

ANNI ♦ In Austria with No Place to Go

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)



Anni had no family and no resources when she arrived in Austria. She had risked discovery at the border to bring a letter to people she hoped would help her, but they turned her out.



The little girl (right) who pleaded with her mother to keep Anni, and her brother. Anni stayed with their family in Gross Florian, Austria from December 1945 until May 1946, when familiar faces arrived at her door and helped her reunite with her family.

In Austria with No Place to Go

Before I left Yugoslavia, an Austrian man in the DP camp asked me to deliver a letter to his wife. He said, “My wife is staying with my brother. Would you please bring them this letter? They will be so thankful that they will take care of you.” He was so worried about his wife that I smuggled his letter across the border. It was very dangerous to do that; if the guards had found it, they might have sent me back. I was searched at the border, but I joked with the guard that was poking around in my bag, and he didn’t look very hard.

I made my way to this man’s brother’s house. He was mayor of the city and well-off, with 19 cows and a number of pigs. The man’s wife was so happy that she finally knew where her husband was, but his brother didn’t want to help me.

He asked me, “What should we do with you?”

I said, “I don’t know. I have nowhere to go.”

“Well, we don’t need a maid,” he said.

I thought to myself, *I don’t want to be a maid, either, but I would have done it, regardless.* It wouldn’t have hurt him one bit to keep me for a few days, just so that I had someplace to stay. But he didn’t want to take me in.

“I heard there’s a farmer nearby who’s looking for a maid,” he told me. “Can you work?”

“Sure, I can work,” I told him, although my feet still weren’t completely healed. I had no clothes except what I was wearing, no possessions at all. These people took me to a farmer who needed a maid. I had to walk the whole way, a four-kilometer trek through the snow. I was limping badly, but managed somehow to make it to this farmer’s house in a little town in Austria called Gross Florian.

When we arrived at the house, I stood outside while the man who brought me explained who I was, and the farmer and his wife looked me over. They had a little daughter who kept looking at me, too. The farmer’s wife asked me, “Where are your clothes and belongings?”

Menial Work: Cleaning the Pigsty ♦ ANNI

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)

“I don’t have any,” I answered.

“How do you expect to work then?” she asked.

“Just as I am,” I responded.

The farmer and his wife went inside to confer, and left me outside. Their little daughter kept looking and looking at me for a long time, and then she went into the house. I learned much later that they took me in because of that little girl. The woman told me that her daughter had said to her, “Mommy, please take that girl. She looks so poor!”

The farmer’s wife came back outside. She said, “Well, it’s almost Christmas. I think we’ll keep you and see how you work out. You’ll have to clean the *Wuckrestall*.” That means “pigsty,” but I didn’t know it at the time.

I said, “Okay, sure!”

Then her husband asked me, “What are you asking for your work?”

“Nothing,” I told him. “Just room and board. I don’t want anything.”

So they agreed to keep me. This was in 1945, and I was 19 years old.

Menial Work

My first morning there, the woman woke me up at 5:00 in the morning. It was December and still very dark at that time. She wanted to show me how to clean the pigsty. We went into the barn. There was a big broom, and she demonstrated how to clean the stalls. I was scared of those huge pigs, but I cleaned all the stalls in the barn anyway.

I also had to do the washing. They had two big barrels of laundry already soaking when I came. Everything had to be washed by hand. First it had to be soaked, then washed, then boiled, then re-washed, and then rinsed. I got water for washing from their frozen pond. I had to break a hole in the ice. Every piece of laundry I had to do this to: dip it in that freezing water, shake it one-two-three times, wring it out, shake-shake-shake out the water, dip it again one-two-three times, wring it out, shake-shake-shake out the water, dip it again one-two-three times, wring it out, shake-shake-shake out the water, and finally put it in the basket.



At 19, not yet fully healed from her injuries, Anni worked for a family in exchange for room and board. She laundered their clothes and cleaned the pigsty. It was an unpleasant job, and the pigs frightened her.

