

## Remembrance

I remembered when I was four today.

It was a bit of a rush, finding the place where the Jeeps were assembled. The traffic, parking the car, getting Dad out of the car, his walker out of the boot.

We had talked to a man called Rocky on the phone earlier in the week. He was from the RSL and he said *'Come up to the corner of Elizabeth and George Streets and we will set your Dad up in a Jeep to march in the Anzac Day Parade'*.

Dad had always marched in the Brisbane Parade. I guess he thought he would be young forever, but lots had happened since the last Anzac Day march last year. Mum had died, his sweetheart, the partner he believed he would have beside him forever. Then he fell over and broke his hip and two more heart attacks and a stroke. Pretty amazing for him to be still alive and he was determined to march with his World War Two mates.

So the volunteers lifted him into the Jeep, a real one, a left hand drive one and he was set, a bit shaky but ready to go. I brushed the imaginary hair off his suit coat shoulders and kiss his cheek.

I had always watched the Anzac Day Parade on television at home but stayed so we could pick him up at the other end.

The 9th Division flag waved up the street and there he was in the Jeep and there I was again, a little four year old girl standing on the side of the street in Geelong, on a cold sunny day. I was dressed in a tartan skirt, wooly jumper, red tights and a little blue coat. I was holding my Mum's hand; she was dressed in silk stockings, matching shoes and gloves and a pale blue wool suit topped off with a sharp buttermilk yellow hat, smelling of something sweet and flowery, I loved the smell of her.

We arrived early so we could be close to the kerb at Moorabool Street and Mum was anxious, how was I to know my baby sister had died two months before? It was Mum's first outing outside the house since Elizabeth had died. She held my hand tight on one side of her and my brother's hand tight on the other.

And there he was, the strongest, tallest, bravest man I ever knew was marching along the street in his best black suit under the shadow of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division banner. His green hat was at a jaunty angle, his medals a blaze of courage across his chest. I swallowed my breath, I was so surprised and thrilled, 'Daddie' I yelled as he found me in the crowd. And he looked at me, for a moment he stopped staring

ahead into infinity and smiled the softest smile, 'Daddie' I yelled again and he waved and waved, then he proudly looked forward and caught himself back up into the march.

Fifty years gone and here I was on the street yelling "Daddie" again and I was proud, proud the way I was at 4, not knowing why I was so proud, was it because he was a soldier and fought for his country at the tender age of 19? Was it because he was from the generation who didn't count the cost? Was it because he was my Daddie?

I was four again and proud again, because he had weathered so many storms, not just the one from 1939–1945. He had weathered coming home and the battle of losing two daughters soon after birth, the battle of change, the world changing so much in 84 years, the battle of having two children who defied him growing up and the Anzac spirit over the Vietnam War, the battle of losing his sweetheart and the great battle to live over the past year.

And there he was, sitting proudly in the Jeep, not marching on his legs but in his heart and spirit, marching for his life.

*Vicki Bennett, written for The Australian April 2007.*