REMEMBERING

Helen Klassen

September 9, 1935 - November 11, 2023

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Helen Klassen was born on September 9, 1935, and entered into the presence of her Lord and Savior on November 11, 2023, at Bevan Village Care Home in Abbotsford, BC after an extended illness. Her siblings provided tremendous support during this final journey.

Helen was born in Steinbach, Manitoba to Henry (1986) and Maria (2003, Sawatsky) Redekop, Russian-Mennonites who immigrated to Canada in 1929. Her family attended the Bethel Mennonite Church where she was an active member. In her youth she was baptized into the confession of her faith.

After graduating from the Mennonite Educational Institute in Abbotsford, BC, Helen briefly worked at a bank in Vancouver, BC, attended Bible college in Ontario, and worked at a boy's home in Ontario. Following this she served at Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Headquarters in Ephrata, Pennsylvania where she met and married Ralph Shelly in 1961. Their initial meeting was setup by the same person who would later officiate at their oldest son's wedding.

Helen and Ralph lived briefly in Albuquerque, New Mexico and then spent several years working with MCC in Nigeria. Following this term of service they settled in Bluffton, Ohio where they raised their family of three boys.

A devoted mother to Ralph Shelly (Renee), Paul Shelly (Lisa), and Michael Shelly, Helen found immense joy in her role as a grandmother, bonding over spirited games like Scrabble and Quiddler with her cherished grandchildren: Joshua, Nathan, Zachary, Abigail, Allison, and her great-grandchild, Saniia.

Following the death of her husband Ralph in 1993, Helen moved to Lynden, Washington and then Abbotsford, BC where she met and married Peter Neufeld (who passed away in 2011) and later Franz Klassen (who passed away in 2021).

Helen's hunger for knowledge led her to be awarded an honorary membership into the Bluffton College National Alumni Association, auditing 25 classes and embodying a lifelong love for learning. An avid reader, her thirst for knowledge extended beyond academia, finding solace in the pages of many books. Her culinary expertise was unmatched, and her home was a haven of hospitality, often welcoming foreign students from the college. She was also a lifelong member of the Mennonite Church, including many years as a member of First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio.

Her adventurous spirit guided her to travel to many places like Russia, Vietnam, Chile, Churchill (Manitoba), and Hawaii, fostering an appreciation for diverse cultures and experiences. She also sang in a German choir, where she met one of her beloved husbands.

In addition to three spouses, Helen was preceded in death by four siblings, Heinrich Redekop (1930), Hertha Springer (2016), Margaret Schroeder (2020) and Henry Redekop (2021). She is survived by her children, grandchildren and seven siblings, including John Redekop, Walter Redekop, Charlotte Johnson, Hilda Hildebrand, Rudy Redekop, Elvera Corben, and Elfrieda Samilski.

A celebration of Helen's life will be held on December 9, 2023, at 11:00 am at the Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church in Abbotsford with a meal following. This gathering will provide an opportunity for family and friends to honor her memory and share in the richness of her life.

In honor of her giving spirit, the family kindly requests donations to the Mennonite Central Committee in lieu of flowers, honoring Helen's commitment to compassionate service.