

Dear Mike,

July 7, 2019

The 4th of July reminded me of the great love I have for this GREAT country. which then brought back wonderful memories of my participation in the 36th Never Forgotten Honor Flight. It turned out to be one of the most marvelous adventures of my life.

Every stop, site and aspect of this experience was planned and executed to perfection. In my personal and professional life, I have never been a part of anything which reached such a lofty height. I commend you, the Board of Directors and the hundreds of volunteers who give from the heart to make each flight a precious and undying gift to thousands of veterans from Central Wisconsin.

I was on bus no. 1 in D.C. after each experience you would ask me
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how that one would rank. My honest response would be, "I thought the last one couldn't be beat, but the one just concluded actually did." This scenario ^{was} repeated at each and every stop.

We boarded our plane at D.C. for the flight home. Now, surely, my next could not exceed the last one. Wrong! I settled in my seat at 30,000 feet, relaxed, but, also, feeling a tiredness from our very busy day.

The cabin lights had been turned down for a while, but were then turned up to bright. Then, an old memory flooded into my cerebellum when someone on the intercom announced, "Roll call and Mailbag time!" I told my guardian (and son, Dan) that, "I certainly wouldn't be getting any mail." Wrong! A huge envelope (weighing about four
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pounds) was passed down the aisle to me. Again, mail call in my four years in the USAF was always a treasured time.

I read two letters at that time and then decided (because I was tired) to wait until I could fully appreciate each and every letter, card, drawing and message.

This ~~was~~ a good decision. I waited until Thursday (May 16).

I read each message slowly, carefully and shed a vast ~~of~~ amount of happy tears, while being joined in this occasion by my loving wife (Joanne). She would read each letter, while I started on the next one. We enjoyed the love and friendship of those letters over a four hour period. My decision at 30,000 feet turned out to be the best one I could have made.

To date, I have written many

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letters to those loved ones who poured out their love and gratitude. Mike, my answer to the question you asked me ~~is~~ is the same. For me, the Honor Flight is a gift that keeps on giving.

The plane landed at CWA c. 9:25 p.m. I had been told about the hundreds of people who come to CWA to welcome veterans home. I certainly thought it would be wonderful, but that word only begins to describe the welcome home celebration that grew before my eyes. Adults, of all ages and descriptions, teenagers, and children of all ages, lined the terminal lobby to depths of 7, 8, 9, 10 ~~deep~~ and on both sides of the ropes placed there. I worked my way among all these patriots and heard, "Welcome home and thanks for your service." What wonderful expressions of gratitude and caring.

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I would respond, "God bless you, and thank you so much for coming to greet me." I uttered those words and warmly shook their extended hands all the way to the pit. My son Dan told me my journey took 45 minutes. It was clearly one of the most wonderful and joyous ~~of~~ ^{turnings} of my life. Indelible in my memory bank is a boy c. 2 years old who was there with his parents and siblings. They spoke those kind words and extended their hands - this encouraged this beautiful boy to shake my hand and deliver a beautiful smile - how could one not be touched by such a beautiful gesture. The Honor Flight is a gift that keeps on giving.

When I am at a restaurant or grocery store or church or wherever - and I wear an article of clothing with the Honor Flight name - (over)

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I am greeted with a warm handshake, words of "Thank you for your service and, yes, even some wonderful hugs in a parking lot. The Honor Flight is a gift that keeps on giving.

This letter has brought back great memories and joy. I will say that whatever years I have left, the Honor Flight will always provide additional joy and love.

Mike, my sincerest thanks for your service to veterans through the Honor Flight. I will always value your friendship.

With love and prayers,

Bill Johnson

P.S. Also, known as "Wild Bill" as he traveled through life.