ANNI ♦ Menial Chores: Washerwoman

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Anni had to wash clothes by hand in freezing water. When the clothes were hung up, they froze stiff. She didn't have adequate clothing herself, not even a dry dress to change into after doing the washing. "It's a wonder I didn't freeze to death," she said.

When it was all washed, I had to hang it up. It was frozen stiff by the time it was hung, and I was frozen too. When I washed my own dress, I had to work in my coat. I must have had guardian angels to keep me warm, because I don't know why I didn't freeze to death, the way I was dressed!

This farmer's wife was once sitting and talking to her neighbor, complaining about the cold Austrian winter. I heard her say "*Meine Anna*," which meant, "My Anna." My ears perked up, and I listened to her say, "My Anna is never cold." She went on to tell her neighbor how hearty I was, having come from Russia, that I never felt cold. My thin dress and coat was all I needed. And I thought, "And just *how* do you know that?!!" She had never asked me: she just assumed that simply because I didn't complain. And since she thought I was not cold, the woman had never bothered to

offer me a warm sweater or anything. I guess that I should have complained a bit. I was cold *all the time!* My bedroom there wasn't heated. I slept on corn husks in that bedroom, and had a down cover, so at least my bed was warm. One thing I *did* have there, though, was good food.

While I stayed with that family, I began writing letters all over the place. I wrote to the Red Cross, and to all the addresses that I had. I wrote to a girlfriend who worked in a hotel in Turahahe. And in April or May, somebody knocked on the door, and I answered it. It was dusk, and there was an unfamiliar man and a girl there. I said, "Yes? May I help you?"

The girl said, "Anni! Don't you recognize me?" And then I knew them! They were Suzie and Peter, my friend's cousin and brother from home.

I was so surprised. I asked them, "What are you doing here?"

"We got your letter," she responded, "and we thought there might be more Mennonites here."

"No, I'm all alone," I told them. Peter and Suzie knew where my mother was, and my sister Tina, and her son Viktor! They were all in a refugee camp in Austria and didn't know where I was, so Peter and Suzie had come to get me.

The farmer's wife was so sad I was leaving. Her wash had never been so white and her windows had never sparkled so much.

Then I was reunited with my mother and sister Tin, and lived with them again in refugee camps. It was a miracle for me to find my family again. I was so glad! Deep down in my heart, I had always prayed to God that I would see them again. I always said, "*Thy* will be done...but if it *is* Your will, then *please* let me find them!"

And it did, *it did*. When I look back now, there were always kind people that looked after my family, just like with me. Even if I thought that there was no help anyplace, still, somewhere, somehow, something always came up.

In Refugee Camps, Reunited with Family ♦ ANNI

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)



With friends in a refugee camp.



It was a relief to be reunited with family and friends in refugee camps after the war. The camps organized various activities, such as this event in Treffling, Austria in May, 1946. Young men and women are portraying the *polak*, a Ukrainian dance. There weren't enough males, so Anni's sister Tina had to dress as a boy.



(Above) Anni (left) and her sister Tina in Treffling, 1946-47, awaiting immigration. Anni and their mother went to Canada in 1949, but Tina remained in Germany, and Anni did not see her for another 20 years, until 1970 when she visited Germany.



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(Above) Anni (left) and her sister Tina in Treffling, 1946-47, awaiting immigration. Anni and their mother went to Canada in 1949, but Tina remained in Germany, and Anni did not see her for another 20 years, until 1970 when she visited Germany.



With friends in a refugee camp.

ANNI ♦ Waiting for a Door to Open

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Anni's permanent home was not to be in Europe. She came to Treffling, Austria in May, 1946, where she stayed for several years with her mother, Anganetha Dyck, and her sister, Tina Vogt and nephew, Viktor. She moved to Kapfenberg, then Gronau, then was in Bremerhafen for a few weeks awaiting a ship to Canada.



