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Vol. 6 Issue 4

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HAWKE**

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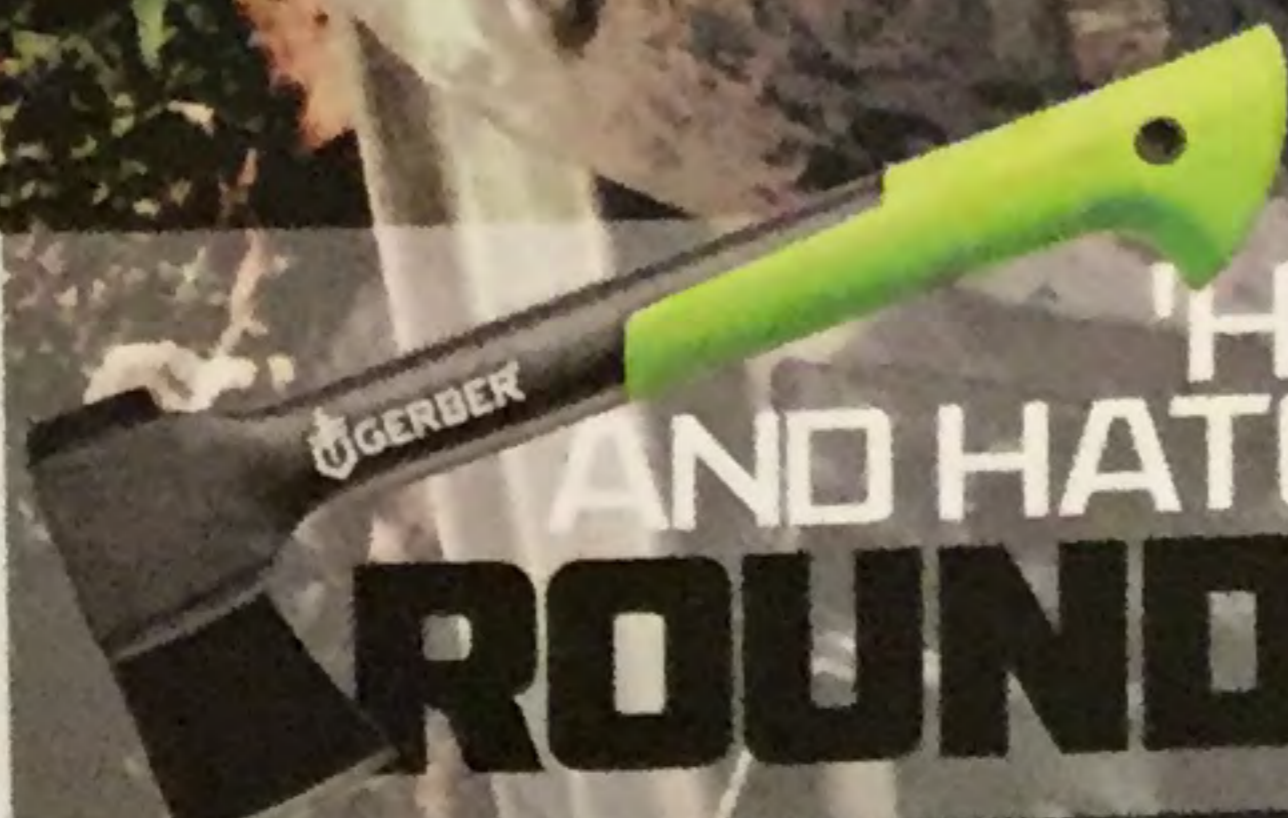
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**AN ASG EXCLUSIVE:
MYKEL HAWKE'S
MILITARY BACKGROUND
AND ADVENTURES IN TV**

BY BRIAN MORRIS



Mykel Hawke is a senior instructor at American Survival Guide University. While on location at ALTAIR Training Facility in the Florida Everglades, ASGU Lead Instructor and Producer Brian Morris took advantage of some of their down time to ask Mykel about his background, military experience and his experiences on the several TV series he's hosted.

