

# ACUA VITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

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## Vesillia

THE TRADITIONAL  
UKRAINIAN WEDDING



# Edmonton Catholic Schools Ukrainian Bilingual Program

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# ACUAVITAE



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PHOTO PROVIDED BY LISA McDONALD



# PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

By Elyse Dzenick



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY LYUDMILA SHEFEL,  
FROM HERITAGE DAYS 2018 & 2019

At one time, wedding celebrations were very elaborate, especially when they involved traditional components from a specific culture. Ukrainian weddings traditionally had up to 24 components. Embroidered cloth, decorated bread, a special wedding wreath and tree, and special clothing—these were just some of the components that were used to celebrate the event.

Weddings often involved the entire village celebrating along with the newlyweds. Many different elements can be observed throughout the entire wedding process, from preparations to the reception. Before a couple is married, however, they must go through the preparation phase of the wedding, beginning with the matchmaking, *svatannia*, and finishing with the invitations to the wedding celebration, *zaproshehnia*.

Traditionally, the first thing a prospective groom needed to do is visit the family of the prospective bride, with his *starosty* (matchmakers) bearing gifts like bread, salt, and a nice bottle of *horilka*—a type of Ukrainian spirit similar to vodka. The groom's *starosty* were often elders who knew Ukrainian wedding rituals inside and out, or sometimes were the groom's closest friends. The first gift presented to the bride's parents is the *horilka*. One *starosta* spoke a few lines asking for a blessing from the prospective bride's parents. If the girl and her family were impressed, the girl would take a *rushnyk* out of her wedding chest and drape it upon the right shoulders of the *starosta*. Next,

the groom and his *starosty* present a *korovai*, a wedding bread, to the bride and her parents. She and her parents also presented a *korovai* to the groom and his party. In the case of refusing a proposal, the girl traditionally presented the boy with a pumpkin and sent him on his way. *Svatannia* usually took place late in the evening, to save the groom from the public embarrassment of a pumpkin, should his proposal be refused. This ritual almost never took place on Wednesdays or Fridays, as these days are traditionally fasting days, and are considered unlucky.

Once the match had been accepted, but before the betrothal period began, the bride and her parents needed a chance to inspect the groom, his family, his house, and his wealth. He must, of course, be able to support his bride once they are married. Parents of the bride and groom began discussions about wedding dowries and where the couple will live after the wedding, along with negotiations regarding livestock, fields, and other products. If the couple were serfs, they would need permission from their landowners to wed. After the bride's parents were satisfied with the inspection, the *ohladyny*, it was time to share the happy news of the couple's betrothal, their *zaruchyny*. In addition to the exchange of rings, the future groom presented his future bride with a red ribbon or a flower, while she gifted him periwinkle leaves. During their *zaruchyny* period, the *narechena* wore a colourful wreath made of flowers, her *vinok*, with long ribbons, so everyone would know she was betrothed.





The final courtship ritual, *umovyny*, saw a wedding date agreed upon and other agreements finalized. Once the proposal had been successful, everyone else involved or attending the wedding all became *starosty* as well. The girl was then be called *narechena* (bride-to-be), while her groom was called *narechenyi* (groom-to-be). Though the couple was now officially betrothed, it was (and still is) critical the *narechenyi* won over his mother-in-law. Traditionally, he brought her a new pair of boots as a sign of respect and sincere devotion.

*Zapovidy* are marriage banns. If a couple prefers a church wedding, as most Ukrainians do, this ritual is absolutely mandatory. Traditionally, the couple presented a chicken and a *korovai* to the priest of the parish they wished to be wedded at. Over the course of three Sunday church services, the priest announced the intentions of the couple to marry. The purpose of this was done not only to inform the public of the upcoming wedding, but also to determine if there were any reasons the couple should not be married. Barring anyone coming forward with protests, the wedding would proceed as planned.


The final ritual of the preparation phase are the wedding invitations, the *zaproshennia*. The evening began at the bride's home. Before sending them on their way, the mother of the bride blessed her daughter and her bridesmaids with holy water. With a *shyshka* (round invitation bread) in hand, they travelled throughout the village. Upon entering each house, the *narechena* presented the *shyshka* and recited three times: "My father and mother invite you, and I invite you with bread and salt, to our wedding," (Kuschnir, 167). As an act of acceptance, the *narechena* was presented with gifts like money, bread, and chickens. The groom and his *druzhby* followed a similar ritual and made their own rounds of invitations separately.

## Dowries

One of the most intimate traditions of Ukrainian weddings involved embroidery as a dowry. Traditionally, a bride would have a wedding chest filled with embroidered shirts, pillows, and varieties of cloth ready to present to her *narechenyi* when the time came. One such dowry was a wedding shirt, embroidered by the bride-to-be worn by her fiancé on their

wedding day. With care and attention to detail, she embroidered flowers and patterns along the collar and sleeves of his shirt. It is said that the more embroidery on a shirt, the more love a bride had for her future husband. Pillows with elaborate embroidery were another common wedding dowry, presented by the bride to the family of the groom. The larger the pillows and the bigger the stack of pillows, the wealthier the bride's family. As the dowry was the responsibility of the bride and her family, it was the groom's responsibility to purchase the rings and his bride's dress and shoes.

*Parents of the bride and groom began discussions about wedding dowries and where the couple will live after the wedding, along with negotiations regarding livestock, fields, and other products.*

The preparations for this grand celebration are complete and it's almost time for the big day—but before the wedding, it is time to celebrate the bride and her transition from girlhood to womanhood. 

## FUN FACTS

The Ukrainian word for weddings, *vesillia* or весілля, is derived from the Ukrainian word for "joy" or "rejoice".

You'll never go hungry at a Ukrainian wedding because they are based on the premise *Stil Hnetsia* (*Zhunayetsia*), which can be translated to "the table must collapse under the weight of the food."

Records of Ukrainian wedding traditions dating as far back as the 11th century.



# *Traditional Ukrainian Wedding Outfits*

TURN OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



#1

CHERNIHIV,  
EASTERN POLISSIA REGION



#2

CHERNIHIV,  
EASTERN POLISSIA REGION



#3

CHERNOBYL,  
CENTRAL POLISSIA REGION



#4

RIVNE,  
WESTERN POLISSIA REGION



#5

WESTERN POLISSIA-VOLHYNIA  
TRANSITION REGION



#6

WESTERN VOLYN





LUHANSK,  
SLOBOZHANSCHYNA OR SLOBODA



KOBELIAKY,  
POLTAVA REGION



MYRHOROD,  
POLTAVA REGION



CHERYHN,  
CHERKASY REGION



KAMYANETS-PODILSKY,  
EASTERN PODILLIA REGION



HUSIATYN,  
WESTERN PODILLIA REGION



KISTMAN,  
BUKOVYNA REGION



HORODENKA,  
POKUTTIA REGION



KOLOMYIA,  
POKUTTIA REGION



HUTSUL AREA,  
TRANSCARPATHIA (RAKHIV)



MIZHHIRIA,  
TRANSCARPATHIA



BILOZERKA,  
KHERSON OBLAST





# UKRAINIAN WEDDINGS TODAY

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ANDREA MURAL, MARRIED IN OHIO, 2014



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY AMBER MALARSKI  
& DARREN HARRINGTON, MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 2016

*By Abby Dewar*

**I**n Ukraine today, it is common to see many different traditions that have recently made their way into modern Ukrainian culture.

For example, a few years ago, people in Ukraine continued to stick to traditional Ukrainian names when it came to naming their children. However, in more recent years many people have chosen to name their children more western names, such as Savannah or Liam. In addition to this, quite a few Ukrainian men have adopted the idea of proposing to their loved ones with a ring, something that had not been a traditional Ukrainian practice in the past. The reason behind these changes in tradition is related to the influence western cultures have on Ukraine and more specifically, the popularity western culture has among young people.

However, despite the fact that Ukrainian culture and traditions are evolving over time, quite a few ancient traditions still remain prevalent, especially among sacred ceremonies such as weddings. Throughout this article, I will touch on a few of these wedding traditions that are still very much alive and a part of Ukrainian culture today.

Traditionally, Ukrainian weddings were week-long affairs. However, over time they have become shorter and now usually only last one day, though in villages it is not uncommon to attend a wedding that lasts an entire weekend. Since most weddings now occur over the span of one day instead of several, the many traditions that were once stretched across an entire week, now need to be fit into a much smaller time frame.

Beginning early in the morning, one important tradition takes place at the



bride's residence. The groom, having already changed into his suit and gotten ready for the day, arrives at the home of the bride. There he is greeted by the bride's youngest family member who proceeds to guard the house or room where the bride is getting ready, so the bride cannot be observed. In typical Ukrainian tradition, the groom is asked several difficult questions about the bride and is given one chance to either answer each question correctly or pay a bribe. In many cases, the questions are very specific and the groom likely wouldn't know the answer to them, which gives him no choice but to pay. Once the groom has either answered all the questions or paid his way to the end, he is allowed to enter the house and see his bride. However, he needs to pass one more test before he can be united with her. The groom needs to ask the parents of the bride for permission to marry their daughter and for a blessing on their marriage. Traditionally, months before the wedding when the groom asks his girlfriend's parents for permission to marry their daughter, if the parents of the bride do not approve of their daughter marrying him, they will give him a pumpkin so that he is not sent away empty-handed. Today this is seen as merely a sign of respect for the groom's future in-laws and will likely

result in them giving him their daughter rather than a pumpkin.

