

MEDALS AND MEMORIES



Memorial Cross GRVI
Image: Reproduced with the permission of Veterans Affairs Canada, 2009

A Difficult Cross to Bear – The Silver Cross Mother

Character Education

- Contrast the essential teachings of a cat or dog mother with that of a human mother. What are the most significant things to impart to a human child?
- Create a list of the most important character traits a mother models
- Prioritize the most important character teachings that a young person should receive. From whom should she or he receive these teachings?

Facts

- Between 1919-1945 there were over 100,000 Canadian military deaths
- 27,000 Canadian soldiers of WWI and WWII were not identified and lie in unmarked graves
- 55 Silver Cross Mothers are listed on the Veterans Affairs Canada website for having participated in the national Remembrance Day ceremonies in Ottawa between 1950–2008

Before the Reading

- Discuss whether ONE woman should represent the many who have lost children
- If you had to select one mother to represent those who lost children for their country, what criteria would you use to select the mother?
- Should the role of mothers be to teach about the prevention of ALL WARS?

Reading

“The modern Silver Cross mother brings the sacrifice of the mothers of history and mythology into view again, and they add a depth of history and tradition to her.” *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs*, Suzanne Evans



The Unveiling of the Vimy Ridge Memorial Painted by Georges Bertin Scott in 1937
Mrs. Charlotte Wood can be seen towards the back.

The Great War’s 65,000 dead touched every part of Canada. In response in 1919, the Canadian government created the Memorial Cross, also called the Silver Cross, to help grieving families. In 1936 when **Charlotte Susan Wood** (née Fullman) placed a wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Westminster Abbey, on behalf of all Canadian mothers, she became known as the first Silver Cross mother. Mrs. Wood immigrated with part of her family from Britain to take up a 160 acre Dominion Land Grant northwest of Edmonton in 1905. Of the 11 sons that Mrs. Wood sent to WWI, five did not return. Louis was lost at sea when his ship the HMS *Hogue* was torpedoed in Sept. 1914; Fred died at the Somme, Harry at Gallipoli, Joseph at Passchendaele and Percy at Vimy Ridge. In a 1936 pilgrimage to Vimy for the unveiling of the new memorial, the by then iconic Mrs. Wood, proudly wearing five sets of medals, was presented to King Edward VIII. When she died at the outbreak of WWII her funeral was attended by large numbers of veterans. The *Winnipeg Free Press* stated that, “... the Imperial Ladies’ Auxiliary attended the last rites in a body. War widows, of which body she was an honoured member, held the service at the graveside and each member present passed the open grave, dropping a poppy on the remains.”



MEDALS AND MEMORIES MINUTES



Alice Taylor

When Alice C. Taylor (née Grimes) died Oct. 12, 1999, she was just 18 days shy of her 102nd birthday. She was the last Silver Cross mother for a WWII veteran and the only woman to be a Silver Cross mother twice. She followed up her first appearance on the national stage in 1991 with her

second visit when she was 100 years old in 1997. *Hansard*, for Nov. 6, 1997, reports M.P. Marlene Catterall's recognition of Alice in parliament. "Mrs. Taylor represents all Canadian mothers who lost loved ones to the war. But she also represents all the home-front heroes who preserved a country of civility and love for our troops to come home to. She also represents a century in which this country moved from colonial status to a proud place on the world stage" On Nov. 11, 1997, the Speaker of the House presented Mrs. Taylor with the page from the *Book of Remembrance* that contained the name of her son Richard who died Aug. 17, 1944, on the march from Normandy to Falaise. Trooper Clifford A. Chute of the 10th Armoured Division, Fort Gary Horse, a comrade of Richard Taylor, visited with Mrs. Taylor in 1994 after seeing her on tele-

vision during the 1991 Ottawa Remembrance Day ceremonies. Trooper Chute relayed details of the day they lost four tanks in combat. "We had a comforting visit with Mrs. Taylor and her family, and Richard's girlfriend who had never married. I was able to explain to Mrs. Taylor the care the crew was able to give Richard until the ambulance arrived. Richard as a member of our crew was highly respected and I will always remember him as a valued comrade."

