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The Meaning of a Holiday

By: Allison Daley

One of the most important family traditions I take part in every year is buying a bouquet of flowers to distribute at our military cemetery on Memorial Day. I began to understand the value of freedom when I was just eight years old. Every Memorial Day, my family visits with a different focus. The first year, we discussed democracy versus dictatorship and how some people are not given the right to choose their education, their livelihood, or where they live. The next year as we looked out across acres of graves, my mother pointed out the three tombstone markings of a Christian cross, Star of David, and a lotus blossom to signify the unity of our soldiers with varying religious beliefs. On the third year, we left our flowers for the women who contributed to the war effort. And each year after, our focus has included men under the age of 21, children, D-Day victims, and those who died in battle of specific wars.

Because this became an important family tradition, we decided to take one family vacation and visit the D-Day beaches, battle sites and the American cemetery in Normandy, France. During that cemetery visit, instead of flowers, we left shells at a soldiers' grave from all 48 states and Alaska and Hawaii.

This tradition has become more meaningful each year and it is something I plan to continue throughout my life and with my own children someday. I feel honored to recognize the sacrifices that each of these soldiers endured in the fight to preserve our democracy. With another election coming up and the polarized opinions we see in this country, I would encourage every American citizen to visit a military cemetery to ponder the fundamental privilege we enjoy as Americans: our freedom to choose. I believe in the value of democracy – something that should not be taken for granted.