



## Introducing Our Next Hero Receiving the Gift of Road Therapy: Marine Sergeant John Giese, a Vietnam Veteran from Elkhorn, Wisconsin

*“I spend a lot of time thinking about my fellow Vietnam Vets and remembering them. Some Vets, like me, bury their PTSD until later in life, pretending it’s no big deal, and then it becomes full blown. Getting back on a Harley would help me clear my head of things and places I do not want to go back to. It’s been a hell of a trip since Vietnam, most of it good and the rest I’d like to leave in the rear view mirror.”—Excerpt from his essay.*

It was 1967 and we were at war. Wanting to serve his Country, 18 year-old John Giese quit high school in Racine, enlisted in the Marines and deployed to South Vietnam less than a year later. He was in the thick of combat, living on a primitive base near Da Nang and surrounded by violence. An aviation mechanic, John wanted to do more and trained in-country for the high-risk role of Door Gunner on a Huey. Flash to February 25, 1969: “We got a call that a wounded Marine needed to be medically evacuated and the normal CH-46 med people wouldn’t go in because the zone was too hot. We kicked off our rocket pads on Hill 55 and went in. My Crew Chief and I were firing our M60’s as we approached and I was shot through the chest. My lung collapsed, I got the wind knocked out of me and I went down. I got back up and continued firing while they loaded that Marine. I remember firing more rounds as we left, then laying on the floor. I was evacuated three days later and spent 6 weeks in the hospital before returning to the States.” For his heroic efforts in combat, Marine Sergeant John Giese received the distinguished Air Medal and was awarded a Purple Heart, along with life-long shoulder and lung ailments...and now, at age 70, PTSD.

John returned home to a Country divided in turmoil. Determined to persevere, he deeply buried searing memories and moved forward. He completed active duty and added two more years in the Reserves. He found work, started a family and went back to school. He continued tamping down corrosive emotions and began drinking too much at home. His most successful strategy was to fully immerse himself in work, commanding an image of strength and hiding any perceived weaknesses. Despite his best efforts to avoid and deny the damage within, the invisible wounds of war continued to haunt this man...finally making their presence known as he moved into retirement 8 years ago.

John has spent every day of his adult life serving and supporting others. His first job, a Patrolman, led to becoming Elkhorn’s Chief of Police for 22 years. Along the way, he obtained two degrees and volunteered as an EMT and Firefighter. He was elected Elkhorn’s Mayor in 2006, serving two terms until retiring from civil service. Still needing an income and involvement in retirement, John became a Teachers Aid at the middle school and worked as a hospital Security Officer until fully retiring this month. He’s served his Veteran community for 44 years, working to enhance the lives of others and holding VFW leadership positions at his Post, District, State, and National levels. He stopped drinking 33 years ago and now uses his experience to help others recover. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment, John remarried and expanded his family to four amazing children and 5 grandchildren. His wife, Sue, is a delightful woman and her love and admiration for John has gotten them through some tough times. In the midst of his golden years of semi-retirement, John, like many others, found himself with spare time to think, to remember, and to hurt. He became depressed and struggled with guilt. Sleep and energy were hard to come by; irritability and anger were not. As he withdrew socially, the isolation worsened his demeanor. No longer a happy man, or an easy one to live with, he finally sought help and, after 40 years of denial, was diagnosed with PTSD. In sharing his story, he serves yet again.

John’s rode for 47 years, buying his first Harley right out of service. Last year after a short hiatus in ownership, and out of desperation, he bought a small, older Yamaha to see if The Road was what he needed again. It was. But on a fixed and dwindling income the Harley of his dreams, and the size he needs to ride dependably and with Veterans clubs, was out of reach. Thankfully, it wasn’t out of ours... and Hogs For Heroes is stepping in to support this Veteran’s ride into the next chapter of his life. John found his dream at Boardtracker H-D in Janesville: a 2018 Heritage Softail Classic in Twisted Cherry. Their awesome team generously embraced our mission and invited us to **Boardtracker’s Block Party on August 25, 2018 from 11-4** where we will hold our **“Presentation of Keys” Ceremony at 1:30 pm**. Please join us as we change one more life and welcome another injured Veteran rider back to the healing road!

