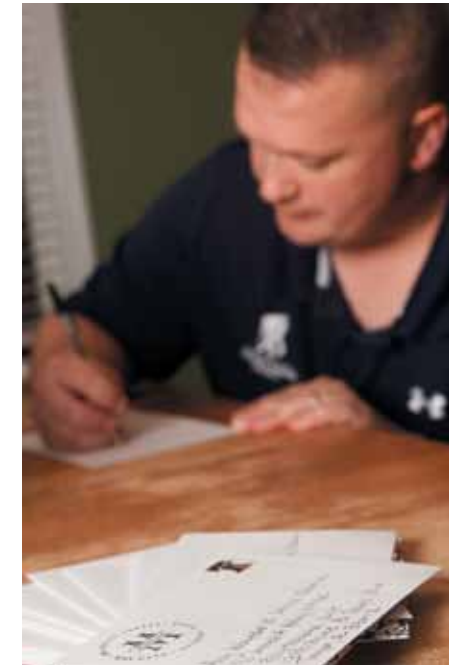
“There’s always a way to find opportunity to give thanks,” she says. “When Tom retired, we finally had the chance to spend Christmas together.”

But when Tom hears April say that he smiles and responds, “Yeah, my kids always remind me that the root word of retired is tired.”

DAD, DO YOU REMEMBER YOU WERE GOING TO GIVE ME \$20?

Humor has played a big role in Tom’s recovery process.

“My family likes to gang up on me during dinner,” he says. “As I deal with memory issues from TBI, they never let me get too down or too dark. They joke about helping me remember things that never happened. It’s all in good fun. And it reminds me every day who really loves me.”



Both the Marcum family and the Mylott family admit the holidays can be difficult for a lot of people. But they all encourage service members and their families to reach out for help, because no one is truly alone.

EVERY DAY IS A GIFT.

April’s advice to other military families struggling through recovery is simple:

“Inspire yourself to do great things because every day is a gift. Grab life or it will pass you by. Step outside your comfort zone and reach out for help. You have more in common with people – especially other Wounded Warriors – than you may realize.”

Tom says he’s amazed by April’s resolve.

“I don’t know what I would do without her. She’s awesome, awesome. She helps me with everything – from picking out clothes to paying bills to remembering appointments.”

But, then again, that’s what family does.

From Jim Mylott’s mom reaching out to him to get out of that truck ... to Tom Marcum’s children teasing him about the money he owes them ... to the Wounded Warrior whose only family is the other warrior lying in the next hospital bed ... family is what you make it.

And as Tom looks at April and thinks, he pauses, smiles, and says, “Family is our lifeline.”



Tom and April consider dachshunds Samson and Delilah an important part of their family unit.



M

ile after curious mile Air Force Major Chris Melton pedaled the Texas roadways, occasionally pondering his decision to volunteer in a charity bike ride.

He had stepped forward to be a support rider during an MS 150 ride from San Antonio to Corpus Christi, but organizers never paired him with another cyclist.

"I rode by myself for the first 30 miles," Major Melton recalled.

So far all he was supporting was the theory: *No good deed goes unpunished.*

His mission, however, was about to come into focus. Major Melton stopped off at a checkpoint and was asked to go back and meet up with a cyclist named Shane Parsons. The woman who was acting as Shane's support rider was unable to keep pace with him. Major Melton was asked to provide an assist.

So Major Melton, a C-5 Galaxy pilot, looped back and found Shane cruising along on his hand cycle. Shane, a retired United States Army sergeant, sacrificed both of his legs above the knee and sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) when the Humvee he was driving struck a roadside bomb in Baghdad, Iraq on Sept. 30, 2006.

As the two finished the bike ride together they found themselves bonding on a number of different levels, unknowingly putting in place the groundwork for a life-altering relationship.

major difference

Like Father, Like Son: Wyatt James Melton has learned from his father, Air Force Major Chris Melton, to respect, appreciate, and support Wounded Warriors like Shane Parsons.

Shane's Surrogate Father

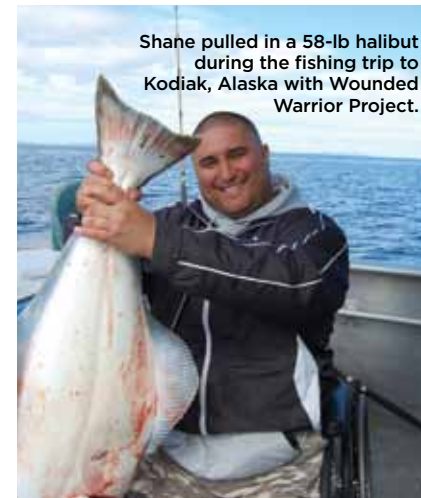
Shane was just six months old when his dad, Rick, passed away from brain cancer at age 33. Shane's mom, Cindy, has spent the last 26 years being single-mother strong.

