



Introducing Our 58th Veteran Recipient: Marine Staff Sergeant Brett Peterson of Thiensville, Wisconsin

First, A Word From Us:

Our mission reconnects injured Wisconsin Veterans with their passion for riding by using a Harley-Davidson as the tool to regain the healing benefits found in “wind therapy”. We select our Recipients through a process that uses an involved, written application to help us understand our Applicant, including questions that ask them to share their experiences, struggles and passion with us. That same application provides a form of written exposure, encouraging Veterans to write down “their story” for the release it provides. For many, this is the first time they’ve undertaken such a task; and, although hard, it can be a liberating process regardless of their selection.

We encourage Applicants to write whatever they feel is “their story”. As one would imagine, each is different; but through their personal sharing our Advisory Board comes to learn who they are, what they’ve been through, how motorcycling has impacted them and where they are in their healing journey. From there, we make the hard decisions of who we think our healing tool will impact most..and then we meet them and share their story publicly to further the supportive release offered.

Once selected, Recipient’s written introductions are penned by Audra, our VP and Co-Founder, using application material and more in-depth conversational learnings. Without formal training, as evidenced by her extra commas and run-on sentences, she instead writes from the heart to introduce, support and educate. The “stories” have taken on a life of their own, loved and appreciated by both our readers and Recipients alike. This time we are going to do something a little different: we are sharing H4H58 Brett Peterson’s own words, his exact “Story” as submitted on his application, for you to feel the power conveyed in his words and all that falls between those sentences.

Question: “Tell Us Your Story” and Marine Staff Sergeant Brett Peterson’s Response:

“My story starts before I joined the U.S. Marine Corps. I grew up in Slinger, WI and my parents were just blue-collared workers. My first introduction to Harley was when my mom worked for the company. I remember seeing bikes on the road and taking a tour of the factory. I fell in love with motorcycles at an early age. Tragedy struck my household: and when I was finishing 8th grade, my father took his own life. My father, being my best friend, and now gone...I lost myself for many years after not caring about much or seeing clearly. This event was the first situation in my life where I experienced trauma and ultimately depression and PTSD. My senior year I asked for help from my guidance counselor and I graduated early. I attempted college for a year and a half until we invaded Iraq in 2003 and I decided I wanted to be a part of what was happening. I wanted to serve so others didn’t and I wanted to save lives. This leads into my story and life in the U.S. Marines.

I first enlisted in the Marines in December, 2003 and went to basic training June 1, 2004. I went in on an open contract and let them decide what occupation I would do upon completion of basic. After a long 13 weeks I graduated and was assigned to a combat support role as an Amphibious Assault Vehicle Crewman. Thereafter I went through infantry training and job training before ending up at my first duty station in Twenty Nine Palms with Delta Company. This is where my journey really begins with training to deploy my first time on the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). We deployed in 2005 to Okinawa, Japan awaiting orders and thinking we were heading to Iraq. We ended up training in Japan and having a bunch of false alarms to head out to Iraq. Instead of Iraq we ended up going to the Philippines to train and do operations with the Philippine Marine Corps against Al-Qaida operating in their jungles. This was the first time I experienced seeing death, poverty and suffering in the small villages we operated in. It made me realize how grateful I am to be an American and how much help we can do around the world. I returned home from Japan in early 2006 and met my first wife and step-daughter and married in July. At this time I was training up with my unit to deploy in the fall to Iraq. This would be a tough deployment, and during the heaviest fighting year for us as Marines.

Iraq, 2006, getting into country is a shock I think for most and the unknown is inevitable. During this deployment my unit was deployed to 3 different battle zones. The first area we were put in was a place called Al Qaim on the Syrian

boarder to stop insurgents from coming into the country and maintaining order in the city. At this time we were a mobile unit until one of our tracked vehicles was hit by an IED and split in half, killing everyone in the vehicle besides the driver. In total I believe 28 were killed in the attack between our crew and the Infantry being transported in the back. This was a major event that caused us to no longer be mobile in vehicles and it turned us into Infantry on foot patrol. I was a squad leader and we were moved to a small city called Baghdadi along the Euphrates River. During this time I conducted over 150 foot patrols/missions capturing high value targets. My biggest event during this time period of 2006-2007 in Iraq, I suffered a brain injury from being exposed to what they estimate as 100-150 IED explosions. Our unit was the most hit by suicide vehicle IED's as well and we suffered some injuries in our company. It wasn't till I returned home that I started suffering from chronic migraines, nightmares and PTSD. Coming home is a major adjustment after living with no real power, running water, and not having to look at everything and everybody as a threat. I was awarded during this deployment with preventing a catastrophic casualty on my entire squad. I was proud, but now needed to decide if I was going to stay in and continue my career. I decided to re-enlist and volunteered to go on recruiting duty in 2008.

