

A Moment of Silence

By: Kate Shackleton

Many people worry that young people will not carry on the tradition of remembrance. They worry that the next generation will forget, that the meaning of remembrance will be lost. Yet, as a teenager myself, I can say with confidence that this is not at all the case. The honour and sacrifice of all Veterans, and those who currently serve our country, will be well-preserved for generations to come.

Last spring, I was fortunate enough to visit the National War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier with my grade eight class. We were cautioned by our teachers to be silent and respectful while we observed the memorial. The arrival of such a large group of students seemed to scare off the other tourists, and, except for the guards, we practically had the memorial to ourselves. At first, I was afraid. Afraid that my classmates would act immaturely and irresponsibly around the memorial. Afraid to dishonour the legacy of thousands of Canadians who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

Instead, when my class reached the memorial, a deep silence ensued. As if we were all mesmerized by the significance, by the history displayed before us. It was then that we all realized the magnitude of the courage, honour, bravery and sacrifice of Canadian soldiers of the past and present. To us, the First and Second World Wars seem distant, they took place so long before we, or even our parents, were born. However, when we came face to face with history, along with more recent memories of war, we were overwhelmed. When we laid eyes on the Honour Guard, we were hit with a fresh memory. As it happened, we were standing in the exact spot where Cpl. Nathan Cirillo lost his life barely a year ago. For me, this was the most powerful of all. It was such a direct reminder of why we remember, what we remember, and who we remember.

Perhaps, we also started thinking about how lucky we were. In other countries around the world, people live in poverty, women don't have the right to education, there is no democracy, there is no equality. Here in Canada, we are *free*. We can vote, women have equal rights, citizens have the power to *choose*. We enjoy the freedom that we do because of the wars we have fought and continue to fight. Thanks to the sacrifices of Canadians throughout the two World Wars, through struggles in Korea, and the ongoing fight against terrorism, we are *free*.

Even though it was not the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month, we unspokenly agreed to a moment of silence. Not because we had to, but because we wanted to, and because we understood it's importance. This year, on Remembrance Day, the poppies we wear over our hearts will be more than just a memory. They will carry a meaning that they didn't before, and the bravery and sacrifice of Canadian soldiers and Veterans will not be forgotten.