A person stands on a rocky shore, looking out at a calm lake under a twilight sky. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow across the water and the distant mountains. The person's silhouette is visible against the bright sky.

“CLIMB THE MOUNTAINS AND
GET THEIR GOOD TIDINGS.
NATURE’S PEACE WILL FLOW
INTO YOU AS SUNSHINE
FLOWS INTO TREES.
THE WINDS WILL BLOW THEIR
OWN FRESHNESS INTO YOU,
AND THE STORMS THEIR
ENERGY, WHILE CARES WILL
DROP AWAY FROM YOU LIKE
THE LEAVES OF AUTUMN.”

- JOHN MUIR

THE TRAIL TO HEALTH

STEVE KRASNOW HIKES 50 OUT OF 52 WEEKS A YEAR.

This commercial real estate broker is focused, not obsessed and he’s got good reason. His brother died at age 39 of a heart attack and his father at age 49 of congestive heart disease. Steve’s high-stress life as a broker, and his weight of 273 pounds, had him heading for a similar fate. Then, at the age of 53, he fortuitously had a stent inserted and he knew it was time to do something different. So he decided to live a proactive outdoors life. He thought functioning like a thermostat, which he controls, as opposed to a thermometer, is a better life model. He began hiking on the A.T. regularly and the Trail has transformed him physically (85 pounds lighter) and spiritually. It has become the center point of his life. He has bad days, like everyone else, but never a bad week. “I’m in a different place now,” he says. “Family members and friends see the difference in me. They’ve watched me change my life and they are being influenced to also go exercise outdoors.”

Tom Lintner, an aviation and airline consultant, actually *had* a heart attack. Time slowed down for him, and he watched the world creep by, living minute to minute, not knowing if this one would be the last, just waiting to die. He weighed 265 pounds back then but he didn’t think he was heavy. “In my mind I saw myself as perfectly healthy,” he explains. Tom has always hated exercising and gyms, so he switched his

BY CINDY ROSS

Bert “Chopper” Allen takes in the twilight along the A.T. at East Flagstaff Lake, Maine — by Megan “Dangerpants” Parker

