



A life-long Wisconsinite, Bill Swaney grew up in Grand Marsh, WI and settled in Adams. Having suffered an abusive upbringing, Bill wanted to leave home at an early age. In 1971, while at the county fair, he met a Navy Recruiter who offered enlistment. As he'd just turned 17, a parent's signature was needed. His mother apathetically signed that night and sent her son off during the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, Bill's intention was to never return, and never turn 18.

Before completing high school, he joined the Navy as a Boatswains Mate, assigned to the care and cleaning of the USS Norton Sound AVM-1. Stationed in Port Hueneme, California, the ship became the first vessel in 1972 to be equipped with satellite communications, allowing it the covert possibility of intelligence collection and strategic communications during the Vietnam War. Dubbed the "Galloping Ghost", it navigated the Pacific and, at times, sat off Vietnam's shore shuttling supplies and troops in and out of country. Looking for action, Bill volunteered to work their shuttles and river boats. He sat upfront on lookout and ready with a gun. The palpable threats, heavy orders to kill and the high risk of injury, or death, didn't affect him...then. He was expecting to come home in a body bag. But after several trips his supervisors learned he was only 17 and Bill was then kept on ship. Safety wasn't what Bill cared about or wanted...and safety wasn't what he got.

In September of 1972, having just turned 18 and with one year of service in, Bill was horrifically attacked on his ship and held at knife point at the hands of his five shipmates. Not long after the brutal crime, he was honorably discharged and quickly dropped back into a world he didn't plan on seeing, a Country divided, and citizens filled with hate for those who served. He had no debriefing, transitional training, or support to navigate his changed life. He turned to alcohol, drinking excessively to numb the pain and block the memories. Angry and short-tempered, he didn't talk about his service to avoid people's wrath. He simply wanted to run away, and floated from job to job unable to meet employment demands. Bill spiraled further, unsure how to navigate and contemplated death. He wanted nothing to do with people...until years later when he saw his sweet classmate sitting a few stools down. He courted his girl, tamping down every demon that showed itself, for the chance to marry her in 1977 and find a sense of normalcy.

For a young man who wanted nothing more than to die at war...Bill, now 65, somehow found the courage and strength to fight through life. He and his wife, Sandy, whom he endearingly calls his "anchor", have been married 42 years and have three children and seven grandchildren. They fought hard to be the parents they never had. They didn't have much, but shared what they could and opened their hearts and home to other children and friends in need. Guided strongly by their faith, they weathered years of struggles and outbursts, not knowing the invisible demon they faced. It wasn't until Bill found himself purposefully headed for an oak tree in 2001 that he finally sought the medical care he needed and began his journey of healing.

Every single day Bill, 100% disabled with PTSD, battles his demons from long ago. Sights he can't unsee, pain he still feels, fear he can't justify and volatile emotions render him reclusive on days. Yet, he summons the strength to move forward, enjoy life and care for others in need. After 18 years as a school bus driver, he took up scroll saw art to keep occupied. He loves being with his family, fishing and crossbow hunting; but, without doubt, his biggest source of personal joy comes from riding.

Bill climbed on his first mini bike at age 9 and sealed his love for riding. Putting family first, it wasn't until 20 years ago that he was able to purchase his own bike. Membership in both ABATE and Christian Motorcycle Association comfortably built his social circle as well as the VFW and Vietnam Veterans of America. But when they risked losing their family home in 2013, Bill sold his cherished Gold Wing to make the house payment. And when finally able to get a bike again, he made do with a small Suzuki for the chance to be on the road he desperately missed. Last year's tough realization that he could no longer safely hold up two wheels, and couldn't afford the three he needed, found him in despair. Enter Hogs For Heroes.

We are about healing. We heard his story, recognized his service and struggle, and felt this man deserved a lifeline that kept him riding well into his next life chapters. We surprised him at his home and took him shopping at Reel Brothers Harley-Davidson in Mauston where they had several trikes on the floor. He found his love in 20 minutes: a beautiful blue 2012 Tri Glide with only 10,000 miles on her. Bill received his keys on May 6, 2020 during a FB Live event at the RBHD dealership as we all practiced social distancing during the 2020 Covid-19 crisis.