



REMEMBERING
Liese Giesbrecht

November 28, 1928 - February 6, 2021



Liese was born on November 28, 1928, to Aganeta and Johann Zacharias. She was born in Neu Halbstadt, Sagradowka in the Ukraine occupied by the Communist Soviet Union. She was the fourth child after John, Neta, and Maria. They lived on a farm of a few acres. They had horses, cows, pigs, chicken, geese, and a vegetable garden. Times were very difficult. Her parents were Christians and prayed with the family, but did it secretly. The children started school at age 8. The first two years were in German, and the rest of the schooling was all Russian. Children had to work from a very young age - cultivating the crop, loading the wagons, packing down the cargo, and working with silkworms. Liese went to school for 5 years.

The war began in 1941. The Germans entered and occupied Russia. In October/November 1943, the Germans took all the German-speaking citizens out of Russia. The whole family fled with their wagon full of clothes, food, bedding, dried fruit, meat, two horses, two cows, and 1 sheep. By this time, the family had grown - there were now 8 children (Peter, Jake, Tina, Helen). The five oldest had to walk beside the wagon for hours every day. It was cold, wet, and muddy. They stopped at night and slept in abandoned sheds. These sheds were in terrible shape - sometimes filled with lice. This went on for at least a month. Many families would sleep together in these sheds. In December, they could not go any further on foot, so they stayed in a school in a Russian village over the winter.

After the winter, the family left everything behind and took a train to Poland, the trip lasting several weeks. Upon their arrival in Poland, the family was cleansed (clothes were washed and sanitized) and they were able to stay in Polish homes. The Germans had forced Polish families to leave their homes so that the German families could stay in these homes. The family lived together for about a year. Liese's father and oldest brother were drafted to the German Army almost right away. Liese was about 15 years old at this time and was sent to a Girls Work Camp. Her Mom stayed home alone with the remaining 6 children.

At the Girls Camp, Liese studied, cleaned, did laundry, and cooked. She also played sports and swam. There were about 60 girls at this camp. Liese stayed for about a year. When the war ended in 1945, everyone fled and separated again. Liese stayed close with two of her friends. They fled to Germany, but were in the Russian zone. The three girls tried three times to get across the border into the British zone, but soldiers always brought them back. Liese's family also fled - they made it to the British sector. Liese and her two friends stayed at a farmhouse with a family, working for room and board. The overseer of the Girls Camp had gone home by this time; through a series of letters, from the girls and their mothers, to the overseer, they eventually were able to learn where their families were.

A Russian soldier finally took pity on the girls and helped them get over the border into the British sector. They were told to hide and wait in one spot from the middle of the night until daylight. In the morning, they fled and took a train to the British sector. The girls found their families in refugee camps in schools. The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) was already present, helping families reunite, and helping to feed and clothe the many refugees. The families were divided and put into homes/farms. This is when Liese's appendix burst and she spent three months in the hospital. She was very sick and could have died. When she recovered, she joined her parents and siblings in a farmhouse (there were now 9 children in the family with the addition of Henry). Here they had to work for their room and board. Liese remembers knitting many pairs of knee socks for the family and for her siblings. They stayed here for about 1 ½ years. Liese gave her life to the Lord and was baptized upon the confession of her faith, with her sister Maria, on July 28, 1946.

In 1948, with the help of the MCC, the family traveled to South America - first for 16 days on a large ship (the Heinzelman) to Argentina, and then on a smaller ship. Once at their port, they travelled by train and wagon to Paraguay. It was the end of a very long journey - Paraguay was hot, dry, and bare. The family had to start over again, with almost nothing, but they were together and free at last. They no longer needed to flee. They had to build their own home and learn to farm on the land. It was here in Paraguay, that Liese met Henry Giesbrecht. They were married on October 21, 1950. In 1958 Liese and Henry and their three children (Betty, John, Netty) came to Canada. It was another new beginning, and it meant starting over again, but they were happy to be in the land of opportunities. They had never been to such a beautiful country. They purchased their first house after only a few years in Canada. Their fourth child (Wendy) was born in 1968. Henry went to night school to learn English and did many different jobs in the construction field before he started working at Sauder Doors in Richmond, and ended up working there until

his retirement in 1992. Liese took great care of the home and family. She cooked, cleaned, gardened, baked, and canned. She also had housekeeping/cleaning jobs outside of the home to earn extra money. The family lived in Vancouver until they were able to buy a lot and build a new house in Richmond in 1980.

