



Introducing Veteran Recipient #67: Marine Sergeant Devin Brom of Warrens, Wisconsin

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"He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."--

Devin's favorite quote by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche

Devin Brom was born with riding in his blood. He grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota as a third generation Harley rider. He had grandparents who owned Harleys and took him on rides, a mom who worked at St. Paul H-D and rode herself, and then himself, who rode with his family as a teen and whose first job was as a Service Assistant at the dealership. Although capable of good grades, school was painfully boring for Devin. He wanted a life of action and adventure; but needed personal growth and discipline to secure the future he dreamed of. The military fit that bill: and since Devin believed nobody did action, adventure and discipline better than the Marines, he joined the Marine Corps Reserves while a senior in high school.

In 2005, fresh off of graduation, Devin stood on the yellow footprints of Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, CA. He then specialized as Military Police at Fort Leonard Wood, returned home, attached to Fort Snelling and worked at St. Paul H-D for the next six years while a Reservist. His roles at the dealership varied, eventually managing their online commerce for Amazon. He loved being surrounded by bikes, the culture, and the "family" it created. While there, Devin bought several old and often damaged bikes, fixed them up and rode. A lot. Tinkering on bikes was just as comforting as riding them was. He appreciated the freedom, release and adrenaline that came with riding; and as his military career became more demanding, and his struggles more pronounced, he learned just how therapeutic riding could be.

Devin wanted more from his military career and he volunteered to deploy any chance he could. Leadership said their time was coming...and when it finally did, its timing was less than ideal. In 2008, Devin met a woman; and two months before he was to leave on his first deployment, they learned they were expecting their first child. The two married in quick order and then Devin left for one year in Djibouti, Africa.

As an MP, Devin worked various base security roles at Camp Lemonnier, America's only base on the continent. They'd leave occasionally to search French WWII ruins for weapon caches stored by illicit traffickers and to provide humanitarian support. They'd travel to remote villages to bring water and food, do repairs and build good will. It introduced Devin to drastic global variations; and the images of extreme poverty, cultural practices and perspective challenged his young ethical views and moral compass for the first time. While he describes his year as an overall tame deployment, on two different occasions while working off base, Devin and his fellow Marines found themselves within the city proper. Although foreign forces were tolerated for their contractual and monetary support, U.S. forces were not welcome within the city. Twice while on a misdirected convoy and on foot patrol, they were unexpectedly surrounded by hundreds of volatile and threatening Djiboutians. It established a crowd anxiety for Devin that would build over time, and he would return home unable to attend larger gatherings as he once did.

Perhaps the hardest part of his deployment was his inability to leave for his son's birth. While it is not an uncommon sacrifice for many military parents, it is one that often hurts a family. It left a mark on Devin's heart that still pains him today, and became the first milestone on his path to divorce. While in Djibouti, and attending to his own personal struggles and hardships, Devin, who's always enjoyed helping people, became someone his fellow Marines sought out to talk through their personal problems and seek advice.

He was recognized for his listening skills and pragmatic approach; and Devin took note of how good it felt to be a Brother who could understand and support his own, but he'd think nothing more of this gift until after his second deployment.

In July, 2009, Devin returned to his young family that he barely knew. Life was now uncomfortable away from his Marines, and he found ways to spend more time with his friends than with his wife. Alcohol became a coping mechanism for the lost patience, rough communication and disgruntlement that became more the norm at home. Devin returned to work at the Harley dealership where he knew what to do and how to act; and, again, began volunteering for every deployment opportunity he could. He had two goals: as a young Sergeant, he wanted to be a leader in a combat zone, and he wanted a combat deployment before his contract was over. Just short of his six-year term ending, Afghanistan became an option and Devin extended his time to voluntarily take on the tour that would alter his world.

From June of 2011 through June of 2012, Devin served in the Helmand Province– the epicenter of the largest international military surge and one of the most violent regions in Afghanistan. The infamous Taliban strongholds required that our forces routinely engage in intense counterinsurgency and clearing operations– and the grueling nature of the times notoriously left lasting psychological impacts on a significant number of our deployed service members. Though he couldn't envision it then, Devin would become one of those statistics.

Devin was assigned convoy security and held many roles during his year: vehicle commander, platoon sergeant, and assistant convoy commander– all of which placed him in the thick of danger and with a hefty dose of responsibility for others. They were repeatedly subjected to small arms fire and, repeatedly, they returned fire. They moved across routes laden with hidden IED's and littered with destroyed equipment and bodies. And while Devin was fortunate enough to avoid significant physical injury, the sheer anxiety, hypervigilance and emotions experienced would build a deeply rooted PTSD to carry the rest of his life. What was worse than that: the triggering memories found in his images of shredded bodies, burned vehicles, and blood...the sounds of gunfire, explosions and screams...and the smells of diesel fuel, discharged weapons and burnings that would mar his dreams and disrupt his days.

As if the weight of those memories weren't enough, it was the heft of the silent moral injury that left him questioning war's outcomes, and his. He painfully watched insurgents fire upon crowds of their own people for interacting with Americans in marketplaces...found Afghan police checkpoints gunned down for taking water from them earlier in the day...knew of Afghan interpreters, drivers and police killed simply for working with Americans to build a better life for their families and country. There were many times where there was nothing Devin could do and no way to have answers to the many "whys" he was collecting. The violation of his conscience and trust would build guilt and anger, and seed the depression he would struggle with, and deny, upon returning home.

While Devin quietly grappled with his own emotions, his helpful nature again shined as a teacher, mentor and caretaker amongst his platoon. And just like in Africa, his Brothers sought him out for support, confiding their personal and deployment stressors and asking for guidance from him. Devin again enjoyed counseling others through the chaotic fray of war; but only with the benefit of hindsight would he realize this was the start of his future career path.

With Devin's extended contract now complete, the new civilian returned stateside in June, 2012, a different man than when he left...and it didn't take long for his invisible wounds to show themselves. His first morning at home with his wife instilled a panic attack that, without the assurance of his Marines and rifle at his side, forced him to flee. Public interaction was physically and mentally exhausting, and being in crowds of any kind was now out of the question. Nightmares invaded his sleep and anxiety altered his waking

moments. He put on a good front to be with extended family, but at home he isolated and drank excessively to quiet the demons. The dynamic further eroded his relationship with his wife; and during this transitional time, one of his only lifelines was riding. On the old Sportster his mother had given him, Devin sought miles of relief, hugged corners for the adrenaline rush he needed, and rode hours to enjoy a cigar and the quiet peace of a roadside in the middle of nowhere. And then he'd return home, somewhat refreshed, for life's realities to further eat at his mind, behavior, and relationships.

While deployed Devin's position at the Harley dealership was eliminated. After unsuccessfully searching for civilian employment, he sought out his former Platoon Commander for a job as a police officer at the Tomah VA Medical Center. The family relocated to Wisconsin, providing Devin a fresh start and an escape from family and social gatherings that produced difficult questions about his deployment. The job would prove a perfect match for him: the psychology of being around Veterans, armed, and in a role similar to that of his time within the military was an instant uptick in his life. Working would prove to be the only time that Devin could feel content and in control while continuing to avoid his own struggles.

In 2013, the couple welcomed their second child, a daughter; and while her birth brought him great pride and joy, it also made his problems more painfully apparent. His police work and marriage took all his energy and left little for himself, or his children...and what was left was clouded by alcohol. His good nature, patience and personal energy at home were gone; and while he saw the problems of his depressive weight, he still wasn't ready to acknowledge its cause. There were mornings where he couldn't get out of bed. Moments without the capacity to play with his children. Times where being the dad he wished he was simply wasn't possible, and his temper flared quickly and irrationally. Times like these still weigh heavy on the mind of a man who would eventually turn his life around for the children he dearly loves.

While his home life crumbled, his professional life started to take shape. Being at the Tomah VA, with its emphasis on mental health, Devin became the go-to officer for deescalating Veterans in crisis. Once again, people sought him out. Veterans and coworkers appreciated his calm demeanor at work, his patience and willingness to listen, and his ability to connect during difficult moments. But once the uniform came off, those same qualities didn't translate to his home. Strife, drinking and his hands-off behaviors took their marriage to the breaking point. Financial struggles and amassed debt only added to their discord; and as divorce loomed, Devin sold his bike for a few months of financial breathing room.

