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NEWS

Iraq veteran featured in documentary about walk from Wisconsin to California publishes memoir

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The Army trained Tom Voss to make life-or-death decisions in the blink of an eye, but when he returned home to Wisconsin after a year in Iraq, he was a different person.

Voss found himself asking what really mattered if anyone could die, even really good people.

Like many military members who feel adrift when they leave the service, Voss had trouble sleeping, tried drowning out the noise of car bombs by frequenting loud taverns, found relief in alcohol and drugs and was suicidal.

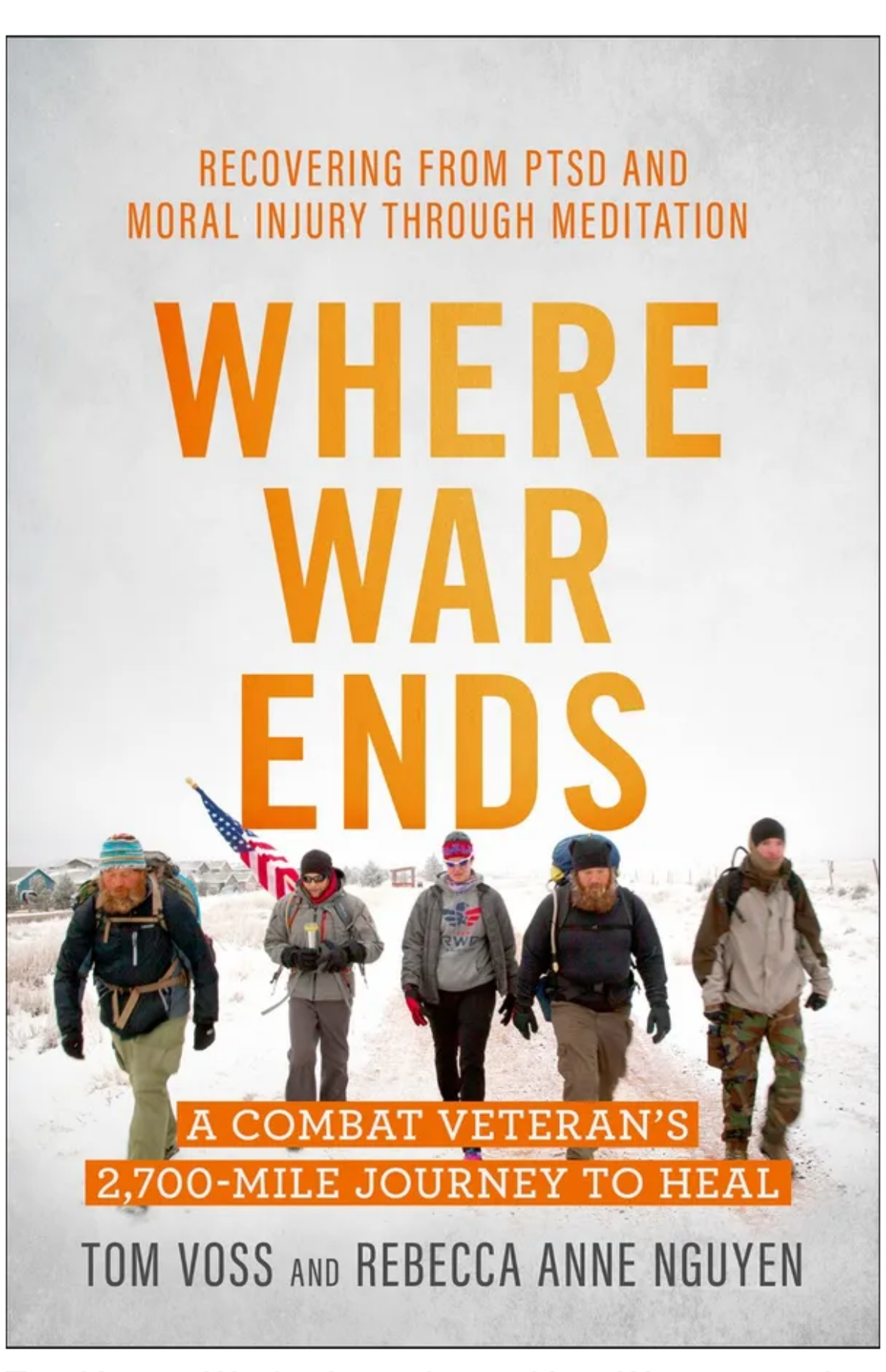
"No matter how much I drank, my friends were still dead. And I longed to join them," Voss wrote in a war memoir published in October.

