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# Marblehead's Frank Kelley urges all veterans to share their story

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Veteran Frank Kelley, creator of Marblehead Television's "Veterans' Stories," urged all veterans to tell their stories and that is exactly what he did Saturday during the town's annual Veterans Day ceremony.

"We're assembled here to honor all the men and women who have served in all branches of armed forces, including a group that doesn't get a lot of attention, Cold War veterans" said Veterans Agent Dave Rodgers, who started the day with the town's annual Veterans Day ceremony.

Rodgers said those soldiers did their duty and were often in harm's way more often than people realized. He also paused during the ceremony to recognize five living World War II veterans: Bert Stanley, John Ciccone, Bob Vick, Dick Bridgeo and Joyce Booth.

"They were the Greatest Generation," Rodgers said.

Selectman Jackie Belf-Becker read a proclamation from Gov. Charlie Baker, VFW Chaplain John Spanks lead the prayers and the Marblehead High School choir sang, but Kelley stole the show.

Kelley said when Rodgers first asked him to talk about his time in the service, "I said no." Then he realized he couldn't very well ask other veterans to tell their story if he didn't share his.

"You've got to tell your story, your story is important," he said.

Kelley said a soldier's story is what bridges the gap between military and nonmilitary personnel

Kelley's connection to the military was formed early, he said. The son of a World War I veteran, he remembers a particular Sunday dinner when he was a kid. It was Dec. 7, 1942 and he pointed out where his parents and siblings were sitting at an imaginary dinner table.

"The telephone rang ... Pearl Harbor had been attacked," he said. "Dad mumbled something I didn't hear, mother cried."

His brother, Joe, lied about his age and enlisted by Christmas, his brother, Tom, followed joining the Coast Guard and years later, his younger brother, Larry, would also join the military. He said it wasn't unusual to wake up and find sailors sleeping in the living room, where they were always welcome.

"I was 10 years old, impressionable," he said.

In 1953, Kelley would join the Marines and though he wasn't a pilot, he said he flew every chance he got. Since he was single, he volunteered for temporary duties that would put him in the sky, he flew with the Navy and served on a destroyer.

"I flew with guys who flew in World War II, in Guadalcanal," he said. "These are the stories I have of individuals. You don't find that in textbooks."

Later, Kelley would also take part in the testing of the atomic bomb.

"To decontaminate us, they swept us down with a broom and said, 'When you get back, take a shower' and 'You should be OK,'" Kelley said.

Over the years, Kelley has collected stories like his from veterans who have served not only in combat, but in support roles. And he invites local veterans to tell their stories on his cable access show. He also urges people to take the time to listen.

"There is a difference between hearing and listening," he said. "Hearing is an automatic function. Listening is an active involved process."

Lastly, Kelley told veterans they should wear their military ball caps and T-shirts and put service decals on their cars, which prompted Walter Horan to pull his out of his pocket.

"Let people know you served," he said before adding, "and I'd like to do one more thing, salute you all and say 'Well done, well done.'"

Veteran John Read said he always liked the ceremony and he appreciated the Marblehead High School teens coming out to sing.

"They don't have to be here," he said. "They come and sing because they want to."

Read tends to dismiss his service because he never served overseas, but Kelley said it doesn't matter.

"You don't just send someone to war," he said. "The (military) has to have weapons and uniforms and socks, not just soldiers."