

Memorial of six soldiers and flag brought to life

Maybe it is because of the Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center or maybe it is just because there is so much unrest in the world today, but there seems to be more and more stories coming to the surface about our veterans — those who valiantly fought for our freedom. And, today, after seeing the lack of freedom in foreign countries, each person should value this freedom more than ever before.

The following article was brought in by one of our readers and it brings the battle of Iwo Jima down to a personal level as a son, whose father was one of those pictured setting the flag on that island so many years ago. Read the article and there will be a tear in your eye. —Karen Krien

Each year, a man (name unknown) is hired to go to Washington, D.C., with the eighth grade class from Clinton, Wis., where he grew up. On the trip, he is the videotape man and each year, he said he takes some special memories back with him and this fall's trip was especially memorable.

On the last night of the trip, they stopped at the Iwo Jima Memorial. This memorial is the largest bronze statue in the world and depicts one of the most famous photographs in history — that of the six brave soldiers raising the American Flag at the top of a rocky hill on the island of Iwo Jima, Japan, during World War II. Over 100 students and chaperones piled off the buses and headed toward the memorial. I noticed a solitary figure at the base of the statue, and as I got closer, he asked, "Where are you guys from?"

I told him that we were from Wisconsin. "Hey, I'm a cheesehead, too? Come gather around Cheeseheads, and I will tell you a story."

He just happened to be in Washington to speak at the memorial the following day.

My name is James Bradley and I'm from Antigo, Wis.. My dad is on that statue, and I just wrote a book called "Flags of Our Fathers" which is number five on the New York Times Best Seller list. It is the story of the six boys you see behind me. Six boys raised the flag. The first guy putting the pole in the ground is Harlon Block. Harlon was an all-state football player.

He enlisted in the Marine Corps with all the senior members of his football team. They were off to play another type of game. A game called "war." But it didn't turn out to be a game. Harlon, at the age of 21, died with his intestines in his hands. I don't say that to gross you out, I say that because there are generals who stand in front of this statue and talk about the glory of war. You guys need to know that most of the boys in Iwo Jima were 17, 18 and 19 years old.

You see the next guy? That's Rene Gagnon from New Hampshire. If you took Rene's helmet off at the moment this photo was taken, and looked in the webbing that helmet, you would find a photograph — a photograph of his girlfriend. Rene put that in there for protection because he was scared. He was 18 years old. Boys won the battle of Iwo Jima. Boys. Not old men.

The next guy here, the third guy in this tableau, was Sergeant Mike Strank. Mike is my hero. He was the hero of all these guys. They called him "old man" because he was so old. He was already 24. When Mike would motivate his boys in training camp, he didn't say, "Let's go kill some Japanese" or "Let's die for our country." He knew he was talking to little boys. Instead he would say, "You do what I say, and I'll get you home to your mothers."

The last guy on this side of the statue is Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian from Arizona. Ira Hayes walked off

Iwo Jima. He went into the White House with my dad. President Truman told him, "You're a hero." He told reporters, "How can I feel like a hero when 250 of my buddies hit the island with me and only 27 of us walked off alive?" So you take your class at school — 250 of you spending a year together having fun, doing everything together. Then all 250 of you hit the beach, but only 27 of your classmates walk off alive. That was Ira Hayes. He had images of horror in his mind. Ira Hayes died dead drunk, face down at the age of 32, 10 years after this picture was taken.

The next guy, going around the statue, is Franklin Soursley from Hilltop, Ky. A fun-lovin' hillbilly boy. His best friend, who is now 70, told me, "Yeah, you know, we took two cows up on the porch of the Hilltop General Store. Then we strung wire across the stairs so the cows couldn't get down. Then we fed them Epsom salts. Those cows crapped all night."

Yes, he was a fun-lovin' hillbilly boy. Franklin died on Iwo Jima at the age of 19. When the telegram came to tell his mother that he was dead, it went to the Hilltop General Store. A barefoot boy ran that telegram up to his mother's farm. The neighbors could hear her scream all night and into the morning. The neighbors lived a quarter of a mile away.

The next guy, as we continue to go around the statue is my dad, John Bradley from Antigo, Wis., where I was raised. My dad lived until 1994, but he would never give interviews. When Walter Cronkite's producers or the new Your Times would call, we were trained as little kids to say, "No, I'm sorry sir, my dad's not here. He is in Canada fishing. No, there is no phone there, sir. No, we don't know when he is coming back."

My dad never fished or even went to Canada. Usually, he was sitting there right at the table eating his Campbell's soup. But we had to tell the press that he was out fishing. He didn't want to talk to the press. You see, my dad didn't see himself as a hero. Everyone thinks these guys are heroes, 'cause they are in a photo and a monument. My dad knew better. He was a medic. John Bradley from Wisconsin was a caregiver. In Iwo Jima he probably held over 200 boys as they died. And when boys died in Iwo Jima, they writhed and screamed in pain.

