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Woodridge Essay Contest

"Come inside! It's getting cold, you might get sick." I heard my mother calling me from the kitchen door. Her protective Filipino accent echoed everywhere, but I continued scoring in my hoop. It's still freezing and it's getting dark out, but whenever I feel bored, playing basketball is my go-to activity.

After 15 minutes, I finally surrendered to the cold weather and decided to go inside. As I entered our house, I noticed my mom watching the news. The newscaster announced the 1st anniversary of the Russian-Ukraine war. As I walked to my bedroom, I wondered what life was like during World War I. How do civilians participate in the war effort? What can I contribute in my small way?

One way I would have helped during the Great War is by volunteering my time and energy to organizations that support those affected by the war, such as the Red Cross or local organizations. I can help collect care packages for military personnel currently fighting at that time. The packages may include snacks, toiletries, or small gifts. I did a similar food drive with Boy Scout Troop 523 at last year's Thanksgiving. I helped in collecting canned goods, bread, pastries, and other food items for the veteran's Thanksgiving celebration. I could have done the same for the benefit of soldiers on the front line at that time.

Back in the Great War, Woodbridge Comfort Committee sent care packages to soldiers on the battlefields. As reported in the Perth Amboy Evening News article "Cellars Blown Through Roofs, Say Former Woodbridge Scot" published on April 10, 1918, Private Alec Macphee wrote a letter expressing his appreciation of the parcel containing sweets and

cigarettes he received. He is a resident of Woodbridge and joined the Seventh Seaforth Highlanders stationed in Scotland during the war.

Also, I could have invited my basketball teammates, fellow boy scout troops, classmates, and friends to write letters of appreciation, support, and encouragement to soldiers in the combat zone. This can help boost morale and lift spirits, providing soldiers with a sense of purpose and motivation. Letters from home can help soldiers feel less alone and isolated and can provide a helpful distraction from the stress, trauma, and memories of war.

In addition to providing emotional support, writing letters to soldiers can also help improve their mental health. Receiving social support, such as letters from loved ones and strangers alike, can have a positive impact on a soldier's mental health and well-being.

Another way I could have made a meaningful contribution during the Great War is by arranging a charitable basketball tournament to collect funds for the families of soldiers. I can ask my teammates, friends, and classmates to participate for a small entrance fee, with all the proceeds going towards supporting families of military personnel. These funds can help to provide financial assistance for food and other necessities while their loved ones are away. This can help to alleviate some of the stress and financial burdens that military families often experience during wartime. It may not be much, but I know that every little bit counts.

Even though I am only a twelve-year-old boy, turning a teenager in July, I can still make a big difference in the war effort. Just like the children during the war, as reported in the Perth Amboy Evening News article "Children in Schools Busy Buying Bonds and Stamps" published on April 10, 1918, students fundraised to purchase liberty bonds and stamps. Even small donations can add up and can make a significant impact.

I am so proud to live in Woodbridge, a town that contributed greatly to the war effort back then. As reported in *Over Here*, Official Publication of U.S. Army General Hospital No. 3, published on December 20, 1918, "Army Hospital Arose From Jersey Fields", told the story of how the military hospital was built here in Colonia. It provided care for a majority of wounded soldiers returning from the war. The approximate cost of the hospital and its equipment is well over \$3 million at that time. But its legacy is priceless as it is where wounded soldiers received the care they needed to recover from their injuries.

I could have organized making cards or artwork with my friends to brighten up the hospital rooms and bring cheer to injured soldiers. These would have been given to soldiers or hung up in the hallways and common areas. I would have also led an effort in my school to collect items like books, magazines, puzzles, or board games to donate to the hospital. These items can help pass the time for recovering soldiers who may be bored or feel isolated. Also, my friends and I can play basketball with able soldiers in the hospital field. Since I live in Avenel, the military hospital is only a few minutes away from my home.

Thinking about all this war effort while lying in my bed, I also thought of ways how I can support peace. While peacebuilding might seem like a task for adults, children too can play a role in promoting peace. This can be done by showing empathy towards others and treating them with respect and dignity, regardless of their backgrounds or beliefs. At St. John Vianney, my school, I learn to appreciate diversity, respect cultural differences, and embrace the values of acceptance and tolerance. By doing so, I help create a more peaceful world, where people can coexist in harmony, and conflicts can be resolved through dialogue and understanding.

In summary, I could have volunteered to collect care packages, write letters to soldiers, organize a charity game, and visit military hospitals. It is a small contribution compared to what Woodbridge residents have done during the war.

"Lights out!" my dad yelled from outside my bedroom. As I snuggled under the covers, my heart was filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude as I reflected on the sacrifices that soldiers made to serve our country in the war. These brave men and women have risked their lives to protect our freedom and keep us safe, and their selflessness and dedication are truly inspiring. Now, I am ready to drift off into a deep and restful sleep.