In 2017, after divorce had devastated him and his finances, and threatened his future with his children, Devin finally sought the counseling he desperately needed. Work was the only place where he knew himself and his capabilities, and he knew he needed more to live. He was barely able to pay his bills and racked up credit card debt to simply cover his family's living needs. The stress of it all, the struggle to find relief and sleep, combined with his excessive drinking, created some very dark times for Devin in the several years that followed. It was, however, a flicker of internal strength that he still had—something way far down inside him, something he thought he had lost, something that was bigger than himself— that pulled him up and out, little by little, through the uncertainty and despair. It was that light, sparked by his children, his “why”... that finally allowed therapy to support his hard climb; and perhaps, just as important, someone to make that climb with.

Devin and Shyleena were neighbors who also worked together at the VA and found themselves moving through similar marital struggles. What started as casual friendship, and professional respect, moved into a supportive partnership that culminated in love. Shyleena was the gentle guiding force that eased his life, encouraged his social engagement and ongoing therapy, and role-modeled positive parenting for him to learn from. And critical to his efforts, Devin stepped away from his dependency on alcohol. As they blended their families and moved forward together, Devin realized it wasn't just his children that brought

purpose and joy into his life, it was also the Veterans he impacted. Not only did these realizations reaffirm his new path, his experiences uncovered a new professional calling.

In 2025, after earning a master's degree in Mental Health Counseling, Devin became a Mental Health Counselor at the Tomah VA to specifically support his Brothers and Sisters, and works within the Residential Rehabilitation Program for Substance Abuse. His passion is helping Veterans navigate some of the most difficult challenges they face, particularly PTSD and moral injury—burdens many Veterans carry but few fully understand. Devin does. He has lived, and struggled, and moved through the shared challenges: and it is this empathetic credibility that fosters his connection with others. Every day he has the opportunity to help fellow Veterans heal...and he absolutely loves the purpose his life has gained.

Through years of concerted efforts, Devin feels his life is “mostly back to normal” by his comparative standards. He enjoys solid relationships with his two children as well as Shyleena’s two. He volunteers in their schools, supports their athletics and laughs easily within their full family dynamics. But “back to normal” isn’t a static line with his history and career, nor is it quite right yet: he is still without a motorcycle in his life.

After ten years without a bike, Devin can’t help but think and dream of motorcycles every day still— they are a part of his life history. Unfortunately, while he continues to pay off debts, rebuild his savings and support his children, finances do not responsibly allow for a motorcycle now, nor in the several years ahead. Devin’s story is not one of surrender: it is one of purpose, responsibility and determination. As our Advisory Board acknowledged his growth and devotion, we heard his passion for riding—one he hopes to share with his own children; and we believed that getting a motorcycle back in his life would help him stay on the good path he’s fought for.

We met him on a Monday night, and by Tuesday afternoon he had found the bike that made him smile: a brand new, 2025 H-D Low Rider S. He loved the sleek, stripped down look of black on black; and he particularly loved the way this model proved its agility, and speed, for the type of riding he enjoys. Fairings, bags and screens aged his 39 year-young mind...and a second test ride solidified his decision and filled his rider’s heart once more. Even better for him, it was a bike choice that would leave fuel in the tank for the next Veteran's bike. It was our first time working with Great River Harley-Davidson in Onalaska, WI, and our new friends, who’d been watching our efforts throughout the years, were equally thrilled for the chance to finally work with us. As a beautiful surprise, they took a bike that was already within our budget and dropped its price even more to help fund our next Bike and Veteran pairing.

Unique to this bike, it has been fully paid for by Wisconsin’s International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 139. After their wildly successful fundraising for us last year, Devin’s bike is the second of four to roll out in 2026 with their compliments—and it only makes sense that we hand over his keys following their June 27, 2026 9th Annual Poker Run benefitting Hogs For Heroes! **Devin’s Presentation of Keys Ceremony will be on Saturday, June 27, 2026 at 4:30 pm at Summit Ridge in Wonewoc, WI.** Join us and help welcome one more Veteran rider back to the healing road!

Have the day free? Join us on either the separate motorcycle or UTV routes they have planned for a fun-filled day supporting our injured Veterans.