

VEGAN•VETERAN•BIKER

THE INTERSECTING WORLDS OF DEVIN WILKINS

Written by Carole Audet | Photography by Martin Nichols

In spite of having left the military in 1996, it's still part of Devin Wilkins's life—from his blog called *Vegan Platoon* and his membership in the veteran's motorcycle club, to the PTSD he has worked hard to learn to live with over the years. Embracing veganism, which he says helps him live in integrity, is one way Devin is coping with the aftereffects of what he experienced during his tour of duty in Croatia.

His compassion is setting an example for others in many ways, including influencing several people in his circle to go vegan, and he's demonstrating how a cruelty-free life is easily achieved.

When Devin Wilkins is asked, *Why are you vegan?* his one-word answer is always "Science."

"I find it doesn't push people anywhere, but it also doesn't allow them room for reasons not to be vegan," he says.

It's the answer I'll be adopting from now on, because it's difficult to argue against science.

Devin's journey to veganism began when his wife's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. This diagnosis led Monica to do her research. What she found made her transform her eating habits and ultimately become vegan. Her daughter Emily and Devin followed suit soon after.

Being vegan is probably not the first thing one would assume of an ex-military, bike-riding man, but Devin is driven by logic. "Once I realized the science was solid, I could no longer eat animal products. It's just logical. The ethical part came later, but it's also based on logic. Seeing homo sapiens as somehow more important than other animals is, to me, illogical."

As with most military personnel, returning to civilian life wasn't always easy. "The tour I was on was quite bad, and a large proportion of the returning troops suffered from PTSD. It affected me and still does. You have to learn to live with that injury just like any other," he shares.

Upon his return from active duty, Devin spent years in a state of hyperawareness—checking every room in his home prior to going to sleep and avoiding walking on soft ground for fear of land mines. In fact, his PTSD was so severe that at his lowest point he lost his will to live, and in that state of mind he decided to drink himself to death.

"I didn't see any point to continuing to live in a world full of creatures capable of such cruel and terrible things; I couldn't



see the future as being better or worth it. When you've been to a place full of quick and random death, you become very fatalistic," he recalls. Before he could succeed with this plan, he came to the realization that he had the choice of filling the emptiness in his life with whatever he wanted. "That realization gave me freedom."

Now, Devin is passionate about learning new things, and thoughts of wanting to die are far from his mind. "I've done quite a bit of personal development and figuring out how my brain works. Whenever you can objectively look at yourself and have some understanding of why you're feeling, reacting or opinionizing about something, it takes the power away from those feelings and allows you to see things from a much wider view. There's only one thing you have control over and that's yourself," he explains.

Emily is grateful for her partner's passion for life. "Devin brings joy and amazing new opportunities into my life. He has so much courage to try new things and embrace whatever life throws at him, one can't help but be continually inspired. He always tells me otherwise when I say this, but to me he really is a hero in every sense of the word."

Devin now feels at peace, and he rides his motorcycle to maintain this feeling. "It's an amazing way to reset one's brain. In the biker world we refer to it as wind therapy." He also credits becoming vegan for preserving his sense of peace, since he's no longer supporting an industry that causes incredible pain and suffering to animals.

As a bike rider, he was one of the first six people to form part of the Commandos Motorcycle Club, a club for veterans. It's been around for less than six years, and now boasts close to 150 members across Canada. Not only do the riders benefit from wind therapy, but they also support each other. Devin explains, "The veteran community is naturally well connected through our shared experiences. If we hear about guys within the community who are struggling, we'll send members to help. For example, we've heard about homeless veterans on the news and have stepped in to assist in any way we can. One of our B.C. members operates a ranch with his wife which provides therapy, including a program that has veterans interacting with horses."

In addition to riding together and helping fellow veterans, the Commandos MC takes part in community events. "We are involved in fundraising for veteran charities—like Cockrell House in Victoria, we donate backpacks to the needy, and we present quilts of valour to veterans. At Deer Lodge Centre in Winnipeg last year, we put on an event where we presented quilts of valour to the veterans. It was humbling."

