



My Journey Of Praise

the testimony of lee kroeker

I WAS BORN IN A LITTLE MENNONITE VILLAGE CALLED Niederchortiz USSR, now part of the Ukraine. I was the youngest of eight children, three of my brothers died in infancy, so I only got to know four of my siblings.

My father, along with many other Mennonite men from our village, was taken to a prison camp by the KGB when I was three months old. They never did tell us why, but we believe it was because he was a Christian. The Soviet state opposed those who believed in God because it was an atheistic dictatorship. Maybe they thought he was a spy because he spoke German. Our family never saw him again. He was later transferred to a Slave Labor Camp in Siberia, never to

be heard from again. Most of these men were used as slaves and either starved or froze to death so this is what we think happened to my father.

My early childhood memories were happy ones. Being so young, I was oblivious to the agony and hardships my mother was going through. Would my Dad ever be released? Would she ever see him again?

Our small white house with barn attached was situated in a very fertile agricultural

area near the Dnieper River, which supplied fish for food. Vegetables grew in large gardens and flowers bloomed in abundance.

Little did I know, things were about to change, rumblings of war were on the horizon.

The Russians, expecting the Germans to come soon, sent us to Siberia but my mother escaped with us by hiding in a corn field. We would crawl under trains to escape and ended up in a town called Saporoshje, where we stayed with a number of other refugees in an abandoned, mice infested, schoolhouse.

My brother killed 26 of them in one night! Food was very scarce, one day a Russian lady suggested to my mother that she should put me in front of the train, so there would be one less mouth to feed.

In Saporoshje we experienced our first air raid. We heard the planes drone overhead just before the bombs started dropping all around us. We saw a German soldier get decapitated during one of these raids. Once a Gypsy threatened to shoot us and said he was going to report us to the Russians. He left, only to come back in the morning with frozen feet and hands. My mother and sisters helped thaw them out, literally saving his life. He was grateful and let us stay.

My sister Mary left before us and went to Germany. In 1943 the day came when we had to leave Russia. We also left for Germany in a plain box car on a train, no windows and no bathroom facilities. We claimed a little spot to put our meager belongings and some food. All we could hear was the clicking of the wheels on the track and the squealing of the brakes. There were air raids, the train would stop, the doors would be opened and we would run out into the field and lay still. The train would be lit up at night like a Christmas tree by the flashes from the bombs exploding. Then when the planes disappeared we would get back in the train the doors would close and we would be on our way again.

While in Munich, Germany we were reunited with my sister. We were put into refugee camps. Our heads were shaved to control the lice. We received bread ration cards. My brother Jake, 17 years old, was conscripted into the German army. We were moved to another refugee camp where we received the sad news that my brother Jake was killed in action. That was very hard news to take but this is what happens in war. One morning my sister told us she believed Jake was still alive as she dreamed that he was cleaning the streets in a village after an air raid. "But child," Mom said, "that was only a dream." Some time later, Jake actually turned up and visited us when he had three days leave. He was still alive, what a reunion! He went back to the front and we never heard from him again.

Things got really tough and we had to move to various places for safety. My 10 year old brother and 12 year old sister

would sometimes go out and beg for some food or pick up a potato or turnip in a field. Sometimes we cooked potato peels and even stinging nettle to survive. This was God's provision for us, Praise Him!

Near the end of the war when there were air raids we ran to a hole in the ground that served as a bomb shelter. We could hear the airplanes, the bombs whistling down and exploding all around us, all while the sirens were wailing. It seemed it would never end. Then there was quiet, someone dared to look out and tell us the coast was clear.

What a happy day it was when the war was over.



Lee & Peter Kroeker Summer 07

The Mennonite Central Committee helped us and took us to Holland where they had leased a beautiful estate where we could stay. There was running water and flush toilets. What a luxury, Praise the Lord! They even had school for us children.

