

## Memorial Day 2018

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### Reading #1 - Decoration Day

It wasn't always Memorial Day.

At least the way we celebrate it with parades and picnics and the unofficial start to summer.

It was 1866 and the United States was recovering from the long and bloody [Civil War](#). Surviving soldiers had come home. Some with missing limbs. All with stories to tell. Henry Welles, a drugstore owner in Waterloo, [New York](#), suggested that all the shops in town close for one day to honor the soldiers who were killed in the Civil War and were buried in the Waterloo cemetery. On the morning of May 5, the townspeople placed [flowers](#), wreaths and crosses on the graves of the Northern soldiers buried in the cemetery. About the same time, Retired Major General Jonathan A. Logan planned another ceremony, this time for the soldiers who survived the war. He led the veterans through town to the cemetery to decorate their comrades' graves with flags. It was not a happy celebration, but a memorial. The townspeople called it Decoration Day.

### Reading #3 - Gettysburg Address

In three days, in early July 1863 between 46,000 and 51,000 soldiers were killed, wounded or missing at the Battle of Gettysburg. 46,000 to 51,000 In three days. Compare that to the 58,000 who were killed in the entire Vietnam War. Four and a half months after that battle, President Lincoln travelled to Gettysburg to dedicate the Soldiers National Cemetery there. Lincoln's two minute address is one of the best known speeches in American History. Maybe his words have something to say to us anew today.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God,

shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

### Reading #3

I have to admit to mixed feelings about Memorial Day.

Tomorrow there will be a parade through the Village.

Complete with Fire trucks with lights flashing.

A band of some type.

Children on bikes or in wagons decorated with bunting and flags.

Accompanied by parents marching, riding, walking from Seminary Rd. to the Village Green.

The boy scouts will also be there and, maybe even a sports team or two.

Prizes will be awarded for the best decorated bike or wagon.

Followed then by a picnic at the Fire Department.

In between parade and picnic there will be speeches on the Green and a wreath placed in front of the flagpole which bears plaques listing the names of those from our community who have been killed in our nation's wars from the Revolutionary War to the Vietnam War.

The ceremony will end with Taps and a 21 gun salute.

In reading about Memorial Day and thinking about this morning, I was stuck the description of that first Decoration Day as *not a happy celebration*. How could it be.

In 1866, the names on the graves on which flowers or flags were placed were the names of their sons and their fathers and their next door neighbor.

The human cost of the war just ended was both deeply personal and far too real.

Such a contrast between then and now.

It's a complicated balance for me between remembering and honoring on one hand and glorification on the other.

Remembering those who serve and have served our country in our armed forces.

Honoring those whose lives have been lost.

And, on the other hand sometimes seeming to glorifying war.

The truth is war is hell...for all involved.

Soldiers and civilians and families back home.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Alarming suicide rates. Lack of support and care still plague far too many in our veterans. We are learning returning home can also hell.

Tomorrow I will watch the parade.

I will listen to the speeches and allow silence to settle around me while Taps is played.

I will offer the Benediction at the end of the ceremony as I have been asked to do.

But it will be difficult to celebrate because my heart will be heavy.

Because war is hell and too many lives have already been lost.

And I will feel a sadness as well.

For all our intelligence and wisdom we are still a long way from that riverside where we will lay down our sword and shield and study war no more.