

## Memory on Memorial Day

“Dignitaries, selectmen, fellow citizens of Bedford, my name is Colonel Anthony W. Genatempo and I am very excited and honored to be here with you to offer my personal thoughts on this Memorial Day. I have to be honest, the moment I was asked to speak with you, a lot of questions about the meaning of today immediately popped into my mind. For so many of us, it equates to a day off from school, or work. It means lots of outdoor picnics and beach activity. What really is the “activity” of Memorial Day? What exactly are we “Memorial-ing”? Now, I know there are a few teachers cringing right now. Is that even a word? Well, it turns out that it is not a word. So what are we doing? Well, Memorial day is about “memory”. So are we “memory-ing”? A few more of you cringed. Well, it turns out, that is not a word either. How about remembering?”. Well, now we’ve got something. We are here to remember. So it begs the question “remember what”?

Our brochure said Memorial Day is a day to honor and remember those Americans who fought, and those who died fighting, in any American war. What I have found, however, is the memories that matter most to us, that truly mean something to us on a personal level, are the memories we call our own, created from experiences that have happened to us first hand. For example, with the exception of Mr. OC O’Conner, please raise your hand if you have a distinct memory of talking with Nathaniel Page right before he took the Bedford flag to Concord.

Does anyone know anyone here who participated in the Battle of Gettysburg during the civil war? How about WWI? This might be a little closer to some of us. While I didn’t get the pleasure of knowing my grandfather, he served in WWI as an airplane mechanic. I’m starting to see a few hands, but still not many.

The memories of these individuals are known to many of us. Some in the audience first-hand like one of our Grand Marshalls Mr. Scheyder. But for most of us the memory is still second hand; our aunts or moms, uncles or fathers.

My father served in Korea and the Vietnam Conflict comes to mind. This was the first time that I have actually been on this earth, however I was too young to have any first hand memories of this conflict knew any of the people that participated in it. However the Gulf War is the first time that I have worn a uniform in the service of our country, but I was not overseas during that conflict, I was in New Mexico. I do have firsthand memory of what was going on in the world at that time. Now let me ask all of our high school citizens to raise their hands. They were not born yet, so while the majority of people sitting here on this lawn can now agree that we have finally hit upon a shared memory, we need to look at our young adults next to us and realize that they can not remember; all they can do is read or find out second hand.

Events of Sep 11<sup>th</sup>: Here is a significant event in our lives that the vast majority of folks here have a distinct, first-hand memory of. Let me see the hands. I’d like all of my 12 year olds and younger folks in the audience? Raise your hands. Ladies and Gentlemen, these young folks, these future citizens and leaders of our great nation have no actual memory of 9/11. The world they are growing up in is very different than their older brothers and sisters; it’s very different from yours and mine, and it is very different from our parents. The only thing that these 12-year old and younger Americans have to remember on Memorial day are the stories they read in books, the video they look at on-line, and most importantly, the conversations they have with you.

But even that has changed for these young Americans, especially from this great town and state. All they have to do is remember 2 short months ago to the events on Marathon Monday. So no, across the

ages, all of us, sitting next to each other right here, has a first-hand connection to a memory we are supposed to be remembering on this sacred day.

And when we add up all of our unique, individual memories the sum total can be defined in the ideals shared by all of us. From Nathaniel Page to Paul Revere who was captured no less than 400 yards from my house, to Mr. Ernie Sheyder and Mr. Joe Damery and to the 13 men killed in action listed in your program and the 45 individuals who have passed on this past year. Every one of those individuals, and those through the ages believed that the prosperity of their family, and friends, and neighbors was more important than their individual lives. They were willing to put up their lives as payment for defending those values and ideals they cherished, and they were not willing to let those people in the world who would deny us these ideals and freedoms win, no matter the cost.

We live in a much different world today. It is no longer just the actions of those soldiers, sailors, coast guardsmen, marines, and airmen dressed like me that we are here to remember. We no longer lay sole claim to the title of "Hero" or "Defender". It was not a uniformed military member that climbed the stairs of the South Tower in New York City on the morning of Sept 11th. It was a fireman. It was a policeman. It was an Emergency Medical Technician. From that day forward, our country's first responders were included in the pantheon of "Defenders of America", and they and their actions are worthy of remembrance today.

But the story does not even end there, for it was not just a military member that leaped into action on Boylston street at the end of the marathon; it was not just the fireman or police, or the EMTs or Doctors. It was EVERY ONE nearby who was capable of rendering assistance. They were fellow runners. They were spectators with cell phones. EVERY citizen did something that is worthy of remembering today, for every citizen from the greater Boston area stood up against the harm that was done to us. We stayed indoors and off the streets when we were asked, we reported strange goings on immediately to those that could take action. We got on the news and said to the world that even though we lost 3 of our finest citizens, and hundreds were injured, we will not back down. We will not give in. We are stronger today, than we were before. This entire region of the Commonwealth and ALL of its citizens supported and defended the values and ideals that are so very worthy of remembering here today.

In this day and age, just by being a citizen of this great nation, we have ALL become elevated to the league of "Defenders of the American Ideal" that Nathaniel Page helped establish and fought for so long ago, because the need for ALL of our citizens help, attention, and perseverance is needed today; not just the help from a uniformed few. It is my honor to think of myself not just as a member of our armed services, but as a fellow American Citizen doing whatever part I can, in whatever capacity I can. It is my honor to be here with you today to remember all those that came before us, all of those who are taking action today, and most importantly, all of those who are passing on these values and ideals to those who will defend them in the future. I thank you so very much for your time and I hope you have a wonderful Memorial Day.