

# Ever heard of Celiac disease? Then it's time to get to know it

by Darren MacDonald  
Staff

For most of us, having toast for breakfast, hot dogs for lunch and pizza for supper is pretty routine. But for the one in 2,000 Canadians who suffer from celiac disease—including three people in Terrace Bay and Schreiber—eating any one of those meals is simply out of the question.

Celiac is a little-known disease whose symptoms include stomach cramps, fatigue, irritability, weight loss and diarrhea. A substance called gluten, which is found in barely, wheat, oats and rye, damages the lining of the small intestine of celiacs. They can also suffer from malnutrition when they are on a regular diet, because of their damaged intestines.

"Doctors used to think that people would grow out of the disease, and that we could cheat," says Heather DeCal, a Terrace Bay resident who has celiac. "But now they know a lot more about the disease."

For nearly two years, DeCal has also been the president of the Thunder Bay Chapter of the Canadian Celiac Association.

She was diagnosed 17 years ago when she was 15. It took doctors three weeks to discover what was wrong with her because, DeCal says, the disease was almost totally unheard of at that time.

"The only way to make a diagnosis is through a biopsy while you're still eating a regular diet," she says.

While the disease is now more widely known among doctors, the general public is still quite unfamiliar with celiac. So the Celiac Association is celebrating Celiac Week from Oct.

4 to 10. The theme, appropriately enough, is "Get to know us".

The Association estimates there are 13,000 Canadians who have celiac, many of whom are undiagnosed.

"Sometimes the disease doesn't present itself early," says DeCal. "There was one little girl in Thunder Bay who was diagnosed at six months. But a lot of times it doesn't become obvious until something traumatic happens in your life. In my case, it was puberty."

Even after living with celiac for 15 years, DeCal says she's still occasionally tempted to munch on a doughnut or on some fresh bread.

"It's a little bit like being an alcoholic and being offered a drink," she laughs.

"But what we try to stress is

not what we can't eat, but what we can. And that includes all vegetables, fruits and meats—as long as its not processed meat, like bologna or certain types of hot dogs, which are made with grain fillers."

They can also substitute grains with foods such as corn, potatoes and rice. But that can be expensive. For example, a loaf of bread made from rice can cost as much as \$5 a loaf.

There are 28 members in the Thunder Bay chapter, which takes in the area between

Kenora and Wawa. DeCal says there are more people than that who have the disease, but they choose not to join. Some are self-diagnosed, and she says they really should be biopsied to make sure they have celiac.

"It's kind of ridiculous—and expensive—to follow this diet if you don't have to," she says. "Plus there may be other problems they're not aware of."

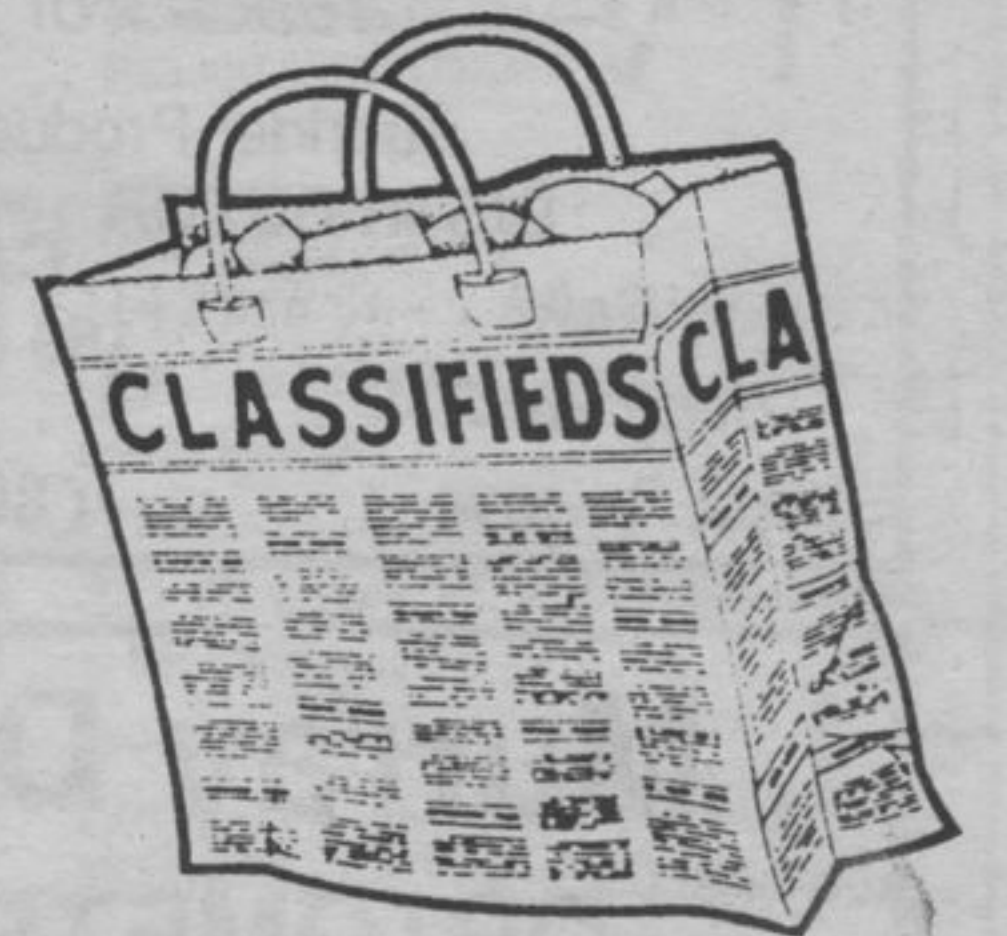
If anyone wants more information, she says they can contact her personally.

## IN MEMORIAM

STACHIW: In loving memory of a dear father-in-law, grandfather and great-grandfather, William, who passed away October 10, 1991.

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You are the treasure I  
love to find

For without your love  
I am lost  
I know deep in my heart  
the only dream that  
mattered had come true,

For in this life I was  
loved by you.

In silence I remember,  
and secret tears still flow,  
for what it meant to lose  
you no one will ever  
know

Never to be forgotten,  
your wife, Anne

## IN MEMORIAM

STACHIW: In loving memory of a dear father and grandfather who passed away October 10, 1991.

*God called him home, it was his will,  
but in our hearts we love him still.*

*His memory is as dear today as in the hour he  
passed away.*

*We often think of him when we are all alone, for  
memory is the only thing that grief can call his own.  
Someday we hope to meet again, to clasp his hand in a  
better land, never to part again.*

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