

Let's Light Up the Town

- Linda Fitzpatrick

Yesterday was Veteran's Day, a day to share our love and support for the men and women who have served our country. Being a singer in MHS's Mixed Choir allows me to spend my day off at Abbot Hall celebrating and awarding members of our own community for their bravery and courageous life decisions. I'll be honest, I'm always a bit surprised at the amount of people who are acknowledged. To our privilege, war seems foreign, but we must remember that we are surrounded by individuals who have seen and participated in far more than we can imagine. As terrible as it is to admit, those of us who do not have someone actively serving in the Army, Marines or other branch of service can too easily forget what's happening around the world – that men and women are placing themselves in harm's way to keep us safe. Veteran's Day, the news, and even the airport can provide certain reminders of this important service and heroism in our midst.

My whole body stops when I see someone in uniform. The work boots, recently trendy again with teenagers, paired with the dusty green jump suit strike me worthy of a pause for gratitude, thanks, and awe. I'm always tentative in these circumstances. Do I approach the stranger and thank them for all they've done — typical to what you hear about on the news or in movies? And what about when they are out of uniform and can't be immediately recognized as a veteran? How do I show my gratitude?

Sometimes I feel like Veterans are depicted as foreign people, with whom we could never understand or even know for that matter. But they are far from that. They are our country's backbone, living as our teachers, parents, siblings, neighbors, fellow townsmen. They surround us, yet we forget to acknowledge them and share our gratitude when they are out of uniform. We forget about them when there is no reminder. That is a shame — one of the major faults of our society.

I am grateful for the fact that my mother works at Home Base, a partnership of the Red Sox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital, because I am always reminded of how difficult it can be for veterans to return home after deployment(s). I have a better understanding of PTSD, TBI, and the complications our country's warriors face. Home Base, and other similar organizations, help support veterans so that they are able to reestablish themselves in their community and families in a healthy manner. The tagline for Home Base says it all: Their Mission is Complete. Ours has just begun.

But, I still haven't figured out an answer to my question. How do I share my appreciation for active duty service men and women and veterans all year round? How do I make sure they realize that we as a country, state, and town have not forgotten about them?

As an elementary student, I used to send care packages with my class. Today, I turned my light to green, thanks to Greenlight A Vet. This campaign is an effort to “establish visible national support for our veterans by changing one light to green.” The term “greenlight” refers to forward

movement, which is exactly what the campaign seeks to do to make veterans in our society visible when they return home and are “more camouflaged than ever.” There are currently 610,052 people supporting this effort to express thanks to veterans and the number of supporters continues to rise as I write this. However, there is more work to do, America. We are a nation of over 318.9 million people. Imagine what it would be like to have our whole nation come together as one to celebrate our veterans on more days than just holidays. I dare each and every one of you to change one light to green this November, as you prepare for Thanksgiving. Because green isn't just a color anymore. It is a symbol of “hope, renewal, and well-being.” It is our community recognizing our heroes.

But why stop there? There are thousands of ways to show appreciation for our veterans. The Love the Give foundation has teamed up with the Bob Woodruff Foundation in a social media campaign everyone can be a part of. All you have to do is post on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or Google+ #GIVE2VETERANS to donate \$1 towards the cause now through November 15th. These organizations pledge to donate up to a total amount of \$500,000 by the end of the campaign.

This holiday season, remember never to forget about our country's veterans. Whatever campaign you connect with most, I encourage you to take part in any way you can to show our veterans we appreciate them always.

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