My father's brother and sister had immigrated to Canada in the 1920's. They were willing to sponsor us. We passed our health inspections and we were very

excited to leave for Canada, the land of milk and honey! Praise the Lord! We traveled by ship, the journey was rough and we all got seasick but we arrived safely in Halifax Canada!

After leaving Halifax, we spent a short time in Manitoba and then moved to BC. We worked hard picking hops, strawberries and raspberries, we raised chickens and sold eggs to pay back our travel expenses and make a living. Mom bought a small house on two acres. We all gave the money we made to Mom so we could survive together. During this time I had the privilege of attending a Christian Junior High school.

When I was twelve, I received Christ as my personal Savior and I was baptized when I was 17. I fell in love with and married Peter Kroeker in 1959. After having one child we went to Bible school and the Lord provided all our needs through that time, they were blessed years. After school, we went to 100 Mile House for a short time. Peter was called to be the Pastor at a church in Vanguard, Saskatchewan for a time. During this time we were blessed with two more children. Then we moved back to 100 Mile House and built a house as we could afford it, little by little, without a mortgage, the Lord was our provider. In 1973 we moved to Smithers, BC where Peter worked as a contractor, we fellowshiped at the Evangelical Free Church there. In 1979 we moved to Langley where Peter worked for Trinity Western University, then to Kelowna where, among other things, God had Peter work at Okanagan Bible College. We had an opportunity to serve the Lord in Africa for a year. That is another whole story in itself!

Since then we moved to Medicine Hat where we are now living. Our three children, all married, are living near us with their families. What a privilege! What a wonderful life the Lord has given us! It surely has been a journey. A Journey of Praise! Why, you might say, with all the hardships? Absolutely, I don't know why we had to go through all that, but God is sovereign and He sustained us through all of it. "Praise the Lord every day, for your praise today is no good for tomorrow, Praise the Lord."

**WHAT A HAPPY DAY IT WAS
WHEN THE WAR WAS OVER**



“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1 NIV)

An old saying is that the difference between an optimist and a pessimist shows up in how they see a half glass of water. The pessimist says it is already half empty while the optimist sees it as still half full.

How do we see life? Do we dwell on the difficult things, the injustices, the hurts, without seeing the good that has happened? Or do we see primarily the good and even the tough things as beneficial? When we have true faith in God, we will see the fullness of life that he has given, we do not understand the difficulties and setbacks but we realize that God even allowed them for a reason. As the scriptures say “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28 NIV

When we moved to Smithers in 1977, Peter and Lee Kroeker were among the first people we met. They have been a great encouragement in our lives. They mentored us as a young family needing guidance and instruction in the Lord. Would this have happened if Lee had focused and held on to all the difficult things that had happened to her? She could still be angry about the Communists taking and killing her father, she could be still making a big fuss over the land that was taken from them, she could be disappointed with God over the siblings she never new. But she isn't, because she has every reason to be optimistic. She is a child of God. She is in His care and he knows how to care for his children even in times of trouble. This life is more than half full, it is a full life. This is why Lee could call her testimony a “Journey of Praise.” This life is for all who truly put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

JESUS SAID “I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL.” (John 10:10 NIV)

Jesus’ Suffering Love by mike cunningham

“Praise be to God...the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.” (2 Cor. 1:3 NIV)

The Bible tells us in Philippians 2:7 that Jesus “made himself nothing” (NIV) for you and me. God himself became a suffering servant to show us the full extent of his compassion and love. What a comfort it is to us in our struggles that God knows what it is to suffer, and that he shares our burdens and cares intimately about the things that have hurt us.

Jesus left comforts behind

The Bible says that “Jesus took on the very nature of a servant” (Phil 2:7). Jesus was willing to take on a frail human body and live right in the middle of this world’s evil and suffering. Jesus always takes the first step towards us. “We love him, because he first loved us. (1 Jn. 4:19 KJV)

Jesus faced real temptation

The Bible also tells us that Jesus faced real temptation. Three times the devil approached Jesus (Matt. 4) and tempted him with physical cravings, self-sufficiency, and pride. Have you battled these enemies in your life? Jesus did also. Yet, he willingly suffered by denying what would be easiest and most

comfortable for himself, to live instead for what would please his Father. Jesus suffered this as an example for us to follow in his steps.