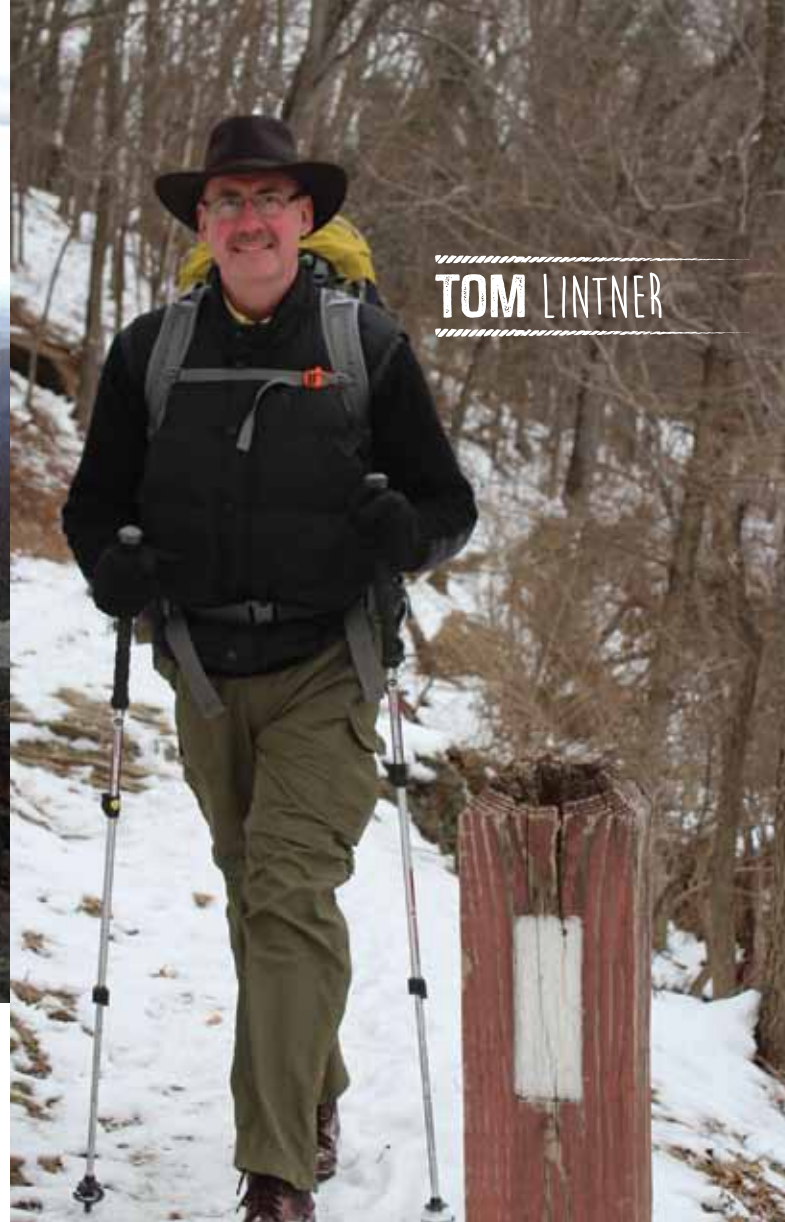


BRIAN WING

thinking and told himself, “increase your activity level.” “I finally had to do something,” he says. “I started with walking one block and then I had to stop.” Now, he is up to 15-mile hikes. He is the picture of health. He used to have a size 42 waist and a size 50 jacket. After hiking a few months, he was at a motel and when he put his belt on it fell down to his feet like a hula hoop. He now had a size 38 waist. “I laughed hysterically,” he says, “and threw it in the trash; but every day the maid would get it out and lay it on the dresser.” The Trail is a target — a mission for Tom. He too no longer wants to build a financial empire.

“I’ve never felt this good or healthy,” he comments. “Surviving the heart attack was the best thing that ever happened in my life,” he says. “It was a *successful* heart attack!” Big hiking is now on his radar — like completing the entire Appalachian Trail.

As a homicide police detective, a wilderness first responder and rescuer, a black water diver, and a man-tracker, **Brian Wing** has seen his share of death. He’s handled about 400 dead bodies over the course of his career, from which he recently retired. Brian responded to the World Trade Center attack in 2001 and was on-site for more than two months. During that time, he assisted at the site in recovery operations, scene security, and escorts of the debris to the Fresh Kills Landfill. Through it all, he was exposed to the toxic waste of Ground Zero and contracted cancer as a result. He also worked with the Coast Guard at Guantanamo Bay. “Murder, suicide, abductions, you name it, I’ve seen it,” he says. In doing this

