


Nonfiction

# THE GUY(S) WHO GOT THE

THE AMAZING TRUE STORY OF AMERICA'S MOST ELITE AND SECRET FIGHTING FORCE:  
THE NAVY SEALS

BY KRISTIN LEWIS

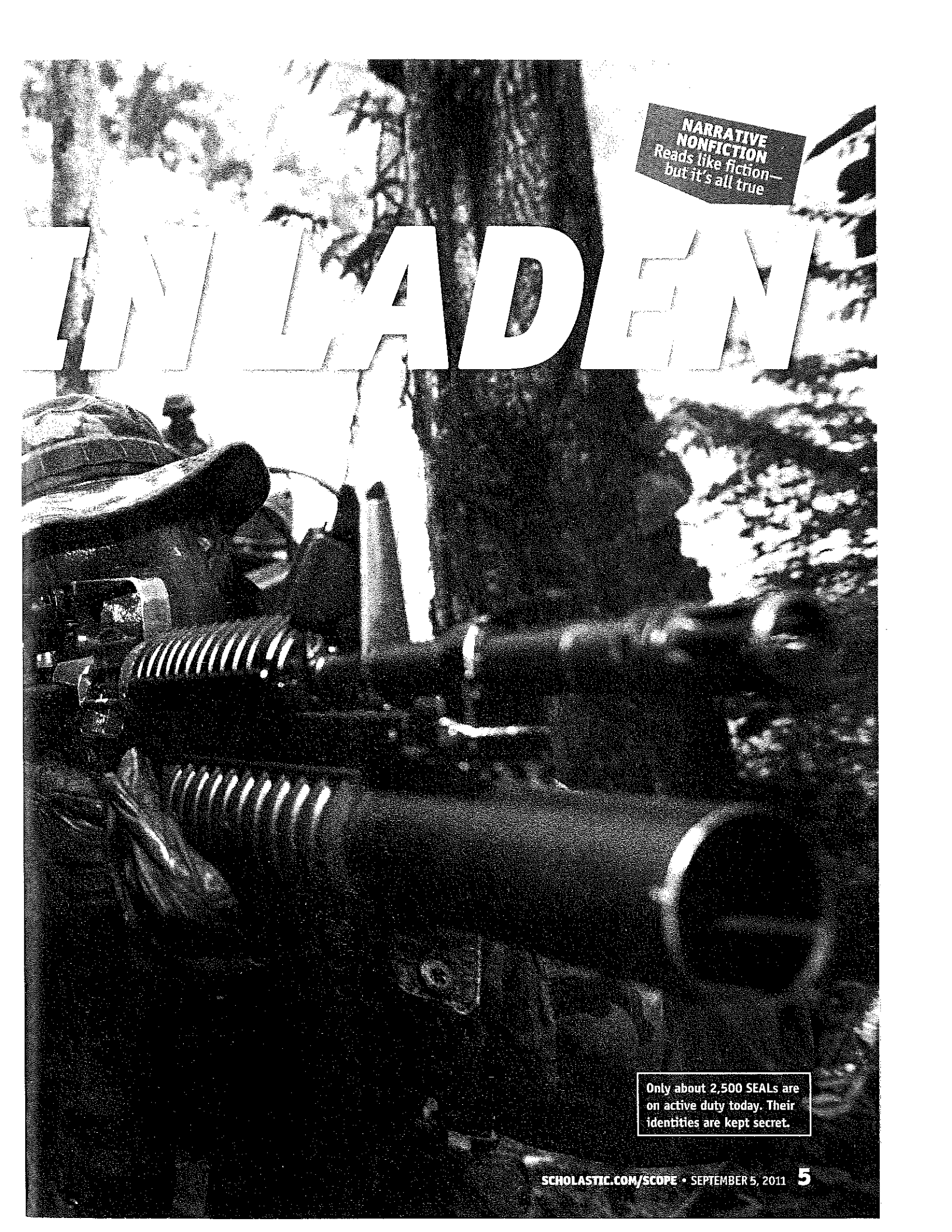
**Y**ou are the most lethal warrior on the planet. You are part ninja, part science whiz, part wilderness survivalist, all rolled into a supreme supersoldier. Tonight, you are headed into hostile territory on one of the highest-stakes military operations in U.S. history. The helicopter you're flying in is loaded with high-tech weapons and explosives, not to mention top-secret technology that only a few people in the world even know about. The President himself is watching you from Washington, D.C. Failure is not an option. 



AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:  
**COURAGE**

Think about the different ways a person can be brave. As you read the article, poem, and True Teen Story on the following pages, find examples of different types of courage.

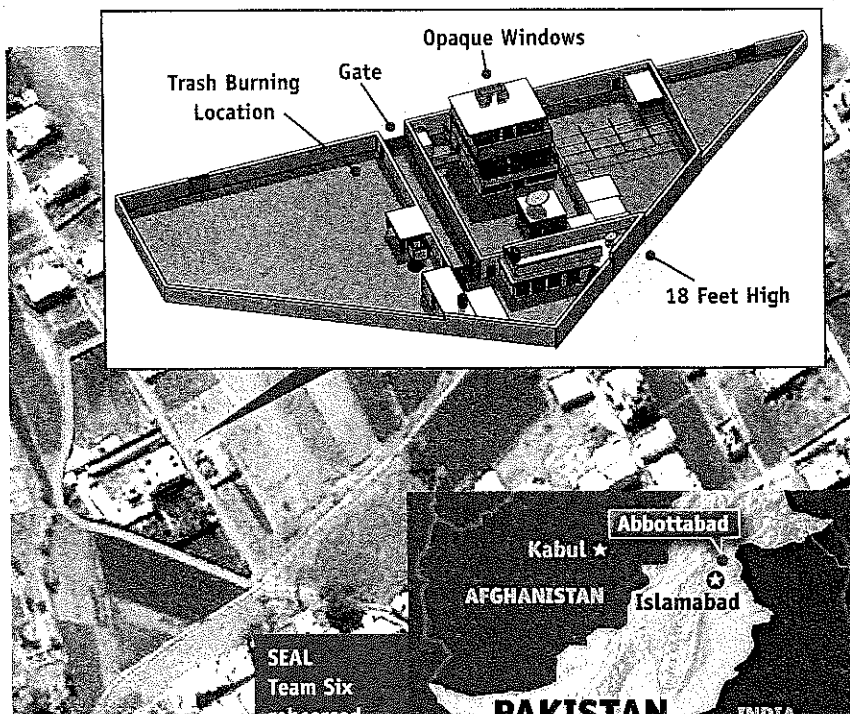
LEIF SKOGSTROF/CORBIS



**NARRATIVE  
NONFICTION**  
Reads like fiction—  
but it's all true

# INWADEN

Only about 2,500 SEALs are on active duty today. Their identities are kept secret.



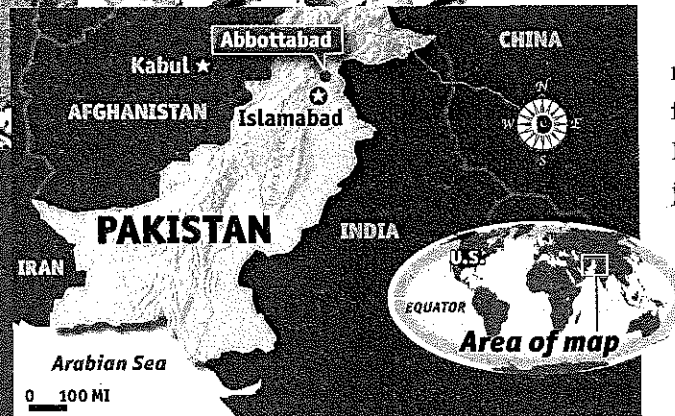
This might sound like a scene from *Call of Duty*, but it's a lot more hard-core than any video game. This is the real thing. Real bullets will fly. Real explosives will go off. Real lives will be risked.

This is a scene from the historic night last May when Navy SEALs killed Osama bin Laden.

The success of the mission was celebrated across America. It brought to an end one of the greatest **manhunts** in modern history. And for some, it brought a profound sense of justice. Osama bin Laden was the mastermind behind the devastating terror attacks of September 11, 2001, which killed nearly 3,000 men, women, and children.

