



REMEMBERING
Tamara Gaertner

November 25, 1921 - November 6, 2016



Tamara Gaertner was born November 25 in 1921 during a period of turmoil in Zhytomir, Ukraine. She herself was initially shielded from the unrest by her parents, Bertha Gallwitz and Daniel Beitler, who were German Russians and who owned flour mills. Tamara recalled happy childhood memories living in their lovely home with fine furniture surrounded by beautiful orchards and flower gardens, and enjoying trips to the circus or Opera House in Kiev, where her father sometimes played the mandolin. There were two major interruptions that would alter her life's direction. The first was a simple cold which transformed into an ear infection and then mastoiditis in a time without antibiotics. Her life was fortunately spared through exceptional surgery but she was left with a lifelong and profound hearing disability that affected her - a very social, outgoing individual - to her very last days. The second upheaval was, of course, the Bolshevik revolution raging around the family, coming closer and closer to home as she witnessed gunpoint to her father's head. In 1928, the family managed to escape, just two weeks prior to the gates being closed, through the help of a maid's husband (a policeman), numerous exchanges of money, and exit papers likely obtained via the black market. They travelled by train to Riga, then boat to England, and then from Southampton by ocean liner, the Duchess of Bedford, to Canada where they arrived as landed immigrants in Quebec City in July. After a long and crowded train trip, the family arrived in Guernsey, Saskatchewan and then eventually settled in Tisdale to farm. Their first 'home' was a granary shack, and their first Canadian winter was one of the harshest on record. Her former life of privilege dissolved into hard physical work, very few worldly possessions, and battle with the elements. She recalled barely being able to brace themselves against the strong winds that blew black soil in their faces, sometimes causing them to retreat home before completing the 3-mile walk to her school. However, despite the weather, her lack of English, and her significant hearing loss, she enjoyed her one-room school-house days with fond

memories of dancing around the potbelly stove to warm up, the Christmas programs, and the picnics.

According to her husband and pastor, Fred Gaertner, the two fell in love "in a wink of an eye" in the fall of 1943. They were married a few weeks later, on October 26, and there began a life together of 64 years until Fred's death in 2008. Their marriage also coincided with the beginning of Fred's ministry in the Lutheran church, a calling that would span 40 years and consist of multiple moves and life transitions between parishes. Their family grew as quickly as the parishes they served, with 10 children born over a period of 20 years, 6 children in the first 7 years of their married life! There were years full of blessings but also tragedies such as the loss of all of their modest possessions in 1955, and the yet more significant loss of their son, Jonathan to cancer in 1990. Throughout these years, Tamara gave of herself into the wee hours of every morning, participating fully in church activities such as women's and children's groups, as well as cooking, sewing, baking, gardening, and knitting for her ever-growing family. Their first salary as a couple was \$400 a year and their lifestyle was destined to be frugal. Tamara took occasional odd jobs to earn a bit of extra money for her family. Her children wore what she knitted or sewed, or what could be patched and passed on to the next sibling. They ate what was pulled from their own garden or donated from compassionate church members. And despite the lack of gardening materials, she took a few seeds or plant cuttings and turned each parish into a gardener's paradise before moving on to the next.

Fred and Tamara moved to Osoyoos in 1977, the start of a new phase in which Fred gradually retired from active ministry in the church, their last parish being St. John Lutheran church in Oliver. As the children left home to study and start families of their own, Tamara devoted her time fully to her many hobbies such as quilting, knitting, baking pies and cinnamon buns, gardening, canning, squeezing apple-juice, and carding wool (with Fred) which she then sewed into blankets destined for world relief organizations. She loved to host family and friends, and continued to play cards or board games in earnest with her many grandchildren. In 2011, she moved to Kelowna to be closer to family and to receive additional support for her increasing health needs. She spent her last three months in hospice, surrounded daily by her children, and gradually, and in the end, barely perceptibly, released her final breath on November 6, in the month of her 95th birthday.

Tamara was predeceased by all of her siblings: older sister Mary Becker, younger sister Valentina Syroteuk, younger brother Leonard Beitler, and by Tamara's son, Jonathan Gaertner. She is survived by her children: Arnold (Barbara) Gaertner, Vonda (Doug) Hutchins, Alice (Paul) Hanson, David (Connie) Gaertner, Elizabeth (Richie) Schnider, Lucy (Lloyd) Ruthven, Brenda Gaertner, Yvonne Gaertner (Ken Buhler), Cynthia (Jody) Acton, and daughter-in-law, Diana Gaertner. She has been blessed with 18 grandchildren (Lorin, Roger, Karen, Brian, Sonya, Randi, Jonathan, Travis, Kyla, Ben, Tiffany, Angela, Rebecca, Hannah, Ruth-Ann, Noah, Matthew, Leah) as well as 13 great grandchildren.

The funeral service will be held on Thursday, November 10 at 1:00 pm at Grace Lutheran Church in Osoyoos. Donations will be gratefully accepted to the Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR), 600 - 177 Lombard Avenue, Winnipeg,

Manitoba R3B 0W5 or www.clwr.org. Arrangements entrusted to Nunes-Pottinger Funeral Services. Special thanks to Dr. Alexis Thomson and the staff at the Central Okanagan Hospice House in Kelowna.

