

They also serve who stand for peace



BARB GUY

On Memorial Day, we honor people who have gone to perilous places with a strong commitment in their hearts. They risk danger and their own death because they feel passionate about a cause.

My dad, born in 1920, was the right age to fight in World War II, but he didn't go because he had a bum heart, a result of childhood rheumatic fever. My father-in-law, born in 1919, didn't go either. He was excused because his heart was too good - he was a conscientious objector. He spent the war doing "alternative service" in the states, jumping out of airplanes to fight forest fires in the West.

I would never argue that those who fight and die for our country aren't heroes. I think

very often they are. I know I'm not capable of making that level of sacrifice, and I also know I have personally benefited from the work of those who are. I am one of the legion in our country who take time on Memorial Day to consider the sacrifices that have been made by people who have fought and died to keep us safe and free.

But on Memorial Day I also honor those who work to end war - or to avert it. Our diverse country is big enough for many kinds of heroes, including people who work for peace.

My father-in-law, Hubert, quietly told his draft board that he didn't want to kill anyone and he stood bravely to face the tough consequences. When he tells me about it now, the memories are softened by the 63 years since his decision. The passion he must have felt has given way to a quiet humor. A man who reveres music, the dramatic arts and literature, he tells me that he just wasn't cut out to kill. He adds, "I'm also not good at marching in rows."

I know it was the killing that kept him home from the war, not the marching.

Guys just as sweet, just as peace-loving and artsy as Hubert made the other decision, the decision to go and fight for their country. Looking back from 2005, Hubert says that the men who went to war and those who didn't got along fine. In his college crowd there was no shame in becoming a conscientious objector.

I ask Hubert about his brothers who served in the military, the people in his town, and in the broader society - what did they say about his opting out of the war. He says only that some people were angry and some were OK, adding that introspective people, "people who worked things out in their minds were more accepting."

I honor the people who have fought righteous battles to keep me free and I also honor my father-in-law who risked his life to keep from taking another. That act of courage, of sanity, added value to my world. Those who cling to their own peaceful hearts amid pressure to do violence are heroes.

I honor Marla Ruzicka, a Californian. Bright-eyed. Blonde. Beautiful. Selfless. The day after Saddam's statue came down, Marla, then 25 years old,

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went door-to-door in Iraq, checking on the people, trying to determine how many innocent Iraqis the United States had mistakenly killed.

Armed only with a college degree, a charming personality and a piercing intellect, Marla hosted parties in the middle of wars. In Baghdad and Bagram, in Mosul and Kabul, she invited military advisers, aid workers, journalists and locals to come together and socialize. Using her refreshingly unorthodox means, this young woman managed to get language into a Senate appropriations bill that has ultimately provided \$7.5 million in U.S. assistance to the civilians we have accidentally injured, and displaced in Afghanistan and survivors of those killed - and \$10 million more for those in Iraq.

When interviewed by Glenn Kessler of the *Washington Post*, she said, "It is a luxury for people to say war is bad . . . You can't say something is bad unless you come in with ways to fix it."

Like Hubert, who worked like a dog jumping from airplanes into forest fires to make his patriotic contribution, Marla didn't take the easy way out, she didn't stay home.

Marla died last month, giving her life in this damned Iraq war.

She and Faiz Ali Salim, her Iraqi friend and colleague, were killed by a suicide bomber attacking nearby U.S. troops. Phillip Robertson of *Salon.com* reported, "When the bomber detonated his explosives, Marla and Faiz were among those killed, and with that terrible act, the bomber cut short the life of a tireless champion of the victims of the war."

Ironies pile up as high as the dead during wartime.

Like our brave American military veterans, Marla, and Hubert 60 years before her, went to perilous places with a strong commitment in their hearts. They risked danger and death because they felt passionate about a cause.

That cause is peace.

Barb Guy is a frequent contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.