

War and Peace: A Family's Legacy and Lessons for Humanity

My family knows firsthand about the Great Patriotic War – we have given the victory its important cost. Its legacy can be seen everywhere: in the empty rooms of our past houses, in the yellowish photos hanging on the walls of our homes and in the stories passed down from one generation to another. You're not fully dead until you are forgotten, therefore we need to tell their stories, bring up their sacrifice.

My story begins on the verge of death. My great-grandmother, starving and exhausted, collapsed on a street of her village. She was taken for dead and placed in a cold barn, where dead bodies of her neighbors were lying down on the floor. But a miracle happened, because of which my family walks on the face of the earth. A stranger saw a faint movement of her almost lifeless body and got her back home. From this story I learned that human kindness, even in the darkest of times, cannot be extinguished. While one great-grandmother fought for life in our home village, my great-grandfather fought on our southern border. He was one of the soldiers who liberated Manchuria, northernmost part of China, from Japanese occupation. He fought for 2 months, going from the Amur River all the way to the Korean peninsula. Later, he returned home, married my great-grandmother and had 7 kids. All of them are alive now, and they are the ones who keep their story of heroism and pass it down in our family.

But there are stories that don't have a happy ending. My two granduncles vanished near Rzhev without a trace. That battle took lives of more than 400000 soldiers. They don't have separate tombs – some are buried in mass graves, others are buried in the forest, lying under the dirt. These are examples of war's fatal cruelty. They speak of the wound that cannot be fully healed – widows mourn, children wonder where their father has gone.

The consequences of these events on my generation are deep. We are the children of that peace, that was brought to us through pain and blood of our warriors, both on the field and in the country. My great-grandfather always said: "Let there be no war", and we all must make everything possible to fulfill his hopes. Our responsibility is to carry their stories. It is to remember that they gave up their lives and youth for us – for our peaceful sky, for their descendants. We must be the guardians of this precious memory, ensuring that the lessons of the past are remembered and became our core.