

THANK YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FOR YOUR SERVICE

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I would like to tell you a brief history of the poppy worn on Veteran's Day. It was during WWI when a Canadian Army Major John McCrae looked out at a field of red poppies near Flanders, where a battle had taken place the year before. He equated those poppies to the bloodstains left by those who were wounded or killed the year before. He wrote the following poem:

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
we lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow.
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

He sent that poem home and it got published in a magazine. A woman read it and was so moved that she created some red poppies out of cloth and sold them to her neighbors to wear. This spread to other countries who were also at war and so the story goes. Monies raised were given to those in need. Today it's still the same story. Over 100 years later.

My father was born in 1898 and was a Veteran of WWI. He was 16 years older than my mother. I don't recall a year when he didn't have a poppy pinned to his shirt on Veterans Day. He fought in the trenches filled with mud in France until he developed Tuberculosis and was sent on a hospital ship to a hospital in New Jersey to heal before being sent back home to a farm in N Wisconsin. He had lots of war stories, but I had heard them so often that I just tuned them out. I wish I had written them down. I have some of the letters he sent home, written in pencil. I can see him growing up through these letters. His parents had to sign for him to go into the Army as he wasn't yet 21.

My mother had a brother that died in WWII. I have cousins that served in the Army in the Korean War. Howard has an uncle that was in the Navy during WWII. And he has an aunt that enlisted in the Navy in WWII and ended up in Hawaii driving officers around in a Jeep. Her funeral was a military one, as it should have been. One of Howard's brothers was drafted and went to Viet Nam, right in the thick of things.

Howard enlisted in the Air Force in 1964 and stayed in for 20 years. He knew he would get drafted so chose to enlist instead. We had dated for over a year when he left, and didn't see each other again for over 7 months. that was the beginning of a very distant relationship until we got married in 1967.

I went from living in the same house on North Street right here in West Bend to being a military wife and moving 12 times. Quite a change!

So when people say 'thank you for your service' I don't think they realize we were a military FAMILY and the kids and I served as well as my husband in his uniform. We moved 5 times the first 5 years we were married. He spent a year on a mountain top in Thailand during the Viet Nam as he worked with long-range radar. Every time we moved the kids and I had to reestablish our lives. New schools, new places to shop, new towns. I would never take away the praise for Howard for what he did for our country, I just wish people would realize we were his back-up team. I could iron and starch those fatigues so they could stand in a corner. I had to reorganize a kitchen every time we moved. I got quite proficient at packing suitcases. I even had to use one as an ironing board.

The plus is that we lived surrounded by other families in the same situation. People from all over the United States that had lived in places all over the world. I miss knowing people from other races and nationalities.

This made me wonder about the families of the Disciples. Jesus walking along the seashore and saying to men "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" and they did just that. People had heard of this man called Jesus so it's not like he was a complete stranger. But didn't these men have wives or mothers waiting for them to come home for lunch or dinner? Did anyone say "no thanks" to Jesus? It's not like they could call home on their cell phone and explain they might be late for dinner - for a few months. We will never know.

I realize the moral of that story is to understand the blind faith these men had in Jesus. And to follow their examples But I have always questioned the details that were left out. And if we were to know the details, they would have been written. Kind of like not knowing about Jesus as a child. I once asked Pastor Jeremy about that and he said, it wasn't relevant to the story of Jesus. Enough said. I am not very good at taking things at face value.

There are men that returned from Viet Nam that were never the same. I am sure the other wars had the same result. How do you go from following the Commandment 'thou shalt not kill' to watching a friend die on a battlefield and not be moved by it?

Yet in Ecclesiastes 3 it tells us "there is a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace"

There have been killings and wars since history was recorded. Look at Cain and Abel. An extreme example of sibling rivalry. Or Adolph Hitler, an example of blindly following a demonic leader.

What's the point of all of this? I don't know if we will EVER have world peace for any length of time. There is always someone with no moral code that can right convince others that he has the way to live.

However, there will always be those that have other ideas of how to live - with love and respect and caring for others We are called Christians.

So, to all of you that follow the cross - thank you for your service and your family's service to God and Jesus. And thank you for all that you stand for.

AMEN