

After Action

SUMMER 2013

REPORT

BACK ON TRACK:
CHRISTOPHER KIND FOUND A NEW
PURPOSE IN AN UNEXPECTED PLACE.

PLUS:

MONEY MANAGEMENT:
WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO ENJOY
FINANCIAL PEACE

EMPTY NEST TO CAREGIVER:
A MOTHER'S STORY



**WOUNDED WARRIOR
PROJECT®**

WOUNDEDWARRIORPROJECT.ORG

a battle plan for Healthy Finances

Just as a plan directs every step of a military operation, personal finances also need a plan of action. Managing money and balancing competing needs is easier when priorities are clearly established. While personal situations vary between warriors, here are some general strategies that can fit any income situation.

2

CREATE A BUDGET



Regardless of your goals, creating a budget and sticking to it will help you achieve them. This is especially true for long-term financial planning.

1

DEFINE YOUR GOALS



A financial goal may be as immediate as paying next month's rent or as far into the future as having the money you will need for your children's college education. How much money do you need? How much time do you need? These are the questions to identify in setting goals.

If you would like personalized financial coaching to assist you with managing debt and creating a budget, contact the Wounded Warrior Project Resource Center at resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org.

3

CREATE AN EMERGENCY FUND



No matter how well you plan, unexpected expenses, such as new tires and house repairs, will occur from time to time. This fund should be separate from what you use to pay bills and day-to-day expenses.

CREATING A BUDGET

Creating a budget is the first step toward maximizing your financial well-being. While effective budgeting requires both discipline and sacrifice, your goal should not be to stop all discretionary spending and deny yourself the things you enjoy. Instead, draft a budget so you better understand where your money goes each month.

TO CREATE A BUDGET WORKSHEET:

Write down all sources of income, including your VA compensation, your work paycheck, your spouse's salary, and any additional income you receive from rental properties, investments, etc.

Record all purchases to get a better grasp on how you are spending your money on a day-to-day basis.

Organize your expenses into "fixed" and "variable" categories to identify areas you can cut back expenses.

A full-page photograph of Christopher Kind, a man with a goatee, wearing a grey polo shirt and blue jeans. He is carrying a purple and red backpack and holding a red book titled 'SUPERVISION' in his right hand. He stands in a modern office with large windows, a yellow armchair, and an American flag on a stand to the left. The background features a wall with a grey geometric pattern.

Christopher Kind: Back on TRACK

A mortar attack during deployment to Iraq ended Christopher Kind's Army career in a flash. His recovery wasn't so swift. After the physical pain of recovery came building a new identity and purpose in life. Years passed before Christopher found direction in a place he never imagined in his future.



It didn't happen overnight. Two long years of rehab meant steps forward and steps back ...

“Don't worry about a thing, 'Cause every little thing gonna be all right.”

Really?

Even when you've been burned over 50 percent of your body? Even when you're immobilized in a hospital bed for months; your arms and legs swollen five times their normal size and mummified in bandages from head to toe? Even with fractures in your hands and feet?

Sergeant Christopher Kind had those questions as he stared at the crack in the ceiling at Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in San Antonio. After 30 days in a coma, and now with the Bob Marley song revolving in his head, Chris wished he could join Marley in death.

Chris doesn't remember anything about the incident that put him there in 2004. In his last moment of consciousness, he was in Iraq, talking to his supervisor. Warriors like Chris who work logistics in the Army never stop planning ahead. So he was up that night getting ready for the next day while the combat unit slept. He knew his job helped keep them alive.

Then, he's been told, there was a massive explosion.

“The attack hit the ordnance,” says Chris. “I was dragged out of there on fire. They got me to the combat hospital on base, then to Landstuhl to be stabilized, but I never woke up until a month later at BAMC.”

His ears were ringing, and he could hear people talking, but it sounded like they were underwater. Although he thought he

was in Iraq, the distinctive odor that wafted to his nostrils took Chris back to his first deployment in Afghanistan.

“You never forget the stench of burning flesh. In Afghanistan, I was tasked with helping transport body bags containing warriors, civilians, women, and children. When you unzip those bags so the families can identify the remains, you smell the death.”

Chris soon realized it was his own burnt flesh invading his senses.

“I had tubes going in me everywhere. There were doctors and nurses and people wearing scrubs that covered everything but their eyes. I felt God had deserted me. So I leaned on Marley to calm my mind.”

“Oh my little darlin' don't shed no tears. No woman no cry.”

