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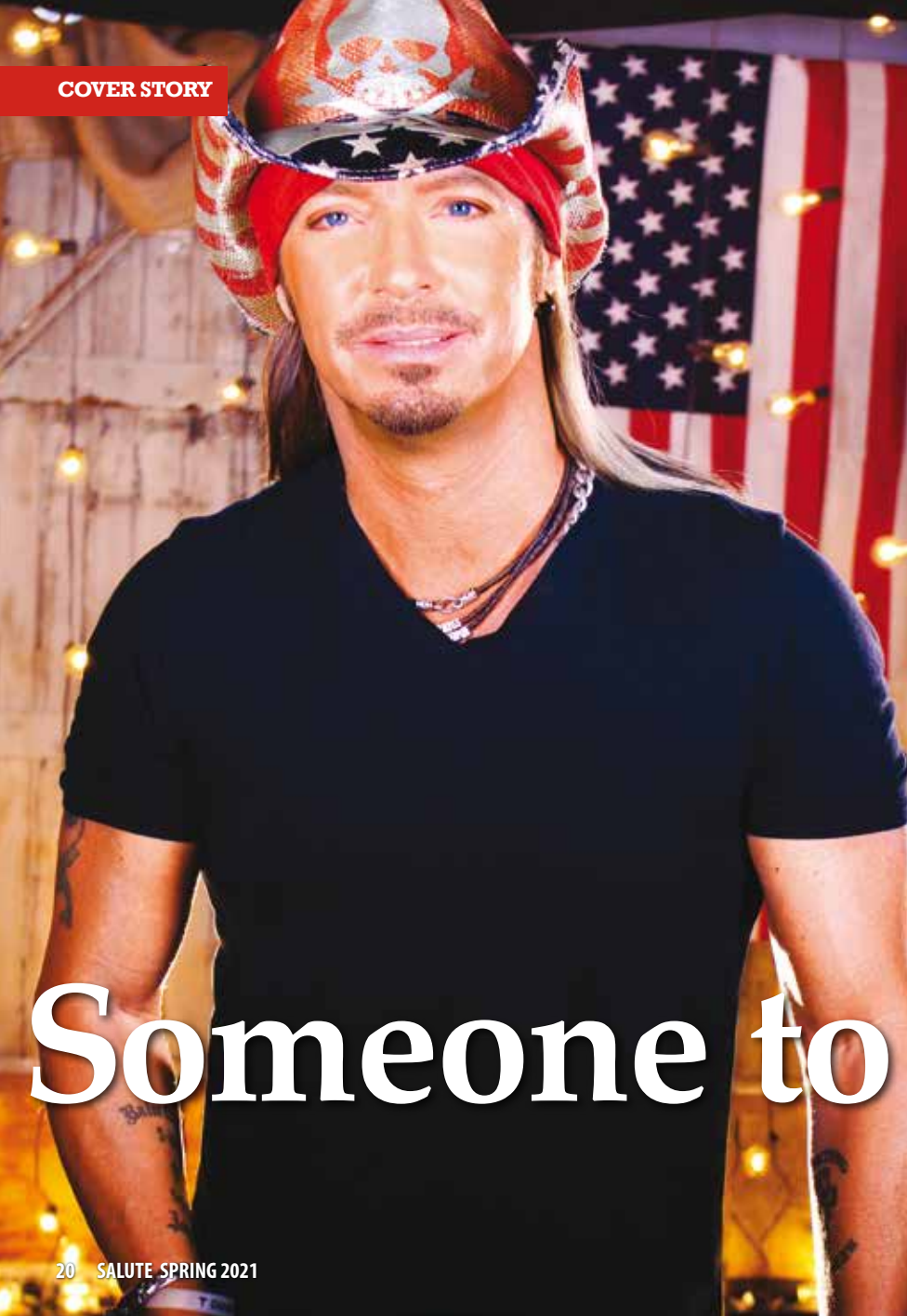
The magazine for America's military

# SOMEONE TO BELIEVE IN

An exclusive interview with lifelong rocker  
and military supporter **Bret Michaels**

Most Intense...  
Most Delicious...  
Most Buttery  
Popcorn Ever!





Bret Michaels visits with service members in Abu Dhabi in 2007.

### As a boy, Bret Michaels was surrounded by military.

The son of a Navy veteran, Michaels (born Bret Michael Sychak in 1963) hails from the small town of Butler, Pennsylvania, where military life was an integral part of his upbringing. He says many of his relatives have served and continue to serve in the U.S. military, including his sister Michele, his cousin Bobby, who fought in Vietnam, and his uncle Nick, who served with the 105th Ranger Battalion and died at the Battle of the Bulge. Michaels was raised with what he calls a "have fun, but get it done" attitude.

