

LEST WE FORGET

by Lynnell Nixon-Knight



Artist Lynn Johnston

Why would a person stand on a street corner on a cold, windy November day, distributing little paper flowers whose deep red petals are so fragile and tissue-thin—flimsy little poppy buds that will merely fade and crumble with time?

Perhaps it is because that person wants you to remember what those poppies represent.

Lynn Johnston remembers.

"Both of my parents were in the Air Force," says Johnston, artist and author of the syndicated comic strip, *For Better Or For Worse*. Her mother and father were veterans of World War II and both served their country as Sergeants. She wrote a comic strip about the memorial poppy (shown below) as a tribute to them—and all veterans.

There's a significant military legacy in Johnston's family, from her parents, to her uncle who was

an Army motorcycle dispatch rider in the second world war, to her paternal grandfather who was a veteran of World War I.

"My father—and my mother, but especially my father—felt like his service was where he really contributed something to his country," she says. "He was a watchmaker, a jeweler... and he always felt like his service was the most important part of his life, because he risked his life for his country."

Appreciation and awareness of the veterans' sacrifice was always important to Johnston's family as she was growing up.

"We always went to the ceremonies for Remembrance Day...and we always went to parades," she says. "It was instilled in us how important the military was in preserving our heritage and our country as it is now."

Her country is Canada, and clearly, the patriotism that the poppy embodies goes beyond national boundaries.

"This is a very military town," says Johnston of her North Bay, Ontario home town. "We have the underground NORAD station here, which is the sister station to the one that's in the United States in Colorado. There is quite a military presence in this city."

Johnston's poppy strip showcases an emotional topic for her, and she considers acquisition of the poppies a sacred duty.

"I am so grateful, and I always buy a poppy!" she says. "It would be so easy to save the one from the year before, but every year I buy a poppy—I buy several. And I think about [what it means] one more time. It's not far from my thoughts anyway because I remember my parents and how much their military service meant to them."

The poppy is important to Johnston in another form as well: "I think that the poem *In Flanders Field** by John McCrae is one of the most powerful poems ever written."

She was taught to memorize it when she was a school girl and says, "I remember memorizing this poem with joy and great spirit because it meant so much to my family."

Gratitude for veterans is an integral part of Johnston's life, and she is concerned that the generations now are losing sight of the debt they owe to those who fought for freedom.

"So many didn't come back!" she says, speaking in particular of World War II. "I look at my son, who is now 25, and my daughter



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