

Introduction: (show map of world) to the west and slightly north of Japan, Russia appears - I was born in Russia, lived in Canada and spent 45 years living in Japan, so I almost made it around the world.

1. In 1928, a tiny girl was born in Russia. Grandma's diary didn't even mention her name. Strange. At that time, Russia, the largest country in the world, was caught up in the Bolshevik Revolution, terrible times of murder and disappearing people. Dietrich and Agatha Klassen decided to immigrate to Canada. (this story is told in a separate article called: Canada, Do You Have Room for Us? published by Readers' Digest in 2017).
2. Thus in 1929 my parents arrived in Waterloo, Ontario. After several moves, they settled in the Niagara region in a small village called Virgil. Dad was a volunteer preacher in the large Virgil MB Church. For a livelihood they had a fruit farm. By that time Mary was the oldest of 6 children.
3. Sunday mornings the family were always in church. One Sunday evening Mary's parents went to church and left her in charge of her 5 younger siblings. However, a friend had come for a visit, and Mary accompanied her partway home by bicycle. Disaster struck during her absence. Johnny, 13, a neighbor friend of her brothers, was a famous tree climber. When he saw a bird's nest high up on the electric pole where his friends, the Klassen boys lived, he climbed the pole. On top he leaned on the electric box, and was instantly electrocuted. Mary blamed herself, she should have stayed home. Johnny had received Jesus into his heart 2 weeks earlier, so that was a great comfort to his family. But Mary? She knew she was not ready to meet Jesus if she died. The next night she accepted Jesus as her Savior.
4. In those days, not many girls in our church went to high school. However, when we heard about OBS, Ontario Bible School (now Niagara Christian Collegiate), a boarding school, I wanted to go. I promised my parents I would work hard to earn my way. Permission granted. Every fall and every spring the school had a week of evangelistic meetings. One evening I dedicated my life to serving the Lord. That was no easy decision for me, because I had a dread of India and Africa, where they had such horrible wild animals. Finally, after an hour of crying, I said, "Yes, Lord." What a relief many years later when the Lord called us to Japan. No wild animals.

5. When I heard of the MB Bible College in Winnipeg, I decided to go. There I had the most important meeting of my life - I met Peter Derksen from Abbotsford, BC.
6. In 1954 Peter and I were married. Peter taught at Bethel Bible Institute in Abbotsford for 2 years.
7. One evening, during our regular devotions, we read Romans 10. Verses 14~15 spoke clearly to our hearts. We knew that many people had never heard of Jesus Christ. Was Jesus calling us to go? Matthew 28:19.
8. We applied to our mission board. Their response? Good. Your next step is more schooling. We moved to Newton, KS. where Peter finished university studies. Next we spent 1 year attending The New York Biblical Seminary. At that time we had 2 children, Evangeline 2, and Richard 1.
9. In the fall of 1954 our mission board, COM sent us to Japan, together with Robert and Alice Ruth Ramseyer. We spent 2 years in language school in Kobe, Japan. Rosaline was born just before the end of language school.
10. In 1956 the mission sent us to Nichinan, Miyazaki Ken, to replace Vorans, who left on their first furlough. Peter was thrust into the role of kindergarten principal, although he had no preparation for such a responsibility. Our big happening in Nichinan 1956, was the birth of twins, William and Wanda, an answer to my wish for multiples!
 1960 - we replaced the Edigers in Hyuga, and worked there until 1967 (with a furlough between.)
 1967 - two big firsts - our first church planting from scratch (kaitaku dendo), and a special gift from God, the birth of our 6th child, Lillian. What joy she brought to our family and our church.
 1978 - our next move was to Beppu that we could see across the bay from Oita. Beppu was called the "Sodom and Gomorrah" of Japan. When the Beppu Mennonite Christian Church was established with their own pastor 10 years later.
 Bill had returned to Japan as a missionary, and established the Oita Minami (South) Church. When he left for his first furlough, we took over for one year. Was it possible? Could we start another church plant at 60? We thanked God for good health and moved to Kyushu's largest city, Fukuoka.

11. When we turned 65, COM asked us to retire! No way! How could we be that irresponsible? We went off COM support and stayed until a young pastor took the responsibility.
12. During this time Peter needed a 4 open heart bypass surgery in Japan. Our Japanese doctor was thrilled that we trusted Japanese doctors with the operation. We were able to stay 2 more years.
13. 1999 - we made it to 70, and said good-bye to our beloved Japan. We made our home in Abbotsford. What a joy when we were asked to help with a young Japanese church in the city of Surrey, where Gerald Neufeld is pastor now.
14. This is my joy now, to be able to worship with my Japanese brothers and sisters in the virtual Surrey Mennonite Japanese Christian Fellowship.
God is faithful to His promises. In Ephesians 3:20~21 God promises:
"Now to Him who is able to do far ore abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."