

PROFILES

OF MENNONITE FAITH

Anna Kröker

"It is the Lord"

Anna (Janzen) Kroeker's father, Peter Janzen, often told his children the story of Jesus coming to the disciples' rescue when they found themselves about to capsiz

in the Sea of Galilee. Not only were the disciples caught in a fierce storm, they also faced an apparition—a horror advancing towards them! They soon recognized that it was their master, walking on the water, and all was well.

Whatever future calamity his children might

encounter, Peter repeatedly exhorted them never to forget "It is the Lord!" When Peter was quite elderly and in frail health, the GPU (Soviet secret police) arrested him. He and his family knew that he would not survive even the shortest incarceration. "Are you at peace, Papa?" his daughter Anna called to him when he was already seated between the two burly officers in the back seat of the car that would transport him to his death. "Yes, my child," he replied. "It is the Lord! But go and comfort Mamma."

Anna encountered the Lord many times during her turbulent life. Born in Kirghiz, the fifth in a family of twelve children and five adopted orphans, she was raised to acknowledge Jesus Christ as her saviour. At the age of twelve, she made a decision to follow

the Lord and was baptized by a missionary named Bonn. At this time she started working as a maid for other people. Formal schooling was not to be her lot. However, she gathered much



Anna Kröker (1902-1999)

Lebensweisheit (general wisdom) during her lifetime and God gave her a special measure of spiritual wisdom. She also possessed an extraordinary talent for story telling.

In 1939 she married Abraham Kröker, a widower with nine children. When he proposed, he asked for the assurance that she would be the parent to his children when the GPU took him away. She promised and later attempted to do just that. They were together only

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three years when Abraham and many other men were arrested, never to return. Anna had borne Abraham two more sons. The older died in infancy; the younger never got to know his father. Anna was left to provide for her large family. The day came when she did not have enough food for them. In addition, she faced having to share with a starving neighbour and her children. To stretch the little flour she had left, she picked up six sugar beets from puddles in the roadway where they had been left to rot. It was her undoing. The administration, endeavouring to get rid of her because she spoke up for justice, accused her of stealing from the commune. Six beets earned her that many years of labour camp.

She, like Job, lost everything. The night before she was deported, she lay in her cell and cried to God for her children, especially her young son who would not recognize her six years later. God, in His mercy, revealed himself in a bright light and a statement, “Anna, I love your children more than you do.”

This God-experience remained with her all of her life. During the hard years in labour camps, she held onto God’s promise that God would look after her children, although she had no guarantee that she would survive and see them again.

There were other occasions when she experienced God’s direct interaction in her life. She recounted a fascinating tale of being rescued by an angel from an oncoming train and certain death. (These years of her experience in labour camps are described by the author in *Six Sugar Beets, Five Bitter Years*. Kitchener ON: Pandora Press, 2003). Miraculously, she survived and returned to her family. Although in dire straits, they were alive. Immediately upon her homecoming, she was among the first to take an interest in the spiritual education

of the youth and the rebuilding of the church.

After 1981 she and all of her children with their families were able to resettle in Germany. She lived with her son, Alfred, and his family in Oerlinghausen. All were members of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Anna Kröker was highly esteemed for her intercessory prayers and her story telling. What a glorious testimony she had for the Lord! Young and old loved to gather at her home and listen to her tell how God had helped her. Her face glowed as she spoke of the many times when God had come to her aid. Her stories were not just recountings of the atrocities of an unjust system nor simply descriptions of hate and acts of inhumanity. They told of God’s presence *in* suffering. And she rejoiced that all of her children and grandchildren became believers.

As the scriptures state of Job, it can also be stated of her—and the Lord blessed the latter part of Anna Kröker’s life more than the first. She lived to the age of 97 and saw her children to the fourth generation. Her son, Alfred, and his family tenderly cared for her in her old age. Anna’s obituary lists 3 surviving children, 90 grandchildren, 93 great-grandchildren and 68 great-great-grandchildren.

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