



## **Introducing Our Next Veteran Receiving a Harley: Sergeant Jarred West, Army National Guard, of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin**

Jarred West, a lifelong Wisconsinite, grew up in the Milwaukee area in a family that required him to fight, from his earliest days, simply to survive. His father left their family to fend through the fallout of alcohol and divorce, without money or resources. They lived in rough neighborhoods and seedy motels; and his mother worked several jobs simply to keep a roof over their head and her family off the streets. He learned to go through school hungry and dirty; and they learned to scrape, steal and fight for what they needed to live. With a lack of discipline and direction, Jarred grew angry and rebellious. He struggled in school and, as a teenager, eventually connected with the wrong group. A string of bad choices landed him in two different juvenile detention facilities for almost three years. Facing the prospect of several years in jail, Jarred decided to fight again: this time, for himself.

An opportunity to participate in an early-release military-style boot camp immediately gave Jarred a sense of purpose and filled him with a long overdue sense of discipline and structure. He learned to work with authority, manage his anger and accept accountability for his actions. Like the rest of the world, he watched the planes hit the Twin Towers in 2001... and unlike most, he wanted to go fight those who so gravely wronged his Country. Keeping his nose clean through four years of probation allowed him to become eligible for the Armed Services, a life he could now look forward to.

In 2005, at age 23, Jarred joined the Army National Guard because he knew they were soon to deploy, exactly what he wanted. A year later, he left for Kuwait to work as a driver/gunner on convoy escort throughout the turbulent and dangerous country. Day one of boots on the ground, their Unit lost a truck to an IED that killed one Brother and wounded several others. Reeling from the immediate slap of combat's reality, and terror, just four hours later Jarred left for his first night mission outside the wire. Two weeks later his convoy was struck by a chain of five IEDs, leaving several wounded and dead, some of whom were on their way Home. This rough start only foreshadowed the grim and terrifying year to come as violence and destruction continued to fill his days. His body hurt physically from the demands he faced but he couldn't afford to let his mind do the same. Replacing his fear, losses and struggles with anger, he built up stores of it to fuel his actions. Jarred cared less and less about what happened to him and more about his Brotherhood, his true family in every sense. He now fought to protect them: he took more risks, put himself in precarious positions and volunteered for dangerous assignments so that he was the one to face death rather than the Brother to the left or right of him.

His tour complete, he returned home in 2007 to a life he didn't know how to live and to a society he didn't think cared about him. His identity, purpose and support system had changed seemingly overnight and he didn't have a plan. He turned to alcohol and drank excessively to forget his anger and pain, and to escape the grip of his unknown assailant, PTSD. Amongst the chaos in his head, he drifted through multiple jobs, tried college and maintained his Guard requirements. Along the way he married, bought a home and began creating a life he only once dreamt of. Life was difficult, but seemed to be working out. And then, in 2009 Jarred deployed to Iraq to work detainee operations at a base prison in Taji. While his second deployment wasn't as dangerous as his first, and the conditions far better, the dichotomy of his efforts as a combat soldier didn't do anything to help his headspace. Working to be respectful to the same individuals who had just tried to kill him, his

Brothers and his Country, proved a tumultuous conflict for Jarred and only served to fuel his personal unrest. But nothing he'd encountered, however, compared to the pain he felt when a Brother on base killed himself. It was all Jarred could do to bury his struggles and continue his deployment. He fought simply to get through his second deployment and return home to the life he and his wife were building.

What he thought was a healthy marriage began to crumble several months after his homecoming: deceit and debt incurred unknowingly, and while he was away, devastated their financial stability and crushed his trust. He spiraled further and drank even more. Divorce and bankruptcy followed shortly thereafter, as did the birth of his first son— the only silver lining to come from that despair. He drank until he lost everything: his house, his savings and himself...and then he hit his rock bottom. With nowhere to go and nothing to his name, he slept on the couch of his best friend from service for two years. He repeatedly fell apart and his Brother helped him move forward. During that rough time he discovered motorcycling—its freedom and support, and bought his first bike. He met his current love, Ashley, a fellow Guard member, and things began looking up. After learning he was to be a father again, he realized his need to be a better man and began fighting, again, but this time to create a better life for his family. He gave up binge drinking, sought medical care and worked any job he could find simply for the extra money. He struggled to fit in and manage his outbursts, but he had support and love to keep pressing on. He eventually earned a Bachelors Degree in Psychology, found steady work as an Assembler at Pierce Manufacturing...and sold his motorcycle to help buy a home for his family.

