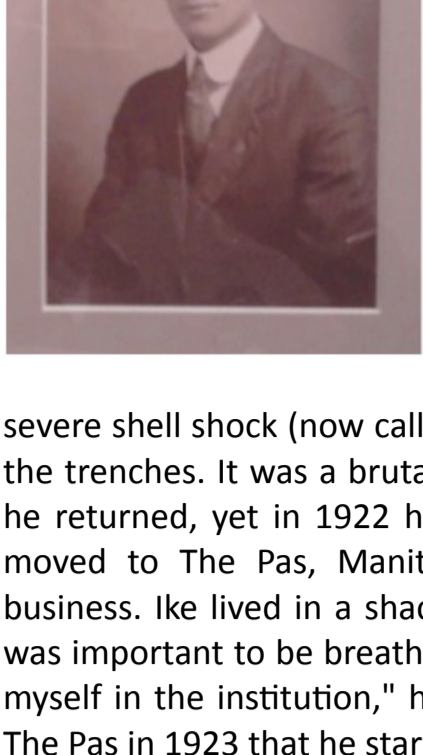


Bridge To My Grandfather - The Ike Landon Trophy

Ike Landon was born Ira Edwin Landon June 7, 1898 in Brainerd Minnesota. His father worked in the lumber industry in Minnesota, Mississippi and Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. By the time Ike was in his late teens, he was working as a chauffeur for Senator Davis.



This is when he met his love Margaret Wilson - 'Maggie', a kind woman with a warm smile who worked in a Prince Albert hotel. She fell in love with the tall, slim, soft spoken man. During their courting days, he and at least two of his brothers, Chester and Heman, went to France to fight with Canada in WWI - The Great War. They'd been living with their mother Fanny, while their father was away working. The youngest of the three boys, Ike was only 19 when he left.

After spending his 20th and 21st birthdays overseas, the troops were demobilized and Ike, Chester and Heman came home in 1919. Ike had severe shell shock (now called PTSD), tuberculosis and fatigue - likely from time in the trenches. It was a brutal war. He entered a sanatorium in Prince Albert when he returned, yet in 1922 he was given only three years to live. That's when he moved to The Pas, Manitoba where his father was involved in the lumber business. Ike lived in a shack-tent (a mixture of canvas and wood) year round. It was important to be breathing in the cold, pure air. "I learned how to take care of myself in the institution," he said, and finally the disease was arrested. It was in The Pas in 1923 that he started to play bridge.

In 1925, he married his sweetheart Maggie on the Leask, Saskatchewan homestead that her parents had settled in the early 1900's, when they brought her over from Scotland. (Her mother had been the first female settler in Leask). Ike started a taxi business in Prince Albert, then moved to North Battleford, Saskatchewan, where he eventually opened and ran a very successful bus line. He was fortunate financially, with an 80% pension from the war which, paired with hard work, is likely how he was able to start these businesses and comfortably raise five children.

Ike wasn't one to sit idle. While living in North Battleford, he joined the Kinsmen Club, Rebecca and Odd Fellows Lodges, sat as President of the Rotary Club and board member, then Chairman of the North Battleford Collegiate Board, being instrumental in getting the Henry Sharp Gymnasium-Auditorium approved and built. Now that was another of my Grandpa's great stories - Ike said he could raise the money from the government to build. The other board members were skeptical. They even went so far as to offer him 10% of all he got, or anything over \$10,000. He raised \$50,000. Of course, the offer was taken back but because of all Grandpa's hard work, including almost living in the school for two years until the building was completed, they wanted to name it the Ike Landon Gymnasium-Auditorium. He insisted that the Principal of NBCI, Henry Sharp was more deserving of the honour.

His interests also inspired him to donate time and money to various music and sports teams, including giving spending money to such players as Johnny Esaw and Moe George when they were young and travelling to out of town games. As well as offering transportation, he also hosted many tournaments.

During WWII, due to the bus line, his surplus of gas and tire rations gave him great local trading power, allowing his family the enviable ability to continue to travel and to have butter, sugar, chocolate bars and any other of the rationed items, while others went without.

This income couldn't protect his family from all hardships though, when they lost their second youngest son Ronnie in a freak accident at the age of 18. He'd been working on his old Model T when the fan blade detached and struck him in the temple.

