Nastia (Nellie) Rezansoff

1913 - 2014

This is the biography of Nastia Rezansoff - a wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, a great, great grandmother, and above all, a remarkable woman.

Nastia was born on November 25, 1913 to the family of Misha and Marfoonya Denisoff in a Doukhobor village in the settlement of Plodorodnoye. This was when Plodorodnoye was just being cleared and settled by members of The Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood.

In time the Denisoff family grew to four children: three girls and a boy. Nastia, being the oldest of the siblings, accepted the responsibility that came with it. Nastia's upbringing was of a communal lifestyle where everyone worked together, shared food together and prayed together. There was little or no time for play.

In those early years public school attendance was limited or unavailable and children grew up helping with the household and communal chores and attending Sobraniye or “bibliotika” (special youth meetings). Mother recalled walking bare-foot in the early morning to Brilliant, to attend Sobraniye there and then walking back to her village late into the day.

Nastia's parents were avid singers and were part of Peter Lordly's dedicated Psalm Singer's choir. It was from them that our mother received her excellent singing voice, strong religious convictions and her desire and ability to commit to memory hundreds of hymns and psalms.

As was the case with her parents, she was proud to be selected at the age of 16 to be in a group of singers that traveled on a good will mission to California and she recollected many times of their visit to the Molokans. Mother was selected to recite from memory one of the more lengthy speeches composed by Peter P. Verigin Chistyakov.

In 1931 Nellie met and married Peter William Rezansoff, not long after his arrival from Verigin, Saskatchewan. As fate would have it, they were to spend the first three years of their life apart from each other. After only four short months into their marriage, they were arrested for taking part in a peaceful demonstration in Thrums and incarcerated separately with other Doukhobors at Piers Island.

Upon their release from Piers Island they settled at Krestova where they started their family of five

children: Vera, Ann, Peter, Katie and Walter. Bringing up a large family was not an easy task, especially in the harsh economic times of the 30's and 40's and with the limited conveniences at Krestova and especially the ongoing turmoil. As a young mother, Nellie brought up the children and helped by growing a garden, which had to be planted some two miles away due to the lack of water in Krestova. Nastia was an excellent seamstress and sewed most of their children's clothing. In the early years she would also accompany her husband for seasonal work in the Okanagan.

In 1946, Nastia's and Peter's yearnings to lead a life based on traditional Doukhobor principles led them to move with a group of like-minded Doukhobors to Hilliers, BC, on Vancouver Island, where they set about establishing a communal life style. Much effort and toil was spent in establishing the community. There was land to clear, dwellings to build, financial needs to meet and at the same time contribute to the community in spiritual needs.

When we look back at those times it was hard to believe that mother and father were only in their mid-thirties. Eventually the community got on its feet, and life became better. No sooner than things got better it was apparent that another move was imminent.

In the summer of 1953, the Rezansoff family moved back to Krestova at a time when there was an ongoing struggle with the government of the day regarding the school attendance act. Mother would recall that they could have chosen not to come back, to stay and continue living in Hilliers. However, they felt they needed to come back. As a result, their school-aged children, Katie and Walter, were forcibly taken away and confined to New Denver and were not to be released until 1959. These indeed were difficult times to endure.

The year 1962 brought with it another resettlement and more hardships, when Nastia with husband Peter and now their grown children and grandchildren left all of their belongings and joined the trek with other brothers and sisters to Agassiz, BC, where they spent the next five years living under extremely difficult conditions.

In 1967 Nastia and husband Peter returned back to Krestova, rebuilt a comfortable but simple, un-extravagant house and continued to live close to their children and grandchildren. Being vegetarians they always planted a larger than necessary garden with the expectation they would share their extra vegetables with some one in need.

Mother was guided by Doukhobor psalms and hymns throughout her life and she shared her knowledge with her family and with all those with whom she came into contact. It was considered essential for mother to recite the psalm “Be Devout” at every family wedding and she would always add the comment “This psalm is to be your guide in your married life”. Whenever there was a hymn or psalm to learn they would say, “Ask mother - she knows the words or the voice to that one.”

Nastia and husband Peter were a well suited couple, mild mannered in character, good hearted and extremely sincere. They were always prepared to share or give away what they had and did so on many occasions without hesitation or regret. Hospitality was always present in their home; visitors calling in would not be allowed to leave until Nastia provided a meal for them.

