*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**As Memorial Day approaches, remember ‘The Last Post’**

When I was attending college, I was just amazed how many holidays there were. In a sense, it was great, as we didn’t have any classes; a day to loaf around not doing anything. Then the world turned when I started working in a restaurant.

Yes, no school all right, but you have to work harder during those holidays as the restaurant would be 10 times busier than usual. In other words, we had to go to work earlier, work twice as hard and get home much later than usual.

In a sense, it was supposed to be a holiday to spend with the family, but in reality, it was just another workday. Looking back, all holidays were no fun for me — New Year’s Eve, St. Patrick’s Day, Easter, Cinco de Mayo, Mother’s Day (the mother of all holidays), Father’s Day (no comparison), the list goes on.

Anyway, most holidays are great to have some fun time with the family — Thanksgiving, Christmas, Fourth of July, Memorial Day, etc. Either spend the day gathering with your parents and grandparents and your other relatives, feasting, laughing and reminiscing, or just light up the grill and spend the day barbecuing brats or ribs with your buddies over some local brews. Ah, what a life, and that’s what America is all about.

There are two holidays that have a different meaning to me, Memorial Day and Veterans Day. My American dad was born on Veterans Day (Nov. 11) and he is a retired Marine. I would fly the American flag in his honor and also for my two brothers-in-law. Tony is a Vietnam vet who got shot three times while on duty and Darryl returned from Afghanistan with PTSD after three tours.

I never have been in service, I know nothing about war and its consequences. The only touch of reality was when I was playing guitar and singing in a cafe in Oceanside, California, a town close by Camp Pendleton, back in the 1970s.

An elderly gentleman in a Marine uniform approached me and asked if he could play my guitar for a bit. He played a few beautiful songs and we started chatting, and I found out he just got back from Vietnam. He asked me, “Guess how old I am.” Looking at his wrinkles and the way he acted, I said “30? 35, at most?” He reached out his hand and shook mine. “Thank you, brother. I am 21, your age. This is what war will do to you.” I wanted to ask more questions but he smiled and left.

So as Memorial Day approaches, just what is it about? As the name implies, it is the day designated to remember those who died for our country. I was told that over 650,000 soldiers died during the Civil War. My goodness, I can’t imagine.

It was the North fighting the South, the Union Army against the Confederate. Regardless, it was still brothers fighting brothers! Then I have to share with you this story I just read, about “The Last Post,” a haunting song. Find a way to listen to it, you will have a lump in your throat too.

This is how the story goes:

In 1862 during the Civil War, Union Army Capt. Robert Ellicombe was with his men near Harrison’s Landing in Virginia. The Confederate Army was on the other side of the narrow strip of land.

During the night, Capt. Ellicombe heard the moans of a soldier who lay severely wounded on the field. Not knowing if it was a Union or Confederate soldier, the captain decided to risk his life and bring the wounded man back for medical attention. Crawling on his stomach through the gunfire, the captain reached the stricken soldier and began pulling him toward his encampment.

When the captain finally reached his own lines, he discovered it was actually a Confederate soldier, and that he had already died.

The captain lit a lantern and suddenly caught his breath and went numb with shock. In the dim light, he saw the face of the soldier and it was his own son. The boy was studying music in the South when the war broke out. Without telling his father, he had enlisted in the Confederate Army.

The following morning, heartbroken, the father asked permission of his superiors to give his son a full military burial, despite his enemy status. His request was only partially granted.

The captain then asked if he could have a group of Army band members play a funeral dirge for his son at the funeral. The request was turned down since the soldier was a Confederate. But, out of respect for the father, they did say that they could give him only one musician.

The captain chose a bugler. He asked the bugler to play a series of musical notes he had found on a piece of paper in the pocket of the dead youth’s uniform.

The wish was granted. The haunting melody, now known as “The Last Post” and used at military funerals, was born.

It goes like this:

*Day is done*

*Gone the sun*

*From the lakes*

*From the hills*

*From the sky*

*All is well*

*Safely rest*

*God is nigh.*

*Fading light*

*Dims the sight*

*And a star*

*Gems the sky*

*Gleaming bright*

*From afar*

*Drawing nigh*

*Falls the night.*

*Thanks and praise*

*For our days*

*‘Neath the sun*

*‘Neath the stars*

*‘Neath the sky*

*As we go*

*This we know*

*God is nigh.*

I am glad that I have chosen America to be my home. And am most honored and thankful to those who have given their lives and are still offering their service to serve our country. Please come home safe, y’all, hear?

More on Memorial Day

Last, year, the American Legion in Webster was celebrating their 100 years of service and they asked our chorus, The Indianhead Barbershop Chorus, to help them celebrate the occasion by singing a few patriotic songs. Of course, we gladly obliged.

Living here in the Northwoods for almost four years, I still haven’t gotten my bearings down. Needless to say, my brother in song drove us to Webster for the celebration. We met at the Webster Library for practice and would go across the street to entertain our guests at 12:30 p.m.

Driving north, I couldn’t help but notice the line of cars going south, all with Minnesota license plates. It went on for miles and miles. I’ve never seen such a sight before. Goodness, my wife and I did find a good place to live!

Except a few members who couldn’t make it because of family obligations, most of the chorus showed up for this wonderful event. What an honor singing to the veterans on Memorial Day.

So we sang “God Bless America,” “The Armed Forces Medley,” “America the Beautiful,” and finally, “The Star-Spangled Banner.” I was honored to see so many veterans in the room, some have even served in the Korean War.

When we closed the show singing the national anthem, we asked the audience to stand and join us. My heart melted when I saw a veteran up front in a wheelchair, insisting his family help him stand up so he could sing the anthem with his hand over his heart. My glasses got fogged up.

Remembering the words from “America the Beautiful” — “Oh beautiful, for heroes proved, in liberating strife. Who more than self their country loved and mercy more than life …” — I couldn’t sing anymore. Words did not come out. Looking at our director, Karl Wicklund, trying to wipe his glasses but couldn’t, I knew that we had done well, as singing is about touching people’s hearts.

It was indeed a great event singing with my brothers in song. Thank you, vets, for giving us the liberty to have a great day.