This is the second of a three-part series that helps us understand more about Mykel. He is a fascinating guy, and we're looking forward to bringing his ASGU training segments to our ASGU viewers.

Be sure to read the rest of the story in our March 2017 (Part 1) and May 2017 (Part 3) issues, and watch for news about his exclusive American Survival Guide University survival skills presentations at ASGU.ASGMAG.com.

American Survival Guide: What drew you to the Army and to volunteer, not only for Airborne training, but then to volunteer for, and ultimately become, a Green Beret?

Mykel Hawke: I was kicked out of junior high school for fighting as a gang leader, defending ourselves against a lot of older, bigger bullies. I was a straight "A" student and in the chess club. But I never went to high school.

I was shot and stabbed before I ever joined the Army. I had friends going to jail for murder and friends who were murdered. I knew I would meet the same fate if I didn't change something. It seemed to me the only way to break the cycle was to get an education.

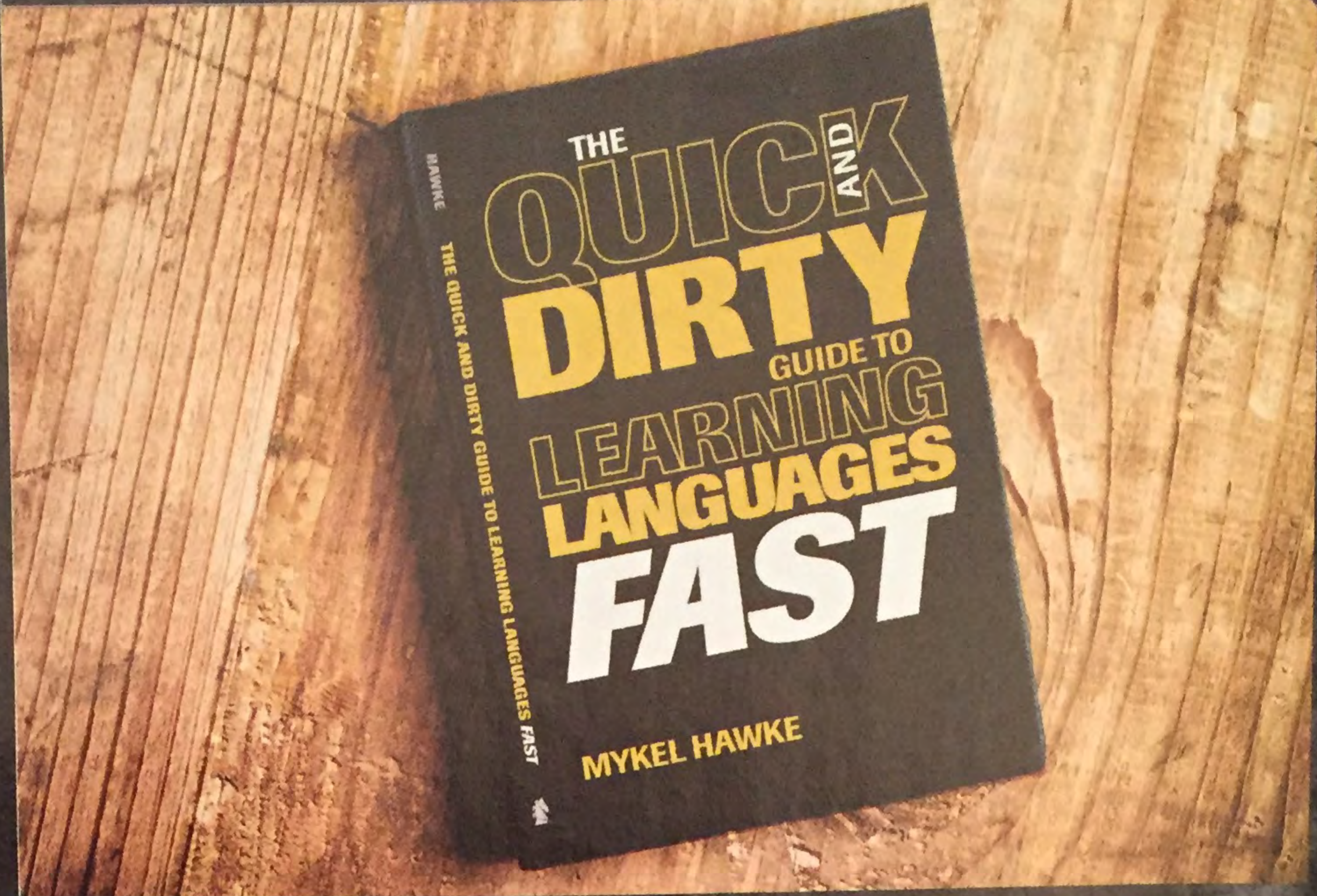
The only way my poor butt was going to get an education was to join the military. I didn't have a clue what a Green Beret was! I went in and got a lot of training in communications (05B [Army radio operator], 31C [radio operator-maintainer] and 31V [unit-level communications maintainer]). Then, a Special Forces recruiter found me.

