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WW1 Anniversary

This is the story that my father told me. It was passed on to him by his father, his paternal grandmother, and his maternal grandmother. We originally came primarily from Ireland; where my descendants lived was in the midst of political upheaval during World War I. This was referred to as Ireland's Revolutionary period. It was a very divisive time for my family and for the Irish people. At the outbreak of conflict, many Irish, including our family supported the war effort, but they quickly soured on the loss of loved ones and the continuous threat of conscription. Members of my family enlisted in the combined British armed forces of Ireland, England, Canada, and the United States.

1916 was a tumultuous time. The Empire was torn apart by the war. The Irish proclaimed their independence and attempted to establish a free Republic. This was known as the Easter Rising. They were rebelling against three hundred years of English Rule. Though the battle in Dublin was ultimately lost, Sinn Fein won the general election of 1918. They would ultimately win the Irish War of Independence. There is little doubt that four long years of war in Europe weakened the Empire's resolve and contributed to what would ultimately become the Free State of Ireland as a result of the "Anglo-Irish Treaty" and the Partition of Ireland.

For my family, who lost ancestral lands and titles and suffered under British tyranny, World War I was a watershed. Finally, they could vote, hold office, own land, speak their native language, and practice their religion without fear of recrimination. Many of my relatives would eventually leave Ireland for better opportunities in Canada or America, where millions of English-speaking Irish were at last favored over Eastern European and Asian refugees.

While my Irish and Canadian forebears began serving in uniform at the outset of the Great War, those already in America did not typically enlist until 1917. Several of my family members came back changed forever. They had initially opposed US entry into the conflict but relented when war was declared. One of my great grandmother's brothers had fought on the Western Front, was severely wounded, and gassed. He never fully recovered and eventually committed suicide. At home, as a result of the post war boom, business thrived. For the first time, many of my family members on both sides would go to college.

In southern Italy, prior to World War I, there was chronic underemployment. Many of my family left for the prospect of a better life in America. Those that stayed fought alongside English and American troops. While the allies were victorious, the war did not end profitably for the Italians. They attended the Treaty of Versailles, considered a member of the Big Four. The war was costly and the delegates left without receiving the Austrian and Balkan lands they coveted. This would eventually lead to recession, social unrest, and the rise of Fascism and Benito Mussolini. With skills learned as part of Mussolini's massive public works projects, many of my family would eventually emigrate to the United States.

In Great Britain, Italy, Canada, and the United States, my family was forever changed by the First World War. Some paid the ultimate sacrifice, some found freedom at home, and some

went in search of a better life. It had a profound effect on our story. Arguably we fared better than many families who lost their entire lineage, breadwinners, or brothers. Some were relegated to live as widowed pensioners without hope of employment or worse if their husband died from wounds. Worse off still were the war weary inhabitants of Europe and Russia. As a whole, we were very fortunate and would eventually thrive in a new country as either a direct or indirect result of World War I.