

Rancho Bernardo MEMORIAL DAY SPEECH 25 May 2015

I HAVE GIVEN MORE SPEECHES THAN I CAN COUNT. THE PROCESS HAS BY NOW BECOME PRETTY ROUTINE: WAKE UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT SEVERAL TIMES, WRITE DOWN MY THOUGHTS AND THEN SIT FOR A BIT AT THE COMPUTER FLESHING THEM OUT. MEMORIAL DAY PRESENTATIONS ARE MUCH DIFFERENT AND BRUTALLY HARD TO PUT TOGETHER. FOR EVERY TIME I TRY TO PUT DOWN WORDS, TEARS BEGAN TO FLOW. AND I DON'T KNOW WHY.

1. PERHAPS IT IS THE EVER PRESENT WORDS OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: "GREATER LOVE HAS NO MAN OTHER THAN THIS, THAT HE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS!"

2. PERHAPS IT IS THE STARK REALIZATION OF THE NUMBER OF WAR RELATED DEATHS THAT HAVE OCCURRED IN MY 77 YEARS OF LIFE:

IN ROUND FIGURES:

WWII	406,000
KOREA	37,000
VIETNAM	58,000
WAR ON TERROR	7,000 (SADLY, WITH MORE TO COME)]

WELL OVER HALF A MILLION IN ALL.

SINCE 1775 OVER ONE MILLION, THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND MEN AND WOMEN HAVE DIED IN THE COURSE OF OUR WARS, CONFLICTS, POLICE ACTIONS, INVASIONS AND SKIRMISHES

SOBERING STATISTICS, BUT NOT SURPRISING SINCE OUR NATION HAS BEEN AT WAR, FOR ALL BUT ABOUT 30 YEARS SINCE 1775

3. PERHAPS IT WAS THE MEMORY OF STANDING BEFORE A WIDOW AND HER CHILDREN TO PRESENT A PRECISELY FOLDED AMERICAN FLAG. "ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE US, THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AND THE DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY, I PRESENT YOU THIS FLAG SIGNIFYING YOUR HUSBAND'S FAITHFUL AND HONORABLE SERVICE." THE WORDS COME SLOWLY AND THEY NEVER SEEM TO BE ENOUGH.

4. PERHAPS IT IS THE REPRESSED MEMORIES OF STANDING INSIDE THE WELCOMING ARMS OF THE VIETNAM MEMORIAL, THE BLACK WALL.

I HAVE BEEN AT THAT SACRED PLACE A HOST OF TIMES. I WAS THERE ON THE BITTER COLD NOVEMBER DAY WHEN IT WAS DEDICATED.

THE VISITS EARLY IN THE MORNING STIRRED MY SOUL, AS THE SUN WAS RISING AND THE STARK WHITE IMAGE OF THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT SUDDENLY REFLECTING ON THE WALL, QUIETLY SALUTING THE 58,000 HEROES,

OR THE MANY TIMES AT NIGHT WHEN I WENT TO TOUCH A NAME.

IT IS A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN BE ALONE, THOUGH IN THE COMPANY OF MANY. IT IS A PLACE WHERE A MARINE CAN CRY WITHOUT APOLOGY-- SHED TEARS THAT DEFY ANALYSIS-- IT JUST SEEMS RIGHT TO CRY. WHERE TALKING TO A BROTHER OR SISTER WHOSE NAME IS ON THE WALL DOESN'T PROMPT QUESTIONS, JUST RESPECT.

TODAY AT THAT SACRED PLACE MANY HUNDREDS WILL GATHER TO HONOR THOSE 58,000 HEROES WITH FLOWERS, NOTES, SALUTES, PRAYERS

AND A DIZZYING COLLECTION OF ITEMS LEFT AS OFFERINGS. ACROSS OUR NATION WE WILL ECHO THIS BY HONORING ALL THE MILITARY MEN AND WOMEN OF OUR NATION WHO MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE . WE WILL DO IT WITH GATHERINGS LIKE THIS ONE, IN WHICH WE REMEMBER AND GIVE THANKS. AND ELSEWHERE, BY DECORATING THEIR GRAVES WITH FLOWERS AND FLAGS, AS WE HAVE DONE SINCE THE CIVIL WAR DAYS. OR BY JUST STANDING AT A HEADSTONE, ALONE WITH THE ONES WE LOVED, QUIETLY AND INTIMATELY CHATTING WITH THEM.

MEMORIAL DAY IS NOT ONLY AN OCCAISON TO REMEMBER AND HONOR THOSE WHO MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE, IT IS ALSO A TIME TO PONDER. A TIME TO IMAGINE AND HOPE. HOPE THAT THE GREAT MONUMENT WE WILL ULTIMATELY BUILD TO HONOR THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE WAR ON TERROR, WILL BE THE LAST NECESSARY.

HOPE FOR A DAY WHEN EACH OF US CAN HONOR THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY, BY SPRINKLING PETALS OF PEACE ON THEIR GRAVES AND CRYING TEARS OF JOY, RATHER THAN ONES OF SADNESS. A DAY WHEN WE WILL BE ABLE TO KNEEL DOWN AT EACH OF THEIR HEADSTONES AND SAY: “THANK YOU FOR MAKING THIS GLORIOUS DAY POSSIBLE.” THAT IS THE ULTIMATE HONOR WE CAN OFFER TO OUR BRAVE HEROES.

TODAY IS AN OCASSION FOR COMMITMENT TO SUCH A DREAM. TO PRAY THAT WHEN WE GATHER FOR A FUTURE MEMORIAL DAY, WE CAN PRESENT THEM WITH THAT NOBLE GIFT.

AT THE PASSOVERS END, WE JEWS INTONE THE WORDS: “NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!” MUCH MORE THAN A PAROCHIAL WISH TO RELOCATE, IT IS AN UNABASHED DREAM OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. LET US END THIS GATHERING WITH WORDS OF SUCH A DREAM: “NEXT YEAR IN THE LAND OF PEACE!”

GOD BLESS EACH OF THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR COUNTRY, GOD  
BLESS THE FAMILIES LEFT BEHIND AND GOD BLESS OUR GREAT NATION  
THAT THEY BOTH SERVED SO FAITHFULLY AND WELL.