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SUMMIT

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weekend 2012 during my graduate studies in Monterey, California. I coincidentally walked into the Naval Postgraduate School's Trident Room (our Officer's club and lounge where I would watch Patriots games) while an annual planning meeting with some Navy SEALs was in progress. Those trip leaders were friends of mine, classmates from the U.S. Naval Academy and Naval Postgraduate School. I told them Whitney was always a goal of mine, they had an extra spot on their SEAL-only hike, invited me to join, and just like that I was on the trip.

The one way distance to the summit is over 11 miles, and we ascended over 6,100 feet in elevation change from Whitney Portal. Starting at midnight, we reached Whitney peak around sunrise and unbeknownst to anyone else, the SEAL hikers had carried within their packs, 10-pound stones to honor their own fallen brothers, a new rock for each fallen SEAL within the past 12 months. The SEALs placed the stones in a secret crevice on the Whitney summit and I barely had enough time to snap a photo before we began our descent. That image remained burned in my mind for about a full year until I had an idea.

Ever since that hike, and coupled with Maine's commitment to serve, I've been inspired to honor our own fallen Maine heroes with memorial stones, but to also make The Summit Project a living memorial to help build and bolster community. I wanted to allow anyone to participate in TSP, and honor the fallen through meaningful action, community involvement and physical exertion. I wanted to capture the stories of our fallen heroes, but I also imagined the meta story of the travels that each stone would take as countless hikers carry it to help keep our heroes' memories alive. TSP has truly become a living memorial where we carry their stone for a hike, and we carry their stories for a lifetime. Our surviving family members know their loved ones are not forgotten.

In the days before this year's Acadia National Park's Cadillac Mountain hike on Oct. 17, organizers of The Summit Project profiled hikers who had volunteered to be part of the experience. We invite you to read why they chose to participate in the living memorial to honor and sustain the memories of Maine's post 9/11 fallen heroes.

(Stories have been edited for the purpose of this publication)

Tatiana Whitlock

My name is Tatiana Whitlock and I am an industrial designer and firearms instructor from South Portland. I am a mother of two children ages 5 and 6 years old and a proud Mainer. Exploring, hiking, hunting and fishing in our majestic state is one of my family's favorite pastimes.

This October will mark my second hike up Cadillac Mountain with the Summit Project in honor of our fallen heroes. As a firearms instructor I have the great pleasure of working with many of our nation's first responders, active duty corpsmen and women and veterans. As a result, I am fortunate to come to know many of the families behind these courageous individuals. The enormity of the sacrifice made on a daily basis not only by the veteran themselves but by their families is immeasurable. With great respect and appreciation I will carry the "Sacrifice" stone in their honor with Team Bubble to the top of Cadillac.

Participating in a Summit Project memorial hike is unlike any other memorial program I have volunteered with to date. The wellspring of emotion and gratitude that the hike and summit tribute evokes from all who participate is overwhelming. This kind of program is one that I hope to see spread nationwide and reignite the patriotic bond between our veterans, their families and communities.

By participating in this year's Acadia National Park hike, we each have the chance to carry the torch that much farther and remember those whose made the ultimate sacrifice. This is the example of respect, honor and gratitude that I wish to model for the next generation and the legacy I wish to leave my children.

Jedediah Philpot

My name is Jedediah Philpot from Embden. I am a United States Army Recruiter.

When I am not recruiting, one thing that I like to do in my spare time, something I'm passionate about, is fishing. Being on the water and spending time with my wife, Shasta, and daughter, Maeve.

I love Maine because there is no other state like it. I grew up here and absolutely love this state. This is my first climb up Cadillac. I volunteered to be part of The Summit Project at Acadia National Park 2015 living memorial hike because it is important to me to remember the ones that are not with us anymore and to make sure