Passport photo, 1949



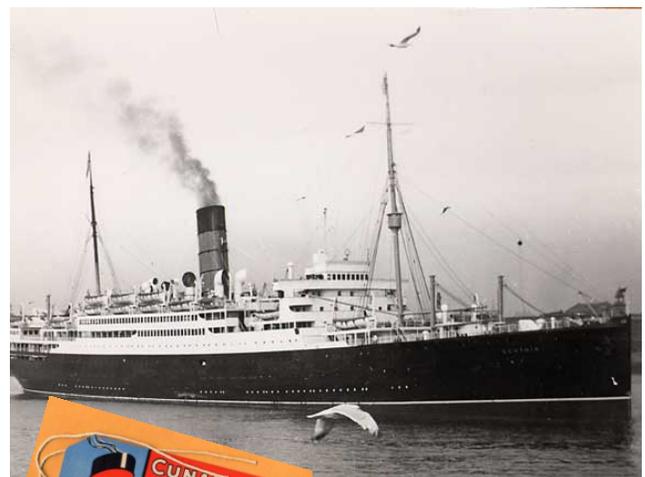
Waiting for a Door to Open

We had to move from one camp to another in Austria. We hoped to immigrate to Canada. My mother's aunt lived in Canada, which is why we chose that country. We certainly didn't want to go back to Russia, and Germany was too close to Russia for us! My aunt, Tante Nüt (Anna Penner), went to Paraguay, and we considered that option, but the MCC workers told us, "Just hang in there a little bit, and maybe the door will open for Canada." So we waited and waited and *waited*, and finally the door did open.

A kind family from Manitoba sponsored us. They sent us a visa, and offered to give us accommodations when we first arrived. The Mennonite Central Committee paid for our passage.

My sister Tin couldn't come with us. At that time, you had to be very healthy to immigrate. She and Viktor both had had tuberculosis, and although they were better, there were still spots on their lungs. We had to leave them behind, which was very hard for all of us.

My mother and I finally embarked on a ship, the *Scythia*, and came to Canada on July 25, 1949.



RMS *Scythia*, brought Anni and her mother to Canada in July, 1949.

A Rough Start in Canada ♦ ANNI

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)

A Rough Start in Canada

We arrived in Halifax with a large group of Mennonite immigrants, and went through Quebec on trains to Winnipeg. When we arrived in Winnipeg, there was a large group of people at the train station picking up their immigrants. It seemed that everybody greeted everybody as they picked up their refugees, but my mom and I were left just standing there. We had name tags pinned to our sweaters and couldn't speak English. Everybody looked at our tags and passed us by. Nobody came to pick us up. At last, my mom and I both broke down and cried our hearts out.

There were a couple of Mennonite men there who spoke Low German. We overheard one say to the other, "What are we going to do with these ladies? They are the Johnson's people."

"The Johnson's people! Why aren't the Johnsons here?"

"I don't know," the other one replied, "but we have a truck. Let's take them to the Johnson's."

These men took us home with them first. They gave us coffee and something to eat, and then they took us to our sponsors, the Johnsons.

The Johnsons had just dug a hole in their yard to add a basement to their house. When we arrived,

Mrs. Johnson came out. She was hard of hearing. The man called to her, "We are bringing you your refugees." She asked, "Huh? Huh?," not hearing them. My mom started walking toward her. She was looking at Mrs. Johnson, not at the ground, and suddenly my mom fell into the huge hole. She had to scramble and crawl out of there. It was a very undignified beginning.

When she finally understood who we were, Mrs. Johnson said, "Oh, they came today? We were at the station yesterday!" Our family had mixed up the day of our arrival and tried to pick us up the day before.

The Johnsons must have been very good Christians. They had a *tiny* house, and they didn't need our help. They had sponsored us just to do us a favor. That family slept in the kitchen and gave us their bedroom, and they fed us well. I was there for two days and looked after their cows while we stayed there. I'm very thankful for them.

Then they took me to a Mennonite girls' home in Winnipeg to find work. People came there to hire domestic servants. A Jewish family hired me from there to clean their house.

I had thought that I'd never be hungry again in my life after coming to Canada, but I *was* hungry that first month in Canada when I worked for that



Anni and her mother, Anganetha Dyck, immigrated to Canada through Halifax in 1949.

They went by train to Winnipeg, and soon moved to Cloverdale, where her sister, Neta, joined them. Many Mennonites eventually settled in Clearbrook, B.C. (Abbotsford).