I was asked to join because I was a sergeant after two years with PLDC (Primary Leadership Development Course) and Jump School. So, I read three books about them and decided that this is who I wanted to become. These men were the real-world heroes I was raised by and about whom I grew up reading and watching movies. So, I tried out and made it. It was the best choice I ever made.

When I went through the Special Forces training for the fourth time—this time, as an officer in the Detachment Officer Qualification Course (SFDOQC) in 2002—survival training was not taught throughout the training in the actual SERE Course (Survival Evasion Resistance Escape). They only taught it for three days. SERE had recently become an official part of the initial training, received by those soldiers earning their green berets, which was a great addition. Prior to this, SERE was given as an advanced training course that only some Special Forces soldiers would choose to attend later in their careers; and many chose to skip "Camp Slappy" training!

ASG: What type of survival training did you receive during your Special Forces training?

MH: Nowadays, all Green Berets receive SERE training as part of the SFQC (Special Forces Qualification Course). SERE training



› One of the books Mykel has written: *The Quick and Dirty Guide to Learning Languages Fast*

› Mykel Hawke has conducted training presentations for foreign military units, as shown here.

teaches Special Forces soldiers how to survive in a full spectrum of environments, including becoming prisoners of war, hostages or being detained by another country during peacetime scenarios.

This also used to be a stand-alone advanced class that I took in 2005 as a captain and team commander. But now, it is included as mandatory training, and it is another great improvement in training that resulted from our lessons learned after many years of combat. The school teaches soldiers how to survive in the wilderness, how to evade capture and how to escape if they are captured.

Only military personnel can be prisoners of war, but all other forms of captivity are applicable just as much—if not more—to civilians. Many places offer "SERE-like" training, but it fluctuates greatly, and the levels of training competency vary quite a lot. American



"... THE MOST POWERFUL AND POSITIVE PROOF OF DEDICATION TO THEM AND THEIR CAUSE IS TO BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM IN THEIR NATIVE TONGUE. THIS IS WHY WE LEARN LANGUAGES."

Survival Guide University is currently working on offering training for civilians in surviving, escaping and evading captivity, so keep an eye out for that coming real soon!

ASG: After holding several military occupational specialties within the Special Forces, you decided to transition over to become an officer. Why did you do that, and how hard was it for you to not only get through that training, but to then re-qualify as a Special Forces officer?

MH: This is a funny story. I had actually gotten out as an 18D (SF medical sergeant), 18E (SF comms sergeant), 18F (SF assistant ops and intel sergeant) SFC. I did five years of contracting in war zones such as Azerbaijan, Colombia, Haiti and Sierra Leone. I was actually a country manager in these conflicts and nearly died many times. This was well before 9/11.

One day in Colombia, I nearly died three times. I was with a famous SF general. After it was over, he told me I should come back in and share what I had learned with the new SF troops.

When 9/11 happened, I answered the call. And that is the second funny part of the story. I was a producer for ABC, living in Los Angeles as a single father of two teenaged sons when 9/11 went down. My sons and I saw the second plane crash into the second tower—live on TV. I told my sons at that moment, "This is war. Gents, I can stay out as a single dad or go back in. What do you say?" They both answered, "Dad, go kick some bad-guy ass!"

