

# Matters of Faith

## Memories can bring spiritual healing.

By **The Rev. Dr. John A. Terry**

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Four years ago this past summer I was away at a conference. While sitting in my room reading, a childhood memory suddenly flashed into my mind. I don't know why. I only know it was a very ugly memory I had not thought about in decades. For some reason I decided to write it down. Then another memory leaked out, and I wrote that down. The leak became a flood, and I started writing down memory after memory, things I had not thought of in decades.

Some were painful, some joyful and some startling — like recalling all the near-death experiences I had as a child. Some were just the silly stuff of childhood. Before I was done I had written 50 pages of memories — mostly just a sentence or two about each. When I finished I wrote, "This is my story. I give it to God for all its joy and sorrow and all the stuff in between."

I found a lot of healing in that. It helped me to better understand some things about myself. It helped me to be more honestly forgiving and more fully grateful.

Memories can be both painful and healing. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel said, "Because I remember, I despair. Because I remember, I have the duty to reject despair." Memories can bring healing. Forgetting does not.

There are good reasons to set aside one day a year as Memorial Day. And there are very good reasons to use this day to gratefully recall those who have served our nation in the military and particularly those who gave their lives.

I came of age during the war in Vietnam. Those of my generation found they came back having risked their lives for our nation only to be blamed for a war they had not started. Sadly, many found it safer and easier not to talk about it.

I have conducted many funeral services for veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam and find that members of the family learn for the first time about the battles their loved one had fought in, their bravery, their wartime friends and their hidden scars. You only have to read James Bradley's book, "Flags of Our Fathers," to know why this is. We also find amongst the homeless on our streets a disproportionately high number of veterans. There is a connection.

I continue to be moved every Memorial Day and every Veterans Day when people shout out to the soldiers passing by, "Thank you!" Every time I conduct a funeral for a veteran and the flag is presented to the family, I find my eyes getting moist.

For me there is a particular poignancy to Memorial Day this year. Last summer our youngest son, after giving it long and serious thought, after finishing college and trying out the business world, decided that in his heart he really wanted more than anything to serve this country in the Air Force. He went with our encouragement and blessing.

I am hoping this Memorial Day we do not just have times for parades and family gatherings. Remember that throughout the history of our nation men and women have fought for our freedoms, including the freedom of worship. Set aside time to worship and sing the great patriotic hymns. And allow, as you are able, times and places to hear and tell the stories of those who fought our wars, for with memory comes healing.

At our last family dinner before our son deployed to basic training, we joined hands for prayer, as is our family's custom, and the words just came to me: "Lord, keep our son safe as he keeps us safe." It is the prayer I continue to pray and I invite you to offer it as well: Lord, keep our troops safe as they keep us safe. Amen.

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