

MEMORIES FROM THE HEART

By Betty Schaefer McCormick

Soon it will be Memorial Day, when we decorate and visit friends' and family graves. When I was growing up, My Mother and Dad made a point of putting flowers or wreaths on all graves of our family and close friends.

I remember picking bouquets and bouquets of lilacs and putting them in quart fruit jars. We would never have had enough vases for all the bouquets we made up. Then I would walk along the ditches and pick wild flowers and make them up into bouquets. It was very exciting if the apple trees were blooming and the Bridal Wreath or Spirea. Sometimes, the Iris would bloom early and they were usually purple or yellow and we would mix them with the apple blossoms and Spirea. My Dad would open the trunk and we would fill it up with bouquets and visit the cemetery usually the night before or very early in the morning of Memorial Day. Back then we actually celebrated Memorial Day on Memorial Day.

After we decorated the graves, we would walk through the cemetery and Dad would talk about some of the people buried and the remembrances our family had of them. Mom would always mention her two friends who perished in the flash flood in Gary. We would reminisce and remember all the beautiful memories of those who had already passed. Dad would get very emotional when we came upon a soldier's grave; especially one killed in action and had died way too young.

We were instructed how to walk in the cemetery; to be careful and not step on graves. Later in the morning on Memorial Day, our American Legion would put on a most beautiful ceremony in our school auditorium to honor our fallen soldiers. The Gary Band would play, the Gold Star Mothers would be honored and then later at the cemetery the Honor Guard would give the Salute. My husband, Jim, was honored to play Taps many times. I was so honored to read the poem, "In Flanders Field". We both played in the band. We have wonderful memories of Memorial Day growing up in Gary.

As Jim and I travel, we enjoy visiting cemeteries. We look up family members who have passed and are buried in SD, Minnesota and Iowa. One time I was looking for one of my Mother's relatives and found her gravesite and a few feet away, Jim found one of his family member's graves. Not knowing they were buried in the same cemetery in Iowa. We always take our camera along and shoot photos. This is a living history we can pass onto our children. They will know where their relatives are buried even though they never met or knew them. They are still family. We post some photos on our web site for family members.

Visiting Arlington Cemetery in Washington, DC was very memorable and it is something I wanted our children to experience. It brings them to reality and makes them realize our freedoms are not free. Many soldiers have given their lives for our freedoms. We have toured much of the Civil War area and visited graves of soldiers, many of them young boys ages twelve on up, who gave their life for our country. That may be one reason our children are so interested in the Civil War. They visited the area at a very young age.

My husband, our family and I do not take our freedoms lightly. We are so blessed to live in this beautiful country and are so proud of our soldiers and so grateful to our fallen soldiers. May they rest in peace.

So this Memorial Day fly your flag, attend a ceremony, visit a cemetery, wear a flag pin, purchase a poppy, and most of all be thankful to be American and live in such a beautiful country. God Bless the USA.