

REMEMBERING
By DIANE HORNING

NY Post - July 4, 2005 -- MY husband, my daughter, her friend and I spent this past Memorial Day in Washington, D.C., visiting memorials, not going to Memorial Day sales.

Our son wasn't with us on this pilgrimage because he was murdered on 9/11. The day filled our own personal need to remember and honor the events and the people to whom these memorials were dedicated.

The World War II Memorial was personal. We traveled the circle, read the carefully chosen words and remembered all — but we thought most personally about Uncle Leo, who had seen the attack at Pearl Harbor as a young soldier. We thought of our dear friend Arthur Russo, twice-decorated recipient of the Purple Heart. We focused on another friend, Bill Wynne, veteran of this war and the Korean conflict.

From here we visited the Vietnam War Memorial. So many names, contemporaries from my youth. We tried to wipe the bird droppings from the dark slabs of granite . . . nothing should desecrate these names. We thought about our wonderful friend, Mario Canzonari; he came home from this war, but it stays with him always.

Traveling back in time, we found the Korean War Memorial, with those haunting figures looking in all directions, never knowing where the next assault would come. Thinking of Bill Wynne again, we happened to be at this memorial at 3 p.m. when a moment of silence was followed by the sound of taps.

Now, focused on our own loss, we went to Arlington National Cemetery with flowers in hand. We placed some at the grave of Kris Romeo Bishundat, the young man we'd come to know through his mother, our new friend. He died at the Pentagon, the same day our Matthew had died. The rest of our flowers were laid at the tomb dedicated to all the dead from the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon. Our Matthew was in our hearts.

Last week, I made this pilgrimage again — now joined by other families who had suffered loss on 9/11. This time, we wanted to watch the visitors to these memorials. What did they want from their visit? What did they expect? Were they disappointed by the lack of cultural facilities at these sites?

What we found was profound respect. At the World War II Memorial, we saw many older people steeped in memories, standing by the parts of the memorial dedicated to their own "theater of operations." We saw grandparents explaining history to grandchildren. We saw people searching for the state name from which they hailed.

We saw quiet contemplation and reverence . . . We saw no one searching for something else to occupy their thoughts.

At the Vietnam wall, we saw a young girl making a pencil rubbing of a name. Her father was taking her picture, while her mother said, "We'll send this to grandma. She'll want to see this."

People were leaving tokens; some solitary figures shunned the crowds and seemed lost in private memories. Others were asking questions: When was the war? How many died? Why are there diamonds by some names and small intersecting lines by others? Their questions were being answered. There was learning and reverence.

It was beastly hot and humid, but we had time for one more memorial: The Korean War Memorial. And then we couldn't complain about the weather any more. We saw these figures clad in so much gear in what was probably a hot and humid place. We felt a kinship with these figures, made all the more real as we saw our own reflections in the shiny wall next to them . . . We were there with them in that captured moment. Again, we saw people reading the text: How many were killed? How many captured? How many never found? How many wounded?

Nothing was missing from this memorial. It didn't need anything else to capture their full attention.

So, what did we learn on this pilgrimage that we should heed in New York when we build the memorial there to honor the deaths of so many on Feb. 26, 1993 and 9/11?

We learned that the memorials speak for themselves. No visitor expected or wanted to find anything else. They did not want to see drawings or theater or diverse history lessons. They just wanted to learn about and remember a specific part of history and specific people. That's what made these memorials speak to the visitors: their single-mindedness.

The second thing we learned was that no one was turned away. We never heard anyone say, "Sorry, we're too full to accommodate so many people. You'll have to come back another time." Yet, built into the projection for the Ground Zero Memorial are plans to turn away 10,000 people per day because not enough space has been allotted for those visitors.

Instead, the proposed International Freedom Center will be given the dominant space. So visitors to the site will be given cultural venues they didn't come to see, but will be turned away from the memorial they did want to experience.

From our visit to the Washington, D.C., memorials, we learned that visitors want and need only the single direction of the event and people they wish to memorialize. And we learned that no one should be turned away.

These lessons were simple enough for the children we encountered to comprehend. Why are they lessons so hard for Gov. Pataki, Mayor Bloomberg and the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. to learn?

Diane Horning's 26-year-old son Matthew worked on the 95th Floor of the World Trade Center's North Tower and was killed on 9/11. She is founder of WTC Families for Proper Burial.

