

A ring's roundabout return

By **Nancy A. Fischer**

News Niagara Reporter

Published: November 20, 2011, 11:01 PM

Updated: November 21, 2011, 11:58 AM

Advertisement

Sister Brenda L. Whelan isn't exactly sure how her 1985 D'Youville College class ring went missing, because she gave all her jewelry to a relative 25 years ago when she became a nun.

It seems to have slipped off of somebody's finger, at some point, during a swimming outing at Beaver Island State Park on Grand Island.

But like a lost sheep, it found its way back to Whelan on Sunday, thanks to the Niagara Frontier Relic Hunters Club.

"I thought it was with my niece, tucked into a box with all the other rings I gave her when I joined the convent 25 years ago, and so did she," Whelan said. "So when they called me, I thought maybe it was a joke or a scam. I wasn't going to even call them back."

Whelan said she thinks a daughter of her niece may have worn the ring to the beach four or five years ago and lost it.

Michael Kasprzyk, a local landscaper and a member of the Relic Hunters for the last six years, found the ring with his metal detector Oct. 27. The ring had been in the Niagara River and washed up on the Grand Island shore after a storm, Kasprzyk figured. He was determined to return it.

"I've found quite a few rings over the years," he said. "I felt that I already have found plenty of treasures to add to my collection, and I wanted to give back, too."

In this case, there was a clue that helped Kasprzyk and his wife, Michelle, in their search to find the owner. The silver ring with what appeared to be a ruby was inscribed with "D'Youville College" and the initials "BLW."

Michelle Kasprzyk, who did the detective work, spent nearly a week searching alumni listings on the D'Youville website, until she found Whelan in the Class of 1985.

"There was more than one Brenda Whelan. We were hoping that we would find her and that she would be local ... and we did," Michael Kasprzyk said. "She was speechless when we called her."

In a twist of fate, Whelan said she got the call about the ring the day she had returned home from celebrating her 25th-anniversary jubilee with the Sisters of Mercy.

"It's amazing that they took the time to find me and give it back," Whelan said. "I don't think I would," she added with a laugh.

The class ring was returned to Whelan, the director of pastoral care at Women & Children's Hospital of Buffalo, during a special presentation Sunday at the Relic Hunters Club's monthly meeting in Zion United Church of Christ in the Town of Tonawanda.

Niagara Frontier Relic Hunters President Joseph Cartonia said, "I've been president for eight years, and this is the first time we've ever done this. It's a real good thing."

"We don't do this to get rich. If I did it for the money, I'd be broke."

Relic Hunters was established in 1977 and meets at 7 p.m. on the third Sunday of every month in Zion Church, 15 Koenig Circle. Anyone with an interest in metal detecting is welcome. At each meeting, members share their treasures and relics, which range from antique coins and gold, to cannon balls and uniform buttons from the War of 1812. Each month, they vote on the best find.

Kasprzyk said he hoped he would win the member vote this month, and he did.

But he said the real win was handing over his find to someone who would truly treasure it.

He called Whelan "an unbelievable saint in her work with the hospital over the past 25 years."

Kasprzyk put the ring in a case so Whelan wouldn't lose it again, but she immediately put the ring on one of her fingers -- and vowed that it's where she intends it to stay.

"Now I think I'm keeping it for a while," she said. "D'Youville was an amazing time for me. I got my education there, and it's where I began my teaching career. It's a special piece to get back. I'm really, really grateful they took the time to bring it back."

