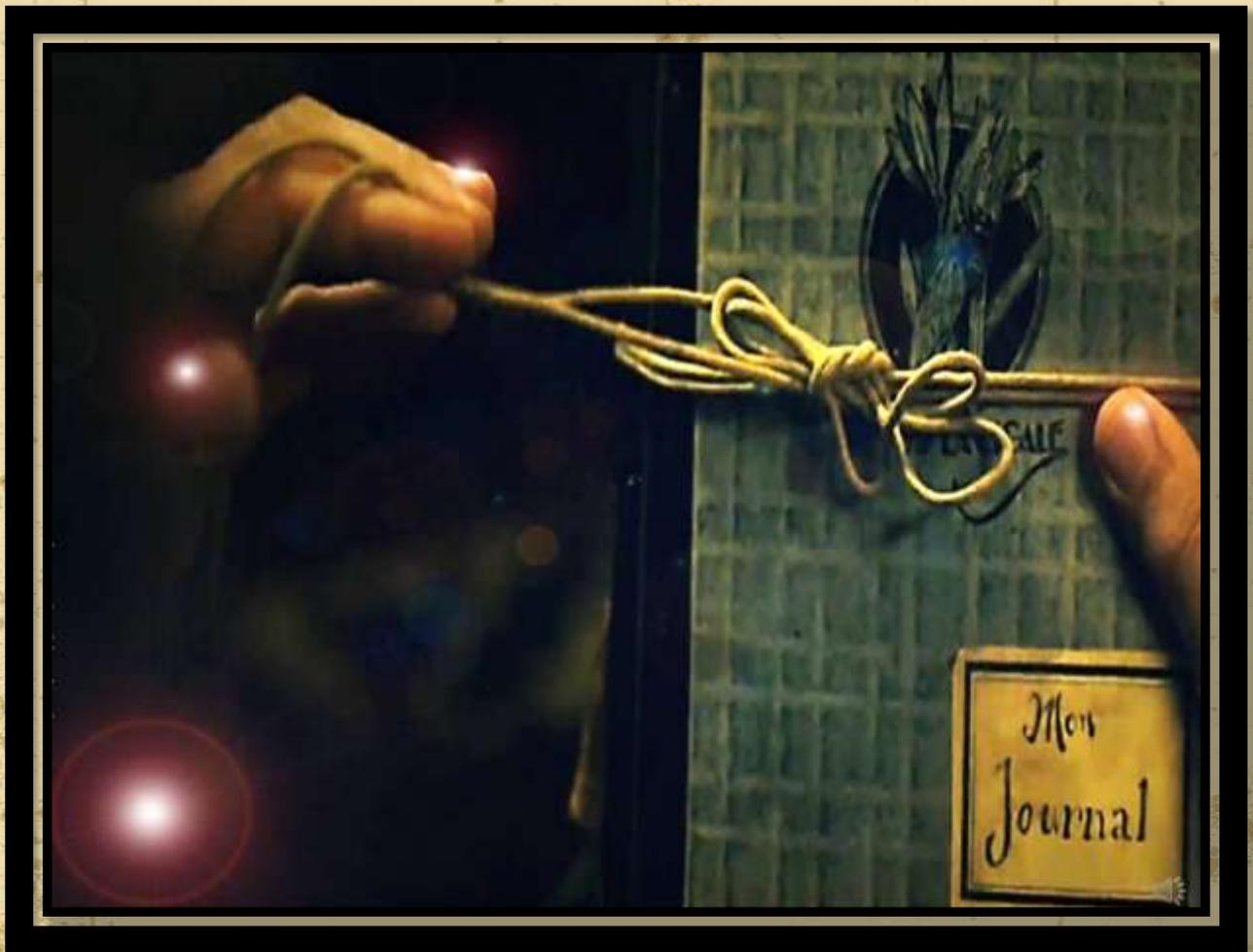


I Remember...