As all of Nastia's grandchildren came to realize, Baba was an excellent cook and homemaker. She would always have something delicious to eat or drink in case some of her children or grandchildren dropped by, whether it was homemade raspberry juice in summer or

strawberry tarts, or perhaps it would be dried fruit in winter. Pears were her specialty. Her borshch was one of the best.

Nastia and Peter practiced home remedies for treatment of most of their medical needs. Their garden housed a collection of plants and roots, which they harvested and stored for the winter. It was common to walk into their house to find dried herbs being sorted on the kitchen table and packaged for later use.

To attest as to how much they relied on home remedies, when Baba first contracted pneumonia and was taken to Nelson hospital, the admitting nurse could not find her health records. After looking for half an hour they finally came out to say they could not find her records - could she be registered under a different name? To which mother said, to the nurse's astonishment, that she had never been admitted to the hospital before.

Mother and father lived in their home actively until 91 years of age. In their later years you would find them in their garden in the summer while in the winter you would find them reading late into the evening. They were avid readers, reading from previous “pismi” (leaders' letters), books and articles. What is remarkable is that mother, not ever having been a day in school, taught herself and was able to read and write. After the passing of her husband she continued to live in her home for another two years. After her bout with pneumonia she was moved to Talarico Place. Amazingly, she survived seven more bouts with pneumonia while staying at Talarico Place.
Our mother's concern about others did not stop even while residing at Talarico. She soon took on the task of consoling others by reciting prayers with the other residents who were having a difficult time. When we learned about this, we tried to reason that it is hard for her to be taking on other peoples burden to which she replied, “A kak zhe, kamoos nada yim razsoodit!” (“But, how else could it be? After all, someone has to try and console them!”) Soon the nurses realized what a help Baba was - she would be asked to go over to Mrs. so and so and read some prayers and console her. You can truly say Nastia was a Doukhobor therapist.

Baba celebrated her 100th Birthday in late summer 2013 with over 80 of her immediate family gathered in her honor for the event. She was able and on her feet throughout the day and participated with great enjoyment in the festivities and singing that carried well into the evening. Remembering the verses to songs was not a problem as Baba was there to help out.

Nastia departed from this earthly life into the Eternal Kingdom on April 17, 2014, at 8:30 PM, with all of her family by her side comforting and wishing her well on her journey.

She was predeceased by her parents, husband Peter, sister Polly Kalodinin, sister Grace Kinakin and grandson Johnny Voykin.

She leaves behind her brother, Mike Denisoff; her children: Vera Podmoroff, Ann Voykin (husband Bill), Peter (wife Elsie), Katie Podmorow (husband Harry), Walter (wife Winnie);

17 grandchildren: Walter Jmaeff (wife Marj), Nadine Podmoroff, Kathy Poznikoff, Peter Podmoroff, Teresa Verigin (husband Ernie), Sharon Philp, (husband Corry), Lorraine Chutskoff (husband Howard), Nina Nixon (husband Grant), Natasha Barisoff (husband Harold) ,Danny Podmorow (wife Jamie), Steven Podmorow (wife Allison), Lara Podmorow (partner Josh) , Liza Maloff (husband Kelvin), Christine Lloyd (husband Ken), Jenny Rezansoff, Tamara Rotach (husband Sandro), Sara Reimer (husband Steve);

30 great grandchildren; and three great, great grandchildren; as well as numerous nieces and nephews.

Nellie was admired, loved and respected by her family and by all those who came to know her. She was a special person, who shared her warmth and love with no reservations. Nastia will be missed and fondly remembered. May the Gracious Lord accept Nastia into His Heavenly Kingdom. Vechnaya Pamyat' v Tsarstviyi Nebesnom.

The family extends their gratitude to: the Verigin family - J.J.Verigin and Laura Verigin, for their expressed condolences and words of sympathy; the Krestova Community singers and surrounding communities' singers; relatives, friends and acquaintances; the cooking group; the grave diggers; and all who brought food and came to support and expressed condolences.

Special thanks to staff at Talarico Place and to Dr. Merit for providing care and support in a loving, understanding and compassionate manner, and to Bill Strilaeff and staff at the Castlegar Funeral Chapel for providing their service in a caring and professional way.

Special thanks and gratitude to Fred Makortoff for his sincere efforts in officiating and conducting the service in such a reverent manner.

Submitted by son, Peter P. Rezansoff, on behalf of Nellie Rezansoff's family - Published by usccdoukhobors.org - Copyright © 2014 - May 17, 2014