Father’s name tag plucked from a field in France

by Carlie Connolly - Peninsula News Review
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Mike Morry with the photo of his father and his father’s name tag he received in the mail.
— Image Credit: Carlie Connolly

October was an emotional month for Mike Morry of Brentwood Bay, as he received his father’s name tag from when he served in World War One.

A man in France by the name of Nicolas Goudefroye, who was searching with a metal detector, came across the metal name tag, worn out but with a visible name: William Sweetland Morry, Mike’s father.

In the mail also came a letter enclosed from Goudefroye along with a picture of Mike’s father and the name tag.
“It’s just kind of a ghost from the past a hundred years ago. It’s been sitting on the field in France — this little plaque,” said Mike’s wife, Val.

And Mike was very excited to have received the letter.
“Well, when I opened it I cried.”

Mike doesn’t know where the photo was taken, but believes it to be off the internet and taken long after the war when his father was around 35 or so. As for the small plaque, it has W.S. Morry (his father) along with a regimental number displayed on it.

The letter from Goudefroye said the name tag was lost by his father while he was traveling around Hazebrouk during the First World War. Goudefroye had found the small plate tag in a field behind his home in Cinq Rues and said Mike’s father probably lost it when he got off the train near the Hazebrouck bypass.

“When he found that, he cleaned it up and read the inscription on it and then he decided that rather than keep it with his collection of artifacts that he better try and get it back to the family,” said Mike.

Mike said November 11 is important for him to remember not only his father, but his brother as well who was in the airforce in the Second World War.
“I had my dad in WW1 and my brother was in WW2 and I was lucky enough to be too young for WW2 so I didn’t get involved in any of it,” he said.

“My dad, he died when I was 15, so I never knew him adult to adult, I only knew him as a father to a child. He never talked about the war so I never got to sit down and talk to him about that, but you know, you hear little snippets.”

Mike gathered that his father lied about his age and joined up when he was just 17 on Nov. 1, 1915, which brings it to 100 years ago this November. As an ordinary soldier and what they call a

sapper, W.S. Morry served until the war's end, coming back in 1920/21. He was in the 67th Western Scots Regiment.

He was gassed in the trenches during the Great war, said Mike, damaging his lungs, which Mike said could have been the reason he got lung cancer and would later die of the disease.

His dad was also a founding member of the Pro Pat's Legion in Victoria and Mike said to the horror of his mom, he liked spending a lot of time at the Legion, playing snooker and staying long hours.

Mike also has a letter his father had sent to his mother, giving an update on how he was doing.

When asked how he would describe his dad, Mike said he was gentle, a good athlete and loved vegetable gardening.

"Well Dad, he was a real quite guy," he said.

One of the things his father did was what actor Jim Carey did in the movie Liar, Liar where he showed his son the hand he couldn't control.

"My dad used to do that with me," he said, adding, "he would say the words from that poem, 'slowly he turned' and as soon as Dad said that I started screaming and I'd run and try to hide..

"And he used to say "slowly he turned" and then this claw would come up, closer and closer. That was our little game."

What Mike remembers the most about his dad is that he was a storyteller.

"When I was really young (he would tell stories), not about the war but we'd make up stories. I'd always jump into their bed Sunday morning when I was a little kid and then Mom would get up to make breakfast and Dad and I would lay there and he'd say, 'Well you make up a story,' and I would make up a story and he'd listen…"

"He still tells stories," added Val. "He's the storyteller now."

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