

# a million reasons

stories from the hearts of VA volunteers



Voluntary Service Office, Department of Veterans Affairs

*How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment  
before starting to improve the world. – Anne Frank*

*Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the earth who reflect this nation's compassion, unselfish caring, patience, and just plain love for one another.*

*– Erma Bombeck*



# introduction

This is a year of celebration and reflection for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). 2006 marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VA and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program.

For 60 years the extraordinary contributions of volunteers has played a critical role in enhancing VA health care delivery by helping to make each day a little brighter for our veterans. Like the veterans they serve, VA volunteers are soldiers whose primary purpose is to support veteran patients by augmenting the administrative, clinical, educational, counseling, and social services provided in various VA health care settings. They sacrifice by sharing their individual talents, resources and time to help improve the quality of life for veterans.

The individuals whose stories are told within this book share defining moments and heartfelt tales of dedication, commitment and love. VA Voluntary Service and its volunteers are proud to be part of a grateful nation. Volunteers are the lifeblood of the VA health care system. Their commitment to service is limitless; their allegiance to veterans knows no boundaries. There are *a million reasons to volunteer*. VA volunteers are truly heroes serving heroes.

We invite others to join our extended family so we can continue to provide exemplary service to our nation's veterans. If you would like to serve our heroes with your time and talents, contact your local medical center or community based outpatient clinic for more information or visit the VA Voluntary Service web site at [www.va.gov/volunteer](http://www.va.gov/volunteer).

# a million reasons

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*We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give.*

*– Winston Churchill*

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# soldier



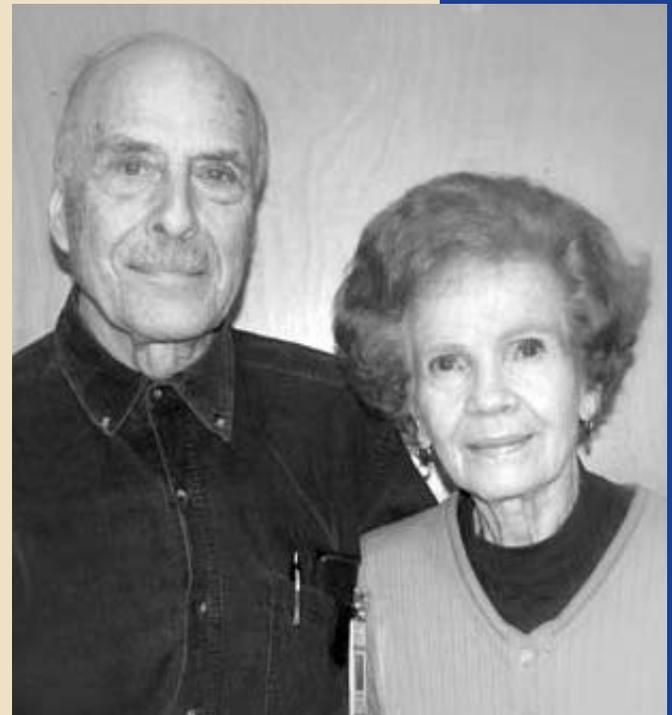
I am very proud to have served my fellow veterans for more than eighteen years through the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) program. The reasons that inspire me to serve are strongly related to my service in the military.

I was a WWII flyer stationed in England with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force and assigned to the 392<sup>nd</sup> B Group, 576<sup>th</sup> B Squadron. My assignment dictated flying combat missions over Germany during World War II with the Army Air Force. Thirteen months of my four years of wartime service were spent as a Prisoner of War after my B-24 bomber was shot down over Berlin. Five of my crewmembers were killed in that crash on April 29, 1944. I survived.

I feel my participation as a volunteer in the Library has allowed me the opportunity to honor those crewmembers lost that day. I have been given the good fortune to share with fellow veterans, staff, other volunteers, students and visitors several speeches concerning my experiences in World War II and as a P.O.W. This has provided me the opportunity to remember those crewmembers and ensure their supreme sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Moreover, I feel VAVS offers my wife Louise and I a chance to help those veterans who might be suffering physical or emotional ailments from which I have been spared. I am fortunate and grateful to the Lord for allowing me to reach the age of 85 in good health so that I can continue to serve my fellow veterans.

David Purner  
James H. Quillen VA Medical Center  
Mountain Home, TN



As an 18-year-old in 1966, I joined the United States Marine Corps. That was my goal growing up because my oldest brother had served in the Marine Corps during the Korean Conflict. A year later, I was assigned to duty with a tank platoon in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam. While under fire, I was struck with shrapnel and received facial wounds. The impact lifted me off the ground and the force of landing fractured my second and third cervical vertebrae.

I spent a year-and-a-half in hospitals in Vietnam, Walter Reed, and the Great Lakes Naval Hospital recovering from my injuries. While in the hospital, I appreciated the volunteers that came to visit. They helped brighten our days. After receiving my discharge from the Marine Corps, I proceeded through school and on with my life.

I was recently encouraged by my wife to volunteer at the Tomah VA Medical Center. I've never liked hospitals and was not sure that my visits would make a difference. In the last few months, while volunteering with my puppy, Gabe, I have come in contact with many veterans who have proudly served our great country. Seeing the smiles that Gabe brings to the faces on the ward makes me realize that our visits bring a little joy to the patients.

I understand that these patients may not be close enough to home to have visitors. Gabe reminds everyone of the pets they miss during their inpatient stay, or those that they loved in past years. Gabe wants to please everyone, and seeing the response that he gets from veterans has shown me that it is worth the effort to come visit. We help brighten the days of patients, and we are proud to do so.

As a veteran, I am thankful that I can play a role in bringing cheer into the days of these brave men who have served to keep America the "land of the free, and the home of the brave."

Thanks for letting me help.

Gary Wheeler  
Tomah VA Medical Center  
Tomah, WI



Prior to becoming involved with VA Voluntary Service, I had a fulfilling twenty-two year military career in the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force. Following my retirement I had ample free time and I was doing little that made me feel I was making a difference. After my home projects were caught up, I started volunteering with the Prescott VA Medical Center. That was approximately fifteen years ago and I am enjoying every day that I am on the job.

Volunteering is simply my way of giving back to a country that provided me with a productive, rewarding career. At the same time, I'm helping those that served and are now in need of assistance. I consider myself a people-person, and I get a lot of self-gratification when helping those in need. If what I do today helps a veteran walk a little taller tomorrow then I have accomplished my reason for being here.

The great people that I work with keep me coming back. In all honesty, volunteering has done as much for me as I have done for the veterans. Everyday that I volunteer I have the pleasure of hearing veterans thank me for what I do. It is a pleasure and an honor to continue to serve others through VA Voluntary Service.

John H. Been  
Northern Arizona VA Health Care System  
Prescott, AZ



As a boy in the Panhandle of Texas during World War II, my ambition in life was to become a soldier. I tried to enlist a time or two, but they told me to come back when I was older, taller and my voice had changed. I did wait until 1947 to volunteer, but it required a small fib. Volunteering for the service while I was young seemed to be the start of something in my life. Besides, it was my country and it needed my help. I still think in those terms, despite the fact that the volunteering I do today requires a different skill set.

In the military, it was said that you should never volunteer, and that was good advice. I remember one incident that involved standing in formation and the cunning words of an old, mean Master Sergeant. Of course, at that time anybody over twenty-five years of age was old to me, and if he had one or more stripes you can bet he was mean. He asked, "Does anybody here know how to drive a Cadillac?"

A dozen hands went up, and each of those hands became a volunteer to push wheelbarrow loads of sand the rest of the day. I learned that I had to be careful when I considered volunteering, and over the next twenty-five years of my military career I became a master at it.

I became a flyer by volunteering. It was romantic work except when you were actually performing it. Your work area was small, with few amenities during flight, and getting shot at while performing your job. However, while strutting around on the ground in your flight suit and sunglasses it was a great line of work. One look told all the "ground pounders" you were a flyer. Volunteering allowed me to become an instructor and an explosives safety inspector. These were all jobs that I loved and I positioned myself in them by volunteering.

My service in the Air Force resulted in a knee injury that eventually brought me to VA for medical care. On my first visit I was impressed with those running around in blue vests or jackets. I learned they were volunteers and I knew that I was on the verge of my next volunteer assignment.

VA Voluntary Service provided me an opportunity to serve those with backgrounds similar to mine. I have driven the parking lot shuttle, conducted tours of the facility, made follow-up phone calls to patients, and gave speeches at schools and other places in the community. In short, it is some of the most rewarding work I have ever done. I only wish that I had started sooner because I now recognize this as a great way to support my heroes.

