

Never forget, nor take freedom for granted

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Last weekend, I attended an early Remembrance Day ceremony honouring fallen soldiers and recognizing those who currently serve our country. As I always do, I find these events both poignant and an opportunity to reflect on one of the greatest gifts we have: our freedom. It's not a cliché, it's not an overused expression, and in light of the strife in the world taking place at this very moment, it is in fact our responsibility to always remember that such freedom must never be taken for granted. What was so bravely fought for, that for which so many paid the ultimate price, is something to be treasured. Lately however, I fear that both time and distance have diminished our appreciation for the horrors of war and that despite even easier access to world news and information than ever before, we remain blissfully unaware of the advantages our freedom provides.

One of my children was with me and as I periodically watched them during the ceremony, I couldn't even begin to comprehend what it must have been like (and, in some cases, is now) for a parent to watch their own child walk out the front door - knowing they were going to war. To take up arms against another mother's child, either close to home or in some far-off distant land. To know that even if your child returned home, what they would have endured in the interim is beyond our imagining. Yet, to these stories we must turn, in an effort to understand - at least on some level - how grateful we should be.

The conflicts mentioned at the ceremony I attended, in all but one example, took place many decades (and even a century) ago and what that means for so many of us blessed to live here in Canada, is that we have so little frame of reference for understanding the realities of war.

Instead of being grateful, however, we're forgetful. We don't remember first hand, and there are fewer and fewer veterans left to share their stories. Complacency sets in and dismissively we claim, "we're Canadian," and "that would never happen here," or "it won't ever happen again, we're smarter than that now." Yet every day our newsfeeds bring us stories of wars and conflicts from around the world and if history has taught us anything it's that it matters not who started the conflict because it can so easily engulf us all. World War I began in Sarajevo, World War II in Poland, still other wars began in countries such as Korea and Afghanistan - yet each of these "far off" battle zones meant action on the frontlines for Canadian soldiers. It also matters not who started the conflict when so many civilians also pay the ultimate price, particularly children who are all too often caught in the crossfire.

Who are the victims of war? We are ALL victims. Bombs don't care whether they land on hospitals or hotels, on terrorists or trained infantry, or on babies or the base command of military operations. Trade between nations stops and scarcities (of food, medicine, water, etc.) occur. Hunger sets in and danger is ever present. Families are separated, homes are destroyed and sources of reliable information are lost. Yes, even in this day and age of advanced technology it is so easy to cut off access to news, or to generate fake news, propaganda and misinformation, creating a steady barrage of words that simply stoke yet more violence and hate. It's why now, perhaps more than ever before, we MUST remember. We MUST pause on November 11th and bear witness to Remembrance Day ceremonies that honour the fallen but which also force us to reflect on the true value of our freedom. We are blessed here in Canada and for that you can thank a veteran. But don't ever, for a moment, take that freedom for granted.