



Introducing 2026's First Recipient: #62 Army Veteran Amber Fleitz of Oostburg, Wisconsin

Strength is not always loud. Sometimes, it is found in the quiet decision to keep moving forward... even when the road behind you has been anything but smooth.

Amber Fleitz grew up in the small town of Belgium, Wisconsin, raised by a single mother for most of her childhood until her step father entered her life at age 11. Amber, a quieter girl, had a strong sense of independence and resilience; and for as long as she can remember, grew up wanting to be either a police officer or a veterinarian. She enjoyed helping her grandparents, high school athletics and playing in the school band. Inspired by her grandfather's Military Police (MP) service in the Korean War, Amber enlisted in the Army as a junior in high school to prepare her for a law enforcement career. She graduated high school in June, 2001 and left for basic training a month later, determined, focused, and ready to take on whatever challenges lay ahead. Those challenges came quickly.

Amber immediately embraced the routines, expectations and culture of her large, new environment. She quickly formed friendships and envisioned years of service ahead of her. Half way through basic training, Amber was repelling and fell from the wall, spraining her ankle. It is an injury that still plagues her today, but at the time she pushed through the pain and graduated— proving early on the strength and determination that would define her life. She then sailed through Military Police specialization, which further solidified her purpose and joy in being a Soldier.

Her first duty station brought her halfway across the world to Camp Carroll in Waegwan, South Korea where she worked as base police. It was her first time out of the country; and Amber again thrived in her new environment and role. She grew more social and comfortable amongst her new friends and within the family she trusted implicitly. Until that trust, that security and that happiness imploded, time and time again, to deteriorate every fiber of her strength, her esteem and the trust she had once had.

In early 2002, a change in leadership brought a new Infantry Captain on base and Amber found herself in an unsafe and deeply troubling environment. On multiple occasions she was cornered by the new Captain, and a few of his friends, and physically forced into unwanted sexual activity. At just 19 years old, and acutely aware and fearful of command structure, she felt helpless to do anything at the time. She did, however, go to her immediate MP Company leadership after every incident over the next several months...only to be told she was lying and that "officers wouldn't do that". Faced with an impossible situation, Amber was eventually given a choice: accept an early, honorable discharge or face court-martial for falsely speaking out. She chose to be discharged, believing it would be the court-martial that would destroy her life.

In late 2002, after just a year and a half of service, a bewildered Amber returned to her parent's home in Wisconsin carrying far more than she ever should have had to. She told no one. Not one word. Not one hint of what really caused her early departure. Part defense mechanism, part denial and part protection...she pushed every ugly memory and horrific feeling down, way down, to smolder and erupt over the years to come.

Without an outlet or resources to turn to, Amber did two things. First, she turned to alcohol and painkillers to soothe the pain and quiet the demons she refused to acknowledge. Then, still wanting to become a police officer, she attended UW-Oshkosh to pursue education in both Psychology, to better understand people, and in Criminal Justice. She worked odd jobs along the way to help pay the bills and she drank excessively to forget the past and soothe the blame she repeatedly heaped upon herself.

In 2004, Amber met the man who would become her first husband. After a whirlwind romance without sign of concern, the two married later that year. Very shortly thereafter, the flags everyone else saw and warned her about appeared: and he became abusive. Amber had finished her degree and landed a job as a police officer within Wisconsin State Fair's police department where she worked for a year before her husband forced her to resign and stay home. After one particularly horrific evening caused her to miscarry at 22 weeks pregnant, Amber found the strength to leave and they divorced after less than a year of marriage. Like her time following her discharge, she

didn't talk about what she'd lived through—she simply pushed it down to fester and silently dealt with one more ugly thing she believed was her fault.

As much as Amber longed for a better life, finding such proved more challenging. Feeling she was a failure at prevention, she couldn't return to law enforcement with personal credibility or zeal. With a crumbling self-esteem, and nowhere to go, Amber again moved back home to stay with her parents. She moved from job to job for the next several years, unsettled and unhappy, and continued to spiral in a sea of undiagnosed depression. Amber didn't believe she deserved better. She didn't trust anyone; and social situations now caused her great anxiety and panic. In response to her declining mental health, she further isolated herself and became increasingly dependent on alcohol and drugs to smooth the rough, painful scars she carried. As the weight of secret burdens further saturated her life, Amber's depression turned into anger. She became more explosive and, often finding herself in fights, strained the few relationships she had left, lost jobs and found herself arrested.

