



## **REMEMBERING Erika Toews**

December 18, 1934 - January 16, 2022



Erika was born on December 18, 1934, in Fernheim (Chaco) Paraguay. She was the firstborn of six children born to Heinrich and Liese Friesen who had recently come from Russia as refugees. She would be first to say that as children they were oblivious to the poor conditions they lived in, as her parents provided a happy home for them. One of her fondest memories was of how they regularly sang as a family after dinner. When Erika was 12 years old, she accepted the Lord at an evangelistic meeting. Erika loved school and finished Grade 6 with honors, but could not continue school due to her help needed at home. When she was 13 years old, her father died of complications from a well digging accident. Her mother married David Isaak a year later and two more brothers were added to the family. In her later teen years she went to work in the big city of Asuncion, first as a nanny and later on in a hotel. Then, as a young adult, she heard about an opportunity to work in the kitchen for the MCC Home in Uruguay. This is where she met Peter Janzen and they were married on September 1, 1956. All three children were born there, Anneliese, Helmut and Monika. Early in 1964, the family moved to a Mennonite community in the outskirts of Curitiba, Brazil, where all three children started their schooling. Erika wrote that they lived there for a happy 312 years, before moving to Canada in the Fall of 1967. She also wrote that wherever they lived, they quickly found their way into a choir, but when they came to Vancouver, facing a new language and a different style of music notation, she thought this was the end of that. However, it was not long before she was in the choir again, while enjoying the fellowship at Culloden MB Church. Erika worked hard to help get established in a new country once more, doing house cleaning and then working at Hanson Plastics. Throughout her full time work, she kept the household running with homemade meals and packed lunches. She enjoyed serving in the church kitchen and packing parcels for needy people in South America. On Saturdays she baked buns and cooked a large pot of soup, just so she would be ready to invite

someone for lunch or Faspa on Sunday, which happened regularly. Erika became a very happy Oma in 1978 and loved every grandchild that followed, building into their lives as best she could. She and Peter moved to Abbotsford in 1985 to be closer to grandchildren and joined Central Heights MB Church. This was a big change for them, because it meant going to English-only services, Care Groups and choir, but Erika was all in. It was hard not to become her friend. Erika's life, as she knew it, came to a sudden change when Peter had his first of many disabling strokes before he was sixty years old. His sudden disability to work and function as he was used to were understandably hard on both of them. In 1997 Peter had another stroke that paralyzed his left side and she became his constant caregiver. When he moved into a Care Home three years later, she visited him almost daily (with a treat) until he passed away in 2007. During these years Erika had numerous eye surgeries due to a genetic eye disease. However, despite her joy and her faith being challenged, her walk with God continued to grow. She sold cookies by the thousands, donating where she could, sang in the Senior choir, and volunteered at MCC. She enjoyed planting flower pots, spoiling her family with her delicious treats and ever present availability to help, or just to pray for her family. Erika also became a proud first time great-grandmother in 2002. Erika traveled to Indonesia with a granddaughter to visit her missionary grandchildren, and also to Paraguay with another granddaughter to visit her family. In 2011 Erika married Abe Toews, her best friend's widowed husband. They enjoyed some happy years together before Alzheimer's began to rob her of her memory in about 2014. The years of watching her memory fade and especially watching confusion set in were very difficult, first for her and then for the family. The simplest of facts were lost to her and her brain could no longer focus on any kind of order of how to do everyday life. In January of 2018 she willingly moved to Bevan Village to be cared for by nurses and care aides. Abe visited her almost daily until he passed away later that year. The last kind of activities she enjoyed had to do with singing or listening to music. Even when her speech was gone, she would listen to a song and open her mouth in awe, or was it that she thought she was singing? We may never know, but for now we know that on Sunday, January 16, 2022 heaven's choir welcomed a beautiful new alto voice and is richer for it. Erika Janzen Toews was predeceased by her husband, Peter in 2007 and her second husband, Abe in 2018, as well as younger siblings Hildegard, Artur, Rudi and Helmi. She is mourned by her children Anneliese (Herb) Friesen, Helmut Janzen, Monika (Bob) Thiessen; her 10 grandchildren Julene (Chris) Uganecz, Kristal (Shaun) Sawyer, Nathanael (Katie) Thiessen, Ben (Kari) Friesen, Darren (Chelsea) Thiessen, Larissa (Tim) Sevenhuysen, Andrew (Naomi) Janzen, Rosalynn (Mark) McCready, Carmen (Pierre) De Fleuriot, and Matthew Janzen; her 26 great-grandchildren; sister-in-laws Lena Funk and Helga Friesen; and siblings with spouses, Hartmut (Erna) Friesen, Sieghard (Leni) Isaak, and Ewald (Eleonore) Isaak.

We also wish to thank the extended Toews family for all their love, as they too became Erika's family through her marriage to Abe in 2011.

