

The man sits quietly, reading a book, his pixelated uniform a sharp contrast to the color and motion of the airport around him. All of a sudden a woman appears at the soldier's side.

"Thank you for your service," she says, and thrusts a wrinkled \$20 dollar bill into his book. Her eyes are a bit distant. A memory, perhaps, intrudes upon the moment. And just as abruptly, the woman is gone, lost in the bustle at the baggage-claim area. The soldier is weary from his travels and taken completely by surprise. Before he knows it, she has vanished.

He can't run after her and leave his duffle bags unattended. He is also prohibited by ethical regulations from accepting the kind gift. But she thanked him. She doesn't even know him. She thanked him for his service. So he donates it at the airport USO. Still, he is awed by the appreciation shown to him by a total stranger.

The woman didn't see the soldier as a stranger. She saw him as the man that fought next to her husband, brother, or son. He was a familiar face to her, one that has seen the dangers of fighting for freedom, and knows what her family members have been through. Now, when the woman sees a uniform, her nephew, father, or grandfather's face flashes to her mind. The uniform signifies a hero, whether they are a stranger or not.

The story I told you above is true. The man in the story is my father. The woman in the story, well, we will never know who she is... But I do know the gratitude she feels. When officers are called on duty, some family members may feel it's an inconvenience. I have felt this when my father goes on duty. He isn't there to see my soccer games, or come to my choir concerts. However, his absence isn't an inconvenience. He, along with all other servicemen around the country are dedicated to serving. They report to their posts heads up, ready to face whatever challenges come their way. No amount of game winning goals could ever make up for their patriotism, or hard work. So while my dad may miss my assists or solos, I wouldn't have him anywhere else. He and the other servicemen are the reason we still enjoy the fundamental freedoms we cherish today. They represent every strife we have gone through, and the ability to move on, victory or loss. I used to wonder why that woman tried to give money to my father, of all people. Now, I understand. We all have different ways of thanking those who represent heroes in our lives. Some send care packages overseas, while others donate to support the cause. Yet others, thrust money into a stranger's book, quietly thank them, and move on their way. In my opinion, all those who serve in the military and the people who assist and support them are our country's true heroes.