War Capsule

It was August of 1945 when WWII officially came to an end. My grandfather had returned home to his high school sweetheart, patiently waiting for him for almost four years. He was finally home and ready to begin a new war-free life, with only small marital battles to lose to his soon to be wife.

My grandfather had witnessed many wars and survived the unthinkable, obtaining three Purple Hearts in battle. He landed over 55 jumps in the 101st Air Born, 907th Division as a Paratrooper and returned with over 20 medals, more than the jacket had space for. With his past now behind him, he chose to focus on his future and maintaining a family as a recognized war hero.

After settling in, he was finally able to marry and begin a family. He met my grandmother during high school at their local church. After years of dating, their minister and family friend promised to perform their wedding, but only when they were ready. During my grandfather’s absence, their minister had been transferred to Fairvary, Nebraska, a town just outside of his hometown in Aurora. Two years after his return, they were finally ready, and drove to Fairvary to fulfill his promise. At age 27, my grandparents were married.

During high school, my grandfather worked at the Hamilton Telephone Company as a linesman. For years he would travel around the town to fix telephone lines that constantly had problems considering all of the technological advances occurring around this time. After working there for almost six years, he decided to help support his family who had no social security, and were struggling financially. He eventually came to the conclusion the best way to help his family would be by joining the army. When he was 20 years old he left with practically no prior training, and was shipped to Europe. He returned roughly five years later to his same position at Hamilton where he worked fulltime for more than 50 years until his retirement.

Before their wedding, he wanted to get my grandmother something different; something he knew would last but could also be useful. In his searching he came across a Lane Company Incorporated Red Cedar trunk. Dated 1942, the trunk was a beautiful brownish red with a polished finish holding reflections with each stare. The diagonal line patterns crossing one another created a zigzag kind of look within the high quality wood work, giving it a decorative appearance. The smooth surface glistened from the oils stored in the wood, while giving off the scent of a freshly chopped tree from their first shared Christmas. The front edge was rounded off five inches down to a triangular pattern chiseled above the top half, with a lock located directly in the middle to store the past within the roughly 150 pound chest. About 4 feet long, 2 feet wide, and 2.5 feet tall, the trunk maintained a sturdy base fitting to the marriage soon to come.

The inside of the trunk was a lighter brown finish, leaving a large amount of space inside. The craftsmanship Lane Company Inc. furniture was known for was apparent, with strong iron arms to support the heavy top when opened up, and thick cut wood to ensure a long life.

The trunk was exactly what he was looking for, though the price resembled its appearance. After great consideration and thought, he paid nearly 100 dollars to the local craftsman, and headed home to give to his fiancé. My grandfather at this point in his life was not considered to be a wealthy man, but buying a chest like this was considered to be more of an expensive item to be purchased by anyone.

My grandmother not only loved it, but immediately knew what she wanted to do with it. She was very talented when it came to sewing and crocheting anything asked, so she used it as a place to store everything she used for her hobby. During the war, her and my grandfather wrote letters to one another as often as possible, so she also used the trunk as a place to store almost five years of letters between the two.

Once the letters were given their new home, she decided to use the chest as a place to store everything they had from the war. My grandfather came back with many pillow tops that he bought for her in each country he visited. Along with many pictures, weapons, and his uniforms that survived each battle. The trunk slowly became somewhat of a large time capsule of items from the war and my grandparents lives, opened only during family visits or when my grandma was storing more blankets, pillow cases or pot holders she crocheted.

After 47 years of marriage, my grandmother sadly passed away a few years after my twin sister Jolene and I were born. The trunk was passed down to my mother after my parents were married as a wedding gift. Throughout my childhood it rested downstairs, holding none of the memories it once did. Instead it was our turn for my family to fill it with our own memories and items we chose to hold on to.

Today the trunk still resides in my parent’s basement in Madison, Wisconsin. After nearly 70 years of use, the trunk has noticeable wear and tear all over. In pristine condition it would be worth almost 500 dollars, but it definitely has been used well. The top no longer holds a reflection from scratches and chips inside the wood. The zigzag pattern can be seen between the scratches in moderation across the whole chest, the front and sides with majority still remaining. The inside has some minor water damage due to basement flooding and accidental spills. The lock, though rarely used, still manages to hold tight if necessary. And the base, with some minor lose screws, is still as stable and strong as ever, as is the marriage it is now carrying within.

Though the trunk itself has been well lived, its monetary value means nothing to our family. My sister has claimed possession of the trunk when she has her own place in the near future, along with many other items our grandparents left our family. It has been over two years since our grandfather passed away leaving many more mementos and memories within our family. Many of these items may be worth thousands to others, but keeping our grandparents memory in our family is worth much more than any monetary value.