

# Memorial Day reminds us to honor war sacrifices

Sept. 11, 2001 is a day that will speak to all generations. For most Americans this day brought about confusion, sadness and a feeling of hopelessness in this country.

Seeing what were considered symbols of power, buildings were destroyed along with precious lives to intimidate our population and government ... placing our American freedom at risk. This act has only awakened patriotism, as well as our hearts.

As the days, weeks and months unfold we may try to forgive, but we will never forget. We can never forget the principles with which this country was founded. We cannot forget the sweat and blood that all races have shed to keep what we call freedom.

Some of us may not have known any of the individuals who lost their lives in this tragedy by name, but we must remember that their sacrifice has given us the opportunity to join together as a country and show our strength, beliefs, courage and faith.

Memorial Day was so named because we must never forget that peace, unfortunately, doesn't last forever. History never stops proving that point.

Indeed, the past generation of veterans marched in and out of various hells around the planet - Bastogne, Iwo Jima, Tarawa, Anzio, the Chosin Reservoir, Pork Chop Hill - and it was obvious by the middle of the century that the World War I Armistice was just one in a series.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur put it this way in a speech at the U.S. Military Academy in 1962: "The soldier, above all, prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war."

For the United States in the past quarter-century, war has drifted in and out of a restless, distant slumber. It has bolted awake in places like Lebanon, Bosnia, Somalia, Panama or Kuwait - locations hard enough for most Americans to find on a map, let alone understand the often complicated reasons why our troops were asked to fight there.

On our own continent, war had slept for nearly 140 years until everything changed Sept. 11. And

as we all know, it did not just reawaken in America. It erupted in broad daylight before our disbelieving eyes.

As workers finalize picking through the rubble in New York City this Memorial Day, American war veterans, non-veterans, reserves, guardsmen and active-duty personnel alike find themselves standing together, sharing a "highly developed will" of patriotism, faith, courage and resolve. Veterans have always drawn upon in times of crisis, when the price of peace might just be paid in human lives.

They are the values America will honor, perhaps more acutely than ever, on this particularly significant Memorial Day.

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We here in the community of Farmington are saluting the heroes of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the unknown heroes of the fatal crash in Pennsylvania.

Let's remember the first persons to answer the call for help - the firemen and policemen in New York City. They were caught in the subsequent fires and lost their lives so others could avoid that fate.

I know there were many others that assisted and are still doing so in the areas of Ground Zero.

There are many accounts of the thousands of firemen, policemen and construction workers who formed human chains, pushing stacks of plastic buckets back and forth, filled with debris. They would stop in signals when they thought that they heard human sounds and dogs were called upon to help and so many times their hopes were dashed in despair with another false alarm.

They dug frantically, hoping to find some of their fallen comrades, but to no avail. So many were affected by this terrible tragedy.

In our hearts and minds we wish them blessings, love, healing and peace. May we each extend a feeling of love and peace in this world and let us replace fear and anger with love. Let that love wash over the world.

God Bless the USA.

Wally Christensen, Memorial Day chairperson representing American Legion Groves-Walker Post #346 in Farmington Hills, delivered this address during Memorial Day services held Monday in downtown Farmington.



Joni Hubred

Monday dawned bright, a perfect Memorial Day with a perfect blue sky and a breeze that kept temperatures comfortably warm. People began filtering into downtown Farmington before 9 a.m., staking out their favorite spots, then settling in to read or nap or calm an excited child. It was a morning tailor-made for a family outing, and families by the score took advantage. You didn't see only Moms and Dads and children, you saw grandmothers and grandfathers, members of what Farmington's own Col. Frederick Bromm called "the greatest generation."

"(World War II veterans) saved the world, and don't ever forget that," Bromm said during services held after the parade.

Those soldiers and their families had obvious enemies in the Nazis, Hitler and Hirohito. They had Pearl Harbor to remember. Their mission was to spread freedom and democracy.

Quickly now - what is the purpose of Operation Enduring Freedom?

Who is our enemy? Where are our battlefields? If you're paying attention to the news, you can probably answer those questions in part, but the complex array of political realities in today's world makes it more difficult than ever to fully understand why America is at war.

Consider that one of the best selling books in France right now was written by a man who puts forth the horrifying theory that the United States itself masterminded the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Consider that since Sept. 11, Americans have quibbled over everything from the amount of money survivors should receive to whether New York and New Jersey ought to rebuild the Twin Towers.

Cynics might contend America has lost its soul and decry the death of true patriotism.

Cynics didn't attend Monday's Memorial Day parade in downtown Farmington.

Everyone flew the colors, thanks to Exchange Club members who distributed flags up and down the parade route. Veterans marched, proudly representing more than 225 years of American military history.

High school students gave up what might have been a fine holiday morning to sleep in or hit the lakes, instead marching from one end of Grand River to the other. This day of remembering wouldn't have been what it should without "The Star Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America," which has become a kind of second national anthem over the past eight months.

# Memorial Day: No longer just the day the pool opens

And then came the newest addition to our nation's cadre of freedom fighters, men and women who now stand on the front lines of a war waged at least in part from the inside out. Police, firefighters and emergency medical workers have always risked their lives, but never in our country's history have their contributions seemed more important.

When New York emergency services workers formed human chains to rescue victims from the World Trade Center, when they dashed into buildings as others ran out, we all gained a new appreciation for our hometown heroes. When Hills firefighters touched by the loss of their comrades organized a fund-raising walk from the Ambassador Bridge to the Brooklyn Bridge, we saw the embodiment of America's unified spirit.

Is this our finest hour as a nation? Perhaps not. We are largely back to our old selves, involved in lives that are too busy and working so hard to maintain a lifestyle that we forget to live.

But when we stop to remember now, we feel the pain of this new war. We know where we were that awful morning; we can still describe the impact, the fireball and the way clouds of dust billowed as the towers collapsed.

We have videotaped reminders of a horror most of us didn't see and near-constant warnings about a danger most of us can't imagine.

On Memorial Day 2001, Hills Mayor Nancy Bates talked about how children think of the last Monday in May as the day the pool opens, because they have no concept of war and the supreme sacrifices made in the name of freedom. A few months later, children learned that difficult lesson, a solemn reminder that freedom is never free.

We are all most certainly standing on a battlefield. Yes, we are a generation charged with the responsibility of preserving America's freedom, but we are also victims of terror who struggle to regain a foothold in lives that will never be the same.

In this, we are different from the Greatest Generation. But like them, we are learning to rely on each other, to reach outside ourselves, to pray.

No American holiday will ever be the same, but more than most, Memorial Day has changed for us all.

"None of us can ever again think of Memorial Day as the day the pool opens," Bates said. "It must be the day we acknowledge with grateful hearts what it means to be an American."

-Joni Hubred is editor of the Farmington Observer. She welcomes your comments at 33411 Grand River, Farmington MI 48335; by FAX, (248) 477-5722; or via e-mail, jhubred@oc.homecomm.net

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