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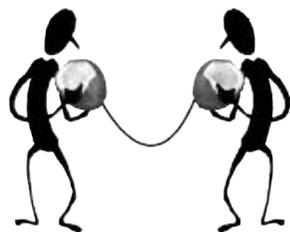
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Editorial: Real Decorations

This holiday season KLI in Key Largo gave notice to their neighbors, the VFW, that anyone parked in front of their store "during their decorated season" would be towed at the vehicle owner's expense. They wanted the public to be able to see their holiday decorations without the obstruction of veterans' vehicles. How is that for holiday spirit?

Imagine this scenario for what could be your son, daughter, grandchild, niece, nephew, or friend: First Sergeant Marine Corps Johnny Doe just got back from a nightmare tour in Iraq. He's on his way home for Christmas to surprise his family. With an eight-hour layover at MIA he decides to rent a car and visit the fabulous Florida Keys. The first thing he sees is the friendly red, white and

blue of the Veteran's of Foreign Wars. He knows there he will find friendly faces and perhaps a bite to eat.

Unknowingly, he parks in front of KLI. After a couple of draft beers and a fantastic dinner for only \$7 he bids his comrades farewell and exits the building only to find his rental car is gone! Back into the VFW he goes, "What happened to my car?" he asks. Another veteran sadly replies, "Sorry Johnny, the not so friendly folks neighbors at KLI probably had it towed."

Sure enough the greedy tow truck company has it. Johnny gets a ride to the towing company where he is charged \$400 to get his car back. That is all the money he had left. No more exploring the beautiful sights of Key Largo and that eliminates his last

minute Christmas shopping money. Mr. Tow Truck got it all. Johnny wouldn't be able to buy his wife that bracelet or his mom that special gift. Welcome back Johnny, you just got 'grinched' by a heartless hardware store!

Obviously the owners of KLI don't know what real decorations are. They are the medals and ribbons that the people fighting for our freedom have earned. They are the hours spent far away from their family crawling through the mud dodging bullets and bombs. They are tear drops on the letters to home written under candlelight late at night. They are the prayers of the loved ones, "God, please don't take my beloved Johnny."

Thankfully Johnny gets to wear his decorations to VFW ceremonies while

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way too many of his comrades came home in a box with their medals in bags along with their dog tags all wrapped up in a pretty flag. The real decorations are the tears of loved ones on a casket and a 21-gun salute. They are the treasures of a fatherless child or bereft parents. They are the greatest gift of all.

This writer is proud of her father's Army service to this country in Korea, and proud of the nine years her cousin Navy Captain Walter E. Wilber spent in Hanoi Hilton as a

prisoner of war because the plane he was piloting was shot down over Viet Nam. She is proud yet saddened by the countless young people she grew up with that never came back, that will never be able to see the KLI "decorated season" and not because some veteran parked in front of it obscured their view. It is because they never got to live the life in paradise that the owners of KLI do. This writer will never shop in their store again.



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