Bob Parrish  
Boise VA Medical Center  
Boise, ID

I am a retired Marine serving as the Hospital Service Coordinator at the VA Medical Center in Batavia, New York. I help veterans get to medical appointments at VA clinics when they can't provide their own transportation. I have a personal goal to leave this life a net contributor. I want to know that the society and culture benefit from my life's works. Volunteering in a meaningful, purpose-filled job is a great way to utilize my retirement time to work towards my goal.

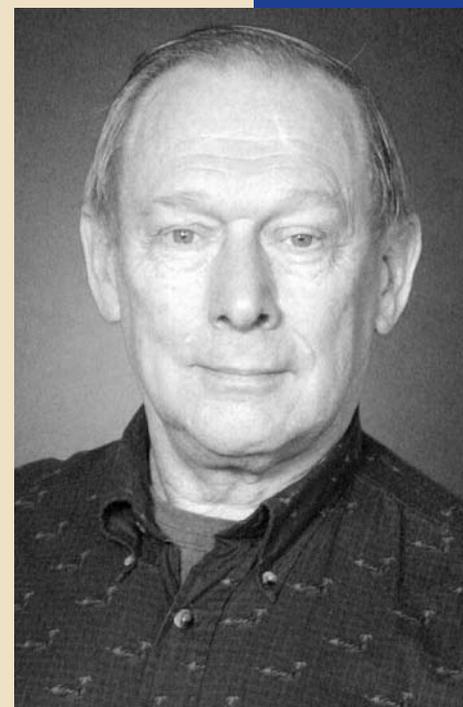
There are many advantages to volunteering. The most important to me is feeling that my efforts are helping others in a meaningful way. Many veterans need our assistance and I am able to help them from having to choose between eating, adequate housing, and needed medical care. We provide for their needs each day and usually receive the unfailing gratitude of those helped.

Another advantage I enjoy in my volunteer work is the wonderful people I interact with on a day-to-day basis. The staff are, by the very nature of their occupations, caring people and always pleasant. Also, I enjoy working with other volunteers. Two volunteers that I frequently interact with are women that through their spirit, attitudes, and actions inspire me in my service to veterans.

Finally, I volunteer because it sustains the ordered, disciplined life that I enjoy. I have a reason to get up every day, and a place where I am expected to be. I would be missed if I failed to be at my volunteer assignment. What could be worse in retirement than sensing you are a burden, and feeling that there is nowhere that you would be missed?

In my mind, the veterans of World War II are particularly heroic. I feel best when I know that I have helped someone of that generation. They left home, some volunteers but most draftees, did not want to go to war but fulfilled their duty without complaining. I believe we live well in America because of these men and women. May we never forget them, and may we do all we can to provide for their needs.

Paul Judkins  
VA Western New York Health Care System  
Batavia, NY



# sacrifice



Volunteering at the Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital has provided me many great experiences. Yet, the most rewarding thing that I am able to do while volunteering is simply visit with veterans. These men and women served our country and represent a tremendous piece of our nation's history. They are the part of history that so often goes unrecognized. They are the part of history that you seldom read about in textbooks; they are the part of history with pages locked inside their memories. Coincidentally, they are also the part of history from which America can glean the most pride.

It has been my privilege and honor to work with these men and women who have sacrificed so much for our country. The sacrifices that I have made to volunteer pale in comparison to those of the veterans that I serve. Their faultless strength, bravery, wisdom and undying patriotism are things I am in awe of each time I walk into Hines. I have learned life-changing lessons from each and every veteran with whom I come in contact. Most importantly, I have gained a vast appreciation and respect for our nation's veterans and all that our country represents. The United States of America takes pride in its freedom and democracy. We enjoy these things because of the sacrifices made by veterans. Veterans like my grandfather...veterans that I have the privilege of serving each day as I volunteer.

Jennifer Kelly  
Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital  
Hines, IL



I was motivated to become involved with VA Voluntary Service because I come from a family of soldiers. My father was a Marine during World War I. He fought through the trenches of Europe enduring the shelling, threats of poison gas, mud, cold, lice and rats. He spoke of his buddies lost in battle and never forgot them.

My husband landed on Omaha Beach in the Normandy Invasion, I had three brothers in the military during the Korean Conflict, my son is an Army Reserve veteran and my son-in-law has two Purple Hearts from Vietnam. Our family loves parades and I tear up every time the flag passes, especially when I see older veterans trying to stand as tall as they did when they were battle ready. We are a family that does not forget veterans, and volunteering is an outward expression of my remembrance.

I love the United States of America and want to honor all those that have, in the past or present, protected and served this Nation. I am proud to put on my green jacket and volunteer name badge and be allowed to be of service to those who helped make our country great. Both soldiers and volunteers sacrifice to provide service to others. Obviously, one does so to a much greater extent, but both are honorable and exemplify the American spirit. The donation of our time as volunteers cannot begin to compare with that given during a single day of combat. Still, I am honored to volunteer to ensure those that served know they are remembered.

Mary Alice Dalton  
James A. Haley VA Medical Center  
Tampa, FL

I have been a volunteer at the Asheville VA Medical Center for 53 years. When I began volunteering I was still working, but I knew I wanted to help the veterans of our country. I knew I could find the time to do it because it was important. No matter how much I do I never feel that I can do enough. Our veterans have paid such a heavy price for our freedoms. Soldiers give of themselves by means of sacrifice, bravery, courage, and love for our Nation. That merits any amount of sacrifice that I must make in volunteering to serve them as veterans.

I feel good about volunteering and it gives me an inner peace that I cannot explain. My most enjoyable times are spent listening to what is on their minds. I try to encourage them, and sometimes just being there lifts their spirits. If I can make the veterans more comfortable in some way, or help them with simple things I know that I have made a difference. Watering plants, getting newspapers, and finding socks are all little things, but it is the underlying thoughtfulness that truly makes an impact. Some are unable to come to the activity room where I sing and play the piano, so I take my singing to them. Most of the time it is their favorite hymns that bring back the fondest memories.

As volunteers, we should love our work and take pride in our duties. I try to be that type of volunteer. We can make sacrifices, be brave, and display courage and love for those who have given so much. I sacrifice many things to volunteer: other meetings, friends and family get-togethers, and money to pay for transportation to get to the Medical Center – and it feels good to do so. I often tell people they should join me here and volunteer. What a great feeling it gives a person when they help others in need. We live fulfilling lives when we show love and help others. I am proud of the service that I provide through VAVS and I will continue to encourage others to do the same.

Ruby Jones  
Asheville VA Medical Center  
Asheville, NC

Volunteering at the Battle Creek VA Medical Center is my way of recognizing the sacrifices made by veterans and their families. The Voluntary Service program offers many opportunities. I am involved as an Ambassador where my duties include: greeting people as they enter the building, helping them find their way around the facility, ensuring wheelchairs are available for their use, transporting them in their wheelchairs from one location to another, spending time visiting and listening to their stories, encouraging them in their daily struggles, and wishing them well as they exit.

Performing these duties is my way of giving back to those individuals who have sacrificed to obtain and preserve my freedoms to worship according to my conscience and speak freely. Faith is the cornerstone of the service that I provide, and many veterans express their appreciation for my willingness to share uplifting messages with them.

It is an honor and privilege to serve them. When I am able to make the person I am serving smile I truly feel blessed to be able to make their day a little brighter. The adage that “it is better to give than to receive” is practiced and affirmed through my volunteer experiences each day.

Howard Clapp  
Battle Creek VA Medical Center  
Battle Creek, MI



On a chilly, gray November morning, Richard lifted himself from the earthen hole that had been his home for many months. The South Dakota farm boy, now an American infantry man somewhere in France, could only prepare for another day in the bitter battle. Though the damage to his lungs from the poisonous gas would have long-term effects on his health, he had survived for now. Many others had not. That day in early November 1918 was his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday and it would bring him the best birthday gift ever. The end of the Great War would allow him to plan for his future. He had sacrificed for the greater good, believing that he had fought this “war to end all wars” for his children and grandchildren.

The Great War would prove to not be the last. Richard’s son was soon stringing telegraph wire through the jungles in New Guinea and fighting in the Philippines. He would catch malaria in the jungle and would always carry quinine with him as a reminder of World War II. This son would never talk about the horrors he experienced in the jungles.

