



Department of Veterans Affairs

Harry S. Truman Memorial
Veterans' Hospital
800 Hospital Drive
Columbia MO 65201
www.columbiamo.va.gov

News Release

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
L. Stephen Gailther (573) 814-6308 (Office)
Public Affairs Officer (573) 424-8130 (Cell)

November 9, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOCAL VETERANS DAY ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Eight Columbia Public School District students are winners of the annual Veterans Day essay contest sponsored by the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital.

Open to junior and senior high students in the Columbia district, entries were reviewed by a language arts teacher at each school prior to submission. VA staff members judged and determined winning essays in the junior and senior high divisions. Cash prizes from donated funds are awarded to the winners. The winning authors will be recognized at the Veterans Day Ceremony at Truman VA on Thursday, Nov. 11.

Junior high division winners are **Isabelle Bouchard**, Jefferson Junior High School (first place); **Megan Kelly**, Jefferson Juniiior High School (second place); **Isabelle Mitchell**, Jefferson Junior High School (third place) and **Melanie Tucker**, Jefferson Junior High School (honorable mention). Senior high division winners include **Courtney Engle**, Rock Bridge High School (first place); **David Maddox**, Rock Bridge High School (second place); **Katherine Woodruff**, Rock Bridge High School (third place) and **Taylor Yeagle**, Rock Bridge High School (honorable mention).

###

First Place
Jr. High

Isabelle Bouchard

If You Had The Choice... Would You Say Yes?

"Daddy how long will you be gone this time?" a sweet, young girl asks her father.

"The government says this is the last trip honey. I'll be back in yours and mama's arms in no time."

He never came back.

Sgt. Karl A. Campbell enlisted in the army in 1995, serving as an infantryman until 2003. In 2009 Campbell re-enlisted joining the 101st in January. While serving in Afghanistan, Sgt. Karl A. Campbell was leaving behind a beloved wife, a son, a daughter, and a stepson. Campbell was a highly decorated soldier. His medals included a bronze star and a purple heart. The bronze star medal may be awarded for bravery, acts of merit, or meritorious service. The Purple Heart is awarded by the President to those who have been wounded or killed while serving with the U.S. military. Sgt. Campbell had the choice to serve in the military, after serving as an infantryman, Karl Campbell knew how risky war was. He was willing to risk his life. Some veterans' life is not always on the line, although they all fight for pride, dignity, honor, etc. Choosing to leave behind a family to go serve is not an easy decision. Many are not as brave as our veterans. Can you just imagine what these brave soldiers go through? Leaving behind a family to serve in the army, watching people die, their own friends die. Thirty-four year old Campbell from north Florida, died serving in Afghanistan. He suffered of wounds when insurgents attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device.

IF You Had the Choice ... Would You Say Yes?

Isabelle Bauehard

Knowing the fear, and blood that war draws, would you be able to make a decision like the decision that Campbell made to go back and serve in the army? Campbell just like any other did not expect to live. In fact when you are enlisted into war you are told to expect the worst, but be able to make the best of it. Our veterans put their lives on the line for us. They give up so much! Campbell knew that there would be a chance that he would not see his children's face again. He put a brave step forward, a step that many of us are not willing to take. Campbell had the choice, and he said yes. If you had the choice... would you fight next to some of these brave soldiers, who put their lives at risk to help you and everyone engrossing you? Would you say yes?

"...He was just a common Veteran and his ranks are growing thin, but his presence should remind us, we may need his likes again..."

Why Veterans are Special

Are you free? That seems like a strange question. The obvious answer is, of course. Freedom comes in many forms. We can vote for what we believe in, we can start our own business, and we can express ourselves the way that we see fit. You and I can say that we are the ones who created our freedom, but none of these things would be possible if it weren't for one group of special people. The truth is we gain our freedom from the veterans who have fought for us.

Veterans are special for many reasons. They sacrifice their lives and some freedoms just to make sure we, the people of the United States, are free. They courageously risk their physical safety and disrupt their personal lives. I don't know about you, but I am afraid to fight in war. I don't think I have the audacity to give up my time, not to mention my life, for my country. Some people think the worst thing in the world is to die, but many veterans return from war with significant physical and mental disabilities. The injured veterans I have met have lost almost everything and yet they can still be happy. They may never be able to move the way they could before or view life in the same way, yet they can still be proud. They have accomplished their duty. They have said they aren't devastated by what has happened to them. Just knowing they have protected America makes them happy. That is true courage.

Why would anyone sign up for a job where you have to give up your time and maybe even your life? Some people simply enjoy taking risks, while others may need this job for financial reasons. But I believe the reason people want to join the military, is due to their passion. Their passion for themselves and others is great, but their passion for their country overflows.

Why Veterans are special
Megan Kelly

Next time you see veterans, look into their eyes. You will see passion burning in their hearts and courage in their minds. Their masks will disappear and you will see who they truly are. Not superheroes, but average people who grew up learning and experiencing new things just like you and me. People set apart by their amazing passion and courage, people for whom we are grateful and proud.

