



Always ready to make new friends, Jesse Brown, former Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the DAV 2000 Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year, chats with visitors at the Vietnam Veterans Women's Memorial during a walk along the mall in Washington, D.C.

## Veterans' Veteran Jesse Brown Is DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran for 2000

The middle-aged man sat on a bench at the south end of the mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans National Memorial, in Washington, D.C. He looked out on a perfect July day, complete with clear skies, plenty of sunshine and low humidity. He knew how rare such summer weather is for Washington.

The man wore a light gray, summer suit. His jacket was folded neatly over the back of the bench. Anyone taking notice would have seen a handsome man with silvering hair, and thought him one of the many government workers who make their way to the mall to walk and relax during lunch. Anyone recognizing him immediately knows he is one of the most respected veterans' advocates in history — he is Jesse Brown, the former Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and the man selected by the DAV to receive the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award for 2000.

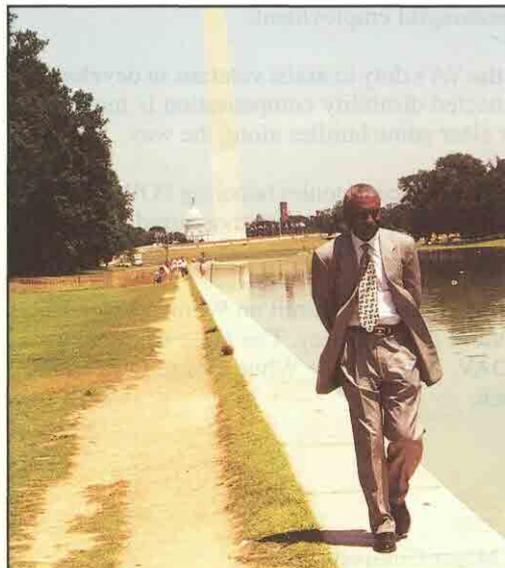
In 1993, during the confirmation hearing to become the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, then-Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman John D. "Jay" Rockefeller IV (D-W.Va.) said Mr. Brown's 25-year career in advocacy for veterans reflected "a deep-seated commitment to ensuring that the government fulfills its fundamental obligation to those who have defended our country in times of war and peace. He truly is a veterans' veteran."

It is his commitment, combined with unwavering moral fortitude and other qualities serving as an example for all to emulate, that has earned Mr. Brown the DAV's most prestigious individual award. DAV National Commander Michael E. Dobmeier will present the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award to Mr. Brown during the opening session of the 79th National Convention of the DAV and Auxiliary in Reno, Nev., Aug. 20.

For Jesse Brown, the journey leading to this event began in 1963 when he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Shortly after the death of his beloved grandmother, Mr. Brown went to his mother to tell her he was joining the Marines. He asked his sister, Dorothy, whom he nicknamed "Girl," to write. Then, like countless sons before and after him, he bid his mother, Lucille, whom he lovingly calls "Sister," farewell, and left his Chicago home for boot camp.

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With the Capitol and the Washington Monument in the background, Jesse Brown, the DAV 2000 Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year, ponders the future of a national memorial for disabled veterans that he and Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation Chairman Lois Pope, are currently working to make a reality.

## Disabled Veteran

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Two years later, the young Marine corporal's military career was cut short by an enemy bullet in the Vietnam War. Mr. Brown was seriously wounded by enemy gunfire while engaged in a combat patrol in the Da Nang area of Vietnam. His wounds left him with a disabled arm, but didn't dampen his desire to excel.

While recuperating at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital near Chicago Mr. Brown received plenty of visits from his family, and a visit from a DAV representative. Before long, Mr. Brown was a member of DAV Chapter 6 in Chicago talking with his mother about becoming a DAV National Service Officer. He was about to start a career with the DAV. It wouldn't involve being shot at, but would certainly involve fighting some battles.

As the Vietnam War escalated in 1967, Mr. Brown joined the DAV's profes-

sional staff as an NSO trainee. He attended the NSO training program at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., and, following graduation, returned to Chicago to battle the VA for compensation and benefits on behalf of disabled veterans and their families.

