

What is a veteran?

Kaylee Harding

What is a veteran? A question that no one ever asks. Why? Because we already know. Or at least, we think we do. I'd like you to imagine this scene:

"Forward march!" The commanding officer bellowed. They exited the city hall, chins held high. Thousands of people crowded the streets as the veterans marched. Several friends they had made marched alongside them, others, only there in spirit.

Leaves tumbled down from the entwined branches. Warm colours dotted the sky as the leaves fell, beckoning the cold winter nights to return.

On the sidewalks, crowds of people were standing, each one wearing a poppy on their breast, each offering a different perspective. There were kids with their families, pointing at the flags. There were mourning daughters and sons, fathers and mothers who were lucky to have their kids home. Each one with a different story; all there for the same reason.

Veterans continued to parade down the long asphalt road. They bore looks of grim sadness on their faces, each one scarred indefinitely. Some only had three limbs, while others had experienced insurmountable amounts of grief, and some constantly felt the need to look over their shoulder. No matter; they were all there to mourn the fallen, celebrate the victory, and learn from past mistakes.

Good, now I'd like you to reflect on what you imagined. How old were the veterans? What gender were they? What did they look like?

Most people envision the veterans as old, male and caucasian. If you picture that as well, there is nothing wrong with that. In fact, it's very normal.

But it shouldn't be.

Veterans come in all shapes and sizes, like us.

On the Veterans Affairs Canada website, the definition of a veteran is, "Any former member of the Canadian Armed Forces who successfully underwent basic training and is honourably discharged." This indicates that a veteran is anyone who was previously in the military. They did not have to have served in any of the world wars or the Korean war. They could be as young as twenty and still qualify as a veteran.

In World War Two, over fifty thousand women fought alongside the men. Currently, there are more than six-hundred seventy-thousand women veterans in Canada, making up a total of fourteen percent of all veterans. That is a large portion of veterans that shouldn't be ignored.

A huge misconception is that veterans are only white. This is completely false. There were plenty of Indigenous People and African-Canadians who served in both world wars and the Canadian military. They played a huge part in securing Canada's victory in World War One, World War Two and the Korean War.

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