



**REMEMBERING**  
**Helen Epp (Leni)**

November 13, 1933 - November 2, 2023



Helena Dyck was born on November 13, 1933, in the small Mennonite village of Zentral, Russia to Anna Heppner and Wilhelm Dyck. Soon after her birth, the family of three moved back to Rosengart, Ukraine. Helen had few memories of her father from her early childhood; being carried on his shoulders home from the village movie showing, and riding in the big farm truck. Once her father had the barber shave her head and her mother was very upset. When she was three the KGB arrested her father. She remembered someone saying that her father was "bottled" meaning someone had turned him in with false accusations. But she pictured him stuck in a very large bottle. He was sent to Siberia and executed in November of 1937. In the spring of 1941, Helen was eight and excited to start grade one. Then the war started. Only a few days after the announcement, she had to hide from low flying planes in a field with her mom and little brother Victor. It was a very difficult time. Food was limited. Many Russian, and later German soldiers occupied the village.

Easter of 1943 was one of Helen's happiest childhood memories. She got to hunt for eggs with her cousins and welcome a new brother to the family. In the summer Helen was busy looking after her baby brother Alfie. The village was run as a collective farm. She had to carry Alfie to where her mother was working when he needed to be fed. Life was very chaotic and there was a never-ending convoy of soldiers coming through the village. In October they were finally evacuated to Germany, first by truck and then train. They lost most of their possessions during this time, but felt lucky that they didn't have to travel on foot. They reached Klaffenbach, Germany in December and Helen remembered it felt like heaven. The refugees were put up in a beautiful ballroom in the former Crystal Palace Hotel. They ate in a dining room, went to school and church, and for a while life seemed almost normal. Her mother was sent to Leipzig for eye surgery at the end of the year. Helen was left in charge of her brothers, ages six and one. She put them to bed fully dressed so they could quickly get to the air raid shelter when the alarm sounded two or three times a night. She remembered being afraid that she would die, and her brothers would be left alone. So, she prayed for God to take them all to heaven at the same time. The fighting ended on May 9, 1945. Helen's family along with her Tante Lena and her cousins were stuck in the Russian zone. Nurses from the refugee camp helped them escape and they walked 35 kilometers to the American zone. Only a few weeks later, the border was redrawn, and they were once again in Russian territory. Officials were looking for translators and her mother Anna volunteered being fluent in Russian and German. They were sent to the old medieval town of Geitheim. They lived there almost a year together with Tante Lena's family. In the spring of 1946, they got a notice that they would be sent back to Russia the next morning. They only had papers for a mother with three children. At the train station Helen went through with Lena first and then snuck back through to get her mother and

brothers. Helen's family was sent to a camp in Bavaria - BergNeustad. The food was very sparse, but blueberries were ripe in the forest. Her and Victor often went on the train with the other kids. They were dropped off in the middle of the forest to pick blueberries to eat. Four weeks later they were assigned a new place in the little village of Wohnau. The people were very friendly and kind. They were well received in the village and some of Helen's best childhood memories were from living there. Her mother did the mending for a teacher in the village in exchange for teaching Helen English.

In the fall of 1948, they went to Backnang Mennonite refugee camp to start the process of immigration with the help of MCC. They left in April of 1949 on the SS Samara. The first morning everyone was seasick except Helen. She went to breakfast and thought that the cornflakes were dried pancakes and ate them without milk.

They arrived one early morning in Mission, BC. The first week Helen stayed with her aunts and cousins in Vancouver. They made clothes for her so she could get a job. She started as a nanny in May. For the first time in her life, she had a room of her own - she felt rich. She looked after a three-year-old girl for an English family. She learned how to set a proper table and serve tea. Later she became a housecleaner and lived in a girl's home, Mädchenheim, set up by the Mennonite church. Helen attended United Mennonite Church and by confession of her faith was baptized on May 13 th , 1951.

She was 18 when she met her future husband, Cornelius Epp. The young German immigrants working in Vancouver used to hang out at Memorial Park to watch baseball, visit, and play games. They all lived in small apartments so evenings in the summer were spent together. People called Cornelius "the Paraguayan". He was always making people laugh. She didn't like him at first, because of a mean kid with the same name growing up. But Corny started to walk Helen home from events and then

he asked her to go to a movie. They dated for two years before getting married on July 21 st , 1953.

STOP INSERT SONG HERE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Mom and Dad began their life together in Vancouver. Before having kids, Mom worked in a factory making fishing nets in Steveston. They purchased their first home on 51 st Street in 1955. They were blessed with three healthy children, Haedy in 1956 Daniel in 1961 and Victor 1964. Dad was often out of town for work, sometimes for months at a time. It was a very busy and challenging time for Mom raising three children, but it was also one of the joys of her life. The women in her community were an important support system.