But Voss eventually found a way to heal from the moral injuries he suffered in Iraq, through yoga and meditation.

Tom Voss deployed to Iraq in 2004-'05 as an Army infantry scout. Suffering from PTSD and moral injuries, Voss and another Wisconsin veteran walked to California which was featured in the documentary "Almost Sunrise." Voss has written "Where War Ends: A Combat Veteran's 2,700-Mile Journey to Heal - Recovering from PTSD and Moral Injury through Meditation." *New World Library*

Voss and his sister Rebecca Anne Nguyen, both Waukesha natives, wrote "Where War Ends: A Combat Veteran's 2,700-Mile Journey to Heal — Recovering from PTSD and Moral Injury through Meditation" and will speak at Boswell Book Company in Milwaukee Thursday.

The book is part memoir, part travelogue of a unique trip he took with a fellow Iraq War veteran and part inspirational text. During a five-month trek from Milwaukee to California featured in the documentary "Almost Sunrise," Voss and his hiking companion Anthony Anderson attended a four-day meditation workshop in Colorado where he learned that meditating could transform the pain of trauma into power.


RECOVERING FROM PTSD AND MORAL INJURY THROUGH MEDITATION
WHERE WAR ENDS
A COMBAT VETERAN'S 2,700-MILE JOURNEY TO HEAL
TOM VOSS AND REBECCA ANNE NGUYEN

Tom Voss, a Waukesha native and Iraq War veteran, has written a book with his sister about his struggles after returning home from war. *New World Library*

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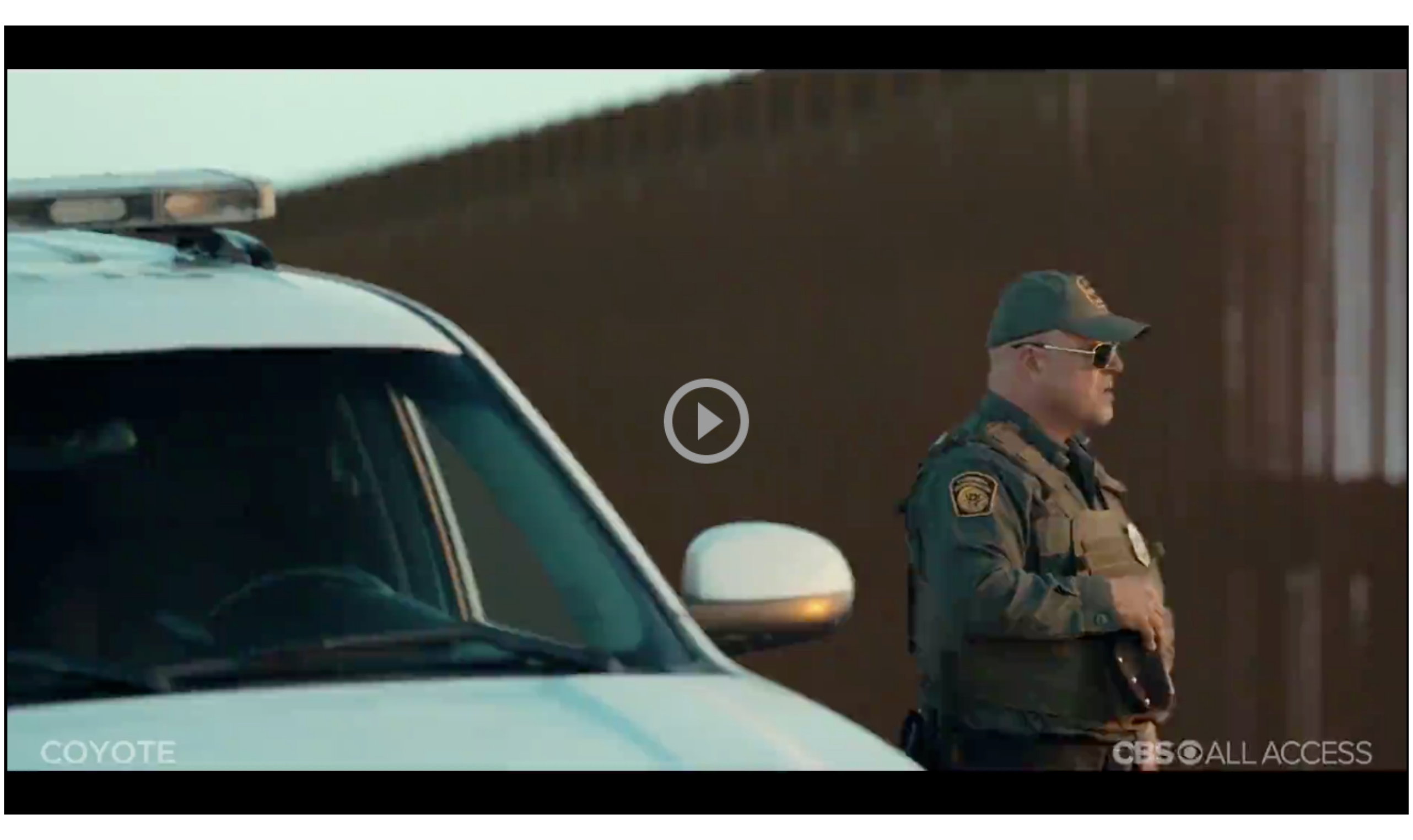