Third Place
Jr. High

Isabelle Mitchell, age 14
2nd hour, Honors English, 9th grade
Jefferson Junior High School
Mr. McGinty

The Importance of Veterans

He looks up at me from across the table where we are sitting, his aged face turning up in a smile. I ask him if he wants a glass of water and go to get him one when he nods his head. I slide back into my chair, watching as he lifts the glass to his lips and takes a sip. I want to ask him, this ninety year old man, about his time in the Second World War. I want to hear his details and experiences, what he has lived, but I save my questions for later because I know that, even sixty- some years later, it still hurts him to talk about it. All the friends and fellow soldiers left overseas have never left his mind. Not one drop of blood has escaped his memory. The guilt from bringing this pain to his eyes always makes me think twice the next time.

After his nine decades of life, this man is the wisest I know. He is my father's uncle, but more importantly, he is a veteran. He and other veterans are the voice of the country's past. They are the reason we are moved when we see the military today, and the reason we can say the "liberty and justice for all" component of the pledge of allegiance.

There are not just America's veterans, though. World War II was an exceptionally important war in world history. All of the allied forces are to be thanked for the winning of this World War. All veterans are special, because they changed history and because they did so not just for themselves, or even for their own nation, but for a large part of the world.

Honorable Mention Jr. High

Melanie Tucker
4th Hour
Mr. Clowe

Once a year on November 11 we celebrate Veterans Day. We call up a veteran that we know - whether it be an uncle, a grandfather, or a father - we say thank you for all that they have done for us and all Americans. On November 12 we go back to our regular lives and the veterans go back to being regular people. The thing is veterans aren't normal people. They are willing to pay the ultimate price for the country they love so dearly.

I am proud to say that I have a veteran in my family. My grandfather served in the Vietnam War. He was awarded a Purple Heart because he was shot in the side and hit with shrapnel from a grenade. He was also awarded a Bronze Star Medal with V for Valor for Heroic actions. My grandfather doesn't talk about his experience while he was in the military. I think it's because he doesn't like to relive his time overseas. Many veterans are normal people who experienced unthinkable things.

A couple of years ago I was on a shuttle to the airport when an older man wearing a Vietnam Veterans hat got on. No one paid attention, until the next stop when a woman wearing a fancy business suit stood up to leave. Before getting off the shuttle she looked directly at the veteran and said "thank you for serving our country." The return smile the veteran gave her gave me goose bumps. Veterans deserve respect all year round, not just once a year.

Next time you see a veteran that you know, or are ever in a situation like the woman on the shuttle, take a minute to say thank you. Because veterans are the true heroes of America.

First Place High School

Courtney Engle
Grade 12
Rock Bridge High School

Veterans: The Unsung Heroes

Before I sat down to write this essay I met with my small group, a cluster of girls that gets together weekly to talk about the ups and downs of life and study the Bible. It's easily the highlight of my Monday. I've always been thankful for it, but prior to mulling over this topic, it never really occurred to me that veterans made this possible. That got me thinking...what else have I taken for granted that exists because of veterans? Without the men and women that have selflessly risked their lives for the sake of our country, Americans would lack many freedoms that we possess today.

Several of these freedoms were utilized unconsciously just in the course of this day. Flipping on the radio as I drove to school, I was able to listen to the music that I like because soldiers fought to help Americans attain and retain the freedom of expression. I can write about whatever I choose in this paper due to freedom of speech, and I could attend small group because the citizens of the United States are given the right to assemble and practice any religion. The Revolutionary War gave birth to America; World War II saved democracy from succumbing to communism; the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have protected our country from the threat of terrorism. Without the contributions of millions of American soldiers, victories would have been impossible to achieve...and where would we be in that case?

Some people in the United States, especially the young generation, tend to forget or downplay the importance of current and past soldiers. What we also sometimes forget is the amount of bravery it takes to zip up a uniform and step into boots to fight for our country. They

have to abandon their families, professions, and all the familiarities of life and take on an incredible burden. One of my good friends (who happens to also attend Monday small group) recently said goodbye to her Afghanistan-bound father for a year. He is currently across the world sacrificing comfort and safety in effort to make a positive impact on the Afghanistan people and our own nation. No matter how much it must hurt for my friend, I can only imagine how her dad must feel. The amount of maturity and courage that soldiers, past or present, possess is deserving of praise.

To anyone who has served or is currently serving in the United States Armed Forces: thank you. Showing appreciation is the least we citizens can do. The author Cynthia Ozick said, "We often take for granted the very things that most deserve our gratitude." It is because of veterans that we live in such a great country; veterans, ordinary people with special character.

You might be asking, "Why are Veterans special?" You probably love the joys you have in life today. Well without their brave efforts and sacrifices, the joyous life you have come to know and love wouldn't even exist today. They have put their life on the line to ensure that you live to see a better tomorrow. They fought not only for America, but also for those outside of the country who were in dire need of assistance. They have saved the lives of many who thought all hope was lost, granting them another opportunity to live.

