

What Veterans mean to America and Its citizens
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That old man in the Shopping line with the Vietnam Veteran hat on the top of his head, the car in front of you with the "My husband served in Afghanistan" bumper sticker, the woman in the nursing home who told you stories about nursing Soldiers back to health; they all have a story to tell, inspire our youth and give hope to our future generations. They walk with pride down our streets. Even though their hair might be grayer and their fingers a little shakier, they stand at the ready because they know what our freedom costs. Every single one of them sacrificed themselves for our country. Some of them went through hell and back. Yet, if you ask them, they would do it again. These are veterans, they are the men and women to whom we owe our freedom and liberty. We may vote, our government might sign papers, but who was it that took up that rifle and did our dirty work? Who paid the price, some of them making the ultimate sacrifice? Our veterans paid it forward so that we can enjoy our quality of life.

Have you ever been to Arlington National Cemetery? Have you walked through those hills and valleys? You were walking through the receipt of the price that America paid. Did you happen to see a young woman standing over a grave? Have you ever listened to the cries of a bugle? Loud rambunctious children go still and silent when they come upon the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; they can hardly breathe. When you see a child react like this you can feel the deep respect and awe radiate from them. There is another thing you will see there. The presence of those who survived, the veterans, coming to visit their brothers and sisters....

So what do veterans mean to American citizens? Let's just use an example. You may have heard of Chris Kyle 'The American Sniper'. He retired as a veteran, his buddy, Micheal Monsoor did not. Michael Monsoor, a man in Kyle's team, covered a grenade with his own body so that the others could live to fight another day. Those men that survived were able to recall this story. The event was written down by many including Chris Kyle. The

event is remembered and continues to show us what true selflessness is. There are veterans out there with stories that have been told, ones that end with 'I should have died that day but I didn't'. Those stories give us hope. Yes, many died, but not all, not me and maybe not you. Veterans make it possible for our mothers to allow their babies to go off to war, because of hope. They inspire our youth to be strong and courageous just like their ancestors.

Veteran, Veteran, Veteran. It has a certain sound and a weight to it. When citizens hear the title they listen. "That man *over there* is a *veteran*" or "that woman served in Iraq". It holds value to even the most ill-reputable people. Do you ever wonder why we let the military board a plane first? Because they were the first to pick up arms and will be the first to lay down their lives. An American would see it as advantageous to have an ex-military service member on his jobsite or working for him because he would know what it means to serve. He may be a little tougher and bring a little more leadership and strength to the team.

To a citizen a Veteran means a Handshake and a "Thank you for your service." A veteran means a smile, a salute, a wave, recognition and love. Have you ever shook the hand of a veteran and seen their eyes light up? A veteran is a symbol to our nation, it means safety for America. Every veteran is a win, great or small. The presence of a veteran means that through this man's life, America was made safer. The American veteran's life taunts our enemies; 'Do you think you can overcome what our last enemy could not?' 'Do you think you even have a chance?'. Our enemies know that they do not stand a chance, at least not against our trained veterans and vet-influenced youth.

Last but not least; A veteran means that we have a responsibility. We send our boys and girls overseas and they do our dirty work. We will always be grateful but let's get real here. I have talked about sunshine and roses, but that's not the whole story. They do our dirty work and then they come home, many of them lost, broken and regrettably some of them forgotten and feeling hopeless. These are our veterans, we can never repay them but we have a responsibility to help them wherever we can. They are strong and courageous, but they are not indestructible.

Give love to the broken, hope to the hopeless, a smile to the lost, kind words and time to the forgotten and an ear to those who need it. Many don't want to talk, make sure that they know you are there for them and then give them space. Fellow Americans, if you were not there you do not know, so do not even think about judging a man for what he did walking the streets of hell. Do not forget how Americans acted toward service members during the Vietnam War. When service members came back, American citizens hated, scoffed and pointed fingers. Americans vote, the government signs papers, service members do the work, so remember. Show love and give hope. Please never forget that veterans paid the price.

So to an American, a veteran means hope, respect, a future, courage, selflessness, America's ultimate symbol, a handshake, a kind word and a responsibility. So remember your local veterans. They mean a lot to our nation. Do not let them go unloved or forgotten. Giving time to a veteran can make a veteran's day as well as yours. "Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

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