

Our City

I always start to feel a bit melancholy the week leading up to Memorial Day; remembrance, reflection and a sense of loss does that to me. Yet, as I stood at the Neeley cemetery last Monday for the Poppy Ceremony to commemorate Armed Forces and Memorial Day with the American Legion, the Ladies Auxiliary and the second grade from Hillcrest Elementary, my mind found focus, pride and comfort in my remembered history as I listened to the Poppy Ceremony:

The Poppy was first chosen as The American Legion's memorial flower at the 1921 National Convention and was worn in memory of the men who lost their lives in World War I. Picture vast armies on two sides in a long four year battle, along a double line of trenches. This was Europe from 1914 to November 11, 1918. In this area of death and destruction, hundreds of thousands of American boys advanced in 1917 and 1918 determined to put an end to the horrible war. You all know the story of how they did end the war, restoring peace and liberty to subjected peoples. But, many thousands of fine young lives were required to complete the task.

The one bright color on the shell torn fields and hills of these war-torn areas was the little, red poppy. On the edges of the trenches, in the ragged shell holes, brave little poppies grew and bloomed on the graves of those men buried in the sacred plots of French soil, which was Flanders Field. Remembrances of the cheery bright red flowers returned to America with our boys. And so, the poppy became the symbol of the dead, their memorial flower. It became the sign that the high ideals for which these brave young men gave their lives, still live, and are honored.

It is also a tradition to pin the first poppy on the commemorating town's mayor; which is what found me standing in the Neeley Cemetery beneath a naked flag pole. The flag to be raised was in the hands of two Legionnaires as the ceremony continued. Watching, I remembered that the colors of our flag were specifically chosen to represent a theme that our founding fathers believed was important to the building of our nation.

Red stands for courage, hardiness, and bloodshed. Courage because our country is based on the courage of separating from what we once knew, courage of starting over, courage of fighting for our freedom. Hardiness because our founding fathers believed our country will outlast the land that we came from. Finally, blood shed to honor all those who lost their life for our freedom and our country.

White stands for purity and vigilance: purity because our country is independent and is not corrupted by any other country. Vigilance because our country needs to be alert and careful in the choices we make.

Blue stands for justice and perseverance: justice because it is the basis of our country, and perseverance because although our nation is young, we will stand strong against all opposition.

As I stood respectfully to the side as the Legionnaires explained the significance of the flag, its raising at dawn, lowering at dusk and the symbolism of all that it should mean to each of us

my feelings were torn. Torn certainly not for the lack of love for this country; but for other reasons better left unstated. As the Legionnaires proceeded to explain the significance of what each fold in a flag symbolized emotions welled as I struggled to remember the history I was taught. Since it is not as fresh as it could be I researched and verified what follows.

Strangely perhaps there is no official flag-folding ceremony and there is no official meaning to each of the folds. Below is the one I believe I learned all those years ago. It makes me proud!

Whenever the United States of America's flag is folded, there is a symbol behind each fold and tuck. It is not random, but very purposeful. This is one reason why they will fold an American flag at a veteran's funeral; it is a small tribute for the ultimate sacrifice. The flag always folded so that way only the blue and white stars can be seen. One reason this is done is so that none of the red shows, because it stands for the bloodshed. We want to remember the person's perseverance and vigilance, not the loss of the person.

Fold 1: The 13 stripes represent the original 13 states: Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island. Fold 2: The 50 stars represent our 50 United States of America. Fold 3: "I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death", Patrick Henry. Fold 4: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman", Thomas Paine. Fold 5: "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", Declaration of Independence. Fold 6: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America", United States Constitution. Fold 7: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances", First Amendment. Fold 8: "The basis of our political system is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government", George Washington. Fold 9: "My God! How little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy!" Thomas Jefferson. Fold 10: "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal", Abraham Lincoln. Fold 11: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door", Emma Lazarus, inscription on the Statue of Liberty. Fold 12: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country", John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Fold 13: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character", Martin Luther King, Jr.

In my mind, these 13 folds embody us a people, country and one nation. Again, I am proud.

Until next week...