

## For the First Time

Stepping off the bus I noticed that the sky was dark and gloomy. The sound of my shoes hitting the gravel seemed to be the only thing my growing mind could take in. Most days here were like that, but rain normally poured from the skies, and dampened your spirit.

Off in the distance, through the grayness, there were wavy hills with open tunnels. "Trenches", my dad said while he turned, and looked at me. I looked up and smiled at him. I had been learning a lot about war from him. After all he's a Canadian soldier and he has been to places of conflict before.

Staring back at the tunnels, I could imagine the loud cries and huge booms in the distance from war. I could visualize the horrific scenes of battle in front of me thanks to the visits to the Ypres and Passchendaele Museums. It was like I was really there. Goosebumps rose on my skin from the anxious feeling that grew in my stomach, but maybe it was just the dampness of the morning that penetrated my clothing and got into my skin.

The open fields were blocked off. The green grass and trees had grown back or were planted, but, mankind had destroyed it all. The large crater holes from bombs still remained, but sheep now grazed in these areas. My eight year old self hoped that they would not step on the wrong spot. My heart sank.

Walking down the grimmy steps made my stomach turn. The underground dugouts were dark and made me feel like I could not breathe. 'How could soldiers live like this? It must have been ghastly.' The fake props that resembled the men even looked like they had seen hell. Some of them even had fake injuries. One more thing my petite sized brain tried to take in . . . to remember.

Stepping out and seeing the gloomy skies again, I could picture the hostile area. Two sides were sometimes separated by only inches of dirt and barbed wire in some places. In the distance, a huge statue with two large white pillars appeared. The walk toward it was quiet, and only the sound of the blowing wind could be heard in the air.

Upon closer examination, I could see names engraved in its base. The names wrapped around the limestone blocks, like the scarf I wrapped around my neck to stay warm. The names belonged to those who had fallen, and had sacrificed themselves for peace throughout the world.

Facts and images moved through my brain like a mini movie. Four years of stories were hard to cram into my little head in only one day, but I was glad I came. It was time to get back on the bus. I looked around one last time. I hugged my dad and said, "Thank you for taking me, thank you for your service, and thank you for teaching me to never forget."