ANNI

◆ Starting Over in British Columbia

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)

family. They didn't feed me very well. I was so happy to be in Canada, and so afraid that I'd do something wrong and be sent back, that I didn't complain, but I was hungry all the time again.

One day, the family that I worked for had relatives visiting from Vancouver. The two couples were going out to eat. The lady I cleaned for opened a tin of canned beans for me, but only gave me half of it for my dinner, and I was hungry enough that I could have easily eaten the whole tin. But her sister's husband saw what she gave me, and wasn't happy. "Never mind," he told my boss, "I'll make Anna supper." And he made me a *steak*! I'd never had a steak before! Oh, that was *so* good.

While I was in Winnipeg, my mom wrote to her aunt, Helena Thiessen (Tante Lena), in Cloverdale, British Columbia. She was willing for us to come live with her in B.C. She came right away to get my mom. She had a vegetable farm that she managed with her two bachelor sons, John and Peter, and her eldest son, Henry, had a chicken farm nearby. But my employer wouldn't let me go until I had finished out the month. So, once my contract was finished, I came to Cloverdale.

Starting Over in British Columbia

Once I arrived, my mom and I lived with Tante Lena (Helena Thiessen, my mom's cousin) and her three boys, all bachelors: Henry, John, and Peter. John and Peter each had each a room in her house, and Henry had his own house, two doors down.

I worked in the fields, and earned 50 cents an hour. I weeded with a wheel hoe and picked potatoes. My mom was stronger than I was, and she could pick more potatoes than I could. She would dump them in a bag, and I helped load them afterwards.

Then we learned that my sister, Neta, was someplace in Manitoba, and very unhappy. I wrote her a letter and suggested that she come to B.C. She still has that letter. She has said that the day she



Wheel hoeing was difficult for someone who had never done it before, and Anni's uncles, the Thiessen boys, mocked her awkwardness as she worked the fields.

received it was the happiest day of her life. When she arrived, Neta and her four children moved to Henry Thiessen's house and worked on his chicken farm.

The Thiessen boys were not very kind to us. I must have been awkward since I'd never done wheel hoeing before. I didn't have work clothes, so I worked in my one red skirt. I had such skinny legs, too. The Thiessens would sit and watch me work, and laugh at me. They'd say, "Ha, ha, ha, look at that stork!" and "There she goes again," when I did something wrong.

The Thiessen boys once told Neta and me, "We hired some other girls and they are *such* hard workers!" Neta and I were afraid that we might lose our jobs if we weren't as good as they were. We planted Spanish onions, and hurried the whole time. And guess what? We did twice as much as those other girls they were bragging about. Probably, the boys had just been taunting us for sport.

Once, Tante Lena said, "Boys, you should take Anni to the Legion." I didn't know what the Legion was. The Thiessen boys had insisted that I wear lipstick, but neither of them had washed themselves. I rode in between them in the car, with one dirty Thiessen boy on my left and another dirty one on my right. They both had dirt crusted on their

Feeling Like a Millionaire ♦ ANNI

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)

ears from the farm. We arrived at the Legion, which was a loud bar. I thought, "I'm so glad nobody knows me here!"

That winter, I went to work as a housekeeper for the Kennedys, four kilometers away. The Kennedys had a big farm, and they were nice. On the weekdays I worked as a maid, and on my day off, I worked in the field for 50 cents an hour.

I saved every penny, and in a year and a half, I bought a house for my mom on Clearbrook Road. It cost \$1500. I had to pay cash, and I saved it all up. Well, almost all...my mom contributed some too. She didn't earn as much as I did because she worked mostly for free for Tante Lena in the house, to pay for room and board for us. I paid Tante Lena \$20 a month for my food. Our new house had no running water. We had a water pump outside, and the toilet was outside too. But it was a *house*, with a living room, one bedroom, and a long kitchen that ran the length of the back of the house. And you know, when I bought that house in Clearbrook, I felt like a millionaire.



