

Sharing the Legacy Brings Remembrance

By Emily Gerszberg

As my grandmother, Renee, and I head towards the entrance of Mamaroneck High School, her eyes catch a glimpse of the Kemper Memorial. Without hesitation she changes direction and stops right in front of the monument's center. I watch her as the muscles of her face tighten and a tear glides down her cheek. Her connection to the names inscribed in the stone feels magnetic, and so strong that I can sense the pull. I notice her lips mouthing the names of each individual, as she honors those who passed in World War II. After vigilantly reciting the veterans' names, she cranes her neck to face me. Without uttering a word, she transfers the stories of her past. They're written in the creases of her forehead, each wrinkle representing another emotion that shook her world during the war.

I was transported to the city of Grenade, France, where I could see her young and vulnerable at the age of seven, standing in the middle of the street with Yvonne, her older sister. Yvonne restrained her while she yelped and cried, as her parents were loaded into a truck to be deported. No one knew exactly where her parents, who were Jewish, would end up; all they could do was hope.

Hidden in a Catholic convent for young girls, Renee and Yvonne were protected from the Nazis. Their parents were both sent to concentration camps and forced to endure the atrocities that haunt our world today. Thankfully my grandmother was never physically hurt during the Holocaust, but her mental health has been greatly affected by the numerous traumatic experiences.

A moment later, I am again staring into my grandmother's pained eyes as they remain fixed on the memorial. While the lines in her face dismay me, I know there is a sense of hope as her eyes brighten and her lips ripen into a smile. As I turn to the Kemper Memorial, I don't just see an array of names anymore. An overwhelming desire to honor these veterans comes over me, for their bravery, strength, and the pain they endured. Within the crevasses of this stone, many memories and stories are protected.

Even though I'm able to see the memorial from her perspective, it is important that I interpret it in my own way. We live every day because these veterans fought for us. It is crucial that our generation honor them and the comrades who carry on their legacy today.

I believe one of the most important ways that people today can honor our country's veterans is by sharing their stories and educating students about what they fought for. It is the choice of the veterans' families to tell the stories, but it is our responsibility to listen. Renee and

Yvonne have spent many years recording and expressing their past memories. I've heard them present their stories to their family, schools, or even the person sitting next to them on the bus. People are more emotionally affected when they hear the personal accounts of hardships faced by veterans or survivors. By knowing specific stories, the sacrifices of many others come alive with greater reality.

In school, when students learn about wars, they hear about major battles and peace agreements, but in order to remember those brave men and women who sacrificed their lives, kids must be taught personal stories of veterans. Telling a specific veteran's story can create a personal connection, making students aware of what they fought for.

Each of the heroes inscribed in the Kemper Memorial has a story to be heard. My grandmother, mother, and I would not be here today if it weren't for these and so many other brave American soldiers. Grandma Renee claims to be forever grateful because of the sacrifices made to save innocent people like herself. The soldiers who fought for the lives of others deserve to be remembered. With the patience of our generation and the cooperation of those who hold their stories, our veterans' legacies can live on.