

Don't Let Memories Fade

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Today, more than any other, we MUST remember.

We must remember those that served across our armed forces, around the world, both those who lost their lives doing so and those who are serving or still suffering today. UN Peacekeeping forces too ? who often face just as much danger during 'peace' time as in conflict - must all be honoured.

As I have written in the past and will likely write again in the future, it's the very least we can do.

With World War One having finished well over a century ago and this the year we celebrate the 100-year-old beginnings of the tradition of wearing a poppy to honour the fallen, it's so very important that we don't ever let memories fade.

For many of us, the last generation who may have had some direct experience of a World War are being lost to us forever. Our grandparents or even great grandparents who may have fought or who lived through the consequences of war may no longer be with us today to share the stories that help bring the atrocities of war to life. These first-hand remembrances are so impactful and, I think, particularly important in helping younger Canadians to understand war isn't a video game with a chance to 'try again' but rather, has devastating consequences impacting families for generations.

Younger adults, teens and children are becoming increasingly far removed from the tragedy that is war and while that's a good thing, it means our collective memories are fading. We cannot forget those lost, the men and women who bravely went into battle and lost their lives. We cannot forget the other victims of war; the wounded, those with PTSD, or even entire families lost or left homeless, families forced to flee in the night leaving everything behind for a chance at a new life, often in another country where they don't know the language or customs and may not even have any paperwork to prove their identity. It happened in WWI, again in WWII and it's still happening even today.

After WWII, displaced persons camps housed war refugees while countries bickered over who and how many families they would accept; today we have recent refugees from the turmoil in Afghanistan are learning how to enrol their children in school and navigate the complexities of re-qualifying their credentials so they can work in Canada. If you still have a family member who can share their experiences first hand you should spend time with them because for many youth who no longer have (thankfully) first hand knowledge of war, these elders can provide context to war's harsh realities.

If you don't know anyone, you might want to spend some time volunteering at a refugee center and learn from people just like you and I, whose country was suddenly thrown into turmoil and who faced the impossible decision of leaving everything they've ever known behind them with blind faith that they would land somehow, somewhere safe. These stories are so very important. They are the stark reminders we need in a world where memories fade far too quickly.

The tradition of wearing the poppy is another way to ensure memories don't fade. It's a visual reminder, traditionally worn from the last Friday in October, until November 11th of the sacrifices made during wartime. According to the Royal Canadian Legion, the poppy came to represent our solemn reflections on both the lost and living wounded as a direct result of two persons in history, John McCrae and Madame Anna Guérin of France. John McCrae of course is the author of *In Flanders Fields*, while Anna Guérin, inspired by his poem, made and distributed fabric poppies to raise funds for a charity focussed on rebuilding France. Later, she presented her concept of the poppy as a symbol of remembrance to The Great War Veterans Association (precursor to the Legion) who adopted it in July of 1921.

The poppy is to be worn on the left side, over the heart and should be removed at the end of the day November 11th, stored or disposed of respectfully or, in what has become a moving tradition in many cities, left on the cenotaph as a sign of respect at the end

of Remembrance Day ceremonies.

In one of the few acts of our Progressive Conservative government that I agree with, they have introduced legislation that enshrines the right of every worker to wear a poppy in the workplace during Remembrance Week.

?By enshrining this support in law, we are reminding employers that Ontario owes them a debt of gratitude to the brave people who serve our country and that should be reflected in employment policies and practices.?

The poppy is an opportunity to ?honour Canada's fallen soldiers, veterans and serving members by observing Remembrance Day and wearing poppies, a visible symbol of their extraordinary courage and profound sacrifice.?

This became necessary, you may recall, after last year's debacle involving grocery chain Whole Foods, who banned employees from wearing poppies. This legislation is important because as older generations leave us and ?first-hand? accounts of conflict, war and upheaval become harder to come by, it's the visual and poignant reminder of the simple poppy that may help to ensure our collective memories don't fade.