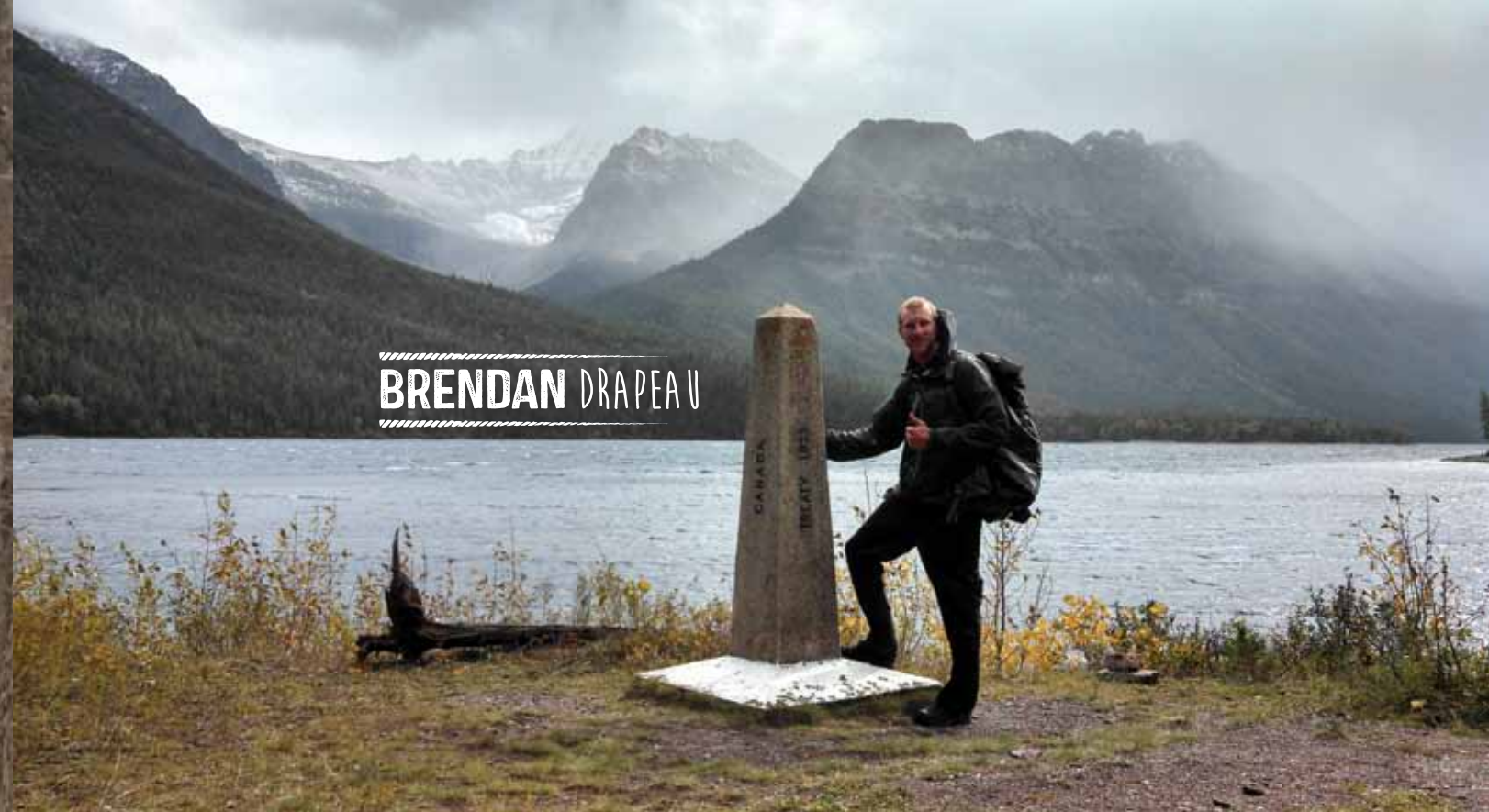


TOM LINTNER

work he faced his own mortality, and had to look closely at his life. Although he fought his way back to physical health, he was suffering emotionally. “I had had it,” he says. “I flipped the switch. I couldn’t take it anymore. All I saw was the vile side of life. I got to the point where I saw so much death, I thought, this can’t be what the human race is all about.”

So Brian will be joining the 2014 Warrior Hikers “Walk off The War” program, which supports veterans transitioning from their military service by thru-hiking the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. Brian has always enjoyed hiking and being in nature has served as a release from his challenging work. Hiking enables him to separate from his work and just be in the moment in the beauty of the natural world’s surroundings. “This Warrior Hike is my Walkabout, my spirit walk,” he says. “It is my reconnect with humanity. I need to meet good people, reassure myself there *are* good people. I am hoping this hike is redemptive for me. I am hoping to get rid of some baggage — become a better person.”

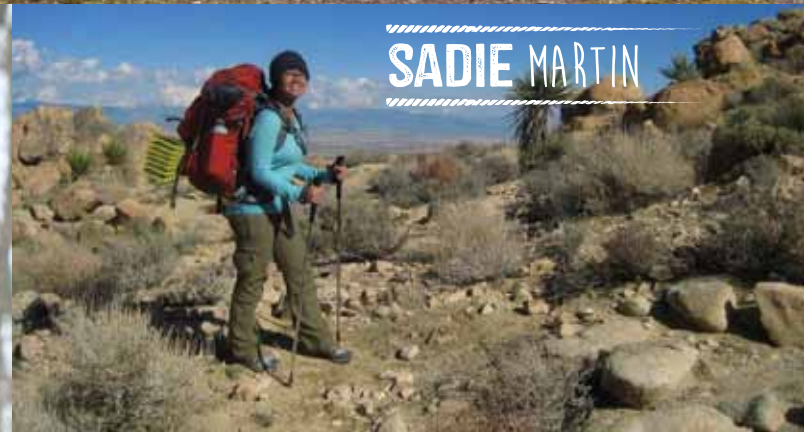
Socializing with other hikers and being in a small group can be hugely beneficial; and can allow the Trail to work its real magic. This is especially true of the Warrior hikers where



