

Mäki (Keltamäki)

Keltamäki, Johann (Ernest) & Selma

Children: Eero, Eeva

Mäki, Eero & Sivi

Children: Eerikka, Eero Jr., Elsa, Joanne

Hardships Bring Out the Best by Eeva (Mäki) Macdonald

My mother, Selma Katarina Kansakangas, was born in 1905; my father, Johann Ernest Keltamäki, in 1906. Both were born near Kaustinen, Finland, a small town, which is still recognized as a cultural centre in Finland—the summer music festival attracts visitors from all over Finland and Europe. Finland has always had an advanced education system. As of circa 1900, it was compulsory that all children go to school until the age of sixteen. Both my parents had the equivalent of a high school education; even Dad, who had been orphaned at age six. Young men were conscripted into the army, to serve a minimum period of two years.

Mom and Dad knew each other as children and eventually married in 1928. They were interested in a major lifestyle change—they were going to emigrate to Canada. The Canadian government at the time was actively pursuing Finnish families to come to Canada, to work in the northern forests. Finland, with its history of intensive forest management, produced ideal

immigrants to develop Canada's growing pulp and paper industry.



Ernest and Selma Keltamäki on their wedding day in Finland -1928

In the fall of 1928, my parents arrived in Halifax, then by train to Port Arthur (Thunder Bay). Mom had left her mother and a sister. Dad

left no family behind (although later we were able to find surviving relatives). My brother Eero was born in 1929 in Port Arthur. In 1930, they settled on a homestead lot near Coté Siding (now Val Coté). Here they learned of the harsh realities of life in Northern Ontario. The winters were brutal, the summers hot. They worked from sunup to sundown, just to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads. They had built a log cabin, which did provide shelter, but didn't protect them completely from the harsh winters.



Ernest and Selma Keltamäki at their home in Coté Siding

They cleared the lot and harvested the wood. Father cut the trees, Mother peeled the bark, then stacked the wood. This pulp was then hauled to the rail siding, to be moved by train to the mill in Kapuskasing. Sawmills in Hearst also benefitted—receiving the larger saw logs and forwarding pulp-sized logs to Kapuskasing.



Ernest and Eero (Kelta)Mäki



Selma (Kelta)Mäki and Eero
-about 1933

Eero's memories of his early years were very poignant. Within the harsh realities, there was always laughter. I remember travelling to Toronto with him and Hans Hietala, listening to their stories of life on the homestead—all of us laughing and crying. It was a world that most of us cannot imagine, but it produced some of Canada's best people. Our parents worked long, hard hours and had limited possessions, as they left most everything behind in Finland. I can remember not having enough dishes to go around—everybody shared. Mother did manage to collect coffee coupons and used them to buy a set of dishes, which Sivi still has. Mother made clothes out of flour bags and embroidered beautiful tablecloths, which I still have. Outer garments and footwear were purchased, but otherwise there was neither money to spend nor stores to spend it in. As Eero grew older, my parents often had to leave him alone at home with the dog for company. One afternoon a bear wandered into the yard. Eero didn't see the bear, but the dog did and bit Eero, who ran into the house crying, with the dog after him. Inside, Eero saw the bear and realized the dog had saved his life.

As they had no vehicles, they walked everywhere, even to dances held in the Finnish Halls in Hearst and Reesor. Reesor was large enough to have its own school as well. There were several Finnish families homesteading at

Coté Siding. The Hietala family was one; their son Hannes and Eero formed a life-long friendship. Hanna and Onni Salo, the Paasilas, the Itook and Otto Koivisto were some of their neighbours.

I remember hearing the story of how Eero, as a child, had a toothache and Dad had to packsack him to Hearst to see a doctor. My father also told one story where he, a Frenchman, and a Ukrainian gentleman were all speaking “English” in a grocery store in Reesor. Dad understood the “English” of the other two, so he translated for everyone. Eventually, everybody got what they wanted. It was a different time.

The family moved to Hearst after five or six years on the homestead. They first lived in a rented house, somewhere near the high school. A year later, they bought a house at number 13, 8th Street.



In front of the 8th Street House –about 1940
(people unidentified)

During this time, Dad worked as a logger in various lumber camps—Oba, Ryland, Wyborn. Mother worked as a cook in the same camps.