After 12 years in the Army, and despite his desire to continue serving and deploy to Afghanistan with friends, Jarred was medically discharged in 2017 due to his PTSD. It's sharp edge remains a heavy presence in all facets of his life today. He's learned to manage his anger better, walk away from situations and focus differently, but he's raw and emotional still. His family, blood and military, is deeply important to him and fills him with pride and comfort. He loves to hunt, particularly crossbow, enjoys spending time outdoors and camping. It wasn't until he sold his motorcycle five years ago that he realized the true impact it had on him, his coping abilities and on his social support. He took up mountain biking to capture the lost rush and manage his negative energy, but it never filled his heart or settled his mind the way riding did.

In a beautiful twist of fate, on May 4, 2019 Hogs For Heroes gifted a Harley to another Fond du Lac Veteran, and it set off a healing chain nobody saw coming. Later that night, that Veteran Recipient met Jarred for the first time. They clicked immediately and Jarred shared how desperately he missed riding. In a stunning display of Brotherhood, Jarred was handed the set of keys to the 35 year old Honda VFR that was duct-taped and zip-tied together to run, and no longer needed by our 8th Recipient. After five years away, Jarred could return to the road... and no ride felt better than his first back out with friends, old and new. Their bond has been inseparable since. And although the bike was in bad shape and undependable, it made Jarred realize how key riding was for his support and healing. At summer's end in 2019, he took out a loan he struggled to afford and bought a 2005 Street Glide that's needed nothing but work, and money, to try and stay on the road. His bigger bike did, however, make him eligible to join the U.S. Military Vets MC and he immediately regained the camaraderie he's missed since service. Shortly thereafter, Jarred partnered with friends to create a small nonprofit for Veterans called **Combat Vets Custom** that encourages conversational support through wood working. He's using his skills, experiences and education to help others, as well as himself, transition through challenges after service. He's gained all this in a year and a half, and all because a bike was returned to his life.

Hogs For Heroes admired the fight we saw in Jarred. The fight to survive, the fight to protect, the fight to build, the fight to heal...and certainly the fight to keep riding in his life. We felt that while this Veteran was making significant gains in his healing journey, the tenuous nature of his motorcycle ownership left him personally and financially vulnerable. Hogs For Heroes believed it was time this man felt the support he is certainly deserving of and gain a ride that will continue to take him forward in life. We chose to surprise Jarred with our news in a very atypical way: we took the stage at the USMVMC Veterans benefit he was volunteering at to share our news while he was surrounded by his Brotherhood for support.

Shopping these days is a bit tricky. Shockingly, inventory at most Harley-Davidson dealerships is extremely low right now and finding the preowned Street Glide Special Jarred longed for posed a challenge. Through the beauty of online shopping, he located his dream at Ukes Harley-Davidson in Kenosha, Wisconsin and we happily headed down to meet with our Uke's friends again. Jarred selected a black, 2018 Street Glide Special with only 5,200 miles on her and killer 14 inch apes...and Ukes helped us bring that sweet ride into our budget.

We are bringing that bike back to Jarred's hometown of Fond du Lac to celebrate it's gifting and honor the respect and gratitude we have for all Veterans, by supporting this one. On Saturday, August 29 we'll be hanging outside at the American Legion Post 75 from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m., and would love for you to ride over to learn more about us and meet some of our prior recipients and support Jarred, our newest family member. We will begin our **Presentation of Keys Ceremony at 12:30 pm** with a Color Guard from Post 75— and trust us, you don't want to miss this emotional and special moment. The Post's Fox Hole will be hosting a Brat Fry to help raise funds for us and their bar will be open for toasting our Veterans and friends.

Please note: During these times of COVID 19 uncertainty, know our event will be held outdoors, encouraging responsible personal actions and distancing to enhance the safety of those choosing to attend this gathering. In case of bad weather, however, we'll move the event into the Post's banquet hall.