"She raised that boy by herself, turned him over to the country, and now the country has given him back and she's doing it all over again," Major Melton said.

Major Melton met Cindy after the bike ride, and learned Shane had significant cognitive issues – including little concept of time. He also discovered Cindy had been forced to quit her job as an emergency room nurse — leaving behind a paycheck and insurance — to care for her son, get him to his appointments, and help him find joy and purpose in his life.

Major Melton, a dedicated husband and father of two young children, made the decision then to become a part of Shane's life. He understood the situation with perfect clarity: A loving parent had given up her career to care for her wounded son. At the same time a grown man was spending every waking moment with his mother.

"If I was hanging out with my mom all the time and couldn't hang out with anyone else, I'd be irritable," Major Melton said. "And at the same time she can't just go take a break.



Shane pulled in a 58-lb halibut during the fishing trip to Kodiak, Alaska with Wounded Warrior Project.

"Shane needs some guy time and I can give him that guy time. Any time he wants to do something with me, I'm there for him."

In the months and years that have followed Major Melton has accompanied Shane to a number of therapeutic and healing outings. Major Melton finds himself giving Shane enough space to enjoy himself while keeping paternal watch over him as well.

"Sometimes Shane gets mad at me because I act like his mother," Major Melton laughed. "I want him to have a good time but I want him to maintain a balance, too."

Most recently Major Melton took leave from his job and own family to join Shane on a Wounded Warrior

Project fishing trip in Kodiak, Alaska.

"Chris is one of the most supportive people my son has in his life," Cindy said. "Not only does he support him, but he is a great advocate for him."

Answering The Call

Major Melton sees no end to his relationship with Shane. He knows there is a need in Shane's life for someone like himself, and he's prepared to answer that call.

"All my life has been about serving others," said Major Melton, who has been in the Air Force 15 years. "Everything I have done has always had a greater cause and I guess that just filters into this, too."

Major Melton's dedication to a complete stranger he met on a Texas roadway a few short years ago continually impresses Cindy.

"I am just amazed because Chris has a family and a job that demands so much and he takes the time out of his day, no matter where he is in the world, to make that connection," Cindy said. "He makes us feel like a part of the family."

Shane is already thinking about his next outing, and wondering whether Major Melton would be open to doing a little hunting.

"I don't even know if he is a hunter," Shane said.

Somehow you know that won't really matter to Major Melton.



Major Melton and Shane have formed a lasting relationship through a chance meeting at a cycling event.

peer mentoring

Wounded Warrior Project Peer Mentoring motivates you by helping develop one-on-one friendships with fellow Wounded Warriors who are further along in the recovery process.

Our certified peer mentors are excellent resources, listeners, and "hospital buddies" who will motivate you by sharing their own real-life experiences. They've been there and understand the trials you are experiencing. If you are interested in becoming a peer mentor, visit woundedwarriorproject.org



THE PATRIOTICALLY PROUD FOLKS on New York's Rockaway Peninsula certainly know how to say, "Thank you."


The Breezy Point community lost 32 of its 5,000 residents in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Every summer the residents line the streets – some of them aptly named – to welcome Wounded Warriors into their homes and lives.

"This is the homecoming these guys never got," said retired FDNY firefighter Flip Mullen. "Rockaway was devastated with the attack on the Towers. We lost someone from about every other block here. Knowing when a lot of these young men signed up, they were picking up the flag and running with it. So, to support them in any way we can is just the right thing to do."

Residents, members of the Graybeards charity, NYFD, and NYPD come together each year to put on the Wounded Warrior Project weekend. Warriors are treated to sunset cruises, fishing trips, and even some well-pampered manicuring for the women.

The weekend also features adaptive water sports activities, such as sailing, scuba diving, and water-skiing, all in a setting that is warm and welcoming.

"It means a lot to me," Lance Cpl. Brandon Long, who sacrificed both his legs, told The New York Times. "To be able to get out in the civilian world without people looking down on us and without discriminating [against] us; people that actually respect what we've done and the sacrifices that we've made."

 **ONLINE:** Visit woundedwarriorproject.org/aar-exclusive.aspx to see more great photos.



The Breezy Point community lined the streets for as far as the eye could see to welcome the Wounded Warriors into town.