The bin Laden mission also shone a spotlight on the Navy

SEAL Team Six rehearsed its mission on an exact replica of bin Laden's compound. It was built based on photographs taken by satellite (above).



SEALs—an extraordinary fighting force that operates under a wing of the military called Special Forces. But who are the SEALs? And why don't we know more about them?

### A Symbol of Evil

The SEALs trace their roots to World War II, when “frogmen,” or combat divers, would clear beaches of obstacles to prepare for invasion. Today, SEALs still perform sea missions, but they do a lot more than that. The name “SEAL” stands for “sea, air, and land,” because SEALs operate in all three environments—and in the most dangerous, remote places on Earth, whether it's the scorching desert, humid jungle, or freezing Arctic.

In recent years, SEALs have carried out hundreds of high-risk missions. In 2009, for example, they rescued an American captain taken hostage by pirates off the coast of Somalia. With trademark skill, the SEALs fired three seemingly impossible shots from 100 yards away in rough seas. They disarmed the pirates and saved the captain's life.

But the bin Laden mission was different from other missions. Bin Laden wasn't just another bad guy.

To many, he was a symbol of evil.

Bin Laden was the creator and leader of a terrorist group

called Al Qaeda. On 9/11, as Americans have come to call that horrifying day, he instructed Al Qaeda members to hijack four airplanes. Hijackers crashed two planes into the Twin Towers in New York City, causing the buildings to collapse. Another plane was flown into military headquarters at the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. A fourth plane went down in a field in Pennsylvania. Thousands of innocent people were murdered. In a sickening video, bin Laden openly celebrated their deaths.

After 9/11, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the government that was protecting Al Qaeda, but bin Laden himself escaped. Over the past decade, SEALs and other special-forces

teams have hunted, captured, or killed 2,000 Al Qaeda agents; yet bin Laden remained at large.

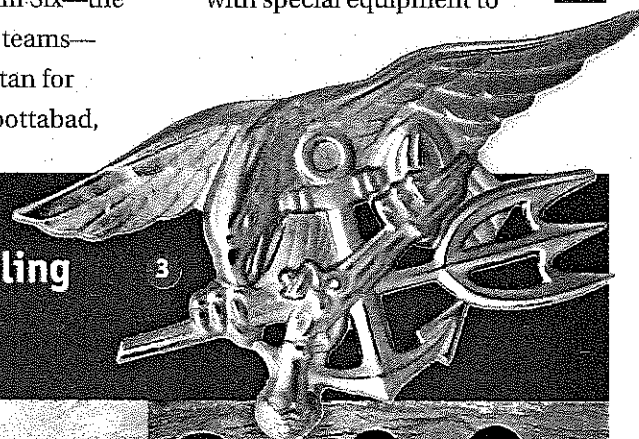
At last, in August 2010, surveillance teams believed they had found bin Laden and some of his family living in a compound in a town in Pakistan. Getting to him would not be easy, though. It would require an expertly trained,

highly disciplined team, along with a good deal of brute force. It was a mission **tailor-made** for the SEALs.

### The bin Laden Mission

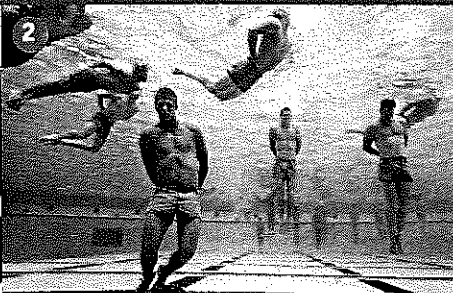
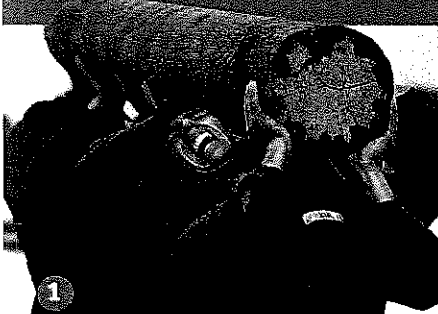
On a warm night last May, members of SEAL Team Six—the most elite of all SEAL teams—set out from Afghanistan for the compound in Abbottabad,