Chloé Peyrichou,

8th Grade Student

Collège Elie Faure, Ste Foy la Grande, Gironde, France

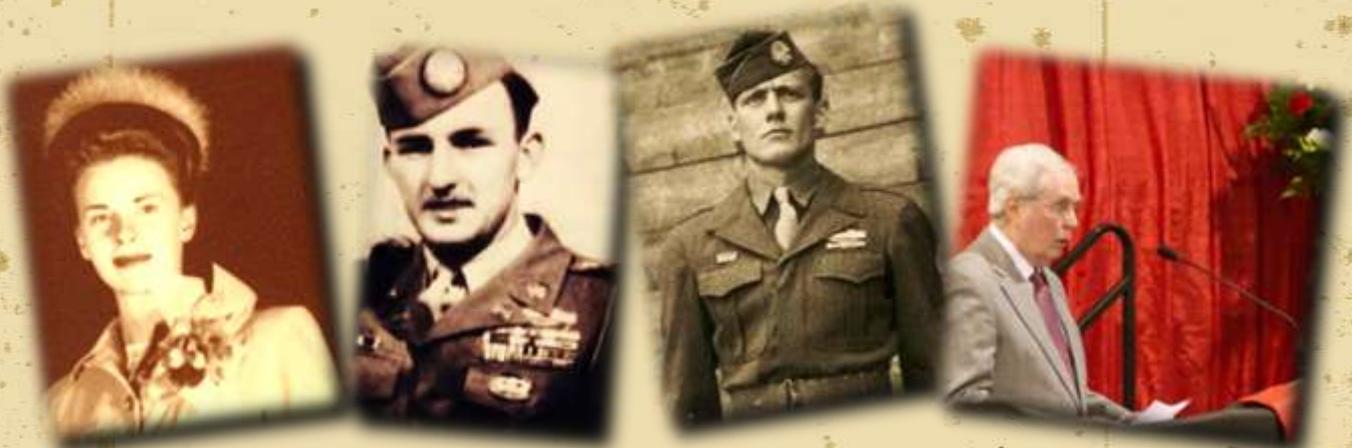
Text written after a school trip to the D-Day sites

Trip organized by Christelle Zuccolotto, English teacher, from June 4th to June 9th, 2011

Tuesday, May 10th, 2011

Dear Diary,

Thanks to my English teacher, I have this year traced History with a capital H. Since September, we have been working on every detail of the June 6th, 1944 landing. We correspond with veterans who, that summer, put their lives in danger to defend our country and to give us back the freedom which had been stolen. You doubtless remember the correspondences we have been keeping with Eugenie Thrapp, our Rosie the Riveter, with our paratroopers Clancy Lyall and Rod Bain and with our war orphan, Joseph Aaron Tomberlin, whose father was reported missing in action on D-Day.



A few days ago, Fabiola (who I remind you is one of my friends) and myself decided to compose a song. "You are losing your reason", you will tell me... No... You know my deep passion for music. The idea of paying tribute to our liberators in musical notes came to me spontaneously.

I am happy to announce to you: our tribute song is now quite ready! We have just ended it a few hours ago! As a matter of fact the lyrics were written by one of our English classmates, Olivia. As for the chords, they almost imposed upon me because I do admire each of these veterans whose faces are unfortunately so often unknown to me.

Fabiola and I have just rehearsed for the first time. It will doubtless seem strange to you, but while we were singing in the cozy comfort of my room, I was somewhere else... The archive pictures of Operation Overlord we had commented on in class came back to my mind and suddenly came to life...

Chloé



Wednesday, May 11th, 2011

What an honor! Our teacher promised us this morning! This song I told you about yesterday, we will sing it in Normandy!

June 7th will doubtless be a very moving day...

Chloé



Saturday, June 4th, 2011

Dear Diary,

Excuse me for abandoning you for a few days ... I have lately had very little time to dedicate to you, I will admit it... But the companion of life you are deserves that I come back to you, at this early June which I feel is going to be striking...

I am finally on this Norman ground about which I have been told so much for so many long months. I have trouble, just know it, realizing that sixty-seven years ago thousands of soldiers landed on these vast expanses of sand which I admire from my room window... The meetings ahead hold me breathless. The moments we are going to live during the coming days may be rich ...

The weather is getting threatening tonight, a little as if at the approach of June 6th someone wished to immerse us into the climatic conditions which reigned here sixty seven years ago ...

Chloé



Sunday, June 5th, 2011

Dear Diary,

Low sky. Gusts of wind. Drizzle. Thunderstorm. Raging sea.

The Norman shores which I discovered under bright sun rays in the early afternoon yesterday now show themselves in a quite different light. The crystal clear blue of the Channel which a few hours ago still mesmerized me has given way to a threatening greyish shade. The noise of the waves is really deafening. It is by a similar weather that our liberators landed. Do you imagine the apocalyptic and harrowing hours they had to endure on the Channel, under the dark skies, while heading for the coasts of France?

In spite of this storm, paralyzed by the cold, we took the direction of Colleville-Montgomery, well-known for the commemorations of our British friends. It is there, on Sword

Beach, that I had the opportunity of meeting my first two veterans of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy: Tony Gibbins and Frank Risbridger.



