**The Raising of a Cairn**

One man’s story as passed on by his father.

The saddest sound I ever heard was a piper's lament. The sound echoed off the icebergs in the Strait and rolled on over the hills and wooded areas. I was in the middle of nowhere, cars were parked on both sides of the road. People were walking. They disappeared into a narrow trail. The keening call drew us closer and closer to the sound of the pipes.

Everyone this April morning was walking slowly and carefully. Our thoughts were far away. I walked on for a half mile with those in front and those that followed behind. A haze covered the land as the snow fell. Ahead, I saw a clearing. An open field with a rock cairn that reached out to us. This was our Remembrance Day. Perhaps not for a battle that you would remember; not for a battle that had been won but for a cause that has touched us all. You see, today is the anniversary of the Battle of Culloden.

Do you know the significance of the cairn? When I was younger my father told me the story. The meaning of the cairn may vary in cultures however, in our culture it dates prior to 1746, across the sea in Scotland.

The clans had gathered from all over Scotland. These soldiers fought for Prince Charlie. Prior to reaching the battlefield which was predesignated in those days, each man gathered and carried a stone. These stones were piled together. This cluster of rocks became a cairn.

After the battle each man who was alive took away his stone. The rocks remaining were the count of the dead killed on the field of battle - a clear reminder of the cost of war.

Today, we are called and we come to this little cairn in Nova Scotia. The piper plays. The crowd encircles the cairn. It takes ten minutes for the back of the line to catch up. The parish priest steps to the edge of the circle. In Gaelic, he recites the first half of the Lord's Prayer. Where he stops, the people pick up the response. The wind whips up the snow and the language carries my thoughts back to Scotland.

What happened in that faraway land that compels us to face this cairn? Why am I and others here more than 250 years after an event that didn't even happen in our own country? Well, after the Battle of Culloden several of the soldiers of Prince Charlie left Scotland. They felt unwelcome in their own land. They came to a new country in
Nova Scotia. They were refugees fleeing tyranny. The bagpipes and kilt were forbidden in Scotland. These men fled for safety. They had settled here in this surrounding area. They died and were buried here in this field. They were not forgotten.

Now, here in this new Scotland, my mind is called to the present as a roll is called. People step forward placing a wreath on the stand in front of the cairn. Many of the family clans are represented here today. A hymn is sung in Gaelic, the response to the verse is picked up by those around me.

Many here do not understand the hidden significance of this particular cairn. I will tell you the story as I can remember it.

The cairn around which I and others are standing was erected in the 1930's. It was to be an historical marker and a burial marker of the three soldiers who, after Culloden, settled and died here in Nova Scotia.

One of these men, when he left Scotland, carried with him, in defiance, the stone he had placed in the cairn prior to Culloden and had lived to retrieve after Culloden. This stone and his few worldly possessions he took to the New World. The stone represented a voice to him, a voice that said, "I am not dead. I live on in the heart of my
owner. The ideals I fought for will live on in my descendants that come after me. I promise that across the sea and in many New Worlds, Prince Charlie will not be forgotten." This stone was given to the eldest son and thus passed on for several generations.

Two events were to join that stone and this cairn together. The history of the stone was a closely guarded family secret, a family secret that lived and grew in the heart with pride over the years.

One spring in the late 1930`s, the stone had one last surviving heir. Why not give the stone a final resting spot in the new cairn? The stone was taken to represent life. The original owner was dead and the last heir in his late seventies soon would be. It was time to return the stone to a new cairn; a monument to honour those who had fought at the Battle of Culloden.

Thus it came to be that the last heir paid a visit to the construction of the cairn. Very casually and without fanfare, he said to the workman, "I believe this stone might fit nicely there."

"Oh, you are right it does," said the workman.

Thus the stone after many years came to be at the final resting place of the man who had fought at Culloden. The memory of the soldier lives on. The heir has long since died.

My thoughts are interrupted by the sound of a drum. The service is over. Remembrance Day is a national event. Not here! Word of mouth, kinship and tradition keep us coming year after year. Only in the hardships of April will you find this spot. Come summer, the trail will be disguised. Deadfalls will block your way. The swamp will not give you passage.

Our past lives on in the descendants of this cairn. The crowd grows each year and lives in the renewal of our Scottish traditions.

The crowd moves on to a small hall a few miles down the road to celebrate with a dinner and ceilidh. In the Skye Boat Song, we live to fight again in our dreams with the descendants of the soldiers of Prince Charlie.

The toast is, "Long live Prince Charlie!"

I am the dreamer of dreams. I am the breath of nostalgia. I am the gentle breeze of summer and the cold wind of winter.

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