Anni and her mother bought their own house about 18 months after arriving in Canada. They paid \$1500 cash, and had saved every penny of their wages to gain independence.

The house had an outdoor toilet and no running water, but "...when I bought that house in Clearbrook," Anni said, "I felt like a millionaire."

Anni and her mother, Anganetha Dyck, with friends in front of their house.



Anni was able to find banking work in Vancouver, B.C.



ANNI ♦ A Difficult Marriage

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)

A Difficult Marriage

My mom never wanted me to get married. She wanted me to stay with her and look after her. Her sister, Tante Nüt (Anna Penner), had not married and had stayed with her mother, and my mom thought that I should stay with her, too. But it wasn't easy to live with my mother. Sometimes she said things that were untrue or called me bad names.

One day, she said to me, "When we were in Europe, I prayed in every church that you wouldn't find a husband." That was hurtful. I hadn't dated anybody in Canada because we were so isolated. Clearbrook was all farms in those days, with nothing much around. But when young men had dated me in Germany, my mom always found something wrong with them and interfered until they broke up with me. She never wanted me to go to Vancouver or anywhere, and I



Anni worked for the Royal Bank of Canada.

was lonely, just sitting in the countryside in Cloverdale, 25 years old then. I think that I was always looking for love, partly because my father had died when I was so young.

One day, my mom and I went to a wedding in Vancouver. It was a second wedding, and all the people attending were older, so I escaped and went to the Alpen Club, a German club in Vancouver where they were having a dance. I met my husband that night. His name was Ralph Gunkel.

We dated, and Ralph seemed to be the answer to my loneliness. He thought that I was silly, waiting for just one man and not

sleeping around, so we went all the way. Then I got pregnant and *had* to get married; but it seemed like a good way to escape my mom's house anyway. I married Rudolf (Ralph) Wilhelm Gunkel in 1953.

It was a very bad choice. I was 26, and should have known better, but I didn't. I was so innocent. We were new in Canada, and I was still learning English. When we got married, I figured I'd be so that I'd be such a good wife to Ralph, that he'd have to love me; but I had misjudged his character, and our marriage didn't work.

Ralph didn't want children, any children at all. Each time I was pregnant, I'd cry my eyes out because he was so unsupportive. That's why all my children are so far apart. Doris was born in 1953, Roy in 1957, and Rodney (he later changed his name to Matthew) in 1962. It was a difficult time for me because Ralph was so unkind.

I worked in the Royal Bank of Canada. I started in 1956, before Roy was born. The salary at that time was only \$1500 a *year*, can you believe it!?? For a while, I was a teller-trainer, then a savings supervisor, then a DDA supervisor, and



Anni with her family: (L to R, back row): nephew Fred, Anni, daughter Doris, husband Ralph; (front row): niece Katie, sister Neta, and mother, Anganetha.

A Difficult Marriage ♦ ANNI

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)



The Gunkel family, 1965



finally I worked in the cash cage. I was very well-liked. Ralph would bring Doris to the bank when he went to work. I would do my teller duties with her sitting next to me. Sometimes she would play with the adding machine, pulling the handle. When the bank started opening branches on Saturdays, I worked every weekday, and on Saturdays, too. I had to quit each time I had a baby, but the manager always rehired me afterwards. In those days, there was no maternity leave.

Ralph wouldn't let me breastfeed so that I could return to work right after the babies were born. Then he started walking out and leaving me. In 1970, he left for good. He was always running around anyway, so I was like a single woman already. I had to work and take care of the children, too. It's very hard if you're *not* alone and yet you *feel* alone.

I attended a Southern Baptist church in Vancouver for many years. I took all the kids to Sunday

School, and was a Sunday School teacher and Vacation Bible School leader. Doris accepted the Savior during one of the Bible schools, and Matthew was baptized later. Roy was never baptized, but he had faith too.

Ralph and I divorced in 1970. He wanted to sell our house and get his share of it. A lawyer negotiated a deal in which I got the house, and Ralph never had to pay child support. At the time, Matthew was 8, Roy was 13, and Doris was 17. They were all still in school and I could have used child support, but I said, "I'll work day and night, just so I won't have to beg him for money."