The next event to take place is the wedding ceremony. Ukrainian wedding ceremonies often differ depending on the religious beliefs of the couple and their families, but there is one tradition that almost all weddings are bound to uphold—stepping on the *rushnyk*. A *rushnyk* is an embroidered cloth often hand-embroidered by the bride in the weeks leading up to the wedding. This tradition involves the bride and groom competing with each other to step onto the *rushnyk* first. It is said that whoever steps on it first will be the head of the household and essentially will call the shots in their marriage. Though it is supposed to be a competition, the groom usually lets the bride win out of courtesy and respect for her.


Once the ceremony comes to an end, the reception begins and so do the fun and games. Just when the groom thinks his bride will never leave his side, she is stolen from him and hidden by her bridesmaids in the middle of the festivities. A young man from the bride's side of the family announces that the bride has been stolen and tells the groom how he can get her back. He must either

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Ukrainian wedding ceremonies often differ depending on the religious beliefs of the couple and their families, but there is one tradition that almost all weddings are bound to uphold—stepping on the *rushnyk*.

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perform an embarrassing task in front of the guests, or drink several shots of vodka with his groomsmen in order for his bride to be returned to him. Though it may have started for a more meaningful reason, this tradition is upheld mainly for the entertainment of the guests and gives the men another reason to take a few shots.

Although many aspects of Ukrainian culture have changed overtime, the acts of paying for the bride, stepping on the *rushnyk* and earning back the kidnapped bride are ones that are still commonly practiced across traditional Ukrainian weddings today. In an ever-evolving culture and country, these are the parts of Ukrainian culture that remain constant with each new generation. 

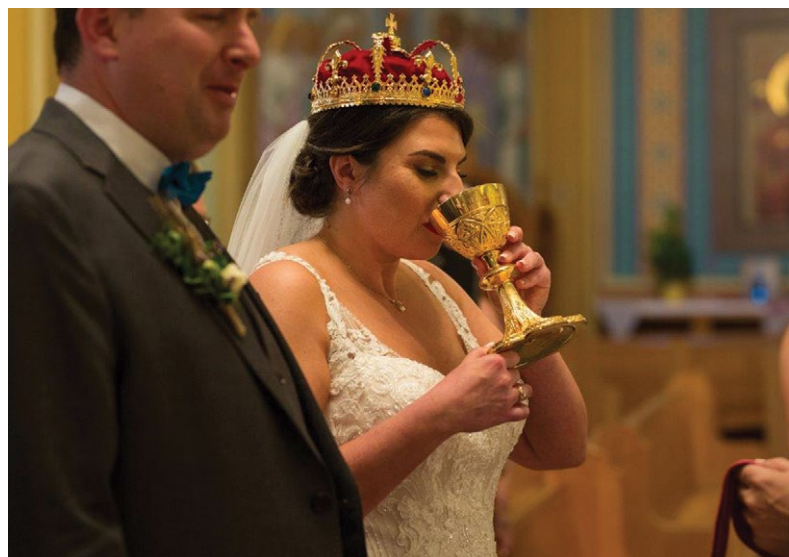
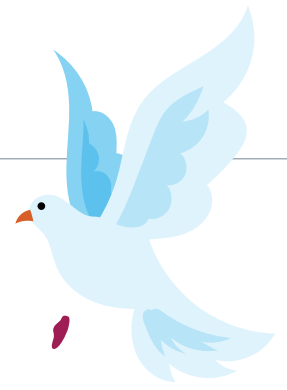


PHOTO SUBMITTED BY AMBER MALARSKI & DARREN HARRINGTON, MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 2016





# The Korovai

By Elyse Dzenick

The *korovai*, or wedding bread, is the most important element in Ukrainian wedding celebrations. It is a critical part of the entire process, from *svantannia*, matchmaking, to the ceremony and reception. The lovebirds which often decorate the bread represent the newlyweds' love for each other. Accompanying the birds atop the *korovai*, are periwinkle, myrtle, pinecones, wild cranberries, and even artificial flowers. Each item is placed there with specific symbolism, and are said to bring a long, happy marriage to the couple.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY CHRISTINE MOUSSIENKO

Traditionally, *korovaii* appear many times during wedding celebrations, and for the day of the wedding, the family of both the bride and groom would bring them. The groom's is larger and sits on the left side of the table. It is decorated with *kalyna* (wild cranberries) and ribbons. The next *korovai*, decorated with *barvinok* (periwinkle), welcomes the guests as they walk in. The bride's *korovai* was commonly decorated with birds in flight. The final *korovai* was decorated much more simply. This was the bread that was cut up and shared with the guests. All of these breads are edible, but it is much more common to preserve them as a keepsake from the wedding and have a separate one for serving the guests. Traditionally, the *korovai* was made by seven women who were all happily married. Each one brings their own supply of water, flour, eggs, and butter. It is important that each ingredient did not come from the same source. In Ukrainian culture, the number seven has been significant since before Christian times, so seven women and ingredients from seven sources were said to bring good health and fortune. For this article, I spoke with three well-known *korovai*

masters, who shared their wealth of knowledge on the subject.

Christine Moussienko has been making *korovaii* for 20 years. She works out of Calgary, Alberta, and began making them as a way to honour her mother: "My mom used to make them for weddings and other breads for church when I was little, so I wanted to continue that tradition from her." Since the wedding bread is defined by a fair amount of detail, the *korovai* is hardly a one-day project.

"I make the birds one night, which takes about two hours. The dough and everything takes about three or four hours. Then you have to decorate it, so another two or three hours after that. I'd say in total, one *korovai* takes about eight hours."

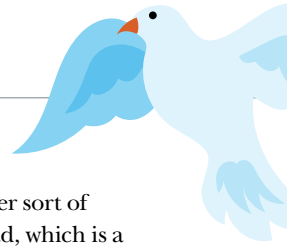
Christine usually makes her birds and the other decorations, like hearts and wedding rings, the night before. The next day is dedicated to the main bread.

1. KOROVAI BY JOYCE SIRSKI-HOWELL
2. KOROVAI BY LISA McDONALD
3. KOROVAI BY LISA
4. KOROVAI BY LISA
5. KOROVAI BY CHRISTINE MOUSSIENKO
6. KOROVAI BY LISA









## Korovai Superstitions

*Korovaii* are traditionally only baked on the Thursday or Friday before the wedding.

One must collect water from seven different sources, before sunset, for good luck and health to follow, since this water will have healing properties.

To prepare the fire in the 'pich' (clay oven), where the *Korovai* will be baking, seven logs, each one from seven different happy households, must first be collected.

At the point of the wedding day where the bride and groom each grab opposite ends of the *Korovai* with one hand and pull it apart, the one who pulls off the biggest piece will be the 'dominant voice' and ultimate decision-maker in their married life.

Occasionally, the maker of the *korovai* will put gold coins inside the dough before baking, for wealth. Other traditions might include placing a walnut in the dough, for intelligence, or a poppy head, for fertility.

After their wedding, some brides will sleep with one of the birds from her *korovai* under her pillow. This is said to be a good luck omen for having children.

She makes the dough, lets it rise for about an hour, punches it down, and repeats this process a couple of times. There cannot be a draught in the kitchen, otherwise the bread will not turn out well. Once it's ready, she takes enough dough out to make the braids that will form the circumference of the bread—this part is her favourite.

"I always say a small prayer before placing it in the oven: God please bless my bread, that it will come out straight, not lopsided, that my braids will not grow apart. May it come out of the oven as beautiful as the couple I am making it for and may they always be strong and love and understand one another forever. Then I cross myself three times and say the Lord's prayer in Ukrainian."

After the bread has finished baking, she places it on a cooling rack, where it will sit until it is ready to be decorated the next day.

Joyce Sirski-Howell of Edmonton, Alberta learned the art of *korovai*-making from experts Eva Tomniuk and Elizabeth Sembaliuk, who was known to most as "Baba Sembaliuk." Joyce has been making *korovaii* for over 30 years, and she decorates hers with traditional designs and details.

"I got a sense of how [Eva Tomniuk and Baba Sembaliuk] did it, and then I just came up with what worked for me, which is kind of like an elaborate *paska*."

At first, her lovebird decorations were all the same size, but as her individuality evolved, Joyce chose to incorporate different sizes of birds to represent the different generations at the wedding celebrations.

"Doves are symbols of love and faithfulness, and also a symbol of uniting heaven and earth. I like the different sizes of birds because the larger ones represent the older people at weddings, the smaller ones represent the younger people, and the tiny ones represent the little children!"

The birds have become her sort of signature. Unlike the bread, which is a softer dough, the dough for the birds must be quite firm, so they don't fall over. To ensure the birds stay white while baking, Joyce does not use an egg wash on her birds. More recently, she has also added artificial flowers for bits of colour. The flowers she chooses—chrysanthemums, periwinkle, and myrtle—represent purity, immortality, love, and fertility.

With her *korovai* business based in Capser, Wyoming, former Edmontonian Lisa McDonald can ship her *korovaii* to you, no matter where you are in the world. For a personal element, Lisa embroiders each *rushnyk* by hand and includes it with each *korovai*.

"I've been making *korovai* for about 20 years, and I make about 25 a year." After 500 *korovaii*, she has created pretty much every decoration, with a variety of types, sizes, and colours. Although Lisa's favourite *korovaii* are more traditionally decorated with pinecones, lovebirds, braids, periwinkle, and myrtle, she takes custom orders as well.

"My favourite *korovaii* are the ones that I make for my friends and family. My cousin got married last year, so I brought one up to Edmonton. The ones with emotional significance to me are always the most memorable."

Recently, a family commissioned Lisa to decorate their *korovai* with the emblem of the family ranch on the top. Another family ordered a *korovai* to reflect their unique family traditions. Lisa placed penguins instead of lovebirds, soccer balls instead of pinecones and placed music notes along with the emblem on the Serbian flag, to honour the family's love for music and their Serbian heritage. Since she couldn't rely on muscle memory to create the different decorations, Lisa was challenged, but in a fun and new way! In addition to making *korovai*, Lisa recently got into making traditional breads for funeral and memorial services.