In their years together, he and Maggie travelled in Canada and the US, playing bridge, curling and golfing in tournaments and giving their children many vacation memories, including time spent at their cottage on Jackfish Lake. Ike also liked playing "serious billiards". In 1957, when their nest was empty and the gymnasium was finished, the Landons followed some of their children and grandchildren west to Edmonton. This is where Margaret died on March 31, 1959 at the age of 60 from a heart attack, only days before her grandson David (my brother) was due to be born there. Earlier that day, she was babysitting our oldest brother Doug, while my mom, Dorothy, went to her final doctor's appointment.

At Mom's request, Grandpa moved in with her, my dad, and oldest brother while Ike learned to cope with his loss. Dorothy's indomitable spirit (which her dad was also known for) allowed her to hold off having the baby for another 6 weeks, much to her doctor's horror. She waited until the Friday Ike left town for a curling bonspiel before checking herself into the hospital. Fortunately, neither she nor her son had any complications. The only problem being that no one, including the maternity nurses, were willing to believe this big healthy boy, who was born with his first tooth, could possibly be a newborn. As planned, both were home on Sunday before Grandpa returned from his bonspiel.

Eventually, Ike moved to Calgary. Birth and death continued to be intertwined for our family at this time. Four years after Dave's birth and the death of Maggie, on the day of my birth - Ike lost his eldest son, Ian (who was also known as Ike). Ian was a devoted father who left behind a wonderful young woman, my Auntie Vi, to raise their five children in Edmonton.

Many years later Ike got remarried to a woman named Matilda but they never appeared close. Looking back, I believe he wouldn't allow himself to give his heart away so fully after losing his beloved Maggie.

Ike continued to play both rubber and duplicate bridge religiously while in Calgary. He played all over but I think the Martinique was his favorite. I also remember him speaking of the Canmar as well as joining a weekly Scrabble group. It was in 1968 or 1969, while playing bridge with Lois Solinger at the Palliser Hotel, between the first and second game, that he opened up a new package of Peter Jackson cigarettes and found a cheque for \$10,000. The room was abuzz with the excitement of it all. According to Lois (who I spoke to recently and was also later one of the recipients of the first Ike Landon Trophy), all the women in the room came over to kiss his cheek, and all the men to shake his hand. As she said, "we didn't get much bridge played that day" but she thinks it was probably one of the best days of Ike's life.

The biggest worry for him at the time was whether he'd be able to answer the skill testing question considering he'd "only made Grade 8". Because of this, during the break he gathered all the smartest men into one of the hotel rooms as he made the call to the Peter Jackson people. As it turned out, he didn't need the help- the math question was only about a Grade 5 level and he answered it easily.

When the cigarette rep asked him where he'd purchased the pack, Ike saw an opportunity to help his friend Walt Alex and his favorite club and he lied, saying they were from the Martinique Bridge Studio. He knew that Walt, and bridge, needed the free publicity more than the big drugstore he'd actually purchased them at on his way there. Meanwhile, the company rep, knowing where the winning package was supposed to be delivered, kept asking Grandpa if he was sure that's where he got them. Finally, Ike ended it all by saying (and I can still hear his voice as I type this), "That's my story, and I'm sticking to it." And it was one that was told in bridge circles for years.

As planned, some of those winnings went towards travelling to tournaments, in Canada and the US, to gain the last 25 points needed for his Life Masters. In 1975, he was honoured by having a trophy named after him which, as many of you know, is now given to the Unit 390 Member earning the most Masterpoints in the Calgary Bridge district in the previous year.

This trophy was originally created by Monsignor LeFort at the Canmar Bridge Club. It was given out to the pair winning a Special Game at "Ike Night". Sometime after Ike's death, likely during one of the club's moves, the trophy fell out of use. Recently rediscovered, Allan Simon was interested in the trophy and got permission from Unit 390 to bring it back into use as it is now awarded.

One year, Grandpa was too sick to attend so my mother and I travelled from Nelson for "Ike Night" and gave the award in his stead. It was quite an honour. This is the trophy that got me started on this search.

While sorting through old photos, I came across the handful of articles that included my grandfather and led me to wonder - what ever happened to that trophy so long after his death? Were there any players that could tell me more about my quiet grandfather?

