

The Price of a Desk

In September 2005, a social studies schoolteacher from Arkansas did something not to be forgotten. On the first day of school, with permission of the school superintendent, the principal and the building supervisor, she took all of the desks out of the classroom. The kids came walking into first period; there were no desks. They looked around and said, "Where's our desks?"

The teacher replied, "You can't have a desk until you tell me how you earn them." They thought, "Well, maybe it's our grades."

"No," she said. "Maybe it's our behavior," they countered. And she told them, "No, it's not even your behavior."

And so, they came and went in the first period, still no desks in the classroom. Second period, same thing. Third period. By early afternoon, television news crews had gathered in the class to find out about this crazy teacher who had taken all the desks out of the classroom. The last period of the day, the instructor gathered her class. They were at this time sitting on the floor around the sides of the room. She said, "Throughout the day, no one has really understood how you earn the desks that sit in this classroom ordinarily. Now I'm going to tell you."



She went over to the door of her classroom and opened it, and as she did, 27 U.S. veterans, wearing their uniforms, walked into that classroom, each one carrying a school desk. They placed those desks in rows, and then they stood along the wall. By the time they had finished placing the desks, those kids for the first time perhaps in their lives understood how they earned those desks.

The teacher said, "You don't have to earn those desks. These guys did it for you. They put them out there for you, but it's up to you to sit here responsibly, to learn, to be good students and good citizens, because they paid a price for you to have that desk, and don't ever forget it."

This is a true story. It was drawn from former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee's March 2, 2007, address to the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, D.C. It recounts events from the first day of classes in Martha Cothren's military history class at Joe T. Robinson High School in Little Rock.

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Cothren is the daughter of a World War II prisoner of war. She regularly has veterans visit her classroom. It's one of the ways she teaches her course on the history of World War II and the Vietnam War. Part and parcel of what she teaches is an appreciation for members of the armed forces.

Cothren and her students have sent numerous care packages to U.S. military personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. They also write letters to soldiers in those theaters. In 2006, the Veterans of Foreign Wars named Martha Cothren their "teacher of the year."

While Sunday was actually Veterans Day, it is being observed nationwide today. What you have – a desk, a chair, a home or, more importantly, your precious freedoms – was earned by American veterans and the men and women in uniform now serving around the world.

Thank God – and a veteran or two in your community or in your center – for their gifts to us.

--Beecher Hunter