

Village View by Andrea Leonard



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Memorial Day weekend may already be behind us, but the tradition Memorial Day, the 30th of May, is still to come.

Memorial Day honors people who served their country in time of war and can't be changed from May 30th, in my mind, with a flip of the page or flourish of a felt-tipped pen.

Those who view Memorial Day only an opportunity to add one more three-day-weekend to our calendar of tourist-business opportunities or fun-for-the-family won't get much support from this week's column; be forewarned.

The 30th of May may be just one more ordinary day of the week to some people, but to me it's still a significant holiday, even though I may follow a typical work-a-day routine, and do nothing obvious to celebrate.

In addition to giving some thought to the years when we especially honored servicemen -- the active, the dead, and the surviving veterans -- we remember, on this day, loved ones no longer living, still sorely missed. I'll be doing that.

Thinking most particularly of them brings memories of days -- not so terribly long ago -- when patriotism was a virtue and nationalism admirable.

People of our nation once felt uniquely blessed to live in this country. They believed it to be, in some miraculous way, superior to all others. There was great strength in that conviction.

A blast of gunfire shattered the concept when the President of our United States died under the Texas sun. When his brother died in California, it was smashed again. When Martin Luther King died, it came crashing down a third time.

It was hammered into oblivion with the war in Southeast Asia. It has been almost completely eradicated during recent months of wrangling and haranguing, attacks and counter-attacks, charges and counter-charges, centering around activities in our national Capitol city.

In happier decades -- though they too were not without their crises and scandals -- there persisted a spirit of unity in spite of distressing revelations, threats to national security, attacks upon personal safety and privacy -- that today seems lacking.

Our pride in ourselves, our faith in one another, our belief in our one-ness -- where did it go?

The country has weathered other Presidential assassinations ... and the people have closed ranks, joined hands, hitched up their belts and worked harder at being better Americans.

Old-fashioned honesty is out of style and there's little to like about what's offered in its place.

There was a day -- not long ago -- when we believed the best of ourselves, each other, and our learned leaders.

Perhaps we were naive. It was lots healthier for us -- for the nation and for the masses of people -- that naive.

When we addressed an elected representative of the people as "Honored Sir" we meant just that. He was honored; we believed him honorable. Whatever we believe about our leaders today, we no longer can see them as honorable.

It's not a common term, is it? It's not "mod" to put people on pedestals -- just to put people on. Today, all have feet-of-clay; all are subtle and manipulative; all will cheat, lie and steal, apparently, to achieve their own selfish self-serving ends.

Somewhere in this great nation there are honest people.

Yes, I'm still naive enough to believe that's true. I believe I know some of them. I believe some of them live right here, here in the Town of Barnstable. I believe this-- first because I know these people -- second, because I want -- desperately -- to know it.

It's because of Memorial day that I want to know it.

Because I remember and feel, and can't erase from the way my head works, what it is to be an American, I can't help it. I'm still proud of my country. I still believe in it, believe it's the best there is.

I believe in its strength, its basic goodness, its honesty. Yes, it's in a mess right now.

But this, too, shall pass.

Other great leaders and potential leaders have been struck down ... and adversity but strengthened us.

It's different in these years of the '70s ...we're split, divided, angry, hurt, fearful, confused, doubting, suspicious, cynical.

The uniforms worn by our servicemen inspire little or no honor. Parental influence wavers before an onslaught of disrespect and defiance. Educators are suspect rather than admired for their learning. Traditional religion staggers along, losing ground daily. New faiths sparkle to life, blaze brightly a short time, blink and go out.

The word "values" seems to have lost its meaning.

Those in high places appear to be running a circus. Those we look to for leadership reveal weaknesses, shams, vacillation and a sorry readiness to stoop to dark skulduggery if it'll save their skins.