

Gertrude Wiens

“Behold God my salvation I will trust and not be afraid. For
the
Lord God is my salvation and song.”

- Isaiah 12:12

Written By: Carley Brissette

Gertrude Wiens is a truly faithful woman of Christ, from the moment I started to talk to her I could see her passion and love for the Lord. She has stood by the Lord for many years and looks forward to the day she can meet Him face to face. From Daughter to Mother to Grandmother, Gertrude's life is truly an amazing story of love, perseverance, and desire for the Lord. I am honored to be able to try and capture all of her astounding stories on paper. Her life verse is Isaiah 12:12. "Behold God my salvation I will trust and not be afraid.

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Something that is very important in Gertrude's life is her history. She does not forget what others did for her to be able to be here today in Canada. She values what brought her to Canada and the life she lives now.

During the time of the Protestant Reformation, in the 1500s there was a mass of religious and political disturbances. From this emerged a group of radicals. They believed in baptism, and that joining the church should be voluntary and not automatically as an infant. From this belief rebaptism came out and is why a lot of people felt compelled to be baptized again, hence the name Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were labeled as radicals or crazies.

One of the groups fled to an area of the Netherland known as Friesland. They gathered listening to a leader who was a former preacher named Menno Simons. This is where the name Mennonite originated. Menno Simons understood the word of God so clear and was able to truly connect and understand the message that was being taught. He based all of his teachings from scripture and because of this the idea of separation of the church and state and the idea of renouncing war and violence was thought of. He changed the way of Mennonites forever. Living in Friesland, the parents and grandparents of Gertrude were able to fluently speak in the Plautdietsch dialect.

In Prussia at this time, the country was going short on farmers and large amounts of land had to be filled. They heard about all the hard working farmers in the Netherlands and invited them over with the promise of protection, freedom of worship and exemption of military service. Due to these promises many Friesian Anabaptists made the journey over to Prussia

to settle down there.

Once years passed from settling down in Polish-Prussia, the French Revolution of 1787 threatened the security and way of life of the Mennonites. The French Revolution caused political, economical and religious climate of surrounding areas of France, including France.

After the French Revolution, Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia had a lot on her hands trying to start a functional land in the Ukraine. She had heard from Prussia how good the Mennonite farmers were and offered them large promises in return. She offered them large areas of free land, freedom of worship and self-government. They were also free from military service, which caused a lot of people to make the trek by foot to be under the rule of Catherine the great.

By the late 1800s and early 1900s with the harder days of the Mennonite life behind them. They were living the dream of the Mennonite; they had good land and economy. All types of children had their own schools that they would fit in at.

The first cracks the Mennonite commonwealth felt was when the Bolshevik revolution occurred. The Mennonites were in the middle of a civil war and their stories changed from good to famine, sicknesses, and horrible deaths. The Mennonites in North America heard about this and sent over food packages and set up local food supply centers for the Mennonites suffering. This was the birth of the Mennonite Central Committee (1920). The Mennonites suffering saw hope in Canada and the thought of immigration became very commonly thought of.

Gertrude tells her story from the beginning, how it all started, not just

of herself. A major part of Gertrude's life is her parents life and how they came to Canada. Gertrude admires this story and it is something that I am excited to tell but know that words cannot come close to describing the events that took place. Their story, like Gertrude's, is a story of love, drive, and desire for the Lord.

On October 4, 1918 Gertrude's parents got married. After a few years of wonderful marriage, the difficult part started. They started to look for immigration applications but were stopped by the government. They were not able to obtain the needed documents for immigration and because of that had to go into hiding since they were not in the same beliefs with the government. Gertrude's parents came to the hard realization that they could not stay in Russia and would have to secretly leave. They were able to tell their parents and families, knowing they would never be able to see them again and set off.

It was a dark night as Gertrude's parents secretly fled. Although it was terrifying, there was also peace and joy in their hearts. On August 4, 1924 Gertrude's father's brother took her parents to a train station in Sicler. The following day they took the train to Feodosiya, then to Batum (which is not far from the borders of Turkey). Gertrude's parents stayed in Batumi for six days (starting on April 6). From there they were detained until May 30 not ever fully understanding why they were detained.

Once they were released they wasted no time and started looking for someone to take them across the borders through the black market. Prayer was taken up asking wisdom from God. God then graciously sent them an older man who spoke both Russian and the Turkish language, which was very

beneficial to them. Trust with that man was easy and they both had faith in him that he could take both of them across the border, easily without proper paper work.

Travel started with horse and wagon and then a great distance by foot. On this adventure at one point, they had to hide between the oxen because Russian soldiers were nearby. At three in the morning, they continued the journey in an ox cart over a small river. So close to the other side, the ox decided to lie down to cool off and rest. No time was wasted; Gertrude's parents crawled across the field to get to the other side. Morning came and they were still on Russian soil. Thoughts were racing throughout their minds and then they saw the Black Sea. The guide they were with quickly rushed them along.