"That had a huge influence on my life," says Michaels. "My dad always treated people with respect. He liked having fun, but he was also a guy who was right there when stuff needed to get done. And a lot of our friends who lived in the neighborhood had parents who served, and they'd return from wartime or combat and then help each other build a back patio or put a roof on a house. There was always a good effort to get stuff done."

These days, Michaels continues to surround himself with military and bring that same sense of "get it done" spirit to the stage. For many years, Michaels has honored veterans and military men and women—as well as first responders, frontline workers, essential workers, teachers and others—at his concerts. In November 2019, he dedicated an entire tour to veterans, military and their families called

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the Hometown Heroes Tour. This was followed by the Freedom Rocks Tour, which, although delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, continued to salute the nation's veterans.

Michaels rose to fame as the front man of Poison, the glam rock band that helped to define the '80s music scene. One of rock's most iconic and enduring bands, Poison has sold more than 40 million records worldwide and charted 10 Top 40 singles in the Billboard Hot 100, including the No. 1 smash “Every Rose Has Its Thorn,” as well as “Talk Dirty to Me,” “Fallen Angel,” “Nothin’ But a Good Time” and “Something to Believe In.” The latter, from Poison's 1990 album, *Flesh & Blood*, is a power ballad that talks, in part, about the Vietnam War experience: “Twenty-two years of mental tears, cries a suicidal Vietnam vet who fought a losing war on a foreign shore to find his country didn't want him back”; it is dedicated to James Kimo Maano, a security guard and best friend of Michaels who had died fighting another kind of battle, one of substance abuse.

“The song means the world to me,” Michaels says. “It's the song that I talk about most backstage—how it's changed someone's life, or bettered their life, or brought them up at a really down moment. Some of the best songs that withstand the test of time usually come from painful moments in your life. In the case of ‘Something to Believe In,’ I had lost my best friend. Music was just so therapeutic to me that I wrote it really raw and

emotional. To lose a best friend of mine who had been around every day for five, eight years, that's a tough moment. I'm still as emotional about it when I play it on stage or talk about it now as I was the moment I wrote it.”

Michaels has written many hits, both as a member of Poison and as a solo artist, releasing multiple albums including *Custom Built*, which reached #1 on Billboard's Hard Rock list. His tireless work ethic has kept him on the road throughout the last decade—with nearly 300 live performances, speaking engagements, charitable concerts and private engagements yearly. And aside from recording and performing, Michaels is also a director, producer, reality TV star and, as of 2020, an author: his book *Auto-Scrap-Ography: Volume 1* was released last May.

He's also a philanthropist. Michaels, personally and through his Bret Michaels Life Rocks Foundation, has helped raise tens of millions of dollars for causes such as childhood cancer, Wounded Warriors, St. Jude Children's Hospital, PetSmart Charities and diabetes awareness. Diagnosed with Type I diabetes at the age of six, Michaels is passionately devoted to raising awareness of the disease in hopes of finding a cure.

“It can be tough watching that blood sugar level on the road,” Michaels says. “It's five injections a day. The schedule is crazy, and I just learn to adapt. If we're playing all the amphitheatres, I



**Top: Michaels welcomes military members to the stage at one of his concerts; many of his relatives have served and continue to serve in the nation's armed forces, including his sister Michele (right), cousin Bobby (far right), and uncle Nick (bottom).**

bring my mountain bike with me. There's normally a small gym area, or fitness area, set up, and you just try your best to mix that with the schedule of the day: the interviews, sound check, and then the show.”

In 2007, Michaels got the chance to take that show to the Middle East to perform for the troops. “It was incredible,” he says. “We had wanted to do it and finally had a chance. They asked if I just wanted to come with an acoustic guitar and perform. I said, ‘If you'll let us, and we can make this safe for our troops, for our men and women, I'll bring the whole band and we will throw a party. I will drag them up on stage. They can sing in the mic, they can stage dive—whatever they feel like doing that just blows some steam off and brings a piece of home.’ For me, it was an incredibly great and transforming moment. You really get to see what a lot of the news doesn't tell you. Like I said, my respect was always high, but it took it to a whole new level.

“Let me say this,” he adds. “General audiences know how to party, but if you go to a military base and they let loose, they know how to have nothing but a good time.”

