



Introducing: Marine Sergeant Brian Russow of Clintonville, WI Our Next Veteran Hero to Receive a Harley and the Gift of Road Therapy

Marine Sergeant Brian Russow graduated high school in Appleton, WI in without much direction and worked odd jobs for two years trying to find his fit. He enlisted in 1994 simply because he “had nothing better to do”. It was a call to life-long service he hadn’t seen coming, an honor he hadn’t anticipated, and a global experience that left him proud, skilled, and devoted. It was also this very same calling that also fractured his life, his family, and his health as the deeply invasive and invisible tentacles of PTSD took hold of Brian’s life.

Nine years in as a Combat Engineer, Brian, an Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran, was deployed as part of the first push into Iraq, building bridges from Kuwait to Baghdad in 2003. Daily tension and violence were inescapable: gunfire, explosions, missiles and mines were the new normal. Hostile threats and the terror of unknown combatants produced a constant state of hypervigilance and fear. Burn pits, sand and excessive gear wore his body down. Squad responsibilities, questions of survival and the completion of work necessary for U.S. advancement weighed heavily on top of hazards and sights few choose to subject themselves to. And yet, upon returning home he wanted more: he saw years ahead in the chosen career he loved. On the verge of reenlistment, he faced an unexpected divorce and aggressive custody threats that questioned the safety of his children. Nine years in...and Brian was forced to put his love of family above his love for the military, and was released to fight his own personal war.

Transition was rough; home was unrecognizable. Military benefits, responsibilities and resources were gone as fast as they were provided. The brotherhood and support he depended on daily disappeared and left Brian to spiral out of control. On days without his children, he drank excessively and developed destructive and volatile behaviors. He couldn’t keep a job. Having considered suicide at his lowest points, it was always his children that gave him purpose and the courage to fight an unknown force. But it wasn’t until he met Robin three years after discharge, now his wife of 12 years, that he began to consider the toll combat had taken. Anxiety, depression, paranoia, hypervigilance, nightmares and sleep apnea finally had a diagnosis and treatment. He eventually accepted PTSD as part of his life and moved forward, pushing through barriers and accessing resources to become a better man, father and citizen.

Brian found strength in fellow Veterans and, in 2006, was one of six to form the Desert Veterans of Wisconsin, a service organization of Veterans serving Veterans, now 300+ strong in northeast Wisconsin. His wife, Robin, is a lively force and a thoughtful, guiding presence. Their four children and new granddaughter are a great source of pride and enjoyment. He loves camping with his family, hunting and fishing. His Service Dog in Training helps manage his symptoms and allows Brian new comforts in public settings and private moments. While job stability remains a challenge with his disability, Brian is determined to work. He is a Custodian at Wisconsin Veterans Home at King where he finds deep pride further serving his Country and enjoys the camaraderie of his fellow Brothers and Sisters.

But perhaps his deepest source of healing came from his decision to finally learn to ride. Harley’s loud pipes and beautiful rumble captured Brian’s young teenage heart and created a dream he never let go of. Years of service and family priorities did not leave room in a tight budget for dreams until 2008 when, desperate for peace and freedom, he finally obtained his license and bought what he could afford: a “79 Kawasaki. He happily rode the heck out of that bike until an unforeseen tax return three years ago finally allowed him to buy his first Harley: a “92 H-D Softail. He loved his classic beauty and rode as often as he could... until one year ago when a deer took him out on his way to work, totaling his bike. He’s healed physically; but unable to afford repairs, the loss of riding has taken its emotional toll.

It’s never too late to make dreams come true; and so, almost to the date of his accident, Hogs For Heroes is stepping in to change Brian’s life, again. Brian found his perfect fit on a shopping trip to Green Bay’s Vandervest Harley-Davidson: a 2018 H-D Heritage Softail Classic 114 in Silver Fortune. What a Bike! And what a Dealership! The VVHD family quickly wrapped their arms around us and enthusiastically supported our work from the moment we walked in and surprised them! They have generously invited us to join their **Customer Appreciation Party on Saturday, August 4 from 9-4** where we will hold **Brian’s Presentation of Keys Ceremony from 1230-1**. Please join us as we change one more life for the better and welcome another injured Veteran rider back to the healing road.