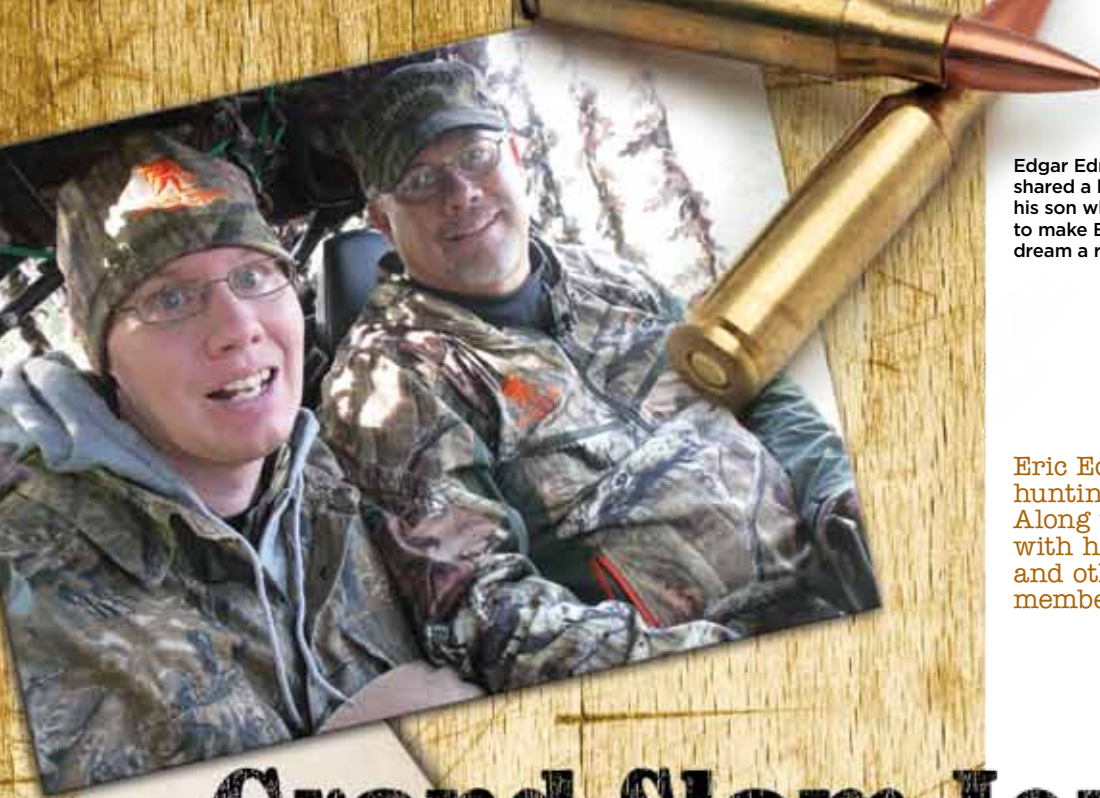
U.S. Marine Cpl. Tony Mullis enjoyed some waterskiing in Jamaica Bay.



U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Brandon Long enjoys a memorable family moment with his wife, Nicole, and daughter, Claire, at Rockaway Point Yacht Club.



Wounded Warriors, volunteers, and FDNY members prepare to enjoy a morning of fishing aboard the Brooklyn VI.



Edgar Edmundson (right) shared a lot of smiles with his son while attempting to make Eric's life-long dream a reality.

Eric Edmundson is on a hunting trip for the ages. Along the way, he reunites with his Army company and other injured service members.

Grand Slam Journal

Eric Edmundson on the Road...

To say Eric Edmundson is going hunting is an understatement. The retired Army sergeant and Purple Heart recipient is on a quest for his own grand slam in hunting. And he's after the big stuff: buffalo, alligator, and more.

Accompanied by his parents, Beth and Edgar, Eric is making the journey in a specially prepared vehicle that allows him to hunt, despite the traumatic brain injury he suffered in a 2005 blast from an improvised explosive device (IED) in Iraq. We're pleased to present these excerpts from the journal of Eric's parents as they make this inspiring journey.



The Edmundson family poses together after Eric checked this axis buck off his grand slam list in Texas.

