

Commemorate is not the same as don't forget

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Commemorate is trying to feel how it was

Commemorate is thinking about them who were

Commemorate is rethink what was

Commemorate is being silent

Commemorate is realise that what was

Is always connected with what is and

What will come

75 years ago. That seems like a very long time ago. When I was in Berlin with my family this summer, my daughters of 16,13 and 7 years old, thought that the year 1989, the year that the wall came down, was a year from a far-away past. For me though, it was like yesterday that I saw the news on television, people standing on the wall, dancing, celebrating their freedom.

75 years ago. That seems like a very long time. My grandparents were in their forties, the same age as I am now. They lived not so far away from here, in a small village. My grandfather was prisoner of war in Poland. But my grandmother, my uncles, my aunts and my own mum - they were little children in the age from 1- 10 years old - must have heard the airplanes of the Market Garden Operation. My grandfather returned from Poland, he just walked right into his village to embrace his wife and children. For me it seems like a very long time ago. For my mum it is like yesterday that she was sitting on his lap, eating some fresh cherries from the tree.

75 years ago. That seems like a very long time. Young men like Joe, Bob, Warren, Alfie, Pat and Jess got in their planes in their passion to liberate unknown people from their enemy, an enemy who killed innocent people because of their religion, who wanted to occupy countries, who wanted to have ultimate power. These young men left families in their home countries, mothers in sorrow, girlfriends they loved, nephews and nieces they cared for.

Somewhere they find the courage in their heart to take off, knowing that their lives could be taken. Many of them didn't return home, they left their lives here, in this land, on this soil, in the Neder-Betuwe.

These men were 'Flyers in the Fire', they took off, flew through the air but were shot by the fire of the war. What would have been their last thoughts? What were their feelings? Did they think about their mothers knowing she would be in grief for the rest of her life? Did they think about their friends? About their dogs who they played with before they left? Or did they think about their future, their dreams which never would become true? Dreams where they maybe had been thinking of when they were a little child playing in the garden, about becoming a farmer, a doctor, a lawyer, an artist?

We don't know and we will never know how their last minutes have been. But by commemorating them, they come a little bit closer to our lives. Although 75 years ago, we can - here at this moment, at this place - maybe feel how they flew through the air, how they were trying to complete their mission, maybe we can imagine how great their fear must have been when not the enemy but they themselves were shot down. Maybe we can imagine how they had dreams like we have today, dreams, desires and wishes for the future.

75 year ago. That seems like a long time ago.

And yet we are standing here today

75 years living on. That seems like a very long time.

And yet we are standing here today, like there will be in 75 years from now on, also standing people here, at this place, trying to look back in the past. What would we like them to see? To commemorate? If we realise this, we can't ignore the responsibility for not only commemorate the past but also to imagine the future, to think about the future.

Let's believe and invest in again 75 years of peace, so that the children who will bring flowers to the monument today and who will play on the streets this afternoon, will drink a cup of tea tonight with their parents, never have to get in a plane to fight for freedom.

Let's hope that we can live in a land where we can respect each other for who we are. Because everyone, whichever religion, race or gender they have, is dreaming of the same. Is dreaming of a world of peace, a world where you can fulfil your dreams by becoming a doctor, a writer, a baker, a farmer, by falling in love, getting children and embrace your grandchildren at one day.

75 years. Let's commemorate and be grateful to all of those who had the courage to give their lives for people they even didn't know, people like us, standing here today. Let us commemorate for ever and at the same time care for the future, so that we will believe and work for a world where not hate and war dominate, but peace and love.

75 years.

Let's fly in our dreams and not in the fire of war.

Let's keep a fire in our hearts, a fire for love, peace and freedom.

Beitske Bouwman

September 2019

Opening memorial Flyers in the Fire, Opheusden