BRENDAN DRAPEAU



STEVE KRASNOW



SADIE MARTIN

Clockwise from top left: Brian Wing on the A.T at Hawksbill Summit; Tom Linter on the Trail in Harpers Ferry — by Cindy Ross; Brendan Drapeau at the northern terminus of the Continental Divide Trail in Canada; Sadie Martin in Joshua Tree National Park; Steve Krasnow along the A.T. in Harpers Ferry — by Cindy Ross

“FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS SEE THE DIFFERENCE IN ME. THEY’VE WATCHED ME CHANGE MY LIFE AND THEY ARE BEING INFLUENCED TO ALSO GO EXERCISE OUTDOORS.”

one of the main components of the program is to connect with not just other Warrior hikers, but fellow thru-hikers and also members of the Trail community at the nearly three dozen VFW/American Legion and community events scheduled along their journey. For many of the Warrior hikers, connecting to kind souls and the large tribe of hikers on the A.T. simply builds trust, faith, and love of humanity.

Sadie Martin suffered from depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) until she went for a night hike at Joshua Tree National Park in the Mojave Desert and discovered the stars and the Milky Way. “When I looked up at the night sky for the first time and saw that river of stars, distant galaxies, light traveling from years ago, the beauty floored me,” she explains. “This wonderful perspective reminded me that we are all made of the same elements and matter as the stars and we are all connected. I began to focus less on my pain and suffering and began to feel at peace and at home out in the natural world. I think about this connection and I am able to maintain it once I come back indoors. It is about self-reverence. Being in nature gives me a sense of love.” Sadie now nurtures her need and makes sure that she backpacks and hikes on a regular basis. Hiking has become a way of life for her. “It is exactly what I needed,” she admits.

Sadie also found the strength to create SHEhike, (Survive, Heal, Empower, Hike) a program designed to encourage women with PTSD from sexual violence/assault to try hiking as a way to heal and empower themselves while learning the skills necessary for backpacking. A relay on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) is scheduled for this year with plans to expand the program to the A.T. and Continental Divide Trail (CDT). Sean Gobin, CEO and founder of the Warrior Hike program, is guiding Sadie as she grows SHEhike and connects to women’s shelters along the trails to help with support and events similar to the VFW’s and American Legions along the A.T. in his “Walk Off the

War” program. Shorter excursions, day hikes, and workshops will evolve and expand into other outdoor activities.

The 2013 A.T. Warrior hikers have been home from Katahdin now for more than four months. Some have incorporated hiking into their lifestyle, like Sharon Smith, who hikes and backpacks a few times a month and has her sights set on the PCT next year, as does Rob Carmel. Tommy Gathman will be heading out to the CDT to thru-hike for Warrior Hike this year. Stephanie Cutts regularly attends her local gym and has continued to shed weight.

It’s interesting to note that one long distance hike on the A.T. may not be enough for our combat veterans. **Brendan Drapeau** is an Army Veteran with two tours to Iraq and one to Afghanistan. After he was discharged in 2007, he attended college and achieved a B.S. in Biology using the GI Bill. In 2011 he thru-hiked the A.T., and while on it, became aware of other long distance hiking trails. He enjoyed his A.T. experience so much he thru-hiked the PCT in 2012 and attended to complete a thru-hike on the CDT to earn the “Triple Crown” of hiking. Like many combat vets, Brendan has developed some PTSD. “War is a nasty thing,” he says “and I saw much death and destruction. But I felt peace while hiking ... more and more peace with each mile that I walked. I was able to meet complete strangers who wanted to know my stories and hear about my experiences. I have made amazing friendships that will last a lifetime. Most of all, I felt healthy and whole being in the wilderness.” Brenden believes healing is a slow process. “It takes time to walk off a war, but talking and sharing your story is one of the steps of the process. [Hiking] gave me faith in humanity the way complete strangers would help me.” He continues, “At one point in my A.T. hike, I remember stopping and looking out over the rolling valleys. I took a deep breath and felt chills through my body. It was a sunny day and not a soul was around. At that point I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be, in the wilderness, on that journey.”

To find an A.T. hike that suits you visit: appalachiantrail.org/findahike. For information about the Warrior Hike program visit: warriorhike.com

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2013 2,000-miler Ryana “Acorn” Adra – A.T., Maine

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