

Who We Are

By Anaya Rawoot

Memorial Day (noun) - a day on which those who died in active military service are remembered. A couple days ago, I was asked a question that this definition answers perfectly. What does Memorial Day mean? Oh, I forgot two very important words. To me. As in, What does Memorial Day mean to me? Most people, when asked to think about it seriously, would answer this question in ways that the definition already presents. For example, sacrifice, remembrance, bravery, freedom and so on. The one thing they might not have thought of is identity. Believe it or not, most of the soldiers honored or remembered on Memorial Day, died fighting so we could say, do, think, or believe whatever we want without fear of being punished. What's funny, is that all those things make up who we are; thus, our identity. So, let's rephrase that definition. To me, Memorial Day is a day to honor those who died preserving our identity.

There, sat a man, quite old, in about his 60's or 70's. His face showed age, but also bravery. His posture, however slouched, exhibited pride. Soon enough, my teacher spoke. "Today I would like to introduce someone very special, my grandpa, first class private, Alfred Faustini." After that, there was nothing but silence. Silence from everyone but Mr. Faustini. I listened as he spoke of his adventures during the Pacific Theatre; spoke of how he protected our beliefs, our way of life, and how he protected who we are. Private first class Alfred Faustini United States Marine Corps received the Bronze Star Medal on November 13th, 1943 for his courage in Bougainville. While his Squad was pinned down, under heavy fire, private first class Faustini daringly made his way forward, launching a grenade, and silencing the enemy. Later, crawling through the constant bombardment of enemy fire, he aided an injured comrade to safety (Faustini).

The soldiers honored on Memorial Day, died preserving our beliefs. Our beliefs are the things we accept as true. Our beliefs can include religion, stories, causes, theories, etc. All of these things make up who a person is. Without them, a person wouldn't be well, himself. Thankfully, every soldier's purpose is to preserve and protect our freedom. The freedom that allows us to believe whatever we want

without anyone's permission or fear of being punished. The freedom that allows us to pray to our gods, celebrate our stories and support our friends. Without soldiers who died fighting for our freedom, we couldn't believe; we couldn't be who we are.

The soldiers honored on Memorial Day, died preserving our way of life. Our way of life reflects our values, upbringing, and character. The way we act, to be more precise. "Actions speak louder than words." Everyone's heard it, but did you ever think that maybe this quote refers to our identity. Our actions define who we are. Not just for ourselves, but also for others. Our way of life is the chance to display who we are. Soldiers who fight and die to give us that chance are the protectors of it. As George S. Patton said, "It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived." Such men who protected our way of life; such men who preserved who we are.

Identity (noun) - the fact of being who or what a person or thing is. I think we've learned it's more than just that. It's what we believe, think, value, and eventually do, and it's the freedom that allows us to do that without fear. The freedom that they fight for, the identity they die for. This memorial day, and every single one to come, we shall remember those, not who just sacrificed, not who just protected, not even those who died, but those who died protecting our identity.

The American Dream

By Brad Cary

White picket fence in the front yard, a pool in the back, a big house, and an even bigger, happier family, the Johnsons. They are living the American Dream. The parents are happy, and they have a kid who is even happier

The thing about this kid is, he isn't any ordinary thirteen year-old boy. All he knows is happiness. He is protected from the real world by his family and his lifestyle.

Every year, mid-spring, his parents and grandparents go away, and every time they leave, they are sadder than the last. Every year, they go to a memorial day presentation, but he cannot realize why they are leaving. The day his family leave, he just yells, "Bye!" and moves on. Every year, the Johnsons leave that white picket fence, and when they come back, everything stays the same. But this year when they leave, they're in for something they could not foresee.

The boy can do anything he wants.

Upstairs is a lengthy, broad hallway. In the middle there's a place where a string attached to a tiny ring hangs. He tugs at the string as hard as he can, and a loud noise, like an earthquake, rattles the house. A set of stairs fall from the ceiling, ending with a powerful thump. Curiosity fills him, so he calmly walks up the stairs and finds a room with no light. Dust is everywhere. The room engulfing him is completely new to the boy, and suddenly he stumbles on a bulky object that he can't describe. The boy wants to investigate, so he grabs a flashlight and a rusty old hammer. The rest of the room is empty, the only thing being the object he'd fallen upon. It's a chest with the numbers 1944-1945 engraved in the middle.

Once he opens the chest, he finds books and letters scattered through it. The books seem to open themselves in his hands, the journals, and all the letters his family have been keeping away from him. He opens the first book and reads,

"December 22nd, 1944.

The Germans sent two of their men holding white flags, the men unarmed. They asked for a surrender of our position or else they will kill us all. When General McAuliffe heard about this, he yelled 'aw nuts', a casual phrase during a serious time. The room was silent. One of our officers sprang up and asked if it was true, that the Germans would really think that we would surrender. At this moment, we decided what we would send back to the Germans, one word.

Nuts."

The word shows that Americans don't back down because they are afraid to lose. We will not surrender, even if it leads us all to our last breaths. The boy continues reading.

“The Germans sent an all out force on our position in the town of Bastogne, deep in the Ardennes forest. We were out numbered about 200,000 to 80,000. I was lucky to get out with my life, even though my brothers should have escaped with me. They had great courage and even greater heart. My feelings can't be explained; the battle had killed my men, who were also my friends. I will always have that pain and horror coming back to haunt me, telling me that I could have done more. The level of courage and bravery was at its highest, shown when the soldiers gave up their lives. At the same time, I can't help but feel inspired, to know that they died for a cause. Ben Johnson, signing off.”

This journal was his grandfathers, a story of his secluded past. The story speaks to him in a way he can not comprehend. It breaks his heart, but at the same time mends it. The story gives him sadness, horror, and grief, but at the same time gives him courage, bravery, and even love. This is what the soldiers have, and we need to give back for their ultimate sacrifice.

.A novel of secrets, battles, and tragedies lie in the boy's hands. They show the major memories of a soldier whose life was forever changed. They show that even the simplest and happiest man's life could be so much more complicated than meets the eye. They show blank faces at a first glance, but deeper beneath his skin, in any soldier for that matter, is confidence and a heart of gold.

Memorial day to me is a day where we should forget about all the fun. We need to realize why this day is important, to honor those whose courage and bravery is beyond compare and how they used this for our greater good. They risked everything for us, and they lost everything for us. They have done everything they can to save us and help us, and we need to honor those thousands of warriors who have died for us. To make sure we never forget them. We will never lose the feeling that we need to honor them. We must never forget, we must to tell our children about them. We will honor their greatest sacrifice, and we must always know that their sacrifice was for us.

For America.

The blue car pulls into the long, spacious driveway slowly. As Mr. Johnson waddles out of the car, two small skinny arms are thrown around him. The boy never had an explanation for his grandfather's limp until now. “Thank you,” the boy says, with tears flowing down his face. “Thank you”. The boy living in the house with the white picket fence is now truly living the American dream.