



## REMEMBERING Peter Thiessen

February 17, 1932 - April 17, 2026



"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Psalm 46:1

How can one possibly tell the story of a 94-year life in a single eulogy? It seems a presumptuous, if not impossible, task. However, Peter's story deserves to be shared. Here is my heartfelt effort.

### Early Life and Global Journeys

On Wednesday, February 17, 1932, in the village of Einlage in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, Peter was born to Gerhard and Helene Thiessen. His mother often recounted his birth story: "The Dnieper River was frozen solid, and the snow was deep as we crossed with my brand-new baby wrapped tightly against my chest. Walking back to the village in the freezing cold, I feared for little Peter's life". Peter was the second child, welcomed by his older sister, Anna; a few years later, his younger sister, Erika, was born. At the age of 12, Peter faced the beginning of years of uncertainty and upheaval. Amid the turmoil of WWII, the family of five fled their village, retreating with German forces to Neustadt, Germany, to escape Soviet capture. The resilience he developed during these times of constant change defined his spirit. Eventually, the family moved to Rügen Island to prepare for immigration. In 1946, they arrived in the Mennonite village of Waldestruh, Paraguay. It was there that Peter was baptized in 1949. Despite the extreme heat and challenging terrain of the Chaco, he enjoyed a happy youth, singing in the choir, learning the harmonica, and riding horses with friends. In early 1950, the family moved to Curitiba, Brazil, where Peter worked as a heavy-duty mechanic, maintaining the machinery that powered the development of local colonies.

## A New Life in Canada

In 1957, the Thiessen family arrived in Canada and settled in Abbotsford, BC. With only a Grade 4 education and no English, work was difficult to find; the family spent their first season working in the berry fields. Occasionally, Peter would catch a ride to Vancouver to visit relatives. It was at the home of Jake and Olga Wall that he met the love of his life, Helen Wall. They were instantly smitten—she with his exotic travels and looks, and he with her laugh and startling blue eyes. Since she owned a car and frequently drove to Abbotsford, she offered him rides, and they quickly fell in love. They were engaged in 1958 and married on November 22 at the West Abbotsford Mennonite Church. Together, they built a life they were proud of. Their daughter, Loretta Ann, was born in 1959, followed by their son, John Peter, in 1961. Never forgetting their own experiences with war and poverty, they often helped other immigrant families and joyfully shared what they had. They were so privileged to celebrate 60 years of marriage.

## Faith and Family

Faith was the thread that ran through their lives. After years in Vancouver attending First United Mennonite and Sherbrook Mennonite Church, the family moved to Abbotsford in 1970. They became members of Ebenezer Mennonite Church—a building Peter's father, Gerhard, had helped construct. As the years passed, they welcomed four grandchildren: Sascha, Mikayla, Julian, and Pamela.

## The Man Behind the Persona

Peter often portrayed himself as a simple labourer who "couldn't afford it"; but in reality, he was a multilayered, complicated man who valued loyalty and duty above all.

**Linguistic Talents:** English was his sixth language. Even at 90, he could still recite poetry in his first language, Russian.

**A Sharp Mind:** He read voraciously in German and maintained a sharp memory for history and geography until his final days.

**A Love for Beauty:** Like his father and sisters, he loved gardening. He grew fabulous roses and peonies, and he often sent flowers to his sisters and family members for special occasions.

**Style and Music:** He liked to dress "dapper" and had a deep love for music, ranging from classical to Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley.

## Final Days

Peter was not always the easiest personality; we had a difficult relationship and often struggled to see eye to eye. However, his social awkwardness was often tempered by my mother's outgoing nature. I have no regrets about committing myself to walking Dad to the end of his journey. As Dad grew weaker and lonelier, missing Mom, he welcomed the idea of rest. Our prayers were answered on Thursday, April 16th, when he closed his eyes and went to sleep, awaking in the arms of Jesus and looking once more into the sparkling blue eyes of his beloved Helen.

"Good night, dear Dad"; "Daut charper es nue oot georbate".

Survived by: Sister Erika Reinke; children Loretta Ann Thiessen Voth (Murray) and John Peter Thiessen (Kathy); grandchildren Sascha (Ainslie), Mikayla, Julian (Tannis), and Pamela; and great-grandchildren Sloane and Levi.

Submitted with love by his daughter, Loretta Ann Thiessen Voth, April 24, 2026