So, I did. I went back to Special Forces Officer School as an "old" guy, non-ranger-tabbed, noncombat arms (I was a medical service officer), and I was not only National Guard, I was a second lieutenant—the lowest of the low!

They tried everything to fail me. They sent me to every advanced school, hoping I'd get

kicked out, but I passed everything with flying colors. So, they finally let me do the Special Forces Officer course. Again, I did super in the course, with my peers and all the psych evals they threw at me.

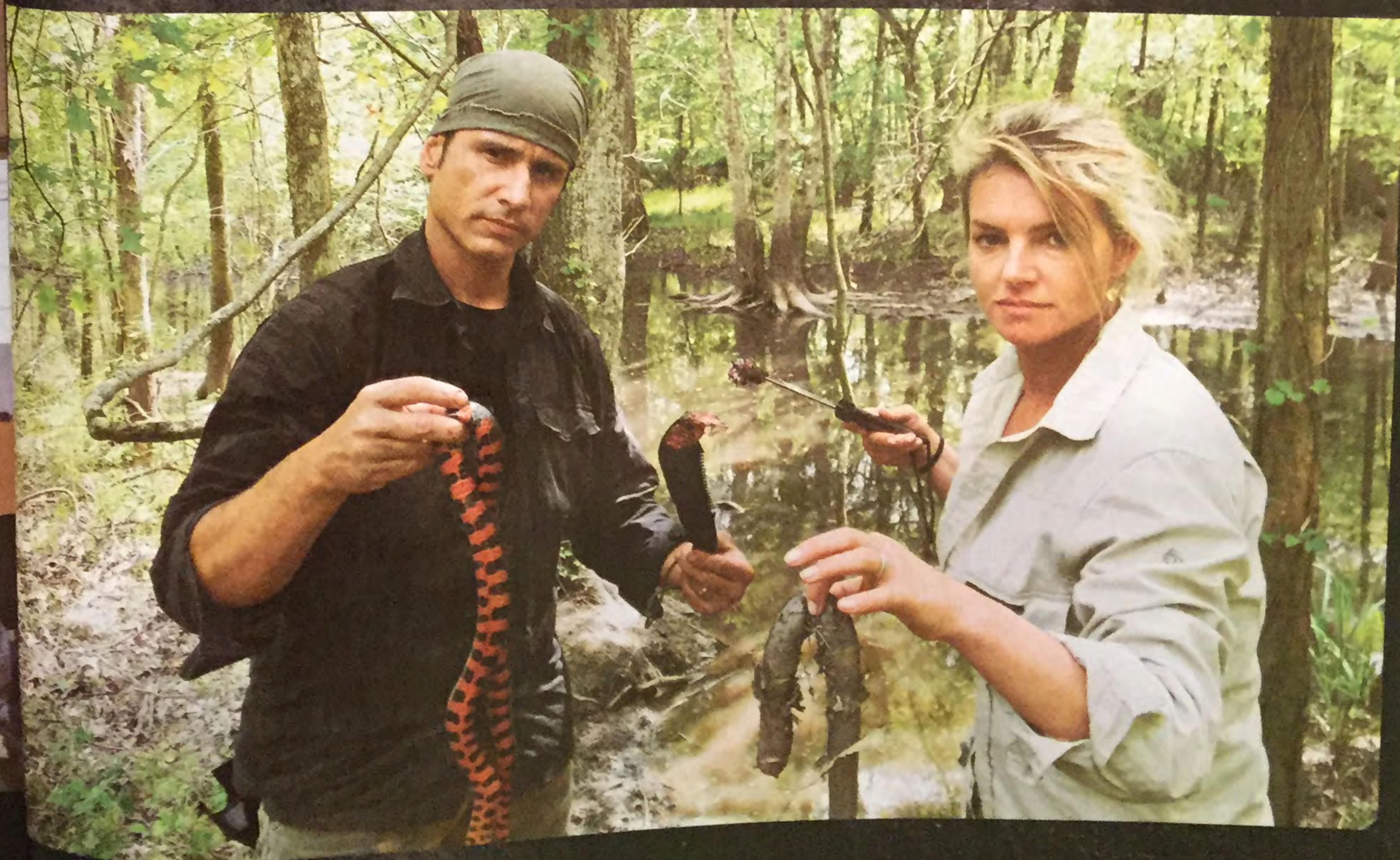
Bottom line: When it was all done, after my combat tour, they asked me to come back to the school and help update their course to fight the current threat, because they were still teaching Vietnam-era doctrine at that point. Things are a lot better now.

