



Sam Alex Popoff

Sam Alex Popoff was born in Pass Creek, BC on April 5, 1926, into the family of Alex and Helen Popoff. He spent most of his life there with his parents and younger siblings Bill, Mary and Mable. Funeral services were held at the Brilliant Cultural Centre on December 21, 2013, with burial at Pass Creek Cemetery.

Tragedy struck when he was only seven years old. His family was living in the Popoff village and one day a couple of elderly men were having a sauna in the village bath house when fire broke out in the sauna room and spread throughout the village. His family lost everything except for one lamp and one chair that Sam was able to carry out while his Mom hung on to baby sister, Mary. His father, Alex, was away working. The fire was in late autumn after all the root cellars were full and all the canning was done. The family had to move to a different village, the Hollywood village, where the Strelaef relatives put them up for the winter until his dad was able to rebuild a shack on the village land. After that trauma, Sam was extremely cautious with all wood burning furnaces and stoves. His houses probably had the cleanest chimneys in the country.

Pass Creek was a community of

six villages about seven miles north of Castlegar. A road was built by using horse and buggy around 1910. Travelling to Pass Creek from Castlegar can be a challenge even today, but in the early years of communal life the road had to be maintained by the Russian community. Sam, along with many others, hauled gravel on wagons to fill in the ruts and to build up the road. In the 1940s Sam Popoff and Alex Tamelin built a V-shaped wooden snow plow and they plowed the snow off Pass Creek road. This homemade snow plow required the body weight of two people to keep it on the road and a team of four horses to pull it. The seven mile stretch of road from Tamelin's village to the School House Restaurant in Raspberry took four hours for the round trip to be completed. Sam kept this up for approximately 10 years in the 1940s and 50s.

Sam attended Pass Creek School until grade eight. Starting in his teen years he learned carpentry skills from his father, which he continued to pursue for most of his adult life. He was an excellent carpenter and worked on building cabins at Johnston Canyon, Alberta, as well as on hospitals, schools and residential homes in the West Kootenay. He did home renovations and he also built furniture, kitchen cupboards, desks, cedar chests, toys and Doukhobor ladders.

In his early 20s Sam went to work in Johnston Canyon in Banff National Park. He started working there only so he could earn enough money to pay for a bus ticket back home. The employer kept raising Sam's wages to keep him from leaving. He also got promoted until he was running the show, so to speak. Sam went back to Johnston Canyon in 2011. The cabins that he built are still in the same family, three generations later (or

60 years). An employee at Johnston Canyon recognized his name and gave him a tour of the cabins and gifted Sam with a souvenir jacket. They were still the original cabins that he had built. Sam was so happy that his workmanship stood the test of time and was appreciated so many years later.

In 1970, at the age of 44, Sam got his official Certificate of Qualification for Carpentry from the Province of British Columbia. After 25 years of building houses, schools, hospitals and so forth, he now had a piece of documentation acknowledging his skills. Sam not only loved to build, but he also loved to design buildings, furniture and ladders. He had a reason for every design element. He was very economical and practical. Whatever he built had to look good, last long and come in under budget. He spent hours and days doing estimates for jobs, and of course, you did not get paid unless you got the job. How many board feet of lumber and how many cubic yards of cement were daily pieces of conversation. Sam and a group of friends owned a small cement mixer and boy did they love to mix. His Pass Creek house was paved with cement sidewalks, walkways and numerous other cement projects.

Sam always told his family to do the best job possible. According to him, years after you build something, people are not going to care how long it took to build something or how much it cost to build something, but they would ask, "WHO built it?" If his name was on a project you can be sure that his best efforts went into it.

Sam wanted all his children and grandchildren to be carpenters. When he was building his house in Pass Creek on the family's new land, they had to do things in order. First the water line had to be built and then the orchard planted. Next the

house went under construction. Oh, but wait, there would be many short trips between the home where the family lived and the new house under construction. No problem. Sam taught his daughter, at a very early age, to drive the truck between the two houses. Florence was not pleased, but Sam was determined to involve his children.

When the High Arrow Dam was being built in the 1960s, Sam bought several houses up the lake and took them apart and brought home the boards. His daughter's job was to pull out the nails, straighten the nails and stack the boards. She is still hooked on recycling. Thirty-five years later, when they went to sell that house, the inspector said that it had enough lumber in it to build a church.

In 1947, at the age of 21, Sam completed a course in practical radio and television for servicing radios and televisions. He received a diploma that entitled him to all honours, rights, and privileges of a Radiotrician and Teletrician. This was given at Washington DC, USA on May 5, 1947. He was very proud of this accomplishment.

