

Deedas Family

Emilija Irma Deedas (nee Ceplis/Ceple)

- She was born in 1907 in Bauska, in southern Latvia, 20 kilometres from the Lithuanian border.
- Irma grew up in unstable, politically unpredictable countries of Latvia and Russia (Siberia).
- Irma learned to speak Russian in school in Siberia. Later, she learned to speak Lithuanian.
- Her parents were Anna (nee Terin) and Andrejs Ceple.
- Irma was the third of seven children. Only she and a sister, Mirzda (about 12 years younger than Irma), lived normal life spans.
- To the heartbreak of the family, the first child, a daughter, died at age seven in a diphtheria epidemic, and two sons were stillborn. Twins Otto and Andrejs were also ill-fated. At age two, Otto drank iodine and died five days later, and Andrejs died at eight in Russia from a cerebral hemorrhage.
- Irma's parents' main vocation was farming. They rented farm land, but owned the implements and livestock.
- Irma's father also worked as a spinner in a wool mill. At age 21, he was called to serve for four years in the army in Lodz, Poland, under Tzar Alexander III.
- During the First World War, Irma's family had to move around in attempt to stay ahead of the advancing red and white armies. They journeyed from Latvia to Moscow, then to Polyany, then to Tobol'sk and lastly to Omsk – a journey which took four months. "Much of this was walking or on horseback. We just cannot conceive of what that kind of life was like but I suppose it might have been easier for a child than for a parent trying to stay ahead of armies and the fighting," said Irma's daughter, Ellen.
- While in Siberia, Irma's father rented out horses for transportation purposes.
- After she completed her schooling, Irma was trained as a cook/baker.
- When the struggles had subsided and the family could stay in one place, Irma went to work in a bakery and tea room where she sold bread and baking, and also did janitorial work.
- Eventually Irma decided to make a better life for herself in Canada. It was a very difficult decision because she was concerned for the welfare of her family. She never saw her parents or sister again.
- She traveled on the White Star Lines ship, the *S.S. Arabic* sailing from London, England on September 6th, 1926. She was 19 years old. Eight days later she got off the ship at Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- All of her original immigration documents have been saved. One card gives her location on the ship (section k, berth 1, room 18) while another is her dining pass (third class table ticket). Her 'third class immigration identification card' was shown to the examining officer at the port of arrival in Halifax.
- Irma had an uncle and cousins who also lived in Canada since 1910. She had hoped that she would be able to eventually bring her parents over too.
- Irma was to marry one of her cousins, Andrejs Terin. "Apparently this was not all that uncommon in those days," said Ellen.
- Terin was born on November 17th, 1895. He was a carter (cart or coach driver) and also owned a rooming house at 71 Martha Street in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which Irma managed.
- Terin turned out to be an alcoholic with a volcanic temper, which made for an unhappy life with him.
- It was difficult for Irma to ask for help considering she could not speak English.
- Her first child, a son, died from pneumonia when he was only twelve weeks old. Their second son, Andrew Jr., was born on August 24th, 1928 and died on April 18th, 1929 at only seven months while teething.
- Terin died at age 33 on July 2nd, 1929 in the Winnipeg General Hospital after getting into an alcohol induced fight with one of his friends, Paddy Thomas. He and some friends were drinking home-brewed alcohol when Terin and Paddy began fighting over which man had superior athletic prowess. They both became very angry, it came to blows, and witnesses were unable to separate them. Terin's face was badly cut and bruised, but he didn't realize he had serious internal abdominal injuries. He later complained of severe stomach pain and died as a result of his injuries.

- After the fight, Paddy immediately left the city and returned to his job in Great Falls. He apparently didn't know that Terin had died in hospital. The murder and subsequent investigation was reported for several days in Winnipeg newspapers. An inquest was held. One week later, Paddy was released from prison a free man. He was free, but Irma had lost two children and now her children's father.
- "I have often thought how unhappy Mom must have been in those years she spent in Winnipeg before she met my Dad [Matt Deedas]," said Ellen.
- Irma eventually remarried, and joined her second husband Matt in Red Lake in August 1931.
- She traveled by train from Winnipeg to Hudson, then by passenger boat to Ear Falls. There she slept overnight at one of the portages and arrived in Red Lake the following day.
- The dramatic change of scenery – from the prairies to nearly solid forest – was welcome. Irma had suffered so greatly in the city and genuinely appreciated the opportunity to start a new life.
- "Mom was very happy with him and her life in Red Lake, hard as it must have been at times in those early years," said Ellen.
- In total, Irma lived and loved Red Lake for 42 years.
- Irma went to live with Ellen and her family in Powell River and Nanaimo, British Columbia and remained with them until her death.
- She died at age 77 on August 7th, 1984.
- Her ashes have been buried with Matt's in the Red Lake Cemetery.

