

## The Treasure

Here's how it all began.

Tato called, "Let's go kids!!" and we were off.

Mama, Tato, Danya and me. On July 20, 2009.

We drove for hours and hours, and then days. Past the trees and bushes, then the endless rocks, lakes and rivers. We drove and drove until we got there.

Baba and Dido's house, Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

"Ditochky!" she called.

We hugged, ate "varenyky" (pierogies), and then went straight to work.

We were there on a special mission, a sad one in a way. We came to clean out Baba and Dido's house. It had become too much for them to care for. They needed to move to the city, to a place where it would be easier for them to live in their older years.

Danya and I already knew where we wanted to start; we had planned it in the car during all those hours of driving.

We wanted to clean the attic.

It was dark, warm, and it smelled that special way we only had ever smelled at Baba's house. So off we went up the stairs before anyone could find us a different job.

We dug in. Over the next few hours, that hot, dark and dusty attic revealed itself to us bit by bit.

We found sacks of clothes, mountains of books and old jars full of nails and marbles. We discovered a broken sleigh, a bag of hangers, old Christmas wrapping paper, and "didukh" - a sheaf of wheat tied with a ribbon - all dry, brittle and honey-coloured.

Then we found IT.

It was a large, long tattered box different than the rest. It had old, Ukrainian

writing on it. It was carefully tied with twine, as if someone wanted to send it somewhere by mail.

“What do we do with this?” Danya asked, looking over the box for clues to its importance.

But I didn’t wait. Something told me this was going to be interesting.

Carefully, I slipped off the knots of the prickly old twine, and gingerly lifted the lid. Inside was a collection of odd things.

At the top there was a goalie stick with a name written on it – Terry. It looked like it had seen many, many games on the prairie rink.

Under the stick hid a small wrinkly paper bag. Danya lifted the bag to look inside but its bottom fell out spilling dozens of little grains that danced across the dusty attic floor.

As she collected the grain, I found a black round disc that looked like a CD, but larger and with a small hole in the middle. Around the hole was a title – “Everytime I See Your Picture I Cry” and a signature with one name –Luba.

And at the bottom, neatly folded, sat an old, heavy “*kozhukh*” (sheepskin vest). Vibrant coloured embroidery stood boldly against the vest’s cracked and dry, well-worn leather.

Danya stood by me, watching.

Then she spied it.

“Look!” she cried.

At the bottom of the box was an old photo. Its edges were brown and crumbling like sand but the image was still clear. “This man is wearing a *kozhukh*,” she said. “Just like the one in our box.”

“Danya – look! Who is this girl? See looks just like you!” I said to her. My sister’s mouth dropped.

What was going on here? Who was this girl that looked like Danya? Why was this goalie stick stuck in a box with a *kozhukh*? And why is this box in Baba and Dido’s attic?

We ran to Baba. We knew she could tell us the story of the box.

“So, you found it,” she said. Then sat down, folded her hands onto her lap, and starting talking.

“I started keeping that box many, many years ago to help me remember our

family story. The girl in the old photo is my grandmother. She came to Canada in 1911 with her family to look for a better life. Danya even looks like her.”

“That older man is my great-grandfather. This is what my family looked like when they came to Canada from Galicia in Ukraine. He wore a kozhukh – a vest made of embroidered sheepskin. He was in his best clothes as he arrived in Quebec City”. A famous photographer named William Topley took this picture. His job was to tell a story through pictures about what immigrants looked like coming to Canada. He picked my family to take a photo.”

“What about these little seeds?”, Danya asked.

“They are kernels of Galician wheat that came from Ukraine. The wheat came to be known as the Red Fife. It became the basis for Marquis bread wheat which is grown all over Canada.

You see, my great grandfather brought few things to Canada when he came. Just his family, the clothes on his back and very little money. But he brought some wheat seed. And these seeds helped him grow food for his family on his farm during the depression when there was no food, no jobs and no money.”

“It sounds like life then was very hard”, I said.

“Yes”, said Baba.

“But it was also very special and fun at times”, said Dido. “That goalie stick you found belongs to my first cousin, Terry. We played together near Winnipeg River as soon as it froze over. Terry grew up to become Terry Sawchuk, the best NHL hockey goalie in the world. He won records, and a Stanley Cup. We are very proud of him.”

“And you know we love to sing and dance and tell stories the Ukrainian way,” said Baba. “That record album you saw is very special to me. My Montreal cousin’s daughter, Luba, wrote this song, in English, about her father in the early 1980s. She started singing Ukrainian songs when she was young, and became a famous Canadian musician. She signed her name on that album just for me because she knew I loved that song very much. Let me play it for you.”

Late into the evening at the dinner table, we heard many more stories and learned Ukrainian songs. As it became bedtime, Danya and I realized that if it were not for the tattered box of treasures, we would have missed our family stories.

We went to bed and dreamed – of wheat fields and kozhukhs, of photo

albums, of Baba and Dido and the Stanley Cup. It was a crazy, weird and wonderful dream of our family, and of Canada.

In the morning, as we prepared to leave on our voyage to Edmonton with Baba and Dido, Danya and I knew we had to ask the question.

“Baba, what are you going to do with this box of yours?”, asked Danya.

“Do you have room to take it with you?”, I asked.

Then together, both of us exclaimed, “We just can’t throw it out!”

“No, ditochky. You must take it with you home. It is your responsibility to hold on to these treasures for your children and grandchildren.” Baba happily handed the box to Danya.

Danya and I looked at each other and gratefully accepted our bit of history. As we hugged Baba and showered her with “Djakuju”, I couldn’t help but wonder:

***What will my story be?***