8/12/11: **Seminole Prairie Ranch, Okeechobee, Florida**

The first of Eric's grand-slam hunts was "wildly" successful. Eric was able to bag an 8½-foot alligator, a Sitka deer, and a wild boar. He is absolutely thrilled to check these animals off his list. —Beth

8/15/11: **Escondido Ranch, Junction, Texas**

We just arrived today, and Eric has already harvested a trophy axis buck. He is one happy man! The look and smile on his face said it all. —Beth

8/21/11: **The Ooh La La Annual Proud Supporter Benefit Dinner, Albuquerque, New Mexico**

The Ooh La la event was a terrific evening. We were told there were 1,050-plus guests in attendance to support WWP. Before the start of the evening, Eric had the opportunity to meet with actor/singer Gary Sinise



Eric and Edgar celebrate the harvesting of a bison in Missouri.

and the Lt. Dan Band. Eric was able to share his thoughts with his Dynavox communication board and also took a moment to recognize his friend R.J. Meade, who was his first contact with WWP in 2005. Mr. Meade brought Eric his backpack in the hospital, and in his speech Eric said he would never forget that important moment. —Edgar

9/2/11: **High Adventure Ranch, Cook Station, Missouri**

After some searching, Eric and his guide Monte were able to locate a bison herd. Monte worked with Eric in selecting a magnificent bison that was so large, it took Eric two shots to bring him down. —Edgar

9/15/11: **The VFW at Fort Carson, Colorado Springs, Colorado**

After arriving at the Fort Carson Soldier and Family Assistance Center, we enjoyed a great lunch with fellow injured service members. After lunch Eric gave a presentation to the warriors, staff, and volunteers. —Edgar

9/22/11: **Scenic View Ranch, Monona, Iowa**

It was a cool, brisk morning when Eric and his guide Lloyd Johannmeier started out in pursuit of ram. The ram proved to be more active than first thought but finally presented itself with a shot opportunity on the edge of a meadow. The ram ran about 20 yards before laying down. Eric was very excited during the pursuit and equally excited to harvest a beautiful animal. —Edgar

9/23-9/30/11: **Eric's military reunion**

Eric flew home to Tacoma to host a heartwarming reunion with members of his Crazy Horse Company. The reading of the names of those who did not make it home filled the room with emotion. Eric had not seen the members of his old company since he was injured. It was an amazing experience to witness the level of feelings and emotions these young men showed when they were able to gather as a group once again. They served together, fought together, and lost friends together. Charlie Company lost

11 of their group during their deployment in Iraq. It was obvious this left the surviving members with emotional scars. All the members felt a comfort after spending the evening talking and listening. —Edgar

10/11/11: **Sunday Creek Outfitters, Bozeman, Montana**

The pronghorn antelope lived up to its reputation as being a fast, elusive animal. Eric and his guide hunted for two days before a pronghorn would give Eric an opportunity to take a shot. On the afternoon of the second day, Eric not only shot a pronghorn but also set a personal shot-distance record using his shooting system. The pronghorn dropped after a 246-yard shot. —Edgar

Postscript

Having spent August, September, and October zigzagging our way from from the Southeast to the Northwest, it has been a most thrilling and rewarding experience. Folks recognize the WWP rig, and we get high-fives, thumbs up, and honks from vehicles. As people pass by, they slow down to read the trailer and take photographs. At almost every fuel stop, people come up to the rig and want to talk about their experience with the war or just ask what WWP is all about.

At every campground people come to visit with us about WWP, asking for information on how they can learn more and how they can do more. At every restaurant, folks visit with us about WWP and are very kind to Eric, thanking him for his service and sacrifice.

It has been a pleasure to find that folks take time out of their daily lives to express their gratitude to our returning Wounded Warriors. Some know of the WWP mission; others want information on how to get involved. The message is always the same—thankfulness and gratitude. —Edgar

Eric and his dad are all smiles after successfully hunting this Merino ram in Iowa.



escaping the world of SUCK



“I’m in the world of suck.”

With those words Joe Washam bluntly recalls where he was physically, emotionally, and mentally during the first two months following his injury in Baghdad, Iraq.

Joe sustained third-degree burns over 40 percent of his body on April 26, 2004 during an explosion at a suspected chemical weapons site. He also incurred a shrapnel injury to his right buttock, which led to his passing out from blood loss.

Two weeks later he awoke at Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in Texas with pain as his constant companion. Joe soon learned the seriousness of his injuries had him completely dependent on others for routine tasks such as eating and brushing his teeth. He even had to learn how to walk again.

“I couldn’t do anything,” Joe said. “It sucked.”

A short time later Joe, who had essentially been isolated in ICU due to infection concerns, found out two soldiers died in the blast, including one of his own.

“I knew there was a family without a son, a father, and a husband,” Joe said. “And so that sucked, too.”