Today's technology found me only a few clicks away from making contact with Unit 390. This is when I started to realize one of the reasons Grandpa loved the bridge scene here so much.... the people he played with are just so darned nice! Rita Allen even embroidered 'Ike' on a special seat cushion for him, so he could keep track of it (he didn't have enough of his own padding). Everyone I've been in contact with from this club has been friendly and encouraging, especially Ken Scott who's helped me with the research and asked me to write this piece, for which I'm so thankful.

I've been fortunate enough to speak to many interesting people who knew, or knew of my grandfather, including a new lifelong friend, Pat Smolenski, who was the second person in Alberta to get her Life Masters (1961) and even played bridge for Canada in the World Bridge Olympiad. Everyone I talked to spoke of a gentleman that was kind, fun to play with and helpful to players of all levels. One of them is Tom Webb. I will quote him, as his words seem to sum up the popular consensus quite well.

"When I went to the Martinique Bridge Club to enquire about how to get started (*in duplicate bridge*), I met the owner/manager Walt Alex and Ike. Ike was, in our eyes, a friendly old guy that knew a lot about bridge and was always willing to answer any question we had about the game. We started playing at the novice game every Thursday evening and Ike was always there. He filled in as a partner if anyone needed one and answered any questions anyone asked. Of course he told us all about the Peter Jackson prize. He liked to refer to himself as "Ike the Psych". A person who makes a psych bid at bridge was making a bid with insufficient values, just to interfere with the opponents bidding. We all had great respect for Ike and appreciated his help."

Grandpa continued to play daily as long as he was able, quitting only after moving into the Bethany Care Facility that could help him deal with his failing lungs. This is where he and I played a lot of Cribbage together. He lived there for several years, still mentally agile, before dying peacefully on October 10, 1983, at the age of 85. His ashes were returned to North Battleford, where they could be laid to rest in the family plot.

If there's bridge played up in heaven (and why wouldn't there be?) I'm sure he and Maggie are still two of its' greatest ambassadors.

— February, 2014 —

Debi Landon



I. E. (IKE) LANDON HOLDS THE BRIDGE TROPHY GIVEN IN HIS HONOR ... winners holding replicas are Mrs. Lois Solinger and Rick Tewari

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BRIDGE DIGEST

A salute to IKE LANDON on his 81st birthday

"Ike is one of the nicest bridge players you will ever meet" — this is a statement you will always hear when his name is mentioned in bridge circles.

A Life-master, he is a veteran at the bridge table, a promoter of duplicate bridge in Calgary and a true gentleman.

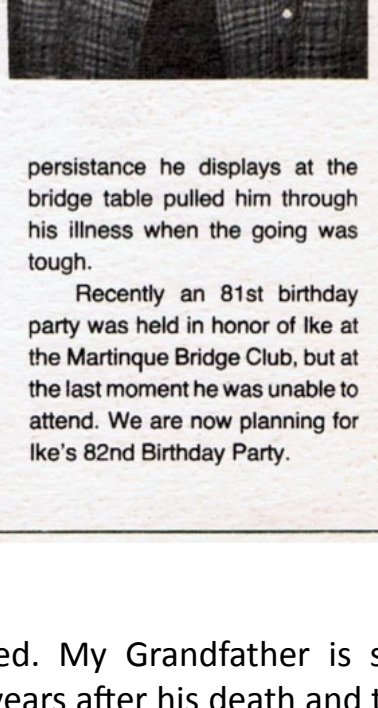
Many bridge players when they acquire their Life-Masters, only wish to play with those similarly qualified. Not Ike, he makes it a point to play with young or new players, encouraging them in the game and giving them gentle and kindly advice. Although 81 years of age and lately because of poor health, he has not been able to play regularly, he is as enthusiastic about the game as when he first started in 1923.

Ike is First World War veteran joining the forces when he was a teenager. Suffering from exposure, shell shock and fatigue he contracted tuberculosis.

In fact, in 1922 he was given three years to live.

The same courage and persistence he displays at the bridge table pulled him through his illness when the going was tough.

Recently an 81st birthday party was held in honor of Ike at the Martinique Bridge Club, but at the last moment he was unable to attend. We are now planning for Ike's 82nd Birthday Party.



So now, many of my questions have been answered. My Grandfather is still remembered with fondness in bridge circles, even 32 years after his death and the Ike Landon Trophy is still being awarded. More importantly for me though, I feel I have a greater insight into what kept him passionate about this game for almost 60 years - he loved the mental challenge as well as the community of people he got to share his passion with. I think both kept him young.