ASG: Why do Special Forces soldiers have to learn another language? What languages do you speak?

MH: What sets (Army) Special Forces apart from all other Special Operations forces is that we are created and designed to do unconventional (aka: guerilla) warfare. That means working with, living with, living like and looking like the locals. We have to know their customs, culture, religion and language in order to understand how best to work with them. So, the most powerful and positive proof of dedication to them and their cause is to be able to communicate with them in their native tongue. This is why we learn languages.

I was rated in seven languages, paid for three and studied a few others. I have a best-selling language book called *The*

◀ Mykel Hawke and his wife, Ruth England Hawke, during filming in a Louisiana bayou



Quick and Dirty Guide to Learning Foreign Languages Fast.

ASG: Let's talk about television for a minute. What is the most dangerous situation you have ever been in on camera, and how was it resolved?

MH: The most dangerous injury for me was on *Lost Survivors* doing an improvised rappel on a blind descent when the rock face gave out. All I could do was manage my way down and burn up some flesh—or crash and burn.

The most dangerous illness was when I nearly went down with heat stroke on the open sea. We couldn't use a tarp to block the sun, because the film crew couldn't see us under it. So, it was quit or take an enema. I took the enema and survived.

The most dangerous for Ruth [Mykel's wife] was also heat stroke. The first episode we did, I told Renegade 83 (the production company) that we couldn't film in the middle of the day in the desert. They made us, and Ruth nearly died. I forced them to call in the medic. They started listening to me after that. And we taught a good lesson on TV: Drink or die.

ASG: What do you think is the biggest problem with survival-based reality TV today?

MH: Too much is faked and too many frauds. There are no real certifications for it, so any quack can claim to be a survival expert. TV is made by folks in Los Angeles and New York who have no clue about the bush, so we get B.S.!

ASG: What are some important survival topics you rarely see covered on reality TV because they are not "sexy" enough or just don't make for good TV but are important for our viewers to master in order to increase their chances of staying alive?

MH: I'm real big on navigation. After all, if you can get home, you survive. But it's too boring for flashy TV execs. That is one reason we were very proud of our show, *Lost Survivors*; it focused on teaching navigation.

The other thing we like to focus on is edible and medicinal plants. We did some in every episode of *Man, Woman, Wild*—and it was always the first thing they edited out.