For a few years in his 20s, Sam drove a logging truck. He always liked to tell the story of how the brakes failed one time as he was bringing a load of logs down the steep mountain road. It was horrific just listening to the story, but somehow by using a combination of skill sets he got the truck down the hill without foot brakes, just using the hand brake. Later he taught at least four guys to drive logging trucks also. He also taught his children how to drive his pick-up truck which had standard gears.

In the 1950s Sam was one of the members on the Board of Directors that was instrumental in founding the Brilliant Credit Union. He mentored Fred Voykin into the position of manager of the Brilliant

Credit Union.

From 1959 to 1969 Sam was the manager of the Kootenay-Columbia Co-operative Society in Brilliant. The Co-op sold groceries, dry goods, hardware, clothes, animal feed, coal, gasoline, cement, etc. The CPR delivered carloads of coal and cattle feed to the store. In 1965 the KC Co-op in Brilliant sold more dry cement in bags than any other dealer in BC. This was reported by a representative from the Vancouver Cement Company. A truck load of 550 bags of cement was sold every week from March to November at the KC Co-op. During this time the KC Co-op Board of Directors decided to purchase a block of land in Ootischenia for future expansion of the Co-op. Sam was able to produce money from the profits at the Co-op to pay for the land in cash. This land is located in Ootischenia and still belongs to the Co-op Society today.

Sam learned to read and write Russian at home. During the winter months of 1950 to 1952, for three seasons, he taught the Russian language to Russian speaking students. There were approximately 20 students in the program who gathered at the Strelaef Village and studied for two hours five times a week.

In the 1950s Sam wrote several plays in the Russian language about life in Pass Creek. These were laced with humour and singing. They were rehearsed and performed in local Doukhobor villages and halls throughout the Kootenays.

Sam loved to play the accordion and guitar. Even as a teenager he would play in dance halls such as Playmor, or on the wooden bridge that crossed Kinney Creek—close to home. Sam would play and the rest of the folks would dance. He always said he could not dance because he never learned. He was the guy behind

the music and one of his favourite tunes was a fast paced Polka dance.

Sam Popoff married Florence Hadikin on July 18, 1953, and they shared 58 years of married life living in Pass Creek and then at Sandalwood Court in Castlegar. Florence and Sam raised three children: Diana, Hapa and John.

While still teenagers, both Sam and Florence went to prayer meetings in their villages. Both came from a long lineage of singers. During these prayer meetings Sam and Florence learned to sing psalms, recite prayers and build their foundational core Christian values. Sam and Florence were both avid members of the Kootenay Psalmists. They loved the music and were dedicated to preserving this part of their culture by gathering with fellow singers and enjoying the psalms. They regularly hosted the psalmists in their home in Pass Creek as they rehearsed the psalms and learned new ones. Sam especially was very excited with this adventure. He personally could sing 57 Doukhobor psalms all by himself. This was an exciting tradition and many of the psalms and other songs are recorded on tapes as a legacy for the community and for their children. At one time Sam mentioned that he wore out five tape recorders.

During his teenage years, Sam helped build the forms to cement and seal the Verigin Tomb in Brilliant. This project took approximately one month of building forms and hauling cement in a wheel barrow. After the reconstruction of the Verigin Tomb, Sam regularly volunteered to be on night guard duty in teams of two or three other men. Sam shared his talents with the USCC community by helping to build the Pass Creek Hall where he put in countless hours of donated labour over a period of several years. He was there from the initial foundation right through to

putting in the septic system, building cupboards, furniture and finishing the inside. Next, he volunteered for the construction of the Brilliant Cultural Centre in the 1970s. In addition, he helped build the kitchen cupboards and office desks at Brilliant. Every year he donated labour for the upkeep of the Brilliant Cultural Centre as well as volunteering for guard duty on a regular basis during the 70s and 80s. When the Kootenay Men's Group was founded, Sam helped construct the work building which housed the Kootenay Men's Group in the basement and the Cultural Interpretive Society upstairs. He helped found the Kootenay Men's Group which continues to flourish and produce caskets and fruit boxes and other wood products. Sam also volunteered in the construction of John J Verigin's home, Sirotskoye, in Grand Forks.

Sam was very protective of his children and he spent a lot of time with them. When his daughters were pre-teens he and Florence decided that the family needed chickens. This was to be a family business. Two chicken coops later they had an army of 500 chickens, barrels of eggs and a long list of chicken related chores: feed and water chickens twice a day, collect eggs, wash eggs, candle eggs, grade eggs, store eggs, prepare for selling, feed chicks and then do it all again tomorrow. Sam was a very smart man. He didn't have to tell his daughters that they could not go on a date. He just asked them, "But who is going to look after the chickens?" At the peak of production the chicken enterprise cleared \$4.00 profit per day. That money went towards buying materials for the construction of their new house. The only time Sam ever bought anything on credit was for the purchase of a truck.