“You look just like my wife,” Chris said to the nurse. “She has the same pretty eyes and the same beautiful smile.”

She flashed that smile and said, “Everything is going to be all right, Chris.”

Was she reading his mind, Chris wondered, because that's the lyric he'd been singing to himself. What he didn't know was the “nurse” really was his wife, Marcia.

“I was so loopy on pain medication I didn't realize it was her,” says Chris. “When I found out, I was overjoyed.”

But it was difficult, too, because they couldn't touch.

“I wanted to sit up so I could hug her, but I couldn't move. They had my hands and arms elevated on stands, sticking straight out to the side. They didn't want the skin grafts touching anything. Plus, I had suffered inhalation burns, and the doctors had performed a tracheotomy.”

After about 10 days, Chris improved enough to start rehab. That's when two burly men would come to his room, help Chris sit on the edge of the bed, and stand him on his feet. Chris' task was to not fall over.

“Then they'd put me back down in bed, and that was all I could do for the day. I had been unconscious for so long the muscles deteriorated. Every moment was painful, frustrating, hopeless, and depressing.”

So much so that Chris told Marcia she would be better off leaving him. After all, she had to do everything — feed him, clean him, and take care of him like a baby.

“What kind of husband could I be for you?” Chris remembers asking Marcia. “I didn't want her to leave, but I told her to.”

Marcia stuck by his side and pushed him to try harder. She knew Chris is a fighter.

“We're both in the military, so we're accustomed to doing more than what's expected of us,” says Marcia. “At first, we didn't know if Chris was going to make it. I couldn't bear to think that I was going to lose him. That's why I pushed him so hard. It was for us. We need each other.”

She says the struggles of Chris' healing actually improved their relationship in a way that wouldn't have happened otherwise. It made them stronger and brought them closer together.

“He's a big teddy bear,” Marcia says with a laugh. “I think I'm tougher than he is.”

“Only the strong will continue. I know you have it in you.”

So — with the lyrics of Bob Marley's son Damian Marley circling his mind — Chris kept pushing forward.

“They'd tell me to take a step, and I'd give them two steps. My wife got me to challenge myself — for her and for my family. And, I must say, I had the best rehab team any man could want.”

It didn't happen overnight. Two long years of rehab meant steps forward and steps back — like when he first saw himself in a mirror, skin all scarred, face all pink, hair burnt off.

“I went into shock,” remembers Chris. “And when they'd clean my wounds, the pain was unbearable.”

Eventually, by 2006, Chris was strong enough for the family to move back to Micronesia, where Marcia's parents lived. Every morning he would grease himself up and slide into a whole body suit he wore 20 hours a day to safeguard his skin. Even so, Chris tried his best to adjust to his new normal.

“We lived there for four years. I traveled back and forth to Hawaii and Guam for my health care. Marcia's dad outfitted his boat with a special canopy to shelter me from the sun, and we'd go fishing all the time. But I was really just sitting around, getting fat, and waiting to

die. I needed to find something.”

Micronesia was good for Chris's stress level, and he got better at handling his traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Yet there were no military veterans of Chris's era in Micronesia, and he often felt no one around understood what he was really going through.

So the family moved back to San Antonio, where Chris finally found the “something” he was yearning for.

“Don't lose track of yourself. Don't be just a stock on the shelf.”

“I was introduced to Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) when we were in San Antonio while I was at a health appointment at BAMC,” says Chris. “I met Mike Owens, the dean of students at TRACK, and he told me all about it.”

TRACK is the first education center in the nation specifically for Wounded Warriors. Students enter the program as a team and continue to learn together for 12 months. Although it was tough for a man almost 40 years old to get the hang of going back to school, Chris persevered and found personal empowerment through the program.

“I remember the civilians in Afghanistan would come up to me and ask endless questions. They had such a hunger for knowledge. I wanted to have that same hunger. TRACK has so many programs — education, life skills training, peak performance enhancement, health and wellness. I felt like I had really started living again.”



Chris Kind, his wife, Marcia, and their children.



Chris found himself changing in a positive way. At first, he shied away from other students. He was hyperaware of his surroundings and made sure he always sat in the back of class where he could see everyone and every exit.

“But you discover you’ve got other vets in class with you,” says Chris, as a big smile cracks his face. “We’ve got a vet in back of the class, in the front, on the left, on the right, and so on. And you realize we’ve all got each other’s back — just like in the military. That’s when I started to relax, and TRACK became a really powerful tool in my life’s toolbox.”

The biggest stride Chris made through TRACK was his connection with other injured service members.

