

lifestyle



Wounded Vet Discovers Freedom on the Slopes

by Heidi Evans

While Heath Calhoun was deployed to Iraq, his wife Tiffany got the dreaded 5 a.m. phone call, on Nov. 7, 2003.

"I got my legs blown off," Heath told her. "The good news is, I am going home."

The Humvee Heath had been riding in was struck by an RPG. Another Soldier in the truck died, and a third was seriously wounded.

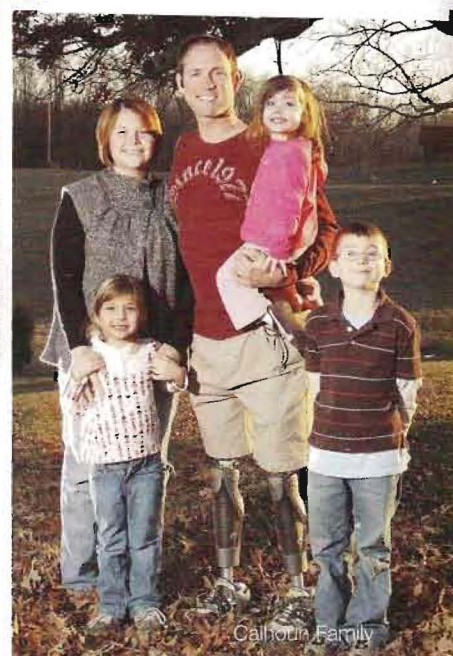
In the moments after that call, Tiffany picked up their young son, cried and told him "Your daddy is coming home."

Heath began his journey home, nearly dying of a collapsed lung before he could reach Walter Reed. Tiffany met him there, and stayed by his side through nine months of treatment.

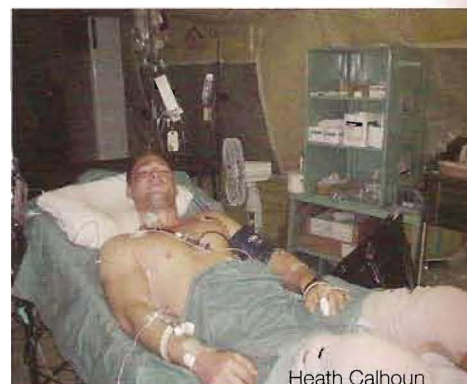
Heath struggled to walk, fighting with prosthetics that never fit correctly. During his convalescence, he traveled to Colorado for a ski program, which didn't go well. After a failed attempt at snowboarding, he tried a monoski. That afternoon, he was shredding slopes by himself.

"It was the first thing I had done that put me back on a level playing

It's a long road back to a new normal for injured soldiers and their spouses. For some, that road takes unique turns — like the chance to represent their country not on the battlefield, but competing for gold in the 2010 Vancouver Paralympic Games. For most of these athletes, success would be impossible without spouses who, like military spouses everywhere, keep the household running while they pursue excellence around the world.



Calhoun Family



Heath Calhoun

Heath Calhoun



Paralympic Curler

By Heidi Evans

Patrick McDonald was always a jock growing up in San Jose, Calif. It was a terrible accident during his military service, though, that finally revealed him as a world-caliber athlete.

During Patrick's Army service in 1991 in Korea, a tank he was traveling on rolled over an embankment. The 1,300-pound supply box he was sitting on crushed him—he suffered a spinal cord injury that left him unable to control his legs.

During rehabilitation at the Palo Alto Veterans' Administration Hospital, he learned about a Paralympic summer competition in Dayton, Ohio, in 1992. He participated in five events — and took home five gold medals.

Since then he has competed in swimming, basketball, skiing, softball, and most notably, golf.

Though he barely picked up a club before his accident, Patrick became a golf genius in a wheelchair. He worked his way to a 1.7 USGA golf handicap and hit a golf ball 358 yards.

"There's nothing that he's come across that I have seen that he has a problem with," said Patrick's wife, Carrie McDonald. "It's a double-edged sword because the sports make me absolutely crazy too," she laughed.

Carrie met her husband after his accident. Though she didn't have the chance to be a military wife, she knows all too well what it's like to spend long months apart from her husband raising their two children while working full-time as a kindergarten teacher. This began in earnest when Patrick decided he wanted to make the U.S. team in wheelchair curling.

"I knew it was going to be hard training and making the team," Patrick said. "I didn't think it was going to be this stressful being away from my kids and my wife."

Wheelchair curling is similar to playing shuffleboard on the ice. Like regular curling, players throw stones, which weigh about 42 pounds. Unlike regular curling, there are no brushers to finesse the throw. Curling has been described as chess on ice.

Patrick has been curling for two years, making the team in only his second year. He hopes to medal in this year's Paralympics and then make the U.S. Paralympic Team in 2012 in the summer sport of shooting. **MSM**

bined. Final results will be announced this month

Skiing requires Heath to travel far from his family in Tennessee. He trains six months a year, from Aspen to Austria. Back in Tennessee, Tiffany cares for their brood—which has grown to three—with the help of her parents. She also works for Wounded Warriors, leading workshops that help caregivers to care for themselves. The sacrifices, she says, are worth it.

"She is incredibly patient," Heath said.

"It's awesome to watch him. It puts chill bumps on me," Tiffany said. "He's up there with the top skiers in the world. I am just proud of him." **MSM**



The U.S. Paralympic Association sponsors Military Sports Camps for veterans and service members with physical injuries. Camps introduce participants to a variety of sports, from swimming and volleyball to skiing to sled hockey. There are currently 105 clubs, and the organization hopes to have 250 clubs by 2012. Check www.usparalympics.org.

field," Heath said. "When I was skiing, I wasn't disabled anymore. None of the runs were disabled runs. It was normal again."

Skiing became a passion and Heath now skis "anything I can get a hold of."

After intense rehabilitation, he has also learned to walk with two specialized prosthetics. While skiing didn't physically help with walking, Heath says, "it definitely helped with the mental aspect of it."

Six years after the injury, Heath is one of the top Paralympic skiers in the world. He hopes to qualify for the U.S. Paralympic team in all five events: slalom, giant slalom, super giant slalom, downhill and super com-