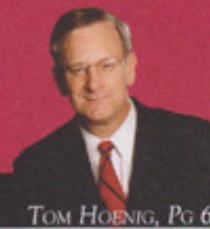


RAVEN REVIEW

Benedictine College | Atchison, Kansas | Fall 2011

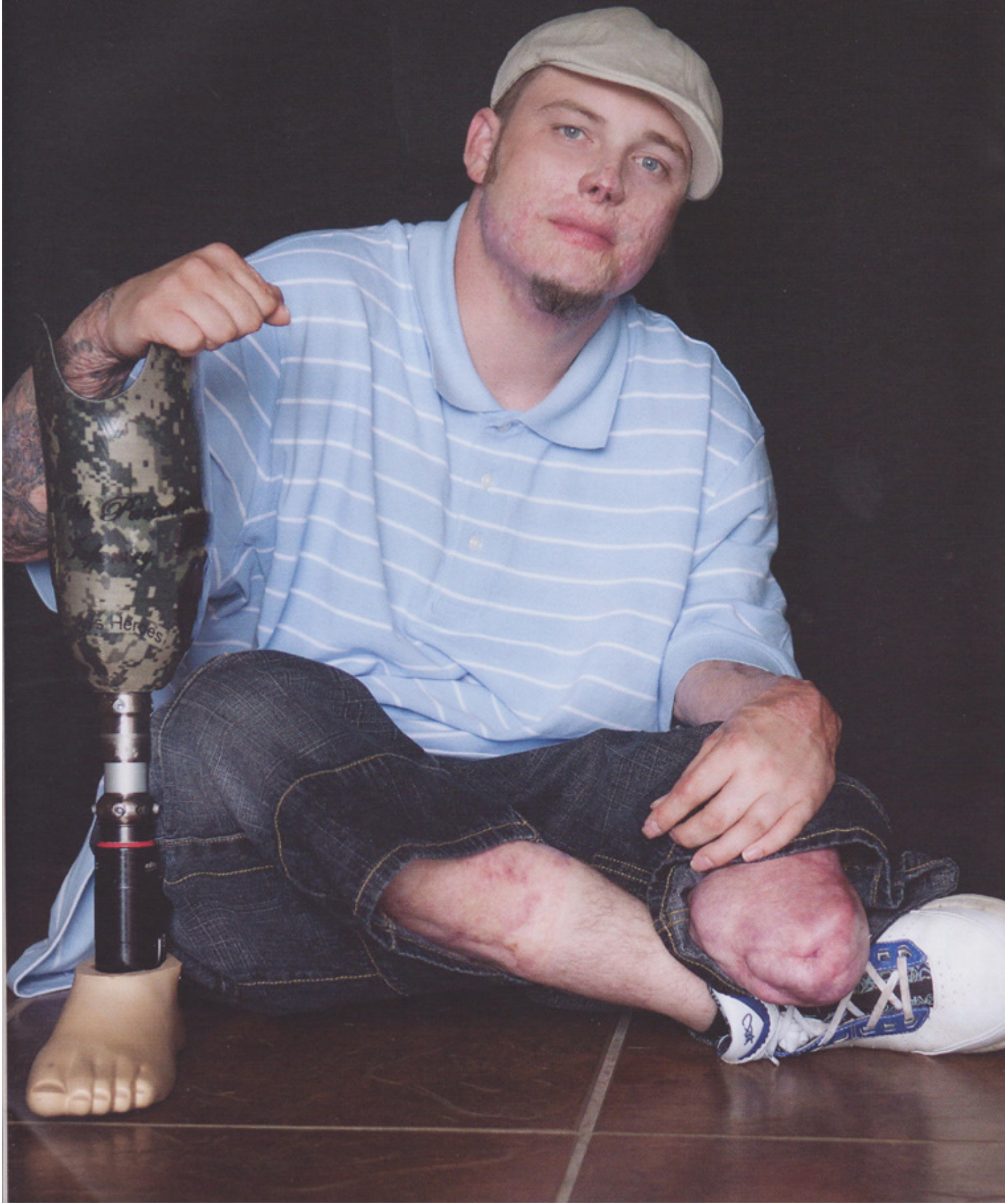


TOM HORNIG, PG 6



Remembering
**WANGARI
MAATHIA**
1940-2011





Unbroken HEROES

By Tom Hoopes

Scott Stephenson
died in Iraq — *twice* — before
he became a student at
Benedictine College and met
Dr. Adam Buhman-Wiggs. Now they work
together to bring badly scarred Veterans hope.

Photos courtesy of Tempered Steel

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Is Our Nation Ready?

•Compassion

Luana Schneider (left) during her presentation to Adam Buhman-Wiggs's Abnormal Psychology class.