Gertrude's mother had already lost a shoe and now was so tired that the guide had to put her on his shoulder. Then they came upon a sailboat with five men. They had to walk hip deep out in the water to get to it. They were covered up in the boat after harshly being pushed in and soon after the boat started to move. After a distance of sailing, an elderly gentleman took the cover off of them and spoke for the first time. Before, the only way they had communicated with others was with signs. They felt much relief and joy and prayed thanking God for the rest of the night. They had finally got out far enough that the Russians would not be able to follow them.

After travelling for three days and two nights, with weather such as a storm and high waves, Gertrude's parents stepped foot on Turkey soil close to the city of Riese. The guide then led them several miles through fruit orchards, the guide always stayed a few feet ahead of them. It was part of

their agreement when first starting. It was not long before the border guards saw them and they were taken to the police station for investigation. They were questioned on how long they had been in Turkey and how they got there. They had received instructions from their guide on what to say. The interpreter there had been able to discover that they were German. The ice was broken. They were then taken at midnight to the mayor of the city. After more questioning, the mayor was satisfied and they were then escorted to a guesthouse where they spent the night. The following morning they had to report back to the police station where they were issued proper paperwork. They were foreigners in a land strange to them.

Weeks passed and they received further papers to travel to Constantinople, the capital of Turkey. They boarded a freight train and got there on June 27. Life was difficult in this new city for them. Many Russian soldiers were there, and they tried to take advantage of the refugees and foreigners. Gertrude's father worked many jobs to stay above water financially. He settled with a job as a restaurant chef, cooking for Russian refugees. He frequently had to cook borscht. They still did not have passports and had to constantly argue with the police. Nine months passed and they believe that through God, one of the police officers finally issued them passports for a small fee.

In Istanbul, they had discovered some Canadian newspapers with ads for immigrant laborers. They took courage and wrote a John Ebersol. Several weeks later they received a reply. After many hours of answering questions for him and sending letters back, John sent them back a cheque for twenty-five dollars. They then boarded a ship called Perrie-Lottie for Greece. Then

headed to Naples, Italy, and onto the port of Marseille. There they found again many Russian refugees. After they took a train to Paris, following four days of being there, the Canadian consulate informed them that their tickets were ready and could head off to Ontario, Canada. Ebersol had guaranteed their passage. They were extremely thankful to God for his protection on their journey.

Back on the train, they traveled to Le Havre, and then boarded to South Hampton, England then to Liverpool and finally on March 21. They sailed to Canada on a ship called Margush. Eight days passed and they finally docked in Saint John, New Brunswick. They were out on a train to Ontario. They had no idea where Milverton was, which was where Ebersol lived. They had to change trains several times, but people were always kind to them and helped them along. They finally arrived in Milverton. The station agent was very kind when they showed them all of their paperwork and when he saw the name John Ebersol he nodded and told them to wait.

Shortly after they saw someone approach with a horse and buggy, which looked very unfamiliar to them. In the buggy was an older man with a long beard and hair wearing a big black hat. They thought he was a Catholic priest but it turned out to be John Ebersol. He was a very kind and friendly man. The buggy only had two seats which meant Gertrude's mother had to sit on her father's lap. They traveled through the town and felt that it was a strange experience. They both thought that God had a sense of humor. Once they arrived at his farm, they were received very politely and cordially. Their few belongings were not allowed into the house. They wanted to make sure they had not brought any infectious diseases or guns with them.

The Ebersol were very gracious; they fed and housed Gertrude's parents for two weeks. After this Gertrude's father found a job in Brunner. Her father worked there for three months. They then left for New Hamburg where many of their people had already settled. He found employment in the cheese factory and then in the Hahn Brass factory where he worked for nineteen years.

Their three children Harry, Lenard, and Gertrude, were born there in New Hamburg. On October 22, 1944, they moved to Kitchener. They attended the Mennonite Brethren Church and praised God for his goodness and kindness throughout their many years.

After having a simple childhood in Kitchener, Gertrude left, in 1956. From that moment, she has been on a very adventurous journey with the Lord for the past 42 years. Gertrude believes that everyone has their own special spiritual journey. She believes that everyone has the same God and same promise along the way.

Her foundation and preparation for her journey all started at the Mennonite Brethren Church. She was saved at the age of eleven. Reverend H. H. Janzen came to New Hamburg for a week of evangelistic services. At the age of thirteen Gertrude moved to Kitchener and was baptized at the age of fifteen. She was active in Young Girls Choir/Senior Choir. As she looks back she sees how much God was establishing and grounding her in the foundation of Christianity. Two truths that she believes are engraved in her are the association of salvation and the sovereignty of God. She has learned that we live by the promises of God and not by the explanations of God. She did not realize back then that those two fundamentals would be her anchor in

the years ahead.