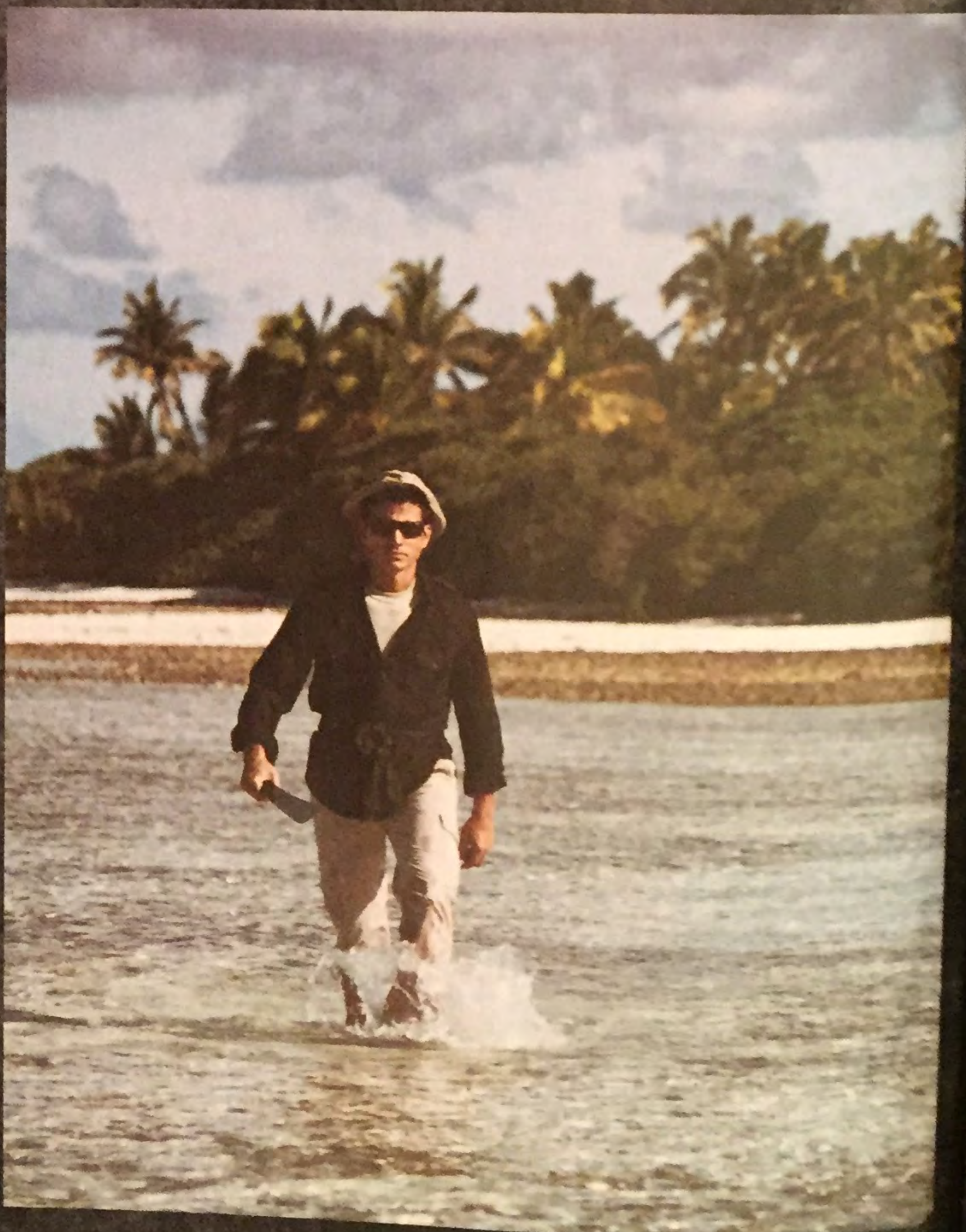
ASG: Those of us at American Survival Guide University pride ourselves on always advising our readers to be slow and methodical in a survival situation in order

› The ALTAR Training Facility in the Florida Everglades was the location chosen for filming several American Survival Guide University training segments with Mykel Hawke.