Pakistan, where bin Laden was thought to be hiding. Their mission was to capture or kill bin Laden. The element of surprise was critical. The SEALs had even outfitted their helicopters with special equipment to



# SEAL TRAINING

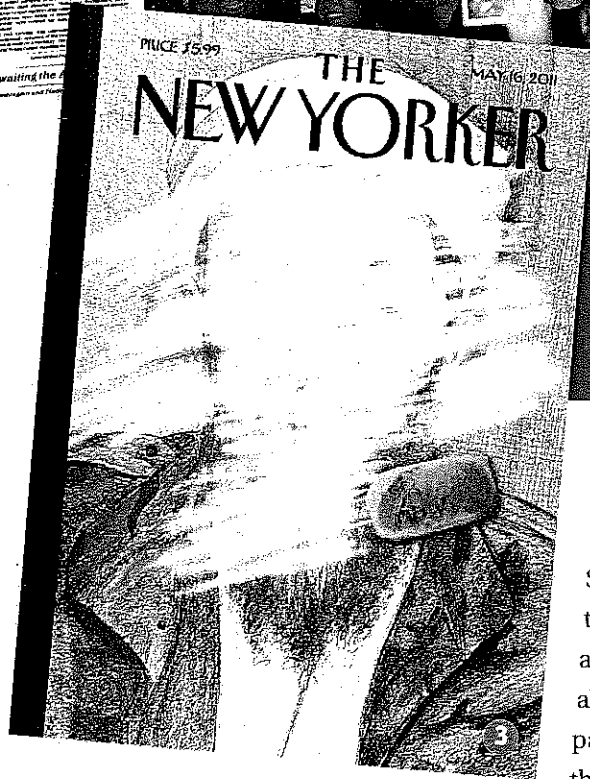
It's the most agonizing and grueling military training on Earth.



1. Learning teamwork the painful way.
2. Drownproofing: Students are tied up, then expected to swim. Doctors stand by to revive anyone who passes out in the water.
3. The SEAL emblem: The eagle stands for the air, the pistol for land, and the trident of Poseidon (Greek god of the sea) for water. The anchor is for the Navy.
4. "Hell Week" involves hours in the frigid water.
5. Backbreaking runs on the beach are a regular part of training.

**DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A SEAL? COULD YOU ...**

- ✓ Swim in shark-infested waters?
- ✓ do 42 push-ups in 2 minutes?
- ✓ retrieve a mask at the bottom of a pool—using only your teeth?
- ✓ go 5 days without eating?



1. News of the devastating attacks of 9/11. 2. After bin Laden's death, people gathered in celebration in front of the White House in Washington, D.C. 3. The New Yorker published this cover of bin Laden after he was killed. **What do you think it means?**

muffle their sound.

But the moment the helicopters arrived, disaster struck. One of the choppers lost its “lift,” the force of air necessary for flight. It plummeted to the ground and crashed loudly. The element of surprise was lost. Now everyone inside the compound knew the SEALs were coming.

### Test of Courage

When you think of a SEAL, do you picture a cowboy with machine guns? A guy with biceps the size of basketballs? In reality, a SEAL probably doesn't look like the tough guys you see in the movies. Look around your class. It might be the little kid in the back, the one with the glasses and Harry Potter T-shirt, who has the makings of a future SEAL.

SEALs have to be smart and disciplined. Before a mission, a SEAL will learn everything he can about his targets, including

their culture. In addition, SEALs must have the mental toughness to stay sharp in the most chaotic situations, even when they haven't slept in days.

So how do they learn these skills? SEAL training. It's the most **grueling** in the world, designed to identify those who have tremendous mental and physical strength—as well as the courage to risk their lives on the most dangerous missions. It's not

surprising that only 25 percent of SEAL students graduate.