By the time Alice Taylor died, she had lived with the loss of her son Richard for 55 years and the death of her husband, a WWI veteran, for 22 years. Councillor Wendy Byrne of Ottawa Regional Council paid the remarkable Alice Taylor tribute at her passing in 1999. "What truly illustrates, not only the importance of the Cross to Mrs. Taylor, but her courage and indomitable spirit, was her reaction three years ago to the attempted robbery of her purse in the courtyard outside her home. When some thugs grabbed her purse and ran off, she gave chase and got her purse back. When the police reprimanded her for her "dangerous" actions, she firmly told them that it contained the Silver Cross given to her in memory of her son, and she was not going to let it go." The active Mrs. Taylor worked in the War Records Office during WWII, did a lot of volunteer work, took up bowling at 86 years of age and never missed the merry-go-round at the Ottawa Exhibition.

1950 was the first year that the Royal Canadian Legion selected one mother or widow to place a wreath on behalf of all grieving families at the National War Memorial during the national Remembrance Day Ceremony. **Mrs. John Beasley**, of Ottawa, widow of Private John Beasley of the Central Ontario Regiment of Canadian Infantry, was the first person to take that long, lonely walk to the cenotaph. Her grief was not lessened by the fact that Private Beasley was 24 years old when he had died 33 years before near Calais, May 11, 1917.

Since 1950, nearly 20 mothers from Ontario have stepped onto the national stage for Remembrance Day, serving as symbols of sacrifice. Although the Veterans Affairs Canada website has excellent materials on the last decade of these Silver Cross mothers, it has proven a challenge to find out about **Mrs. A.J. Reynolds** from Chatham, **Mrs. Helen Forrestell** of Coniston, **Mrs. George Stephens** of Toronto, **Mrs. Elsie Adams** of St. Catherines,

Mrs. C.L. Wilkinson of Ottawa, **Mrs. Mary Little** of Welland, **Mrs. Rose Bernst** of Thunder Bay, **Mrs. Mabel Bateman** of Richmond Hill and **Mrs. Elsie Pearce** of Trenton. Student researchers should take up the challenge to bring their stories into the new information age—under their own names.

Mrs. Bernadette Rivait, a Windsor mother of 13 and grandmother of 58, was the Silver Cross mother in 1964. She lost Privates Leon and Edward Rivait at Dieppe in 1942 and Private Lawrence Rivait in northwest Europe in 1944. Her son Raymond spent three years in a German prisoner of war camp. When her son Edward enlisted shortly after Lawrence was killed, Mr. and Mrs. Rivait drew up a petition to get him released from service. Although they succeeded in having him discharged, the rebellious Edward signed up again a month later; Edward survived the war.

MEDALS AND MEMORIES MINUTES



Private Buckam Singh's grave is the only known Sikh Canadian soldiers grave in Canada. Photo: sikhmuseum.com

Chandi Kaur, Medals from a Far Land

In 1907, 14 year old Buckam (Bukkan | Buk Am) Singh, born in Malipur, Punjab came to Canada to make a future. He left behind a child bride, Pritam Kaur, to whom he had been betrothed when he was 10 years old—as was the custom of that day. Buckam worked in mining camps in British Columbia before moving to

Toronto. For six months, until April 1915, he worked on the farm of Wm. Henry Moore of Rosebank, (now Pickering) Ontario. Then, as the Canadian call for soldiers became louder, Buckam made his way to Smith Falls to enlist with the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force, 59th Battalion. Described as 5'7" tall and of "swarthy complexion" on his enlistment form, Buckam was one of nine Sikhs who served in integrated Canadian units in France and Belgium.

