This page was exported from - Shelburne Free Press
Export date: Fri Oct 30 8:42:12 2026 / +0000 GMT

An interlude of peace

On Remembrance Day, as we remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives, we also honour those who sacrificed their peace of mind and lived on as best they could to the benefit of our nation as well. My father, a gunner and dispatch rider in the Canadian army was one of those.

Here is one of Dad's many stories. I only remember a few now. Time has had a way of preserving the ones with the most important messages.

Early in the summer of 1943, a platoon of Canadian soldiers had been marching through the countryside of southern Italy. They came to the banks of a broad lake. Putting down their packs they gazed out over the clear and shining waters. A river flowed into the lake at one end and out again at the other. The hills around were baking in the hot sun. The soldiers were hot and tired and dusty. The water looked clear and cool and inviting but they had been told the enemy was on the other side of the lake so they kept hidden.

They waited and watched for several days. Each morning the sun rose in the East with such brilliance that it turned the lake to gold. When the Canadian soldiers looked towards the rising sun they were blinded. Each evening when the sun set brilliantly in the west, the lake was once again turned to gold but only if you were looking at it from the enemy's side.

One evening, a Canadian soldier, fed up with being hot and dusty, desperately wanted to swim in the lake. He waited until he knew the sunset had turned the lake to gold and then ran boldly out of cover and into the lake. That first dip was short. What if he was seen by the enemy? What if they began to fire? But they didn't. When the enemy soldiers looked west into the sunset, they were completely blinded. The next evening the soldier took a quick swim in the lake. After a couple of days he was joined by his comrades. They began to look forward to the fun every evening. It was pretty boring to stay there day after day waiting for orders to come from the higher ranks.

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the lake, the enemy soldiers had noticed how brilliantly the sun set over the lake each evening. They supposed that the sunrise must be equally as bright from the other shore. Eventually one or two enemy soldiers decided to risk it and take a bath in the lake in the morning. Pretty soon they were all turning out bright and early so they could get in a quick swim before the sun rose too high, for then they could be seen from the other shore. Things went on that way for about a week or so ? the Canadians enjoying their evening swim and the enemy soldiers starting their day with a refreshing bath in the golden sunrise.

Then one morning some Canadian soldiers on guard duty thought they heard shouts and splashes in the distance on the other side of the lake.

?By Jove,? said one, ?Darned if they aren't having a swim over there!?

?Son-of-a-gun,? added another.

Those probably weren't their exact words but you get the idea. One soldier got really excited.

?Get the guns!? he called. ?Boy can we surprise them! We'll blast them outta' the water.?

?Hold on!? ?Wait a minute!? The others stopped him.

?Don't you see? All they want is a little fun and a chance to clean up in this dust and heat. I bet they sit around over there just like we do, wishing they were home with their wives or moms and dads. It can't be any better for them than it is for us.?

Another soldier chimed in, ?Yah. They haven't bothered us all this time, have they?

Say?..you don't suppose they've figured out we swim in the lake at sunset, do you??

Now, that was a sobering thought!

No shots were ever fired there, but the evening swims and the morning baths came to an end. Each side discovered how much alike they really were. But, somehow, knowing that didn't help. They couldn't trust that the other side would not fire first. So you see, understanding goes a long way towards bringing enemies together but only trust can make peace.

By Reverend Stephanie Pellow