

Lest We Forget

Cpl. Grenon to be honoured at St. Joseph's on Remembrance Day



Theresa Charbonneau, right, the mother of Cpl. Andrew Grenon, sits on a bench that was named after her son at St. Joseph's Catholic High School with teacher Deirdre Drouillard. A plaque commemorating Grenon's ultimate sacrifice will be blessed during a Remembrance Day ceremony and then mounted in the school's main hall.

(Windsor, Ontario, Nov. 7, 2014) – The spirit and ultimate sacrifice of Corporal Andrew Grenon will never be forgotten at St. Joseph's Catholic High School.

“It’s been six years now,” says Theresa Charbonneau, the mother of the area soldier who died instantly on Sept. 3, 2008 when a rocket-propelled grenade struck the armoured vehicle he was riding in during his second tour of duty in Afghanistan. “You would have thought it may have gone to the back of people’s minds by now, but it hasn’t. People I hardly even know, even strangers will come up to speak to me. They remember.”

People will continue to remember Grenon, a former St. Joseph's student, thanks to a new tribute in his honour that will be erected in the building's main hall. A commemorative brass plaque – which was donated by CP Rail – will be blessed by Erin Walls, the school's campus minister at a Remembrance Day ceremony and then mounted on a wall near the main entrance, right above a bench that was named after him. A framed photo of Grenon, along with a poem in his honour, will be hung there too.

Along with her husband Mike and younger son Matt, Charbonneau will be an integral part of the school's Remembrance Day ceremony this year. The family will lay a wreath at the school and Grenon's mother will say a few words about her son's ultimate sacrifice for his country.

"We recognize Andrew every year," said Deirdre Drouillard, a teacher at the school who is part of the Remembrance Day ceremony planning committee at the school. "He's always a part of our ceremony."

A member of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Grenon attended St. Joseph's, but didn't graduate. During his Grade 12 year, at the age of 17, he left school to join the Canadian military. His mother can recall a long car ride when they discussed his decision at length.

"I asked him why the military," she recalls. "He said, 'I need structure and I need discipline, and I can't get that by myself. The military will allow me to succeed.' I thought that showed remarkable maturity for his age."

Charbonneau said she recalls wanting to call the recruiting centre to ask them not to talk with him until he had graduated from high school.

"But I knew it wasn't my place," she said. "He knew what he wanted to do."

When Charbonneau dropped by the school last week for a visit, she broke down in tears when shown the prominent position in which the tribute will be placed, and was comforted by Drouillard. Permanently etched in her memory is the morning her son died when two representatives from the Essex & Kent Scottish Regiment, dressed in kilts and full military regalia, arrived on her doorstep to deliver the tragic news.

"I was getting ready for work when they knocked on the door," she recalls. "I thought one of my neighbours was in some kind of trouble. I tried to close the door when I realized why they were there."

Even though she's had to suffer the pain of that horrible loss, Charbonneau says she still wouldn't have tried to dissuade her son from joining the military if she could go back and take that car ride with him again.

“He loved every minute he spent in the military,” she said. “He wouldn’t have changed it, and neither would I. His attitude toward life was that you do what you need to do, you constantly improve, and you live each day as if it’s your last.”

She also believes that her son’s death was not in vain.

“What our soldiers did in Afghanistan was very helpful,” she said. “They are in a far better place because of our efforts. I think we’ve made great strides. Canada, and the rest of the world, can’t stop fighting terrorism now. We need to continue what we started.”

Check out this video tribute to the life of Andrew Grenon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oEySkUBSQ8>

Check out this video interpretation of Cpl. Grenon’s poem “Why We Fight”:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AFTiiVy2-g>