Neither man thought of himself as a hero, just ordinary citizens that answered the call to duty. Richard came to the United States and started a family, but died of complications from the poisonous gas before he could meet his granddaughter – my mother. Richard’s son, after World War II, also came back to the United States and started a family, but lost a battle with cancer before he could meet his granddaughter – me.

These two members of my family are among the thousands that willingly sacrificed so much for this country. Today, I serve with tremendous pride with my classmates in the VA Voluntary Service program. I volunteer in honor of the sacrifices made by my family members and countless others. I am proud of the legacy I have been given and will share my family’s stories with my own children.

Maren Cannell  
South Texas Veterans Health Care System  
San Antonio, TX

# defining moment



I have been a volunteer at the Beckley VA Medical Center for a short time. I must admit, in the beginning, I was volunteering just to satisfy a school requirement. However, on January 17<sup>th</sup> of this year my motivation changed. I now know that there is more to volunteering than just the number of hours worked. There is a real joy that you get when you do good things for others and they recognize your efforts. It is a feeling that no money can buy – only through volunteering can you receive this gift.

On that cold afternoon we left the Voluntary Service office to go to a veteran's room and wish him a happy birthday. As we approached the room the nurse informed us that the gentleman was sleeping. She had just tried to wake him but had no success. We decided that we would drop off his gift and quietly leave the room. Once inside his room we placed the gift within his reach, but then paused. We decided to sing "Happy Birthday" despite him being asleep.

While we sang the veteran opened his eyes slightly, smiled and whispered, "thank you". He repeated himself very quietly a couple of times and it really touched my heart. He was happy that we were there and that we took the time to recognize him on his special day. His smile and gentle words made me realize the gifts that only volunteering can provide. It makes me proud to know that I was able to put a smile on his face that day.

Adeola Fagbemi  
Beckley VA Medical Center  
Beckley, WV

*If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.  
– Booker T. Washington*

To me, a volunteer is someone who agrees to do a job without getting anything in return. This was my attitude when I began volunteering with the Battle Creek VA Medical Center. I had an interest in talking with local veterans about their military experiences, so I was assigned to the Library of Congress' Stories of Service project as a youth film producer. My first task was to interview and create a short documentary on the life of Marine Corporal Duane E. Dewey. He was a Korean War veteran who received the Medal of Honor for outstanding heroism in combat. Though he lived more than three hours away, Mr. Dewey graciously agreed to drive three hours so I could interview him before we got started with the documentary. I was excited to meet him, but I knew the honor and responsibility that came with working with a man who is a living legend in the Marine Corps. However, any nervousness soon passed as I shook Mr. Dewey's hand.

He was a nineteen-year-old kid, fresh from the farmland of southern Michigan who was seeking adventure and a healthy paycheck from the United States Marine Corps. I listened intently about basic training and I tried to understand his fear when he described his deployment to Korea that changed his life forever. Then he revealed what happened on April 16, 1952. His unit of eighty Marines came under attack by over 700 communist infantrymen. It was still hard for him to describe the fighting he experienced that night, but the word "desperate" is one he used that sticks in my mind. He said that he went through so much ammunition in the first few minutes of battle that the barrel of his machine gun glowed red in the moonlight, and yet he continued to fight until he ran completely out of ammo. As he searched for bullets, an enemy grenade exploded beneath him, ripping his leg to shreds and knocking him off his feet. A medic began to administer first aid when a second grenade landed right next to him. He didn't have the strength to throw it out of range of his comrades, so he rolled onto the grenade as it exploded, shielding his fellow marines from the blast. The explosion threw him several feet and filled his body with shrapnel. Mr. Dewey said he lay there for several hours as the battle raged on around him, refusing medical attention because he didn't expect to survive. It was not until the Marines had successfully routed the enemy that he allowed himself to be taken to a field hospital.

As I listened to Mr. Dewey, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I couldn't get over the fact that this man had actually thrown himself onto a grenade and survived. I was mesmerized as he went on to talk about the phone call

he received one year later, which summoned him to the White House, where he was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Mr.



Dewey remembered that when the President shook his hand that day, he leaned over and said, “Son, you must have a body made of steel.” It must be true when you consider his miraculous recovery that left him active with minimal disabilities.

As we wrapped up the interview, I was struck that although he is one of the most celebrated veterans alive, Mr. Dewey is really an unassuming and humble man, not unlike the millions of other veterans who

consider their military service was no big deal. They believe they were doing what was asked of them. Whether we realize it or not, unsung heroes like Mr. Dewey are all around us, waiting to tell their stories.



I’ve enjoyed getting to know many people at the VA, but the time I spent with Mr. Dewey is the highlight of my experiences. The opportunity to know and learn from him taught me what a true hero and patriot is, and helped set the stage for other projects I have been involved in. Looking back, I realize that my attitude when I started volunteering was partially wrong. The relationships, knowledge, and work experience that I have gained from volunteering with the VA cannot be adequately described. It has made me a better person and more aware of this unique privilege we as volunteers have; to give a little bit back to a veteran who has given so much for us.

Andrew Layton  
Battle Creek VA Medical Center  
Battle Creek, MI

I became a volunteer because I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn new things. I have been able to learn new technical skills, basic job responsibilities, and many things about career fields that may be of interest later in life.

Volunteering makes me feel good about myself. I know I am helping the staff get their work done and I am learning to do the various tasks that encompass their positions. Just being here everyday to help people is worthwhile.

I keep coming back because of the wonderful experiences that I have had while volunteering. One very memorable moment occurred when I assisted with a Stand Down. This Stand Down event was held so that homeless veterans could attend and receive helpful information, a good meal, warm showers, and clothing. I was there to be an escort, so I took people around to the various tents that were set up and answered questions.

I approached an elderly gentleman to ask if he would like my help. He quickly replied, "Yes Ma'am, I would." He asked me to stay with him the entire time that he was there, so I helped him get around to all the tents. We began talking about football because I could tell he enjoyed the topic. He went on-and-on about his favorite teams and games that he had seen. After the day was over he thanked me, gave me a quick smile and walked away.

When I got home I sat down and thought about all the different people that I had helped during the event. Above all, the elderly gentleman stuck out in my mind. Maybe it was the fact that he wanted me to stay with him the entire time, or maybe it was how he enjoyed our conversation. It seems he just wanted someone to listen to him, and to talk to him while he was at the event. It made me feel really great about myself that I could be that person for him. It made me want to be there for other people that just want someone to listen to them, or someone to tell them hello. It made me realize how much my volunteer work makes a difference in the lives of others.

Coy Conway  
VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics  
White City , OR

I became involved with VAVS to show my appreciation to the veterans who served our country during war and peacetime. They gave years of their lives so that we would remain a safe and free nation. I've been fortunate to serve in a number of assignments during my tenure as a volunteer, but one of the greatest experiences I have had came through the Adopt-A-Veteran program.

My sister and I adopted a veteran that, for the purposes of this story, we will call Jim. When we met Jim the clinical staff informed us that he had severe short-term memory loss. This meant that he could remember everything up until approximately 1985, but remembered little thereafter. His doctor explained that he would never recall our names, the places that we would take him or even where his room was located in the Medical Center.

We visited Jim for several months until we felt we knew him and we became familiar with his condition. We began to take Jim off VA grounds to go out and eat or to my home for a simple visit. These things fostered a tremendous relationship between him and my family. My husband and three sons loved having him over; and we did so for Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, and even for birthday parties. We all fell in love with Jim.

One day I went to pick Jim up from the VA and after seeing me walk in he said my name. He remembered my name! The doctor said he could not believe what he heard. He, himself, had worked with Jim for ten years yet Jim did not know his name.

That is one of the moments that stand out in my mind, and it remains an incredible defining moment of my volunteer service. The helping hand that I have provided veterans like Jim has led to blessings that I cannot express. By giving to them I have received so much more in return. I feel very blessed and I know that I am a better person because of my experiences as a volunteer with VA.

Donna Clary  
Chillicothe VA Medical Center  
Chillicothe, OH



My interest in oral history began when I was writing my Masters thesis on the use of storytelling and creative arts in the older adult population. In 2004, my great uncle died at the age of 97. He had served in World War II and was the recipient of a Bronze Star Medal for saving many lives. I realized then that I had not really heard his story about the war, and by the time I became interested he was too ill to tell me. At his funeral he received full military honors and I felt so proud that he had served our country. Although I was saddened by his death, I promised myself that I would try to gather the stories of veterans who have not yet had a chance to tell others. At this same time, my father, a Merchant Marine in World War II was approaching his mid-eighties and I decided that I wanted to know more about his service. I discovered the Veterans History Project and I began to interview my father. This led me to become a volunteer at the Los Angeles Ambulatory Care Center.