I admit to you: it took me some time to realize that these two sirs, strangely very agile in spite of their snow-white hair, had landed on the beach on which we were then standing. On this site, sixty-seven years ago, they had at all costs tried to avoid enemy shots, crawled on this sand littered with the bodies of too numerous companions, held their breath to go ahead and achieve their mission. And these same men were in front of me today, smiling, happy to be alive, proud of their country, proud I also believe of meeting so many young French people.



Opposite the wild sea, Fabiola and I declared in music to our veterans the feelings that they inspire in us. They listened to us almost religiously. Their glances sometimes dived into ours. At other moments, they got lost on this beach swept by the wind.

Dear Tony Gibbins,

Dear Frank Risbridger,

If I succeeded in containing my emotion for a few minutes, once our song was finished, tears ran down my cheeks. Tears of joy? Tears of sadness? Certainly both ... It is then that I truly realized how lucky I had been to declare in music the admiration we have for you. You deserve it so much...

I kiss you again and hope that I re-meet you one day at the bend of a path. Fondly,

Chloé

At dusk, we attended Fiona Harrison's concert, which across the Channel but also in France, sings famous tunes from the 1940s. Right before she came on stage, Fabiola and I opened the party; we sang our song "I Remember", but this time, before a larger audience - mainly composed of Normans but also veterans - and a capella! How joyful it was - no matter our different nationalities and ages - to celebrate the Liberation! Thanks to Fiona, her enthusiasm and her costumes, during one festive evening, we immersed ourselves into this period which had marked our spirits so much by the pains which it had caused. Accompanying the artist, we sang La



few meters away from Arromanches artificial harbor, our hymn took a dimension which may have so far escaped me: This national anthem was also the voice of our great-grandparents happy not to live under the yoke of Nazism any longer...

But the softest memory of the evening may always be the few dance steps I was able to have in the arms of a very frail but so kind veteran ...



Do you think this made him feel, at least a little bit, how grateful to him I am?

*It is getting late...
I have to leave you ...*



Chloé



Tuesday, June 7th, 2011

Dear Diary,

Yesterday, France celebrated the sixty-seventh anniversary of D-Day. During two magnificent official ceremonies, it is along with renowned personalities whom we were sitting close to that we had the privilege to pay tribute to the Allies. As soon as the national anthem resounded, my friends and I spontaneously stood up, and we began singing, proud of our country and of what it had been able to become once the Occupation was over.

Today, we left way to more intimacy ...

Do you know the most idyllic place that a soldier fallen on the field of honor can rest in peace for eternity? Colleville-sur-Mer American cemetery. We went to the cemetery this morning. Nine thousand three hundred and eighty-seven soldiers rest there, soldiers who came and died on these Norman lands, which moves me more each day. I have to confide to you: facing this never-ending view of perfectly white crosses and stars of David scrupulously lined up in the middle of so beautiful a landscape and haloed with intense blue and green left me speechless for long minutes ...



Since this morning, we have been in the company of Ryan, grandson of Joseph Argenzio,



veteran who passed away on April 17th, 2010. You cannot imagine our joy of having Ryan by our sides. It is a little as if we met



his grandfather who served for our Liberation while he was so young ... Just try to imagine...

Joseph Argenzio was sixteen years old when he landed on Omaha, at about 6:30 am, on June 6th, 1944 ... Sixteen years old, that is one year more than me, who last Saturday, had difficulty in leaving my friends for these five days, which I was nevertheless looking forward to... Yes ... Joseph Argenzio was then still a child... A child who, for us, falsified his identity card and went through hell, a hell he had tried to reveal in a correspondence established with two 8th graders in my school, two years ago ...

"The beach littered with the dead and wounded. Bullets were flying all around me so I pulled two dead men in front of me and used them as a shield. They took many bullets meant for me. The ping of bullets hitting the crossed railroad tracks was a sound I will never forget. I knew my only way to survive was to reach a sea wall. It seemed like two miles away. So I started running, zig zagging as I went. There was no cover at all, low tide and the Air Force and Navy missed their beach targets. When I reached the sea wall, I was not alone. A guy stuck a cigarette in my mouth and lit it. It was my first one!!"

You now understand better why the presence of Ryan is a real honor for each of us ... It is also strange ... Since the arrival of Ryan, who discovered Normandy for the very first time, the sky has cleared and the sun is warm, a little as if from up above, Joseph Argenzio voluntarily pulled the curtain of clouds, which weighed down on us for two days. A little as if he wished to welcome Ryan in the best conditions possible, a little as if he wished to greet us all and make us understand that he was in a way among us ...

