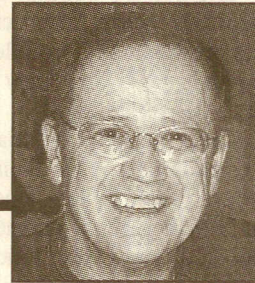


guest columnist

by Roger Wm. Anderson



Plain yet priceless items help remember past

THE SET of salt and pepper shakers are quite plain. The base is clear glass, the tops are dark. If you saw them in an antique store, you would pass them by because they are so ordinary.

But they are not. They have a connection for me that is simply invaluable, and I hope to pass them on with their story to my children.

We have to go back to World War II where the story begins. My mother, Wilma, was married two weeks after the Pearl Harbor attack by the Japanese. Although my father was not drafted because he failed the physical, his younger brother Ray, was drafted into the army.

He was a part of the 14th Armored Division which fired the big guns, and, in the spring of 1945, he ended up near the front lines.

His division had just crossed the Mains River and was set up outside a small town named Lohr in Germany. It was cold, and my uncle Ray and another soldier decided they would like to get extra blankets, so they went to enter the town. They stopped at a checkpoint, and the sergeant gave them the okay.

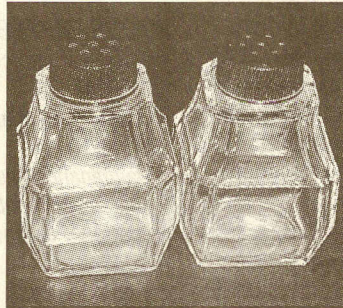
They entered the deserted town, and looked for what they needed. They decided that they should also "liberate" a few souvenirs. Ray knew that my mother collected salt and pepper shakers, so he saw this set and took them to eventually give to my mother.

They headed back to the line, and they were given, as my uncle says, "Holy hell" by a different officer at the checkpoint for entering the town. The town had not yet been occupied, and they were going to start shelling the town in the morning.

That is what I had known about the salt and pepper shakers.

But that was far from the whole story. I was in Ohio for my uncle's granddaughter's wedding, and we talked more about the salt and pepper shakers. He told the story as I had written earlier, but then went on.

He said that the "big guns" started the next morning pretty well leveled that entire town. When the infantry entered, they lost 200 men taking the area.



As they left the town, there was a small field. In that field, there were probably 50 Germans and 50 Americans lying dead. It had almost been hand-to-hand combat. Then he saw something even more horrific that he never would forget.

He saw two guys with a stretcher. They were both kneeling, the stretcher between them, with a body on the stretcher. "They were both kneeling, both killed."

I loved my uncle before, but when I hear of the sacrifices he has made for this nation, and how he dealt with such horror and yet overcame it, I love him all the more. I encouraged him to write down his story for his children and grandchildren, and for preserving these memories forever.

The moral of this small tale is that if it had not been for these very plain salt and pepper shakers, I would never have known this of my uncle.

Every family may have ordinary objects that symbolize extraordinary things, and I hope they are shared by older generations with the younger generations.

World War II veterans are dying by the hundreds every day. Capture those stories, not only of theirs but of your father and mother, grandmother and grandfather. Ask them about those ordinary objects that mean so much to them. Then write it down. If it is not preserved, it is lost to eternity.

As for my uncle, he came back from the war in 1945, and made use of the G.I. Bill. He got a degree from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and had a very successful career as a pharmaceutical salesman and real estate agent. He remains a quiet and unassuming hero living near Cleveland, Ohio.

Talk to your parents and grandparents, or better yet, have them write the stories down. Future generations will thank you.

Roger Wm. Anderson is the Isanti County Historical Society Vice President. Learn more about the society at www.ichs.ws or call 763-689-4229.