Prior to volunteer work with VA, I planned to work in end-of-life care with older adults. I wanted to use stories and the creative arts to assuage the passing of life. After experiencing several defining moments with the veterans, I decided to devote my passion and skills to this very special population.

I started volunteering when I was a teenager in summer camp. While raising my children I was always the first one to raise my hand when asked to help out. At work I was the one who took on special projects and activities. This led to my involvement in my union and working through the ranks from an active Board Member to Chief Steward, and ultimately, to President. I did this for twelve years and spent countless hours listening, advocating and negotiating to help make the workplace better for employees. This often meant sacrificing my own personal social activities. During this time I discovered the rewards of being able to listen to other people in need and advocate for them. Seeing the results of a stronger contract and better benefits for the worker was very rewarding and I still enjoy the satisfaction that comes from helping others.

I was interested in volunteering for the Veterans History Project because I was particularly concerned with the death rate of World War II veterans. When I first started I was in unfamiliar territory. I did not know then what I know now about the culture of veterans who have served during peace or wartime. I have listened to countless stories from this special group of people who have served our country. The more I listened the more they shared. Each day I learned something new and gained insight into their experiences. My interaction with the male and female veterans of all ages broadened my understanding of what it means to be a member of the Armed Services.

After working with the Veterans History Project, I decided to start a project of my own for the veterans in the Mental Health Day Treatment Center. I created and implemented a creative art and poetry group. I worked closely with social workers to help recruit the veterans that showed an interest in writing. While the project was a risk I knew that I should proceed, and with the support of John DeSoto, Voluntary Service Program Site Manager, I did. Hesitant at first, the veterans soon realized the potential that writing held to help express their feelings. Using a different poem each session, the veterans wrote in response to the reading and discussed the poem. Each week brought new insight into their stories and feelings. Their responses were often poignant and insightful. The first defining moment that I experienced occurred when they came back with the poems they had written during the week.

As the group continued to write and share their feelings, I witnessed their newfound voice. For many of the veterans talking about their experience was difficult. Suddenly, using writing as a tool, they were able to write down these feelings in poetic form. The success of the group is evidenced by their ongoing attendance and by their willingness to share and discuss their writings.

The second and most profound defining moment for me as a volunteer took place when the group asked if they could read their poems to an audience. This led to a reading at the National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans program held in February of this year. The room was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. It was greater than I could have ever imagined as I watched their peers pay close attention and applaud after each read their poem. What could be more gratifying than that? This is what makes volunteering so special – to be of service and to see the rewards of your efforts and know that you have helped validate a special group of people.

I believe there will be more defining moments as I continue my volunteer work with VA. There are so many that simply need someone to listen to the stories that they have to tell. The veterans continue to thank me for showing them a new way to express their feelings. They tell me that it helps them to cope with their problems and they look forward to coming to the poetry group. However, I feel that I should be the one thanking them for what they provide me. What I get in return for volunteering is priceless.

Hannah Menkin  
VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care System  
Los Angeles Ambulatory Care Center  
Los Angeles, CA

It was one of those dreary days when I just wanted to stay in and work around the house, but a friend called and told me that some really nasty weather was expected. She suggested that I go out and get whatever I needed before I got snowed in for the weekend. I had not planned on going anywhere that day, much less to an art supply store; however, since I was now going out for groceries I thought I might as well get some paint for the project I was working on. Once on the road, I headed for my usual arts and crafts store, but halfway there remembered a new store closer to my home. I decided to check it out.

As I crossed the parking lot, I was vaguely aware of someone behind me and I knew when I went right, she went left. In a few minutes our paths crossed as we were going opposite ways but we took little notice of one another. At the counter, I showed the cashier the bottle of paint that I had brought with me for comparison. With the information I needed I turned to resume shopping and there stood the woman. I smiled and she smiled back. As I passed her she called out my name.

“Nancy? You are Nancy Rogers, aren’t you?” she asked with a big smile.

“Yes.” I assured her, smiling back. I quickly searched my tired head but found no idea of who she was.

“Oh, Nancy!” she exclaimed as she grabbed me by the arms in a vice-like grip. She then turned and looked over her shoulder to tell the clerk, “This is Nancy Rogers! She’s the kindest, sweetest, most caring, most generous woman you’d ever want to meet. She’d give you the shirt off her back!” Several people had stopped to listen and I felt rather uneasy, but tried to keep an even, pleasant expression. The woman continued for several seconds with generous praise. I knew that I must have met her through my work at the Asheville VA Medical Center, but I honestly couldn’t place her. In the fifteen years that I had volunteered there I had met hundreds of people. Finally, she turned back to me.

“Oh, I know that you probably don’t remember me, but do you remember Bonnie?” Before I could say more than a simple yes, she continued.

“I knew you would. We remember you and have thought about you often, especially over the holidays. You know, since Bonnie’s husband passed away last Fall she finds it hard to come here, but she’d really like to visit you. You know what?”

I shook my head.

“Bonnie did exactly what she said she was going to do with that drawing.” She got quiet.

“She did?” I responded softly touching her arm. I knew who she was talking about now and though I really didn’t recognize her, I remembered the group, especially Bonnie. Her husband was very ill and she came to see him everyday for months. She would stop at the Information Desk where I work the afternoon/evening shift and admire whatever I happened to be drawing that day. Sometimes she would ask me to sing a hymn for them. Part of my job has become singing for the patients, staff, visitors and others as well as drawing pictures for them while I provide them whatever information they need to know.

“Bonnie was so happy that you would go to all that trouble for her husband,” she explained.

“I remember the drawing and that day quite well,” I said. “I only wish that I could have finished the drawing sooner, so he could have seen it.”

“Oh, we believe he saw it,” she assured me. “Bonnie placed a copy of it in his casket and has another hanging in her living room. Every time she looks at it she thinks of you and her husband. It makes her smile.”

I noticed that of the people that were still listening to our exchange some had tears in their eyes, as did the lady with whom I was speaking. “It’s all right...it will take time,” I told her as I gave her a hug.

She smiled at me, “You are still drawing aren’t you?”

“Absolutely! In fact, there is an Art Show at the VA next Thursday and I have three pieces in it. Here’s the odd thing...” I said, trailing off.

“What?” she asked looking puzzled.

“That very drawing, the one I did for Bonnie’s husband is the third one that I chose to enter into the show. I almost didn’t choose it.”

She broke into the biggest smile and her whole face lit up! “Wait until I tell Bonnie! This will make her day. Oh, I hope it wins. When and where is the show?”

“Now don’t get your hopes up. There are a lot of talented people entered in the show. It is next Thursday at the VA.” As it turned out, they wouldn’t be able to make it because of prior commitments, but she said she would get back in touch with me to find out how it went. She gave me a big bear hug and we said our goodbyes.

I finished my shopping and went to the car and that is when it hit me. I have always loved volunteering at the VA. To me, it is rewarding and I know that I am doing something that is needed, and I’m giving back to a special group of people. I am a disabled veteran myself, so I know what it is like for many of those I serve. However, this was the first time I could remember actually seeing the results of my work...the results of something that I did. There is a lesson here for everyone. Even the smallest kindness, no matter how silly it may seem to you may have deep, far reaching effects greater than you could have ever imagined.

When I started that drawing it was just another drawing. It was something that I hoped would be pretty. Then it became so much more...and now, even more. A piece of paper with some colors on it, a lot of love and an ocean of memories surrounding it; I’ll never be able to look at that drawing, or any other drawing, the same way again.

Now I know for sure that I make a difference as a volunteer at the VA Hospital. If I ever had any doubts they are gone forever. One never knows how a smile, a warm hello, a song, a simple drawing, a hug, or just listening will affect someone now or down the road.

How does volunteering make me feel? Like I’m doing something right, something for the Lord and something good for me. I would recommend it to everyone. Give it a try and you won’t be disappointed. It is the best thing you could ever do with your time and the rewards are spectacular!

Nancy Rogers  
Asheville VA Medical Center  
Asheville, NC

I am a World War II veteran that has been volunteering with the VA Western New York Healthcare System for the past six years. I became interested in volunteering with VA because I had worked with Pharmacy Service and Voluntary Service during my career. Volunteering provides me the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of veterans while staying close to an organization and staff that have come to mean so much to me. My volunteer work allows me to interact with veterans on a day-to-day basis. I answer telephones and greet patients and visitors as they enter. I try to say hello to all veterans that I come into contact with so that I can help bring some cheer into their day.