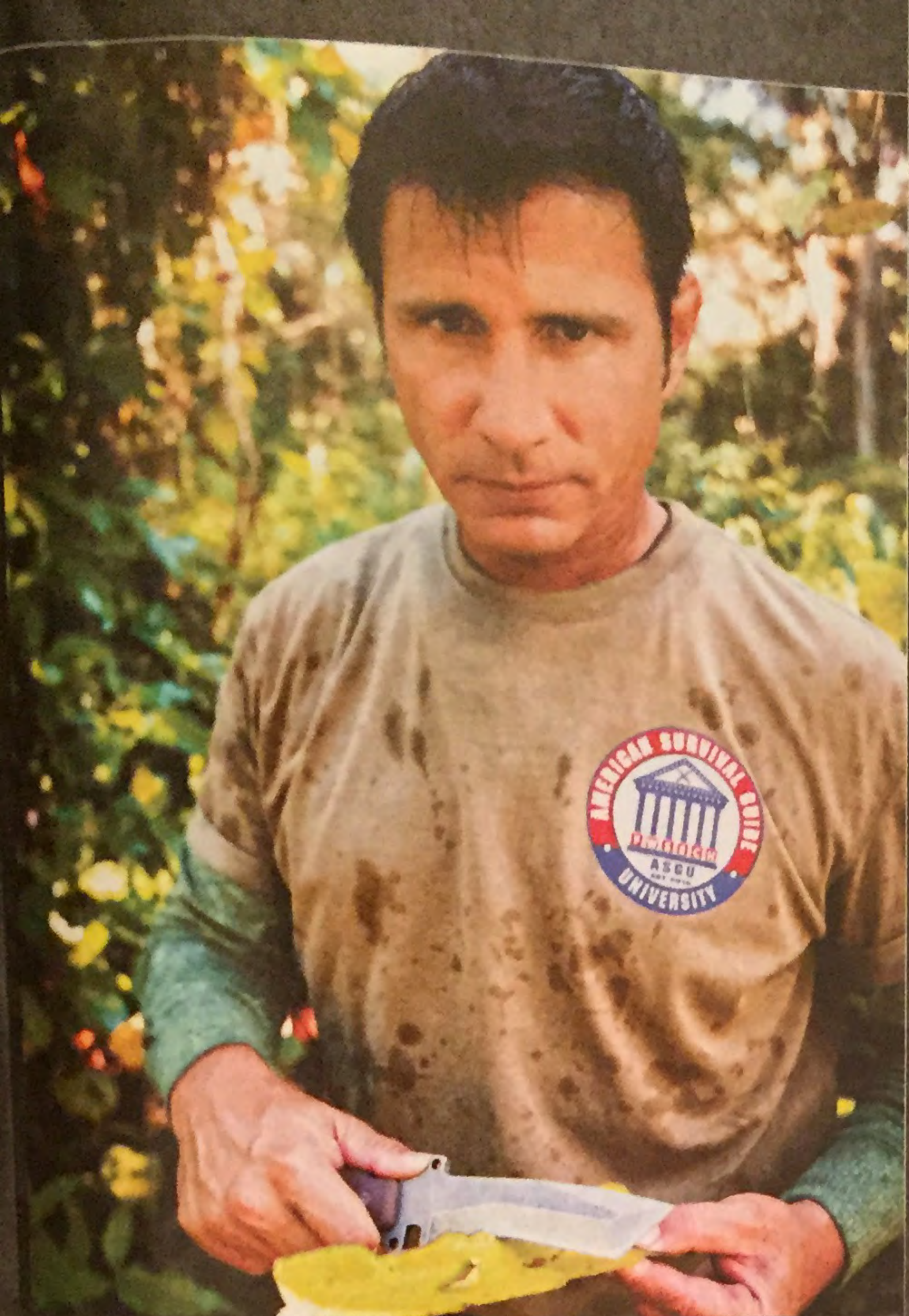


to conserve energy and minimize the risk of injury or illness. Quite often, we see so-called "survival experts" trying to walk out of a desert or climb a mountain at the hottest time of the day with little or no water. Do you think they are potentially putting viewers' lives at risk by teaching unsound survival techniques?

MH: Most of those "stunts" are faked and extremely wrong. Those folks would never have the energy or hydration to run up a mountain and get ice to drink, and it's damned dangerous to teach jumping off cliffs and going into caves, tunnels and such. They do it for the drama and to look like big heroes, but they are zeroes in my book, because that



› Mykel Hawke on location on Aitutaki, one of the Cook Islands in the Pacific Ocean



"THE MAIN WAY WE HUMANS LEARN, SAD TO SAY, TENDS TO BE BY FAILURE RATHER THAN BY SUCCESSES. SO, FAILURE IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF LIFE AND AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT PART OF SURVIVAL."

will get folks killed.

Also, I hold those "experts"—and the networks—responsible for those dangerous teachings. If a network says this person is a doctor, and they give bad medical advice, and it turns out they're not a doctor, then it's a double wrong to the viewer, because they've been lied to and their lives put at risk.