If you're making your own *korovai*, our ladies tell us that there are a few important things to consider. Firstly, never cry when you're making a *korovai*. Any negative thought, energy, or emotion might ruin the bread and your marriage will be doomed.

"You cannot have anything negative happening when the *korovai* is baking," Lisa warned.

Secondly, the women preparing the *korovai* must all be happily married, and widows and women from broken marriages cannot participate in the baking of the *korovai*. This brings good luck and ensures a happy marriage for the couple, while deterring any negativity. Thirdly, prayer can be helpful for the *korovai* to turn out perfectly. Christine says a prayer as she places it in the oven. Lisa uses a few drops of blessed water in her dough, and she

makes the sign of a cross as she asks for the bread to rise up and rise well as it's baking—a tradition she picked up from her baba: "Rosty velekyi, rosty dobre." She also prays for its safe arrival as she packages the bread up to ship off. To help with the good energy, Lisa also plays Ukrainian music as she prepares her *korovai*.


If you're in the market for a Ukrainian *korovai*, Christine can be contacted by email at [cmoussienko@gmail.com](mailto:cmoussienko@gmail.com). Joyce can also be contacted by email at [joyce.howell@live.ca](mailto:joyce.howell@live.ca). Lisa McDonald's website, [korovai.com](http://korovai.com), is a great resource for anyone looking for more information about Ukrainian weddings, and specifically *korovaii*. Lisa can also be contacted through her website for *korovaii* orders. 

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ANDRIJ HORNJATKEVYČ,  
MARRIED LILEA WOLANSKI IN NEW YORK, 1968



## My Korovai Recipe

Christine Moussienko

I use my Easter Paska recipe as the base for my *korovai*, which is from the Ukrainian Daughters Cookbook. It's the best you can give a Ukrainian bride. I received it from my sister, Sonia.

### Ingredients

- 1/2 cup warm water
  - 1/5 tablespoons of yeast
  - 1 tsp sugar
  - 6 Eggs beaten
  - ½ cup of sugar
  - ½ cup of butter
  - ½ cup of oil
  - 1 tsp salt
  - 3 cups lukewarm water
  - 10-11 cups of flour
1. Combine the warm water, yeast and sugar until they dissolve, about 10 mins.
  2. Combine the softened yeast with the beaten eggs, add sugar, butter, oil and salt and water.
  3. Mix in the flour and knead until smooth and elastic. The dough should be just a little stiffer than for bread.
  4. Cover, let rise in a warm place until double in bulk, punch down and let rise again.

### Ornamental Flowers

- 1 cup boiling water
- 1 tsp oil
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 egg
- 3 cups of flour
- 1 egg beaten for glaze.

I make birds and decorations in advance and let them dry on parchment paper. I use a fine point black felt pen for eyes of the birds. And put toothpick in bird immediately after baking to dry with toothpick already on.

I take out some dough to make braids, which is a favorite decoration of mine, and once I am done the braid, I put on the dough in the containers, and cover and let rise.

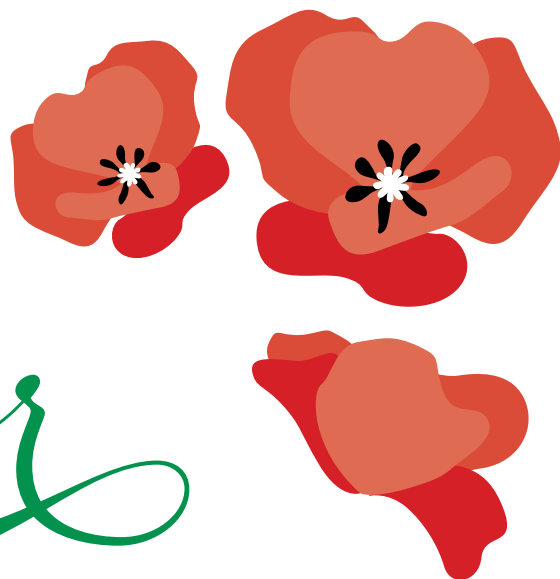
I usually make the birds in advance, as well as crosses, flowers, wedding rings, hearts, depending on the bride's request.

Bake at 325 for 15 minutes (birds) and 350 for forty-five minutes (bread).



# Divych Vechir

## MAIDEN TO BE



By Mara Palahniuk

The night before the wedding there is an air of sadness within the bride's home. It's *divych vechir* – her bridal party. The bride is surrounded by her closest female relatives, friends, and neighbours. Each one is there to provide her blessings and love to the bride before she is given away to her husband. The bride pays her respect to all who came to support her. She bows three times to those older and wiser. To those younger, she bows once. The bride's mama – her mother, and *babusia* – her grandmother, take an extra moment to stroke and kiss her hair, because soon the bride will not be able to showcase her single braid. The single braid represents virginity and innocence, and when the bride is wed, it will be tucked under a *khustka*—a head scarf—never to be seen by the public again. With melancholy, mama reminiscences about the first time she taught her young daughter how to braid her own hair, reminding her that the braid must be accompanied with wishes for good love and faith. Now that the bride will have that love in marriage, she will not need to show her braid in public any longer. *Babusia* sheds a tear, the scene mirroring when she performed the same ceremony during her own daughter's wedding. As she reflects on her own *divych vechir* so many years ago, *babusia*, together with mama, sings a song.

The bridesmaids, to keep the night on track, shuffle the bride away from the somberness and bring everyone to the prepared *barvinok* and *myrt* – the periwinkle and myrtle. These are woven into two wreathes, to be worn as crowns by both the bride and groom during the wedding ceremony. It is important that the crowns are made from *barvinok* and *myrt* because these symbolize ever-lasting life, love, purity, and fertility. *Barvinok* is more traditional than *myrt* because it is indigenous to Ukraine. Sometimes other flowers and herbs are added for their beauty, scent, and symbolism.

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Garlic and coins are sometimes woven into the bride's *vinok*, which are said to ward off any evil forces and bring good luck.

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The *vinkopletennia* – the wreath weaving, begins with the mother-in-law who blesses the marriage. It symbolizes the weaving together of the two families, as the mother of the bride adds branches to the wreath. Next, relatives, bridesmaids, friends, and anyone else continue adding to the wreath. Only the unwed women were allowed to be involved in the weaving. However, the mother-in-law is also allowed to participate in order to

represent acceptance of the bride into her family and the symbolizing of two families weaving together. During the weaving, the others would watch and sing about weaving the *barvinok*.

Entering the house just in time is the bride's *brat* – her brother, who is also the *druzhba* – the best man, bearing a young sapling or the top of a spruce. This role can also be fulfilled by the next important male figure in her life. This gift of a sapling is important because it directs the women to the next activity of the night, the decoration the *derevtse*, or *hillse* – tree or branch. The *derevtse* symbolizes the tree of life and the new family tree that is being established with the coming together of two families in marriage. The women decorate the tree with paper, ribbons, coins, pinecones, candles, flowers, and berries, all symbolizing personal good wishes for the couple. The *druzhba* carries it at the wedding placing it either in the centre of the *korovai* or beside it.

After the completion of the decoration of the *derevtse* the evening comes to completion and all of the bride's friends, neighbours and relatives begin to bestow upon the bride one final blessing and make their way home. All by herself now, the bride takes a deep breath, and runs her hands over her braided hair. Feeling serene, she cherishes these last fleeting moments of her single life. AV



1. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY CHERISSE KILLICK. CHERISSE'S BRIDE'S NIGHT, EDMONTON, 1991; 2. SUBMITTED BY LYUDMILA SHEFEL, FROM HERITAGE DAYS 2018 AND 2019;  
3. SUBMITTED BY DARKA BRODA-MASIUK. ORIANA MASIUK'S BRIDE'S NIGHT, 2013

# Songs for a Bride's Night

*Translations by Andriy Hornjatkevych*

## *BRAIDING THE BRIDE'S HAIR*

...Ой коси, коси ви мої -  
Oh, my braids, my braids,  
Довго служили не будете -  
You will not serve me for long  
Під білий вельон підете -  
You will go under the white veil.  
Більш не підете за дружку -  
No longer will you be a bridesmaid  
Під білий вельон, під хуску -  
[But] you'll be under the white veil,  
under a kerchief...

## *VINKOPLETENNIA (WEAVING THE WREATH)*

Рівняйте барвіночок -  
Smooth (out) the periwinkle  
(Ім'я дівчини) на віночок -  
For [name of betrothed]'s wreath  
Рівняйте його рівненко -  
Smooth it out evenly  
Щоб її було гарненько -  
So that she will be beautiful  
Вона піди поміж люди -  
She will go out among the people  
А нам славно́ки буде -  
And we will be famous."





## BRIDE'S NIGHT



4. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY LYUDMILA SHEFEL, FROM HERITAGE DAYS 2018 AND 2019

5. PHOTO PROVIDED

6. SUBMITTED BY CHERISSE KILICK, 1991

7. SUBMITTED BY DARKA BRODA-MASIUK. ORIANA MASIUK'S BRIDE'S NIGHT, 2013



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many decades of successfully promoting  
and showcasing Ukrainian arts  
and culture in Alberta.

