

Stan Bieniawski - Memory Has No Time - Focus 50+ November, 2014

It happened a long time ago Memory has no time

by Lucia Ricardo

In June of this year, Stanley Bieniawski stood on the shores of Juno Beach in Normandy for the D-Day Anniversary Ceremony of Remembrance. He was accompanied by his grandson.

Bieniawski had been in the same spot 70 years prior during WWII. "The city is modern now. It was like nothing happened. Back then, it was a different world. Everything was burning..." he recalled.

At 88, Bieniawski's memory is sharp and he articulates with vivid imagery, his emotions at times, still raw. "There were boats as far as the eye could see...I could see bullets over our heads, bullets all around me. I could see guys like me flying into the air and dropping. I was looking around and thinking, this is what war looks like."

While each veteran's story is set on the backdrop of war, no two lives turn out the same. "People often ask me to write my story," Bieniawski says, adding, "more or less the story is the same."

Having always wanted to be in the air force, he joined the RAF/Polish Air Force in 1944, and trained as a mechanic and air gunner. There is much more between the lines, all of which cannot be recounted, to capture the depth and destruction of war. But Bieniawski remembers that as a youth confronted by the horrors of war he did not succumb to fear. Some of that resiliency came from surviving two years in a Siberian concentration camp, where he witnessed dying from starvation and disease.

Throughout history, many young lives ended in bloody battle, with loved ones left wondering what might have been. Others survived by luck or destiny. For Bieniawski, he went on to marry his wife Marysia in 1949. They immigrated to Canada in 1955 and had three children. He went on to work at DeHavilland Aircraft and McDonnell Douglas Aircraft. In 1993 he retired to Wasaga Beach. He is pleased to note that another veteran air gunner, Fraser Muir also resides nearby.

It is always an honour to take some time to learn about another person's life, lessons and experience. If on a rare occasion, you are fortunate to meet a veteran who is willing to share a story



Veteran Stanley Bieniawski, Wasaga Beach

LUCIA RICARDO PHOTO



with you, it can change the way you look at the world. It can deepen your appreciation for what Remembrance Day is really about.

Bieniawski recalled one more story at the end of our interview. As he walked through a field strewn with guns and bodies of dead soldiers he encountered a chilling sight. "It was a boy, his hair was long, he was maybe 14 years old. He died holding his wallet open looking at a picture, like he was saying goodbye."

If you listen—really listen—you can feel the raw emotion flooding back. Every time the story is told, the teller goes back to relive a sad and senseless time so that the rest of us may never forget.

This page last modified: 03/03/2015 13:08:29