



***Surprise— We did it again!
Veteran #10 just hit the road...
and this time with a different spin!***

Meet Army Sergeant Cassandra Cutler of Two Rivers, WI.

The Backstory First: In December 2017, we received a 2006 H-D Street Bob, in exceptional condition with less than 1,400 miles, from a woman who no longer rode. Enamored with our mission, she said to sell it, raffle it or gift it— whatever helped most. Our process allows recipients to choose the bike that fits their needs, we decided to sell it in 2018. The bike was listed for 3 months, and almost every day had a set of Veteran eyes staring at it from afar. We met that Veteran in late August when she took it for a test ride. After being told she'd never walk again, she hardly imagined riding. It fit her perfectly and she rode steadily. She immediately loved that bike and it lit an inner fire. We held it while they saved; but when the young family decided to buy their first home, affording a bike was no longer possible. It crushed her; knowing she could physically do it, she now longed for the release in riding again. She applied this spring and retook the riding class to remove the disability conditions. After reviewing her application, our Board realized the opportunity to put another very deserving Veteran on the road and decided not to sell that bike. On June 23, 2019 we knocked on her door, taking her by surprise, and handed the tearful woman her well-deserved keys.

The Veteran: A life-long Wisconsinite, Cassandra was a spirited child who landed on a destructive path after high school. Needing a fresh start, she joined the Army in 2010 for structure and discipline. She trained as a helicopter mechanic, was quickly promoted and loved every aspect of service. In July of 2013, she was on her second combat tour in Afghanistan when a night mission forever changed her life, leaving the now 28 year old Veteran 100% disabled.

As Crew Chief on an air-assault mission in black-out conditions, her helicopter had just dropped off Special Forces in Jalalabad and was landing to await retrieval. Cassandra was tethered and standing when the Chinook came in too fast, bounced and threw her. She had immediate pain but was adrenalized and lead the aircraft's evacuation, only later realizing the significance of her injuries. She'd suffered a lower spinal cord injury that left her nerves damaged and without sensation from her hips to her toes, significant musculoskeletal damage to her back, neck and hips, and a traumatic brain injury. She was medivaced out and eventually transitioned to Walter Reed for multiple surgeries and years of rehabilitative therapy. Told she may never walk again, she was wheelchair bound for two years until her then boyfriend Matt, a fellow soldier and now spouse, told her in no uncertain terms she would walk. He's a driving and supportive force in her life and they share an outlook and commitment like few other. Wanting to independently walk down the aisle for their wedding, she relearned how to do just that in 2015. And her injuries didn't just take a physical toll, they disrupted every facet of her functioning life and ravaged her mental health. She found herself in dark places: angry, depressed and in pain. She withdrew, abused medications and contemplated suicide. With the support of her family, she sought treatment and regrouped, but fights the invasive demons of PTSD most days still. And while she's social, entrepreneurial and passionate about mothering their one-year old son, a sense of freedom remained missing.

With ongoing therapy, every year Cassandra has regained a portion of feeling in her legs to the point where she can walk, chase their son, renovate their home and now, ride a motorcycle again. Rides with her dad solidified an early love for motorcycling and she began riding at age 13, eventually taking up motocross. She last rode before entering service, and in regaining her physical abilities was able to get on the back seat of her husband's Harley in 2016. Proud of that accomplishment, she then set her sights on riding herself again. And this is where our beautiful "backstory" comes in. Hogs For Heroes did things a little different this time around simply because it seemed fate intervened. Cassandra's been riding since we delivered that bike, rebuilding her skills and comfort... and enjoying miles of freeing peace. We provided an allowance to have the bike inspected, serviced and adorned with her own touches, and Harbor Town Harley-Davidson in Manitowoc was more than happy to generously support the cause...and host her gifting!

We will officially celebrate Cassandra's return to the road with our **Presentation of Keys Ceremony on Saturday, July 20 at 12:00 at Harbor Town Harley-Davidson in Manitowoc.** Make it a destination ride and grab a lunch— HTHD will have lunch available. Equally special, Cassandra, a Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association 45-3 Auxiliary Member, will be publicly "patched in" during this time as a CVMA Full Member, given she now has her own sweet ride.

