



Introducing Veteran Recipient #64: Army Specialist Natasha Normand of Tomah, Wisconsin

For Natasha Normand, known to many as “Storm”, the nickname reflects a life that has weathered more than its share of storms—and a strength that refuses to be washed away. Natasha grew up in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin in a close-knit, competitive and athletic family. She was fully engrossed in year-round club athletics until her father was diagnosed with cancer her junior year of high school; and then their family rallied around his changing needs. Just after graduating, Natasha faced one of life’s earliest hardships when her father passed away. And swirling without direction, all she knew was that she wanted to leave town.

On a whim, Natasha went with family friends to a military graduation; and all the culture she absorbed while there instantly hooked her. She decided to join that weekend, connected with a Recruiter and stood in front of the “jobs board” determining her specialized focus all in quick fashion. Although she’d barely boiled water before that, she only needed to see the \$10,000 bonus to become a Cook and her decision was made. She sailed through basic and advanced training and was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, in July of 2009 to prepare and serve meals on base. Mere weeks after arriving Natasha learned she would deploy to Iraq, a fate her Recruiter told her would never happen.

In March, 2010, Natasha landed in Taji, Iraq, for a year as our Country shut down its presence in Iraq. The Cook found herself pulling guard duty at the gate, providing security in the dining facility, and monitoring safe practices of the third country nationals who were preparing their meals. She worked nightshifts that were frequently plagued by mortar attacks on base, and was tormented by sleeplessness during the day’s exhaustive heat. But outside of the chaos it physically and mentally created for her, Natasha believed her time in combat fairly uneventful; and she’d, of course, heard, and seen, and lived amongst otherwise. It was an eye-opening experience that would shape her future commitments, and she was ready for more.

Natasha returned to Fort Riley and resumed base life work schedules, training routines, and her beloved friendships. She was doing well; thriving, in fact, with the structure, pride and belonging she’d gained within her Army family. Like many who serve, she had found something bigger than herself. And like many wanting to experience more of what life had in store for her, she chose to transition into the Army Reserves as her contract wound down. In the spring of 2012, weeks from her planned move to Denver, Colorado, everything changed.

One evening Natasha and her fellow “cook” friends were throwing a party at her apartment as she prepared to move. As the night went on, a group of unknown military personnel, partying on the floor below them, came up and asked to join in the festivities. As a military family, they were welcomed in. Eventually realizing Natasha had too much to drink that night, her friends carefully tucked her into bed while they continued the fun. Passed out in the safety of her apartment, her bedroom, and her own bed, and amongst the presence of her close friends...an unknown attendee made his presence known. He watched where they had thoughtfully tucked Natasha in... and then he found her.

Forcibly raped and knocked unconscious, Natasha was found bleeding on the bedroom floor by her friend coming in to check on her. She received medical care, a report was immediately filed and throngs of friends showed up to protectively sit watch while she tried to sleep. To hold her while she cried endlessly. To assure proceedings and arrests were done. To physically drive her home to the arms of her mother. To gather and move her belongings to Colorado still. And to support her as the devastating case went unsuccessfully to a jury trial, months before the “too drunk to consent” laws could protect her.

The impact of that night’s catastrophic storm didn’t end there: it followed her to affect every day since. It was an event that, in her own words, “ripped the pride right out of my chest.” As a soldier, Natasha had been a “protector” who saw her military brothers as family...and as she grappled with what happened to her, her pain grew into crushing personal blame, anger and mistrust. Newly settled in Colorado and realizing her obligations, Natasha worked multiple restaurant jobs to stay busy and control the turmoil in her mind. She wasn’t ready to seek help because that meant acknowledging what happened to her. Instead, she self-medicated with alcohol; but when she landed in jail for a DUI, she knew she needed the support of home. Natasha transferred to the Army Reserves unit in Eau Claire, WI, worked in restaurants, and finished the last two years of her contract. They weren’t easy years; and as her life

crumbled along the way, she drank even more to numb her pain, find sleep without nightmares, and to muster the strength to go on. She couldn't imagine then the additional devastation still to come.

After six years of service, Natasha separated from the Army in July of 2015, and what followed was another difficult and painful chapter—marked by arrests, instability, and the loss of any direction she had once built. Unable to find relief in alcohol anymore, Natasha “made the worst decision of my life”: she tried Meth. She was instantly addicted; and life spiraled downward. Rapidly. By September she was arrested for the first time and, soon after, subsequently lost jobs, her apartment, her car, and almost her life. She continued down this self-destructive path until January 22, 2017 when Natasha found herself arrested for the last time...and as she sat in that cell, ashamed and horrified at who she'd become, she committed to sobriety that very next day.

She spent the next 111 days in confinement, cutting ties with her past life and fighting for a future she could be proud of. When released in May, she didn't stop there. Natasha went straight to the Tomah Veterans Hospital where she spent the next seven months in inpatient treatment doing the hard, honest work of healing. And slowly, by successfully completing substance abuse, PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma programs, she began rebuilding herself.