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## THE 24 COMPONENTS OF A UKRAINIAN WEDDING

The Matchmaking  
*Svatannia*

The Inspection  
*Doptyty*

The Betrothal  
*Zaruchyny*

The Wedding Tree  
*Hiltse Or Derevtse*

The Wreaths  
*Vinky*

The Invitation Of The Guests  
*Zaproshuvannia*

The Seating Of The Couple  
As A Sign Of Honour  
*Posad*

The Undoing Of The Bride's Hair  
*Rozpleteny*

The *Korovai*

The Blessing  
*Blahoslovennia*

The Ceremony  
*Vinchannia*

The Return  
*Povernennia*

The Fetching  
*Poiizd*

The Introduction Of  
Other Girls As A Distraction  
*Predstavliuvannia*

The Reconciliation  
*Pomyrennia*

The Sharing Of The Bread  
*Rozpodil*

The Departure Of  
The Bride From Her Home  
*Vid'izd*

The Interception  
*Pereima*

The Reception  
*Zustrich*

The Wedding Night  
*Komora*

The Announcement  
Of A Successful Wedding Night  
*Perezva*

The Supplements  
*Prydatky*

The Presentation  
*Perepii*

The Gypsyng Or Merrymaking  
*Tsyhanshchyna*

1. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ANDRIJ HORNJATKEVYČ, MARRIED LILEA WOLANSKI, NEW YORK, 1968

2. SUBMITTED BY IRENE MAZURENKO, MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 2010

3. SUBMITTED BY KIM HULA-HETU. DOROTHY & WILLIAM HULA, MARRIED GRASSLAND, AB, 1960

4. PHOTO PROVIDED

5. SUBMITTED BY DARKA BRODA-MASIUK

6. SUBMITTED BY WALTER & SYLVIA KILLICK, MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 1965

7. SUBMITTED BY SLAVKA SHULAKEVYCH, MARRIED YAREMA IN WINNIPEG, 1975





PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ALICE MUCHA. ALICE AT HER PEREPIY IN EDMONTON, 1953

*Alice Mucha,  
Married 1953*

*Arlene Tomnuk,  
Married 1970*

*Darka Broda-Masiuk,  
Married 1980*

*Natalie Prytuluk & Phil Sembaliuk,  
Married 1989*

*Tanya & Paul Hyska,  
Married 2001*

*Borys Tarasenko,  
Married 2016*

Ukrainian Canadians experienced discrimination for many years in Ukrainian diaspora, and especially in rural Alberta. Because partaking of any Ukrainian tradition would explicitly demonstrate how Ukrainians were 'different', many traditions, including elaborate wedding traditions, were not passed down generations.

As the expression of Ukrainian culture became more accepted in society, traditions that were forgotten slowly began to reappear in modern-day celebrations. Today, many of the traditions discussed in this issue are commonly seen in Ukrainian-Canadian wedding celebrations. With the help of some people who were married in different decades, we can see how each wedding demonstrates a unique blend of personal, cultural, and traditional elements. I asked several people, who were married in different decades, a series of questions about each of their weddings. Their answers are recorded on the following pages.



## WHO HELPED WITH WEDDING PREPARATIONS?

*Alice Mucha*

My parents and my husband's parents both helped out.

*Arlene Tomnuk*

My mother helped with plans, as did my sisters, who were my bridesmaids. My husband's family had input, some special requests for food and drink and were very helpful. The wedding was very friendly and we had no issues with anything. We were married at St Francis of Assisi by Father Anthony, a very kind priest.

*Natalie Prytuluk & Phil Sembaliuk*

Phil's Baba – Elizabeth Sembaliuk made the *korovai* and miniature *korovaii* for each place setting. Baba also wove the embroidered *rushnyk* that we knelt on and that bound our hands for the church ceremony

Phil's Mother – Patricia Sembaliuk, Sister Andrea Sembaliuk and Larisa Sembaliuk-Cheladyn helped to make all the miniature *korovaii*.

Natalie's Mother and sisters Leda Prytuluk and Alana Prytuluk and Oma Anna Starchuk helped to decorate all the miniature *korovai* with *barvinok*.

Phil designed the wedding invitation using his Tato, Paul Sembaliuk's, Trypillian graphic. Phil screen printed all of the wedding invitations and reply cards as well as a *rozpys* styled backdrop for the head table at his printing business.

Ken Linkewich, from Vegreville Alberta, owner of Margo's Flowers, was hired to design the bouquets, lapels and floral arrangements.

Phil's brother Meron Sembaliuk painted the icons and carved the frames. The icons were also used in the church ceremony. Baba also wove the *rushnyk* for each icon.

Phil's Baba had all of the *barvinok* from her garden used in the *Vinkopletennia* and to decorate the *korovai* and the mini *korovaii*.

*Tanya & Paul Hyshka*

We are very blessed to have a strong community of friends and family. When we were engaged, we were both still dancing with Shumka so naturally our Shumka family along with our immediate families were a big part of helping us prepare for our wedding day. Paul attended a private High School in Roblin, Manitoba so many of his brotherhood friends were part of our wedding day as well. It was touching to see so many of Paul's High School friends sing at our wedding ceremony. My parents and siblings along with Paul's family were a huge part of our day. We are still so grateful to this day for all of their help to make our wedding day so memorable.

*Borys Tarasenko*

We certainly had a ton of help from friends and family preparing for the wedding. Everyone with a wedding-related skill had that skill put to use: My aunt Nadia baked the wedding cake, our friend Megan with floral arrangement experience did the flowers, my brother-in-law Jonathan with audio tech experience ran karaoke at the end of the reception... It was all hands on deck and we're so grateful for everyone who helped.



LEFT TO RIGHT: PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ARLENE & MARVIN TOMNUK. ARLENE & MARVIN MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 1970. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY DARKA BRODA-MASIUK, DARKA'S KOROVAI, 1980





LEFT TO RIGHT: PHOTO SUBMITTED BY DARKA BRODA-MASIUK, MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 1980. SUBMITTED BY DARKA BRODA-MASIUK, 1980. SUBMITTED BY NAT & PHIL SEMBALIUK, MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 1989

## IF YOU HAD ONE, WHAT DID YOU DO FOR YOUR BACHELOR/BACHELORETTE NIGHT?

### Arlene Tomnuk

We didn't have bachelorette parties back then, but they did have a poker night for my husband to be.

### Darka Broda-Masiuk

I had several wedding showers and a traditional *vinkopletennia*. The *vinkopletennia* included the making of the wedding wreaths, the making of the wedding garland of fortune and the wedding tree with all the wishes. My brother combed my hair and my mother placed the flower wreath on my head. Traditional *vinkopletennia* songs were sung throughout.

### Natalie Prytuluk & Phil Sembaliuk

Phil had three bachelor parties. One thrown by his cousin for work related people. A hunting bachelor party thrown by his best man. A Cheremosh dancer bachelor get-together thrown by one of his groomsmen. Natalie had a *Vinkopletennia* with friends and family at her parents' house. This included the weaving of the *vinky* for the bride and groom, a *vinok* for the *korovai*, and garlands of *barvinok* for the head table. There was also a tree of good wishes where each guest wrote a wish for the couple and hung it on the wedding tree. Natalie also had 6 bridal showers prior to the *vinkopletennia* for all the many invited guests and family including a Shumka bridal shower.

### Tanya & Paul Hyshka

The months leading up to our wedding were so special with many celebrations! One particular wedding shower was a night hosted by my Shumka girlfriends. Each friend put together a special written memory about our time together

and shared it during the evening. The memory was then hung on a beautiful tree that Paul and I were given to place in our new home. We were also gifted a traditional Ukrainian print created by artist Leda Prytyluk. It still hangs in our home today! My *vinkopletennia* was held a few days prior to my wedding with my mama, Krystyna Sendziak, mother-in-law, Helen Hyshka, sisters, Natasha, Andrea and Nicole, along with my bridesmaids. During the evening we sang traditional Ukrainian songs and each person was able to help weave the two *vinky* Paul and I wore during the wedding ceremony. The wreaths were made out of myrtle and symbolizes everlasting love and new beginnings. We still have our wreaths that are now dried and placed in our wedding chest.

### Borys Tarasenko

I thought we were going golfing, but my groomsmen woke me up at 6am, dressed in Ghostbusters costumes and blaring the Ghostbusters theme song. We reshot the entirety of the Ghostbusters film in one day using my friends as the cast, and myself as the lead. It was a ton of fun. Filmed at lots of beautiful locations around Edmonton incorporating lots of handmade props, and I was constantly being surprised by old friends joining the project along the way. In the end we came very close to completely reshooting the film in one day (except for a scene or two, shot after the wedding). Our "Ghostmobile", a 1985 Chevy Citation with racing stripes, would reappear at our wedding as a prop for the wedding photos, and also drove us as a couple to our reception. After the wedding we had a little screening for the completed film, and Vue Weekly ran a piece on the project in one of its final issues.



## WHAT MADE YOUR WEDDING UNIQUELY YOUR WEDDING (PERSONAL TOUCHES)?

### Arlene Tomnuk

We were married on Halloween night, so that made it very unique! I think flower choices of yellow and orange flowers made it my own.

### Natalie Prytuluk & Phil Sembaliuk

CYMK choir sang at our wedding – it was really beautiful and outside the church we had a folk music band from Phil's Cheremosh and CYMK days playing out front. Having live music was really important to us.

We had three priests at our wedding. Father Kryschuk was a good friend of Natalie's dad and priest at St. Andrew's Parish. Father Demjan Hohol was a friend of ours, and Father Ravliuk was the Parish priest of St. John's Cathedral where we got married. Each priest took part during different times in the ceremony.

Our first dance was to the song "I'd be Surprisingly Good for You" from the musical Evita. This was the first musical we went to together, and we took ballroom dance lessons before our wedding to learn to tango. We purchased the musical score for our band "Dumka" to learn before the wedding so they could play this song live.

Having a live band was wonderful.

We had Katrusia Stephaniuk come to Phil's parent's house and do a wine tasting for us before our wedding so we could select good wine to serve with dinner. I was just beginning to learn about and enjoy fine wine so this was important to me.

