



I wear a mask. I wear a mask in school  
and with my friends. I laugh and joke.  
Sometimes it is straight from the heart.  
But often, too often, it is forced out.  
Sometimes I wonder if my classmates  
have ever heard my real laugh.

A 15 (now 17) year-old who swam away from Utoya Island to  
escape the 2011 massacre.

Memorial Day was once a day for remembering. Now it is a day for forgetting. All the drudgery of the winter season is over and gone; in the classroom, the office, the home. The summer season has begun, time to frolic and forget the cares of the world! Sometimes, however it is good to go back to remembering.

With great resistance, I have ended up wedded to a wheelchair. It is a very nice wheelchair. I just want it made clear that I am not the kind of person who needs a wheelchair! But I have been issued an ultimatum by friends and doctors — either stop walking for awhile and heal or face a pretty grim future from a rogue nerve.

I discovered some surprising advantages to the wheelchair. I did not realize how much I was racing around. As I slowly propel myself down a familiar hall, I am astounded at all the things going on in the garden outside the windows. There were many examples of this. Instead of racing into the chapel there are very beneficial times on the chapel deck discovering views I never knew were there and hearing the songs of birds that were new and refreshing to me.

What does this have to do with Memorial Day? Be patient. Because of the wheelchair I started remembering other things, enriching things, I had forgotten. Now, this is pretty subversive. The American way is to get over sad times and move on to life that is forever better. Recently I almost threw a bed-pan at a young nurse telling a man my age that it had been four months since his wife's death and it was time for him to "forget and move on." At my age I have experienced many losses. I have "moved on" with my life but I have not, and hopefully will never, "forget."

Part of our onward attitudes may come from the media. It's always fun to blame the media. With platitudes like, "If it bleeds it leads" or from way back in my day, "Today's news is fish-wrap tomorrow" we are encouraged to move on from one headline to the next. But behind the headlines are the ongoing stories that really provide the fiber of our culture.

Memorial Day originated with a group of mothers whose sons and husbands had died on both sides of the Civil War. In the beginning it was a pacifist attempt to keep us out of future wars and tragedy. That did not work out very well but it's always good to try in such a

noble cause. There are always opportunities around us.

Often I find it helpful to look at times of grief in other countries and cultures. Norway, one of Europe's prime examples of a successful egalitarian, compassionate, democratic society is nervously approaching July 22<sup>nd</sup>. It was two years ago that a right-wing extremist, Anders Breviik, went on a shooting rampage at a summer camp killing 69 and badly wounding 500 others. These were mostly young people. There are a lot of different opinions as to how Norwegians should approach the anniversary of this tragic day but to my knowledge no one is suggesting that they forget and move on. A creative young photojournalist, Andrea Gjestvang, started keeping track of some of the young survivors in words and pictures in a recently published book, *"A Day in History."* I was captivated by the way these young people expressed a story that will never end in their lives.

A 13 (now 15) year-old with serious visible scars from being shot in her stomach, thighs, and shoulder, "I carry my scares with dignity because I got them for something I believe in." A tattoo on the arm of a boy who lost a finger, "One Day Last Summer." A 19 (now 21) year-old Iraqi refugee who lost an arm and leg, "I used to take care of my mother. Now she takes care of me. It makes me sad." A 13 (now 15) year-old who hid behind a rock as her friends died, "I had terrible night terrors. My mother got me a dog who sleeps on my stomach every night." A 19 (now 21) year-old who was shot 4 times and whose friends hid her and put pressure on her wounds, "No day has felt normal." Another 19 (now 21) year-old who hid with 3 others in a rock cleft in the water. Now she often sits for

long times by the road looking at the forest. “I like to sit here because I feel my dead friends are in the nature that surrounds us. In that way they are close even though they are gone.”

There are things to remember in every community, family, circle of friends, and every person’s life experience — no matter how old or how young. If we want to know more we can ask: anyone we sent away to fight in a war or works to keep us safe–healthy–educated; anyone who lived through the AIDS pandemic or any illness, or probably someone on any street on which we live.

Well anyway, those are some thoughts from a wheelchair while watching a hummingbird bathe at the fountain ....

***Brother Toby***