In 2008, as she sobered up in a jail cell and realized her world had hit a new rock bottom, Amber vowed to be and do better. She crafted a path toward sobriety and went to both Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. And while she gained strength and new skills to manage her vices, she continued to remove herself socially and took to video gaming for the short release from reality it offered.

In 2009, life began to positively shift after she encountered Jesse, her spouse of 15 years now. The two connected in an unlikely way— playing Call of Duty online—with roughly 1,800 miles between them. What started first as merciless attacks on his Operator, turned into a friendship and then, as they talked, something much more. After deciding to meet, and then traveling back and forth between Wisconsin and Arizona, Amber and Jesse knew they'd both found their person. Amber moved to Phoenix, where they married in 2011 and welcomed their daughter, Audrey.

Amber found work in a veterinary clinic and, after reconnecting with a childhood dream, she decided to become a Veterinary Technician. She completed the two year program certification and landed her first job in 2015, a perfect role that encompasses her love of animals and their gentle gift of affection in return. After several years of expensive living in Arizona, the family returned home to Wisconsin in 2017, settling in Oostburg to be near family. Amber found work as a Veterinary Technician and, once they could buy their first home, promptly expanded their household with three cats, two dogs and a bearded dragon to further fill their hearts. With love and support Amber continued to work hard, focused on raising their daughter and...still silently battled the effects of her past. Jesse knew very little about her past traumas, and trauma wasn't even an acknowledged presence yet by Amber. But the volatility and emotional lability found a seat at their table and strained their relationship. As they rode the waves of marriage together, Amber and Jesse discovered something that would become an important part of their lives, and her healing— riding.

Amber had grown up riding dirt bikes but was never in a position to have a motorcycle as she'd dreamed of. Jesse, too, had always wanted to ride, but Phoenix was not the place to learn. In 2021 the couple took the riding class together and purchased a 2013 H-D Heritage from which they each learned to ride on. They rode separately, and then together, building their skills and joy, and reconnecting with each other. When they could finally afford to get Jesse his own motorcycle, Amber claimed the Softail all to herself and, with a little more practice, began taking their daughter on rides. She found peace and freedom on the road, and quickly learned to release her struggles in the wind. In 2024 they were introduced to the Military Veterans Motorcycle Association (MVMA) and that is where Amber found a brotherhood that she could connect with. As she learned to socialize more, she cautiously learned to trust again. And through this new source of Veteran support, she was encouraged to seek out the VA and obtain the medical benefits she'd earned and the resources she needed. In 2025, after being diagnosed with PTSD from her Military Sexual Trauma (MST), Amber connected with a therapist, began counseling and talk therapy. After 25 years of believing the assaults and harassment were all her fault, she's realized the validating truth that they were not. And after 25 years of hiding her injuries and deep emotional pain, she has felt incremental release as she finally begins to share her story.

The road to this point hasn't been easy—but family love, riding, and supportive resources have helped propel Amber forward. On her final ride of 2025, her Softail's engine seized... along with her heart. Although she's attempted to fix it, the bike remains an unreliable ride with repairs likely to be more than the bike is worth. Hogs For Heroes heard the damaging pain of her story and equally the impactful change that riding and treatment have provided her. Our Advisory Board decided to keep Amber on the healing road she's created for herself by giving her the tool that will continue to support her release and growth.

We took Amber shopping for her perfect fit: and after realizing the Road Glide was it, she fell head over heels for the 2025 H-D Road Glide in Mystic Shift—a deep, ever-changing purple— just sitting on Suburban Motors Harley-Davidson’s showroom floor. Unique to Amber’s bike, it has been fully sponsored by the fundraising efforts of Tavern League of Wisconsin members across the state.

Amber’s Presentation of Keys Ceremony will be on Sunday, May 17, 2026 at Curve In Bar in Kewaskum, WI at 12:30 pm. Not only is this a cool biker-loving bar, they have been ginormous supporters of ours, spearheading a raffle for the Fond du Lac County Tavern League that raised \$20,000 for us this year! We will be hanging out from 11 am - 3 pm, and look forward to kicking off 2026’s season with you at our side...and showing off our new shirts!