I sold my first house on Clearbrook Road for \$98,000 in 1988. It was a good return on my \$1500 investment. With part of the payment, I bought a house in Surrey for my son, Roy. When he sold it, I bought a place in Aldergrove, which I eventually gave to him.

ANNI ♦ My Family

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)



Anni with Aunt Anna Penner and mother, Anganetha Dyck.



Doris, Rodney, and Roy, 1965.



Rodney in 1975 at Disneyland.



Anni walking Doris up the aisle, March 1938.



Anni, Rodney, and Doris at Rodney's high school graduation, June 1980.

My Family ♦ ANNI

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)



Anni with a grandchild



Granddaughters Jennifer and Lara



Anni with her daughter Doris, and granddaughter, Jennifer.



Doris and Jennifer a few years later. Doris worked in banking and Jennifer became a hospital administrator.



Roy and Matthew.



Lara and Matthew. Matthew worked as a social worker.

ANNI ♦ Meeting Karl; My Grown Children

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)

Meeting Karl

Karl would stop by the Alpen Club at 10 o'clock at night when I got off work. We started dating, and then we ended up married. I married Karl Kessenich on March 16, 1996 at Peace Lutheran Church in Abbotsford. It will be 21 years next March.

I was Mennonite, then Baptist. Karl was Catholic. And since we were both divorced and our spouses were still alive, we had problems finding a church to marry us. We visited Peace Lutheran. The pastor came to see us, and when we explained our situation to him, he had no problem marrying us. That church is where we have been since. To tell you the truth, there might be differences between the Baptists and Mennonites and Catholics, but we have only one God.

My Grown Children

Doris followed me into the banking industry. She was a secretary in Dominion Securities. She worked many years in the bank, and enjoyed it. She is retired now. The two of us are close. We have so much fun together on holidays; we giggle like kids. When Karl and I were in a car accident a year ago, she was here, and she handled the whole thing. I don't know what I would do without her. I believe that Doris would do anything for me. Doris has a daughter, Jennifer, who is very accomplished, and works in hospital administration.

Growing up, Roy loved to read out of his set of encyclopedias. He earned a degree in civil engineering from UBC, and then worked with a Vancouver firm on computer mapping. He suffered several injuries, though, that left him in chronic pain and unable to work. He occupied his time riding his bike, watching sports, solving puzzles, and playing chess. He tutored math and volunteered at Gleaners with his cousin Fred.

Roy probably suffered the most from his dad



Anni married Karl Kessenich on March 16, 1996, at Peace Lutheran Church in Abbotsford, BC.

leaving. He wanted to have contact with his dad, and reached out to him several times when Ralph lived in Abbotsford, hoping to play chess with him, but his dad said, "Tell Roy not to bother me anymore. If he does, I'll go to the police." Still, Roy maintained his sense of humor, and a loving, tender heart. Roy passed away suddenly on September 7, 2016, at the age of 58.

Matthew (Rodney) was interested in music growing up. He played guitar in a high school band. He graduated from UBC and worked as a social worker for 28 years. His clients were people in half-way houses, parolees, and those with

My Grown Children ♦ ANNI

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mental illnesses. He has a soft, gentle heart and enjoys helping people, and he's very loving. He has one daughter, Lara. Matthew lives in Vancouver and rents a bachelor suite. He doesn't want to buy real estate or become wealthy. I sometimes worry about him, because you can't live on love and air alone. "Mom," he says, "I'm so happy you brought me up the way you did. I don't care about possessions, and you always said that money is not all that important." And he's right... I did say that!

My ex-husband Ralph's health worsened, and he spent a couple of years in the Menno Nursing Home. In later years, Doris got through to Ralph. She looked after him until he died. At the end, when he was in very poor shape, I felt that I had to go and speak with him. I tried to encourage him to make things right with God. But he didn't listen. He willed his body to the university, and Doris still doesn't have the ashes.



Despite the hardships she endured, Anni is characterized by a joyful, giving spirit. She is a wonderful storyteller, and she laughs often.