“Others can only understand you to a certain point. But another injured brother, he or she knows what you’re going through because they’ve been there. They know about the nightmares, the flashbacks, the depression, and the anxiety. We stand on each other’s shoulders — the shoulders of giants.”

“David slew Goliath with a sling and a stone; Samson slew the Philistines with a donkey jawbone.”

Today, Chris is a proud graduate of TRACK. He says it has put him in a better place in life. He does things now he never thought he’d do, like visiting other burn victims in the hospital and ushering in church.

“Marley had it right. In a way, we are all David, and we have our own personal Goliaths to battle. WWP is like a stone God gave me for my sling. And I’m a better man today. I realize now God never forsook me. I was the one who forsook him.”

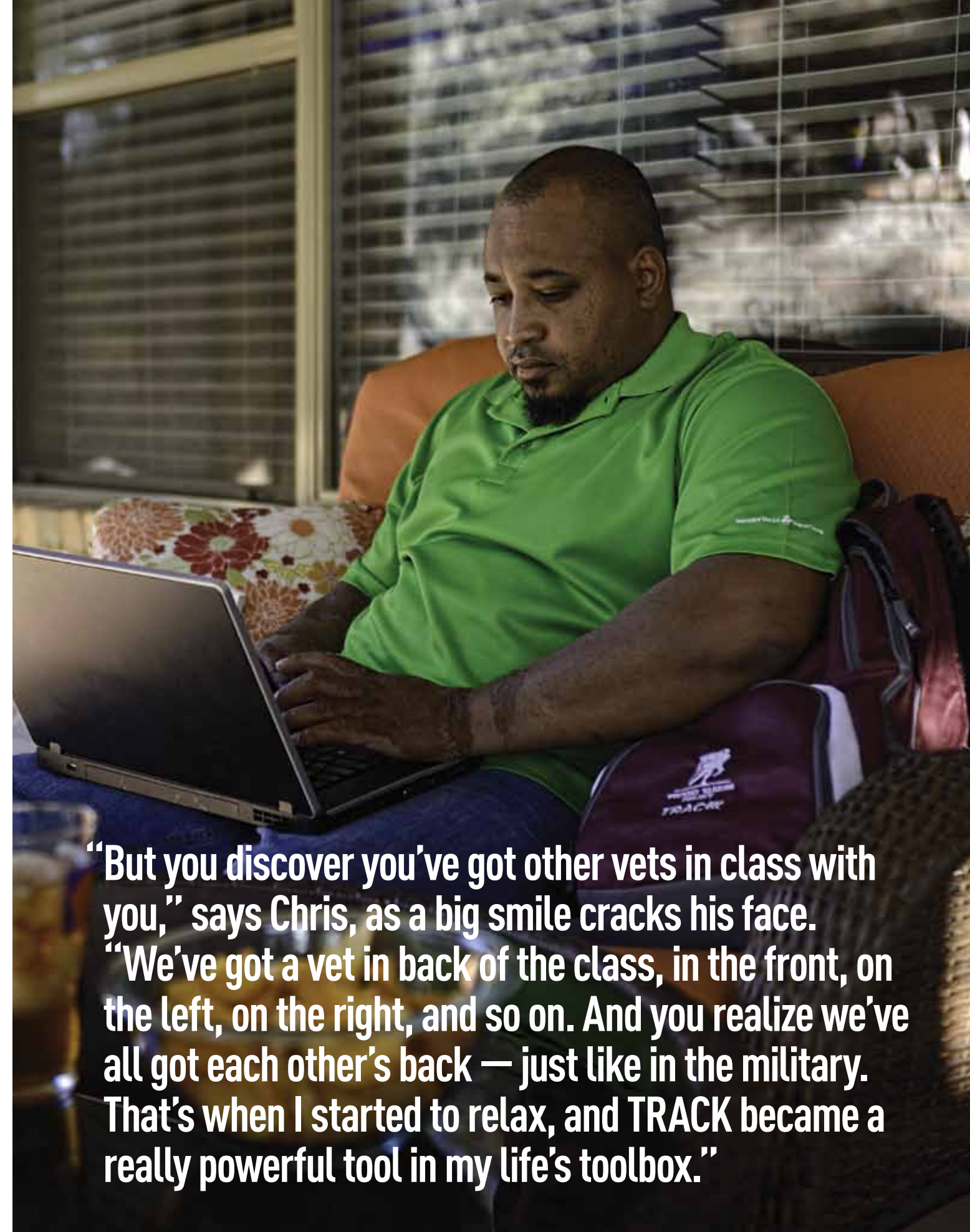
Chris looks forward to building on his TRACK education, particularly in a way in which he can help other Wounded Warriors.

