



From my sister-in-law, Susan Hurd Barr:

"It seems I have told this story so many times, but I know that there are parts of it that I had not had time to tell. When I found out about Honor Flight, my kids were 9 years younger. My Dad's twin, Wilbur, was a patient in the clinic the Founder of Honor Flight worked in as a Physician Assistant. Back then, Earl Morse was taking 2 Veterans at a time in each Cessna to DC, with his Aero Club. In just a short time, the Veterans had spread the word and piles of applications were being turned in. The need was exceeding the limited resources. In a few months, Southwest Airlines had flights to BWI and they were affordable. Just \$79.00 round trip and we could book enough of them to fill a tour bus with 56 seats. Southwest flew out of Port Columbus and my kids were old enough to dress themselves, so I emailed Earl and asked if he needed an ER nurse to go along for assistance. I was on the next flight with a huge fishing style fanny pack with first aid supplies in it. This eventually evolved to my Magic Back Pack with everything but the kitchen sink. At that time, the Veterans were mostly from Dayton, so they would park at one of two pick up points and be school-bussed to CMH in time for the flight. There were times that Veterans met us very early at CMH so they would not miss their chance at a free trip. Some even SLEPT overnight in the waiting area for the same reason. And once in a while we had one that was not on our list who was hoping to find an extra seat and go with us. We always found a way to get them on the trip.

When we got to the airport we met our tour bus and loaded up and headed to the WWII Memorial. Arby's had boxed lunches and bottled water for us, and the Scooter Store brought in motorized scooters for the Veterans to get around the memorial without much assistance. Another oxygen company brought tanks and wheelchairs in a box truck and we borrowed what we needed from that truck. After visiting at the WWII Memorial we loaded back up to see the other memorials if we had time. Or an added window tour of DC and the Capitol. The airports were always a challenge in security, getting that many Veterans through the lines, all their metal in a bin, and back into the pockets of the right Veteran. Wallets were often misplaced for a few minutes, or a belt ended up on the wrong Veteran. Getting shoes back on arthritic swollen feet at the end of the day and sometimes running for our plane due to the Baltimore Parkway traffic being backed up, made it pretty hectic. Montano's bus company employed a Vietnam Veteran named Robert Campbell, AKA Soup, to drive us, and he always had a plan B route back to the airport and sang Happy Trails driving back into the airport. Those first year's trips, we saw an awful lot of DC's secondary routes. Eventually we figured out how to navigate the day and leave enough time to walk through security in the evening, even being able to get a sandwich delivered to the gate for each Vet. Fast forward several years and Park Police escorts made the trip quicker.

There were 5 trips my first year and safety measures were put in place due to the constantly changing physical and medical needs of each Veteran. Soon, I was appointed to the National Honor Flight board and placed in charge of PR and Marketing. Our office moved out of Earl's home and into a converted school house in Springfield, Ohio and we started getting press time and air time and the applications poured in. We would eventually get so much mail that I used to joke that Honor Flight would have its own zip code soon. The applications came from all over the USA and outpaced the donations. If someone knew someone in the news, I was contacting that person. Word spread and donations started coming in. Paul Harvey mentioned us, Senator Dole came to greet the Veterans, and celebrities sent money and did PSA's. Finally, the focus could move from finding donations to getting the Veterans there as quickly as possible and as safely as possible. Earl set a date for our first Honor Flight Summit and we had quite a crowd. The Honor Flight Network was formed.

Shortly after that Airtran started cheap flights from Dayton so there was no reason to fly those Veterans from CMH; they could meet at the Dayton airport and fly easier from there. We had applications from Columbus and Delaware and surrounding counties and so I asked if we could fly on the same day from CMH and meet up with Dayton and travel the Memorials together. Columbus Honor Flight was formed as the first hub and Jim McLaughlin and I set up those flights. We now needed 2 tour buses and lots more wheelchairs. The Scooters were soon stopped as there were not enough for all the Veterans. We started taking the Veterans' wheelchairs or borrowed some. More oxygen was needed and

eventually we had an oxygen service meet us at the airport. The hard part was trying to get them to pick the tanks back up on time and they were always late because of traffic. This made me late, and I almost missed a flight several times. There was no way to ditch the tanks in a bathroom, or a hallway, as this was post 9/11. And you could not take them on a plane. One time when I was the most frantic, a BWI Pathfinder volunteer saw my panic and assisted with taking the tanks for me to wait for the service. His name was Daniel and he introduced me to one of the other Pathfinders named Glen and pretty soon Glen was assisting however he could. I never saw Daniel again after that, but Glen and his trusty crew of BWI ground crew volunteers were assisting us with ALL the flights. I cannot tell you how much we rely on them, and how valuable their time and assistance has been to this program. I would ask SWA to borrow their mike and would sneak off the plane first so that I could announce to the crowds that the passengers were WWII Veterans and would they please clap and cheer for them as this is their first and ONLY flight to DC. Glen and his crew now assist with that and also with making sure that our Honorees stayed in a group until we all got off the plane. They brought donated water bottles to us in ice in coolers that the Silver Diner donated to us, sometimes dumping their whole ice machine to cover all our needs. The airport gave them a storage space for spare wheelchairs, bottled water and oxygen and my 3 suitcases of flags, blankets, umbrellas and medical supplies.