From 2008-2011 I was a recruiter and ran the north Milwaukee recruiting station. This was the first time I bought my first motorcycle. I bought a 2003 100th anniversary V-Rod and that began my first experience understanding how my motorcycle helped me in a therapy way. I learned how the open road and camaraderie gave me the same sense of feeling I had when I was with my team in Iraq. Riding became a major part of my life and after recruiting duty I was shipped and stationed back in California. At this time I actually gave up my primary vehicle for my next motorcycle, the Harley Dyna, which I used daily for everything. This was my therapy for what occurred in Iraq and it helped me with the stress and anxiety I felt everyday being back in the mix of society.

In 2012 I deployed to Afghanistan for the whole year. I was the operational chief for the Afghan National Security Forces and oversaw all of our advisor teams in the Helmand Province. During this deployment I ended up losing 3 Marines on one of my advisory team to an inside attack. Working alongside and living with the Afghans was a stressful and terrifying year for me. My PTSD, headaches and mental health turned worse and I decided my time in the military was done and I needed to focus on myself.

I left the military in 2013 and am at 90% disability and have been fighting for 100% since last year when I was finally diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury (TBI). I got myself a dog and trained it to be my service dog for my PTSD and TBI. I bought a Street Glide in 2018 and absolutely loved riding with my wife and fellow Veterans. When Covid happened I lost my job and couldn't find work. My truck and motorcycle were both repossessed. I lost my getaway from my mind, my riding friends, and, almost like a part of me. I have been able to get work, but am not credit worthy of financing a bike for myself and am still digging out of debt and trying to rebuild my life.

I appreciate you taking the time to hear my story. Thank you for what you do as an organization helping Veterans. For me a motorcycle is more than a machine. It allows me to clear my mind, bond with fellow Veterans and it is a part of my soul that I have been missing."

Before joining the Marines, Brett was traveling down a path fueled by alcohol, drugs and the loss of several friends to overdose. After nine years of service, he believes he wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for becoming a Marine and the directional strength he gained. As a result of that same service, Brett suffers from PTSD and TBI, whose combined toll and shared symptoms magnify the depression and mood disorder that affects every part of his life. Although his life feels full with the love of his son, step daughter and second wife, Meg, Brett still feels the heavy loss of Brothers in war and to suicide on the home front. War's demons and damaging toll continue to invade his dreams and affect his sleep, while migraines plague his waking hours. In 2022, after a few difficult personal years during which he sought treatment, life wrapped around for the couple to come back to Wisconsin to live near family. He found work in talent acquisition, then landed what he calls his dream job: working for the nonprofit Heroes for Healthcare. There he uses his recruitment and communication skills to help Corpsman and Medics transition into civilian medical positions after separating from service. Not a day goes by that Brett isn't grateful for the life he now has and the family who fills it; but there also isn't a day where suicide ideation isn't a part of some thought process he has. He stays busy to prevent his mind from wandering and is committed to the hard work moving forward requires: in fact, he's done that his entire life. Brett loves the peaceful joy found in being outdoors, fishing and hunting; but the one passion that truly soothes his soul remains far out of his reach. Our Advisory Board admired Brett's raw disclosure, his commitment to himself and family, and his efforts to push through the invisible wounds he carries. We understood the mark riding left on his heart and mind; and Hogs For Heroes decided it was time to fill

that void for this valiant Marine. And after meeting Brett, we have no doubt this good man will ride that bike and strengthen his resolve.

We took Brett completely by surprise and enjoyed a heartfelt moment of gratitude together. We laughed through dinner as we shared stories, learned more about his life and talked motorcycles. Turns out, Brett had been walking his dog past his neighborhood dealership, Suburban Motors H-D in Thiensville, WI, and wishing hard the gorgeous blue Street Glide sitting out front could be his. The very next day we made that very same 2024 Blue Burst Street Glide Special, with just 5,400 miles on it, his.

Unique to Brett's bike, it has been fully sponsored by the 2024 fundraising efforts of the Tavern League of Wisconsin and their over 5,000 members across the state. **Brett's Presentation of Keys Ceremony will be on Sunday, July 13, 2025 at 12:30 pm at Sheryl's Club 175 in Slinger, Wisconsin.** Not only is this cool bar & restaurant a longtime Tavern League Member, Brett's wife, Meg, works there on weekends! We'll be hanging out for the chance to chat you up during the Parking Lot Party from 11-3, with Rugged Charm offering live music and a cool Tito's promotion from 1-3. Make us a destination ride and cruise on over during H-D Homecoming's last day to welcome another injured Wisconsin Veteran rider back to the road!