Sam and Florence enjoyed gardening. They had hot beds,

greenhouses, a huge vegetable patch, fruit trees and a garlic patch. They raised chickens, milking cows and a horse. They also enjoyed picking wild huckleberries, mushrooms and *suziki*. They were very hospitable and enjoyed entertaining guests.

Sam loved his family and enjoyed teaching his children how to sing, look after the animals, learn carpentry skills, tend the garden and orchard, drive vehicles and anything else that was relevant. He enjoyed coaching the Pass Creek Minor Softball team. He was a very passionate member of the USCC and gladly served his community. He encouraged his entire family to participate and share their culture and heritage. Sam liked to bless people by giving to them gifts such as knife blocks, magazine stands, Doukhobor ladles or money.

Florence and Sam travelled to many destinations over the years. As a young family they went to Saskatchewan. Other memorable trips were to the Soviet Union and to California and Oregon. They also enjoyed the Alaska Highway when they went to the Yukon in their motor home. They also travelled across Canada to visit family in Petawawa. Some of their favourite outings were to the Ainsworth, Nakusp and Halcyon Hot Springs. They also enjoyed numerous campsites where they gathered with friends and enjoyed the great outdoors.

The Pass Creek Cemetery was established around 1910 and Sam took over the administration of the paper work and maintenance of the cemetery in 1975. He held that responsibility for approximately 35 years. He organized the record keeping for the cemetery according to government regulations and vigilantly organized work parties to look after the grounds, to dig the graves and to purchase equipment. The cemetery now looks like a well

kept park. Sam was also asked to be an MC for many of the funerals in Pass Creek and Brilliant.

Sam, Florence and their children participated in the Pass Creek Local presentations for Children's Festivals, USCC Festivals, Christmas and New Year programs and Talent Shows. They all took their responsibilities very seriously. Sam and Florence Popoff dedicated their lives to serving God and have been active members of the USCC in many capacities.

After his retirement from construction, Sam took up the hobby of carving ladles in the traditional Doukhobor style. His ladles have blessed many people in many countries. He has given away and sold countless ladles which are carved in his own unique artistic style.

Sam Popoff was a very complex man. He loved to tell jokes, visit, carve ladles, keep extensive diaries and travel journals, prepare photo albums, give advice and so forth. Yet, after Florence passed on, Sam struggled in many areas. They had been married for 58 years and he was just not interested in this steep learning curve of how to live on by himself. It didn't matter that there were a lot of people at Sandalwood Court, Castlewood Village or at Castleview Care Centre. He was lonely for Florence. Now they are together again.

Sam is survived by his children: Diana Parker, Hapa (Gary) Christiansen, John (Neva) Popoff, and his grandchildren: Eric and Jake Parker, Tanya (Michael) Flood, Malcolm Christiansen, Alexander Popoff and his sister Mable Allan. He was predeceased by his parents, wife Florence, brother Bill Popoff and sister Mary Osmachenko.

Sam went to be with his Lord on December 16, 2013. He will be sadly missed and will remain forever in our hearts.

Sam's Family would like to thank Dr. Merritt and the staff at Castleview Care Centre, plus all of the doctors, nurses, medical staff, pharmacists and home support workers who assisted in Dad's care over the years. Thank you to all relatives, friends and neighbours who supported us with your kind words, visits, telephone calls, emails, cards, flowers, food, gifts and donations. Thank you to the Grand Forks Funeral Home for your compassionate and professional services. Thank you to Ernie Verigin for officiating at Dad's funeral. Thank you to Marcia Strelaeff for preparing the song booklets. Thank you to Nick Plotnikoff for playing the accordion. Thank you to the psalmists and congregational singers and all those who came to support the family.

The following donations were made to ISKRA in memory of Sam Alex Popoff: Kootenay Men's Group, \$100; Laura Zaitsoff, Ron, Catherine and Nolan Zaitsoff and Debbie, Dean, Mike and Jason Scott, \$100; Phil and Shirley Zaytsoff, John and Violet Zaytsoff, Jim and Nancy Crawford, Bernice and Randy Haviland, and Marie and Leonard Bayoff, \$100; Nick and Verna Ogloff, \$30; Pat and Linda Gallagher, \$25; Bill and Laura Verigin, \$20; Lewie and Beatrice Verigin, \$20; Paul and Mary Verigin, \$20; John and Elizabeth Voykin, \$20; Nora Pozdnikoff, \$10; Nick Verigin, \$10; Katherine Chernoff, Ken Chernoff, Jason, Carolyn and Abbott Smith, \$25. Total, \$480.

The following donation was made to the John J Verigin Fund in memory of Sam Alex Popoff: Lucy Strelaeff and family, \$50.