Shumka performed Hopak for our wedding and that was an absolute joy and a highlight of the evening. The *kolomeika* was pretty fantastic too as we had dancers from both Shumka and Cheremosh in the crowd.

One of the other special things was having Con and Vera Semeniuk, who owned House of Gems, work with Phil to design our wedding rings. They are unique and beautiful, made out of white gold. I still get comments on my engagement and wedding bands to this day.

We had Gene Zwozdesky as our emcee. He was a good family friend and of course, an excellent speaker. He kept things light, lively and most importantly, on time!

### Tanya & Paul Hyshka

Our wedding was celebrated on Thanksgiving weekend, so it was a beautiful way to spend time with family and friends. My mama and mother-in-law created cute jars of cranberry chutney as a thank you for our guests. Both of our families

love to make preserves so this was a special touch! As well, we wanted Paul's family priest to be part of the ceremony, so we cordially invited Monsignor Boyachuk from Dauphin, Manitoba to be part of our ceremony. As a gift from our Shumka family, we had over fifty of our closest friends from Shumka perform the traditional Wedding *Hopak*.

### Borys Tarasenko

Instead of getting engagement photos we chose a handful of artists that we liked and commissioned them to create portraits of us as a couple. We then used those images on our wedding invitations, and also displayed the original artworks at the wedding reception. Our reception was vaguely horse-themed. When we made our first entrance to the hall as a couple we did so dressed in big rubber horse masks. Hilary's family baked these amazing little horse-shaped sugar cookies to give out as wedding favours. Also, we had a set of halved coconuts at each table, and made "clip-clopping" with them a substitute for the usual glass clinking to get the couple to kiss. After the dance Hilary and I surprised the guests with a professional fireworks show outside and we planned a signature shot of the night for the bar: "Chocolate Cake" - one part vodka, one part Frangelico with a lemon wedge bite to finish.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:  
PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY NATALIE & PHIL.  
NAT & PHIL'S CEREMONY, RECEPTION,  
AND KOROVAI, 1989





## WHAT UNIQUE FAMILY TRADITIONS DID YOU INCLUDE?

### *Darka Broda-Masiuk*

The wedding *rushnyky* were embroidered by my mother and my husband was presented with an embroidered shirt made by my mother. My bridal veil headpiece was made with real flowers. The icons used in the family blessing were old family ones. My family traditions were based on Ukrainian wedding traditions that were passed on to my parents and onto me. My parents talked about the weddings that took place in their respective villages in Ukraine.

### *Natalie Prytuluk & Phil Sembaliuk*

The most important thing for both of our families was to make sure close family was invited to the wedding – this meant second cousins too. There were about 400 people for dinner and another 200 afterwards for the reception.

### *Tanya & Paul Hyshka*

Before the wedding ceremony, both Paul and I received a blessing from our parents. Paul's parents and grandparents presented him with the icon of Jesus. A boutonniere of myrtle and coins were placed on his lapel symbolizing good fortune and love as he stepped into the next stage of his life. At my parents home, I also received a blessing and was presented with a *kolach* and the icon of Mother Mary. My mama placed my veil on my head with a small bundle of myrtle under it symbolizing love and purity. Paul and I have been married for almost 19 years and in every home we have moved into we have our wedding icons of Mother Mary and Jesus hanging in our home. Our faith has been the foundation of our love and marriage and we are so grateful for the many blessings in our lives.

PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY TANYA & PAUL HYSHKA, MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 2001 FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BLESSING OF TANYA, CEREMONY OF TANYA & PAUL; SHUMKA PERFORMING AT THEIR RECEPTION; TANYA'S MOM GETTING HER READY; SHUMKA PERFORMING; TANYA & PAUL HYSHKA



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PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY BORYS TARASENKO, MARRIED HILARY IN EDMONTON, 2016

## WHAT UKRAINIAN TRADITIONS DID YOU INCORPORATE INTO YOUR WEDDING?

### Alice Mucha

Our wedding reception was held at a hall in Devon, Alberta because it could accommodate a lot of people. We had what was called *perepyi* or the presentation. All the guests would come and congratulate the couple and with the couple, they would have a shot of alcohol. Instead of gifts, they would bring money for us. The best men were pouring the drinks and drinking with the guests because you have to say “dai Bozhe” as a toast. Some of the guests went through the line twice, maybe because they forgot they went or something, but it was good because we got a little bit more money. Pretty soon, the best men were drunk, and my husband ended up taking over to pour the shots. He didn't drink with every guest though, otherwise that could've been a disaster.

### Arlene Tomnuk

My future father-in-law insisted that we had bottles of whiskey on each table, his tradition was to have plenty of alcohol. Things were very different back then! He also wanted *perishke* made by his cousin. They were delicious.

### Borys Tarasenko

The ceremony was a traditional Ukrainian Catholic union. We started with an exchange of icons at my parents' home, followed by a walk to St. George's Church where the ceremony took place presided over by Father Danylo Kuc. The outstanding St. George parish choir sang for the service. It was beautiful and we still feel so lucky. And to our non-Ukrainian friends and family we apologize for the length of the service but hey, it's kind of a special day. Euphoria played for our reception, and it was a heck of a polka party. On the head table we had a lovely *korovai* baked by my mother, and it was important to us to have delicious *varenky* as part of the dinner.

### Darka Broda-Masiuk

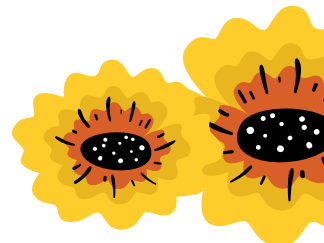
We had all the symbolic religious traditions: the starosty and the icons, the embroidered towels, the crowning, the common cup, the joining of the hands, the ceremonial walk, the *vyvid*. At the reception, we had the greeting at the door with bread and salt and the veil dance.

### Natalie Prytuluk & Phil Sembaliuk

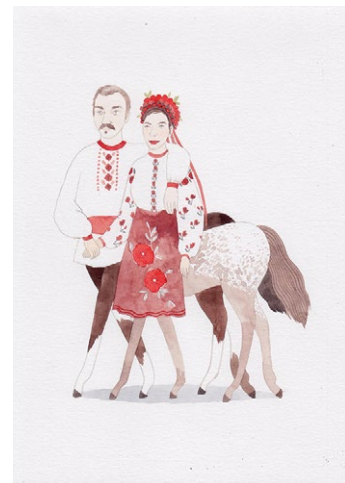
We had a traditional Ukrainian wedding ceremony. We had a church booklet that described the traditions during the ceremony. We also had shots and a *kolach* in the receiving line, which was our *perepyi*.

### Tanya & Paul Hyshka

For the church ceremony we had two Ukrainian *rushnyky* made of white and gold woven by Pani Elizabeth Holinaty. One was placed at the head of the altar where we took our first steps as husband and wife together. Tradition is whoever steps on the *rushnyk* first will be dominant in the marriage. Paul and I looked at each other and stepped onto the *rushnyk* together! Another tradition is to walk around the tetrapod (small altar) three times hand in hand symbolizing the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). These *rushnyky* are in our home and have been used during the sacraments of Baptism and First Holy Communion for our three children, Cassian, Ella, and Luke.







PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY BORYS TARASENKO. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BLESSING OF BORYS & HILARY; CUTTING THEIR CAKE; ENGAGEMENT PORTRAIT OF BORYS & HILARY

## WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE/YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF YOUR WEDDING?

### *Alice Mucha*

It was raining the day of our wedding, and our car ended up getting stuck. We had to hire a policeman at the wedding to prevent any party crashers, which was pretty common back then. He tried to push the car out, but ended up getting completely covered in mud, from head to toe. That was memorable for sure.

### *Arlene Tomnuk*

I remember it as being a wonderful time with family and friends with lots of all the good things in life. My future sister-in-law sang Ave Maria during the service which was quite beautiful.

### *Darka Broda-Masiuk*

The actual ceremony. I loved the symbolism, the traditions, and the joy of it all. At the reception, my favourite part was the veil dance and the *perepyi*. It allowed us to talk to everyone there. We had 406 guests, so it was a great opportunity to catch up with, and even meet some of the guests I didn't know.

### *Natalie Prytuluk & Phil Sembaliuk*

Phil: I remember the looks of happiness and joy as we walked out of the church to Mnohaia Lita – people with tears and smiles. It was joyful.

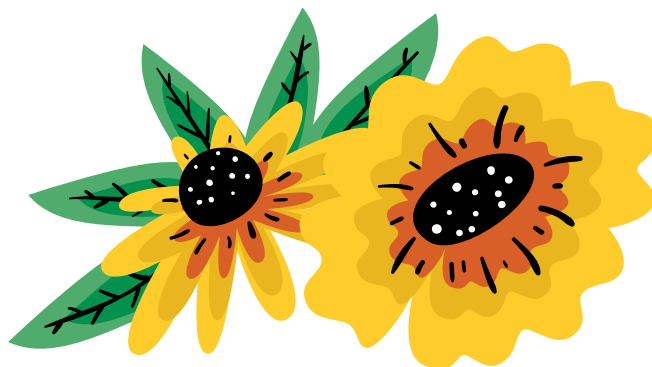
Natalie: My favourite part was coming out of the church and standing at the top step looking down at all the guests, hearing the folk music from the little band and then everyone started to cheer.