Cleveland was the next to be trained and it was an honor to be on their first flight. One of their Veterans, Frank, was on that flight and had gotten away for the day, from the nursing home he stayed in. He was paralyzed and full of shrapnel and had to be carried into the plane, into the bus, out of the bus and back into the plane. You could feel the hard shrapnel lumps under his skin when we moved him. I apologized often, knowing we were hurting him, and causing bruises, but he never once complained. On the way home, he had this HUGE smile and kept saying over and over....THIS was the BEST day EVER!This was THE BEST DAY EVER! He was one of the reasons we never gave up. HE deserved this honor. But we needed to find an easier way on all of us to get more Vets like him there. Buses with wheelchair lifts were now on our lists. They have an elevator like lift that takes the Veteran in the wheelchair into the bus. No more carrying the Vets up and down the stairs. New England, Illinois, Michigan, Connecticut, Wisconsin, New York, Georgia, Colorado, Alabama, Texas, Arizona, Wyoming, California, Iowa, Oregon, Nevada and Oklahoma all jumped on board quickly.

Jeff Miller was the first to book charter flights out of North Carolina with US Airways and the southern states were now joining in with Honor Air. Michigan and Utah started planning and also used charter flights so they could bring a whole planeload and fly more in one day. Judy Lemmons and her connections in the Protocol Office of the Army helped forge much needed military connections. Multiple tour buses and hundreds of Veterans and guardians prompted a need for a wedding tent and chairs to eat under and get out of the weather. Many times this tent proved to be more than a shelter. Pretty soon we were not just the only group in town and the WWII Memorial became the most visited memorial in DC.

In the meantime, we were getting more applications from all over and the Veterans were calling us asking when they would get their chance to go from Arizona, or California...saying, "my application has been in for 2 years, WHEN are you going to fly ME?" It was heartbreaking and I had no simple solution. So much mail came in and applications needed sorted, that several of our key volunteers were added to the payroll. I had another role added as Regional Director of the Western States and when Sky Bus ran their \$10.00 specials, I set up trips to the capitals of many western states and then call the Veteran Service Organizations and ask for a conference room to have Honor Flight meetings. Eventually, a daughter or son or Veteran Service Officer took up the torch and started a hub in those states. I was at the mercy often of total strangers I had just met, but with having the same goals, trust was built and friendships formed. Bobbi and Bill, Jim and Kay, Susan, Joe, Shelia, Steve, Gail, Tony, Larry, Dave, David, Carla, Traci, Jeff, Clarice and Earl, Al, Judy, Gene, Tammy, Frank, Jan, Margaret, Jim, Gary and Linda, Debbie and Tom, Jim, Beth, Rhonda, John and Terri, Glen and Mona, Elaine, Sam, Fred, Ace, Keith, Bill, Duke and Jean, Donna, Dennis, Jon, Kim, Belinda, Bryan, Buddy, Glenn, Chris, Brian, Cindy, Matt, Lona, Valerie, John, Anne, Mike, Mary, Dee, Stan, Renda, George, Alan, Senator Dole and so many more I am forgetting to mention here, really had my back. In all the travel out west, I only stayed in a hotel twice. Someone always opened their home up for me to save the cost and allow more Veterans to fly. Al Bailey took the role of Eastern States Regional Director and we split up the remaining states to assist and help form more hubs. Our cell phones were donated by Verizon and they gave us the latest HTC smart phones. We all had to increase our cell minutes to unlimited as they were ringing off the hook. An Honor Flight documentary was made by WOSU PBS and took an Emmy. A movie was made and a Guinness book of world records was set for the most people viewing a movie at one time when it was showed. HBO wined and dined several hundred Veterans with a premier to The Pacific in DC. All with fantastic publicity.

Because of what I did and how busy I was, I asked Bobbie and Bill Richards from Upper Arlington, to take over the Columbus hub so that I could concentrate on assisting other hubs with their start up need and fly with them also until they were trained. I still flew with Columbus and worked a part time job from home and contingent in the ER. When you do what you love, it does not seem like a job, and it all worked out fine, even as busy as it was. It just flowed. Columbus took off as a model hub and set the pace for steadily flying Veterans. Nationally we have flown Veterans from every state, including Hawaii and Alaska and have flown over 120, 000 Veterans all for free. I am often asked about memorable Veterans and there are so many that have left a special place in our hearts. I am hoping to tell those stories next. Since I get asked to tell how it started often, it was easier to write it down. I also get asked how you can help. 1. We need donations. The Veterans fly for free, but those costs are increasing. ALL of us, except a few National office staff are volunteers. Most of the hubs have a 92% to 95% average of the donations going to fly the Veterans – the rest goes into operating/office costs. I need to double-check those figures after the first of the year, but I am pretty sure those percentages are close. We are a nonprofit, so those donations are tax deductible. You should donate to the hub in the state/city nearest you. Time is NOT on our side. 2. We need more applications for WWII and Korean War Veterans. We know there are a few that have fallen between the cracks, either by not knowing it is a free trip for them, or they feel they are not able to go based on their role in the war. 3. We always need guardians and volunteers and those applications are on each state's website. 4. We need opportunities to get the word out and often have outgoing Veterans who are happy to tell their story to school groups or others.

I feel blessed to be able to help in this way and to have made friends with the same passion. Thank you to all who have dropped everything to make these trips happen and Thank you to all who serve or have served.”

~ Kelly Kingery

You can find out even more about this wonderful program for our Veterans at the sites below . . .

<http://www.honorflight.org/>

<http://www.honorflightdayton.org/>