During that time, Mr. Brown earned his degree as an honors graduate of Chicago City College and married his wife, Sylvia. The couple moved to Washington, D.C., in 1973, and the family grew to four with the addition of son, Scott, and daughter, Carmen.

Washington honed Mr. Brown's skills to a surgical edge as he advanced from supervisor of the DAV National Service Office in Washington, to DAV National Appeals Staff Supervisor at the Board of Veterans' Appeals, then on to the DAV National Service and Legislative Headquarters to serve as Chief of Claims in 1981. By the end of 1983 he was serving as Deputy National Service Director. He later served as Executive Assistant to the National Adjutant, and in 1989 was promoted to Executive Director of the DAV Washington Headquarters.

In 1993, Jesse Brown received an offer to quit battling the VA and run it for President Clinton, ending his DAV career. But what Jesse Brown had learned as a National Service Officer, and his unending desire to serve the needs of veterans, their families and survivors went with the new Secretary "for" Veterans Affairs.

During the next four and a half years, Secretary Brown's leadership helped the VA to improve the lives of veterans and their families at every level. From expanded benefits to military men and women exposed to Agent Orange, radiation, and mustard gas, to priority health care for illnesses possibly incurred by military men and women in the Persian Gulf, the compassionate and intelligent leadership of Secretary Brown never faltered for the veterans he served. He also convened the first national summit meeting on homeless veterans and expanded services to women veterans.

When he left the Office of Secretary in 1997, Jesse Brown was lauded as one of the foremost leaders to ever head the VA.

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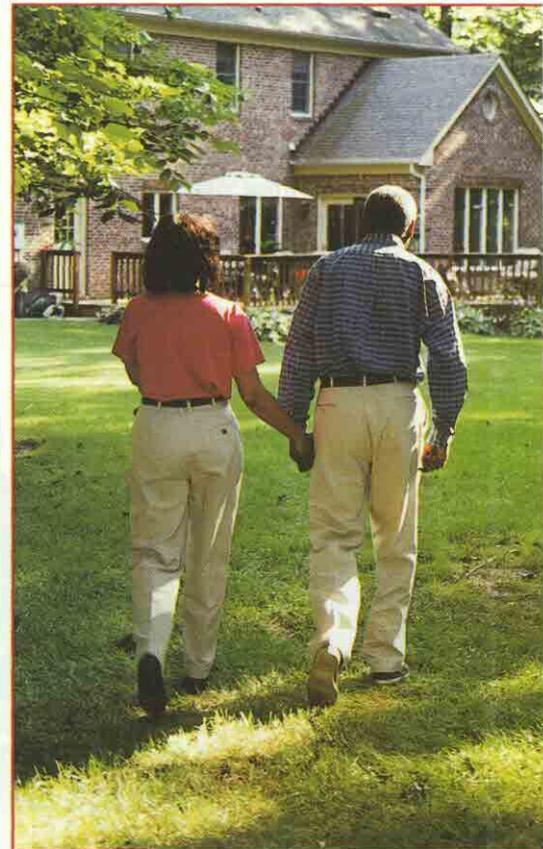


Holding a photo of her son Jesse, Ms. Lucille Brown, lovingly known as "Sister" by the former Secretary of Veterans Affairs, checks the room she keeps ready for his visits to her Chicago apartment.



Among DAV National Service Officers (NSO) graduating from the NSO training program at Catholic University in 1967 is Jesse Brown, standing, far right.

A devoted husband and father, Jesse Brown enjoys quiet moments, such as this evening walk through the yard, shared with his wife, Sylvia.



## Disabled Veteran

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In the ensuing years, Mr. Brown has been named to several corporate boards and is serving as Executive Director of the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation working to establish the first national memorial in the nation's capitol honoring disabled veterans from all wars. Working toward this goal with his long-time friend DAV National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson, LIFE Chairman Lois B. Pope, and others, is a labor of love for Mr. Brown. Time, however, is no longer on his side.

Over a year ago, Mr. Brown was diagnosed with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a fatal disease often referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease. But the initial diagnosis was wrong. Further testing revealed that Mr. Brown is suffering from Lower Motor Neuron Syndrome.

