

# VOICE OF DEMOCRACY CONTEST

## FIRST PLACE 2008 NATIONAL WINNER Jordan Lord Mississippi

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### **“My Role in Honoring America’s Veterans”**

**by Jordan Lord**

At the age of 11, I went to Washington, D.C. with my family for the first time. While visiting the various monuments and sites around our nation’s capital, my father requested that we walk down to view the Vietnam Memorial. Growing up, I had heard bits and pieces about my dad’s service, but since he didn’t talk about it much, I ignorantly figured it wasn’t a big part of his life. After all, it had been more than twenty years since he had last put on a uniform. But as we rounded the corner at the National Mall and the onyx walls of the memorial lay out before us, I looked up and saw an expression on my father’s face that I had never seen before. It was one of pain, longing, and a bit of regret. He silently approached the books that held the names of those lost in the war and flipped through without saying a word. He ran his finger down one of the many pages and stopped at a name myself, my sister, nor my mother had seen before. He then silently walked along the walls and found the etching that matched the entry. There he stood for no more than five minutes staring at this lost soldier and then walked away as silently as he had come. Later that day, he began to talk about the war to my sister and I for the first time. He explained that this name was a man who he had fought with, whose fate he had been unsure of until this day. I realized then, that that non-descript entry on a wall filled with so many soldiers had been my father’s friend. He had fought alongside my dad and unlike my father, had died in the process, and it dawned on me on that day in July, that my father truly was a veteran of war.

You see, I come from a family of quiet heroes like my father—a family of patriots; a family of soldiers. At last count, we had seven members of our family who are currently serving our nation in one of the four branches of our military. Together, they have fought in the last five major military conflicts our country has entered into. With a history like that, it’s difficult for someone such as myself to grow up without a respect and overwhelming sense of gratitude for our nation’s veterans. My appreciation for them is given on a daily basis in a quiet manner to match their quiet and selfless service. By hanging an American flag in front of our house, to standing in reverence for the pledge and national anthem, I honor their commitment to this great nation of ours.

Upon turning 18, though, I will honor them in the most appropriate manner I know how, by becoming an active participant in the electoral system. I will honor them by voting and by heeding the call to participate in what they have spent my whole life and years before me protecting. By being an active citizen, I will become an integral part of what they have dedicated themselves and sometimes given their lives to ensure will always be there for myself and all Americans—the right to be free.

Until then, though, every time I see a man or woman in uniform or pass Old glory blowing in the wind, I am reminded of that summer when I finally met my father, the soldier. It is then that I am brought back before those haunting black walls and remember how difficult the sacrifice of serving this nation truly is for our men and women in arms. It is there before the thousands of listings of those who gave the greatest price for my right to live in a free nation that I hear the distant voice of a soldier lost in that war. This anonymous man speaks to all of us from beyond the grave when he says, “Take what they have left and what they have taught you with their dying and keep it with your own. And take a moment to embrace those gentle heroes you left behind.” And I leave those walls, carrying these words with me to always remember each and every one I leave behind.