

# Shilo Harris

## A Step in the Right Direction

**Shilo Harris, a veteran of the United States Army, was our cover feature in an interview by James Williams for our July/August 2016 issue of *Hearing Loss Magazine*.**

**J**ust by looking at me, you can see that I am not an ordinary man. I have lived through extraordinary experiences, not the least of which was a traumatic war injury. On February 19, 2007, an improvised explosive device (IED) struck my armored vehicle near southern Baghdad. This was one of those moments that can break anyone—physically, spiritually and psychologically—but on that day, my motto became “from tragedy to triumph.”

My recovery from six weeks in a medically-induced coma began in the burn unit of Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Waking up took a significant amount of time, as I faded in and out of consciousness, yet I can vividly recall that I was asked

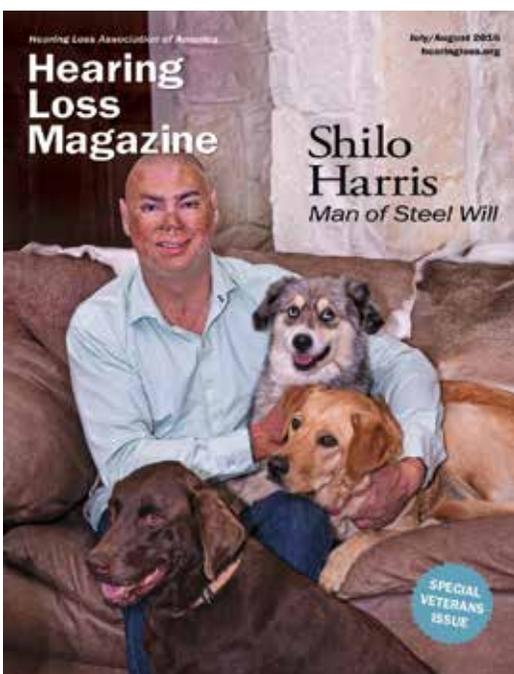
to take ten steps. Anyone can take five steps. I said to myself, “I’m a combat soldier. I run 20 miles per week. I’ve got this!” But on that particular day, I could shuffle along for only three agonizing, painful steps before I collapsed into the nurse’s arms.

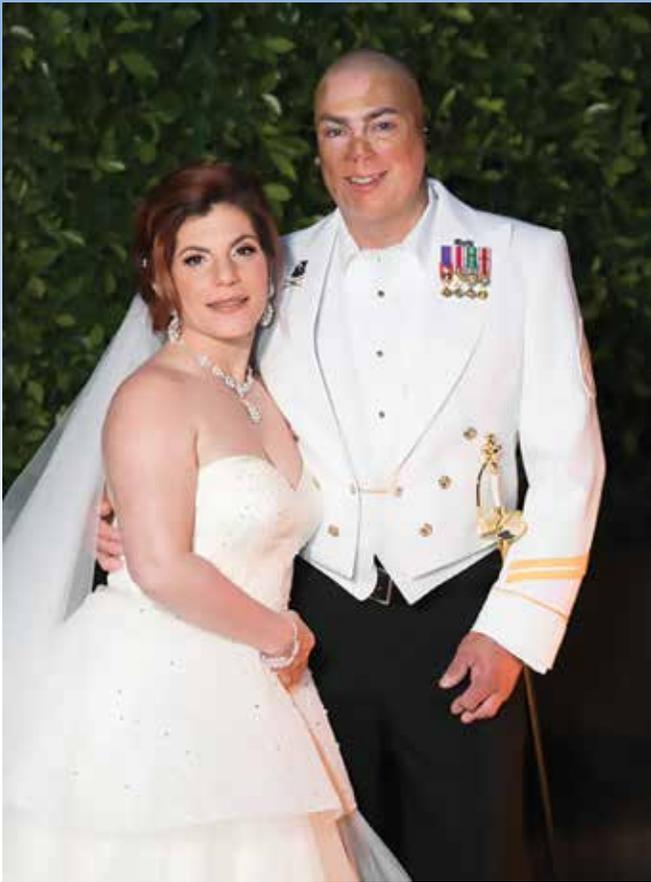
That was 13 years ago. Today, I skydive, scuba dive, hike, bike, ride my tractor and chop wood. Nothing is going to take me down. It all started with my mindset. I needed to embrace where I was physically and then do the same mentally, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically. The leader I had trained to become, in both my military life and personal life, stepped up and took over in this completely life-altering time. I relied on my own moral compass to guide me through my recovery.

