

The Albert & Alwine Steinke Family



Albert Steinke was the oldest son of Gustav and Rosalie Steinke. He grew up on a farm in the village of Bryschtsche I (Bryszcze) and learned to work hard at a very young age. During the war years the family was displaced from their farm and country ending up in East Prussia on a large estate where our grandmother was expected to work to earn her and her children's keep. Accommodation became a problem and they were very thankful that her sister Mathilda Holland with her husband and nine children, were willing to share their one-room residence.

Once the war ended, the family was reunited and eventually returned to Volhynia. As their property was not as they had left it, preparing the land and reconstructing the buildings became their first priority. Although our father was just a young boy, being the oldest he was doing the work of an adult. Gradually the land became productive, the buildings were replaced and our father found some free time in the evenings and learned to play several musical instruments. He must have really loved music as he walked a great distance to learn to play and later to practice with a church band.

A young lady in the same village caught his eye and after a short courtship, Alwine Debus, the daughter of Friedrich Debus und Emilie (Zerbe) Debus, was the chosen one. The marriage took place on January 17th, 1933. After a small celebration at the Debus home, their honeymoon consisted of going back to the farm and working hard. On October 31st, 1934, their first child, Herbert, was born.

After farming for a short time in Bryschtsche I, Uncle Wilhelm and Aunt Mathilda Holland's farm became available because they were immigrating to Canada and our parents purchased and moved to this farm located in Ozierce.

A second boy, Siegbert, was born on April 9th, 1939, but sadly to say, this little fellow only lived for a few months. This was a difficult time for the parents, not only did they lose a baby but they both were dealing with health problems at this time.

In 1939 World War II started and created upheaval for the family. Due to circumstances the German people were asked to move out of the area and were eventually resettled in Western Poland, which became known as the Warthegau. On August 7th, 1941, a daughter, Gerda, was born.

Early 1944 our father became conscripted into the German Army. After a short training period, he was sent to the Italian War Theatre and became a Prisoner-of-War in the same year. The Russian army was advancing and on January 18th, 1945, the rest of the family received orders to evacuate the area and flee west. As fodder was needed for the horses, a limited amount of space was available for possessions and the family, which consisted of our mother, Herbert, Gerda and the Gustav Steinke Grandparents. Just imagine the traffic jam! All of Warthgau was trying to travel west at the same time and in the same direction.

Since the Russian Tanks were already further west than our village, in no time at all we were overtaken and ordered back. This was the start of a very difficult time for us. Mother and Gerda did not end up in West Germany until 1947. As the family had become separated, Herbert was not able to join us until August 1948, when the Red Cross started bringing transports of children out of Poland into Germany. He joined us in time to have his name added to the immigration application papers. September found us in the refugee camp in Hannover where we were waiting to have our immigration papers approved. We left from Bremerhaven and docked in Quebec City. On October 31st we were in Winnipeg, MB ready to head up to Minitonas, MB our new home in a new country.

After two years on the farm, father realized that he would have better earning opportunities in Winnipeg and in November 1950, the family resettled there.

Eventually the children married, grandchildren arrived and the parents retired. They lived long enough to celebrate their 60th Anniversary in 1993 with their children, grandchildren and many relatives and friends present. As their faith was an important part of their life, they were very involved at church. As well, they enjoyed it immensely when their children and grandchildren participated in various church activities. Father passed away June 17th, 1994, after his 5th Heart attack. Mother lived for another three years and passed away on June 12th, 1997.

Herbert Steinke and Gerda Krause

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