

America once again celebrates Memorial Day. This somber holiday occurs on the last Monday in May as it has for well over one-hundred years. It began shortly after the Civil War with the purpose of paying homage to Union and Confederate soldiers who died while serving in the war. Originally called Decoration Day, sometime in the early 20th century, the name changed to Memorial Day. Following WWI, Memorial Day expanded. Memorial Day became a day to visit and decorate the graves of deceased relatives whether they had served in the military or not. Currently, Memorial Day continues to have serious moments, but it is also a day to celebrate the beginning of summer vacation by having picnics, attending ball games and participating in many other outdoor activities.

The Memorial Day torch passed to me fourteen years ago. In January of 1997, my mother died. As a young child and even later in life, I served as Mom's assistant. As odd as it may sound, I looked forward to helping her. Mother was the person in charge of preparing and delivering beautiful floral arrangements to the graves of our departed relatives. I do not recall ever asking her, but I have a sneaking hunch she assumed the role as official torchbearer after her mother died.

As if it were yesterday, I recall the night before Memorial Day; we would visit Mother's beautiful flower gardens and begin cutting an assortment of fresh flowers. They included peonies, irises, painted daisies, columbines, Shasta daisies, dame's rocket, timber phlox, bridal wreath spirea and anything else that was in bloom. We would place the cut flowers in buckets of cold water overnight.



Great-grandparents' Headstone

Then, early the following morning, we would arrange the flowers in an assortment of makeshift vases and containers. While the day was just beginning, off we went to the cemetery. My job, when we arrived, was to help anchor the vases, so the wind would not topple them. I then filled each container with water. While visiting each grave, Mother would always take the time to share with me stories about the departed. Many of the deceased I

had never known. They had long passed away before my arrival on this earth. No matter, I always felt the kinship through Mother's tender, loving words. I miss those days, and I miss Mother.



As we have done for the past fourteen years, this Memorial Day, Rita and I will make our journey to Sutton, Nebraska, delivering flowers to those same graves that I visited with mother so many years ago.

Furthermore, we will visit her grave and also those of other departed family members who have died since Mom's death. Rather than using cut flowers, we will place living potted flowers.

Although my children and grandchildren live many miles away, I wish they could join us in Sutton. It would be my joy to share with them this reverent activity. As Mother did with me so many years ago, I would tell those stories about each departed person. Then, perhaps, they too would feel the loving connection.

After all, some day the torch will pass from my hands to theirs. It is important they understand the value of Memorial Day. It is my belief that for each of us to find our way through this wonderful journey we call life, it is important that we know from where we came. Memorial Day helps to give us that knowledge.