“I tell my fellow vets to keep pushing forward through your darkest hours. You can get to the light. You can find that better place. Think of your fellow brothers who can’t because they are in the dirt. Any day you’re breathing above ground is a good day.”

And if that’s not enough motivation for Chris, he says he can always look to his wife, Marcia, and their children D’Shaun, Maria, Marisa, D’Andre, and their newest inspiration, five-year-old D’Markus, who nobody thought was possible.

“I live for them,” says Chris, “because they never gave up on me. Don’t worry about a thing. Exhaust all of your means and never give up.”

TRACK is a 12-month education program offered by Wounded Warrior Project. Eligible warriors have served in combat, qualify for vocational rehab from the Department of Veterans Affairs, possess fewer than 20 college credit hours, and must be willing to relocate (at no expense) to Jacksonville, Florida, or San Antonio, Texas. For a full list of eligibility requirements and to apply, visit woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/track.aspx.

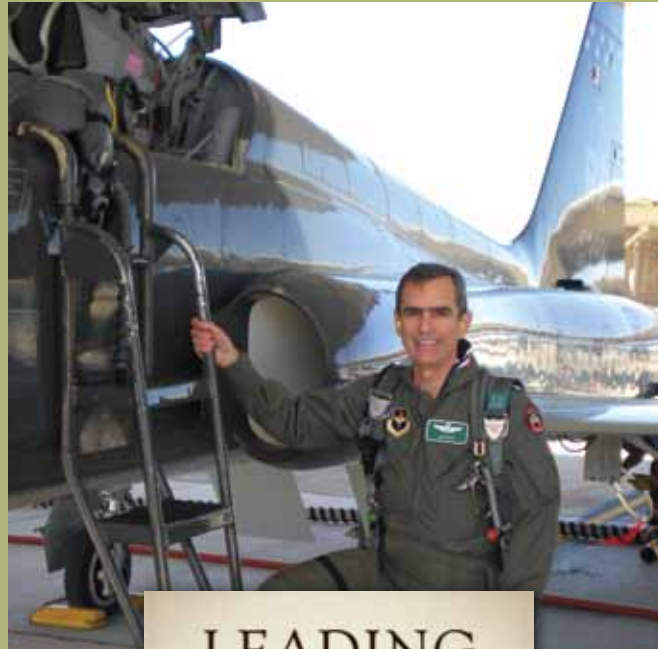


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“Leading with Honor”

LESSONS FROM VIETNAM FOR TODAY’S WARRIORS

Retired Col. Lee Ellis was serving as an Air Force pilot when he was shot down and captured November 7, 1967, on a mission over North Vietnam. He spent most of his 1,955 days as a POW incarcerated near other American captives — U.S. Senator John McCain among them. By his March 14, 1973, release, Ellis had honed a keen sense of leadership, and his experience later led to four books on the topic. The latest, “Leading with Honor: Leadership Lessons from the Hanoi Hilton”, tells his POW story in detail and explores the lessons he shares today with corporate leaders.



Lee: We had to be mentally and physically tough. Mental toughness governs physical toughness sometimes. Being mentally tough inspired me. When you’re sitting alone for hours and hours, your mind can do amazing things like memorizing poems and scripture, learning Spanish, working math problems in my head.

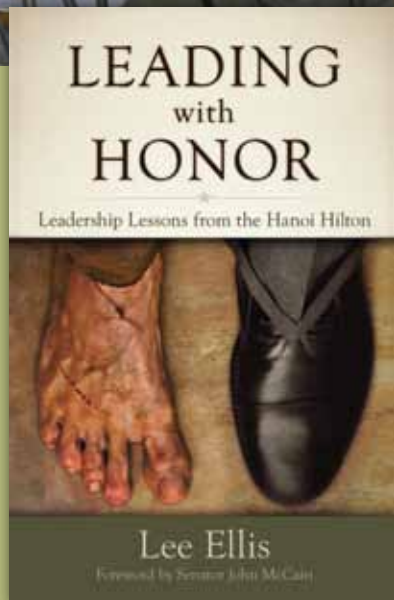
WWP: You cite many ingredients for success, but emphasize the importance of courage and character. Why?

