

Take two minutes, it's the least you can do

BY SHERALYN ROMAN

Many have written on this topic and far more eloquently than I, yet I sit here as Remembrance Day approaches, thinking of those that made the ultimate sacrifice and wondering how I can use this space to adequately express thanks to those who willingly gave up their lives so that we could freely live ours.

With conscription a late addition to both WWI and WWII, it's safe to say that most Canadians willingly went to war on our behalf and certainly all those who enlist today do so voluntarily. Think about that for a moment. These are your neighbours, the son or daughter of a friend, your nephew ? it might even have been your family Doctor. ?Everyday? people who chose to serve our country, knowing that at best, they would be separated from family and, well we all know what ?at worst? means. These are people that have gone bravely into battle (or even peacekeeping missions that often prove dangerous) facing an enemy many might never have heard of outside of the odd history lesson in school. I recently read a book, based on true events, which highlighted the valor of a select few women dropped in to France at the height of the resistance. Leaving children and families behind with a courage I will never possess and pray I will never have to. Men and women did this then, they still do it today and all we are asked to do is stop for a moment or two to honour them.

A recent Maclean's article explored the idea of whether or not Remembrance Day should be a national holiday. It is for civil servants, why not the rest of us? They asked veterans of WWII and many clearly stated they would prefer it remain a public holiday so that families could attend services together. I believe this to be a noble idea but I'm afraid a great majority of us might not act so nobly. Over many years I have had occasion to be at various schools as they mark this solemn day. In the weeks leading up to Remembrance Day teachers do an excellent job of providing lessons that give some historical context to the students. Many invite veterans to speak, hear from Holocaust survivors and generally mark the occasion with the respect and dignity it deserves. In our current environment, often with both parents working outside of the home, a day off is a luxury. While I don't want to sell my fellow citizens short ? I'm just not sure that provided with a full day of ?extra? time ? we would find the time to stop and pay our respects at 11am. I recall just once in my life, as a result of an unavoidable scheduled appointment, it finished and I ran to my local coffee shop. I realized with horror that 11am was literally moments away. I jogged back to the car so I could at least listen to services over the radio and pay my respects, albeit sitting in a parking lot. Glancing inside however, I saw zero evidence of anyone paying attention to anything other than their double double.

I'm not sure what the answer is. Those workplaces that allow employees to stop and pay respects are doing the right thing. I'm sure there are many that don't. I'm equally sure that giving people the day off ?so that families could attend services together? is, unfortunately, an inaccurate reflection of our times. I think keeping our kids in school at least allows the opportunity to provide that history lesson. Frankly, as we move farther and farther away from the harsh realities of WWI and WWII, it's a lesson we could all use.

In addition to attending services when I can, I always try to buy my poppy from someone who served. It's a small thing but a chance to say a personal ?thank you.? What small act do you do to honour Remembrance Day? Do you talk to your children about the lessons they learn in school? Will you stop what you are doing at 11:00am this November 11th and take two minutes to honour the dead? Will you find the time to thank those living with war wounds or those living with PTSD? Will you take longer than those two minutes? You could, because you have the freedom to do so. You have the luxury of time, because those who bravely went into battle for us don't.