

Loving Peace



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By Nate Smelle

Each year on Nov. 11 people across the country gather around cenotaphs and in public spaces to honour those who have given their blood, sweat, tears and lives to protect the rights and freedoms we enjoy as Canadians. After speaking with Bancroft resident Angie Rail about the photo taken of the 155th Battalion of the Hastings/Quinte Regiment in 1916 that she found in her attic last year, I started to think about what it is that makes this solemn occasion such an important day on the calendar.

When asked what Remembrance Day means to her, Rail talked about our need to reflect on those who have served and those who have fallen in order for us not to repeat the deadly mistakes of our past.

Rail also spoke of how the stories of veterans from the First and Second world and the War in Vietnam differed from those told by soldiers engaged in in modern day wars. Pointing out how many battles today are fought from remote locations with the press of a button, she explained how the language used to describe modern warfare seemed to paint a less accurate picture of war than the language used by the veterans like her father who fought in the Second World War. For example, instead of reporting civilian casualties in terms of innocent men, women and children, Rail highlighted how the loss of innocent lives are now talked of in terms of 'collateral damage.' By downplaying the horrors of war, she said people are able to disassociate with the seriousness of these atrocities. In doing so, Rail, said people also disconnect from their ability to be empathetic and practice compassion.

'If we disassociate with that seriousness then we also disassociate with our own compassion and we don't allow ourselves to be compassionate,' said Rail.

'Because if we were in that situation of being bombed, losing our homes and having to be on the move for weeks and weeks, and months and months to try and find somewhere that is a safe place for us; and we were the innocent victims of somebody else's decisions, we have to ask ourselves how we would want to be treated.'

Despite having experienced much of my adult life amid an era of unprecedented fear mongering which kicked off with the onset of the War on Terror in 2001, I, like Rail see Remembrance Day as an opportunity to celebrate peace and nurture compassion. Unlike peace, there is nothing about war worth celebrating. Anyone I have spoken with over the years who has lived through wartime has made this point loud and clear to me in the tear-filled stories they have shared.

Canada's third prime minister John Abbott got it right when he ominously defined war as 'the science of destruction.' Not only does war destroy human lives, it literally obliterates all that is beautiful and worth celebrating within a community, while at the same time needlessly depleting our natural resources and toxifying the environment in the name of greed and a hunger for power. While war is often thought of as armed conflict fought with guns, bombs and missiles by poisoning of our water, air and soil 'often in an effort to acquire another country's oil and resources as in the U.S.-led invasions of Iraq in 1991 and 2003' we are waging war on the planet and war on the poor.

What I have always found disturbingly enlightening in my ongoing study of war is following the money trail back to the

corporations and individuals who profit from destruction. What I have found throughout these investigations is that the trillions of dollars earned by these corporations before, during and after wartime are always gained at the expense of already marginalized populations around the world. Even more sinister, the individuals who fight and die in these privately profitable conflicts tend to already be collateral damage of the relatively non-existent war on poverty.

Instead of spending trillions of dollars on our own destruction to prop up a military industrial complex that makes the rich richer, would it not be more prudent to administer a dose of compassion by investing our time, energy and tax dollars in things like health care, education and eco-effective enterprises that improve our quality of life?

As Jimi Hendrix once said, "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace."