

Cumberland's Memorial Day Parade
By Jenifer Spencer

" The year is 2005. I'm a little girl, wearing my newest red, white, and blue shirt, eagerly bouncing up and down on my toes. As soon as the man yells into his megaphone, I'm off. My little fists are clenched tightly by my sides, my bangs slipping out of my ponytail and into my eyes. All I can think of is the little blue ribbon I will get once I cross the finish line. All around me are the sounds of sneakers smacking the pavement and puffs of air as people exhale. I round the bright orange cone marking the turn-around point and tuck my chin to my chest as I run harder than I had the whole race. As I reach the home stretch, the street is lined with kids and adults alike, parents encouraging their children, friends cheering each other on. I high-five people I don't even know as I run by. After crossing the finish line, I am greeted by a grinning woman with a stack of ribbons. As soon as she hands one to me, I run to my parents, waving the little piece of royal blue fabric victoriously over my head. This mile race comes next, awards are handed out. There are certificates, gift cards, medals and pies awarded to the top runners of each race and for each age group. I place third for my age group, and receive a certificate for a free ice cream at Food Stop. I know it will be put to good use once the parade is over.

Shortly afterwards, I tug on my blue Daisies Girl Scout vest, and head down to the elementary school, clutching my mom's hand, to meet the rest of my troop. I look around in awe at the groups of people. There are men in checkered kilts, cradling bagpipes in their arms. Kids zoom around on bicycles they have decked out in red, white, and blue balloons and ribbons. High schoolers and middle schoolers alike read over their sheet music, their instruments glinting in the bright sun. Various Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops hoist their banners, eagerly waiting for the parade to start. Fancy old cars putter towards the beginning of the group. Veterans dressed in their uniforms hold flags proudly on their shoulders, their medals and pins shining, their white gloves standing out. I have never seen so many people in my community brought together at once.

After marching in the parade to the Moss Side Cemetery, I crouch in the grass with other members of the parade, and listen to that year's speaker conduct the ceremony. I swivel my head from side to side. It seems as if the entire town has come to see this event. I remember thinking I had never seen so many people in one place before.

I repeated this same schedule for the next six years, always enjoying each and every minute of it. Once I stopped participating in Girl Scouts and in the races, I still would sit on the sidewalk with others to cheer on the runners and watch the parade. There are always lines of camping chairs in the grass, dogs with their tongues lolling out of their mouths surrounded by giggling kids, and mini American flags on wooden sticks being waved excitedly in the air. It is such a community event that brings everyone together for the day in a way that you don't see very often.

Memorial Day in Cumberland is an extremely beautiful and exciting event that people of all ages have the opportunity to participate in. The fact that this event has been taking place for *ninety years* is absolutely incredible to think about. As a little girl, I could only imagine what the parade was like all those years ago, but I am confident that it was just as community-involved as it is to this day. The amount of history that you can learn

just by participating in this event is incredible. From veterans marching down the street to speakers who have lived in Cumberland for decades, there is always something to learn.

I hope that Cumberland's Memorial Day will continue for many years to come, even after I have moved on to the next stage of my life. As I grow older and move around to new places, I can only hope that those places I go have traditions that are equally exciting and community-involved. Once I have kids of my own, I would love to be able to come back to Cumberland and show them what always entrained me as a kid.

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