

Couple forced by war into labour celebrate 70th anniversary

by Abigail Cukier
Special to the Beaver

To be married for 70 years is a rare achievement.

Considering what the Koloszuk family lived through together, it is even more exceptional.

Anna and Mikolaj were married on Oct. 17, 1943 in the Bloodlands of the Ukraine. The Bloodlands were a region, including Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and the Baltic states, where an estimated 14 million people were killed between 1933 and 1945 by the regimes of Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union and Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Anna and Mikolaj knew each other through church and Sunday school and grew to "like each other," said Anna recently from their Oakville home.

"During the war, we were occupied by the Germans and married people weren't taken to Germany, so we got married," Anna said. "But by the time we were married, they took us just the same."

The couple was taken to a forced labour farm in Germany, where they worked for one year and two months until the Second World War ended. Anna says they were lucky because they had food from the farm, adding that many people sent to work in factories in the city starved.

At war's end, Anna and Mikolaj did not want to return to the Ukraine under Commu-



Mikolaj Koloszuk (88) and Anna Koloszuk (89) celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on Oct. 17 in Oakville. Life today is a far cry from where the couple started as newlyweds, forced into labour on a farm in Germany.

| photo by Nikki Wesley – Oakville Beaver (Follow on Twitter @halton_photog)

nist rule, so they stayed in a displaced persons camp from 1945 until 1949.

When asked about that time, Anna says, "We had help from the United States and the Red Cross. We managed."

Anna also gave birth to Victor and Nicholas in the camp. On May 16, 1949, when Nicho-

las was four and Victor, 3, the family immigrated to Montreal.

"Thank God for that. We are so happy we are here," Anna said. "At first, it was hard. We had no money, no place to live. Friends who came before us helped us find a tiny room. We paid \$30 a month, which we didn't have."

With two small children, Anna worked nights as a cook and then a waitress and Mikolaj worked days. Eventually they both took jobs sewing for a clothing company, where Anna stayed until retirement. When the company stopped making men's clothing, Mikolaj moved to the airplane motor parts manufacturer, Canadian Aviation Electronics until retirement.

Mikolaj also founded the Slavic Full Gospel Church in Montreal and was its minister for 35 years. It was affiliated with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, of which he served on the executive for many years.

In 2001, the couple moved to Oakville to live with Victor. Nicholas remains in Montreal. They also have four grandchildren and one great-grandchild, with another on the way.

Anna and Mikolaj own a condominium in Florida, where they spend their winters together. They have always loved to travel and spend many hours volunteering and fundraising for their church. Victor believes volunteering and helping those less fortunate is a key to keeping his parents happy and feeling young.

"We have our family. We know God wants us to be together. We are blessed by God," Anna says of the secret to their longevity.

Mikolaj adds another key to their success, "We argue sometimes, but the key is never to hold a grudge. You just pick up and move on."

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