

Thoughts on Armistice/Veteran's Day

It was with a small spark of hope for motivation and a whole lot of resignation, that I recently attended the Veteran's Day vigil at a park just across the "Y" bridge in downtown Akron. The day was ugly; it had been raining and cloudy all day, cold, and night was rapidly falling. As I drove up by the park, I saw the usual small band of dedicated people, maybe two dozen at most, looking fairly miserable, under umbrellas.

We were there to listen to survivors of war, from WWII on up through the current Iraq War, tell their stories. It was a very moving, intense experience as they, one by one, related their narratives. The scene was quite emotional, as the negative emotions that war engenders, were exposed: the anger, rage, sadness and bitterness that have to accompany the mass killing of even "small" wars.

Possibly the most intense part of the gathering were the two separate stories of post-traumatic stress disorder and its chilling effects on the psyche. One veteran told of the disorder's contagious effect on his wife and family, while another read a very powerful poem (his own?) with concrete imagery of the side affects of war. I think even for non-veterans, a lot of this hit home. Near the end, before the candlelight vigil, one last person asked to speak and the strange experience became downright surrealistic.

I do not know if this young man really was a veteran, and quite possibly he was. I do know he seemed to have partaken of alcohol and/or drugs and he proceeded to turn the previous testimony on its head as he insisted that we CANT leave Iraq and if we did the legions of terrorists who are even now amongst us, would start doing all manner of hideous acts to our citizenry. People were polite and let him have his say, though a few of us had to back away, somewhat horrified at his reasoning. To his credit, he obtained matches to enable us to light the candles, since none of us had brought anything to do so. More importantly, when the vigil ended, some of us wondered whether his appearance was almost poetically appropriate on such a strange night: he reminded us of the paranoia that drives so many of our fellow travelers in life and that much work remains to be done to convince otherwise.

In conclusion, I have to say it was an extremely interesting evening and I felt very privileged to have been a part of it. All of the veterans were applauded and thanked for their stories. I hope in some small

way that it helped bring some healing to all that were there. I also would like to hope that this type of gathering, without grandiose speeches about honor and courage are what our veterans really want and need. The worn-out cliches that are commonly dredged up seem to me to be yet another way of using and abusing those who are led to fight.

- Bernie Bisheimer