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# Memorial Day



Written by Ann Weil

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“Kyle, we’ll stop at the post office on our way into town. Did you put on sunblock?” Grandma asked.

“Yes, Grandma, I did” he answered. It was only ten o’clock, but the sun felt hot on his back. It was the last Saturday in May, and Kyle was ready for summer.

His grandparents' small town was so different from the city. Kyle loved the old buildings here. He was glad when his parents told him he would be spending the long Memorial Day holiday weekend here with his grandmother.





The short walk to the post office took longer than Kyle had expected. It seemed like everyone in this town knew each other. You couldn't walk past someone without saying hello or swapping news.



“See you at the parade,” people said with a friendly wave. This was the first Kyle had heard about a parade.

“What parade?” he asked Grandma.

“The Memorial Day parade, of course. This is Memorial Day weekend, you know,” she said.

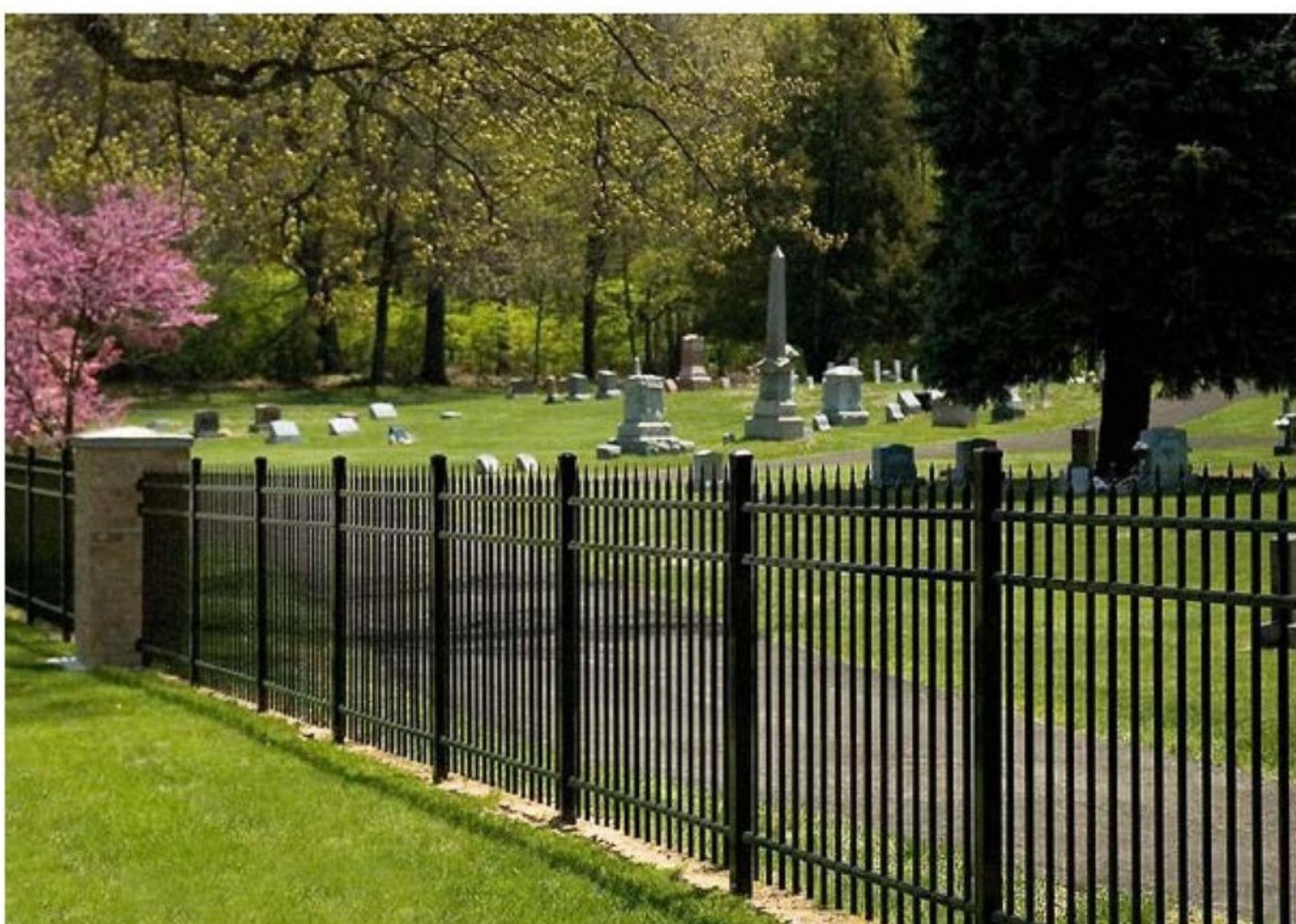
Kyle knew this three-day weekend was special. The town pool opened this weekend. But he didn't know there would be a parade! "You have a parade for the beginning of summer?"

