

# The love that soldiers gave families was a blessing

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Remembrance Day for someone of my vintage (60 years young) is a reminder of the two most important people in my childhood, my father and my grandfather. Nov. 11 is the day when I stop and pause and give thanks for the gift of these two men in my life.

My grandfather was born in Elmira, N.Y., but by the age of four had moved to St. John's, Nfld. When the First World War took place, he joined the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and served in the Dardanelles.

As a young boy, I would often hear the story and see the items that were part of his life at war. It seems that during a bombardment, a piece of shrapnel penetrated his tunic at chest level and struck a coin, a pen and a notepad, falling just short of striking his heart.

I was and still am startled at how my family's creation was wrapped up in luck, fate or God. My father was born after my grandfather's return and he was their only child.

My grandfather did not return unscathed from the war; he had contracted an illness which left him with a severe and permanent curvature of the spine. My grandmother, a few years later, suffered a severe mental breakdown, probably treatable today but not then in the 1920s. The relationship of these events has always remained unclear, but simply were what they were.

The gift of my grandfather was what every child should receive. He showed me about the importance of love and family. I still remember him sitting on my bed, holding my hand, waiting for me to say it was OK for him to leave. I remember the shopping bags of fireworks that appeared every May 24 that put the public displays to shame.

He provided that needed place of quiet and comfort so needed by any teenager struggling to make sense of his world. Just knowing that he was there with his unwavering love, no matter how I messed up, was perhaps his ultimate gift.

There but for that coin and pen that saved his life, I have reason to remember.

My father, my grandfather's only offspring, had his first son (not me) prior to the Second World War. My dad volunteered in 1939 and was sent overseas to London until 1943. He returned to train soldiers at Camp Borden until the end of the war. I was born in May 1944 and I like to believe that my conservative father went absent without leave nine months earlier.

My father, like many dads of that time, left their children and wife to serve in the military. Many didn't return, others returned with the injuries of war and the reality of not participating in and knowing their child's early years. I was lucky and the end of the war gave me an involved, loving dad for 50 years of my life.

He had learned from his father and the war that family and one's children were the greatest gifts, and while he had his share of baggage, there was never any doubt that he would always be there, and he was.

It is a remarkable feeling to know that you have someone who has faith and belief in you and to have the knowledge that you are loved. I sometimes think that a father's love is often tested by the adversity of absence, chosen or otherwise, and many fathers acquire the real meaning of fatherhood through this fire.

Nov. 11 is a national day of remembrance, but it is the ceremonies in every community across our nation where the loss and sacrifice, and even the celebration of survival, is honoured.

I give thanks to gramp, my dad and to all the fathers and grandfathers. We do remember.

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