



REMEMBERING Peter Penner

September 3, 1924 - July 14, 2022



Peter was born on September 3, 1924, Shoenhorst, Ukraine to Johann and Maria (nee Olfert) Penner. He had an older brother Hans. Peter's father died September 5, 1927, shortly before younger sister Maria was born. Stories from Peter's childhood include the hard times, where food was never quite enough, churches were closed and work was non-stop, and the good times that he loved, working with the farm animals.

Under Russian rule, religious practices of any kind were not allowed, and the majority of the land was taken away and collected into large government farms. Peter enjoyed school, but had to quit in grade 6 to help out on the Collective Farm. German troops entered the Ukraine in 1941, and for a short time life became better. They allowed the churches to reopen, took less food and treated the Mennonites much better than the Russians had. In 1943, with the German retreat, the family, along with most other Mennonites, chose to flee, first to Poland, then on to Germany. At this point, Peter was drafted into the German army. He was sent to the eastern front and saw active duty first in Poland, then in Romania, where, on Feb 1, 1945 he was hit by artillery fire. He barely survived, and spent the next year in hospital. After his release, he was able to search for and be reunited with his family. While in Germany, Peter was baptized by Aeltester Heinrich Winter in Brakel, on May 25, 1947.

In October of 1949, the family emigrated to Canada, sponsored by the Schmidt family in Abbotsford. At this time the family already included Hans's wife Irene and son Helmut. To repay the cost of passage, the family was obligated to work on the Schmidt farm for one year. While Peter and Hans worked on the farm, younger sister Maria was sent to Vancouver, as were many other young Mennonite women to work in the houses of the rich. Later on, Hans, Irene and Peter took jobs with the CPR. Shortly after this, Peter worked on the tugs that serviced ports in Georgia Strait. While Maria worked as a maid in Vancouver, she became good friends with Helen Wieler who also lived in Abbotsford. On weekends, they would invite each other over. It was during these visits that Peter and Helen met. A year later,

the Penner family decided there were more opportunities in the city, so they relocated to Vancouver. At this point they became members of First United Mennonite Church in Vancouver. Peter and Helen were married at West Abbotsford Church on November 14, 1954. Soon after that, Helen also became a member of First United Mennonite Church. They were blessed with five children: Lynda Luise (1955), Anita Anne (1957), Ronald Peter (1959), Elsie Helen (1961) and Doris Mary (1964). When the children started appearing, Peter quit working on the tugs in order to stay closer to family. During these years, Peter worked at a variety of mills along the Fraser River. Often he and brother Hans would work at the same mill.

Along with working and raising children, Helen and Peter were very active in church. Peter ushered, and helped with building and maintenance projects, and Helen was active in the Ladies Aid groups, acting as treasurer for many years. When the children were grown, Peter and Helen were happy to welcome their children's partners into the family. First, Laura Koop married Ron, then Hugh McDonald married Elsie, then Blake Wagner married Lynda, then Brian Vizjak married Doris. After retirement they got a truck and camper and spent a few happy years camping and touring, especially in the southwestern US. Peter and Helen were delighted with the arrival of grandchildren and would help out in any way they could. Karemi, Lorna and Nolan Wagner, Kimberley and Kathy MacDonald, Joseph and Kelly Vizjak. Sadly, Joseph was the last grandchild that Helen would hold. Six months after Joseph was born, on June 25, 1995, after over 40 years of marriage, Helen passed away from cancer. Peter was devastated by this loss. Some joy returned to Peter a short time later with the addition of his final grandchild, Kelly Vizjak, and Peter was never happier than when all of his grandchildren were together. The family suffered a further loss when Peter's daughter Elsie, after a long hard battle with cancer, died in October, 2005.

With retirement, Peter was able to spend more time on his hobbies. These included a real passion for gardening. His flowers, especially roses, were a matter of great pride to him. When Peter moved to Garden Park Towers in Abbotsford, he continued to work in the gardens there, but also spent many enjoyable hours in their woodshop. Peter was also very welcoming to the partners of the grandchildren. Zachary with Karemi, Corey with Kimberley, and Jarret with Kathy. Peter was able to welcome great-grandchildren as well: Hudson, Asher, Myla and Berkleigh born to Zachary and Karemi, and very recently, Sophia Elsie, born to Kimberley and Corey. Peter had moved to assisted living at Menno Home in 2018, but became quite ill in February 2022. After 6 weeks in hospital, he was moved to Fairhaven Home in Burnaby. He passed away on July 14, 2022. He will be missed.

