

God bless the peacemakers

By Francie Healy



It happens every year. The wind grows cold, and it's November, and there is no colour but grey.

I don't want to do it, don't want to go out into the bluster of Fall and stand around, toes freezing, listening to strains of O Canada. I don't want to be bothered with Remembrance Day.

November is too bleak to be talking about death and war. It's too dreary, too greyish, to be thinking of young men and their battles, old women and

their grief. Every year I ask: If they're going to do the Remembrance Day thing, why don't they do it in July?

And then the bugle blows and the old men march, the banners wave and the flags fly high.

And I remember the first time Remembrance Day made me weep. It was several months after my first child was born. I held him in my arms and watched out the window as the white-haired soldiers went by.

Because of them, I thought, my child is safe and free.

I took my little son, and then his brother, to the next ceremonies, and the next, and I clutched their tiny hands in the cold.

I wanted to call out to those vets, or hug them, or thank them somehow. They had given us the right to speak, and think, and grow. They had given us a future.

And then my little boys grew to be strong and privileged young men of 18 and 19, with nothing to hold them back, with no war to fight and no enemy to fear.

And now, in these Novembers, I begin to realize more.

The Remembrance Day ceremonies start with the Brownies and Cubs and Scouts and Guides, lining up, kicking the last dead leaves of the season, enjoying themselves, not really understanding war.

And it goes on to the men and women in their uniforms and medals, and it spans the rows of plain white crosses marking the spot where they might have been.

And it creeps into my heart as a mother, remembering my grandmothers and the grief of a generation of women.

What if those white crosses honoured my sons? What if my boys had gone to war?

This is when it hits me, when the lump in my throat swells and I am embarrassed about my tears, and I am glad I have come here to remember.

And then a funny thing happens on the drive home. You'd think I'd know this. It was there all the time.

The colours of November are not grey but rich with purples and browns and pinks.

I point this out to my third son, who is 11. I tell him to pass it on to his sister. He sees the colours, too, and finds others, and we decide November is a fine month to be alive, to be Canadian, to be free.

And under my breath for yet another year, I say it again.

God bless the vets. God bless the kids lying beneath crosses. God bless the peacemakers.

God bless the memory, so it will never happen again.