

Thank You for Your Service

By Theresa Staley

Day 5: #AmericaNeedsLove I met George and his family from NYC. George is in his late 70s, a proud and humble Vietnam War Veteran. He is nestled comfortably in his wheelchair, adorned with a US bald eagle on his armrest. He is perched under a pavilion, taking in the fresh warm Florida air, and view of the glistening Atlantic Ocean.

I asked George, "Do you think America needs love?" Excited and with great fervor, he announced, "Ohhhh , yes, we do!" I probed for evidence of why and George, as he resumed his position and stance with powerful might exclaimed, "Without love, we have hate and so we gotta have hope and love to keep us going."

I didn't take George's picture, but I walked over and met his family. They were generations together- husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, children, grandchildren, and a great grandchild. I wanted to respect their time together and was thankful they were talking with me.

So, I did the only thing I could do, the thing my father-in-law, in his last days of his life taught me, which was to convey admiration, gratitude, and respect. You see, a few days before his passing, we had taken him out for a midday stroll. We came upon two men dressed in army fatigues. Insistent, he cajoled us to stop the movement of his wheelchair, where he saluted the heroes and recognized their service with gratefulness and pride.

I never forgot that. It was one of the most powerful acts of love and honor I had ever seen and through this, I then understood the magnitude and meaning of such a gesture. From that moment forward, I felt the importance of making this behavior a habit. As I listened and observed George, I thought about our land of the beautiful and home of the free, and how his courage and bravery have provided me the privileges of being an American. Therefore, I extended a sincere handshake and a warm smile, then declared with passion and wholeheartedness, "Thank you, George, for your service."

This is for George and all the men and women making each day happen for me and you.

Thank you for your service.