

8 Ways to Thank a Veteran—This Veteran's Day and Every Day

As far as military families go, I'm a brat, a grandbrat, a wifebrat and a mombrat. Yes, military service runs deep in the Kay family. My grandpa died as an aircrew member in World War II, my dad retired as a chief master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force; my hubby flew fighter aircraft in the Air Force for 30 years; one of my sons graduated from the Naval Academy and is an active-duty Marine; another son graduated this year from the United States Air Force Academy and is at pilot training; and my youngest son is a junior at West Point. So when it comes to thanking our troops for their service, I really appreciate those of you who take the time to do so. Here are some more easy ways to express your appreciation:

1. Say "Thanks" – The fact that you are reading this post indicates that you probably already thank those in uniform when you see them. When people say "Thank you for your service" to my Marine son, he responds with, "Proud to serve." Be sure to also thank family members, including parents of service members, for the way they serve by supporting their military members. You can also say thanks by donating to Heroes at Home, which provides financial readiness for military readiness. In our Heroes at Home events, I explain that when people say thanks to them, it's their way of being patriotic.

2. Say "Welcome Home" – As we all know, the Vietnam War was not a popular conflict, and those who served were greeted with jeers, taunts or just plain apathy. There are also those who returned from the Korean War who were never properly welcomed back. So when you see an older vet, ask them what war they served in and if it's one of those two, then ask one more

question, "Were you ever welcomed home?" If they say no, then simply say, "Well, you have been now. Welcome home, soldier; thank you for your service." I've done this many times and all were deeply thankful for the sentiments, and some were so deeply moved they even had tears in their eyes. In our Heroes at Home Events, I encourage our young service members to welcome home these veterans and explain just how much it means for someone currently serving to thank those who have served.

3. Pick Up Dinner – Every year, restaurants give free meals and discounts for veterans and those who are serving now and at The Military Wallet, you can get this year's update. But why not keep it going year-round? Once a year, or more, depending on your budget, pay for a military member's meal. You may see a service member with his or her family or a group of military dudes and dudettes in a small group at a restaurant. Don't go up to the soldier, sailor or airman to ask if you can pay for their meal. Instead, go to the manager or the waitress and ask for their bill, then pay it as you leave and tell the waitress to give them a simple message: "Thank you for your service."

4. Operation Gratitude – During Veterans Day week, our USAFA parents club volunteered to help put together care packages for the troops. Lots of volunteers put together over 7,000 care packages in one day! Each time I went through the assembly line with my boxes, it took all my self-control not to slip that package of Rocky Mountain Factory fudge into my pocket. You can also donate DVDs, Girl Scout cookies, trial-sized toiletries, candy, scarves, gloves, small stuffed animals, books and more to the effort.

5. Mow A Yard – Or rake leaves, or plant rosebushes, or paint an outhouse, or—you get the idea—for the military family of a deployed service member in your neighborhood, church or community. When Bob was gone and I was left home alone with a house full of kids, I really appreciated that help. The best help comes from people you know, where that military family is

comfortable knowing you are not a creeper.

6. Donate Your Old Cell – If you are like most of the Kay family members, you get a new phone about once every 18 months or so (it seems to be an inalienable right in our clan). Instead of trading in when you trade up, give it to Cell Phones for Soldiers.

7. Calling All Coupon Queens – I started out in the financial area as a coupon queen and eventually evolved to “America’s Family Financial Expert” ®. Along the way, I’ve encouraged families to donate their expired coupons to military units overseas. They can use your castoffs for up to six months past the expiration date. For more information, email us at assistant@” and put “Expired Coupons” in the subject line.

8. Care for Critters – If you are like my hubby, you are a critter person. He sits in his easy chair each evening and instantly–voila!–three mini schnauzers appear in his lap. They were his constant pet therapy when he broke his back a couple years ago and ended his career as a fighter pilot. If you love critters, you can offer to provide foster care by taking in a dog or cat of a wounded or deployed military member while he or she is receiving medical treatment or on duty. For more  on this, go to Guardian Angels for Soldiers.

Thank you to all our veterans and their families, and a special thanks to my husband, Lieutenant Colonel Bob Kay, the world’s greatest fighter pilot, for his 30 years of service; and thanks to my Marine, airman and soldier. I’m so proud of all of you!