

#335

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HONOR FLIGHT

There wasn't a dry eye in the crowd. We just happened to arrive at the WWII Memorial in Washington DC at the same time as a large group of WWII Veterans were also arriving and who had just left their bus and were coming down the walkway to see the Memorial. All of us tourists lined the pathway and clapped and cheered as they made their way down the walkway --- almost all of them in wheelchairs. Since 2005 a group called the Honor Flight Network has been flying our World War II Veterans to Washington absolutely free!

It was two weeks ago and we drove down to DC with our 13 year old to take in sights and to learn/relearn a bit of history. We didn't expect to encounter living history along the way – but we are glad that we did. It was obvious to all that this was a very emotional visit for these men and women ---- it brought back memories that perhaps have not been talked about in decades.

These living examples of the '*Greatest Generation*' never aspired to recognition for their service. At the end of the War they quietly returned to civilian life and apart from a parade now and again --- probably never looked at their uniform again. Here they were --- traveling with their fellow Veterans --- to receive in some small measure the recognition they so richly deserve. I am glad for our good fortune to be in the right place at the right time to see it.

Unless they lied about their age to enlist (and many did) the minimum age of a WWII Veteran is going to be 85 and most are going to be in their 90's. It is a sad statistic that we lose some 800 WWII Veterans per day. It was out of a commitment to help as many WWII Veterans as possible get to Washington to see '*their*' Memorial that the Honor Flight Network was created and to date they have brought over 100,000 Veterans to Washington. This is a truly remarkable achievement!

Although we were impressed with so many things about DC – the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns, the other war and service memorials --- nothing impressed us more than seeing those men and women coming down that walkway to see ‘their’ Memorial for the first time!

As tourists heading to our Nation’s Capital on school vacation our intention was to visit Museums and Memorials – and along the way at the WWII Memorial we also found a wonderful group of living Memorials. Men and Women who were willing to put their lives on the line in order to protect this great Nation.

Too often we let our focus fall onto the great statues, monuments and memorials to remind us of the sacrifice that has been made on our behalf -- - without seeing those who live next door or around the corner who are truly living reminders of those who served this country. These are men and women who because of their advanced age are not always able to be out and about like they used to be. Our WWII Veterans have begun to slip to the sidelines --- and the rest of us need to take the initiative to reach out to them.

Memorial Day is just around the corner and while that day provides an important opportunity to honor the memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice ---- let it also serve as an opportunity for us to show our respect and appreciation for those who are still with us. This is the perfect time to thank those who were able to make it back for their service. Yes, monuments are important ---- but even more important is thanking those who are still with us – while we still have the chance!

Honor Flight as an organization has chosen as their Motto the following words of Will Rogers:

“We can’t all be heroes. Some of us have to stand on the curb and clap as they go by.”

I am very proud to have had that opportunity to stand on side of that walkway and clap as a great many heroes went past.

Age Well!

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