

When I first received an email from band of brothers telling me about a chance to go to America and ride route 66 as a pillion I was to say the least a bit unsure. Unsure if I would be up to this sort of holiday due to my disabilities. That will be the only time I ever call what Bike Tours for The Wounded offer as a "holiday" as it's not. What it is, well I can best describe it as a life changing moment in time. The experience is not for everyone, you will be challenged to move outside your comfort zone. You will adapt to being with others again and with lots of help and support from Darren and his team you will overcome the obstacles that normally prevent you from doing things. Remember this is not, and I cannot repeat myself enough, this is not a holiday let me explain why and then you can judge for yourself.

I am 51 years young; 2 months ago I would have used the term old. I am a war veteran with multiple disabilities, I am a wheelchair user, my spine lower and upper is damaged, my knees, my left ankle, my right wrist is all damaged from a helicopter accident while serving. I have PTSD, depression and adjustment disorder from my service, I am now classed as morbidly obese and to top it all I have Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis. I live in pain every moment of my life, and have a personal assistant to support me 40 hours a week and family support outside that time and if I am totally honest, up until I came across Darren and BT4TW I wanted to die. I had hatched a plan to eat till I drop, it's called chocolate suicide but to the rest of the world it's a heart attack which is acceptable.

I have now set the scene, now let's get back to my story. I had this email I kept reopening it as the morning progressed I kept thinking I would love to do this, travel 'Route 66' it must be on most people's bucket list. I spoke to my pa about it at lunchtime and decided no, I was too disabled to go. When my pa left the house to pick up my son from school I was on my own which in itself is a strange feeling, I kept thinking about the trip, it was a chance of a lifetime. Without thinking I picked up the phone and called Darren ("oh dear" or words to that effect), he answered (my mind raced, I could just say wrong number or just hang up. No be brave) I spoke and said I was interested, I kept throwing up obstacles to why I was unsuitable to go, frustratingly Darren was not phased by my reasons why I could not do this or if he was he did not voice his concerns. Darren calmly explained that BT4TW had taken many disabled veterans on this trip, he did not sugar-coat anything he said it was a challenge, but I would be supported all the way if that is what I wanted. To my surprise I said I wanted to go but gave myself the get out clause, I will need to speak with my partner before I confirmed my place.

Well you know I had an excuse to say no, that night I spoke to my partner Colleen. Ok what is going on, she thinks it's a great idea. Not the response I was expecting, I was now in a corner I would have to make the decision. The next day I called Darren and after a conversation I said I was in. Three weeks later I was at Heathrow airport, I was scared, nervous, excited, but mainly nervous of the unknown. We all meet in the terminal, it was strange as I started to talk to others my nerves went, I was me again. One of the group offered to push my wheelchair, Lou was great, she was the support van driver and made me feel part of the group and at this point a big thank you to Ed who shared a room with me and tied my laces each day.

I do not want to talk too much about the trip as I do not want to spoil it for others, but what I will say is that getting on the back of a motorcycle for a disabled person is a big challenge, first you have the logistics and then the trust in your rider to keep you safe. It was not easy and to be totally honest I was in pain every moment and some days the pain was so bad I was in tears at times, but if

you can overcome your fears and manage your pain the rewards far out way the downside. Both physically and emotionally this experience has helped heal me, when we were in Las Vegas I had a night flight in a helicopter. The first time I had been in one since my accident, well if I could get on a motor bike I could fly in a helicopter. The smell of avgas did unsettle me a little but I did it and it in a strange way started my healing process. I have now returned to the UK but this opportunity has given me the chance to re-evaluate my life. I am on a diet to shed some of that excess weight; I see life differently and am no longer scared of a challenge. Darren and his team are still on hand if I need a chat or want to get involved. Once you have been on one of the expeditions you are part of the BT4TW family and working together with each other and for each other helps the recovery process.

If you are an injured veteran or still serving, this challenge is worth taking, it is not for everyone you have to be willing to give it a go and let Darren and his team support you in what every way they can. This is an opportunity of a lifetime if you embrace it, your life experience will be enriched by it. There is no miracle cure you have to want to be part of the process of change.

This message is to all those riders who are reading this; THANK YOU, without your support none of this would be possible. You gave your pillion the chance of a lifetime, the opportunity to overcome the obstacles life has put in their way. Riders have told me they are humbled by the change they see in the guys by the end of the journey. The spark is back in their lives, but without your support none of this is possible.

Another group that needs to be mentioned that can be overlooked all too easily, is those that sponsor an injured veteran to complete this opportunity for a life changing challenge. This is not a jolly these trips are hard on the body and mind. Your donations will help injured service and retired veterans to overcome their fears, will give them the opportunity to feel worth and value once again as it has done for me. I and all others who have been supported THANK YOU and hope that you will continue to support this worthwhile life changing organisation.

I will finish with a comment that Darren told me, when you get up in the morning there are two words to live by, "*you decide*"