

What Memorial Day Means to Me"

When I first began to think about what Memorial Day means to me, I remembered attending the Memorial Day Parade each year on Forest Avenue with my family. I also recalled stories from my grandfather and about my great-grandfather and how they had served our country. Despite my trips down the parade route each year and hearing the stories about my grandfathers serving in wars that I was not familiar with, Memorial Day had previously been more about barbecues with family and a long weekend just before the end of the school year.

This past Saturday, November 11th, my understanding of Memorial Day changed forever when I attended the Clearbrook Veterans Day Celebration Dinner. I was invited by a classmate's father to attend the event and to help serve food to a group of Veterans. I did not expect that the experience would prepare me to write this essay or that it would permanently change my view of Memorial Day.

My role at the event was to serve food to the Veterans who had made it home from foreign wars; yet, what struck me most was the way in which these Veterans honored others who never made it home from war. When each Veteran approached the buffet line, gathered up their food and made their way to a table, there was one table in the room that remained unoccupied. I later stopped by the table to get a closer look and learned that it was called a "missing man table", also known as a "fallen comrade table" that was set up to honor fallen, missing or imprisoned military service members.

After meeting many Veterans that night, and watching them pass the "missing man table", I gained a better understanding of the importance of Memorial Day. I thought about the families of those who never came home, the ones who died to ensure that we continue to live freely here in the United States. The empty table now helps me appreciate when there is a full table at my own family barbecue on Memorial Day and teaches me never to take for granted the sacrifices that these men, women and their families have made for us all.