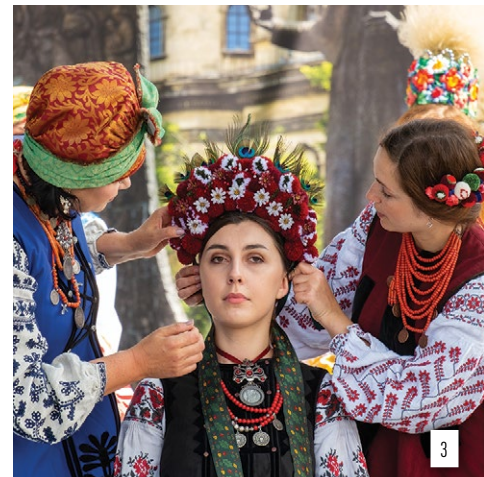
### *Tanya & Paul Hyshka*

Our most memorable moment was our wedding ceremony at St. Basil's Ukrainian Catholic Church. As we turned around at the end of our ceremony and looked at the amazing community of friends and family who traveled and attended our wedding day, we could not put into words the love we felt by everyone present. Another magical moment was our first dance! We waltzed to our favourite singer and song-writer, Mr. John Denver who composed Annie's song, known for the lyrics "You fill up my senses..." It was the perfect song that our children are now learning how to play on their violin and guitar.

### *Borys Tarasenko*

I have to say it was surprising everyone with a professional fireworks show toward the end of the night. It's a pretty special experience having everyone close to you and your partner all together in one place, and I loved that they got to have a colourful and exciting shared experience. If I have any final advice to give regarding wedding planning... it's to only put effort into the elements you really care about, and make sure they happen your way.





# The Wedding Icons

By Joyanne Rudiak

1. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ANDRIJ HORNJATKEVYČ. ANDRIJ'S PEREPIY; 2. PHOTO PROVIDED;  
3. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY LYUDMILA SHEFEL. HERITAGE DAYS 2018 & 2019; 4. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ANDRIJ HORNJATKEVYČ. PEREPIY IN NEW YORK, 1968

*Step inside a Ukrainian household and you will probably see these items: a picture (or several) of Taras Shevchenko; wheat, either bound in a sheaf or woven into some sort of design and hung on the wall; pysanky (decorated eggs) on display, perhaps in a glass case or hung in a frame; embroidered table runners, or rushnyky; and icons.*

Icons, or holy images, have a special place in Ukrainian Christian spirituality, as evidenced by the interiors of Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox churches alike. Images of significant moments in Christ's life, Mary's life, and of the saints traditionally cover every square inch of a church's nave and sanctuary, giving the experience of being in Heaven on Earth. Icons are often described as "windows into Heaven," offering a glimpse of eternity to the faithful who pray with them. It is no surprise, therefore, that icons have a role to play in the many celebrations and services held in the church, including weddings.

Ukrainian weddings are chock-full of symbols and rituals that add layers of meaning to something that has become nothing more than a contract in some circles. The gifting of icons to the couple is one such ritual. Wedding

icons come in pairs, one exhibiting Jesus Christ, the other portraying the Mother of God and Christ Child. Both icons are written in the same style so they obviously belong together as a pair, much like how a bride and groom, though different, are now bound together to become one.

In some traditions, the godparents present the couple with the wedding icons, while in others the parents are the ones to gift them, passing them along from previous weddings in the family. If the icons are new, they are to be blessed by a priest before they are gifted, so they can be used along with the *korovai* in the parents' *blahoslovennia*, or blessing, of the couple. This blessing can happen previous to the wedding day, on the wedding day itself, and with the bride and groom separate or together – plenty of options! The blessing offers best wishes to the couple for fruitfulness of the new marriage,



# ICONS

including a long life, happiness, love, and many children. When the icons are included, the blessing takes on an extra layer by wishing the couple to rely wholly on God throughout their marriage.

Once everyone arrives at the church for the ceremony, the *starosty* process down the aisle bearing the icons. They place them on the tetrapod, or little altar, at the front of the church, nestled in with the Gospel book, crowns or wreaths, and the common cup. Once the ceremony finishes and the bride and groom have successfully declared their love and fidelity to one another, the icons transition to their new home with the newlywedded couple.

These wedding icons traditionally start the couple's icon corner, an

eastern-facing corner in their home, that becomes the hub of prayer in the household. East is the same direction a church's sanctuary faces, and signifies the direction whence Christ will come again. Standing in front of the wedding icons is where the couple gathers together to grow in faith and love, and reminds them of the promises made on their wedding day: to love and trust God, inviting Him into their relationship, and work for the salvation of the other, all the days of their lives. Perhaps one day they will pass on their wedding icons to one of their children, continuing the tradition of faith and culture Ukrainians do so well. AV

TOP TO BOTTOM: PHOTO SUBMITTED BY DARKA BRODA-MASIUK. BLESSING OF ORIANA MASIUK & MARKIAN SILECKY, 2013; PHOTO PROVIDED.



## What are YOU reaching for?

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PHOTO SUBMITTED BY CHRISTINA & KRISTOPHER CSERNYANSKI,  
MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 2016

# THE WEDDING CEREMONY VINCHANNIA

*By Lyrissa Sheptak*

**U**krainian weddings are legendary. Lauded as exceptional celebrations, traditionally the big event can last up to a week by the time the various rituals have been completed. Ukrainian weddings conjure up images of hundreds of people gathered under one roof. Some singing beloved folk songs about brown eyebrowed maidens or forbidden love; while others grab partners twirling them on the dance floor to their favorite polkas performed by the band. Not surprisingly, one of the main attractions

for guests are the Ukrainian culinary delights made lovingly by the local *baby*; and imbibing in only the smoothest *horilka* (vodka). It is an event that all people should experience at least once in their lives. A source of pride for the Ukrainian community – wedding families painstakingly plan every detail, while guests excitedly prepare for it in great anticipation.

But equal to peoples' zest for a fun wedding celebration, is the understanding and respect for the

church ceremony where the happy couple affirms their marriage vows before the community and in the eyes of God. In the not-so-distant past, Ukrainians believed that a "proper" wedding entailed traditional folk customs which could not be overlooked, like kidnappings, ransoms, and the fashioning of *vinky* (floral head wreaths). Yet to the Christian faithful, the most important element is having the marriage blessed by the Almighty. To Byzantine Christians, marriage is more than a civil contract and ancient



# CEREMONY

customs. The ceremony is a sacrament steeped in church tradition and infused with sacred scripture – words uttered by God Himself through the church.

When guests walk into a Byzantine church, they are pleasantly barraged by sights of flickering candles, mottled hues of sunlight beaming through stained-glass windows, and icons congregated much like the crowds that surrounded Christ when He preached. If the wedding couple decides to celebrate with the Divine Liturgy, guests will hear the ancient chants of the choir, and smell the spicy aroma of the incense as its billowing smoke ascends to heaven from the thurible on the rising prayers of the devoted. As guests step into the holy house of God, His presence calls for reverence and solemnity. The Sacrament of Matrimony, instituted by Christ, is a calling by God. It is a couple's declaration of lifelong love and faithfulness to one another. Just as the couple enters into a covenant with each other, so too do they enter into one with God. The married couple commits themselves to one another and God, and God commits Himself to the married couple for life, perfecting their love (with their cooperation) throughout the journey of their marriage.

## Betrothal and Declaration of Intent

A wedding ceremony in a Byzantine church has two parts: the betrothal and the wedding. The betrothal takes place first. Unlike Latin Rite and civil weddings where brides are typically walked down the aisle by their fathers, Byzantine weddings begin with the bride and groom together, as equal partners, at the narthex (the vestibule doors area at the rear of the church). In Ukraine's distant past, betrothals were done prior to the wedding day. Often, now at the church ceremony, the bride and groom stand together and declare to God and their guests that they have come to the marriage by their own free will. The priest then makes the sign of the cross



over each of their heads, performing a blessing.

## Exchange of Rings

Next, the priest takes out the wedding rings, blesses them, and places them on the fourth finger of the right hand of the groom, then he does the same for the bride. The rings are symbolic of everlasting love and the couples' indissoluble commitment to each other. In Canada, rings are traditionally placed on the left hand.

## Candles

At this point, the bride and groom are given two candles which will be used throughout the ceremony. Candles are a symbol of joy and warmth, and act as a reminder that Christ should always light the way of their lives. Like the biblical maidens who kept their lanterns full of lamp oil so they could receive the bridegroom, so too will Christ bless the bride and groom throughout their marriage if they are faithful to each other and Christ during their lives, keeping Christ as their beacon.

After the betrothal, the priest takes a hand of both the bride and groom, wraps them with a *rushnyk* and ushers the couple down the aisle towards the tetrapod (small altar in the nave).

## Matrimonial Icons

Prior to the betrothal, as the guests wait for the ceremony to begin, chosen *starosty* carry two icons down the aisle and place

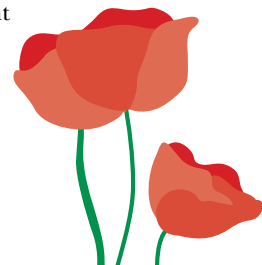


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
PHOTO SUBMITTED BY AMBER MALARSKI & DARREN HARRINGTON; ANDRIJ HORNJATKEVYČ, MARRIED LILEA WOLANSKI IN NEW YORK, 1968; CHRISTINA CSERNYANSKI AT HER *VYVID*, EDMONTON 2016

them on the tetrapod. Traditionally, matrimonial icons are passed down through the generations, and parents will gift them to the bride and groom prior to the wedding. Typically, the groom receives the icon of Jesus, "Our Lord Teacher," while the bride receives an icon of the Virgin Mary, "Our Lady, the Mother of God." The icons are blessed and after the wedding, the married couple hangs them in their house in a place of prominence where they will act as a constant reminder of the sanctity of marriage and family life.