I have seen many amazing things in my time with VA. Still, I believe the most remarkable times were spent working with Prosthetics. To watch a veteran go from having no legs to having prostheses that allow him or her to walk again is truly incredible. I cannot thank veterans enough for what they have done for themselves, their families, and for America. I recommend that anyone who is thinking about volunteering do so through the VA Voluntary Service program. Young or old, the time you are able to spend talking to veterans and hearing their stories will more than validate your decision. I truly enjoy what I do, and I am proud to be a VA volunteer.

Helen Jacob  
VA Western New York Healthcare System  
Buffalo, NY



# grateful nation



I have always felt close to our veterans because I had five brothers in World War II. I lost one brother while he was serving with the Marines. Later, I had two sons who served in the Vietnam War. I joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary approximately twenty-eight years ago and started volunteering at the Fresno VA Medical Center. My volunteer work was more rewarding than anything else I had ever done. It filled me with pride to know that I was doing something so worthwhile.

We need volunteers because there is always something we can do to help hospitalized veterans. Pushing patients in wheelchairs to their clinical appointments, serving coffee or delivering mail are just a few things we can do to show veterans, both men and women, how proud and grateful we are of their sacrifices. We gladly listen to them when they want to talk about their experiences, and they are so grateful for anything we do for them. They deserve help and attention from all of us. This country should do all we can to show our support and gratitude for the many sacrifices made by our soldiers. They have gone beyond the call of duty to make this country safe and free for all of us. May God bless each of them. Let us keep volunteering for veterans and when we volunteer we can be proud of our service.

Dottie McClelland  
VA Central California Health Care System  
Fresno, CA



I learned at a very early age to, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The example my parents unknowingly set for me by helping others has had a lifelong influence on me.

My first recollection of volunteering came during World War II when I was between the ages of four and eight years old. I vividly recall tearing the paper labels off all of the empty tin cans that once held our food, smashing them down with my feet, throwing them in a bushel basket, and giving them to the collectors that came by to gather them.

The materials were used in the war effort to build planes, tanks and other armament. Food was rationed because it was needed to feed our military, so we were given a set amount of tokens to buy food every month. Families were encouraged to grow Victory Gardens to supplement their needs and to share the food with other families.

I also remember the men who volunteered as Air Raid Wardens. They would come through the neighborhood at night during heightened alerts to make sure that no lights were coming from houses that could be seen by possible enemy aircraft. People were praised and made to feel good for participating in these activities that helped the United States win World War II.

The same feelings of accomplishment, pride, compassion and helpfulness have remained with me throughout my life of volunteering. During my school years I served on many committees to better the lives of the students. I began my professional career as a result of being a volunteer working with children who had developmental delays and their families. I’ve served on numerous committees involving the welfare of people in the community. Currently, I volunteer twice a week at the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System in Tucson, Arizona. I am honored to be able to assist the veterans and their families in receiving the care they so richly deserve.

I have three sons, all of whom served with pride in the military during peacetime. My husband is a disabled veteran who served in the



Army during World War II. When he tells stories of his wartime experiences I am in awe of him. Likewise, I am in awe of all those who have served and continue to serve in the military so that we remain a free nation. As a nation we need to continually express our thanks to each veteran we meet. We need to do everything in our power to ensure that they receive whatever care they need as a result of serving our country. I am grateful to all veterans and for the opportunity to serve them.

Janet Kenigsberg  
Southern Arizona VA Health Care System  
Tucson, AZ

*Never doubt that a small group  
of thoughtful, committed citizens  
can change the world; indeed,  
it's the only thing that ever has.*

*-Margaret Mead*

I am one of thousands who serve as a volunteer in a VA Medical Center throughout the United States. Currently, I serve refreshments to veterans at the VA Outpatient Clinic in Martinez, California. The main reasons that I became a volunteer were my late husband's encouragement and the stories he told me of being a medic in the Army during World War II. He related vivid, gory accounts of how he rescued and cared for the injured on battlefields throughout Europe. At times, he was saddened by the many he couldn't save, but pleased with those he did. These stories inspired me to carry on the torch of caring and become a volunteer in 1982.

Today, as I come to volunteer I am as enthused to start the day as when I first began my service. As I serve refreshments, I am treated to stories about the wars and the experiences that veterans had while in the Armed Forces. I'm a good listener and they are passionate about our country and the service they provided to protect our freedom. Often, when I leave the clinic I think about the first American soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War to gain that freedom. I know that the same courage and tenacity that kept them fighting exists in all of our United States soldiers today. These men and women have willingly laid down their lives in order to protect and defend our land, and the land of our allies around the world in their time of need.

Let's honor and support these courageous veterans. They can be found in VA facilities across the country, and the best way that I know to honor them is to become involved in the VA Voluntary Service program.

Elaine Renas  
VA Northern California Health Care System  
Martinez Outpatient Clinic and Center for Rehabilitation and Extended Care  
Martinez, CA

Frankly, I became a volunteer because I felt guilty for not serving. I was too young for action in Korea and by the time the Vietnam War began I was married with two little boys. For many years, it bothered me how badly many people treated our returning Vietnam service men and women. While countless veterans came home with missing limbs and damaged minds so many others did not return at all. It hurt me so much because I never did what I felt was my duty.

However, it came to me that I could possibly do something now to pay a little back for the service I felt I should have provided. Fifteen years ago, I began driving others to Alcoholic Anonymous meetings. This helped me a lot to get over the feelings I had, but it didn't alleviate the void completely. It was almost five years ago when I learned that VA needed drivers for the Disabled American Veteran-Volunteer Transportation Network van, so I quickly volunteered to help and have been doing it ever since.

It is a bittersweet job. I am happy that I can do something for those that have given me a free country to live in, but sometimes I am saddened at the number of people that gave so much. I know that I get more out of what I do than the veterans I serve. Thank God for all of them.

Jim Cornell  
Tomah VA Medical Center  
Tomah, WI



Volunteering has been the most rewarding “job” I’ve had. There is a bumper stick that proudly states, “I love my career: I’m a volunteer!” I started volunteering in 1983 at nursing homes, and then with VA in Buffalo, New York in 1996, and I can say that statement is true.

My Dad was an Army veteran and served at Pearl Harbor and in occupied Japan during World War II. Although he never talked about the devastation he saw after the Japanese bombed the U.S. fleet nor the catastrophic losses in both property and life in Japan, he was moved by them and always encouraged my sister and I to appreciate our country. My parents always flew an American flag, and my Dad never failed to pick up a serviceman who was hitchhiking to get home. Dad would take him wherever he needed to go, even if it was out of our way. We always attended our local Fourth of July parade, and stood respectfully as the veterans marched by us proudly displaying the nation’s flag. I was born on July 4<sup>th</sup> and at seven years old my older sister told me the truth: the floats, marching bands, and fireworks were not for me! I never remember not feeling proud to be an American and grateful to have the privileges of being born here.

My volunteer position with VA started because of an experience my Dad had while hospitalized at the White River Junction VA Medical Center. Some school children had made decorations for the food trays on Easter, and Dad was impressed that children would do that for people they didn’t know. His reaction made me realize how important little things can be when you’re sick, and how much it means to a veteran to be remembered. My family began volunteering with VA the following Christmas and I have been involved with VA Voluntary Service ever since.

Our country is not perfect. There are a lot of problems in America, but thanks to our veterans we are free! Each veteran made sacrifices for me and my family. I feel blessed that I have not forgotten his or her sacrifices and I do not take my freedom for granted. It doesn’t matter if they were a cook or a combat pilot, or whether they “saw action” or served in peacetime; each one has earned our gratitude and our respect.



If you are not currently a volunteer, let me encourage you to consider it. I am grateful to the veterans who served our nation and for the opportunity to tell them “thank you”. I enjoy putting my gratitude into action as a VA volunteer.

Brenda Wisz  
VA Western New York Health Care System  
Buffalo, NY



I became a volunteer at the Battle Creek VA Medical Center ten years ago because I wanted the sophomores I was teaching to learn history from the veterans who helped make it. Two of my students each year are paired with a veteran from World War II, Korea, or Vietnam Wars. They interview the veteran in their room, day rooms or lounge area, then go back to school and research their military experience and their lives. They find charts, maps, and modes and in the process learn to honor, respect and appreciate not only “their veteran” but also all other senior citizens. In May, the students go back to the Medical Center and present “their veteran” with a personalized notebook about their military experience and their lives. An old-fashioned picnic sets the culminating tone of a growing experience for all involved.

