

# Why Wear A Poppy?

By Don Crawford

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"Please wear a poppy," the lady said  
And held one forth, but I shook my head.  
Then I stopped and watched as she offered them  
there,

And her face was old and lined with care;  
But beneath the scars the years had made  
There remained a smile that refused to fade.

A boy came whistling down the street,  
Bouncing along on care-free feet.  
His smile was full of joy and fun,  
"Lady," said he, "may I have one?"  
When she'd pinned it on he turned to say,  
"Why do we wear a poppy today?"

The lady smiled in her wistful way  
And answered, "This is Remembrance Day,  
And the poppy there is the symbol for  
The gallant men who died in war.  
And because they did, you and I are free —  
That's why we wear a poppy, you see.

"I had a boy about your size,  
With golden hair and big blue eyes.  
He loved to play and jump and shout,  
Free as a bird he would race about.  
As the years went by he learned and grew  
And became a man — as you will, too.

"He was fine and strong, with a boyish smile,  
But he'd seemed with us such a little while  
When war broke out and he went away.  
I still remember his face that day  
When he smiled at me and said, 'Goodbye,  
I'll be back soon, Mom, so please don't cry.'

"But the war went on and he had to stay,  
And all I could do was wait and pray.  
His letters told of the awful fight,  
I can see it still in my dreams at night  
With the tanks and guns and cruel barbed wire,  
And the mines and bullets, the bombs and fire.

"Till at last, at last, the war was won —  
And that's why we wear a poppy, son."  
The small boy turned as if to go,  
Then said, "Thanks, lady, I'm glad to know.  
That sure did sound like an awful fight,  
But your son — did he come back all right?"

A tear rolled down each faded cheek;  
She shook her head, but didn't speak.  
I slunk away in a sort of shame,  
And if you were me you'd have done the same;  
For our thanks, in giving, is oft delayed,  
Though our freedom was bought — and thousands  
paid!

And so when we see a poppy worn,  
Let us reflect on the burden borne  
By those who gave their very all  
When asked to answer their country's call  
That we at home in peace might live.  
Then wear a poppy! Remember — and Give!

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## History of the Poppy

Why was the poppy — the flower of the forgetfulness — chosen as the symbol of remembrance for Canada's war dead?

The poppy, an international symbol for those who died in war, also had international origins.

A writer first made the connection between the poppy and battlefield deaths during the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th century, remarking that fields that were barren before battle exploded with the blood-red flowers after the fighting ended.

Prior to the First World War few poppies grew in Flanders. During the

tremendous bombardments of that war the chalk soils became rich in lime from rubble, allowing 'popaver rhoeas' to thrive. When the war ended the lime was quickly absorbed, and the poppy began to disappear again.

Lt.-Col. John McCrae, the Canadian doctor who wrote the poem IN FLANDER FIELDS, made the same connection 100 years later, and the scarlet poppy quickly became the symbol for soldiers who died in battle.

Three years later an American, Moina Michael, was working in a New York City YMCA canteen when she started wearing a poppy in memory of the mil-

lions who died on the battlefield. During a 1920 visit to the United States a French woman, Madame Guerin, learned of the custom. On her return to France she decided to use handmade poppies to raise money for destitute children in war-torn areas of the country. In November 1921, the first poppies were distributed in Canada.

However, thanks to the millions of Canadians who wear flowers each November, the little red plant has never died. And neither have Canadians' memories for 114,000 of their countrymen who died in battle.

### IN FLANDERS FIELDS

John McCrae [1872-1918]

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

### NOVEMBER ON THE RIDEAUS

The wind blows strong, the waves roll high;  
The clouds look cold, no sun in the sky;  
November has come with its wintry chill;  
But there remains a memory of summer still.

A few frozen leaves still cling the oak;  
The maples lie on the ground to soak;  
The birds have gone to the southern clime,  
T'is bleak and chilly here most of the time.

But winter will pass with its ice and snow;  
And folks will be glad to see it go,  
For spring will come to us once again  
As we bid farewell to winter's strain.

We will welcome the warmth of the pleasant sun,  
For another season will have begun.  
The wind may blow but it's lost its chill  
Flowers come to life, they have long been still.

To those who have travelled away from the cold,  
We send you a message brave and bold;  
Do hurry back to your summer home,  
For we tire of staying up here alone.

By Lloyd L Irwin, Delta, Ont.