

A Thank You to Our Veterans
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You ask why I ought to honour our veterans? Quiet! You're being conscripted. Turn on the TV and take a quick preview of your life to come. Can you see the innocent faces of the millions of people, killed, marred, and scarred by the wars? Did you have plans? A big family, a thriving career, a life in peace? Well, that's in the past now. It's time to face your new fate. Go tell your mother and watch her cry as she wishes you goodbye. Go face your father. He's looking away because he can't bear it. He doesn't know if he'll ever see you alive again. You meet the other soldiers while you're waiting to leave. You look around and make a friend. You wonder if he'll live. You wonder if you'll live.

You ask why I ought to thank our veterans? SHH! The enemy is on the other side. There are bombs on the other side. There are guns on the other side. Do not move. Do not speak. Try not to breath too loudly either – you'll set something off. Look to your right. There's your friend, coated thick with the sticky, sickly mud, that's been made wet by the floods of rain which poured in on the trenches last night. Look at his leg! There's a crater running down his thigh and, like a fountain, it's overflowing, gushing, with thick blood. Now you're submerged in that familiar, metallic stench, and you defeatedly stare at the agonized, shrivelled face of a man trying desperately to stifle the pangs of pain. A meal finally makes its way down the line of soldiers, cramped together. You stare down at the measly can of rations. You're not hungry anymore.

Yet, again, you ask why we ought to do this, or that, as you sit in your soft, comforting chair, in your safe, warm home. Your veterans – *our* veterans – all the while, are on the streets. They remain neglected, despite their work. They are forgotten by us, and by our governments, despite their service. They remain on the streets, maddened by the banging, the shattering, and the shrill, screeching of the only world they were allowed to know. Did you know that 5000 veterans are homeless right now? Did you know that 23% of soldiers return from war with severe mental illnesses, such as PTSD? Did you ever think that they may need our help – *your* help – to find a home, to find support, to find care, or love? You ask why we ought to honour our veterans? Why we ought to thank our veterans? Well, it's the least we could do.

So, the next time I meet a veteran, at school, or in my community, I would not say anything; I would *listen*. I would listen to their struggles, victories, and, most importantly, I would listen to their needs, to truly help them succeed. I hope that, now, you will do the same.