Over the years, Liese and Henry enjoyed hosting many family gatherings and babysitting their grandchildren often. They travelled a lot with friends and family, making many trips to Palm Springs and Arizona, as well as having many vacations in Hawaii. Liese did not think she would like the heat in Hawaii after being in Paraguay, but she soon realized how different it was and fell in love with the tropical paradise. They also went on a Panama Canal cruise and took a tour in Europe. Liese went to Hong Kong once with her sister, Tina. They also took many local bus tours going to Vancouver Island, Whistler and other locations in BC and the USA.

The family started off going to the Vancouver Mennonite Brethren (43rd) Church and then began attending the daughter congregation, Culloden M.B. Church, in 1968, where they were members for over 30 years. Henry even helped during the construction of the church. Both Liese and Henry were quite involved with the church. Liese and Henry worked in the kitchen for special events and weddings. Liese helped with sewing MCC quilts; Henry helped usher and was a parking lot attendant. They made many friends and had a happy life. In June of 2001, Henry was diagnosed with terminal cancer and passed away on November 9, 2001. Liese stayed in Richmond until October 2003, when she moved to Abbotsford to be close to friends and family. She moved into Evergreen Village at that time and lived there for over 17 years. She loved it and had many good years there. She had friends and family in the building and was able to walk to stores and to her church, Clearbrook M.B. Church across the street. She was quite involved with her church - sewing quilts for MCC, going to Bible Study and Sunday morning services each week, as well as attending a Church Ladies Group. She also enjoyed participating in special events at the church and would also attend activities at Evergreen Village. In her retirement, Liese enjoyed reading, sewing, knitting, crocheting, playing games and doing puzzles. She made hundreds of special hangers for all of her family and many were donated to the MCC.

Liese began suffering with terrible arthritis pain in her later years. After a surgery in 2015, she began having other health issues as well; so in addition to her mobility issues, she was not able to get out as much in the last few years. She always said that she was thankful though, things could be worse. Her hearing was also very bad, but her mind was always sharp. She had an incredible memory and still felt blessed, despite her limitations. She loved visits from her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Liese was strong in her faith and felt ready to end her earthly journey. She was especially saddened when she lost her great-granddaughter, Blake, in 2016, and then her daughter-in-law, Genelle, in 2020. She would have traded places with them if she could have. She loved her family dearly and prayed for each and every one of us daily.

It was a difficult decision, but on November 28th, 2020, on her 92nd birthday, Liese moved into Tabor Court. Shortly after her move, her health declined further and she was hospitalized on January 7th. She was in hospital until January 27th, when she was discharged to Tabor Home. She passed away peacefully in the early

morning hours of February 6, 2021. She is laid to rest with her husband Henry in Valley View Memorial Gardens in Surrey, BC.

Liese was predeceased by:

Her parents - Aganeta and Johann Zacharias

Her husband - Henry Giesbrecht

Her siblings - John Zacharias, Neta Federau, Maria Flaming, Peter Zacharias and Jake Zacharias

Her great-granddaughter, Blake Miller

Her daughter-in-law, Genelle Giesbrecht

And many other relatives and friends

Left to cherish her memories are her children:

Betty and Alf Wiebe

John Giesbrecht

Netty and Don Klein

Wendy and Darryl Martin

7 grandchildren and their spouses

9 great-grandchildren (and one on the way)

Two sisters, Tina Walde, Helen (& Jake) Penner, and one brother Henry Zacharias