### Shaped by Example

I had strong role models for learning how to cope with challenges: beginning at a young age, I observed the behavior of dynamic leaders, both natural and trained. My dad, Allen B. Harris, paved the way for me throughout my life, identifying good and bad leadership qualities as we watched movies, TV and the news; read books, magazines and newspapers; and observed others in our community, state and country. Our long drives together on fishing and hunting trips involved listening to motivational speakers like Zig Ziglar, Earl Nightingale and Jim Rohn. The respect people had for these men and women inspired me to earn respect and create a similar following of my own. Yet my personal motivation remains leading others to success, not focusing on my own.

In my teens and early twenties, I enjoyed occasional moments of leadership success—mostly because I finally realized success doesn’t remain in the background. Success takes responsibility and displays a person’s talents and strengths. Success appears as confidence in someone’s answers to questions. Success speaks up when a person knows what should happen next. Success leads with action and words when everyone else is idle. Success drives a group of people to build a team as they embrace and fulfill its goal or mission. When we succeed, experience triumphs.





Shilo and Jamie were featured on “My Great Big Live Wedding with David Tutera” on the Lifetime channel when they were married on March 12, 2019. The show gives dream weddings to eight couples who have remarkable stories.

## Surrounded by Love

We all have our Jiminy Cricket—that internal conscience with a voice that urges us to make ethical, responsible and selfless choices. At the same time, that inner voice encourages us to surround ourselves with people we can trust and who support us.

Throughout my recovery—which, even today, still includes upcoming surgeries—I have been very fortunate to have the tools and resources that help me find assistance and continue to grow. My current tribe consists of my loving wife, Jamie, who loves me and supports my decisions; my children, who help me become a better father every day; and a few good friends who help me stay grounded. If I feel that any of those components are not in place or are out of balance, I address the situation and make changes immediately. Growth within us comes as our love for others grows. My friends and family remind me to stay true to myself.

## Staying True to Myself

I love serving as a proud, confident professional who voluntarily represents groups that need a voice, which is funny when you consider that I have hearing loss myself

and advocate for others who also have hearing loss. With my triumphs, I’ve discovered that it is not just about making decisions; it is about implementing my plan confidently and swiftly. Results will impress. Yet, that is where our own self-efficacy and psychological strength can set us apart from others.

None of the life lessons, courses, leadership training and retreats I have experienced would have mattered if I had given up after being blown up. I could have easily looked in the mirror at my scarred face and quit believing in myself, but I did not. I pushed myself. I educated myself. I became a motivational speaker and an author. I wrote a book, *Steel Will*, about my recovery, which was released in 2014. Currently, I am writing another book with my wife, detailing the steps I used to become triumphant in my recovery. We are eager to release this new book together, and we are also working on a movie.

I am also attending college. Imagine what I can do tomorrow! Better yet, what can *you* accomplish tomorrow? Whatever it is, it starts with one step in the right direction, and then all of your next steps will follow.

I believe achieving personal triumph encompasses communicating effectively, learning to adapt to each situation, living by a set of moral values, displaying confidence—especially in the face of adversity—and leading by example. There are many qualities and attributes that help us triumph over adversity, such as intelligence, reliability, consistency, caring, hygiene, appearance, unwavering determination and fairness. The list goes on. I recommend carefully choosing your core values and overcoming your own challenges, and then others will be eager to follow your example. **HL**

