

A 'Silent Walk' a year later

It's hard to believe it will soon be a year since I traveled to The Netherlands to take part in the Keeping the Memory Alive tour.

The tour was a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Liberation of The Netherlands, as well as a pilgrimage to remember those soldiers who didn't return from the two world wars, by visiting their graves as well as the battlefields they fought and died on across Europe.

While on that trip, the group was honoured take part in a Service of Remembrance, when we visited the town of Ermelo on its Remembrance Day, which is observed May 4.

Ermelo and Halton Hills have developed quite a rapport over the years and a great friendship has emerged with the small Dutch town now unofficially twinned with Halton Hills.

Both communities maintain 'Friendship Gardens' to acknowledge that friendship. Our garden is located on the Civic Centre grounds while theirs is situated in an area that is their equivalent to our Remembrance Park.

During that service last year, I experienced their Silent Walk, a reflective walk throughout the town from their community centre to the cenotaph, in memory of those soldiers who liberated their country so many years ago.

The procession is quite unique. We walked through a completely silent town— even the motorists shut off their cars and motorcycles as we passed by en route to the cenotaph.

With only the sound of the birds in the air and the solitary church bell setting the tone of the walk, it was impossible to NOT think of why we were there— to honour, and most importantly, remember those who gave their lives.

After numerous visits to Ermelo, some of our local Dutch Canadians, along with both local Branches of the Royal Canadian Legion, began their own Silent Walk—the first in 2003.

It's called the Candlelight Tribute.

Ted Brown



As in Ermelo, the walk makes its way through the town, the only difference being the walkers carry candles, to set them at the cenotaph when they get to their destination.

On May 4, hundreds of school kids in Georgetown will assemble at the fairgrounds at 10 a.m. and walk to the cenotaph, to place candles and thank veterans who are on hand. Later that same night, Georgetown participants will meet at the Legion at 6:30 p.m., then walk to the cenotaph to place candles. Acton participants meet at either the olde Hide House or St. Alban's Church, at 7 p.m., and both groups will walk to the cenotaph at Trinity.

There is something incredibly moving about this ceremony. The silence, broken only the sound of feet on pavement, is conducive to making one remember the contributions of those who went overseas, never to return.

It doesn't end there. The candles, specially designed to burn for several hours, make a wonderful spectacle at the two cenotaphs, as they glow late into the night.

For me, there will be another thought as the local crowd makes its way to the cenotaphs.

In Europe, another group is doing the exact same thing— all in honour of our veterans.

—Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com

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