Anni's family: son Matthew (Rodney), granddaughter Jennifer, daughter Doris, son Roy, and Anni.

ANNI ♦ Family & Full of Spirit

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)



Walking with Lara and Jennifer.



Anni married Karl Kessenich just before her 70th birthday.



Anni laughing. She has endured life's hardships gracefully, maintaining her grateful and joyful spirit.



Anni is full of spirit. She walks and swims regularly, gardens, hosts visitors, and still drives at 91. She survived two robberies at gunpoint during her banking career, and a flipped car at age 89. At 90, she advocated for and won lower gym rates for seniors. "If they've lived that long, and are active, at least give them a break," she wrote.



With foreign visitors in 1983. L to R, back row: Tante Nüt, sister Neta, brother Hein (from Kyrgyzstan) and sister Tina (from Germany); front row, Anni and Tina's granddaughter.



Anni with sister Neta in 2002: Anni is 76 and Neta is 90 here. When Karl, Anni and Neta visited their sister Tina in Germany, the three had to share a bed, which they laughed about many times.

Reflections on a Rich Past ♦ ANNI

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)

Reflections on a Rich Past

Many Mennonites eventually settled in Clearbrook, B.C. It was nice to be together. In Russia when I was growing up, there wasn't much of a Mennonite community. The communists had squelched the spirit of the Mennonites, and everybody had to save their own hide. In Canada, though, the spirit of the Mennonites returned. There was freedom of religion and plenty to eat, and we were very happy to be there. It was good to be among the Mennonites in Canada.

The Mennonites are industrious people, and they have a rich past. When they came to the Ukraine, there wasn't much there. They started farms and factories; they began to prosper, and the whole country bloomed until the communists came and destroyed it all. They started over in Canada, and they have prospered there, too. It seems that wherever the Mennonites settle, the land grows and blooms and prospers.

I didn't worship in a Mennonite church in Canada. In Vancouver, I attended a Baptist church,



Anni on her 91st birthday in April, 2017.
"I love dancing," she said 20 years earlier. "And I love to laugh and be happy. I think that when I'm happy, that's when I most worship God."

and now I go to a Lutheran church. To me, it doesn't matter what church you attend...it's the heart of the person that matters. But deep in my heart, I think I'm still a Mennonite.

I love dancing. To me, that is not a bad thing. And I love to laugh and be happy. I think that when I'm happy, that's when I most worship God. I'm most thankful, and I think, "Oh, God, you are glorious!"

Many of the older Mennonites are more reserved than I am, like my sister Neta. Neta is a marvelous Christian. She would give the shirt off her back to somebody...but then, so would I. Tante Nüt and Neta don't preach their faith: they live it.

I never became bitter about the hardships I had to go through. Even to this day, I'm glad it all happened. It made me a stronger person, and more compassionate. I really know that God is always with us. We don't have to worry. He takes care no matter what happens.

Anni Kessenich



Anni and Karl, 2000.



Saying goodbye.

Many of Anni's family members have passed away: her aunt, Tante Nüt in 2000; all her siblings: Hein in 2001, Peter in 2002, Neta in 2003, Gerhard in 2005, and Tina in 2011; and her son Roy unexpectedly in 2016.

ANNI ♦ Laughing at Life

Anni Dyck Kessenich (1926-)

Anni in 2014, next to a picture of herself taken by Nazi photographers when they invaded Ukraine in 1941. In 2014 she was 88, and in the picture she is 15.



Right: **Karl and Anni with the Nakhla family** in front of their Abbotsford home. Anni is a gracious hostess, a captivating storyteller, and a vibrant personality.



Anni grows sorrel in her back yard to use in cooking, the same leaf that she used to collect as a girl in the Ukraine when her family was so hungry during the Holodomor famine.



Visiting Anni and Karl in their Abbotsford home in 2014. She fed the Nakhla family a wonderful lunch, and entertained us with stories from World War II. "A piece of shrapnel just came out of my leg a few months ago," she said, laughing...that's nearly 70 years later! "But look, I can still dance!"



Anni her great-niece Anne-Marie Nakhla in 2015.