It is thus under beautiful weather that Ryan was at Colleville cemetery able to raise the American flag... By his tears, which he tried to hold back, we felt his pride, but also his boundless emotion ...



The military salutes made by the cemetery Superintendent and his staff strengthened the solemnity of these few precious minutes.

Slowly, in an absolute silence, accompanied with singings of birds, the Star - Spangled Banner raised toward the blue skies. Please, understand it well... By this gesture, Ryan may have been having the feeling of greeting in his turn his grandfather and his comrades-in-arms about whom he had heard so much...

Some minutes later, the other moment of deep emotion ...

On this path of the cemetery bordered with pines, Noémie, Tom and I read in English a tribute to Joseph Edward Tomberlin.



To our left, in front of our eyes, Omaha Beach, which on June 6th, 1944, Joseph did not have the time to reach ...

And yet, he was so near ... Struck by a shell, its LCI caught fire ... Joseph was reported missing in action... Burnt alive, we will probably never know if his body was recovered... When came the moment of our reading, as you can imagine, shivers ran through my whole body; my heart was in knots - do not forget that in class, we had studied Mr Tomberlin's path, read one of the last letters which he had written to his sister in England, read the tragic telegram which had been sent to his family at the end of July 1944 - but it is with strength and respect that I declared these few lines in honor of this father whose return for long months was hoped for by a wife and three children... Because listen. It is only in 2011 that one of his sons learnt the exact circumstances of this death and painfully had to accept them... The wreaths which Ryan and we laid down in his memory in the Garden of the Missing and at the grave of an unknown soldier seem so derisory to me, because I know it: nothing can ease the sorrow caused by the sudden death of so young a father ...



Then we went down to Fox Green, exactly where Mister Joseph Argenzio had landed... Bloody Omaha, where so many young men, some of whom were hardly older than me, died in hideous sufferings ... Sixty-seven years later, I was walking on the sand beach, which meant so many hopes but also gloomy memories ... Pictures taken by Robert Capa - who just like Mr Argenzio landed with the



prestigious Big Red One - came back to my mind. So many desperate young men hungry for Freedom had lived their last moments thinking one last time about their families ... Difficult not to drop tears at this thought... Emotion carried me away. The landing, I had the sensation of living it. I heard the biting noise of the bullets drowning themselves into this reddish water. The war now had the smell of blood ...

Then the moment which I was looking forward to but also dreaded so much came ... My fingers trembled. Tears invaded my eyes. The landscape was misted. But I quickly had to regain self-control, I knew it. My guitar in my hands, I had to be equal to our song, which we had this day decided to dedicate to Joseph Argenzio.

Behind me, the waves of Omaha Beach, which reminded me that this site had a soul and a history. Up the hill, in the distance, the Big Red One Memorial ... Before me, my English teacher and Ryan, holding a wreath decorated with a tricolor ribbon and pictures of Joseph Argenzio and his family. While singing, I looked at Ryan in the eyes, trying to share with him the deep gratitude which inspires me: his grandfather ...





« Je me Souviens »

*Merci, Vétérans
Merci, Pères,
Merci Fils,
Merci à tous.*

*Je me souviens encore de la toute première fois
Où je foulai les plages du Débarquement
En Normandie, en Normandie
Je fus tout particulièrement frappée
Par le calme qui y régnait.*

*Des enfants couraient nus pieds
Sur ces plages de sable, sur ces plages de sable
Qui jadis étaient couvertes de corps
De soldats de diverses nationalités
Venus mourir là, le tout premier jour*

*Merci,
Merci, Chers Vétérans,
Merci*

*Oh, mon Dieu, Merci pour tout
Merci de nous avoir libérés
Nous sommes vos petits-enfants
Le seul mot que nous devons vous adresser est
« Merci »*

« I Remember »

*Thank you, Veterans
Thank you, Fathers
Thank you, Sons,
And thank you to all.*

*I remember the very first time
I set foot on the landing beaches
Of Normandy, of Normandy
The thing that struck me the most was
How calm everything was*

*There were children running bare foot
On the sandy beaches, on the sandy beaches
That were once covered with bodies
Of soldiers of different nationalities
Who died on the first day*

*Thank you,
Thank you, Dear Veterans
Thank you*

*Oh my God, thank you for everything
Thank you for liberating us
We are your grandchildren
The only words we must say are
“Thank you”*



*Des enfants, heureux, nageaient
Dans la mer azur qui le Jour-J
Était teintée de sang.*

*Merci,
Merci, Chers Vétérans
Merci*

*Le 6 juin ne fut que le premier jour
De nombreux sacrifices et actes héroïques
Consentis par nombre de jeunes qui,
Des plages à l'intérieur des terres,
Durent, mètre par mètre,
Kilomètre par kilomètre
Ramper afin d'atteindre l'objectif final*

*Merci,
Merci, Chers Vétérans,
Merci*

*La Liberté de la France,
la Liberté de l'Europe
La Liberté pour les Vétérans,
la Liberté pour les Soldats
Oui, la Liberté pour les Soldats
Venus se battre en Normandie
La Liberté pour nous, La Liberté pour nous*

Merci.

