

SCRATCHPAD

The power of thank you

By **NIKKI DAVIDSON**
COAST WEEKEND EDITOR



"I've got a story for you, and it's a big deal," whispered my assignment editor with an amused smirk.

I had just started my journalism career in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and was working a grueling early-morning shift. After a year of coming into work at 2 a.m. and leaving past dusk for "big stories," I wasn't sure what to expect. I couldn't hide the hesitation on my face.

"You're going to Washington, D.C.," he said in a hushed voice, careful not to alert the other eager reporters in the newsroom about the assignment.

I had to pinch myself. I was an Iowa girl who had left my comfort zone in the

cornfields, picking up my belongings and moving 12 hours away from family to Michigan. The idea of being sent to the nation's capital to cover a story seemed like a dream.

It turns out the assignment was the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to document the area's inaugural Honor Flight. I would be flying with 80 surviving World War II veterans to see the nation's war memorials for the first time. The non-profit organizers hoped that by bringing a reporter on the trip, it would be easier to secure funding for their mission to give America's veterans a free trip to Washington, D.C., to see the war memorials created for them.

Looking back 10 years later, most of the 18-hour trip is a blur. I recall how helpful the veterans were, insisting on carrying my camera gear from their wheelchairs, and

chuckling over the funny adventures they shared with their comrades 60 years ago. Others were more serious, confessing to me they hadn't ever talked about what they experienced, and the painful memories that never faded.

The entire trip was extremely moving, but I mistakenly assumed the most emotional part of the assignment would be when the veterans arrived at the memorials. I was caught off-guard when the tears started flowing at a different time.

We were on the plane home, and volunteers announced it was time for a "mail call," and handed out dozens of letters written by volunteers, family and local school children. Each note genuinely

thanked the veteran for their service.

Despite the fact that the plane was full of the toughest people I had ever met, there suddenly wasn't a dry eye to be found. When I asked why the letters were so moving, they explained they hadn't ever had people really ever tell them thank you and mean it like this before.

This Veterans Day, consider taking the time to say thank you to a veteran and really mean it. It could be the gratitude they've never gotten.

Sadly, most Honor Flights are on hiatus due to COVID-19. The Oregon chapter plans to resume trips in 2022. You can learn more about the local Honor Flight chapter at honorflightforegon.org/

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ON THE
COVER



Passengers on the Arrow 2 tugboat tour are treated to views of sea lions lounging on the waterfront of Astoria.

PHOTO BY
ANDY CAMERON

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