By November of 2017, Natasha was re-entering her new community in Tomah with a refreshed mindset and a second chance at life. Her greatest gift arrived the following year when she welcomed her daughter, Aurora—an addition that gave her even more reason to keep moving forward. Natasha continued to push herself, earning degrees in automotive technology and applied sciences. She followed that with additional diplomas in diesel and heavy equipment—all of it with a 4.0 GPA—to build a career as a Diesel Technician with her own two hands. But one of her journey's most meaningful turning points came through the power of connection.

In 2020, a fellow Veteran noticed how Natasha kept to herself. He reached out and encouraged her to attend a meeting of the area Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association (CVMA). From the moment she walked in, she felt something she had been missing for a long time—camaraderie, understanding, and belonging. She had never ridden before, but that same encouragement led her to take a motorcycle training course at Fort McCoy. Natasha passed the course, was hooked, and began another healthy, new chapter in her sobriety.

New license in hand, Natasha bought her first Harley: a 2007 Heritage Classic on which to learn, and took the road name “Storm”. The more time she spent on the road, the more she realized its impactful value. Riding gave her peace. It gave her clarity. It gave her space to breathe and the power to release. And combined with joining CVMA, Chapter 45-8, riding gave her family and the ability to serve others again. She had found the missing piece of her puzzle.

In 2023, Natasha upgraded to a 2018 Harley-Davidson Street Glide Special and more than doubled her mileage the first year. She had built a new life—one grounded in sobriety, purpose, and community. Things were looking bright and she was happily looking forward; but in June of 2025, Natasha faced another storm.

While riding home from a National CVMA event in Georgia, Natasha got too close to the gravel, left the roadway and was thrown more than 400 feet from where she left the road. Her injuries were severe; and she was transported by ambulance, then airlifted to the University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics to begin a long road to recovery. Her bike was totaled; and she didn't know which hurt more—the physical pain or the loss of her love. Natasha eventually returned home to spend months in a wheelchair and underwent additional surgeries. Unable to work as a diesel mechanic, she eventually lost her job and has since relied on her VA disability allowance to make ends meet. As unexpected costs arose, she used her insurance payout to stay afloat rather than save it for the replacement Harley she wanted. Nonetheless, she kept rebuilding and strengthening and, strangely enough, she kept looking forward to riding again.

Every day Natasha struggles with depression and anxiety and conscientiously chooses her path forward despite the hardships and demons. Wanting to use her life experiences to support other Veterans through theirs, she is working toward becoming a Peer Support Specialist. But until she secures a job and rebuilds her finances, buying another motorcycle remains far out of reach...and without a bike she loses the wind therapy she's come to depend on and the Veteran family she's come to love. After test riding a friend's bike this winter to make sure she was ready, physically and mentally, it all came back to her without missing a beat; and she knew her heart needed the lift now more than ever. That's when she sought us out for the chance to get back on the healing road she needs.

Our Advisory Board proudly selected Natasha because her story is one of resilience in its truest form. She has faced loss, war, trauma, addiction, and physical hardship in her young 36 years—and has fought her way back each time with a level of resolve and perseverance necessary to rebuild and move forward. She is nine and a half years clean and sober. She is a mother, a leader, a friend, and a Veteran helping other Veterans. Soon again, she will be a rider; and this time, the road ahead won't be defined by the storms she's endured...but by the strength she's found in riding through them.

Natasha was reduced to tears when we met her. After talking about bikes, we asked if she had a special dream in mind...and she held up her phone to show us a picture that's been her fighting inspiration. We found that exact bike up the road from her at Chippewa Falls Harley-Davidson: a gorgeous white, 2025 Road Glide Special with a mere 2,000 miles on it. It was our first time working with the CFHD team, and they couldn't have been more thrilled to now have played a part in our healing mission. Unique to this bike, it has been fully sponsored by a Wisconsin family foundation who has preferred to remain anonymous throughout their several years of sharing with us. Some are riders, some are not, but all were raised with philanthropic hearts. Last December they stunned us with a check for \$30,000, thereby earning full, confidential bragging rights to this powerful connection.

Natasha's **Presentation of Keys Ceremony will be on Sunday, June 7, 2026 at 5:30 pm during the Smoke on The Water Music Festival for Hogs For Heroes, featuring the Bobby Friss Band, in Okauchee Lake.** Gates open at 3:00; and followed by a patriotic flag raising ceremony and warbird flyover, the music will start rocking the crowd at 4:00. Please note there is a \$10 donation fee to enter.

Have the day free? Join us at their sister restaurant for their annual Sloppy Joes Ride, in Hubertus, Wisconsin, with kick stands up at 10:30 and the ride ending at the Music Festival.