

# Caregiver's Corner Column (November 2015)

## **Serving Those Who Served Us...Caring for a Veteran**

By Margaret Howard  
Hospice of Michigan

For many, the title “caregiver” wasn’t a role they ever thought they’d find themselves in—a role that oftentimes comes at a great personal sacrifice physically, emotionally and financially. Likewise, those on the receiving end of care, likely didn’t see themselves as becoming a care “recipient”, and suddenly having to depend on someone for support, one’s basic needs, and perhaps intimate care, can be equally as challenging.

The relationship of caregiver and care recipient is one that is built on trust, compassion and respect, and when these things align, it can be one of the most beautiful and rewarding relationships one will ever experience. The truth of the matter is that we’ve all got a story, and a truly good caregiver, should care about the life story of the one they are caring for.

Caring for a Veteran relies on those same values of trust, compassion and respect, and this privilege can be one of the greatest honors a caregiver can experience. But caregivers do need to realize that the needs of a Veteran can be different and unique, and to provide the best care possible, it is very helpful for a caregiver to have an understanding of that Veteran’s service to our country. And realizing that each Veteran’s story is different and unique, so too is each Veteran’s comfort level in sharing their experience, their story, their time of service. Letting a Veteran take the lead on what they want to share or not share, is something that must be honored and respected.

This said, a caregiver caring for a Veteran really has a responsibility to learn about Veterans in general--the following are things to be aware of, and can be extremely helpful when caring for a Veteran: When did this Veteran serve? Was it during peace time or a time of conflict? WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, and others. What was their branch of service? Army Air Corp, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard? And what might this Veteran have experienced during their time of service, either abroad or stateside? Might this Veteran have been involved in a combat situation? What was the “welcome home” like for this Veteran? These are critical things to be aware of, as they are all part of the unique experience that make up a Veteran’s “story”.

And whether a Veteran is comfortable sharing their story or not, this knowledge on the caregiver’s part, will only enhance a relationship of trust and respect. Showing an interest in, and appreciation of one’s service to our country, is one of the greatest gifts you can give a Veteran—a simple but heartfelt, “thank you for your service” can have a tremendous impact on a Veteran...many of whom who have never been thanked.

If you are a caregiver, challenge yourself to learn more about the Veterans you care for, consider these resources as helpful guides to broaden your perspective on “Caring for a Veteran”:

[www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov)

[www.wehonorveterans.org](http://www.wehonorveterans.org)

*Caregiver's Corner* is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at [www.CaregiverResource.net](http://www.CaregiverResource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.