Calif., featured Tempered Steel's photographic introspective.

Scott, like many of the men and women depicted in those photos, was the victim of a roadside bomb – an “improvised explosive device” or IED – that burst through the rear seat of Scott's transport in Iraq. One moment he was lighting a cigarette. The next, he realized he was on fire, drenched in fuel from the car.

A medic had to smother Scott with a fire blanket to stop the burning. “What I do remember is Lew looking at me and him telling me I was going to be alright,” says Scott. “But by the look on his face I knew I wasn't going to be okay.”

Scott recovered, physically, with hard work and a prosthetic leg. Recovering socially, psychologically and emotionally is a harder process.

Living with his scarred body meant he had to face what Tempered Steel's “disfigured heroes” face all across America: People would rudely stare at him, or turn and beat a hasty retreat in order to avoid having to look at him. Scars like that change your life radically.

“I look in the mirror now and I see that I'm not the same person I was,” says Scott. “That's tough for me. Tempered Steel is about breaking down those barriers where people are afraid to be around us, make them see us for who we really are instead of crispy fried monsters.”

His mother Luana, an Atchison artist, started the

Scott Stephenson flatlined twice during the surgery that saved him. Today, he is glad to be alive, and glad to be a part of the efforts of his mother, Luana Schneider, and Psychology Associate Professor Buhman-Wiggs, '89, in the organization Tempered Steel, helping gravely disfigured military veterans return to a full life despite what happened to them.

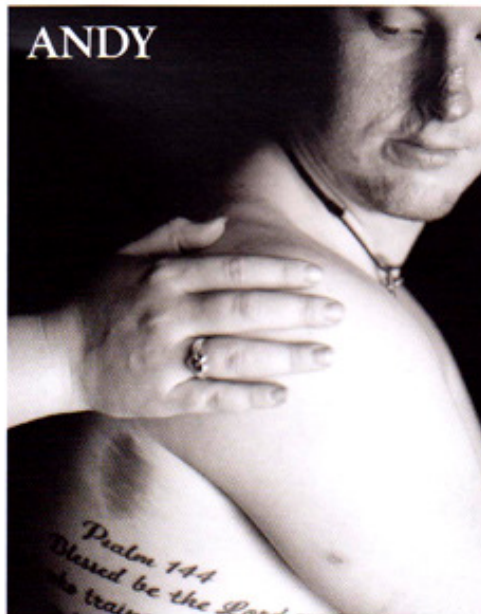
The two are helping launch a national speaker phase for the organization which gained prominence last Veteran's Day when the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley,

TEMPERED STEEL'S PHOTO PRESENTATION

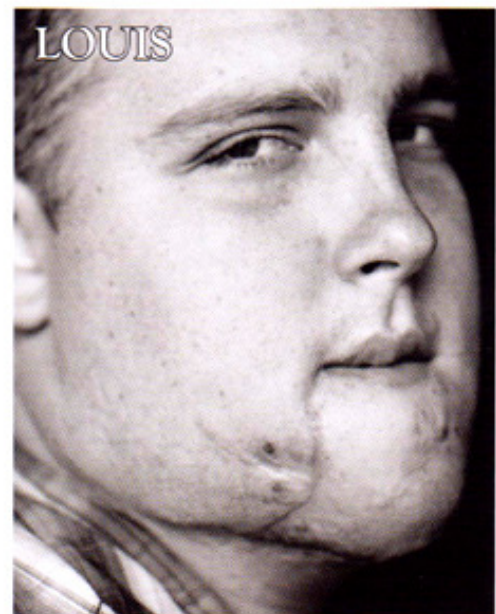
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organization, but enlisted the help of Dr. Buhman-Wiggs early on. Buhman-Wiggs had Scott in classes and was able to offer a clinical psychologist's view of the situation.

"The difficulty goes all the way back to Vietnam and Korea and even further," he says. "The civil population is made uncomfortable by people who have had to participate in real violence. Even if you're a soldier doing it for a good reason, after you kill somebody you are not the same person anymore."

How to help them? "They need acceptance, welcome and support because they feel different," says Buhman-Wiggs. "They feel soiled on a spiritual level. When you add to that a physical deformity, it only complicates the problem."

The situation is a perfect illustration of two points in Catholic teaching about war: "Because of the evils and injustices that all war brings with it, we must do everything reasonably possible to avoid it," says the Catechism, No. 2327.

At the same time, the Church of St. Joan of Arc has often praised military personnel. Pope John Paul II, the son of an army captain, personally addressed the Jubilee of the Military in his year 2000 celebrations. He thanked military members for their "service to peace" and quoted the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 10, calling the centurion Cornelius "a

Here I am almost dead and I feel guilty because I left them out there without anyone to watch their back.

