



## Viewpoints, Outlook

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### It could take a village to honor those who serve

On Memorial Day try some new ways to say thank you

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This Memorial Day, many of us will turn to those we know in our church, our neighborhood, and our workplace and say, "Thank you," to those who have served in our country's armed forces in peace and war. We will remember the fallen, and perhaps say a prayer for them and their loved ones.

That is all any veteran can ever ask, but for those who occasionally look around and say, "I wish I could do more," here are some ways that you can do something beyond those heartfelt words, ways to honor the dead by helping the living.

- Volunteer at the VA. There are thousands of veterans who are ill, elderly, wounded, or just hitting a tough patch of luck and who could use a hand navigating the labyrinth of rules of getting their benefits, or who just could use someone to talk to about the troubles they are experiencing. We have one of the largest VA hospitals around smack dab in the middle of Houston; why not see if you could help? Call 713-791-1414, or go to <http://www1.va.gov/volunteer>.
  - Give to the Army, Navy and Marine Corps, or Air Force Relief. Many folks don't know about these organizations; they are all volunteer groups that provide money and assistance for active duty and retired service members and their families who experience financial hardship, mostly due to their service. They provide financial assistance for the short term, counseling, and even practical items like furniture and housewares for those families who have to relocate due to changes in orders. By the way, if you cannot give cash, your time is even more valuable. Go to [www.csmahq.org](http://www.csmahq.org); [www.afas.org](http://www.afas.org); [www.nmcrs.org](http://www.nmcrs.org); [www.aerhq.org](http://www.aerhq.org) for more.
  - Adopt a family of a military member in your hometown. A lot of people, especially those married to or parents of active or mobilized reserves and Guard, are pretty quiet about it. Yet, if you ask at your work or your church, you will be surprised how many folks you know have a blood stake in this difficult time. When you find out who they are, ask if you can write to their son or daughter. Ask how they are doing; offer to do something for them, baby sit, fix a leaky pipe, whatever you can.
- Just the offer lifts their spirits and those far away who worry that there is no one to take care of their loved ones back at home. If it takes a village to raise a child, it sure takes a village to watch over those left behind.
- Write a letter or mail a package. Remember what it was like to actually get a letter from someone? In these days when most of us get only bills and credit card solicitations in the mail, most of us have no earthly idea how much of a boost it is to get a letter or a package of "nice to have" items from someone, anyone. Go to [Anysoldier.com](http://Anysoldier.com) and strike up a new friendship. Check out [www.anysoldier.com](http://www.anysoldier.com).
  - Volunteer at the USO. Yup, that old organization that used to sponsor Bob Hope is still hanging around, and there is a station right here in Houston at both of the airports. If you have a few hours each week to give to keep open a place for soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines to relax and have a friendly cup of coffee, you just helped. Maybe more than you realize. Call 1-800-901-1501 or drop into [www.uso.org](http://www.uso.org).
  - Give time or money to the veterans homes in Texas. Texas does more than a lot of places to help veterans, including running a series of nursing homes for our elderly and disabled vets. They are scattered throughout the state, and you can find out how to help with time or money by going to [www.TexasVets.Gov](http://www.TexasVets.Gov).
  - Join the Reserve or National Guard in your area. Before you say, "Oh, I couldn't," ask yourself, "Why NOT me?"

Whether you are a nurse, a baker, a computer programmer, a forklift driver, a lawyer, or a fireman or mechanic, if you think you cannot offer anything you are just plain wrong. A member of the Guard or Reserve is someone who takes up the burdens of helping or protecting their neighbors.

What could be a better or more honorable thing to do?

- Lay a wreath on a veteran's grave. There is a cemetery filled with men and women who put themselves on the line for their friends and neighbors in Houston, right out on, appropriately, Veteran's Boulevard. Maybe after services this weekend, or after the ballgame, you could stop by the flower market and drive by and say a prayer as you lay them down.

My grandmother use to say no one is a stranger before God, so whomever you honor with that prayer and those flowers will know they were remembered, and so will you and your children.

This Memorial Day, thank you for remembering those who served.

*The author is an attorney in Houston and a reservist recalled to active duty this past year.*

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