ASG: Other than yourself, of the most widely known and respected survival experts who have had or appeared on survival-based TV, whom do you think is the best overall?

MH: My personal fave of the celebrity survivalists is Ray Mears. He is truly into the art of survival. I love Lofty "SAS" Wiseman, but he's kept out of the TV light.

ASG: There has been a considerable amount of controversy over the years involving survival reality TV stars staying in hotels each day after a shoot. How do you feel about that practice, and what was the longest you ever had to survive in the wilderness?

MH: It's been well publicized about Bear Grylls in hotels. I think Bear is a great guy.

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but I never considered him a survivalist.

We had a great producer when we made our shows. He made sure we were able to speak truthfully and say we lived in the shelters we made. We did ... and it sucked!

But that was the mission: Live it, do it, teach it. We're proud our suffering entertained, but more importantly, it educated. We're pretty sure the *Dual Survival* folks stay in hotels, because we've had way too many fans and friends tell us so. But that is between them and the public.

For us, the longest we stayed [in the wilderness] was five days. We usually try to do it in three, but sometimes, we needed four to make it. Once we got stuck. I think it was Alaska at a bad time of the year (the "thaw"). The weather was bad. A blizzard coming in forced us to have to tap out for the second time, which I hated. But it was real, and we had to own it. Sometimes, folks die.

ASG: You are one of the few survival TV personalities who have aired their failures in an episode. How important do you think that is in driving the point home to people that no one, not even a true survival expert, is exempt from the power of Mother Nature?

MH: The main way we humans learn, sad to say, tends to be by failure rather than by successes. So, failure is an important part of life and an extremely important part of survival. That's why it's key that folks study and practice. While we never like to fail, we are proud to own our failures and teach folks the importance of preparedness, readiness—and most of all, respect for Mother Nature.

Weather is fickle, terrain can change, disasters can happen. We must all be mindful that we are but part of this life, and the universe does not revolve around us; nor does it stop when we perish. The secret is to go with the flow and pay attention. Take your time while moving with a purpose. Look around and be situationally aware. The more you see, the more opportunities you can exploit and the more dangers you can avoid.

ASG: Both you and Ruth have achieved fame over the years. What is the best and the worst thing about being famous?

MH: I never set out to be on TV. I never imagined it and never cared. I was teaching survival to kids in Costa Rica, and *MTV Road Rules* found us and asked me to help. I did, and it grew from there.

Ruth had dedicated herself to photography and ended up in front of the camera. We both are actually private people and enjoyed the anonymity prior to television. However, it is a great honor when folks like our work and tell us how we united families. And, as a teacher, it is a wonderful thing to know I've been able to help more people learn. We consider it a blessing, for which we are thankful.

ASG: You are quite well known in the television industry as a survival expert. Your name and image are plastered all over the Internet, and you have your own line of survival products. Have you ever had trouble finding work in other fields you are skilled in—such as the security consulting field, medical field or the intelligence field—because of your fame?

MH: I held top secret clearance, and I've been awarded State Department Small Contractor of the Year. I've taught soldiers, as well as civilians, for many years. It is interesting how continuing to do so seems odd to some. They ask questions such as, Why are you teaching or operating? And my answer is always the same: I was me, doing this before TV, during TV; and even now, without TV, I am the same. Nothing has changed, other than they have seen me on TV!

ASG: You are a family man. How hard is fame on your family? Have you or anyone in your family ever been stalked?

MH: The only thing hard about the fame was being stalked by a former brother. I won't go into the details, but we feared for our lives and that of our son. Sad to say, we still do. There are so many ways it impacts your life that only those who have been stalked can understand.

ASG: Do people often recognize you in your day-to-day life? Do you still try to be the "gray man," or have you embraced your fame?

MH: We do get recognized a lot. I never seek it; sure don't embrace it. I ignore it. If someone says, "Man, do I know you?" I just smile and say that I don't think so. If they can call me out for any of my shows, of course, I'll own it. If I see they're vexed, I don't leave them like that. Quietly, off to the side, I let them know and then ask them to keep it low. They smile, I smile, we go on our way, and it's all good. **ASG**