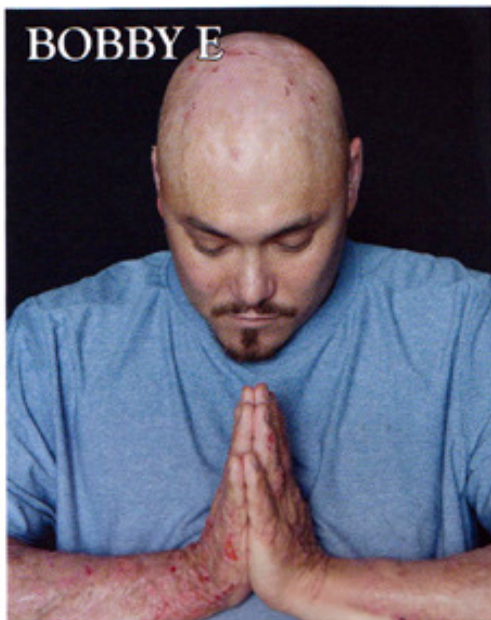
Stephenson

devout man who feared God." appreciate the personnel who have served in our armed services. They are doing a job that is extremely valuable and extremely precarious. ... As far as they are concerned, they are there to make sure we can wake up free every morning."

Working with the disfigured heroes returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, he says, doesn't just make him appreciate being an American: "They make me proud of being a human being."

He pointed out what troops in the field report. In the heat of battle, the overriding concern is always to protect their squad, not themselves. Scott remembers that.

"One of the strongest feelings I had was just needing to know my guys were okay," says Scott. "Then wanting to go back regardless of my condition – it was like I wasn't done, like I had abandoned my friends and here I am almost dead and I feel guilty because I left them out there without anyone to watch their back."



He says he's glad that he was the victim and not someone else. "I'm thankful I don't have to remember what it was like seeing my friend there in that condition," he said. "I don't know what they see when they close their eyes – probably worse than what I see."

It is a tragic, super-charged version of community, and it is impossible not to be moved by it.

"What they are doing for each other on the battlefield is an act of love, it's not an act of violence," says Buhman-Wiggs. "And to see that emerge in such a violent, questionable context is very inspiring. It really is. They demonstrate a level of human love that most of us only aspire to, like the rare person that runs into a fire to rescue a kid and dies in the process. They do that every day for each other."

Longing for Normalcy

That is what makes the difficulty of the current situation of these disfigured heroes even harder.

While getting care for Scott in the United States, his mother Luana met a lot of people suffering the same issues.

"We have a whole generation coming back that are severely injured and disfigured and they're going to be everywhere," she says. "You'll see them in the bars and in the restaurant. The public needs to know how to accept them and deal with it."

More than 37,000 wounded military members have returned to the United States since the start of the Iraq or Afghanistan wars. The miracle of modern medicine means

that men and women who would formerly have been lost are now among the walking wounded.

"They are saving people today that there is no way they could have saved even five years ago," Luana says. "Their average age is 18 to 25. They have their entire lives ahead of them. This has become a mission for me. I want our public, our country to understand what these kids have given up."

Her goal for the organization is to identify a speaker in every state who can engage the public about the problem and teach them how to react. Her blogsite (temperedsteelinc.net) features a video showing the reaction these speakers get. In one case, through tears, a California high schooler can barely say, "It took a lot of strength to tell that story."

"We're finding a way to bridge the gap between the disabled and disfigured world and the world at large," says Luana. "How do you talk to each other after this? How do you talk to someone whose injury is so horrifying?"

As for the disfigured veterans, "They want to have a life that doesn't revolve around their injuries," she says. "They want you to know: This is not who I am. It's how I look."

Buhman-Wiggs says that the key strategy he sees for these men and women is normalcy.

"Some of these people are hard to look at. Some have huge portions of their skull missing. You can certainly understand what it must be like for them. They were young, spry, good looking people," he said. "They were popular, they had successful relationships, and all of a sudden one explosion and a year and a half later, everything is different."

Now, many just want to "get a college degree, find someone to love and be able to contribute. They don't want to be in and out of treatment for substance abuse and watch one relationship after another fall apart. They want banality. They want an everyday way of life."

He says that to expect normalcy should not be to expect too much. Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, and these men and women are no exception.

"They are a tangible reference to the suffering that is innate in our human nature," says Buhman-Wiggs. "We believe that, incarnate in Jesus, God is capable of feeling pain and hurt just like the rest of us. They are the crucified Christ walking around, shredded and mutilated."



Schneider started *Tempered Steel* to encourage peer-to-peer and community support for those suffering debilitating trauma from Iraq like her son, Benedictine student Scott Stephenson. For more information or to learn how you can help: www.TemperedSteelinc.org