

REMEMBRANCE DAY

By Marina Phillips

My husband was in the United States Army for eight years before I met him. He went on several missions and fought as a tank gunner on the front line in Desert Storm. When I think of all the hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of bullets that tried to find their way to his heart, I am thankful every day that God saw fit to spare him and bring him to me.

It was not fun. It was not pretty. It was not the glorified battlefield portrayed in movies. It was ugly, and it was hard. Who would not be forever changed by such an experience? It left my husband with questions and conundrums. But he also carries within himself, a certainty that he did what had to be done to defend the freedom of his country. I admire him for this very much, because I am not sure that I could remain so clear about my purpose in the face of that kind of bloodshed. It haunts him, of course, it always will.

I am thankful also that through my husband, I have come to understand the nature of war and what it means to actually, physically be in one. It used to be so easy to shrug and say, 'I don't believe in war' without ever realizing the more complex heart of the issue. I think few people ever get that kind of insight and even though it is not pleasant, it is something everyone should strive to understand. Not only because it is a part of our history and people have laid down their lives, but because there are those still living who have fought in wars, and who should be remembered with utmost respect and empathy. Those people carry some very heavy memories and they should not have to carry them alone.

Steven Tyler once said, "Every life has a measure of sorrow and sometimes this is what awakens us." This is, perhaps, even more true of soldiers. The deep commitment it takes to stand with an army and endure the horrors of war is of rare quality, indeed. What do you think you would do if you came face-to-face with all that you are capable of? How would you bear the burden of that knowledge for the rest of your life? Do you think that ordinary life with family and friends would take on a rather ethereal atmosphere when you measure it against the awful things you've done on the battlefield? Would you be able to leave it all behind and take comfort in the ordinary?

A former soldier not only has to reconcile all of this, he also has to reconcile the fact that others have died and he did not. He faces the monumental task of trying to help others understand and remember the profound sacrifice his comrades have made for freedom and democracy. It is not easy. Young people are far away from the wars.

The Royal Canadian Legion is losing more members every year. The job of remembering and taking the message to the public is being carried by fewer and fewer people. Unfortunately, time does not stop. The Legion has realized this fact and is beginning to change its focus to be a resource for everyone in both wartime and peacetime. Changing their old image will be difficult, but if anyone can do it, they can. They have also left a legacy across the country that will continue to stand even if they cannot.

Canadian War Monuments are a poignant reminder of the price Canadians have been willing to

pay to preserve our democracy. There are approximately 850 war memorials across the country, put there largely through the influences and efforts of local Canadian Legions. Every province remembers its fallen citizens.

We remember, even though we do not understand entirely. We know that the wars were about something important and that our way of life would not be possible without them. We know that many gave their lives, and we remember them in our hearts not only on Remembrance Day, but every day. So the efforts of those who came home alive are not in vain. They have done their job well!

Remembrance Day observances will be held downtown at the Main Cenotaph in Riverside Park on Monday morning, September 11th.

Have a reflective week, all!