Matausas (Matt) Dydas (Deedas)

- In Canada, Matausas was known as Matt or Mike.
- He was born in the city of Ukmerge, county of Vilnius, Lithuania, on November 19th, 1896.
- He was the only son and had twin sisters, one of whom was handicapped.
- He had a good elementary education, could speak, write, and read in Russian and some Polish, and had beautiful handwriting.
- He served in the army for some time, as military service was compulsory.
- As a young man, he was married in Lithuania and had one daughter, Kamile, who was born about 1924.
- Prospects were limited in Lithuania at the time and Matt thought that by going to Canada, he would be better able to make a good living and be financially secure enough to send for his wife and daughter.
- He traveled to London, England and left Canada on the *U.S.S. United States*. He arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia on March 22nd, 1926. He was 29 years old.
- Matt was the only member of his family to emigrate.
- Matt was heartbroken to learn that in his absence his wife had a child with another man. He refused to have any contact with her after that, but kept in sporadic contact with his daughter.
- Matt went to Winnipeg, Manitoba and even though he spoke no English, he found work in a furniture manufacturing company, and cutting ties for the railway.
- He and two friends, Albert Adolf Malzan (Malson) and Alfred (Fred/Bimbo) Roccola, decided to try their luck in the gold mining district of Red Lake in 1929.
- His first employment in Red Lake was as a carpenter, then underground miner at the Howey Gold Mines, Limited.
- Matt managed to survive an underground cave-in without being seriously injured.
- In total he remained at the Howey Mine for 13 years. His last years at the mine were as a deck man.
- He became a Canadian citizen on August 10th, 1939.
- His certificate of naturalization was signed by Ernest Lapointe, the acting Secretary of State of Canada. It noted personal characteristics such as 5 feet, 8 inches tall, fair complexion, blue eyes, brown hair, and that the tip was missing from the fourth left finger.
- After the Howey Mine, Matt worked at Madsen Red Lake Gold Mines, Limited from December 1941 to February 1942 as a timber man. He then moved on to Hasaga Gold Mines, Limited, Dickenson Mines for a brief time, and spent 16 years with Campbell Red Lake Mines, until his retirement in 1967. He worked only on surface during his last few years of employment.
- Matt's lungs sustained damage from his work underground. This ailment troubled him for the rest of his life.

- He died on June 2nd, 1971.
- Following his funeral at Red Lake United Church, he was buried in Red Lake Cemetery.

The Couple

- The Deedas' met when Matt was staying at Irma's rooming house in Winnipeg.
- "He was going to the gold mines [of Red Lake] to get a job and when he came back he wanted to marry me. For an answer at the time, I told him, 'maybe ask me when you get back'. Well, he started to write me letters in Russian. Our friendship and romance all started in Russian," recalled Irma.
- Before meeting Matt, Irma was nearly engaged to a Welsh émigré. Then she became engaged to a British widower. However, she was especially drawn to Matt and she felt that their similar backgrounds would bode well for a better match, so she broke off her engagement and married Matt instead.
- They were married in December 1930.
- Their first home in Red Lake, Irma recalls, "had no insulation and in the winter our clothes froze to the wall and stayed there until the frost let them go. We carried water from the lake up the hill, and with a crosscut saw and an axe we faced the woodpile for winter heat. Since we were only renting that first shack, the next year we built a nice log cabin."
- Irma assumed that she and Matt would be living in Red Lake for two or three years at the most. Miners were earning wages of about five dollars per day so she thought that they would save a 'nest egg' without much hardship. Despite her plans to move elsewhere, this new cabin became their home for the following 16 years.
- After 12 years of marriage they had their first and only child, Mary Ellen, in 1942.
- They were both very sociable and on good terms with many immigrants from their home countries, as well as others.

Children

Mary Ellen

- Ellen was born on March 11th, 1942 at the McKenzie Island hospital.
- She was the only child born to parents Irma and Matt Deedas.
- She received both her elementary and high school education in Red Lake.
- Ellen worked as a waitress during her teenage years at the Lakeview Bakery and Café in the late 1950s.
- "As a child, the people I knew best were all the Lithuanian bachelors who used to gather at our house fairly often. They would usually have dinner with us and then sit around drinking and singing Lithuanian songs. I called all of them 'uncle'. There was Liudvik ('Second Hand Louis') Balcuinas, Karl Zalenas ('Uncle Collar'), Charlie Shukstes, Tony Valiukonis, Jonas Juska, and Augustas Petnuinas. We used to visit the Pavlovich family in Cochenour quite often and they are like family to me," remembers Ellen.
- "My parents only spoke English to me at home and I deeply regretted that when I travelled in Lithuania and Latvia, and needed a translator to speak with my relatives there."
- After high school, Ellen attended King's Business College in Thunder Bay, Ontario.
- After college, she worked as a secretary for the Marathon Corporation in Caramat, Ontario.
- She met her husband, Bernard Waatainen, when he was a forestry student in Caramat during the summers.
- Bernie received his Bachelor of Science in Forestry in 1962.
- Ellen married Bernie on August 31st, 1963 at the Red Lake United Church.
- Together they had three sons, Jeff, Glen, and Stephen.
- They lived in Marathon, Ontario for five years.
- In 1969 Bernie was transferred to the Queen Charlotte Islands (now Haida Gwaii) in British Columbia. They spent three years living there.
- Ellen and Bernie then moved to Powell River, and two years later returned to Nanaimo.
- Ellen earned a diploma in local government administration from Malaspina University-College.

- She later worked in the office of Nanaimo Home Support where she held various positions until her retirement.