## The *Rushnyk*

*Rushnyky* are ceremonial cloths that have ancient beginnings. Intricately embroidered with symbols specific to the person who receives it, these special cloths accompany the individual through all the important stages of his or her life. The cloth is one solid piece, and like fate and





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY ELIZABETH PSHEBYLO, SASKATOON, 2019;  
CHERRISSE KILLICK & TIM DZENICK, EDMONTON 1991;  
AMBER MALARSKI & DARREN HARRINGTON, EDMONTON 2016

time, it, “moves ever forward, never to be interrupted.” In the case of weddings, they are used for the tying of hands, and stepping and kneeling on. The *rushnyk* is spread on the ground before the altar, symbolizing the prayer that the couple may never know poverty or misfortune. This same *rushnyk* will frame the icon in their home after the wedding or be used to cover their Easter basket. During the wedding, the couple will step on the *rushnyk* together symbolizing their first steps in their marriage.

## The Crowning

The crowning of the bride and groom has long been considered the climax of the wedding ceremony. The most solemn point of the ceremony, wreaths of periwinkle and myrtle, or crowns of gold (whichever the wedding couple prefers, or the church provides) are placed on the heads of the bride and groom. With these crowns, the couple

enters into partnership where they are now declared the king and queen of their own households -- the domestic church. As king and queen, they owe it to Christ to live out the Sacrament of Marriage with honor and love.

One day, the Holy Trinity will crown the bride and groom in heaven with honour and glory, “rewarding them for their commitment, faith and unselfish love for one another.”

At this point in the service, the bride and groom each places a hand on the Holy Bible and exchanges their vows before God. Their marriage officially becomes a sacrament blessed by the Holy Trinity.

*“And though one can overpower him  
who is alone, two can resist him.*

*A cord of three strands is  
not quickly broken”.*

*Ecclesiastes 4:12*

## The Epistle, the Gospel, and the Common Cup

The scriptures read aloud during the service are meant to remind the bride and groom of the Christian virtues that they should endeavor to obtain. On their journey towards holiness, the married couple is encouraged to treat each other

with humility, kindness, understanding, forgiveness, and above all, love.

After the crowning, the priest offers a chalice of sweet wine to the couple where they are required to take three sips each (symbolic of the Holy Trinity). This is a reminder of Jesus’s first miracle at the wedding in Cana. Just as Jesus changed the water into wine in Cana (sanctioning weddings), so too does Christ transform the everyday water of the bride and groom into something more sacred.

Drinking from the common cup also symbolizes the joys and sorrows the couple will share for the rest of their marriage. It signifies the unity of marriage and how each person is meant to lighten the burdens of the other.

## The Dance of Isaiah

With hands bound with a *rushnyk* as a sign of unity, the bride and groom then follow the priest, circling the tetrapod three times. The tetrapod holding the matrimonial icons and the Bible demonstrates the importance of keeping God at the center of their lives. The circular pattern signifies that sacraments are eternal. This ceremonial “dance” is a reminder that, “God, His Kingdom, and His righteousness should be the first priority in their lives. It is the center around which married life revolves.”

Marriage will have its ups and downs, and the couple is part of marriage much like Christ sacrificed Himself for us. This Dance of Isaiah presents the married couple as an “icon of Christian marriage” where they hope to dance with Christ for all of eternity. This “dance” around the tetrapod becomes the first steps in their journey in the sacrament of marriage.

## The Benediction

At the end of the ceremony, the crowns are removed, and the priest blesses the groom saying: “Be magnified, O Bridegroom, as



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Abraham, and blessed as Isaac, and increased as was Jacob. Go your way in peace, performing in righteousness the commandments of God."


Then, turning to the bride the priest continues by saying, "And you, O Bride, be magnified as was Sarah, and rejoiced as was Rebecca, and increased as Rachel, being glad in your husband, keeping the paths of the Law, for so God is well-pleased."

## Bride's Blessing

Prior to the signing of the documents, the bride and her mother are ushered before the icon of the Blessed Virgin where the bride kneels and offers flowers to Our Lady. She then receives a special blessing from the priest. After the blessing, a scarf is wrapped around the head of the bride. This act, called *vyvid*, signifies the bride's transition from girlhood into womanhood. Now a married woman, the bride would traditionally keep her hair covered outside the home.

## Presentation to the Guests

Upon her return to the altar, the bride and groom, now as a married couple, turn to face their guests. As husband and wife, they are king and queen of their own domestic kingdom – the home. They are to rule it, "with wisdom, righteousness, and integrity," which can only be accomplished through Christ's blessings and graces, their dedication to their faith, and the prayers and support of the families and community. As they exit, their guests sing the celebration anthem, *Mnohaia Lita* meaning "Many Years".

With the marriage now blessed by Almighty God, the bride and groom are officially husband and wife. They stand as one body and soul, transformed into a picturesque living icon of the domestic church. Together, they begin their journey braided into a strong relationship with each other and Christ. 



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY DARKA BRODA-  
MASIUK. *VYVID* OF ORIANA MASIUK;  
CEREMONY OF ORIANA AND MARKIAN  
SILECKY, EDMONTON, 2013; SUBMITTED BY  
AMBER MALARSKI & DARREN HARRINGTON,  
MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 2016



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# THE RECEPTION



By Tamara Soltykevych

The traditions involved in a Ukrainian wedding are vibrant and colourful. They have been passed on through the ages, as far back as pagan times, and over time were blended in with Christian traditions. Many of these customs are still practised both in Ukraine and in North America.

It is fairly well established that Ukrainians love to drink, sing, and dance, and overall have a great time. And there is no more fitting occasion for all of these than a Ukrainian wedding.

When guests arrive at the reception hall, they are often greeted with a shot of vodka and a piece of Ukrainian wedding bread. Drinking in Ukraine has long been a historical tradition. Guests will toast the bride and groom, and after every toast, everyone is expected to take a drink. To encourage the couple to stand up and kiss, guests will call out “*hirko, hirko*,” meaning “bitter.” The “sweet” kiss is meant to soothe the “bitter.”

No Ukrainian wedding would be complete without music to celebrate the wonderful occasion. During the ceremony, the choir sings religious choral music that beautifully underscores the significance of the sacrament of marriage. At the reception, instruments can be added. Some couples choose to include traditional Ukrainian instruments such as a *bandura* (a string instrument similar to a lyre), *tsymbaly* (dulcimer) or *sopilka* (flute), especially for the processional. In addition to singing, there often will be a live band keeping the party going through the night. A Ukrainian live band can mix up its playlist between folk music and more modern dance music. The most common

song to hear at a wedding is *Mnohaia Lita*. This is sung at the end of the ceremony, after the couple has been pronounced husband and wife and may also be sung randomly throughout the reception. It is a joyous song meant to wish the couple many happy years together, and it is not uncommon for random bursts of *mnohaia lita* to pop up throughout the evening.

One folk tradition in Ukraine involves the presentation of the gifts, known as *perepyi*. Guests will express their best wishes and present their gifts to the newlyweds at this time. Sometimes the guests will also tell a joke or sing a song as they present their gift. Some guests give small household items while others give cash. The happy couple thanks each guest and offers them a drink and piece of *korovai*.

Modern weddings in Ukraine have adopted some Western traditions, including the first dance of the newlyweds. They usually dance by themselves, with everyone else watching from the sidelines, to a waltz or romantic love song of their choosing. Sometimes, the couple works with an instructor to choreograph their first dance.

As the celebrations continue into the night and guests burn up the dance floor, eventually a *kolomeika* takes place. Guests join hands in a circle to get themselves warmed up, and then some hidden

talents are revealed. Guests take turns doing leaps, jumps, and spins in the middle of the circle to the beat of the live music with everyone clapping. Often there will be some Ukrainian dancers on the guest list, whether current or former, and they will pull out their best moves. Some may even try more daring moves to wow the crowd, depending on how much confidence they have – whether fueled by alcohol or not. The bride and groom also often participate in the *kolomeika*, supported by their dancing friends.


Throughout the ages, brides have worn veils at their weddings, perhaps because in ancient times it was believed that a veil protected the bride from evil spirits. At Ukrainian weddings, a popular custom known as the veil dance may take place. Throughout this dance, the bride symbolically leaves her single status behind and becomes a wife. This transformation begins with the bride seated in the middle of the dance floor, at which point her mother-in-law approaches and begins to slowly remove the bride's veil, replacing it with a handkerchief. As this takes place, the other women present will sing ritual folk songs. For example, often the song *Horila Sosna* is played, which means “The Pine is on Fire.” Once the handkerchief is on the bride's head, she has attained the status of a married woman. The bride then may briefly



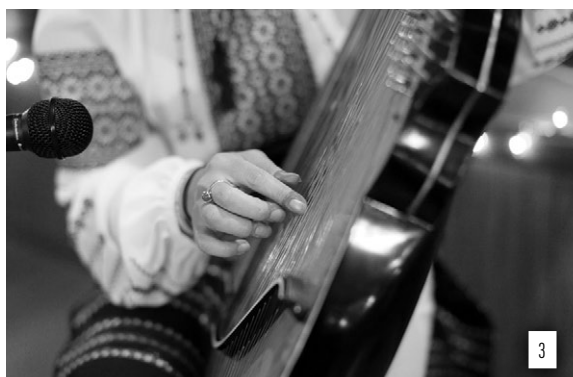
# RECEPTION

dance with her mother-in-law. Next, the bride chooses unmarried women in the room to dance with, putting the veil on each of them at a time, allowing them to experience some of what the bride is feeling. In some regions of Ukraine, the single women will take turns dancing with the groom, which is meant to represent their hope of finding the love of their life—their future husband. At the end of the dance, the bride may throw the veil towards the crowd of single ladies, similar to a bouquet toss typically seen at North American weddings. It is said that whoever catches the veil will be married next.