When Voss was discharged from the Army in 2006 he didn't understand why he was different, why he was troubled and hurting.

"When I was in the Army it wasn't an option to just talk about experiences. That's still ingrained in me. Being open and honest and vulnerable is a challenge," Voss, 35, said in a recent phone interview.

Tom Voss deployed to Iraq in 2004-'05 as an infantry scout with the Army's 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment. Voss, a Waukesha native, has published a memoir "Where War Ends: A Combat Veteran's 2,700-Mile Journey to Heal - Recovering from PTSD and Moral Injury through Meditation. He's speaking at Boswell Books on Dec. 12. *Tom Voss*

He joined the Army in 2003 for college money and to honor the legacy of family members who served, including a grandfather who fought on Iwo Jima during World War II. He served in a scout sniper platoon in Iraq and saw death up close. His platoon sergeant was killed on a day Voss was given off while the rest of his platoon gave a tour of Mosul to a group of SEALs.

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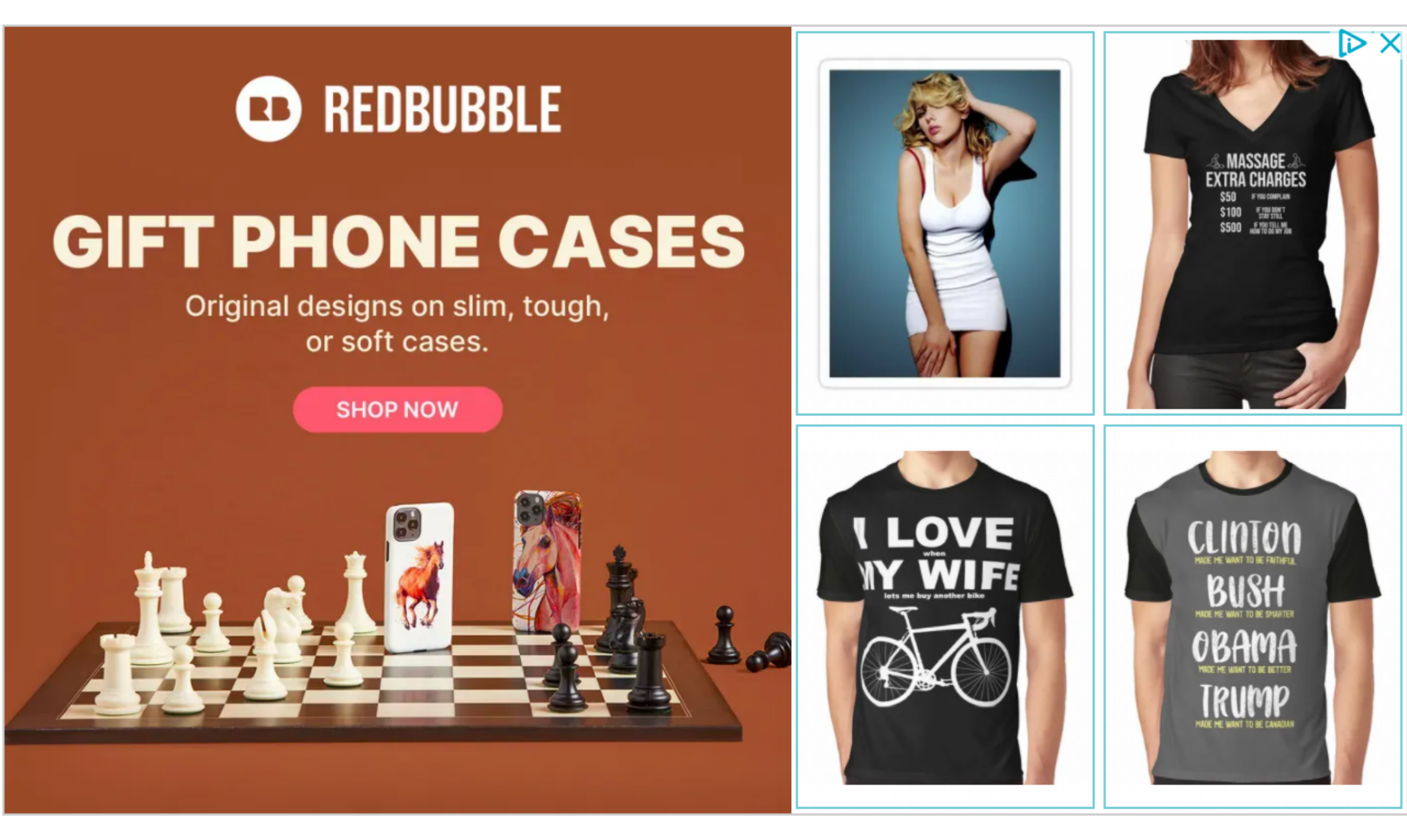

