

Faith of Our Fathers: a review by Jim Irvine

G.F. MCCAULEY has authored an intriguing weave in *Faith of Our Fathers*. The weft carries the reader along a fictional path that might be autobiographical. As Sandy McDougall's life passes from pre-adolescence to middle age, the weft is held together by a warp of pain that runs throughout the story.

Begun in northern Ontario, in the Diocese of Moosonee, where black flies are hungry and where memories are anchored, we are introduced to Sandy and his pals as they struggle for survival in the post-war years. The scene is filled with pain and loss, allowing us a glimpse into the thoughts, hopes and fears of the characters in the face of alcohol abuse and sexual awareness.



This could be a coming of age story, one that could take its place among other coming of age novels. But *Faith of Our Fathers* is different. The brokenness in the wake of Hitler's war reaches from the western front to Lowvert, Ontario.

What is *Faith of Our Fathers* about? The question surfaces repeatedly throughout the book. Beginning in northern Ontario with a pre-adolescent Wolf Cub enduring the pain of his Grandmother's death, Sandy McDougall's path leads him out of the Diocese of Moosonee through the Dioceses of Huron and New York to a rural parish in Maritime Canada and the Diocese of Fredericton. It is an account of a vocation with its genesis as the senior server at St. George's Church in Lowvert, Ontario, that leads to the cities of Ottawa, London, New York and Fredericton.

But it isn't a story outlining the vocation of a senior server to an almost reverend serving as a seminarian at St. Alban's the Martyr in White Plains, New York. Or the priest who finds himself discovering a

forgotten thread of an unforgotten war criminal at Dorchester Penitentiary in Atlantic Canada.

In the spirit of Erich Maria Remarque and Lothar-Günther Buchheim, McCauley has penned another anti-war novel. He recounts stories of collateral damage in the life of a sergeant who returns as a broken victor. Only surface battle scars are worn publicly. Allan McDougall wears his scars deep within, wrapped in silence, nightmares and alcohol. The seed of the novel was penned by Allan in a cheap, black, spiral notebook that he wrote after returning home:

“War,” he’d written in September 1947, “is simple and easy. Your worries are plain, your needs basic, your focus total. Peace, on the other hand, is a much more complicated affair.” (p. 61)

Peace is indeed a more complicated affair. This novel imparts authenticity to large issues. Societal brokenness and corporate sin is presented here, eclipsing the individual mores that catch our attention and our judgement.

The toll of war is immense—to the individual, to the human psyche. The toll is weighed in our Anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and bigotry; in our fear of being alone and in our exploitation of those close to us.

Skillfully alternating from war torn memories of the past in Lowvert to the death of J.F.K. to the outrage of Vietnam, McCauley gives us a glimpse of outrage and struggle as Sandy McDougall encounters homosexual advances and the exploitation of mature love.

Father William Yates is the second character who holds his ground on centre stage. Yates is every bit the father Allan could never be to young Sandy. Father Yates’ ministry helps to create a story of redemption, one without cliché.

Faith of Our Fathers by G.F. McCauley is available as a paperback (350 pages) from General Store Publishing House, www.gsph.com.