Very much like ALS, Lower Motor Neuron Syndrome is much slower (it can take 15 to 20 years to be fatal). The disease attacks nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord eventually destroying all

*Jesse Brown, the DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 2000, relaxes at his northern Virginia home with his wife, Sylvia.*

voluntary muscle action and paralyzing the victim before death.

National Adjutant Wilson was stunned by the news of his friend's illness.

"I felt like I'd been kicked so hard I wanted to double over," Mr. Wilson said. "But once I realized and understood the type of illness Jesse has, and the person he is, I know he will take this illness as a new life challenge. He will understand it, he will teach it, and he will do everything in his power to identify ways to deal with it.

"Jesse will turn this into a positive venture for other people while he must deal with his own personal situation,

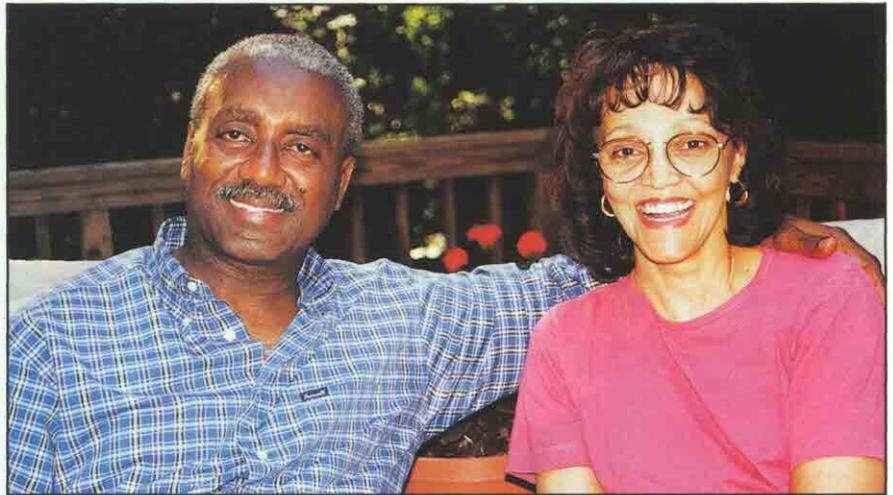
which is certainly a credit to Jesse the man, where he comes from, and how he deals with all challenges.

"This is a man people in this country would do well to emulate as a human being.

"Jesse Brown is a veterans' veteran. There aren't too many veterans' veterans around these days. Jesse truly carries the torch for veterans of this country, and I'm proud to say he's a friend of mine."

There are more than a million DAV and Auxiliary members who are also proud to call Jesse Brown, the DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award for 2000, their friend.

DAV



### Preparing to Help ...

Volunteers and DAV and Auxiliary members assemble "Disaster Needs" tote bags at the VA Medical Center (VAMC) in West Palm Beach, Fla. DAV Chapters and Auxiliary Units in Florida donate the bags and contents, which include comfort items, a flashlight, bottled water, a radio, can goods, can opener, rain poncho, cookies and other items. An ongoing program at the VAMC, the tote bags, provided to homeless and needy veterans, were distributed prior to Hurricane Floyd. Assembling tote bags are, from left, Assistant VAMC Chief of Voluntary Service (VAVS) Barbara Martin, DAV volunteer Milton S. Newman, DAV Chapter 42 member Jake Jakuboski, DAV Auxiliary VAVS Representative Claire Newman, DAV Hospital Service Coordinator and VAVS Representative Sal Uccello, and DAV Chapter 42 member Mike Bove.

### Veterans Get a Lift ...

Below, members of DAV Chapter and Auxiliary Unit 20, Glendale, Ariz., and DAV Chapter 24, Sun City, Ariz., presented this motorized cart to the Arizona Veterans Home. Due to age and disability, many veterans find it difficult to get from the home to the nearby Phoenix VA Medical Center for appointments. The cart, capable of carrying three ambulatory passengers and two wheelchairs, resolves this difficulty by transporting veterans between the home and the main lobby of the hospital.

