

## Remembrance Day Essay

"What does Remembrance Day mean to you?" That was a question we used to get asked a lot as elementary students, as the youth of today. The real answer is I don't know. I've always felt detached from the question like it wasn't particularly relevant to my life. My peers, my friends all had stories about their grandparents. I felt like I could never really understand the depth of Remembrance Day. I was always respectful and tried to understand what it meant. I was always told on remembrance day to imagine what it would be like if I were in their shoes. But if I'm being honest I don't think that's feasible. To me, war was a horrific event of a great disaster that should never occur again. That's why it was so hard for me to picture. I've never experienced something like that, and I find it hard to even sit through movies about war. Remembrance day has always been a bit of a challenge for me to wrap my head around. So this year I did some more research.

"What does remembrance day mean to you?" I learned I had a great-great-grandfather who went to the war when researching for a history project a few weeks ago. After looking through many census records from 1916 and 1926 and old papers, I learned he had left his family and went to Camp Hughes (an important military training base in Manitoba) before serving in the First World War. He later returned and we think he suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD which at the time was not recognized as a diagnosable condition. He was an Indigenous veteran who was struggling and there was no one there to help him. My great-grandma rarely spoke of him but she remembered him as abusive especially when he drank alcohol. The lack of support for his mental health and financial support for Indigenous veterans likely contributed to him leaving his young family to struggle without him.

"What does remembrance day mean to you?" My great-grandmother grew up without a father and struggled through the Great Depression. She married a young man who also joined the army. This time he was an Indigenous soldier who went to war and came back with a trade. After returning from war, he became an electrician and supported a large family of 11 kids. He was a proud veteran but also did not talk about his time in the army.

"What does remembrance day mean to you?" Remembrance day makes me think about my cousin who joined the military. The same cousin I went to Skyzone the trampoline park with is now driving tanks. He is very proud of this choice and will get his secondary education as part of his time serving our country. He is smart, kind and made the choice to be a part of our military for his own reasons.

This question has always been difficult for me to answer. And I know it is part of who I am, the life I live, and the country I am proud to live in. Our past veterans and military men and women made and continue to make hard choices to serve Canada. I am proud of my family for being part of that history. I am proud and grateful on Remembrance Day.