When I was a little boy, my third grade teacher told me that my dad was a hero. When I went home and told my dad that, he looked at me and said, "I want you always to remember that the heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who did not come back. Did NOT come back."

So that's the story about six nice young boys. Three died on Iwo Jima, and three came back as national heroes. Overall, 7,000 boys died on Iwo Jima in the worst battle in the history of the Marine Corps. My voice is giving out, so I will end here. "Thank you for your time."

Suddenly, the monument wasn't just a big old piece of metal with a flag sticking out of the top. It came to life before your eyes with the heartfelt words of a son who did indeed have a father who was a hero. Maybe not a hero for the reasons most people would believe, but a hero none-the-less.

We need to remember that God created this vast and glorious world for us to live in, freely, but also at great sacrifice. Let us never forget from the Revolutionary War to the Gulf War and all the wars in-between that sacrifice was made for our freedom. Remember to pray praises for this great country and also pray for those still in murderous unrest around the world. Stop and thank God for being alive at someone else's sacrifice. God Bless.



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Hangin' With Marge

By Margaret Bucholtz



Handicapped

How many times have you been in a big hurry and pull into the parking lot only to find that all the places were taken closest to the door? I don't know about you but the thought used to cross my mind that I wish I had one of those signs so I could have a good parking place.

Same thing with bathrooms! How many times do you go into a bathroom and the one for handicapped is roomy and the one you get to use you have to throw one leg over the stool just to get the door shut.

Many times I thought that it would be so nice to take a wheelchair shopping, so you could rest now and then and the packages wouldn't tire out your arms.

Then it happened. I broke my ankle, had to have surgery and be in a wheelchair and do all of the above and it isn't like you think.

The first experience was going shopping. I just had my ankle in a cast be-

fore the surgery and Kurt took me to Kansas City. We got to a mall and he got out the wheelchair and I was so excited. An hour later when we were leaving I was not nearly as happy. I have never spent so long in the automotive department in my life. He pushed me by the clothes, but of course the racks were too close together to get a wheelchair through so that was out of the question. Even the ride back to the closest parking wasn't neat as I didn't have time to enjoy the ride and to get the smell of the oil and automotive parts out of my body.

Then came the day of surgery, we got in the car to come home. At noon we stopped at a Wendy's and I got into the wheelchair. When we got to the door I realized that I couldn't reach and hold the door open and it was all Kurt could do to push me up the knoll at the doorway. After careful planning he decided he could back me in. The plan might have

worked if they wouldn't have had that bubble gum machine sitting in the way. He did catch it just before it hit the floor and finally we got inside. By this time the people, who didn't bother to help, were smiling like they knew us.

I told him I could manage the bathroom, after all it would be the BIG one I could use. I got in there only to find that the door on the handicapped bathroom opened the wrong way. If you went by it you couldn't reach the handle to open the door, but the other way there was not room to open the door. I don't know if it was the fact that the pain killers, or if it was just me but I really didn't feel the splitters off of the door that were in my thighs when I finally got in.

No more do I envy the close parking, wheelchairs or large bathrooms. It was a whole new experience.

Reader is ashamed of Party

To the editor:

I have been a Republican all my life and I've voted in many elections but I've never been so ashamed of the Party as I have been this year. The tactics they have used to try getting their Party elected. The phone rings and when I pick up the receiver there is a tape lambasting Sebelius, just a tape recording but the worst was Sunday evening when the phone rings and Laura Bush urges me to vote for Shallenberger. Just why does she think she knows more about what goes on in Kansas than I do. How much has it cost the Kansas taxpay-

Letter to the Editor

ers to pay for all this running around the Buses have done trying to get someone elected.

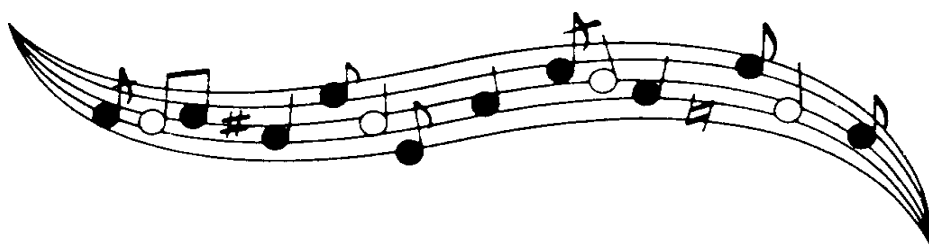
When a sniper was going around killing people, where was the Selected President...out on the campaign trail!! Maybe it would be better if the Bush family paid more attention to the rearing of their own family instead of flying all over the country telling the rest of us what we should do.

Wake up America, before it's too

late. We are rapidly losing our power, if we vote for everything Dubya wants we are rapidly nearing the hour, of losing the freedoms we now enjoy, by giving him all the power.

I know this will be published after the election is over but I'd still like for voters to decry the method's party's use to imply we aren't capable of deciding ourselves whom to vote for.

Fern Estes Kanorado



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GOD SAYS

I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord.

Psalms 116:17

The Saint Francis Herald

(USPS 475-960)

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