

Long-time Legion leader celebrated by local students on Remembrance Day



Remembrance Day is always a busy time of year for Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Len Whines.

Whines' face is a familiar one to Aurora residents as a stalwart leader at the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion who helps lead the community in the solemn act at the eleventh hour.

On many Remembrance Days, however, he arrives at the Cenotaph ready to go, having already led students at Aurora Montessori School (AMS) on Industrial Parkway North in an identical ceremony that will unfold later that morning for the whole community.

This year was no exception as Whines led kids through all elements of the formal ceremony.

It's something he has been doing for the better part of a decade ? even after announcing his retirement. For him, it's important that students remember and he's determined to make that happen.

But students expressed their gratitude this year with a very unique token of appreciation: a portrait of Whines with some of the AMS students he's impacted over the years.

Students from each of AMS' classrooms took on the task of writing postcards to Whines ahead of the service thanking him for his service, but student Raaina Salyani went a step further and created the portrait. In doing so, Raaina found inspiration in a photograph

taken at the school just a few years ago that has a special place in Whines' heart.

?This picture is in my library in Technicolor,? said Whines on receiving the portrait. ?Even my daughter sees this photo all the time and comments on what a beautiful picture that is.?

During the service, students heard not only from Whines but from Meera Kanojia, a member of AMS' parent community, who shared her experiences in the Royal Canadian Navy.

?We made new friends and became a family,? she shared with students. ?We became brothers and sisters regardless of our race, age and colour. We had plenty of good days and plenty of sad days. We did not get enough sleep. We worked hard and then played hard. We could not earn a great wage. We experienced the happiness of mail call and the sadness of missing important family events and holidays. We did not know when or even if we were going to go back home again. We grew up fast yet somehow never grew up. We just remained young at heart. We fought for our freedom as well as the freedom of others. Some of us saw actual combat, some of us did not. Some of us saw physical injuries? We had seen and experienced and done many things we can't fully explain or describe? We participated in time-honoured ceremonies and rituals with each other, strengthening our bonds and? We counted on each other to get the job done and often sometimes to just survive.

?We celebrated and we mourned. We lost a few along the way. When our adventure was over, some of us went home, some of us started somewhere new. Some of us would not return home at all. We have told amazing stories of the fun adventures we experienced, we shared an unspoken bond with each other that most people do not experience? We speak highly of our rank and service and poke fun at the other services, but the bond is always strong. We know however if we needed to sacrifice ourselves for our country, our brothers and sisters will stand as one and take our oath all over again.?

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