

News

TAKE TIME TO REMEMBER FALLEN HEROES

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Tomorrow is Memorial Day.

Millions of people will be celebrating a day off from work, hitting the malls or beaches or firing up their barbecues to launch the beginning of summer.

Opportunistic real estate folks will have blanketed neighborhoods with small American flags poked into front lawns, their business cards placed strategically on the staff of each flag, just in case the homeowner wants to sell.

Likewise, troops of Scouts will place flags on the graves of all the service members in the local cemeteries. Hopefully, they understand the solemnity of their task, the only one remotely close to the real meaning of the national day of remembrance.

As of Friday, The Associated Press reported 3,444 war dead from Iraq. While my son returned safely home from Iraq, I cannot help but think about the 1,021 other families whose loved ones were added to that total since last Memorial Day.

Along with the troops who have lost their lives, 177 journalists have been killed since the fighting started in March 2003. They died protecting the same thing that the soldiers did -- your freedom to know the truth. It's not just a military honor.

My feelings on the war are no secret -- I firmly believe that it's time to bring our troops home to their families. I mention the numbers because we need to stay aware of the cost and effect of the war. I refuse to use the flag to keep the reality under wraps; I choose to pay attention because their sacrifice makes our flag fly proudly.

Memorial Day, to me, is a day to think of everyone who makes those colors shine so brightly. While it is primarily a day to honor the war dead, it is also a time to thank the mothers and fathers who teach their children to shoulder the responsibility of democracy as it passes from generation to generation.

I had a couch full of girls watching TV at my house the other night when a tease for the evening news showed reporters at the home of Pvt. Joseph Anzack Jr. His body was found that morning and had been identified as one of the American soldiers kidnapped in Iraq on Mother's Day. The girls took issue with reporters' presence, saying that they were intrusive and that much of the media sensationalizes the war.

I told them that sharing the family's grief kept the war at the front of our minds and that Anzack did not die in vain if his death made one citizen -- better yet, one politician -- rethink the wisdom of our involvement in the Middle East. And I added that Anzack died protecting their freedom to know the truth, with news unfiltered by a government or censor that decides what people can or can't know.

Before you head off to whatever business your Memorial Day involves, take a moment. Attend a Memorial Day service (there's one at 10 a.m. at Eternal Valley and the flags will fly at half-staff in the Veteran's Historical Plaza from 8 a.m. to noon), drop by a VFW hall or write some cards and letters for the Blue Star Mothers or the Prayer Angels for the Military. Thank them for their contributions and sacrifice. They all deserve your support.

The definition of remembering is never forgetting. Memorial Day was established to make us take the time to ponder the dedication of thousands of people in service to our country. Never forget that you enjoy the freedoms you do because of them -- freedoms that include writing opinion columns, news and human interest stories, as well as your freedom to choose whether or not to read them.

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