



REMEMBERING
Maria Nickel (Mary)

January 5, 1925 - March 16, 2021



Mary Nickel was born to Maria and Johann Enns in Hamberg, Ukraine, on January 5, 1925, just over 96 years ago. She had an older brother, also named Johann (John), and would have four more siblings: Katie, George, Victor, and Henry. She completed grade four and spent some of her early years assisting with care for the children. This was a war-torn region, and, tragically, soldiers came and took her father away on Christmas Eve, 1937, never to be seen again; brother John was taken in 1941.

In 1943, at age 18, Mary, her mother and siblings, fled the terror of marauding soldiers and landed in neighbouring Poland. Mary was separated from her family for 12 years when one day in 1944, while Mary was away at work 18 kilometers from home, her mom, sister and brothers were forced to flee again and took a train to Germany, and, eventually, with assurance from sponsors, boarded a ship to Canada. Mary followed the exodus to Germany but the search for her family was in vain. She stayed in Germany and was working on a farm when, at age 23, Mary met Emanuel Nickel through some relatives. They were married a year later on March 26, 1949. Fortunately, with the assistance of the Red Cross, Mary's mom in Vancouver was able to contact Mary and Emanuel in Germany, and this led to a glorious reunion in 1957. Mary and Emanuel lived together with Mary's mother (Oma) until her death in 1987. Upon arrival in Canada, Mary quickly found work on the meat line at Canada Packers. This is where she learned to speak English and earned her pension upon retirement 32 years later in 1984. During this time, she and Emanuel built a new home right beside their old one on 58th Avenue. Emanuel

nailed the stucco wire and mounted the drywall with his nephews, and Mary painted the entire house. Mary loved to spend time in her back yard growing vegetables and flowers. Like others in the community she canned lots of tomatoes, but also peaches and even cubes of watermelon. She was a tireless and engaging host for the many visits of family and friends. She could be both generous (guests never left empty-handed) and stern (for example, when Emanuel, a gregarious giver, sought to deplete her pantry by loading canned goods upon departing guests, she would say, "That's enough already"). She enjoyed annual summer vacations in the Okanagan with Emanuel in their camperized van. For years they camped with friends in Penticton and later with family in Oroville, Washington. Even well into her 90's she loved to dine at the White Spot on Marine Drive. She enjoyed her last order of fish and chips only two and a half weeks before she died. With an early life of such turmoil, like her mother and many aunts and uncles, Mary found solace and strength in her Christian faith. Every day she read from her German Bible, devotional book, or tear-away daily calendar, followed by prayer down a list of family members and others in need. A few years after Emanuel died in 2002, Mary moved to an apartment on Chester street where she continued to grow tomatoes and geraniums in large pots on her balcony. She regularly made the short walk to Fraser Street for doctor's appointments. For longer shopping trips she enjoyed routine visits and accompaniment from her brothers Vic and Henry. She was a devout church goer all her life. Baptized at age 33 at First United Mennonite Church on May 25, 1958, she moved to Sherbrooke Mennonite Church after it started in the late 1960s.

A prolific member of the ladies sewing circle, she made quilts and countless dishcloths for the annual Mennonite Central Committee relief sale. Crocheting was an activity that sustained her throughout her life. When she went to the hospital at the end, a half-finished dishcloth lay next to her easy chair, threaded with sewing needles eager to carry on. On March 10 this year, at the age of 96, she spent 12 hours in emergency at the Vancouver General Hospital due to complications with her kidneys. Feeling faint a few days later, she was re-admitted and her heart finally stopped on March 16, 2021.

She is predeceased by her husband Emanuel, brothers John, George, Vic, and sister Katie, and survived by her brother Henry (and Hilde) and many nieces and nephews.