The first step to becoming a SEAL is taking a series of tests that measure physical ability and intelligence. (Only men are allowed to apply.) Those who pass begin six months of training that pushes them to the limit. It ends with Motivation Week, better known as “Hell Week.” During an agonizing five days, students are subjected to severe endurance tests. They are constantly in motion, constantly freezing, starving, and exhausted. Grown men break down and weep as they push themselves to keep going. Injuries are **inevitable**. More than one person has broken his neck. Anyone can quit at any point by ringing a brass bell, and usually

two out of three students drop out during this week.

After Motivation Week, those who remain train for another year and a half. They learn to skydive. They build their wilderness-survival skills and become precision shooters. In the end, it's those who have the courage to confront and master their own weaknesses who become SEALs, not those with the biggest muscles. It's the ones who have the mental strength to carry them through long after their bodies have given up.

### Prepped for Disaster

The SEALs chosen for the bin Laden mission spent months preparing; **meticulous** planning is a hallmark of the Navy SEALs. They planned for any possibility, including a downed helicopter. So when the chopper crashed, they knew exactly what to do.

Without hesitation, they climbed out of the helicopter's wreckage, sprinted toward the wall of the compound, and placed explosives on the door. In a matter of minutes, the SEALs stormed the compound, located bin Laden, and executed him. Next they seized documents, computers, and other materials. These items contained the names of other Al Qaeda members and plans for another attack on the U.S. This information could save thousands of lives.

Then the SEALs boarded another helicopter and vanished into the night.



## A POETRY CONNECTION

The famous author Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) wrote this poem for his son, about the qualities a man should have (though there's no reason why a woman should not have them too!).

**Do you think the Navy SEALs possess the qualities Kipling lists in his poem?**



### If

By Rudyard Kipling

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim,  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;  
  
If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,  
And never breathe a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"  
  
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son.

## Justice Has Been Done

For the past decade, America has lived in the shadow of 9/11. The attacks shook our sense of safety. Though the war on terror is not over, in some ways bin Laden's death marked the end of this terrible chapter in American history. President Obama said as much when he addressed the nation after the SEALs' mission was completed: "We can say to those families who have lost loved ones to Al Qaeda's terror: Justice has been done."

As the President's message spread across the nation, Americans gathered together, just as they did in the days following 9/11. This time, though, they gathered not in grief and horror, but in pride and unity.

As for SEAL Team Six? The President thanked them in a private meeting—no journalists, no cameras, and no public recognition. After all, SEAL identities are secret. We may never know the names of the SEALs who killed bin Laden, but we will always remember them. ●

## TRUE TEEN STORY

### I Lost My Dad on 9/11

Payton Wall, 14, opens up about the devastating loss of her father in the Twin Towers.

It was September 11, 2001. Terrorists had flown a plane into the World Trade Center in New York City, and Glen Wall was trapped inside one of the burning buildings. Realizing he would not escape, he called his family to say goodbye. "I love you, Payton. I will always be watching over you," he told his daughter, who was 4.

Payton never saw her dad again.

Now 14, Payton has handled her loss with courage and grace. She does well in school and plays lacrosse and runs track, just as her dad did. But, she says, "I lost a part of me that can't be replaced."

Payton kept her story to herself—until earlier this year, when she was inspired by Justin Bieber. Moved to learn that Bieber also grew up without a dad, she reached out to him on Twitter.

Undeterred when Bieber did not reply, Payton sent a 1,500-word letter to the White House about 9/11 and the devastating loss of

her dad. The letter landed on the desk of President Obama, who was so stirred that he invited Payton to a ceremony at Ground Zero, where the Twin Towers collapsed. The ceremony was held just four days after bin Laden's death. The President gave Payton an enormous hug and said it was an honor to meet her.

As for Justin Bieber? The President promised to introduce Payton to him.



Payton Wall with President Obama

## CONTEST

### Writing About Courage

In his famous poem "If," Rudyard Kipling expresses the idea that being courageous means staying strong even when we feel weak and defeated. How do both 14-year-old Payton Wall and the SEALs show this type of courage? (HINT: Reread the section "Test of Courage" on pages 8-9.) Write a paragraph answering this question.

Send it to **SEALs CONTEST**. Ten winners will get *The Things a Brother Knows* by Dana Reinhardt. See page 2 for details.

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