

They were carefully arrayed in ascending rows on the steps of the Evangelical United Church of Christ as though marching into eternity. At the very top stood a lone pair, adorned with fresh flowers, for a death so recent the body had not yet been committed to the earth. Off to the side, Women in Black stood in silent vigil.

All day Saturday people went about their business in downtown Frederick: going to lunch, meetings, jogging, walking their dogs. But they stopped in their tracks at the sight of the boots. Understanding their message, passersby approached reverently, silently, as to a bier. Many cried. Many took time to read the individual stories of the fallen in the "Portraits of Honor" posted nearby. Most poignant were the veterans, who said "thank you for understanding."

Sunday at noon, people gathered to carry the boots in solemn procession to nearby Baker Park. As the church bells tolled, the names of the dead were read, both American and Iraqi. Our worry that we would not have enough volunteers for the procession was unnecessary; there were more than enough people to carry the boots and the civilian shoes. At the park, the boots were placed around a fountain, and the civilian shoes in a shaded labyrinth, all in places of rest and peace. The Society of Friends convened a Meeting for Worship in their honor.

"Eyes Wide Open" was the centerpiece of "Frederick's Days of Reflection on the Human Cost of War". Our Memorial Day commemoration was focused on honoring the fallen, Iraqi and American; promoting nonviolence, and healing the wounds of America. First-rate speakers, storytellers, musicians, poets and artists all generously lent their talents to our message of peace and reconciliation. But in the end, the boots spoke most eloquently in their silence.

As someone said, "This is how Memorial Day should be kept."

--from the Days of Reflection Planning Committee