

Remember, We Are the Land of the Free Because of the Brave

My dad was the kindest man I've ever known. The pastor of three small-town churches, he was a circuit rider of sorts, who tended these congregations and groups of Christians throughout our region of Pennsylvania. My dad was also one of those World War II veterans Tom Brokaw called the "Greatest Generation."

Dad often talked about being on the USS Pennsylvania in the South Pacific and his war experiences as a young man. He was so happy to get back home that he kissed the ground when he finally arrived stateside. My dad was thankful to God that he came back at all, unlike many who made the ultimate sacrifice during that horrific war. It just made sense that the Fourth of July was one of his favorite holidays and that he continued to fly a flag in the yard until the day God took him home.

Not long ago, someone sent me a photo of the USS Pennsylvania as she looked during World War II. She was one of the super-dreadnought battleships in the U.S. Navy of those days, and she was a beauty. Receiving that photo was a tender moment for me because a plaque dedicated to that heroic ship hung on the wall of our family home when I was growing up. My father raised me on stories of kamikaze planes and torpedoes hitting the hull and of the death and horror all wars create. And I'm sure my dad endured things he could never speak of again.

Members of the "Greatest Generation" did not have the language for the internal scars of war that we have today, like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Many of our U.S. troops are traumatized by war. Suicide rates among U.S. Army veterans rose 46% in the second quarter of this year, compared to the same time in 2020. According to the USO, "In 2021, research found that 30,177 active-duty personnel and veterans who

served in the military after 9/11 have died by suicide—compared to the 7,057 service members killed in combat in those same 20 years. That is, military suicide rates are four times higher than deaths that occurred during military operations.”

It’s not an exaggeration to say that America is a traumatized nation. Too many veterans in our country are going through life either numbing themselves or reacting to pain they cannot process. We are losing individuals to mental health issues that could be helped with education, counseling, service animals and medication. These veterans are our neighbors, family members, and friends, and we need to step into their distress.

It is critical that we honor our veterans, prioritize their well-being and learn from their example—every single day.

When my siblings and I were growing up, Dad told us about the sacrifices of the men he had known in war. He took us to the nearby DuBois, Pennsylvania, cemetery and tenderly taught us that freedom isn’t free and that we can worship God openly only because other people fought and died for us.

I grew up at a time when members of the “Greatest Generation” led our nation. I remember how valiant men fought fierce enemies abroad and then came home, put up their uniforms and then lifted our country to new heights with that same character, courage and skill. That generation shaped me, and I will never stop thanking God for it.

All that valor, all those inspiring stories, seemed to live in my dad and make him the man of sterling character I loved so much. In fact, it was a conflict between my early understanding of masculinity and Dad’s sterling character that created one of my earliest perspectives about how a man ought to behave.

My dad, as I’ve said, was the kindest man I ever met. He was a

gentle soul who was quicker to turn the other cheek than he was to fight back. I loved him for it, but as I got older, I started to resent the fact that he sometimes wouldn't stand up for himself. People took him for granted and used his gentle personality and loving ways for their own advantage. I wanted him to push back. I remember getting angry that he would take the high road when I thought he should be calling people out for their vicious ways. I wanted him to stand up for what I thought was right, even if it meant, as I would have said at the time, "knocking some heads."

Though I chafed at my dad's reactions to those people, I learned from him. I learned the power of a soft answer turning away wrath. I learned that the godly man answers first with prayer in all matters. I learned the power of humility and that the measure of a man isn't about an ability to dominate or seek revenge but rather an ability to exercise self-control in all things. This was the imprint many of the "Greatest Generation" left on their sons and daughters. This is the legacy that many of our U.S. troops continue to leave today.

When Dad died, I stood in line with my siblings for hours, listening to those he loved and served share how much he meant to them. I've often thought of how his impact on their lives will move down through generations in ways that only heaven can record.

My dad and all our servicemen and women made immense sacrifices so that future generations could thrive and achieve. On this Veterans Day, we remember and honor all those courageous and selfless souls who willingly placed themselves in harm's way so that our world might be safer and more just.

As it has been said, we are the land of the free because of the brave. {eo}

This editorial is based in part, upon excerpts from Tim Clinton's newest book *Focus on the Future: Your Family, Your*

Faith, and Your Voice Matter Now More than Ever (Charisma House), available [here](#).

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