Lee: Courage is like the enzyme to press on in a hard situation. It’s Leadership 101. If you see a problem, run toward it, not away from it. If you wait, it gets more cancerous and worse. Don’t have a knee-jerk reaction. But start moving ahead, clean it out. I don’t think you can have good character without courage.

WWP: How often do you remember instances of your POW experience and how do you use that in a positive manner?

Lee: It’s a part of me. For many years, I wanted to ignore the POW part of me. I just wanted to do the job and be like everybody else — no special favors or sympathy. But it’s always there,

a reservoir of my life experience that I’m always drawing from without realizing it.



WWP: What advice do you have for veterans returning home on turning their negative combat experiences into positives?

Lee: The biggest challenge is a plane lands, and two days later you’re home. Even the wounded soldiers immediately come home, and they’re at the dinner table with family. They haven’t had time to decompress. The hypervigilance of war and anger at buddies who have been wiped out is still there. My advice is to find other veterans who can relate to your experiences and help you sort through those feelings.

WWP: Why was mental strength such an essential ingredient in surviving during your experience and also in everyday life?

PATH TO SUCCESS

By Stephanie Masterson

Six months ago I was in a difficult place. I was facing medical retirement from the Army after six years as a soldier. I was a single mother with no plans for life after service. It was all very discouraging.

Then I heard about Wounded Warrior Project and the Transition Training Academy at Fort Stewart, Georgia, through an Army Career and Alumni Program class. Before I started the TTA classes I was very intimidated and unsure about computers, but two weeks later I was enrolled and learning more about information technology.

I soon learned the instructors genuinely care about their students and they eventually became valuable friends as I struggled with medical retirement and the unexpected death of my fiancé. What made the biggest impression on me came when we reached the mentoring and internship stage of our training. When I got my first interview, my instructor took myself and another student to a department store at the Savannah Mall. It was a dream come true for me and the other student. I felt very empowered and confident about my interview when I put on the

suit that we picked out. I was very nervous when Monday arrived, but I made it a point to first visit the instructor who gave me the skills and confidence to even receive an interview. When I arrived at the classroom, she gave me a hug and told me how great I looked and assured me I would get the job. The interview went very well. I called my instructor before I ever left the parking lot. I was cooking my children dinner when I got the call that I had the job and would start the next Monday. What’s more, I received power tools and boots through Wounded Warrior Project and the Warriors to Work program. With my financial situation as it was I could not have purchased these items on my own and I would not have been able to begin work.

I am now much more confident and proud, and I owe a lot of that to my instructor. She is not only our instructor, but she is also our mentor, inspiration, and a friend. I am very blessed to be in her class and to have such a truly caring and wonderful person in my life. I am very thankful to have found the Wounded Warrior Project as they have truly empowered all aspects of my life.



Soldiers examine and repair the inner workings of a computer during a Transition Training Academy session at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Learn more about free training to develop a career in the IT field by visiting our website: woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/transition-training-academy.aspx.

SHUTTERBUGS

“Photography is the best way I know to share with others what I see and observe around the world.”
— Mark Lalli

Photography is just one of many hobbies warriors are using to stay engaged with the community. These three warriors have different techniques and subjects, but all agree that exploring with a camera in hand is a great stress reliever.

PHOTO BY: MARK LALLI



NAME: Mark Lalli
AGE: 27
CURRENT LOCATION: Tampa, Florida
BRANCH OF SERVICE: Army
FINAL RANK: Staff Sergeant
NATURE OF INJURY: TBI, PTSD, paralysis
HOW DID YOU GET INTERESTED IN PHOTOGRAPHY?:
I've always been a very observant person, and always love the outdoors. Photography gave me an excuse to be out in the woods. It's the best way I know to share with others what I see and observe around the world.



NAME: Jonathan Winchester
AGE: 42
CURRENT LOCATION: Cambridge City, Indiana
BRANCH OF SERVICE: Army
FINAL RANK: Sergeant
NATURE OF INJURY: PTSD, TBI, lower back pain, tinnitus
HOW DID YOU GET INTERESTED IN PHOTOGRAPHY?:
I have a lot of images and noises in my mind that I just can't seem to shake and I really can't put them into words to share with anyone. So, I try to capture new, positive images and moments in time that I can share with others. I want to put a smile on the community's face.

