

'Nobody Has Bigger Hearts Than Bikers'

A VFW Post in Virginia granted a Vietnam War veteran suffering from Parkinson's Disease his wish to ride a motorcycle again for the first time in more than 15 years

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It had been 15 years since Michael Polsley rode a motorcycle, feeling the rush of wind hiss as he traveled fast and steady down an open road.

A Vietnam War veteran, Polsley's favorite pastime had been stripped from him by the utterance of a name given to symptoms he was beginning to experience in his later years, that of Parkinson's Disease.

The thrill of one last ride prompted Polsley's son-in-law, Iraq War veteran Jerry Robinson, to reach out to Virginia VFW Riders Chairman Rob Pedersen on Nov. 26 in hopes of borrowing a sidecar that could be mounted on a motorcycle.

"Jerry Robinson wanted to give his father-in-law a special gift by taking him on a motorcycle ride," said James Cooper, the VFW Post 637 commander in Hopewell, Virginia. "He spoke to Rob about how his father-in-law rode motorcycles all his life before his condition kept him off a bike for 15 years."

Empathizing with the inquiry, Pedersen contacted the president of the riders group at Post 637, Michael Losoya, who sought help from Cooper in finding a sidecar to accommodate Polsley.

After a few days, Losoya and Cooper landed help from VFW Post 637 Chaplain and fellow rider Sharon Sculthorpe, who has often volunteered to use her trike to give hospice patients in Hopewell rides around town.

"I had heard they were having trouble finding a sidecar, so I told them I had a trike and if

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

they could get him onto my bike then I could take him on this ride,” Sculthorpe said. “I had been giving rides to people at hospices in order to grant them wishes of one last ride.”

Without knowing what had been set in motion by his son-in-law, Polsley, thinking he was going to see a motorcycle show at Post 637 on Dec. 11, was surprised when he arrived at noon to a motorcade of more than 25 riders waiting to join him on a memorable ride.

“He was so excited and humbled by the surprise his family had set up,” Sculthorpe said. “We strapped him in with padded pool noodles and he seemed very ready to go despite it being as cold as it was.”

Setting out from Post 637 on a motorcycle for the first time in more than 15 years, Polsley held onto Sculthorpe as the pair rode about 40 miles in temperatures grazing the low 20s.

They strolled down backroads and highways around Prince George County, Virginia, passing through the scenic countryside and busy intersections alike.

“We stopped one time along the way to give him a break because he gets tired easily with his disease, but he kept saying, ‘Let’s go, I want to keep riding,’” Sculthorpe said. “He was really enjoying all the bikes around him, too. We had riders from the VFW, American Legion and Patriot Guard. They all wanted to show their gratitude for his service, which goes to show you that nobody has bigger hearts than bikers.”

Following the 40-mile trek that ended back at the Post, Polsley was presented a Vietnam War veteran’s pin and certificate by Post 637 Quartermaster Lee Dixon during a small ceremony.

With his family and grandkids present, Polsley accepted the honor and thanked all those who helped make his wish a reality.

For the Post 637 members and VFW Riders in attendance, the joy in a fellow veteran’s eyes despite his circumstances was a reassurance of an ethos Sculthorpe added they all follow.

“For us veterans, we live with the ‘others before self’ motto, and if we could do something like this to make someone else’s wish come true, we’re going to do it,” Sculthorpe said. “It was an honor and a privilege to do this for him.”

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