Her husband "Red" was a tomato farmer for the first few years of their married life. He then ventured into building homes where he was very successful. This was during the building boom in Leamington. The Lord blessed them financially at this time. They had three children and life was good. She often wondered why God had blessed them so abundantly. She questioned whether there was something more that He might want from them. In 1967, they met Barry Moore, an evangelist, at a crusade. He sensed restlessness in them, Gertrude and Red. Red and Barry talked and Barry encouraged Red to share their faith with others in the community.

Red started handing out tracts and talking to people. Gertrude and Red started with the booklet "This was your Life." Within the next year their life was turned upside down. Gertrude's life went from being a structured planner to being totally unpredictable. Red led one person after another to the Lord. These people all had totally different backgrounds from theirs. They would line up on their doorstep at all hours. They all had unique problems that Gertrude says she never could have imagined. She viewed them as baby Christians who needed baby Christian teachings. They were able to witness miracle after miracle as these new Christians showed their faith to their families and friends.

Gertrude had to change her traditional thinking in some areas. She believes that it was absolutely God's doing. Nothing really planned but it just happened because they were obedient to Christ's mandate given two thousand years ago. Gertrude and Red found God's warning in Ezekiel 3:18-19. "When I say to a wicked person, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn

them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. But if you do warn the wicked person and they do not turn from their wickedness or from their evil ways, they will die for their sin; but you will have saved yourself.”

At that time, a young Pastor named John Rush was just starting a new church. He is now associate pastor at People’s Church in Toronto. He had a burning zeal to win the whole town to Christ. Gertrude and Red joined with him and the people came by the dozens and then by hundreds. Gertrude found it thrilling to witness people being saved every week. Gertrude believes their enthusiasm was so challenging to the older Christians. Gertrude could tell many stories of people transformations. There was a young man who was wanted for five breaks ins and theft. When he gave his heart to the Lord, Red and Gertrude told him he must turn himself in. When he went to court the judge listened to the defense lawyer speak about how he was now attending church and turned himself in. By then the judge had come to know Red and had knowledge that Red was trying to help all the young people in trouble. The judge looked at Red and said, “Mr. Wiens, this is one of your people?” Red replied with “Yes, sir”. The judge then said, “Take him home and look after him.”

The new Christians kept Gertrude on her toes. She had to always be ready to give an answer. They couldn’t understand her total assurance of her salvation. They would ask her “Don’t you ever doubt?” She would reply with “No. Never. I know God will keep his word.” She sometimes has emotional discussions with God. Gertrude’s spirit always agrees with his spirit. She

knows God will never leave her. Red eventually retired from business and dedicated his life to friendship evangelism with Gertrude. Their neighbors would sometimes wonder what would be going on at their house because the traffic was pretty heavy.

One rather noisy neighbor said that they must be “bootleggers” because all kind of people came and left. Scruffy people, young people, old people and rich people all came and went. The evening that really blew Gertrude’s mind was when Red invited a whole group of motorcyclist to their house to listen to a recording of a dynamic evangelist. They all lined up their motorcycles and went into their basement very politely, listened to the speaker and then went on their way.

In January, 1980, Gertrude and Red were asked at church to pick a verse for the coming year. Gertrude picked Philippians 3:10 “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” By the end of the year, Gertrude learned what the second part of the verse was talking about. They had used their personal finance’s for the church and street ministry. Someone always seemed to need a loan. They were running out of money so Red and Gertrude asked the Lord for a new business venture. Red came up with a new invention, got a patent and went into a partnership with a Christian. He poured all of their life savings into the new business. As time went on they had discovered that their partner had defrauded them and lost everything.

At that time, Gertrude had another emotional discussion with God. After that, a new pastor came to their church. He had no vision for reaching out into the community. The church over time fell apart. They had close

friends who deserted them and Gertrude's father suddenly died in February, 1981. Someone then torched their house in July, 1982. "I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me." A verse in the daily strength devotional from Psalm 13:6. In July 1983, one of their children became very ill and they devoted the next month to him and his recovery.

After that God said to them to get back on the streets and that he will bless and provide for their family. That is what they then did. They traveled to many fairs in Southern Ontario. Wherever there were cars and people, Gertrude and Red would be there. From places such as Shipshewana to Florida, Gertrude and Red traveled. Gertrude could recite many stories of people accepting Christ and people being encouraged.

Gertrude now teaches Junior Church and Women Bible studies. In 1990, she joined a steering committee where she founded SNA where she served until she retired. Gertrude's life is a story of faith and love. She is dedicated to the Lord and I hope that through reading this you can see how she is truly a woman of Christ.