His sister noticed a change in him when he returned home for a 15-day vacation during his deployment. The brother Nguyen had known all her life was a nice guy who was friends with everyone.

"When I saw him on leave there was something very different and troubled and dark. I think I hoped that over time he would come back and get back to who he was," said Nguyen, who is 2½ years older.

"After I heard more about what he saw and experienced, I don't think the human spirit is capable of coming back from that. He's healed and he's better, but he's not the same person. War just changes you."

Voss knows it's not easy to talk about bad experiences especially among veterans trained to keep their emotions at bay, who don't want to burden their families with their war stories.

Voss felt the same way. But once he admitted to himself that really horrible things happened, he could let go of the burden. He now lives in Ojai, California, where he is a yoga and meditation instructor and an inspirational speaker.

Waukesha native Rebecca Anne Nguyen co-authored with her brother Tom Voss, "Where War Ends: A Combat Veteran's 2,700-Mile Journey to Heal - Recovering from PTSD and Moral Injury through Medititation." *New World Library*

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Iraq War veterans, Anthony Anderson (left) and Tom Voss are shown at Loveland Pass in Colorado on their walk from Milwaukee to Los Angeles featured in the documentary "After Sunrise." *Anthony Anderson*

He considered writing a book about his deployment before he walked to California and the documentary was released. But it took a while for Voss to get his thoughts together, as well as live more of his life, he said. The book ended up being a way for Voss and his sister to have tough conversations about his war experiences. Nguyen, who did much of the writing and editing, is a travel writer, screenwriter and digital content strategist.

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"It's challenging because you're writing someone else's memoir. We had to do a lot of digging and honor his memories," said Nguyen, who lives in Charlotte, North Carolina.

They both hope the book will help veterans deal with trauma and help family members understand why some veterans don't want to talk about their experiences.

"A lot of books on Iraq and Afghanistan really just focus on the horrors of war and the challenges of coming home. We offer a way to move through that," said Voss.

If you go: Tom Voss and Rebecca Anne Nguyen will visit Boswell Book Company in Milwaukee at 7 p.m. Thursday to talk about their book "Where War Ends: A Combat Veteran's 2,700-Mile Journey to Heal - Recovering from PTSD and Moral Injury through Meditation."

***Meg Jones** is at home virtually anywhere in Wisconsin, reporting on the character and characters of her home state for the Journal Sentinel and Sentinel since 1993. She was part of a team named a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2003 for coverage of chronic wasting disease in the state's deer herd. A UW-Madison graduate and former member of the Badger band and women's crew team, the Rhinelander native has a passion for covering weather and military affairs. Since the war on terror started after 9/11, she has made eight trips overseas to cover Wisconsin troops in battle four trips to Iraq and four to Afghanistan.*

Email her at meg.jones@jrn.com; follow her on Twitter: @MegJonesJS.