"Not exactly," said Grandma as she dropped a few letters in the mailbox. "Haven't you ever been to a Memorial Day parade?" she asked.

Kyle shook his head. There were many parades in the big city where he lived with his parents. But they never went to them. His parents usually worked on holidays. He saw a Thanksgiving Day parade on television once. He hoped there would be big balloons at this parade, too. Maybe he would meet other kids there.

“Memorial Day means more than the start of summer fun,” Grandma explained. “It’s a time to remember...” She stopped without finishing her sentence. “Come, I’ll show you. We’ll go to the **cemetery**.” Grandma turned, and walked briskly in the opposite direction.

“We’re going where?” Kyle asked, quickening his pace to keep up with his grandmother.





Kyle had never set foot in a cemetery before. He imagined a creepy place. But the town cemetery wasn't at all creepy. Kyle thought it was actually very nice. Especially with all the flowers and flags.



As they walked, Kyle noticed that other people were there. He saw young families standing by headstones, and a woman his grandmother's age. He saw a **soldier** in uniform. Then, he saw a troop of boy scouts had gathered at the far end of the cemetery.

“What are they doing?” he asked Grandma. Then he realized that they were the ones putting out the flags.

“The flags mark the graves of those who served in all branches of our armed forces,” explained Grandma. “It’s part of our Memorial Day tradition to honor soldiers buried here. To remember them.”

Kyle remembered his teacher talking about the Revolutionary War. That was a long time ago. He knew that the United States had fought many wars since then. “Was there always a Memorial Day?” he asked Grandma.

War	Approx. U.S. Military Battle Deaths
Revolutionary War	4,450
War of 1812	2,260
Mexican-American War	1,730
Civil War	215,000
Spanish-American War	400
World War I	53,400
World War II	292,000
Korean War	33,700
Vietnam War	47,400
Persian Gulf War	150
Iraq/Afghanistan	4,700

“At first, it was called Decoration Day. You know, *decoration* can mean a medal or award to honor bravery in battle,” Grandma continued.



They had stopped in front of a grave with a flag next to it and Kyle read the inscription. “This soldier was only nineteen years old, Grandma. That’s my cousin Ken’s age.” Kyle suddenly felt sad.

His grandmother noticed his mood changed. “Yes, it can be a **solemn** occasion for many people,” she said.



As they walked back to the house, Grandma told him that many countries have different days set aside to honor lost soldiers. “In England, it’s called ‘Poppy Day,’” Grandma explained. “Poppies are red flowers that became a **symbol** for Memorial Day there.”

Back at the house, Kyle used the Internet to discover more about Memorial Day. He read General John A. Logan’s Memorial Day Order, made in 1868, three years after the end of the Civil War. This was the official beginning of the Memorial Day tradition in America. It became a **federal** holiday in 1971.

By the morning of the parade, Kyle felt like a Memorial Day expert. “Did you know they have a Memorial Day in Australia, too?” Kyle said as he dug into the pancakes his grandmother had made for breakfast. “There, it’s called ANZAC Day. ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps,” he explained.





Kyle and his grandmother had found a shady spot to watch the parade. “You can watch the parade with me, or you can ride on that old fire truck, and be in it,” his grandmother said.

“Wow, thanks Grandma!” Kyle said as he ran toward the truck. Kyle knew this was a solemn occasion, but parades were for fun, too!

## Glossary

**cemetery** (*n.*) a place where dead people are buried (p. 8)

**federal** (*adj.*) relating to a government that serves many separate states or regions (p. 13)

**honor** (*v.*) to show respect or think well of; to keep a promise (p. 11)

**soldier** (*n.*) a person who serves in the armed forces of a country (p. 10)

**solemn** (*adj.*) serious; slightly sad (p. 12)

**symbol** (*n.*) an object, picture, or sign that represents an idea, letter, or word (p. 13)

**tradition** (*n.*) a belief or custom that is passed down from year to year and generation to generation (p. 11)

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