Joe even told his girlfriend, Jennifer, since he was in such dismal shape she could leave him if she wanted and he wouldn’t blame her. Jennifer stayed at Joe’s side (they

celebrated their seventh wedding anniversary in October), serving as “the anchor in the storm.”

A Re-birthday Celebration

Joe knew he would spend June 23, 2004 at BAMC largely as he had spent every other day the previous two months. This day, at least, would be a little different. Joe was turning 24, and some family and friends were dropping by to celebrate his birthday.

That celebration would become as much about Joe’s re-birth as it was his birthday. June 23, 2004 was the day Joe began escaping the world of suck; it was the day he received his Purple Heart.

Joe was helped up the stairs and onto the auditorium stage at BAMC where he would receive his medal for being wounded in combat. The presenting officer made it very clear to the standing-room only crowd of soldiers, staff, and patients that this was, indeed, Joe’s day.

The auditorium crowd burst into song and belted out a heart-warming version of Happy Birthday. A line formed shortly thereafter and lasted a full 15 minutes. Nearly everyone in attendance came forward to shake Joe’s hand, thank him, and wish him well in his continuing recovery. “Having them sing Happy Birthday and shake my hand really helped me out,” Joe said. “There was something about that and being so disconnected for the last two months, being stuck in this small room in intense pain, and then having my brothers and sisters in uniform sing to me. I felt a part of the Army again.”

Joe said that moment switched his mindset and way of thinking.

“From that day forward everything started to change,” Joe said. “I wanted to motivate myself and motivate others.”

Today Joe is doing exactly that by serving as a member of the National Campaign Team (NCT) for Wounded Warrior Project. NCT members share their stories across the WWP program platform, raising awareness for the most recently injured servicemen and women while serving as an example of the successes one can achieve after injury.

“Participating in WWP Alumni events has helped me grow my network of fellow Wounded Warrior brothers and sisters throughout the nation,” Joe said. “I’ve been educated on other injuries and issues that I personally don’t deal with directly, i.e. TBI, amputees, and caregivers. With this knowledge I feel that I can better advocate for my fellow Wounded Warriors.”

The transformation was complete. The world of suck had given way to the world of success.



ONLINE: See exclusive photos and read the extended version of Joe Washam’s story by visiting woundedwarriorproject.org/aar-exclusive.aspx

SOUTHWEST REGION

March 22-25

Soldier Ride San Diego
San Diego, California
mspeicherharris@woundedwarriorproject.org

SOUTHEAST REGION

January 2

TRACK Cohort 8 Students Arrive
Jacksonville, Florida

January

Alumni Summit

February 16-19

Soldier Ride Tampa
Tampa, Florida
mspeicherharris@woundedwarriorproject.org

March 1-4

Soldier Ride Jacksonville
Jacksonville, Florida
mspeicherharris@woundedwarriorproject.org

MIDATLANTIC REGION

February

Alumni Summit

MIDWEST REGION

January 2

TRACK Cohort 3 Students Arrive
San Antonio, Texas

January 28

Tough Mudder Texas
Brackenridge Park

NORTHEAST REGION

January 6-9

Adaptive Sports Foundation Learn to Ski
Windham, New York
whannigan@woundedwarriorproject.org

February 6-8

Adaptive Sports Foundation Intermediate Ski
Windham, New York
whannigan@woundedwarriorproject.org

March 6-9

Boot Camp Kitchen
Hyde Park, New York

March 26-29

Boot Camp Kitchen
Hyde Park, New York

GREAT LAKES REGION

January 12

Adaptive Adventures Ski Event
Chicago, Illinois
jmartinez@woundedwarriorproject.org

February 12

Adaptive Adventures Ski Event (Family)
Chicago, Illinois
jmartinez@woundedwarriorproject.org

MULTIPLE REGIONS

January 9-March 16

Intro to Computer Technology Classes
Locations:

Fort Sam Houston
Fort Bragg
Balboa
Camp Pendleton
Fort Carson
Bethesda
Fort Belvoir
Fort Stewart

fpedroza@woundedwarriorproject.org

January 9-March 23

Intro to Computer Networking
Locations:

Fort Sam Houston
Fort Bragg
Camp Pendleton
Fort Carson

fpedroza@woundedwarriorproject.org

January 9-March 23

Intro to Computer Security
Locations:

Fort Bragg
Fort Carson

fpedroza@woundedwarriorproject.org

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PARTING SHOT



Chris Buscema, physical therapist at the Warrior Transition Unit in Germany, assists 1st Sgt. Vasile Zbanca of Romania during Soldier Ride Germany.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: Look for Policy Agenda/Happenings On The Hill