His mother Chandi Kaur, in Malipur, did not know that

her son sustained a shrapnel wound to his head in June 1916. When a bullet shattered his left leg below the knee in Belgium July 20th, she did not know that he was treated in the Canadian Hospital run by Dr. John McCrae, the author of Canada's famous poem, "In Flanders Fields". She did not know that his life was ebbing from him as he suffered from tuberculosis. The first news she had of her 25 year son's soldiering for Canada came when she received a death notice and a Silver Cross. The child bride, Pritam, who had never really known her husband, received a Silver Cross as well. The Memorial Plaque and Scroll which only Buckam's mother received bore the words, "He died for freedom and honour." Although Chandi Kaur may not have been able to read the words in English, the Sikh-Canadians who celebrated around the grave stone of Private Buckam Singh in Mount Hope Cemetery, Kitchener, November 2008, proudly understood their meaning. Toronto war historian Sandeep Singh Bar, who has documented the life of Buckam Singh one of the first Sikhs to live in Ontario, stated, "As Sikhs, we can feel we're no longer outsiders. We helped form Canada's history."

Documentary: Sikh-Canadian Heroes of the First World War by David Gray
www.thestar.com/news/gta/article/515245
<http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/article/540217>



Mary Louise McLeod, Silver Cross Mother 1972 accompanied by her daughters in the Memorial Chamber of the Peace Tower Photo: Legion Magazine

Mary Louise McLeod of Warton, Ontario, was the 1972 Silver Cross Mother. She and her husband John, who served in WWI and was in the Veterans' Guard in WWII contributed six sons and one daughter to the WWII effort. Two McLeod sons (John Joseph and Alfred Joseph) were

killed and two injured. All eyes were on Mary McLeod, the first Native Canadian mother to represent all Canadian mothers in 1972. She had two daughters with her as she signed the *Book of Remembrance* in the Memorial Chamber the entrance of which is emblazoned with a Memorial Cross. As she passed under the archway featuring a bas-relief by sculptor Frances Loring, representing a mother with two children, Mary McLeod took a giant step forward in the recognition of First Nations and all women.

Nora A. Wagner (née Bosswell), the 1965 Silver Cross mother from Teeterville, Ontario, lost two sons: Private Harry Everett Wagner in 1944, and Bruce Howard Wagner in 1945.

Mrs. Daniel McCann, the Silver Cross recipient for 1952 had no body to mourn. Her husband Daniel was one of the 3,050 Canadian airmen with no known grave who are commemorated at the Runnymede Memorial 32 km west of London.

Mrs. Edna Pafford of Toronto, **Mrs. Ida Beattie** of North Bay and **Mrs. Loyola Helen Park** (née Harrington) of London, Ontario have all held the Memorial Cross. Of the trio, only Mrs. Park, the 1999 Silver Cross mother, has a story to read on the Veterans Affairs Canada website. Literally 100,000 stories of loss are left to be told about the Canadian families who sacrificed loved ones to war and peace keeping.

The young people of Ontario have a considerable challenge. With a little effort, they may reclaim many lives—maybe even one from the community in which they live. As John McCrae said in the poem "In Flanders Fields", "... they are not dead". The courageous only die when there are no young people to champion them.

After the Reading

- Look up sculptor Frances Loring and try to find examples of her work to show your classmates
- Which Silver Cross mother impressed you the most and why?
- List all the places in Ontario mentioned. Which is the closest to where you live?

Extensions

- Report on the Silver Cross Mothers whose stories are on the Veterans Affairs Canada website
- Research the representations of women throughout history. Look at the role of mother, goddess, maiden, siren/temptress, warrior queen and decide what is the most powerful representation of women and why? From whose role model does society benefit most?
- Research and report on the Military Cross/Silver Cross mothers in your community

Sources

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Canadian war mothers waiting to meet King Edward. Charlotte Wood is on the right of the front row, wearing her sons' war service medals. Alongside her are Mrs J.A. Wardle of Toronto, who lost three sons in the Great War, and Mrs. G. McDonald of Toronto, who lost two. Photo ~ Chalotte Fullman: "Canada's War Mother"

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Images

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