

LATEST and FINAL EDIT June 5 6:30 am:

Volume 1 – The True Tale of One Tough Pirate

Scroll 1 – Bare My Soul

Last summer, I heard a song by Empathy Test called “Bare My Soul,” and that is exactly my intention here.

But how do you finally tell the story of an amazing life lived while surviving a death sentence and everything that comes with it, before and after? For me, the only way to start is with a simple willingness to be honest—keeping it raw, keeping it real, and letting the story speak for itself.

I’m a living, breathing, walking, and talking miracle. My name is Bob Bowers. To most folks, I’m just Bob, or Bobby. To many others, I’ve been One Tough Pirate for more than a quarter of a century. We’ll get into how I got that crazy moniker later, but right now, just know I’m not here to sell you a damn thing. As I told the kids at a youth military academy I spoke for years ago, “I couldn’t sell a banana to a starving monkey.” I’m simply here to tell the true tale of my life, and I hope you find some strength, humor, and a different way of looking at others and the world via my story.

My life is messy; I’m far from what anyone would call perfect, and many days I’m just trying to keep my own head above water. I’ve dodged death more times than I can count—by virus, by needle, by gun, by self-hate. But if telling the truth about my struggles helps someone else find their way out of the dark, I will lay it all out there every single time.

Over the years, my outreach has happened on social media, the highway, in churches, and in schools. But these days, most of my talks happen on a sidewalk or some random spot. It usually starts with a compliment on my ride, and five minutes later, a total stranger is crying over a brother they lost to AIDS—like the time it happened over a damn sandwich at Jersey Mike’s. Real connections just seem to find me wherever I go. People sense the truth in my journey and drop their guard. They see me for who I am:

Beautifully broken.

I continue to live my life out loud, sharing my truth with fire and grace. I exercise, dance, and ride my motorcycle because sitting still drives me crazy. And yeah, at 63, my swollen ankles from sitting here at this desk writing are proof of that. I continue to speak up and out because staying quiet never helped a single soul.

I still live to ride. There are plenty of other guys riding motorcycles carrying a message. Some quote from the Bible, some wave flags. Me? I carry names. Hundreds of them. Thousands. They aren’t written on my vest; they are a part of my DNA. They are part of what drives me. Clay. Richard. Hillary... Hillary actually signed a Harley-Davidson book of hers and gave it to me right from her hospice bed before she passed, knowing damn well I’d still be out here—boots down, throttle wide open, looking for something resembling a life without HIV. Doing outreach via my motorcycle continues to be among the most rewarding experiences I’ve had.

I'm an ordinary guy on an extraordinary mission. For over four decades, I have lived with HIV/AIDS—riding with it and through it into big cities and small towns that would rather pretend it doesn't exist. I roll on three wheels now, an open heart, an open mind, and a playlist full of music for the soul. I don't seek it out, but I'm always ready for a real connection when it hits. I'm passionate, I'm tattooed, I happen to give a damn, and I'm too stubborn to shut up.

I refuse to hide shame like a secret anymore; I treat it like an old scar or one of my tattoos—it's a part of who I am.

My life is about being saved, being seen, and being heard—dragging the raw truth right into the daylight. You won't find hope wrapped up in a pretty bow here. This is a real-time journal, and I'm going to keep writing it and sharing it from here to the roads of Texas and beyond, until I'm finally called home.

Sweet. Heavenly. Home.