

Julia's Story

By Myn Hursin

This is the story of my mother, Julianna Yaremko-Holowchak-Yachimec, as told by her daughter, Amelia Hursin, of Baptiste Lake, Alberta.

Julia was born in Subotiv, Ukraine on March 7, 1907. In 1926 she married Roman Holowchak in the Ukraine. Very shortly thereafter he left for Canada and within two years he brought Julia to Canada. He made arrangements that she purchase a "western style dress" and have her hair bobbed before leaving. Julia arrived in Halifax on January 1, 1931, not knowing the English language. She travelled by train to Edmonton and then went on to Cardiff, where she lived with her husband as he worked in the coalmine in Cardiff. Her husband became ill with tuberculosis and was placed in the TB sanitarium in Calgary in November of 1931, and Julia moved to Edmonton where she lived in a small room with friends in north Edmonton. She was pregnant. Because of the depression there was no job, she could not speak the language, and therefore was eligible for "relief" (as stated by the interpreter at the Government Relief Station) and she was able to travel by train to Calgary to visit with her husband.

She was all alone during labour and took the streetcar from north Edmonton to the Royal Alexandra Hospital, where she gave birth to her daughter, Amelia, on March 23, 1932.

In April of 1933 her husband passed away in Calgary. She was now widowed and considered a non-person. Through an interpreter she is advised that she will be deported back to the Ukraine and that her daughter will be placed in an orphanage in Edmonton, as she is a Canadian.

With the help of her friends she leaves Edmonton and hides from the authorities and gets word to her uncle in Cardiff so that he can find her a coalminer bachelor who would be willing to marry her so that she could remain in Canada.

In November of 1933 Julia married Andrew Yachimec, a coalminer working in the Beverly coalmine. They are situated in a one-room shack on 59 Street and 122 Avenue in Edmonton, where they rented an additional two lots from the City of Edmonton for \$1 per year. They built a barn, got a milk cow, raised chickens, and had vegetable gardens.

In 1936 Julia gave birth to her son, Walter, on January 12.

In 1936 she received her Canadian citizenship through her husband and became employed at Swift's packing plant. She had no opportunity to learn the English language until her daughter (who knew no English) started school in 1939. Myn had to bring her school book home to practise, and it became an important part of each day after supper that she taught her mother to read as well.

Julia was determined to read and write the English language and was very proud to be a Canadian. Canada was the land of freedom, particularly for women.

In 1944-45 Julia required an operation, and in order to pay the hospital bill she grew potatoes and cabbages on the rented land, and her daughter and son would walk the approximately 40 city blocks pulling the vegetables in a wagon to the hospital until her bill was paid in full.

Julia was in an abusive marriage for years but a divorce could be granted only on commitment of adultery. So she waited until her son was 13 years of age and had a choice of which parent to live with. In 1949 she hired a detective, who would give evidence in court that he saw her enter and stay the weekend with the man of the house while his wife was away. To her surprise the judge said she was entitled to one half of the sale of their property and was able to take her furnishings and belongings.

Julia worked six days a week at Burns Packing Plant during the war years but always found time on Sunday to take her son and daughter to Borden Park to swim, go to the zoo, and have a picnic. She would watch us swim from the stands and remarked that someday she will purchase a swim suit and have time to swim.

In the 1950s her son and daughter both married and she was very pleased to welcome eight grandchildren.

In 1970 she travelled back to the Ukraine to visit with her brother and upon returning remarked to us that we were very lucky to be living in Canada and that she was very proud to be a Canadian.

In 1972 she retired from work and received her old age security pension. She travelled—even with some of her grandchildren, who thought that their “Baba” was a lot of fun. She was devoted to her family and had a very positive outlook. She loved bowling, swimming, cooking, camping, and especially fishing at Baptiste Lake. She welcomed ten great-grandchildren over the years. She was always active, always interested.

In 1994 her health started to decline. She moved from Edmonton to her son’s home in Leduc, then to her daughter’s home at Baptiste Lake, and lastly to Extendicare in Athabasca, where she was known for her outspoken comments and great sense of humour. A fun person!

In 1997 Julia celebrated her 90th birthday on March 7 at Extendicare, and on March 23 when her daughter told her she was 65 years old, her comment—quite loud in the dining room of Extendicare—was, “OYEE, I have to go because the government cannot afford to pay the old age pension to both of us.” Her remark brought lots of laughter to all.

Exactly one month to the day, on April 23, Julia passed away peacefully.

In her words, “Canada gave me the freedom of choice. My old age pension was the Canadian blessing that gave me the freedom to enjoy my elder years in my Canada!”