

# Remembering and Honoring a Generation

**As we mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II and honor the “greatest generation” of those who served to protect a free democratic society, I wonder if our generation too will be remembered for a collective commitment to further the ideals that founded this nation. It’s a question for every generation.**

BY LARRY J. MARTIN

This summer we will mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. For many people, it is a milestone in history; for me, the lessons of the greatest generation who served and sacrificed continue to shape my thoughts and world view.

As a kid growing up, almost all the male adults I knew fought in the war. My fraternal grandparents had three sons. Uncle John flew bomber missions over Europe, Uncle Bob was in the Army in the Pacific, and my dad, Allen, served in the Navy. My maternal grandparents had five daughters and one son, my Uncle Louie. The son of Italian immigrants, he fought in North Africa and helped liberate Italy from the Nazis. A couple of my aunts served on the home front, as “Rosie the Riveters” in Kenosha’s factories. I knew literally hundreds of people in my life – teachers, family, friends, and neighbors, who all served in one way or another.

They are all now gone. But what they fought to preserve, and the collective character and integrity with which they lived their lives, are worth remembering, honoring, and emulating.

After defeating the tide of fascism and imperialism, they came home to grow a nation and struggle with our country’s own commitment to civil rights, equal rights, and justice for all.

Forged in the crucible of the Depression and then war, they remained in large measure united by their common experience. They worked hard, paid their taxes, voted, invested in their communities, volunteered in record numbers, and supported institutions that worked toward the common good. They instinctively knew we were stronger together than apart. Sure, their generation had their partisan differences, but they knew the role a free democratic society needed to play, both at home and abroad, and how institutions, at their best, could be powerful agents for the societal good.

If they were with us, what would they say of our times today? About the nature of civil discourse, the state of our democracy, how we care for our planet and each other. Are we still that beacon of hope shining in the harbor welcoming those huddled masses yearning to breathe free?

In just a year we will celebrate our nation’s 250th birthday. As we prepare to hang the flag, cheer the parade, grill our brats, and watch fireworks, what will our collective commitment be in furthering the ideals that founded this nation? Are we still striving for a more perfect union and that all people are created equal and committed to the rule of law? Most important, will we still see ourselves a nation worthy of our motto – e pluribus unum?

Each generation must answer these questions anew. My parents’ generation did. What will our answer be? **WL**



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