

Submission for weekly column “Space for Reflection” in The Current

“To Feel Appreciated”

Some of them signed up. Some had no choice. Some of them saw their friends die. Some thought they would die of boredom. But when I asked one yesterday what he would want this Saturday, he said, “To feel appreciated.”

What’s this Saturday? In the United States, it’s Veterans Day. A veteran is defined as a person who has served in the armed forces. It could be man or woman, in combat or not, during time of war or peace. The main thing is, veterans spent a period of their lives in the role of protector and defender of the nation. And they just want to feel appreciated.

Imagine being in a situation where you don’t have control over where you are, what you do, or when you do it. Imagine being separated from your family and friends and not being free to pick up and visit them when you feel lonely or homesick. And those are the easiest aspects of your job! There may be times when you are exhausted, despairing, disgusted, terrified. I can’t even imagine. It must be a time that is spiritually challenging—testing, strengthening, or transforming your faith.

I know many of us have strong feelings against warfare, and fierce opinions about the war in Iraq or even the Vietnam War. That’s good. It’s important that we think deeply about these issues related to our nation’s choices and actions in the world. But are we willing to put our lives on the line for our nation? Some people are, whatever the various factors that may have led them into the armed forces. And they just want to feel appreciated.

So how do we show appreciation to our veterans, not just on Veterans Day but any day? I don’t think I have a good answer for this. What do you think? I heard recently that for months now at the Dallas airport, volunteers from all different backgrounds and religious and political affiliations meet every single plane coming in with servicemen and women in order to embrace them and thank them. That’s powerful. For me, I try to remember to say, “Thank you for your service” when I learn someone is a veteran. We honor those who lost their lives in the service on Memorial Day. I’m glad there’s a day to honor those we still have with us, so we can let them know they are appreciated.

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