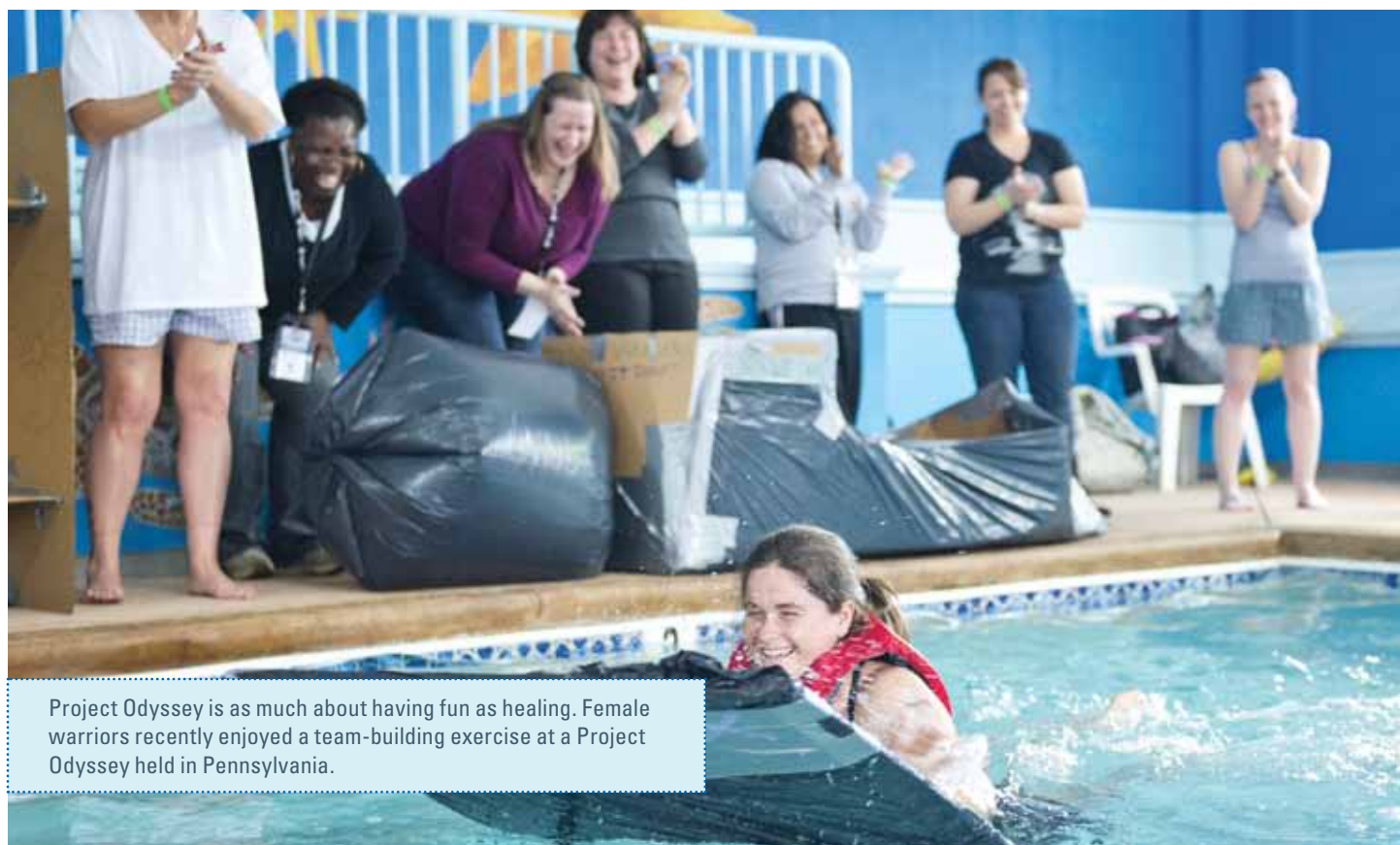


NAME: Jimi McMahon
AGE: 38
CURRENT LOCATION: Gladstone, Michigan
BRANCH OF SERVICE: Army
FINAL RANK: Sergeant First Class
NATURE OF INJURY: PTSD, TBI
HOW DID YOU GET INTERESTED IN PHOTOGRAPHY?:
Tracey McMahon: “The photography my husband does is part of his recovery process. It gets him out in the community and helps him enjoy the picturesque surroundings that the Upper Peninsula of Michigan offers. Photography helps ease Jimi's isolation.”

What kind of hobbies do you enjoy? Email editor@woundedwarriorproject.org.

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PARTING SHOT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Project Odyssey is as much about having fun as healing. Female warriors recently enjoyed a team-building exercise at a Project Odyssey held in Pennsylvania.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: 10 Years of Service, a Lifetime of Commitment