



REMEMBERING
Elisabeth Harder (Betty)

February 16, 1937 - July 1, 2023



Betty was born on February 16, 1937 to Jacob and Susanna Thiessen in a small Mexican ranch house near Cuahémoc, Chihuahua, Mexico, the sixth child of thirteen. All her life she maintained that her birth date should be taken with a grain of salt, as the journey into Cuahémoc to record a birth with the appropriate civil authorities was an arduous one, and her dad could very well have been off by a day or two by the time this happened.

As a member of an Old Colony Mennonite community, she started school at the age of six and attended through the age of twelve; boys attended one additional year. Times were often tough for the family. Around 1947, when Betty was nine or ten, for financial reasons her parents sold the beautiful farm into which they had put a great deal of work. Betty had fond memories of that farm, living close to nature, with an abundance of fruit trees, and a big garden every summer. Instead, they moved next door into a very small house with a big barn.

In February of 1950 the family moved again, this time far from the Mennonite colonies to a Mexican ranch near Chihuahua City. A life-changing event occurred in September of 1952, when Betty was 15. Her father returned to Mexico to collect her, along with her siblings Mary, Abe, John and Judy to reunite them with her mother and other siblings who had preceded them to BC. The journey on the bus seemed endless to Betty and her siblings, the girls still dressed in their Old Colony garb, with aprons and kerchiefs and big straw hats on their heads. The English language they encountered for the first time during this trip seemed so very strange to them. Betty and her siblings were very happy to be reunited in Yarrow with their siblings after about a half a year's separation. However, she felt like a fish out of water, not knowing the language or the customs of this strange land. Her younger siblings were required to attend school, but as she had turned 15, she stayed home and helped her mom with the work of the household. After a time, she attended night school in Yarrow to learn English, along with her dad and her brother Jake.

Betty's brother Jake introduced her to Yarrow boy Ben Harder. They dated for several years, and on August 14, 1959, Elisabeth Thiessen and Bernhard Harder were married at the Yarrow United Mennonite Church, a day after he arrived home from construction work in Hixon, BC, about halfway between Prince George and Quesnel; this was also their honeymoon destination a day after their wedding.

They settled in Yarrow in the home in which he had grown up on Eckert Road. In 1961 son Gerald came along, and in 1962, by which time they had bought a new home on an acre in Yarrow, daughter Judi came on the scene.

Over the years Betty was busy as a homemaker and mother; she was an expert cook and baker, and more than once painted all the rooms of the family home to perfection. Occasionally she took work outside the home. She worked in a casket factory, a box factory, where she made hallocks, and in the Menno Home, where she discovered an affinity for food science when she took a Foodsafe course.

Betty and Ben had very different ideas about travelling. Betty had at least some of the Thiessen proclivity for travel; Ben would just as soon bloom where he was planted. Nevertheless, every few years, realizing that at least part of Betty's heart was still in Mexico, Ben piled the family into the car, usually around Christmas time, and made the trek to northern Mexico to visit grandparents, along with an abundance of aunts, uncles, and cousins. Ben joined Betty on several non-Chihuahua-related trips to Cancun, Belize, and cruises to the Caribbean and Alaska. However, he couldn't be convinced to travel to the Middle East, so Betty took a tour to the Holy Land without him. It meant a great deal to her to be able to walk where Jesus had walked.

In the early 2000s Betty and Ben moved to Salmon Arm, BC. Betty particularly loved the quietness of their home, the clear Interior air, and the proximity to their grandchildren. Betty became involved with Shuswap Community Church, where she formed lasting friendships that continued to the end of her life. As Dad's Parkinson's progressed, Betty became his primary caregiver, and when he passed away in 2016, she was bereft.

In late summer of 2019 Betty sold her home in Salmon Arm, and in November of that year she moved into Garden Park Tower, just a block from here. Betty had always been an introvert, and this, coupled with the onset of the COVID pandemic just a few months later, made for some very lonely days early on in her return to Abbotsford. However, friends old and new took her into the fold, and she enjoyed some great times in her new community, including the opportunity to attend Clearbrook Mennonite Brethren Church, where Pastor Walter and the congregation made her feel very welcome.

Betty was always physically active, and particularly enjoyed walking. She keenly felt the loss of this in the past year or so, and hinted more than once to her children that she felt her days on earth were drawing to a close. She found great joy in her children, and in her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They will miss her bone-crushing hugs, her strong grip, walks in which they struggled to keep up with her. She found great strength and solace in her faith, which was strong to her very last breath. She knew this to be absolutely true: when her life here was finished, she would be with the Lord.

Predeceased by Ben, her parents, siblings Sarah, Helen, Margaret, Susanna, Abe, John, and Bernie, she leaves to mourn;

Siblings Jacob, Mary, Judy, George, and Isaac, her children Gerald and Judi, grandchildren Autumn and Caleb, and great-grandchildren Adelyn and Quinn.

Memorial gifts may be made to the ALS Society of BC.

A funeral service will be held Thursday, July 13 at 11:00am at Clearbrook MB Church, 2719 Clearbrook Rd, Abbotsford BC.

