



## REMEMBERING Peter Klassen

February 9, 1936 - November 29, 2022



Peter Klassen was born on February 9, 1936, in the city of Zaporozh'ye, Ukraine. He was the youngest child of 5 children born to Anna and Bernhard Klassen. Life for the Klassen family in the 1930's Soviet Union (of which Ukraine was a part of then) was challenging, to say the least: Religious and political oppression by the Stalinist government was reaching its peak, and 2 years later after Peter was born, his father Bernhard was arrested by the secret police, imprisoned, and never seen alive again. This was the fate of many Mennonite fathers.

This situation resulted in Peter's mother having to work to support the family, and often led to Peter (only a toddler then) being alone and without his mother's care just when he most needed it. In the summer of 1941, things got worse; the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany went to war, and this caused further disruption and chaos in the lives of the family and residents nearby. As the German army advanced eastwards, they occupied the area (and life improved somewhat) but by the latter months of 1943, the battle frontlines again approached the city (from the east this time) as the Soviets advanced and pushed the Germans westward. The Klassen family decided to leave before the Soviets arrived, and they became part of a flood of refugees exiting Eastern Europe by any means possible. The Klassens left hurriedly by train, under rather difficult conditions, putting it mildly.

They were eventually settled in the tiny Bavarian village of Abersdorf, where they stayed until the war ended.

In 1948, Peter's Uncle Redekopp, already in Canada for some years, sponsored the family as immigrants to Canada, and Peter, along with his mother and his sister Agatha, moved to Yarrow, BC., after a trans-Atlantic boat crossing to Nova Scotia. Agatha soon left Yarrow to find work in Vancouver, while Peter and his mother remained in Yarrow until 1953, when they also moved to Vancouver. While in Yarrow, Peter took some schooling and learned English, which continued in Vancouver. By the mid- 1950's Peter was in his late teens and eligible to work; after a few years he found a job working for Drexel Contracting Ltd. as a heat and frost

insulator (a construction trade). Initially, Peter was an apprentice, but soon was employed full time and travelled to various parts of BC for his job. He was known to be a meticulous worker. The wages were good, the hours were steady, and this allowed Peter to spend money on some of his favourite activities, which included travel abroad: New York city, the Middle East, Europe and Australia were some of the destinations he visited over the years. When Peter wasn't actively travelling, he was reading and looking at it, through books and magazines like National Geographic, Time and Reader's Digest.

Peter also became a member of the Vancouver Mennonite Brethren Church, (later Culloden Mennonite Brethren). There he served for many years, working on the sound system, and was trusted for his faithful and diligent work. In December 1978, Peter's mother (Anna Klassen) passed away and this event was a deep loss for him, but he recovered from his grief and continued to work and travel through the 1980's. However, on August 8, 1989, Peter suffered a traumatic injury while pruning a tree in his backyard. The accident caused him to lose his ability to drive and work, as well as cognitive and memory impairment. Although Peter recovered sufficiently to return to his home and live independently, it was decided he should move into a senior's housing facility in Abbotsford. He went there in May 1991 and stayed in Abbotsford for the rest of his life.

Peter was still able to travel, but because of his physical limitations he went with tour groups instead of on his own as he used to before 1989. He also found it increasingly difficult to shop for food on his own. In September 2022, Peter was diagnosed with inoperable cancer of the colon and liver, and was moved to Christine Morrison Palliative Centre in Mission, BC. In his final weeks on earth, Peter talked about a place he believed in and had long heard about but never had seen—"Glory land". He finally got his opportunity to go to Glory land and meet his Heavenly Father.

