

News.

## A serendipitous reunion:

### The story of a young woman, her missing medal and a high tech connection with Wadena



Joyce Dann, Canadian Women's Army Corps, World War Two

The story I am about to share is about a series of serendipitous moments and chance encounters—and it is a story friendship and heroes.

I was attending a ceremony last fall to honour those fallen soldiers from Saskatchewan who had served in Afghanistan. While there, a local military historian, Gordon Goddard, approached and asked if I knew that a woman from my hometown was one of the seven marching figures engraved on the face of the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal 1939-1945—which depicts the women and men of the army, air force, navy and nursing service. This medal is presented to all who volunteered to serve during World War Two.

Gordon was not sure of her name, so we set about mining the memories of our Second World War veterans in Wadena. I called my Dad and asked him to get in touch with all his Legion comrades. It was 90-year-old veteran Mike Sowa who remembered a young, beautiful neighbour girl named Joyce Dann who had grown up on a farm just outside Wadena!

She left the farm at age 18, determined to sign up for service. Joyce says she was at the right place at the right time to be chosen for a place of honour on the original cast for the medal. Again, a serendipitous moment.



Canada 1939-1945 Volunteer Service Medal—Joyce Dann is figure on far right.



Legion colour party, Branch 622, Stoney Creek, Ontario, at ceremony to replace Joyce Dann's lost Volunteer Service Medal

After returning from the Canadian Women's Army Corps, Joyce spent her adult life in British Columbia and now lives in Stoney Creek, Ontario, with her son, Wayne, and daughter-in-law, Linda. Just before Christmas, we traced her there and I went out to meet her. It was a great occasion for both of us.

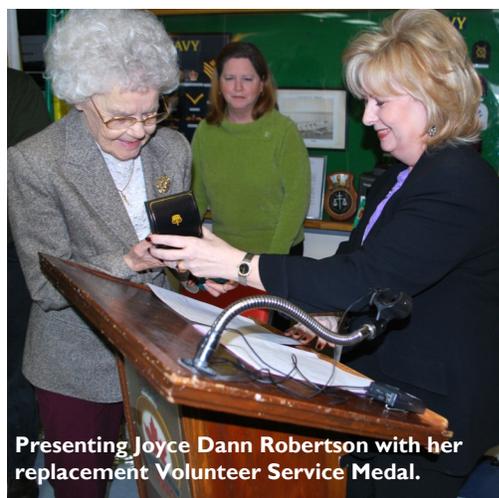
It turns out that through the many moves during her married life she lost her own CVS medal. Veterans Affairs agreed to strike a new one for her and we conspired to have a special presentation ceremony. Through the miracle of modern

technology, a plan unfolded—more than we could have imagined. The Wadena Composite High School, teachers and students alike, the members of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 62 in Wadena, and Branch 622 in Stoney Creek all joined to pay tribute to Joyce and help reconnect her with her home town.

Shy and humble, Joyce shunned the moniker "hero" but there was not a dry eye as veteran Mike touched the medal on his chest and told Joyce he had worn her so close to his heart for 68 years without ever knowing it was his childhood friend. Then he looked at her on the computer screen—thousands of miles away—and said "you are still as beautiful today as you were back then."

Serendipity, technology, and the compelling story of our war heroes all merged for a moment of history in the making. The high school kids were enthralled with the story of their hometown hero and were soon asking the local veterans to show their medals and tell their stories.

Using 21st century technology, four generations came together. It was a powerful connection between today's students and yesterday's warriors and made their incredible service and sacrifice real for a generation for whom war is a television event.



Presenting Joyce Dann Robertson with her replacement Volunteer Service Medal.



Bill Wallin (left) and fellow Wadena Legionnaires declared Joyce Dann Robertson a member of Branch 62 by video link with Stoney Creek, Ontario, from Wadena Composite High School.



Raelyn Hoffart, a student at Wadena Composite High School, was one of many who took part in the emotional cross-generational video-link ceremony.