An entertaining tradition that one may experience at a Ukrainian wedding involves “thieves” stealing the bride away to a secret room, being careful to catch her at an unsuspecting moment. This is known as *pereima* or “the interception.” The thieves then return to the guests and make a fuss about the missing bride. They may demand a ransom for the safe return of the bride, but not monetary, as she cannot be bought! More likely they will demand the groom to profess his love for her or request some song and dance. This is also a chance for men to do various dares, especially ones that the groom is reluctant to do. Successful completion of the dares allows the groom to reclaim his bride—only she may get kidnapped again if the thieves aren’t yet satisfied!

There is no question that Ukrainian weddings are full of unique customs, and it is always interesting to attend weddings where versions of these traditions are incorporated. The fact that so many historical traditions are still celebrated today is an encouraging thought that gives hope to the idea that the Ukrainian culture will continue to flourish for generations to come. 

1. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY CHRISTINA & KRISTOPHER CSERNYANSKI; 2. SUBMITTED BY KRISTA YUSKOW; 3. SUBMITTED BY TAMARA SOLTYSKEVYCH; 4. SUBMITTED BY TAMARA SOLTYSKEVYCH; 5. SUBMITTED BY TAMARA SOLTYSKEVYCH; 6. SUBMITTED BY RENA HANCHUK, MARRIED IN EDMONTON, 2008; 7. SUBMITTED BY THE CSERNYANSKIS; 8. SUBMITTED BY TAMARA SOLTYSKEVYCH. VOLYA! PERFORMING AT HER RECEPTION; 9. PHOTO PROVIDED





# PLANNING AROUND A PANDEMIC

By Elyse Dzenick



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: SOLOMIA HARAHUC & MARK BOHDAN; AND THEIR BACHELOR AND BACHELORETTE NIGHTS IN KELOWNA, 2020.

Solomia Harahuc and Mark Bohdan were planning to be married in the fall of 2020. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic at hand, their plans have been shifted slightly.

## WHO IS HELPING YOU WITH WEDDING PREPARATIONS?

Mark & I are very lucky to have supportive families who have been helping us with wedding preparations. We also have six bridesmaids and six groomsmen who have been recruited to help.


## WHAT UKRAINIAN TRADITIONS WILL YOU HAVE IN YOUR CEREMONY AND RECEPTION?

We will be having a very traditional Ukrainian wedding. We will start our day off with the traditional *vykup* —buying of the bride. This is an old Ukrainian tradition where on the wedding day, in the morning, the groom and his groomsmen will go to the bride's house to 'buy' her from her family. Once the family decides that the groom has offered enough for the bride, he is then allowed to see her for the first time. After this ritual we will receive the traditional parents' blessing before heading to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary church for a traditional Ukrainian ceremony. Our reception will include Ukrainian dishes for dinner & lots of homemade desserts. We will be having a live Ukrainian band, *Barvinok*, so our guests can enjoy a long night of dancing and celebrations, and we're going to ask Christine Moussienko to make our *korovai*.

## HOW DID THE PANDEMIC AFFECT YOUR ORIGINAL PLANS FOR YOUR WEDDING?

We were originally supposed to get married on September 19th, 2020 however due to COVID we have had to postpone to June 12, 2021. We decided to postpone because we have immediate family that lives outside of Canada and there was no way for them to attend the wedding with the two-week isolation rule that is currently in place.

## HAVE YOU HAD ANY BRIDAL OR WEDDING SHOWERS YET? HOW WERE THE PLANS ADJUSTED AND WHAT DID YOU DO?

Mark and I both had our bachelor & bachelorette parties at the end of June because at the time we were still hopeful that restrictions would be lifted and we could move forward with our wedding plans. We were both lucky enough to be able to have our celebrations in Kelowna with some warm weather at the lake. We both had a great turnout of friends come out despite COVID. I have not yet had a bridal shower but now with the wedding being postponed we will leave that to 2021. 

*Mnohaia Lita, Solomia and Mark, from everyone at ACUA!*





ANDRIJ HORNJATKEVYČ AND LILIEA WOLANSKI, NEW YORK, 1968



CHERISSE KILICK & TIM DZENICK, EDMONTON, 1991



ELSIE & MIKE KAWULYCH, VEGREVILLE, 1958



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY CHRISTINA & KRISTOPHER CSERNYANSKI, 2016



ELIZABETH PSHEBYLO, SASKATOON, 2019



ELIZABETH & HOFAN PSHEBYLO, SASKATOON, 2019



VICTORIA HRABEC & EUGENE MARTINIUK, EDMONTON, 1964



GEORGE OSATCHUK & EVA MATICHUK,  
SMOKY LAKE, 1925



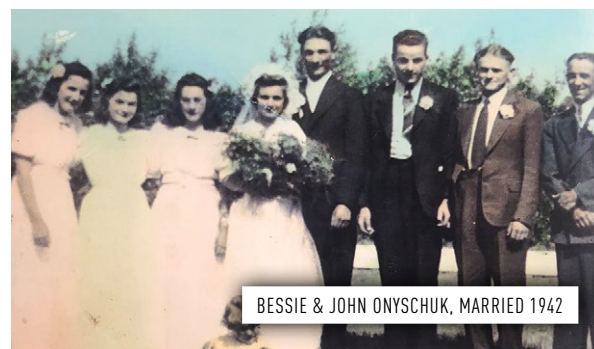
TETRAPOD. PHOTO PROVIDED BY IRENE MAZURENKO

## A Note to the Reader

Although there is much information about Ukrainian wedding traditions and culture presented throughout this magazine, this is not meant to be a strict rule book for planning a Ukrainian wedding. Furthermore, the traditions mentioned throughout this issue are based on the generic customs followed in Ukraine and in the Ukrainian diaspora. Wedding traditions and rituals will vary depending on the region, historical time period, and family.



KRISTA YUSKOW



BESSIE & JOHN ONYSCHUK, MARRIED 1942





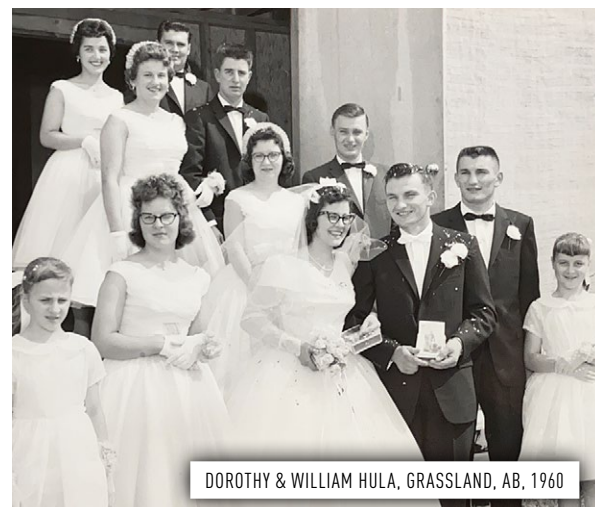
LILIYA & OSTAP SOKHA, LVIV, 2010



SLAVKA SHULAKEVYCH, WINNIPEG, 1975



SUBMITTED BY RENA HANCHUK



DOROTHY & WILLIAM HULA, GRASSLAND, AB, 1960



SYLVIA & WALTER KILICK, EDMONTON, 1965



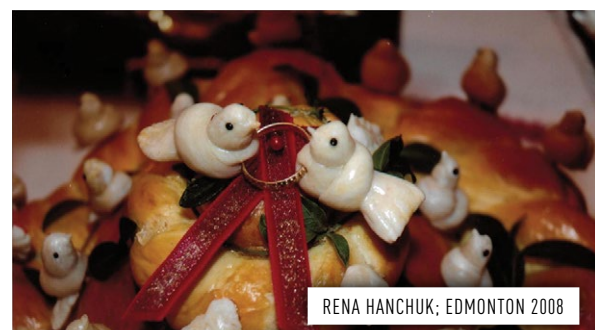
DOROTHY & WILLIAM HULA, GRASSLAND, AB, 1960



PHOTO PROVIDED



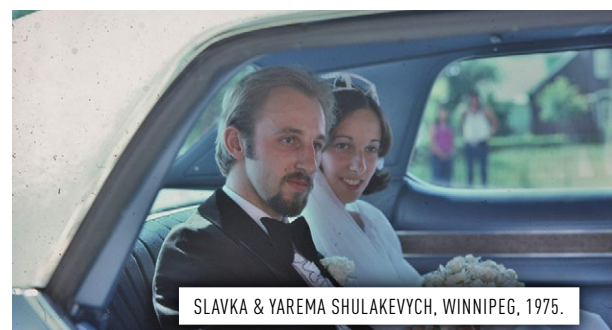
JOSEPH ZINYK & ELENA MAZURENKO, WASKATENAU, 1940



RENA HANCHUK; EDMONTON 2008



NANCY & NICHOLAS KILICK, 1938



SLAVKA & YAREMA SHULAKEVYCH, WINNIPEG, 1975.



ORIANA MASIUK & MARKIAN SILECKY, EDMONTON, 2013

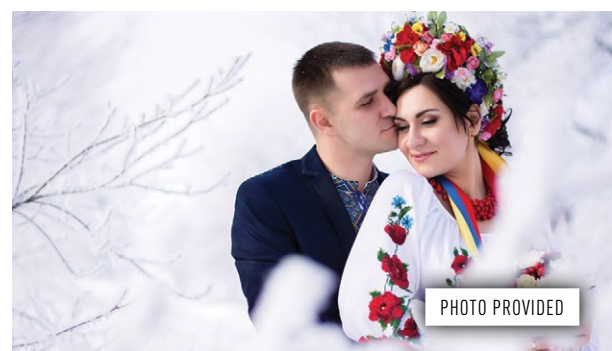


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