

Dear Friends and Families of MMS,

When I greeted the students over the PA system this morning, I urged them to ask you and other members of your family about anyone they are related to who served or currently serve in the armed forces of the United States of America and/or our allies. Memorial weekend should be a time to renew and retell family lore. I know that some of our students and families have come from other places in the world, so I also suggested students should also ask about the story of how they got here, to their life in Darien, Connecticut.

My father's people can be traced all the way to the Mayflower's landing in 1620, and my mom is an immigrant who came here in 1962, so I am either an old-blue-stocking or first generation. I want to know and be able to hand on both of those storylines.

This might also be the weekend to explain to your children why they have their names. I am named after my Great Uncle Thomas Perkins, who ran away from the family farm in Maine in 1944, lied about his age at an enlistment office, and spent the next 39 years in the Navy. He retired as the commander of a destroyer. When my nephew graduated from Annapolis three years ago and received his commission as a Marine Lieutenant, he carried Tom Perkins' ceremonial sword. Over this weekend, I am sure to hear from my father about his time in the Air Force, and I know I will hear again the story about the Battle of Leyte Gulf in WWII, where another of my Great Uncles, Harrison Otis Perkins, was a gunnery officer on the USS Cooper, which went down with all hands.

And I will hear about my mother's father, after whom I am also named. I'm Thomas Hugh, and Captain Hugh Hart was wounded in the battle for control of North Africa. He was part of the South African Irish Brigade who marched the length of the continent to defend the British Empire. Before he was captured by a German tank corps, and transferred to an Italian prisoner of war camp, he was famous for getting a cranky old truck to start just prior to his position being overrun, and he was able to lead his men to a safer location. Over the years the number of soldiers who claimed to have been saved in Captain Hart's truck grew into the dozens.

As an English teacher, when I taught Shakespeare's Tempest, I would have a private resonance of the lines, "Full fathom five thy father lies/ of his bones are corals made/ those are the pearls that were his eyes/ nothing of him that doth fade/ but suffers a sea change into something rich and strange." This is a description of the king in the play who is presumed to have gone down with his ship. When I hear it, I think of Harrison. I know my great-grandmother believed that one day her boy would walk into the farmhouse kitchen so she could take down her gold star from the parlor window.

How does this fold back into the work of a middle school? We study our history, our literature and world literature; we seek to master math and science and art and languages and the rest of our subjects in order to grow into the sort of people who will want to know their history. In these times when so very much divides us and, as the saying goes, 'rends the fabric of our nation,' there are shared experiences that can knit us back up.

Saying the Pledge of Allegiance is one way, learning from the elders in our family is another, and on Memorial Day we can put those things together. Tell your kids the story of your families. If it's appropriate watch a favorite old movie such as "Run Silent, Run Deep" or "Midway." Watch a few episodes of "Finding Our Roots" with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Go through the old photo albums. Tell your story.

And, (you know it is coming), set aside the cell phones, the pings, the distractions, the unlimited access to whatever the Internet purveys. Have a couples hours of a technology Sabbath where you unplug as a family. Tell your children your stories.

Respectfully,

Tom McMorran, Ed.D., Interim Principal