Selma & Ernie (Kelta)Mäki in Mead
-early 1940s

There were several prisoner of war camps near Hearst; Dad and Mom worked at these camps as well. During this time, Eero went to school. He had a very eclectic education. He would attend the school wherever our parents were working. Many of these schools were one-room classrooms. He eventually finished elementary school and did his high school in Hearst, then went to Port Arthur to complete Grade 13. While there, he won a car; this interfered with his education, so he headed back home to Hearst.

Our parents now owned a boarding house in Hearst, where Mom did all the cooking. As late

as the '60s, there were at least seven Finnish rooming and boarding houses in Hearst, catering mainly to the Finnish population—single men working in the lumber industry. Eero apprenticed as an electrician under Alex Levaire and eventually opened up his own business, Maki Electric. Father then apprenticed under Eero, and he also earned his electrician's license. Eero then opened a hardware store, which is still operating in Hearst.

After several miscarriages (as many as seven), I, Eeva, was born on December 22, 1946.



Ernie, Selma, Eeva, Eero (Kelta)Mäki in 1947

This was the time when Eero was the goalie for the Hearst Lumber Kings. They won the championship in 1951. My mother never attended a home game, but loved watching hockey in her later years.



Lumber Kings -1950-51 John Bourgeault, Eero Mäki, Emile Joanis

I don't really remember my early years, but do remember Sivi Myllymäki arriving from Finland to marry my brother in 1954. I adored her. They raised four children: Eerikka, Eero Jr., Elsa and Joanne; Elsa stayed in Hearst, Joanne moved to British Columbia. I was always close to Sivi, Eero and their children; they've played a very important role in my life. My brother Eero passed away in 2006 and his daughter, Joanne, in 2005. At the time of his death, Eero was

grandfather to eleven children and great-grandfather to six.

I went to HPS. Ellen Fex was my Grade 1–2 teacher, Katy Larouche Grades 3–4, Kelvin McKinnon Grade 5, Olga Bies Grade 6 and Principal Clayton Brown 7–8. I remember taking piano lessons with Mrs. Fulton, which enabled us to play at the Kiwanis Music Festival in Cochrane. This was always a highlight in the

spring—Miriam Rasinpera and I playing piano duets and piano trios with Brian Turner. This was usually good for at least a week off school.

In the spring, when the snow melted, we would play scrub baseball at noon. We hurried home to eat lunch so we could get back to the game, yelling, “first fielder” or “second fielder,” depending on how quickly you got back. In high school we played baseball. There were three teams in town—high school, the convent girls, town women.

The school furnace exploded when I was in Grade 3. All I remember is Mrs. Larouche throwing her pencil in the air. Mr. Brown did so much more than just teach us our lessons. He introduced us to the world. He taught us about the Group of Seven and other Canadian artists. In Grade 7, we grew an orange tree, and all had a taste of the fruit.

We sang in the junior choir at church and attended CGIT. In the summer, there was CGIT camp, which was held at Wests’ cabin, on Lake Pivabiska. We used to play “tin can” and hide-and-peek at night—usually in Miriam Rasinpera’s backyard, where it was so easy to hide in the shadows. At Halloween, we hurried to Mrs. MacEachern’s house to get a candy apple before they were all gone.

After high school, I took my Grade 13 in Kapuskasing, boarding with the Rosebushes,

along with Gerald Bolduc and Lorraine Kurki. I attended University of Toronto pharmacy school and still work as a pharmacist in Dryden.

One summer I went to Hornepayne for a wedding and was introduced to a blind date, Alex Macdonald. We married in 1973, settled in Kapuskasing, then moved to Red Lake and finally to Dryden, where we have lived for thirty-one years. Our children were born in Dryden: Natalie in 1979 and Scott in 1983. Both went to Carleton University for post-graduate studies and now live in Ottawa.

When my parents were visiting Alex and me in Dryden in the spring of 1977, we took them to the Legion to play bingo. There he saw a man seated at a table who looked vaguely familiar. Dad was seventy. He approached and introduced himself. Of course they knew each other, as they went to school together in Finland. Mom and Dad celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1978. A local newspaper printed a picture of them over the caption, “50-year honeymoon.” They had a good life in Canada, wintering in later years in Florida. Dad passed away in 1984, Mom in 1987.

When I think of the courage my parents had in immigrating to Canada, where they could not even speak the language, I admire their bravery and thank them for the opportunities that they provided for Eero and myself.

