

## Ursula's Story

I was born November 12, 1940 and raised in Steddorf, a small village (600 people) south of Hamburg, Germany. I was the second youngest of seven Albers children. My parents owned a grocery store that they started in 1924. It was a home based business that ultimately expanded to other ventures. Customers travelled a fair distance to our store as it was the only one for several kilometres. My father was from a farm family and was the only member to obtain an apprenticeship in business.

During the war years my parents worked very hard and endured great hardship. The store was open six days a week. Saturdays we kids had to bake cakes, shine shoes and clean our yard in preparation for the Sunday afternoon visits from relatives over coffee and cake. Family life was very important.

There was always food in our house, unlike so many others who went hungry in wartime. In 1944 our village mayor requested that we share our home with two other families, these folks had fled Prussia, leaving behind all their belongings. Anyone with room to spare was asked to make room for these destitute people.

Each of the families moved into one bedroom in our home where they slept and cooked. Our family members doubled up in remaining rooms in the house, there was sharing amongst ourselves and our visitors. Some of these lodgers helped my younger brother Helmut and I with homework assignments.

Although I was very young during the war years, I do recall the sirens that signalled bombing missions. Our family and customers in our store would run to the basement during raid alert. I was especially fearful of the noise of low flying airplanes. When the war ended, we displayed white truce flags. My first taste of a candy at age 5 was provided by the occupying British troops.

Even after the war ended, things were not easy. Every person got 50 marks from the government. My oldest sister Tina worked very hard helping in the store. My parents needed her to serve long lines of customers with their government food vouchers. We had hired help both in the store and in the home. This meant that meals were shared with many and it made for a busy, busy household.

In spite of troubles and hard work there was fun for children. Our home was beside a small creek – unpolluted at that time. Perhaps the convenience of this water for swimming is why I had such enjoyment with this sport all my life.

I have found memories of my school years. My school was just five minutes from my home. There were eight grades in two classrooms. In this setting we learned from the older students as well from our teachers. Discipline was number one, but we



Ursula Nyenhuis on a school excursion with Herr Ziegenhagen and school friends

held deep respect for our teachers. My favourite teacher was Herr (Mr.) Ziegenhagen. He took students on many holiday trips. Some of these school excursions lasted about a week in youth hostels. I recall sleeping in a castle that was hundreds of years old and spooky too. Years later I was proud to introduce my husband and our two sons to Herr Ziegenhagen in his retirement.

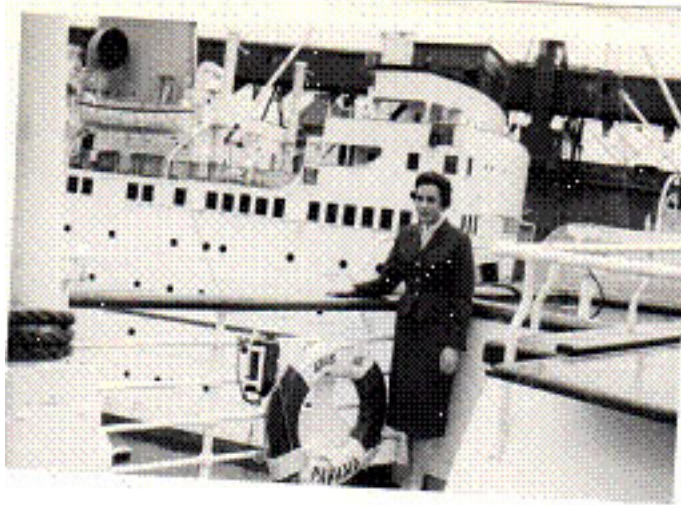
Thinking back to my school years I also recall how proud and fortunate I felt to have my very own backpack for my assignments. Very few children had one. My mother traded a rasher of bacon to obtain the backpack for me.

As I grew older I shared good times with my brother Herbert. He had a motorcycle and took me on a hostelling tour of Germany. My married brother Guenther also owned a motorcycle. He would pick me up for summer vacation at his home he and his wife had in Celle. Celle is a beautiful and historic city. During one summer vacation I experienced my first canoe ride on the Aller River.

When I finished school in Steddorf, I apprenticed for a business diploma. I left home to live with another family of store keepers in Hessedorf. I would attend classes one day a week and work the rest of the week in the store. I still have my diploma and resume from this apprenticeship. At that time in Germany you need this diploma to open your own business. Many of the skills I learned enable me to enjoy cashiering and food demonstration work here in Canada.

My decision to emigrate was because my sister Tina was in Canada and was very homesick and yearned for family. When I left Germany in June 1958 twenty two family members saw me off on the ship Arosa Star. I left behind a loving caring family. There were times when the crossing was rough. I was sea sick, but there were young people on board and good times as well. My brother knew one of the stewards who looked out for me. During our ten days crossing we saw whales and icebergs in the distance.

We were happy to spot a speck of land: NEWFOUNDLAND. Then we sailed on to the St Lawrence River with lovely scenery along the shore, then a brief stop in Quebec City and on to Montreal, for customs and emigration processing. This was followed by three days and three nights on a train for the reunion in Edmonton with my very happy sister, her husband and



**Ursula on board the Arosa Star**

their three young children. I took a job at GWG (Great West Garment Company) as a seamstress. This was a job I learned from scratch. I made new friends with other German girls at work. I was also enrolled in English classes at Alberta College.

