



**REMEMBERING**  
**Jessie Klassen**

March 19, 1925 - February 4, 2024



Born Jessie Cornies, her remarkable journey began on March 19, 1925 in Mariville, Ukraine, where she was born to struggling parents. Clothes were donated for her due to their dire circumstances. She was born into a family of 8 brothers, two of whom died during childbirth, and three sisters. Unfortunately she was never able to meet her sisters as they died within three weeks of each other from typhus, some years before she was born. Life under communist rule was difficult, especially for Mennonites. Six months after Jessie was born, her family immigrated to Canada aboard the ocean liner, Modessa, in search of a better life.

Her family settled in southern Manitoba and initially took up residence on a farm. Due to the rigours of farm life, her father had to move her family numerous times to find work that he was more physically able to handle. This led Jessie to change schools every year. These disruptions caused her to leave school at the end of grade 7. Due to her father's continued ill health, the family moved to Winnipeg, where she began working at Dyson's pickle factory at the age of 15.

When Jessie was 18, she moved with her parents to British Columbia, where they settled in the Newton area. Soon after she left her family home for Vancouver, where she lived in a boarding home for single young women, run by the Mennonite churches. She found employment working at Farina, a local laundromat, often frequented by sailors. Finding a home church was paramount, as her faith was incredibly important to her throughout her life. Once employment was taken care of she quickly found her weekly church services at the First United Mennonite Church. Little did she know at the time, that this decision would change the course of her life. Here she met her brother's friend Art Klassen.

They courted and fell in love soon after. This led to Jessie and Art getting married in her home church, on February 14, 1948. In 1949 they were elated to welcome their

eldest daughter Linda and in 1951 Bob joined the family. This young family guided by their faith in God lived in Vancouver until 1952. When Linda was 3 years old and Bob one year old, they packed up and moved to Surrey. They purchased a rural property that had the space for them to continue growing their family. As they lived in Surrey, Jessie gave birth to three more children. Peter was welcomed in 1953, then in 1955 Don arrived. He couldn't wait and was born at home, which Jessie was always very proud of. This was a testament to her strength and resiliency. Finally in 1958, she gave birth to their youngest daughter Pat. Jessie was a wonderful homemaker and mother to her husband and five children.

Jessie and Art were a team in all aspects of their lives. While taking care of her children, she could also be found helping Art dig a new well for the family. While Art got all the credit for building their home addition, what many don't know is that while pregnant with Pat, she helped nail down flooring on the split level they were adding. Jessie was chagrined to discover that many of her nails missed the joists. People laughed at what had happened, but Jessie at the time was in tears. In later years she could laugh about it too.

After her children were all in school, she got her driver's license and then became a very successful Watkins sales lady. She sold numerous products for them, including animal vitamins. A local farmer was the recipient of some of these vitamins, and ended up with his sow in the Surrey Leader newspaper, because of the enormous litter of piglets she produced. Those vitamins did the trick.

Jessie enjoyed attending, and was a passionate member of Cedar Hills Mennonite church. Later in life, Jessie and Art also enjoyed volunteering at MCC 10,000 Villages. Jessie was always the consummate hostess and often hosted relatives from the prairies for overnight visits. When out of town visitors came, she always made room for them, even if it meant pitching a tent in the back yard.

In 1985 Jessie and Art retired to a condo in Abbotsford. As an avid swimmer, she loved the indoor pool and swam half a mile per day. Her doctors said this aided in her living such a long life. Art and Jessie enjoyed their retirement and travelled over North America via bus tours, campers, and numerous cruises. She often beamed with pride when recalling sleepovers, play time, and forging beautiful relationships with her 12 grandchildren. Their love of cruising had them set sail on a cruise to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. Unfortunately Jessie faced yet another test of her faith and strength when Art had a heart attack on the ship. She was devastated as he was flown back to Royal Columbian Hospital and unfortunately passed away.

Jessie found it difficult to live without her best friend and husband of 60 years. She relied on her strong faith and loving family to help her embark on the next chapter of her life. Without Art by her side she filled her lonely hours with numerous hobbies including baking, swimming, knitting, crocheting, jigsaw puzzles, cribbage, and reading. As she aged, her vision was not as resilient as her spirits and she became legally blind. In the last years Mom embraced audiobooks to continue her passion for literature. Jessie's love for babies and children came to the forefront again as she was blessed with 17 great grandchildren. These new members of the family brought her great joy and she relished her time with them. Relationships forged with

grandchildren and great grandchildren have continued and remain strong.

In 2011 Jessie moved to Evergreen Manor in White Rock and enjoyed the chapel and grounds, most notably the beautiful gardens. Jessie also enjoyed the fun games and activities at the Manor. In fact she ended up winning a lot of those games that rewarded her with mini chocolate bars. In alignment with her loving heart and generosity, she wouldn't eat these treats herself, but rather shared with her great grandchildren when they came to visit.

People were always impressed with Jessie's 21st century skills. She was the most tech savvy great grandma many had ever seen, continuing these skills while legally blind. This was most evident as she enjoyed keeping up with her extended family through Facebook. Her ability to use technology as she aged was due to her determination, or as many close to her would say, feistiness.

Jessie was an extraordinary mother, grandmother, great grandmother, aunt, and friend, whose presence and sunny disposition left an enduring impact on all those fortunate enough to cross her path.

She is lovingly survived by 5 children, 12 grandchildren, and 17 great grandchildren. Her children and spouses are - Linda and Dennis Peters, Bob and Margie Klassen, Peter and Joanne Klassen, Don and Dianne Klassen, and Pat and Dave Sawatsky. We are all grateful for everything Mom has done for us over the years. On behalf of the family, I would like to thank all of you for coming out to celebrate my Mom's amazing life.