Spending the hundreds of hours getting the Living History Project up and running each year is enriching to me and is well worth the time and effort. I don’t think about all the work required, as it is something I will remember and cherish all my life. The students involved break the bonds of the typical student-teacher relationship through all the time spent outside the classroom. Many become friends and return to the classroom in order to share their memories and experiences with current students in the project and class.

We also have many student-veteran bonds that have lasted for many years. There are several veterans who have graduation pictures of “their student” and even pictures of “their student” with their children hanging in their rooms. The veterans, many of them having been involved in this project from the beginning, become dear friends with “their student” and with me. I have attended several funerals of those that have passed away since the beginning of the project years ago. They become like grandparents to me, and I couldn’t imagine doing anything else but meeting their families and paying our respects at their funerals. We also have a family that has financially supported this project since the passing of their father as a living tribute to him. It is a way to keep the Living History Project alive for other veterans’ families and the students.

The Battle Creek VA Medical Center has become very much a part of my teaching life and existence. I have presented the Living History Project at the National Council for the Social Studies for the past four years. In addition, I have discussed the project at numerous state conventions and in front of many groups within the Kalamazoo area. It has done great things for me. One of my greatest achievements was being honored with the Battle Creek VA

Community Service Award. What an honor it was to bring students and fellow teaching professionals to Battle Creek for a project I love so much. Still, the most important thing it has done is provided the unlikely combination of my students and Battle Creek VA Medical Center veterans and fostered relationships between them. It is the most heartwarming experience when the two forces meet, share time, and realize how much they have in common. Although their age in many cases is six decades apart and they are not related, they give of themselves to one another and form a special bond.

As a result of the Living History Project being included in the 2001 edition of *Faces of a Grateful Nation* these words will always have special meaning to me, “To honor, respect and show deep appreciation and gratitude for making our country what it is, will always be the driving force.” Having my students learn for themselves the reasons our veterans need to be honored, respected and appreciated through the Living History Project are the memories and thanks teachers will never, ever forget.

Sveri Stromsta May  
Battle Creek VA Medical Center  
Battle Creek, MI



*We can do no great things, only small things with great love.*  
– Mother Theresa

# veteran



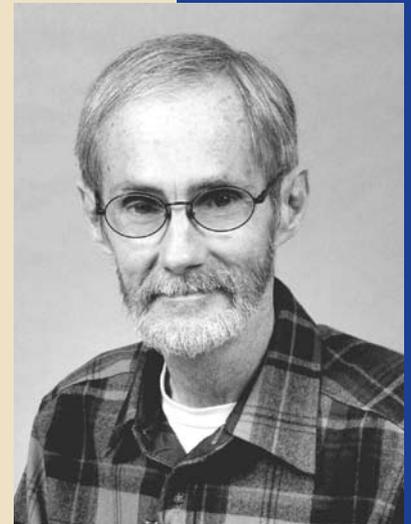
When I hear the word “veteran” the image that I envision is a Marine crouched down in a trench on Iwo Jima during World War II in the Pacific. He’s sweating, his M-1 Rifle barrel smoking while he reaches for another bandolier of ammo. He’s dirty, unshaven, with a tattered uniform and a fear in his eyes only God could understand. This man, this Marine, Sailor, Airman or Soldier, is risking his life for our freedom. As he fights for us we sleep, play, attend school; basically, we enjoy life and all the freedoms afforded us by his actions.

Too often we take for granted the privileges we have as United States citizens, and rarely take time to remember our veterans that have sacrificed for them. Maybe on Veterans Day or Memorial Day we will give these veterans a passing thought, but all too often, after that moment we will simply continue with our peaceful lives without taking action.

One morning while volunteering at the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Veterans Hospital I had the honor of escorting a veteran in his wheelchair to one of his clinical appointments. I asked him what branch of the service he served in; he quickly replied that he was a Marine and followed that statement with a hearty “Hurrah”! I told him that I was also a Marine and it prompted a story from him that I could barely believe. It turns out that I, Byron Adams, 2143592 USMC, had the honor of “wheel chairing” a man who helped raise the U.S. flag at Iwo Jima! Tears came to my eyes, I choked-up, a warm glow came over me. I stopped, stood proudly and began to quickly wipe my eyes trying not to be noticed since Marines don’t cry.

I have dedicated the rest of my years to volunteering with VA. I feel so good about my volunteer work because the truth of the matter is “freedom is not free”. Some use the term “veteran” without stopping to think what that word signifies. All who served are heroes and it is my honor to now serve them. Thank you veteran. Bless you.

Byron Adams  
South Texas Veterans Health Care System  
San Antonio, TX



I was proud to be in naval aviation during the Korean War – as a volunteer, not a draftee. Now, I am just as proud serving as a volunteer for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Looking back I realize what a valuable experience my military service was and what a resulting blessing and reward I have since enjoyed volunteering with the VA Voluntary Service program.

Each day that I volunteer is a day full of emotions. I get a chill every time I enter the Boise VA Medical Center and see the rock sign that reads, “The Price of Freedom is Visible Here”. When pushing a disabled vet in a wheelchair I often realize how fortunate I am to have all my limbs and no disabling injuries, and the phrase flashes in my mind, “There but for the grace of God go I”.

During my retirement I can think of no better way to spend my idle time than helping my fellow veterans. The experiences that I have had while serving as a volunteer have been gratifying and interesting. One experience involved a retired Army Colonel of World War II. While volunteering with me she described her duties and experiences working under General Douglas MacArthur in the Orient. On another occasion, a patient seated beside me at lunchtime chatted about his days working as Ernest Hemingway’s private mechanic in Sun Valley, Idaho. He related a story of him joining his employer, Gary Cooper and Clark Gable on a pheasant hunt.

Over a twelve-year period encounters with veterans from all walks of life have enlivened my time spent volunteering with VA. The courage and hope that most veterans emanate is admirable and I feel privileged for the involvement I have with such stouthearted men and women. Witnessing the fortitude of the veterans that I serve makes my problems miniscule.

The friendship and rapport that I enjoy with my fellow volunteers and many of the staff enriches my life and gives me a sense of accomplishment. I am able to help deserving veterans and I know that I am a better person for it.

Michael Tessier  
Boise VA Medical Center  
Boise, ID



My first experience as a VA volunteer came when I was asked to play the bugle at the groundbreaking ceremony of the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Ann Arbor on October 18, 1953. As I played “To the Colors” the flag was raised and I felt a great sense of pride. Also, I had the privilege of bringing the Veterans of Foreign Wars “house band” to entertain at the event. It was a great occasion and we were very well received.



After the hospital was completed and patients arrived, I became involved as an occasional volunteer assisting with bingo games and other entertainment. In 1961, I was persuaded by two VFW Ladies Auxiliary members to sign up as a regularly scheduled volunteer. I soon became involved in many chores, but my favorite work was serving as a patient escort. As time went by and I reached “senior citizen plus” status, I decided to bow out gracefully from this assignment; I still miss it.

These days I am an “early bird” ambassador at the Rotunda Information Desk. I greet early arrival outpatients who may need guidance. When the regular Information Desk volunteers arrive I report to the office for another assignment. Most times I receive a list of newly admitted patients on various floors. I greet and welcome them to the “best darn hospital in the Midwest”! It is always a pleasure to meet my fellow veterans.

Fred Bentz  
VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System  
Ann Arbor, MI

Let me first say that I am a veteran of the United States Navy. Through the years I have volunteered for several organizations including the Parent Teacher Association and Pop Warner Youth Football program. During the past ten years I have been volunteering with great satisfaction at the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa, Florida.

I am the mother of a veteran who was seriously injured on active duty and today is a quadriplegic. Working with my son in his rehabilitation I found complete self worth in helping him and other veterans in need of care and assistance. I began my trek working with veterans, those in similar circumstances as my son, and I have become quite adept at providing them the care and information that they need. I am proud to be a veteran helping veterans.

Two years ago, I began working with the returning injured from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. A physician alerted me to the fact that some families of returning soldiers were sleeping in their vehicles to be near their loved ones hospitalized at James A. Haley's Polytrauma Center and Spinal Cord Injury Service. Fellow volunteer Mary Ellen Harlan and I began to devise a plan of action that would address the needs of families that needed and wanted to be close to those they loved. We organized ourselves as a non-profit agency called the Haley House and are now, with information provided by Social Work Service, available to house low-income families at no cost to them. We are doing our part to take care of our nation's heroes and their families, and it fills my heart with great pleasure to make this happen.