Jesus suffered compassionately

The word compassion means to “suffer with” -- and this describes the very nature of Jesus. Moved with compassion for those who suffered, Jesus went to them and poured himself out for them: healing the wounded, raising the dead to life, and tirelessly teaching them of God’s heart and will for mankind. Jesus has compassion for you. He is “familiar with all your ways” (Psalm 139:3 NIV) and knows every concern of your heart. Are there problems in your life that you have been carrying alone? Ask Jesus for His strength and guidance in your situation.

deaths, and gave his sinless life in our place. The Bible says, “he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole.” (Isaiah 53:5 NLT)



Jesus took our death sentence upon himself

The Bible teaches us that death, or separation from God, is the penalty for our sin (Rom. 6:23). The Bible says that we are all deserving of this fate, because of our sinful condition (Romans 3:10). However, Jesus suffered the cruelest of

What a Saviour we have! A God who would choose to suffer for us to show us the depth of his love. Will you receive his invitation and ask him into your heart and life? Will you allow God to bring you comfort for both this life here, and then for all eternity in his awesome presence? Please call us at Streetcorners (contact information on back page) if this is something you would like to do today.

I RECENTLY PARTICIPATED IN A COUNSELING COURSE THAT stretched me in so many ways. In this course, story after story was told of the deep wounds of life, caused by experiences similar to those of Lee Kroeker in this issue's testimony.

My first response is so often to ask "why". Why so much pain? Why do people do what they do in war? Why do father's leave their children? Why do innocent people get hurt so bad? Why does God allow so much suffering in this world? I'm certain that in your life too, there are many areas where you are simply left to ask "why" with no obvious answers.

Our instructor gave us a little gem to help us along with our "why's". He encouraged us to turn our "why" questions into "what" questions instead. What can I learn through this? What good has, and can come out of this? What sweetness is there despite the pain?

Lee's testimony rings with hope! Not because she got answers to all her why questions, but because she found God's goodness, his provision, and his presence in the midst of her pain. She allowed her "why's" to become "what's", and found the flowers of joy in her soul even when her earthly gardens had been stolen away.

I am always amazed at how the most beautiful trophies of God's love come out of the greatest hardships.

Perhaps you, too, have experienced undeserved and unexplainable suffering? May we remember Jesus who was the most innocent, and yet suffered the greatest of all on earth. In his response we find forgiveness, surrender, selfless love, and mercy—true treasures that no injustice can ever destroy.

We may not see the answers why...

but till the end we've grown thereby.

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through

whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering." (Hebrews 1:10 NIV)

"Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:3 NIV)



WHAT WE BELIEVE

THE BIBLE AND ITS AUTHORITY

- We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as verbally inspired by God and inerrant in the original writings, and that they are the supreme and final authority in faith and conduct.

THE ETERNAL GODHEAD

- We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

MAN AND HIS NEED

- We believe that man was created in the image of God: that through sin man incurred both spiritual and physical death. Consequently, man is totally depraved, alienated from God, under his righteous anger, and in need of the new birth.

JESUS CHRIST AND HIS WORK

- We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary and is true God and true man.
- We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice, died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that all who believe in him are justified on the ground of his shed blood.
- We believe in the resurrection of the crucified body of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his ascension into heaven, his present life there for us as High Priest and Advocate and in his personal return.

SALVATION FOR SINNERS

- We believe that by the grace of God, all who in repentance and faith receive the Lord Jesus Christ are born again by the Holy Spirit and thereby become children of God. Such are sealed unto the day of redemption. Nevertheless, the believer is commanded to be filled with the Spirit, moment by moment.

THE FUTURE

- We believe in the bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust, in the everlasting blessedness of the saved, and in the everlasting conscious punishment of the lost.

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