After several months I was able to move in to my own place at my girlfriend's sister's house. Life was enjoyable. I liked my new country and my friends but I missed my family back home. I made the decision to return to Germany. Plans were finalized for me to return, and I booked on a ship called Berlin, sailing out of New York to Bremerhafen Germany. I got tickets for my long bus right to New York. I stayed at a friend's house in New York who showed me around for a week.

An interesting development had begun to take shape here in Edmonton. His name was JOHN –my husband to be. John had immigrated to Edmonton from Holland in 1952 after spending some time of his youth in Indonesia.

Although my plans were not changed, and I was back in Germany, John did not forget me. He kept in touch with letters, flowers and numerous phone calls. Long distance calls were very expensive back then.

Many changes awaited me upon my return to Germany. In my absence father's business had been passed to three of my brothers. Following the war life, Germany was getting back to normal, as was the case in other parts of a post-war world. Business was starting to boom. My brother Heini put me in charge of a wholesale grocery business he had started in Hamburg. I still made my home with my parents and commuted seventy autobahn kilometres each way to Hamburg in my Volkswagen van. My days started at four a.m.

In spite of my heavy work schedule I still made time to keep up correspondence with John in Edmonton. In 1962 he made a trip to Europe. I joined him at his sister's home in Holland and he accompanied me to meet my family. John and I toured much of Europe during this visit. Our reunion was a great success. My parents feted us at an engagement party at their home. John had met with their approval. In December 1962 I returned to Edmonton and we were married two weeks later in the Lutheran Church. Our reception was at the King Edward Hotel, once an Edmonton landmark. My sister and her four kids attended the wedding. Her husband had passed a way. John's family lived in Edmonton and were among our guests. Having John's family in Edmonton enabled me to learn Dutch.

We set up housekeeping in an older rented home in the Oliver district of Edmonton. Our son Andy arrived a year later. John worked hard as a mechanic, saving to purchase our own home. Home ownership was delayed a bit as John felt it was important for me to make a trip to Germany to introduce 1 ½ year old Andy to my family. Andy and I made the seventeen hour flight in a propeller plane in 1964. My relatives were so happy to spoil Andy and load him down with many toys.



**Ursula with Andy and Steve**

In 1966, our dream of home ownership was fulfilled. Our second son Steve arrived three weeks after moving into the home we still occupy.

With two boys in the family, camping became a big part of our lives. We started with a tent trailer and a small boat. As the years went by, the boats got bigger to allow for water skiing. We progressed from a VW camper to a motor home.



We honoured our European roots with a six week visit there. A highlight of a trip to Holland is a visit to Madurodam, a park of miniature statues. Our boys were fascinated by miniscule houses, trains, plans and boats – a world in miniature! While in Germany a must for the boys was our tour of the VW factory.

My niece Ingrid scheduled her wedding to coincide with this family reunion visit. It was a formal affair, lasting into the wee hours. They sure know how to celebrate!

Soon, as always, holidays end and it was time to leave once more. Fortunately we were able to enjoy other visits to Europe but departing from loved ones was always a heart - wrenching experience. Later I made a trip to Germany on my own. My mother was gravely ill and quite despondent in hospital. My family felt I should go to her bedside. Upon seeing me, it was a surprise; my mother rallied and enjoyed relatively good health for another eight years. After my father passed a way, my sister Erika took my mother into her home. We were always very welcome in her house. As parents aged good-byes got harder as we became more aware that some contacts with loved ones would end.

John retired from AGT (Alberta Government Telephones) in 1992 and I retired from Safeway a year later. By this time we owned a 27' motor home and towed a small car for side trips. We toured this beautiful country from Vancouver Island to Prince Edward Island. We traveled from Alaska into Mexico and enjoyed a few winters in Arizona, California and Hawaii. John was a good driver and I was the navigator. Cruises also were a big part of our retirement travel and when son Andy's work took him to Melbourne, Australia for two years, John and I visited him and his family there. From there we made trips to Tasmania, Adelaide and Brisbane. All of us rented a houseboat on the Murry River.

Our son Andy is married to Caralin and they have two grown children Sheena and Jeffrey. Younger son Steve and his wife Nicole have a ten year old Kayla and a seven year Cole. We have enjoyed camping trips with our grandchildren and lots of sleep overs. For her graduation, granddaughter Sheena accompanied me to Germany for my brother's golden anniversary. She was able to visit with her dad's cousins, as they are fluent in English. On a special side trip to Paris, Sheena became my interpreter with her expertise in the French language.

Looking back I see that my life has been very fulfilling with a lot of blessings. However, life has handed me a few challenges as well. In 1995 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. An operation followed by radiation treatments enabled me to be cancer – free for eight years. Life was normal and busy during this time, but once diagnosed, cancer is a concern. In 2003 I detected a lump in my neck. A biopsy

showed cancer and my early prognosis was grim. The lump was inoperable, but hormone treatments had stabilized my condition. My doctors consider me an exceptional patient. I was the sole participant from Edmonton in a worldwide study involving 257 women. I was monitored every three months with checkups. My cancer was stabilized for another five years, but lately I have undergone further radiation. Throughout this time, I have relied on my faith, my loving family and good friends and will continue to live my life to the fullest.

Canada has given me a good life and I never regret coming here. This country has offered me many opportunities as well as it has provided a good life for my children and my grandchildren.



**Nyenhuis family**



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