As the mother of an injured Airman, having received the call that shattered my world, I have picked up the pieces and I am now ensuring that others do not suffer some of the financial hardships I did nineteen years ago. Volunteering and seeing the smiles of those that I have helped makes me feel wonderful. I am honored to be a part of a program with the motto "Veterans Helping Veterans".

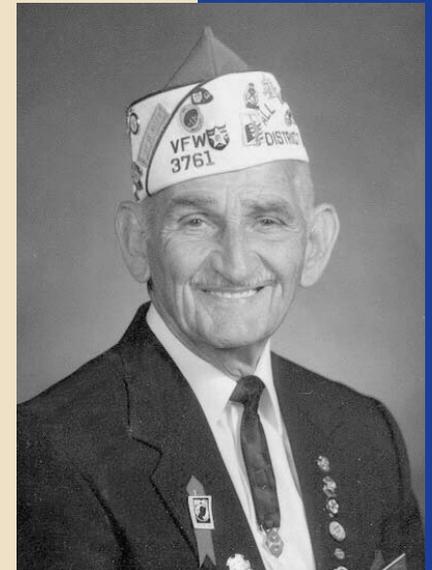
Mary Ann Keckler  
James A. Haley VA Medical Center  
Tampa, FL

I became a volunteer with the Department of Veterans Affairs over twenty-five years ago. Through VA Voluntary Service, I wanted to help those less fortunate than myself, as I am a proud veteran of World War II with a lot to give back to the community. My duties as a volunteer allow me to return the same kindness that I have received over my lifetime.

My commitment displayed in military service has carried over into my volunteer assignment. Hosting hospital related functions and providing parties, coupon books, and Christmas gifts have been rewarding experiences that I have enjoyed providing for my fellow veterans. It delights me to see a smile on the face of a veteran as he calls out “bingo” and claims the prize that I was responsible for supplying.

My military experiences have taught me that it is difficult to be away from loved ones. Thus, my volunteer duties allow me to assist patients that are alone during their hospitalization. A smile and a word of thanks make it all worthwhile, and are proof that I, George Gornall, have made a positive difference in the life of someone in need.

George Gornall  
Chillicothe VA Medical Center  
Chillicothe, OH



*No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.*  
– Aesop

# hero

*No one has learned the meaning of life until he has  
surrendered his ego to the service of his fellow men.  
– Beran Wolfe*



Why do I volunteer? I do it because it is the right thing to do. Helping people directly and indirectly can be very rewarding to one's own feeling of contribution and self worth.

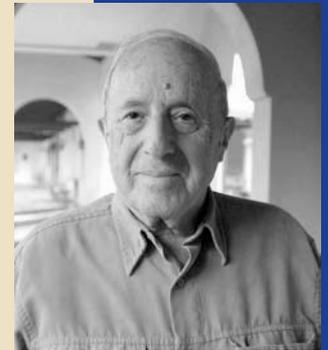
I will never forget my experience the first time I volunteered. In World War II, I was in Europe with the Fourth Infantry Division as a combat rifleman. Prior to engaging in what turned out to be one of the biggest battles of the war – the battle of Huertgen Forest in Germany – we had to reorganize our squads to account for our losses in manpower. When asked for a volunteer as a First Scout, no one responded. We all knew the extreme danger involved. Finally, as a recent replacement of other fallen soldiers, I stepped forward and volunteered. Then and there I began a lifetime of realizing that in all situations somebody has to do it!

After sustaining cold weather injuries to my hands and feet I was transported to a hospital in Wales. When I was able to walk again I slipped out of my ward and, citing my degree in chemistry, volunteered to help in the clinical lab. I worked there until I was returned to non-combat duty three months later.

Other situations in which I have volunteered followed during the course of my life, and today I am 84 years old and still at it. Currently, I volunteer with the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System twice a week at the Information Desk. There, my background allows me to relate well to other veterans of whom most are less fortunate than I. When I am at the VA I am reminded that veterans have given a part of themselves so that everyone can enjoy a higher quality of life. I meet men and women who could have been comrades-in-arms and to whom I may be of assistance.

Volunteering is not always smiles and laughs, but the positives far outweigh any negatives. When volunteering through VA Voluntary Service I can be confident that my contributions are needed. I get a tremendous amount of satisfaction from the work that I do, and most importantly, the people that I help.

Morris Kenigsberg  
Southern Arizona VA Health Care System  
Tucson, AZ



I retired from the United States Air Force with 30 years of service. For the next 15 years I taught in a local high school. In 2000, I turned 62 and decided that I was ready to move on. I was sure that I would not be spending time at home glued to a television, and was very active in the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans. I soon began volunteering at the Asheville VA Medical Center as an American Legion Service Officer.

Helping fellow veterans and their spouses deal with service-connected disabilities and other related issues is very rewarding, and a great way to volunteer my time. Many veterans receive great healthcare through the Veterans Health Administration, but have little understanding of the Veterans Benefits Administration. I have the privilege of assisting veterans that are often intimidated by paperwork and have difficulty understanding how to navigate the system and access available programs.

I recall helping a veteran who had a wife and three children. The family had been evicted from their home and was living in a tent on a campground. His initial visit to my office was to inquire about his eligibility for VA healthcare, but after learning about his situation I wanted to ensure that he was receiving all of the assistance for which he was entitled. Months later the veteran was rated 100% service-connected and the retroactive payment allowed him and his family to purchase a new home. I received a nice letter of thanks and a photo of their youngest child. That photo stays on my desk as a constant reminder that every veteran that comes through my door must be treated with respect and compassion.

The many letters, cards and phone calls I receive from the veterans that I assist are very rewarding. I'm certain they will encourage me to continue as a volunteer as long as my age and health allow.

Larry Fowler  
Asheville VA Medical Center  
Asheville, NC

I am a veteran of the United States Army and when I signed the dotted line I wholeheartedly gave myself to the service of the military. In my mind, this was not a commitment that solely spoke to the time I was on active duty. Instead, I believe that I made a commitment for the balance of my life.

I became a volunteer at the White River Junction VA Medical Center for many reasons. I volunteer because I want to honor the dedication and sacrifice demonstrated by my fellow veterans. Additionally, it makes me proud to know that I give of my time to help those in need. Knowing that you are making a difference in the lives of others is amazing. The volunteer work that I do is also fun and educational. Although I am no longer able to practice nursing, I feel my knowledge and skills are utilized through my assistance with the geriatric nursing unit. The experiences that I have had as a volunteer have helped to strengthen my confidence.

When reflecting on my service as a volunteer, one particular experience stands out. A few years ago, after shopping and running errands for an elderly couple I returned to their home to find that the husband had passed away. Understandably, the veteran's wife was beside herself and was unsure of what to do. Knowing that her children lived out of state I made the funeral arrangements, contacted family members and stayed with her until the children arrived in town to care for her. I was very touched when she explained to her children that I was the one person that made life easier for her and her late husband. She credited me for allowing them to stay in their home until his passing, and described me as a hero. Of course, I didn't feel that I was a hero, but it did my heart good to hear her express her appreciation.

I love the fact that I am able to serve others through the volunteer work that I do, and I would recommend it to anyone looking to build character and give of themselves.

Juanita Paynter  
White River Junction VA Medical Center  
White River Junction, VT

I just got in on the last two months of World War II, was sent to Alaska, and was assigned to Special Services. I spent two years in Whittier, the only bay in Northern Alaska that remained open to large ships during the winters. I'm now 77, retired, in good health and have time on my hands between the visits that I make to developing nations where I preach and assist small churches. When walking alone or with my wife, I often wear my World War II Veteran cap with the Polar Bear insignia denoting my Army outfit. The number of people in the United States and abroad that approach me to shake my hand and thank me for my military service overwhelms me.

I have been a volunteer at the James A. Haley VA Medical Center for 15 years. To serve my fellow veterans who served their country with great dignity is an honor. What a true pleasure it is to be there for them when they need a helping hand or some comforting words. They sacrificed far more than I did and yet most of them are very humble in their suffering.

One day as I pushed a Vietnam veteran's wheelchair from his inpatient unit to his appointment we began discussing the differences between the Vietnam War and World War II. As we parted ways I took the time to say, "May God bless you for your service to your country in Vietnam!" To my surprise he countered with, "Hey, thank you for serving in World War II!" I want to tell you – I was so proud!

