

# A Gem of a Memoir

*Caught Between Two Devils*

By Mark Creedon

Iguana Books, 2019

253 pages

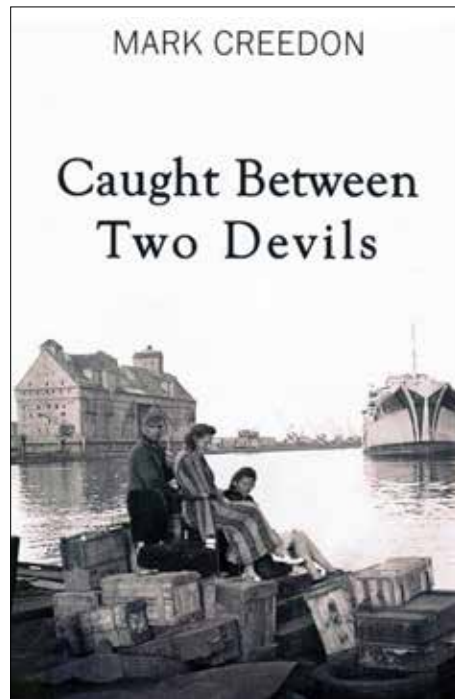
Every Lithuanian immigrant family has a story to tell – and it can potentially be a book, or even a film, portraying the life, times, adventures and sorrows of people forced to leave their homeland behind. Many immigrants have translated and published or self-published their memoirs throughout the decades since World War II, in an effort to share (and perhaps) lessen the pain of loss, ensure that their reasons for leaving are understood, and that the upheaval caused by the war is not forgotten.

*Caught Between Two Devils* is one of the best of its kind. Why? Mark Creedon is a good storyteller, combining the talents of a compassionate yet objective listener, and a writer who truly understands the art of both dialogue and description. Many a book of this type lands on a Lithuanian newspaper editor's desk, but few are as refined as this one.

This is a novel based upon the real-life experiences of Antanas Paskevicius, his Polish wife Jadwyga and his sister Maria, beginning in 1939. For any reader who is not well-versed in history, a key element in the book is the concise overview of political events heading each chapter and providing a context for each stage in the threesome's journey:

"In the winter and spring of 1944, Lithuanian and Lithuanian-Jewish partisans intensified their bombings of railways, telecommunications, and Wehrmacht ammunition dumps. German oppression and murder of Jews in Vilnius and Kaunas intensified. More and more Lithuanians and Poles were sent to work camps."

This is not merely a story of love and loyalty. *Caught Between Two Devils* has an abundant abundance of histori-



cal detail woven into the adventures and encounters along the characters' way, from Vilnius and Kaunas to work camps and refugee camps in Germany, and eventually Pier 21 in Halifax. Presented with date and place headings within the chapters, as would a journal, the book is written in the third person, but is convincingly empathic, and flows logically without being encumbered by either gratuitous detail or the usual wistfulness of a first-person account.

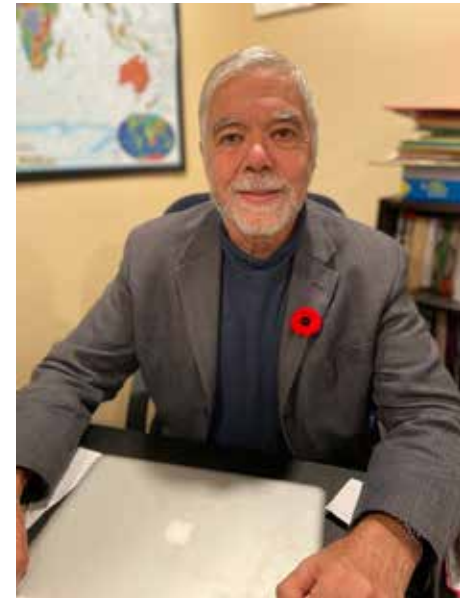
A new and excellent read by Mark Creedon. But who is Mark Creedon and why did he write this book? His answer: "I met my wife Chris in 1972 and we married in 1974. Chris' parents Jadwyga and Antanas Paskevicius and her aunt Maria and her uncle Antanas Vasiliauskas accepted me into their family as did Chris's cousin Giedre. Over the years I got to know, appreciate and love them all.

On January 5<sup>th</sup> of each year Jadwyga would recount the courageous and amazing story of her and Antanas' wedding in 1942 despite a Nazi ban on church

weddings. This piqued my interest to learn more about how she, her husband Antanas and her sister-in-law Maria had supported one another as forced labourers in WWII. When I retired in July, 2013, from being the Executive Director of Catholic Family Services Peel Dufferin, I was determined to capture their stories of faith, hope, courage and love. I was fortunate that Jadwyga was open to sharing those stories with me and Giedre; Chris and her brother Peter were all willing to have me share their parents' stories with the readers of my proposed novel. As a newcomer to this remarkable family I was amazed by the love and resilience of Antanas, Jadwyga and Maria. I wanted to document their stories as a tribute to them. I was extremely fortunate to be able to interview Jadwyga for nine months in her last year of life. Despite being blind and confined to a wheelchair, her mind was sharp, and her memory was exceptional. For the first nine months of my interviews, things went extremely well, and I compiled copious notes. Unfortunately, in her last three months, Jadwyga gradually slipped into dementia and could only repeat the highlights of stories that she had already revealed to me. I knew then that I would have to do some academic research.

...Their story of forced labour was one that had been under-told and [I realized] that Canadian, American and British readers need to know more about this. Maria, Antanas and Jadwyga were not unique; there were six million people forced to work for the Third Reich, and millions more compelled to be slaves for Stalin.

Another motivator for me was the role of the Catholic faith and the Catholic Church in the lives of the protagonists. Their strong, simple Catholic faith greatly assisted them to endure very difficult and dangerous times. Two priests helped them directly and aided them both spiritually and instrumentally. In an age when the secular press attacks religions, and particularly the Catholic



**Mark Creedon**

religion, on a consistent basis, I believed that it was important to write a positive and true account of how faith and love allowed Antanas, Jadwyga and Maria to deal with great hardships and come out of the war as loving people.

I primarily wrote this book as a tribute to Antanas, Jadwyga and Maria. However, I also intended to educate readers about forced labour and the magnitude of the Eastern Front. Finally, I hoped that readers would be inspired by the simple and profound Catholic faith of the three protagonists."

In my interview with Mark, a newly-minted author in the community, he also spoke in detail about his personal journey in creative writing and gave credit to several people who assisted him along the way. Nevertheless, the end result of his extensive research and effort is Mark Creedon's success. We look forward to his next endeavour!

**Ramune Jonaitis**

*The book may be purchased at [amazon.ca](http://amazon.ca), [iguanabooks.ca](http://iguanabooks.ca), [kobo.com](http://kobo.com), [Apple iTunes](http://apple iTunes), or [Nook](http://Nook), or by emailing the author at [markcreedon1@gmail.com](mailto:markcreedon1@gmail.com).*