Our Veterans have endured feelings many of us couldn't possibly even imagine. They have seen just how ugly the world can be. They have seen with their own eyes just how cruel and evil human intentions can be in the world. They have saved those who were already overwhelmed by that very evil. They have protected us from ever having to experience those very evils that have been cemented into their minds. They have been through hell itself, ensuring that no one else would have to experience the wrath that they have endured.

Our veterans have survived through many hardships with their fellow comrades. They have fought side by side with fellow friends, colleagues, relatives and even enemies and watched out for each other's lives to make sure they get through this hardship, even making the ultimate sacrifice to ensure their comrades live to fight another day. Seeing how things turned out, their sacrifices were not in vein.

After going through so much, our Veterans didn't give up the fight, no matter how gloom things had gotten. They didn't give up the fight for what they believed in and the results have really shown. They are admirable to us all. They are what makes us proud to be Americans and that is why our Veterans are special to us all.

Third Place
High School

Katherine Woodruff

Rock Bridge High School

Why Veterans Are Special

Could you leave behind your entire life for your country? Thousands upon thousands of valiant young men made the ultimate sacrifice for the home of the brave. Imagine getting called to serve your country. Could you drop everything knowing you might not come back?

My great uncle Jack was called to fight in World War II along with two of his six brothers. They were all shipped to different parts of the world and Jack ended up in Hurtgen Forest in Germany. This was the longest battle that the US has ever fought in history. For months, Jack lived in a hole in the dark forest where it rained constantly. Bombs went off relentlessly and the soldiers drank and ate rarely. Of course, death was regularity and the soldiers were forced to come to terms with it. Jack went months without communication from his family. Little did he know, his father died, one of his brothers had been diagnosed with scoliosis, and another brother had been injured in the war and sent home. Jack had been scarred by the gore of the war would later return home with horror stories.

Veterans brave through countless hurtles for their country. They hold traits that not many human beings carry. Perseverance, bravery, love, and passion are just a few characteristics that veterans have. The appreciation that soldiers deserve is not nearly enough. The people of this country need to look around and see what they have, and thank their brave and valiant veterans. The painful memories they hold will be permanently stuck with them for the rest of their lives.

To be a veteran is to give up everything, sometimes life, for the freedom and happiness of your country. After the many hard days fighting the enemy with fellow soldiers dying all around you, the altercation is finally over, but we constantly overlook their passion for this country. These heroes did not have to be asked to do what was right, or uphold their countries' values. Serving your country and standing up for what you believe in is an extraordinary characteristic that every single soldier has. It is not just putting on a uniform and carrying a gun against an enemy, but it is much more than that. Veterans deserve not only one day a year, but every day.

Honorable Mention
High School

Taylor Yeagle

The Cost of Freedom.

Tu ne cede malis sed contra audentior ito.

Yield not to misfortunes, but advance all the more boldly against them

The United States of America is undoubtedly one of the greatest nations ever to exist. It is a nation built upon strong moral values, and hard work. Americans enjoy one of the few truly free societies. Many tend to forget, however, that these freedoms that we enjoy were not, well, free. No, a handful of brave men and women over the course of our nation have given so much to gain and defend said freedoms. If not for our bevy of uniformed servicemen, who knows where we would be (or wouldn't be for that matter.) This is the reason why it is not only our duty, but our privilege to take care of the men and women who return from service. They are our backbone, they are our pride, they are our protectors and watchmen.

In our history, veterans have had a unique chance to play a major defining role in shaping our nation. All of the qualities of our nation that set us apart were achieved through our defenders. In the very birth of our nation, the military fought against tyranny and oppression. They gave their time, their bodies, their minds, even some gave their lives. This has become an honored tradition throughout our history. Veterans are special because they have had the responsibility of truly shaping this nation; they have held time and time again in their hands our fate.

On September 11th, 2001, our country was at its most vulnerable state. The crimes

committed against our citizens were heinous and unforgivable. Had our military failed to step up and fight back against terrorism tactics, the United States would be in far worse condition than it is today. Had our heroes not made such a sacrifice, only God knows how many more planes would be crashed into national monuments; who knows if we would even still be in the hands of our own government.

Veterans are special, because more often than not, they give virtually everything they have with virtually nothing in return. It is sad to see that our veterans are homeless, ridiculed, or left uncared for in veterans' hospitals because of the lack of funding, and the lack of willingness to serve those who have served us. Veterans are special because they fought for the rights many of our citizens use today to abuse and harm our own veterans. Veterans rarely get the credit; they rarely get the glory or appreciation that they deserve in the very least. It is appalling to see people protesting military funerals or throwing slurs left and right about our sacred warriors. They are special, because they deserve far more than we have given them.

Veterans are perhaps the most special and most unappreciated citizens of the United States. They are brothers, sisters, fathers, wives, children, grandchildren, uncles, teachers, doctors. They are American in the purest sense of the word. They are special because in the most wonderful way, they embody all that this country stands for. Veterans gave everything in return for nothing. Veterans are the reason why we are all safe and on top. We owe them so much; they are the essence of our nation.