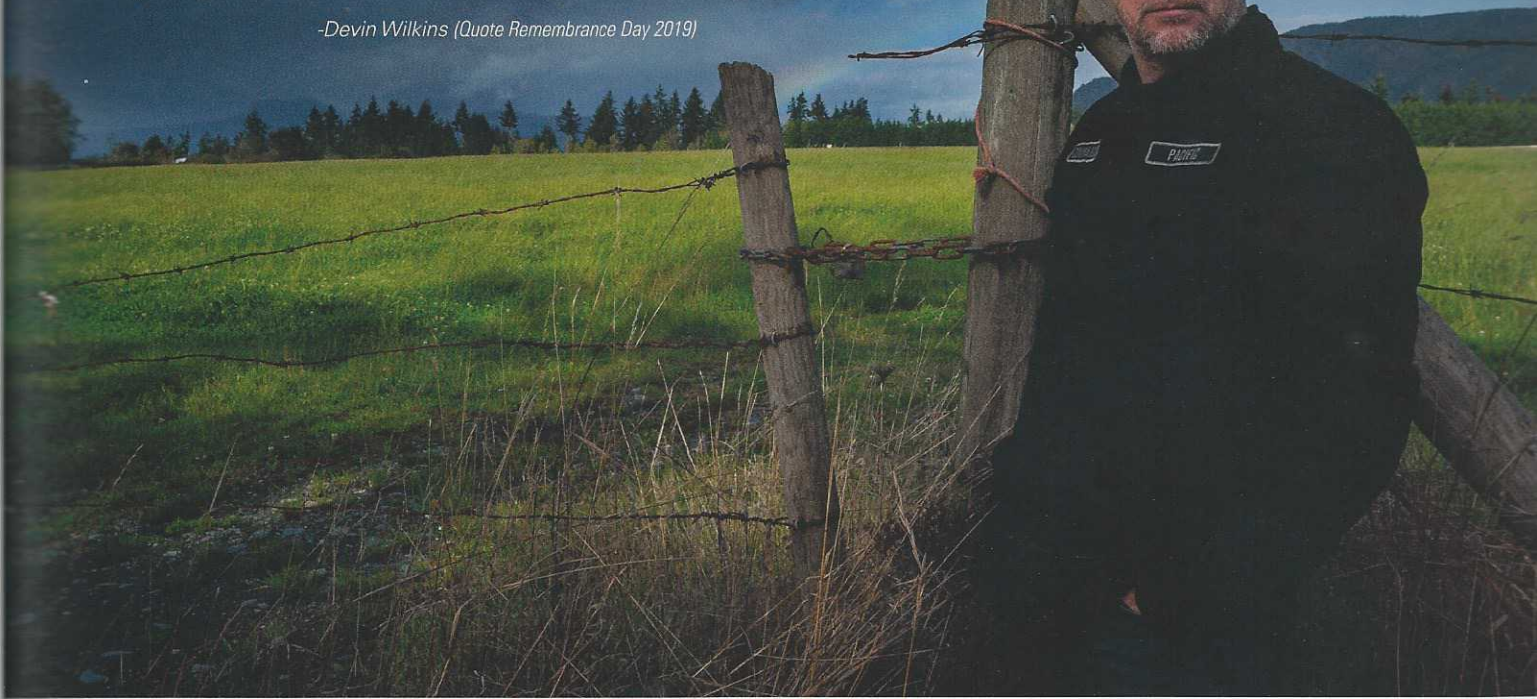
In case you were wondering, his dedication to a vegan lifestyle extends to his riding gear: no more leather.



Devin on duty in Yugoslavia, circa 1992

"Today is a time to remember the fallen, but also to remember and honour the sacrifices of those who returned never to be the same. For those soldiers, and their families, every day is Remembrance Day. We thank you Veterans."

-Devin Wilkins (Quote Remembrance Day 2019)

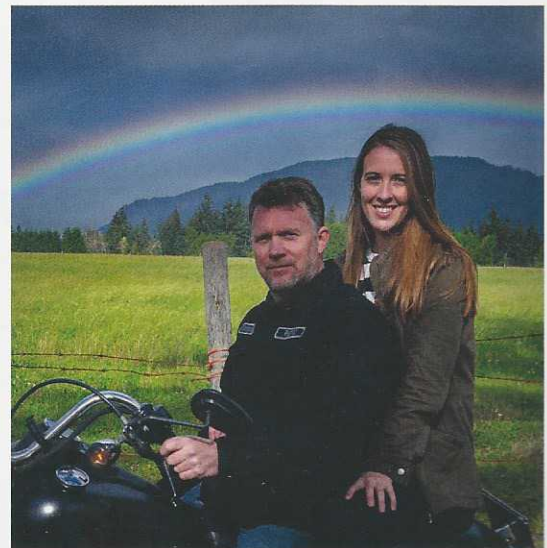


Continuing with the military theme, Devin and Emily launched *Vegan Platoon*, a blog where they share recipes and a quirky sense of humour. They don't take themselves too seriously, and their posts are often amusing with Devin the more irreverent and sillier of the two. And, of course, the military aspect is depicted in the images. While they don't have specific plans for moving forward and growing the blog, they are open to promoting it in any way they can because of their passion for sharing their cruelty-free lifestyle.

Devin notes, "People I run into from the past are shocked that I'm vegan. I think many more people would become vegan, but they're worried what others will think of them. We have no control over what others think. I get a kick out of telling people about my choice. I don't preach to them, but I will give them information when they ask."

When not working on the blog or getting creative in the kitchen with Emily, Devin works in the film industry as a construction foreman. Emily, who has a master's degree in piano performance, teaches piano, which she does online because of our current restrictions. "Sharing a vegan lifestyle with the most important person in my life is an enormous gift and I am grateful for it every day. I never imagined the biker or veteran worlds intersecting with veganism, yet here we are. I also never imagined I'd be riding my own motorcycle alongside him, composing music inspired by veterans, or creating content for our silly little blog *Vegan Platoon*," Emily shares.

While many veterans may never completely conquer PTSD, this former soldier has found ways to thrive in spite of it. "I'm a hopeless optimist, but I patently refuse to change because I'm happier." 🍓



Devin Wilkins and Emily Armour

   @veganplatoon | veganplatoon.com

To learn more about the Commandos Motorcycle Club visit: www.commandoscanadamc.ca