

February 13, 2012

This is Jill Duffy, with Community Comment

Two weeks ago I stood near the steps of the U.S. Capitol building gazing west towards the Washington Monument. Despite the expansiveness of the Mall, my eye was captivated by the series of statues closest to the Capitol and I wandered closer, camera in hand.

In the center are four reclining lions flanking an equestrian. The rider is calm yet weary, shoulders slightly slouched, worn hat pulled low, eyes fixed to the far horizon and without a sword or gun, he sits astride his keyed and alert horse. To the rider's left are artillery soldiers, and to his right are cavalry soldiers, each group charging towards him, and yet, the rider is seemingly unaware of the battle scenes unfolding to either side of him.

Rich and incredible detail abounds throughout this memorial. In the cavalry scene, a falling rider is suspended mid-air in eternity as he and his mount are about to be trampled, ..the riders behind shield their faces from the inevitable sight, their horses straining upwards as they vault to avoid their fellow steed. The debris of war lies scattered on the churned ground, full of broken sabers and canteens.

There's nothing overt in the memorial to suggest this depiction is that of the Civil War, just the faces of war ~~shown~~ as shown by lifelike men and horses plunging forth into battle – brother against fellow brother.

There is nothing glorified, simply resignation and impassive faces.

The equestrian is Ulysses S. Grant, former Captain of Fort Humboldt, a General in the American Civil War and 18th president of the United States. The Grant Memorial provides an anchor to the east end of the National Mall, directly opposite of the Lincoln Memorial so that the General who fought for the Union could forever sit facing the President who saved the Union.

It is powerful imagery, and forever a reminder of the destruction that strife and divisiveness can wreak upon a Nation and it's people. And it sits at the foot of our United States Capitol Building as a daily reminder to those who represent us.

As we visited with Senate and House representatives, Democrats and Republicans and their various staffers, the conversation often turned to the increasing inability of Congress as a whole, to come together to work on causes for the common good. Oh, certainly it is important to our democratic process that our representatives engage in deliberation, vigorous debate, brinksmanship and verbal battles – but the fiery words and rancor have given way to an inability to do the necessary business.

Despite the astoundingly low Congressional ratings, one has to question whether our representatives are solely to blame. Perhaps their inability to debate and compromise is a reflection of the communities that elect them, and a 24/7 media, blog and political community that castigates our representatives for 'stepping out of line'.

Walking away from the Grant Memorial, I could only wonder how many of our representatives have taken the time to reflect upon our history and affirm the importance of keeping our Union whole.

This has been Community Comment with Jill Duffy