

Remember the Cost

The piercing train whistle slices through the air of the crowded train station. A willowy young woman strains her eyes, searching the length of the train, anxiously waiting to see her husband once again. The train doors finally slide open with a bang, and cries of joy fill the air as soldiers are reunited with their wives and families. The young woman pushes through the surging crowd, trying desperately to catch sight of her husband. Nearly all of the cars are empty, except for the last one. At last, the doors open, but instead of leaping off the train these men are assisted by nurses- pushing their wheelchairs, carrying stretchers. Many are blind, missing limbs, or stricken with disease. Eventually, a young man, once strikingly handsome, now marred by the horrors of war, is wheeled off of the train by a tired nurse. His gaze rakes the crowd, looking for the young woman he left at this same station a few years ago. At last, the two pairs of eyes lock, their worrisome expressions wiped away with the joy of being reunited again. The young woman rushes forward, and, kneeling down, wraps her arms around his thin body, so glad to have him home, but knowing deep down that although this war may be over, the battle for this wounded soldier has just begun.

“Grandma, Grandma!” A young girl’s voice breaks through the elderly woman’s thoughts of that day, just over 70 years ago. “Are you coming, are you coming? Mommy said we’d better leave now, or else we’ll be late!”

“All right dear,” the elderly woman replies, setting down the worn picture of her smiling young hero, and easing out of her rocker. “Let me find my coat and then I’ll help you fasten your poppy.”

After fetching her coat, she bends down, looking her great-granddaughter in the eye.

“Do you know why you wear a poppy?” she tenderly asks her great-granddaughter.

The young girl’s eyes brighten, and she earnestly replies, “I know, I know, it’s to remember Grandpa, and all the other soldiers!”

The elderly woman smiles at her great-granddaughter’s eagerness and simplicity.

“Yes dear, but it’s even more. It’s to remember the freedom they gained, the freedom that cost so many their lives, and wounded so many in both body and soul. It’s to remember why we can hold ceremonies like the one we are going to today.”

The elderly woman’s eyes are bright, shining with tears, remembering her own soldier. She pauses, wiping away a tear, and continues. “It’s to remember the price that they paid- the ultimate sacrifice for our country, Canada.”

The young girl takes her great-grandmother’s hand, and pats it gently, her look solemn, a look of understanding.

“Yes Grandma,” she replies, “that’s how we can remember Grandpa.”

Taking the poppy from her grandmother’s hand, the young girl fastens it on her coat, right above her heart - for her Grandpa - and for so many others.