

MEMORIAL DAY ADDRESS
May 27, 1991

Mr. Mayor, members of the Schroeder family, honored guests, friends, and fellow 'Tosans. I am deeply honored to be here this morning to give this address, in part because I knew Scott, and in part because some of my earliest and warmest memories are of Decoration Day, as we called it when I was a boy.

I remember, for instance, the wonderful glow of excitement which began early in May when the American Legion drum and bugle corps would come to our end of town to prepare for the big parade. There was never much traffic out our way, and they could march up and down the streets to their heart's content. And every boy and girl in the neighborhood --myself included-- would march along behind them, trying to look very serious and very grown-up.

And I remember the big day, itself. There was no school, of course, and almost every kid in town marched in the parade one way or another. If they were not Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts or Brownies, Bluebirds or Campfire Girls, they marched with their class in school.

I remember lamp-posts, decorated with red, white, and blue bunting. I remember bands, and sailors from Great Lakes --and soldiers from Fort Sheridan. And I remember an old convertible with three or four Civil War Veterans. And I remember that, when the parade was over, everyone would gather at the town hall for patriotic prayers and speeches.

I will not pretend that I remember any of those speeches --or even that I understood them at the time. But one thing I understood quite clearly. Without really knowing why, it was very clear that what we were doing was important. So important that only when those ceremonies were over did we turn to personal things, like going to the cemetery to put pink peonies on my grandparents' graves.

But now that I am older, I think I understand why those ceremonies were so important, and why this ceremony is important. Certainly it is not because of the speeches. As President Lincoln noted in his speech at Gettysburg, "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here." And if he underestimated the impact of his own words, he was certainly right in general. What makes these ceremonies important is that we need them. We need them to remind us of things we all too easily forget.

We need a Mothers' Day to remind us of the love we ought to cherish all year long. We need a 4th of July to focus our thoughts on the freedoms we enjoy every day. And we need Memorial Day to remind us that those precious freedoms have been purchased at a great price, that brave men and women of many generations

have paid with their lives that you and I might live together in justice, and freedom and peace.

That lesson has always been important, but never more important than today. For once again a young man from this community has been called upon to make the supreme sacrifice for this country which he loved, which we all love. Though it seems hard to believe, it was only four years ago last month that Scott Schroeder knelt in the church which I serve, to be confirmed into membership. It was just a little less than two years ago that he graduated from Wauwatosa East High School. And, last January 29th, shortly after his twentieth birthday, Scott was killed in the battle of Khafji,

During Operation Desert Storm, as we Americans sat, almost mesmerized, in front of our TV sets, we often heard some commentator talk about an antiseptic war, a Nintendo kind of conflict. And it may have seemed that way to some. But, to this community, it stopped being that the night Scott Schroeder died. Suddenly the war seemed terribly real. And all of us --whether we knew Scott or not-- were brutally reminded that our freedom is not free.

We knew that, of course. We have probably always known it. But let us be honest. We often take for granted even life's most precious blessings. That is why we need a day like today. That is why we need the flags, and the bands, and the speeches. Lest we forget.

But, be that as it may, what happens here is not really the important thing. Scott knew that. He was a good marine, and he knew that what makes a good marine is not what he does on the parade ground when the flags are flying and the bands are playing, but what he does day by day, and especially what he does in battle.

So I ask you, what happens tomorrow? What happens when the speeches are over and the trumpets are still? What happens when life's incessant demands turn our thoughts to other things? Speeches, and bands, and flags, and flowers are not memorials. They are only symbols. The only true memorial is not in what we do today, but in what we do tomorrow, and the next day, and all the days after that. Encouraging his brother to live at his best, Scott wrote, "Remember, you're a Schroeder." The day Scott died, in one way or another we all became Schroeders.

Scott was committed --to his job and to his country. And he paid for that commitment with his life. In so doing, he set a standard for the rest of us to follow. A long time ago, at another memorial service, Abraham Lincoln said, "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us --that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion --that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain."

If Scott's death and the untold sacrifices of others are to have any lasting meaning, it is up to us to do just that. To do our duty as they did theirs. In the words of Theodore Parker, "Let us do our duty in our shop or our kitchen, in the market, the street, the school, the home just as faithfully as if we stood in the front rank of some great battle and knew that victory for mankind depended on our bravery, strength and skill."

If we do that we shall be keeping faith with Scott and all those others who have given so much. A short time after the American Revolution, John Adams wrote, "Posterity! You will never know how much it cost the present generation to preserve your freedom. I hope you will make good use of it. If you do not, I shall repent in heaven that I ever took half the pains to preserve it."

It has been said that "At the close of life, the question will be not how much have you got? but how much have you given? Not how much have you won? but how much have you done? Not how much have you saved? but how much have you sacrificed? It will be how much have you loved and served? not how much were you honored?"

If we really want this world to become the kind of place where young men like Scott Schroeder no longer need to fight and die, let us look beyond the speeches and the trumpets. Let us look around us day by day. Let us find some place where we can render service, and do so. "For those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must . . . undergo the fatigue of supporting it." (Thomas Paine)

So I close with these words by John McCrea:

"In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard among the guns below.

"We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields

"Take up our quarrel with the foe!
To you from failing hands, we throw
The torch --Be yours to hold it high!
If you break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields"

The speech is over. The memorial has just begun!