*Children were happily swimming
In the blue sea that on D-Day
Was colored with blood*

*Thank you,
Thank you, Dear veterans
Thank you*

*June 6th represents only the first day
Of many sacrifices and heroic actions
Of many as they crawled
Meter by meter,
Kilometer by kilometer
From the beaches
To reach the ultimate goal*

*Thank you,
Thank you, Dear Veterans
Thank you*

*Freedom of France,
Freedom of Europe
Freedom for Veterans,
Freedom for Soldiers
Yes, Freedom for Soldiers
Who fought in Normandy,
Freedom for us, Freedom for us*

Thank You

*Once the song was over,
bare foot, Ryan and my
teacher walked into the sea,
and laid the wreath in the
water... After respecting
a minute of silence which
was particularly moving
for Ryan, I sat on a
rock and I tirelessly
watched the waves of
Omaha Beach
breaking on this sand and these
pebbles ... Lost in my thoughts, I silently thanked our
Liberators ...*



Mister Argenzio,

Your grandson is extremely proud of you, just like me. In spite of your recent death, we all wanted to show him the gratitude that the people of France owe you. It is carried by this desire that this morning we paid tribute to you on Omaha Beach, that you discovered on a much darker day...

Ryan and I had the same words to define you: "You are a Hero". Never will I succeed in thanking you as nicely as your grandson, Ryan, was not able to in your lifetime, but in spite of your absence, I wanted to write to you: thank you again and again for liberating us. It is thanks to you that the fifteen-year-old French girl I am can live serenely...

The solemn honors which were paid to you during your last flight at Arlington National Cemetery, your ultimate house, will have been in the image of your infinite courage. Rest in Peace, Sir.

Chloé

Our day has just ended with the meeting with Mrs Monique Corblet, a remarkable woman. Daughter of French Resistance fighter Philippe Livry Level, while she was only sixteen, she fought for our Freedom too. Her acts of resistance led her on the path of Déportation, where she endured the worst, we understood it well. Her testimony, tinged with courage, strength and dignity profoundly moved us and we have all found it hard to get back to a normal life. The glance of Mrs Corblet does not lie and reveals to us that the tragic months which she lived in a concentration camp are still alive in her memory ...



Yes, I assure you: this day was really poignant, much more than you - who have not lived it - can imagine ...

Chloé



Wednesday, June 8th, 2011

Dear Diary,

After visiting the Utah museum and the Azeville battery, we took the direction of the North Cotentin wild beaches for a few hours. A real Garden of Eden!! Raw nature. Blue sea. Round green hills. And these beaches are so vast and deserted!

Running on this sand toward the waves, my hair in the wind, I then understood: D-Day veterans fought so I live such moments of enjoyment and delight.

What sadness to have to leave this land of Freedom tomorrow ...

Chloé



Sunday, June 19th, 2011

Dear Diary,

It has now been a fortnight since I left Normandy. Fortnight since I came back home... The banks of the Channel which can be so rough have left way to the serenity of the River Hope. Two weeks have passed by since my return, and nevertheless, everything is still so present...*

I am happy to have shared with you these meetings that will remain unforgettable due to the emotion they aroused and the human enrichment which they brought, but I now have to go beyond, understand it... I feel it: I have to share with human beings this unique experience which I was lucky of living; I now have to become the voice of all these men and women who for five days so generously confided to me, to reveal to others their bravery, their sense of honor, their generosity, their wisdom, and the mission which has to be ours: protect this Freedom so costly gained and be up to these sacrifices.

Dear Diary, I thus leave you to open my mind to the world of here and there, to the world of yesterday, but especially today and tomorrow.

Chloé

P.S.: Dear Reader, whoever you are, you have just read my diary and plunged into my deepest thoughts. I confide in you a precious souvenir: the recording of our song, "I Remember". I hope that you too will remember ...



** Second name of the Dordogne River*

