

# John Martens

MAY 18, 2023

John Martens, was born on June 5, 1930 in the village of Marienthal, Molotschna, Ukraine and passed away to be with the Lord on May 18, 2023. He was the first-born child of Jacob John Martens and Anna (Kornelsen) Martens.



John lived in Marienthal until September 1943 when dire circumstances dictated that his family needed to flee Ukraine with 350,000 others, of which 35,000 were Mennonites. The Great Trek took them across Ukraine, White Russia, Poland, and into Germany. When the war ended in 1945, they needed to wait until March 1948 until they were sponsored to come to Canada where he spent the last 75 years of his life.

John's early life was severely impacted by conditions that faced all Mennonites living in villages in Ukraine. Some of the harsh realities the Mennonites faced in those early years were the results of civil war, societal anarchy, widespread famine, and Communist rules which targeted many German-speaking Mennonites as enemies of the state. As John wrote in a Pier 21 reflection, "I lost my father to the Communists. He died on his way to a concentration camp." He would say, though, on thinking back about his own family situation at the time: "Even under Communism I had a wonderful family life. I had a very loving father."

In terms of schooling, he and his younger brother Jake, attended a Russian elementary school once they were seven years old. Dad attended for four years and

Jake for three. They liked to claim they both had a seventh-grade education when you added the years together! Both John and Jake recalled many times the funny stories about their youth in Marienthal when looking out for their younger brother, Nick, as their parents worked or playing pranks with their cousins, the Dahl boys.

Once John arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, his family took the train to Yarrow, BC where they met their sponsor, Nickolai Reimer. They were grateful to have entered a free country and set about working to pay off their sponsorship. They accomplished this quickly and within two years John found the love of his life, Gertrude Esau. They were married on April 16, 1950, a marriage that lasted over 68 years until Gertrude passed away on August 27, 2018. They lived in Vancouver, Richmond, Chilliwack, Yarrow, and Abbotsford.

John and Gertrude had five children, Marian (Eb), Jim (Nena), Tilly (Aubrey), John (Tabitha), and Trudy (Manon). John was very proud of all the accomplishments of his children, sixteen grandchildren, and sixteen great-grandchildren. John is survived by all five of his children, his grandchildren, and fifteen of his great-grandchildren as well as three siblings, Nick Martens, Anne Hamaguchi, and Bill Bachman.

John had a number of jobs during his married life. He spent 27 years at Ocean Cement until a workplace injury changed his life direction. Having to change course, he and Gertrude worked at Columbia Bible Camp (now Stillwood) four years as custodian and cook and then for the final fourteen years they worked together for MCC at The Cedars. John said these final fourteen years were the best working days of his life.

Unlike his dear Gertie, John was not an accomplished cook. He did other things in the kitchen like peeling the potatoes or cooking hot dogs for his kids. But one thing

he was accomplished at was eating Gertie's great cooking, trips to the White Spot (burger and fries), New Saigon (Henry's Special), C-Lovers (fish and chips), and especially the Mennonite Heritage Museum for borscht, veriniki, zwieback ("the darkest ones") and perishki. And he loved cashews and 7-Up. Unlike his children, he liked his coffee weak, but his opinions were strong when it came to his favourite foods. We'll all miss those trips together to his favourite eating spots.

When John was still in Europe he was always hoping to someday come to a free country. He found that in Canada. He could worship freely in Canada and this meant everything to him. He was baptized in 1949 and became a member of the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren church. He continued to attend MB churches in Vancouver, Burnaby, Richmond and then returned to Yarrow MB before ending his church life at Clearbrook MB for the past 27 years of his life where he served in many ways on the board and through visitation. John's faith was a practical one—he believed you needed to help your neighbour close by and far away. He was devoted to helping charities worldwide if he and Gertie saw the need. He said his three priorities were God, Gertie, and his family. He was a man of faith and hopeful in his eternal home with Jesus.

His early life informed his last 75 years in that he was grateful to live in a free country celebrating often on March 22nd the day he entered Canada at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He was thankful for the opportunities he and his family were given and joyful to have lived a long life with his children and his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Though his family grieves our loss, we too are grateful. He was an example of a beloved brother, brother-in-law, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, cousin, uncle and friend to many. We are thankful that he rests in eternal peace, reunited with Gertie, his parents, his brother Jake, great-grandson Marcus, and many other relatives and friends who predeceased him and who have welcomed him into his eternal home.

We are also thankful for the staff at Hallmark on the Park and Hallmark on the Lake who helped John (and Gertrude) over the past dozen years as they entered independent and assisted living care. We are also thankful for Dr. Clifford Moodley's compassion and care of our Dad throughout the years he was his patient.

You are invited to leave a personal message of condolence for the family.

## Messages of Condolence

Such an amazing life your dad had. The legacy he left for your entire family will carry you through the pain of his loss! He left behind a beautiful family!

May the Lord continue to bless you all with His peace!

Love and blessings,

— **Nini and Don Dell**

How precious to read your dad's life story. As much as you will miss his presence.... how rich it is to know he has reached the ultimate goal... heaven.

Blessings to your family

— **Lori**

We would have enjoyed meeting your dad but we will in Heaven. Our sympathies to you John and Tabitha and Sam. You will miss him. I to remember the way we fled East Berlin.. in 1951.. Not fun but Mom and I were alone on the train... I still am leary about going to Berlin.. One never knows what is still in store for all of us.

— **Renate & Maurice Gardy ( Renate Wolfe )**

Uncle John and Aunt Gertrude over the years left us various Peter Borgen progeny with many memories of authentic lives unfolding with great dollops of humor. So sad personally but blessed by having experienced Uncle John's and Aunt Gertrude's uniqueness in our lives.

— **Richard Borgen**

To John and Gertrude Martens Family

What a privilege to know and remember your Mom and Dad. What I will always remember is the laughing and joking when the Martens family came to visit Winnipeg. Always banter back and forth between my Dad, Hans Dahl and Uncle Henry Dahl and your Dad. Always loud, always loud. While we were just kids at the time the love between the families was very obvious. We are thankful for the shared friendship. May God bless your family

— **John & Judy Dahl**



<https://www.myalternatives.ca/obituaries/martens-john>

Printed on June 13, 2026