The neighborhood was very close knit. Mom had an open-door policy and an extra plate of food for anyone who needed it. All the moms in the neighborhood were "Tante" to the kids. She didn't worry about her kids wandering the neighborhood since everyone was so close. Mom was involved in the Frauverein at First Mennonite Church serving in many different capacities. In the early sixties our family started to go to the Okanagan. We enjoyed camping, horseback riding, boating, water skiing and fishing. Every summer twenty to thirty families from our church went to Lakeside Resort in Oliver together. She always made us wash our feet before coming back into the cabana.

Mom and Dad purchased property in Aldergrove in 1971 and the family moved into the house they built in 1975. They began attending Bethel Mennonite Church in Langley. Mom became very involved in the church; helping in the kitchen, baking cookies for DVBS, costumes for plays and much more. She especially enjoyed doing the flowers for Sunday morning service and church events. She completed a professional training certificate in floral design.

Mom received a school kit to share with her brothers when they were children in Germany. That and the generosity of MCC during her family's immigration process, inspired her to continue

to give back all her life. She passed down the importance of compassion and service to her family. Over the years she helped make hundreds of school kits for kids all over the world. The whole family was involved with the MCC sale. Mom started her own booth in the nineties selling floral arrangements, peppernuts, Dad's woodcraft, and beaded keychains made by the grandkids. The family continued to grow as everyone got married and grandchildren started to arrive. In 1998 Mom and Dad started an annual ski trip to Sun Peaks with the entire family. Mom was always willing to watch the younger grandkids while everyone was on the slopes. She'd have a delicious hot meal waiting every night including a full turkey dinner.

Her love language was food. She baked tens of thousands of buns over the years. Mom was known for her paska, periski, gallons of borscht, chicken noodle soup and the best verenika. She taught us to always give thanks to God for our daily bread. Mom and Dad built a new house on the ravine and moved in 1987. The grandkids loved exploring the forest in the back, building teepees in the yard, and watching "Skippy" the squirrel. She was an incredible grandma. She devoted a lot of time to making life magical for her grandchildren. Some favorite memories include getting all dressed up for tea parties, crafts, knitting and embroidery, sewing clothing and costumes, countless sleepovers, and the legendary New Year's Eve Alaskan Cruise. Mom would do anything for her grandchildren and was always there for them during good and hard times.

20 years later Victor and Monica bought the house on the ravine from them and we still live there today. Mom and Dad moved into the basement suite that they built that they always hoped to move into once one of use bought the house from them. Dads' health started to decline in 2009 and he went on before Mom to glory in January 2011.

On July 2, 2016 Victor's son Isaac got married to Kara in our backyard, It was the first wedding at the house on the ravine and

Mom could not have been happier. She was very involved especially with the flowers. Two days after while we were all still together after a hike to a water fall with Mom, she told us she had breast cancer... she wasn't worried, but she kept the news to herself so it wouldn't make us sad before the wedding.

The next few years were good for Mom, she still kept busy with going to MCC, she wouldn't drive on the freeway or make lefthand turns, so the trips to Abbotsford were not simple, and Mom was involved with other things that helped people, she loved to serve and almost nothing could stop her.

I (Victor) could never keep the property good enough for Mom so she helped me get it right, when we put a new roof on the house, she burned all the old cedar shingles the roofers were amazed at how she could work, the fire was so hot it scorched a tree 50 feet up.

We were sure Mom would out live us all... then on February 14, 2021 Mom had a stroke, that changed everything, over the course of the next year Mom's mental health declined rapidly and it became more and more difficult for Mom to live in her place. We did what we could to take care of her at home but soon it was clear she needed round the clock care that was beyond us.

About one year to the day of here stroke in 2022

She moved to the Menno Home, she was in the same section as her younger brother Victor and she was happy about that, she could take care of him again as she did when she was a young girl in The Ukraine...

Mom didn't like living in the home at first, but over time got used to it and I think she actually enjoyed it after a while.

On November 1, just a week ago Mom's health started it decline very rapidly and the next morning November 2 at 4:47 AM Mom went home to be with our Lord Jesus, and to many happy reunions.

We're sure we've missed things in Mom's story, and that's because she wasn't here to tell us what to do. She lived her life

every day for Jesus and left a legacy for us all.

In Matthew 25: 35 & 40 Jesus said:

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Mom is pre-deceased by her Mom and Dad, Brothers Alexander and Alfred, Husband Cornelius many relatives and friends

Her memory will be cherished by her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

Her daughter Haedy & Rick their children Meshell (Ray and their sons Philip & Ethaniel), James (Brandy, their kids Judah, Harmony & Arileigh) & Christopher (Emily, their kids Seth, Elayna, Claire, Vallery & Jonathan)

Her son Daniel & Cindy, their daughters Hannah, Rebecca & Emily.

Her son Victor & Monica their children Audrey (Mark), Issac (Kara, their daughters Kaeti & Pippin) & Jacob

Her siblings Victor Dyck, Peter Dueckman, Anna Kruger & their families

A large extended family, many friends that are spread out all over the world.

