**Why I Believe War Is Not the Answer**

**By Rebecca Pedek**

**Class of 2014**

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“War, I despise, it means destruction of innocent lives. War means tears to thousands of mothers’ eyes, when their sons go to fight, and lose their lives.” In the popular 1970s hit by Edwin Starr, he explains the losses of war. Who really wins in a war? Though many only know the one side to the story, who really is of benefit after war?

After speaking to a representative of the Veterans for Peace organization I decided to a bit of reading up on this topic. When he came to our school he gave me a book that I will give to the library for them share with the student body. The book is *Addicted to War* by Joel Andreas, and it explains the war in Iraq in a different perspective than we are given during school and through the media. One of the most interesting fact I read in this book was that the IRS takes out of our paychecks a huge chunk of change to support military spending. I mean 51 percent of all taxes goes to military spending. The other 49 percent goes to everything else (education receives only a whopping 7 percent of spending!). The money of our country, the taxes taken out of our paychecks should be going to causes that are needed such as education and health care.

If I told you that the government was dumping hundreds of thousands of gallons of toxic waste into your community’s water system, would you believe me? Last year I would have thought the same and wouldn’t have believed it. But in many military bases around the country chemicals such as napalm, explosives and PCBs are contaminating the groundwater of the little communities surrounding the bases. That could be any small community such as Muscoda. These chemicals could be harming the wildlife, a part of our country that desperately try to protect. Not mentioning the people, the American citizens, this could be affecting. To me this sounds like the opposite of what I’ve been taught in school. I have been told we are trying to protect America, to keep the citizens free, to create an environment that is safe, but the more I read about this the less I see this being true.

And the big case that really hits my heart hard is how many American losses we have had. More than 100,000 U.S. soldiers and sailors have died in foreign wars since 1950. And how many more Americans have been wounded and some disabled for life because of these wars? Hundreds of thousands more! These wars that the men and women of our nation are told they have to go over and fight, that it is their duty as an American citizen for fight for freedom, but whose freedom do they take away when they gain freedom? How many lives have to be lost or damaged because of this need, the power hungry need to be on top? It’s just the same as the bully on the playground in third grade. He will beat you up until he gets your lunch money or your toys just because he’s bigger than you. All of this ridiculousness with war just seems like adults in the sandbox to me.

These are only three of the many reasons and ways war can deprive us and damage the people and environment. What can be done to stop this, you may think? Spreading the word. The more people know, the more interested they get and the more they will spread. It will take time, but in small steps everything will be right again with people standing up for what they believe in. I wear my Vets for Peace pin, with the little white dove, everywhere I go, and many questions arise about this pin. I feel like I am doing the right thing when I tell them about the organization and the destructions of war.

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*(Note: Rebecca Pedek received a $500 scholarship from Chapter 25 Veterans for Peace for her essay, one of six written for the VFP scholarship competition at Riverdale High School. Of the total 51 graduates, 12 percent of the class wrote essays on the topic “Why I Believe War Is Not the Answer.” Chapter 25 also awards scholarships at River Valley, Richland Center, Boscobel, and Dodgeville is Southwestern Wisconsin, and at one high school in Madison.)*