My days are frequently filled with these inspiring moments. I am always moved when physicians, nurses, or administrative staff make a point to tell me "thank you for your service to veterans...we could not function as well as we do without you". You have to be a volunteer to really understand how tall that makes you feel. The James A. Haley VA Medical Center is an awesome place to volunteer.

Curtis Morelock  
James A. Haley VA Medical Center  
Tampa, FL

*The moral test of a society is how that society treats those who are in the dawn of life – the children; those who are in the twilight of life – the elderly; and those who are in the shadow of life – the sick, the needy and the handicapped.*

*– Hubert Humphrey*

I would like to tell you about volunteering – the best paying “job” I ever had. Once I fully retired at age 66, I golfed once or twice a week. I soon found that I was not getting the satisfaction that I needed from my day-to-day activities. I thought about the many people over my lifetime that had made a significant impact on me. The Chaplain at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri who cared for me when I collapsed with pneumonia; the First Sergeant that influenced me to sign the application for NCO Academy; and the first sales manager I worked under who taught me the ropes and the value of family. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of others and I found a way to do that volunteering with VA.

The best paying job I ever had has been with the Disabled American Veterans Transportation Program. This volunteer assignment, also referred to as the Volunteer Transportation Network, prompted me to sign-up as a volunteer driver. As a driver I go out and pick up veterans who have no ride to get to their clinical appointments. Many of these veterans cannot drive because of health conditions or financial hardship. They truly need support and I am there to help them. I know that the service I provide is critical to meeting their needs because they often tell me that they would not be able to get to their appointments if it were not for me and other drivers. The veterans are so appreciative and that is better than any paycheck.

I also enjoy some fringe benefits on my job. I have been to Gettysburg and other historical places and read about a number of heroes throughout history. However, better than any of these vacations or written accounts is the stories that I hear from the heroes that ride in my van each day I volunteer. I have the pleasure and privilege of hearing first hand accounts of Pearl Harbor, the Battle of Guadalcanal, and other famous events while volunteering.

I recall one “young” lady who told me about her military service during World War II. She joined the Navy and helped design a machine used to decipher enemy code. She later went to Washington, D.C. and worked with a special team that successfully cracked enemy code during wartime. Upon discharge, the military told her that she could not tell anyone about the job she did for 50 years. She thought that after 50 years no one would

what she did, but she was wrong. We do care about her service to our country and I see her as a true hero.

Today, I have the pleasure of making sure that she is able to access the healthcare that she has earned through her honorable service. Every day that I volunteer I go home and talk to my wife about our good fortune. So, the bottom line is this – no, I do not get money for doing what I do, but what other job pays like this? Each day I volunteer, I have 10 or more veterans who thank me over and over for what I have done for them. What a great feeling, what a great job!

Frank McIntire  
Huntington VA Medical Center  
Huntington, WV



*I expect to pass through life but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do for any fellow being, let me do it now.*

*-William Penn*

The following pages list volunteers who submitted stories for inclusion in *a million reasons - from VA Volunteers*. Although they were not selected to be featured in this publication, their dedication and commitment to America's veterans deserves special recognition.



Grace Bachman,  
Lebanon VA Medical Center  
Lebanon, PA

Louise Beaton,  
VA Central California Health Care System  
Fresno, CA

Hazel Berry,  
James H. Quillen VA Medical Center  
Mountain Home, TN

Rev. Daniel Block,  
Tomah VA Medical Center  
Tomah, WI

Jenny Bolash,  
Beckley VA Medical Center  
Beckley, WV

Elizabeth Braune,  
South Texas Veterans Health Care  
System  
San Antonio, TX

Rosemary Bressler,  
Northern Arizona VA Health Care System  
Prescott, AZ

Donavan Brown,  
VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation  
Center and Clinics  
White City, OR

Richard Buscemi,  
VA Western New York Healthcare System  
Buffalo, NY

Marguerite Cagle,  
VA Northern California Health Care  
System  
Sacramento, CA

Charles Catalina,  
VA Western New York Health Care System  
Buffalo, NY

Dolores Cornelius,  
Erie VA Medical Center  
Erie, PA

Jenny Crookshanks,  
Beckley VA Medical Center  
Beckley, WV

Howard Crull,  
Chillicothe VA Medical Center  
Chillicothe, OH

Mae Daugherty,  
South Texas Veterans Health Care System  
San Antonio, TX

Harry Dearen,  
Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center  
Houston, TX

Jack Debus,  
VA Western New York Healthcare System  
Buffalo, NY

David Doughty,  
Southern Arizona VA Health Care System  
Tucson, AZ

Cathleen Evangelista,  
VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center  
and Clinics  
White City, OR

Georgia L. Evans,  
Canandaigua VA Medical Center  
Canandaigua, NY

Susan Frasher,  
Chillicothe VA Medical Center  
Chillicothe, OH

Robbyn Frazee,  
Iron Mountain VA Medical Center  
Iron Mountain, MI

Dennis Futrell,  
Erie VA Medical Center  
Erie, PA

Gabe, Therapy Dog,  
Tomah VA Medical Center  
Tomah, WI

James Genesky,  
Chillicothe VA Medical Center  
Chillicothe, OH

Helen Glass,  
Southern Arizona VA Health Care  
System  
Tucson, AZ

Vi Gogle,  
Battle Creek VA Medical Center  
Battle Creek, MI

Billie Goodwin,  
VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care  
System  
Biloxi, MS

Hunter Grindstaff,  
James H. Quillen VA Medical Center  
Mountain Home, TN

Mary Guess,  
Chillicothe VA Medical Center  
Chillicothe, OH

George Hall,  
VA Central California Health Care System  
Fresno, CA

Nancy Herrera,  
South Texas Veterans Health Care System  
San Antonio, TX

Marianne Hopkinson,  
VA Northern California Health Care System  
Sacramento, CA

Alfred Howell,  
Boise VA Medical Center  
Boise, ID

Evelyn Hummel,  
VA Western New York Health Care System  
Buffalo, NY

John Jackson,  
Michael E. DeBaakey VA Medical Center  
Houston, TX

Pat Johnson,  
VA Western New York Healthcare System  
Buffalo, NY

Ruby Jones,  
Asheville VA Medical Center  
Asheville, NC

Shawna Kutsch,  
VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center  
and Clinics  
White City, OR

Walter Kwasniewski,  
VA Western New York Healthcare System  
Buffalo, NY

James Ladelfa,  
Canandagua VA Medical Center  
Canandagua, NY

John D. Lamont,  
Boise VA Medical Center  
Boise, ID

Robert Lance,  
New Orleans VA Medical Center  
New Orleans, LA

Sol Liebster,  
VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System  
Los Angeles, CA

Vida Martaus,  
VA Western New York Health Care System  
Batavia, NY

Arthur Mc Clelland,  
VA Central California Health Care System  
Fresno, CA

Frank Mc Ilvenna,  
VA Western New York Health Care System  
Buffalo, NY

Casey Mitchell,  
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Rehabilitation Center and Clinics  
White City, OR

Rose Mitchell,  
Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center  
Saginaw, MI

Joseph Moreno, Sr.,  
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James Mulligan,  
Asheville VA Medical Center  
Asheville, NC

Rev. Merry O'Connor,  
VA Western New York Healthcare  
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Rehabilitation Center and Clinics  
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James H. Quillen VA Medical  
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Mountain Home, TN

Molly Reckhow,  
Canandaigua VA Medical Center  
Canandaigua, NY

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Battle Creek, MI

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Fresno, CA

Catherine Shaver,  
Fayetteville VA Medical Center  
Fayetteville, AR

Paul Skogsberg,  
Orlando VA Healthcare Center  
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Maryanna Sitzlow,  
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Healthcare System  
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George Urrutia,  
Orlando VA Healthcare Center  
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Dean Weaver,  
VA Western New York  
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Batavia, NY

Jim Wilson,  
Erie VA Medical Center  
Erie, PA

Mickey Wood,  
VA Western New York Healthcare  
System  
Batavia, NY

Viviana Zazueta,  
VA Southern Oregon  
Rehabilitation Center and Clinics  
White City, OR

*Volunteering creates a national character in which the community and the nation take on a spirit of compassion, comradeship and confidence.*

*– Brian O’Connell*



*Everyone can be great because anyone can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't even have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve... You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.*

*– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

