

2020 Essay Runner Up-Brynn Sievert
What Memorial Day Means

What is Memorial Day? From what it seems, Memorial Day is a day off to have a barbeque and see endless mattress sale commercials with peppy music playing in the background. Parades with more red, white, and blue than you've probably ever seen in your entire life. Maybe 'celebrating' Memorial Day is something you and your family do. However, Memorial Day is not a day of celebration. Instead, it is a day of commemoration.

Memorial Day falls always on the last Monday of May that became official in 1971, though it originated in the years after the civil war. Many people mix up Memorial Day and Veterans Day, but the difference is quite clear. Veterans Day is to honor all who served, including those who lived. Memorial Day is to remember those who died for our country. Perhaps the general public does not see it exactly as it is, but talk to a Veteran or a family who lost someone to war, or the battle at home, and you will hear a different story.

Commemoration. It's the base of Memorial Day. Honoring those who had the courage to lay down their lives for strangers to give them freedom. People touched by war, those who lost friends or family to it, this is what the holiday is to them. One WWII veteran tells the story where in a battle, he had just talked to a man before looking away. When he looked back, the man was dead. You don't forget things like that, no matter how many years separate you from it happening. Sometimes, days are ruined for you because of what has happened in the past. How can you wish someone a happy birthday when years ago, someone was killed on that day, for example? One veteran sees Memorial Day as 'another day I have to remember'. Another keeps the names of people he knew who died in war in his hat. We who have not served cannot begin to fathom those memories and the awful things that those who served had to witness. We are hardly deserving of the sacrifices so many men and women have gone through. We overlook them every day. 26,800 people from Wisconsin have died in wars for our freedom, according to "Remembering the Cost of War". And on the day, we are meant to give to them in return, we often gloss over this great sacrifice. We also don't often think of those who lost the war at home. Those who couldn't deal with what they had gone through, and so took their own lives. It is important to remember them, too.

I never exactly 'celebrated' Memorial Day. I probably went to a couple of parades, but never anything special. Now, looking at what veterans feel when they look at Memorial Day, really focusing on what it stands for, I cannot go another day as I was before. It's almost sad to see people celebrate Memorial Day instead of remembering those who died for our country. Some veterans have a different attitude about this, though. One says how he doesn't mind the celebrations. It is what he fought for. Have a barbeque, get a threat, beat them, come back and have a bigger barbeque. It is a bit odd to think about, but it is one of the things that were fought for. They gave us the ability to have our parades and our barbeques and our camping without having to worry about our safety. We owe everything to them.

Memorial Day to me, and what should be to everyone, is a day we remember and honor those who died for our freedom, both on the front lines and in the battles at home. I believe we should take Memorial Day more seriously and understand more of what it means, but also let the people have their fun. After all, that freedom is what those in the armed forces fought for. To those that fought, whether you are here now or not, thank you.