



Russell Peterson

March 7, 1916 - February 8, 2011

Russell A. Peterson, 94, longtime Ephrata resident passed away Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2011 at Columbia Crest Care Center surrounded by his loving family. The family would like to thank Columbia Crest for their wonderful care of Russell.

Russell Arthur Peterson was born on a cold winter day, March 7th, 1916 in rural north central Minnesota. He was the sixth of eight children born to Frank and Hilma (Olsson) Petersson. The delivery was at home on the family farm, his mother attended by a neighbor woman with birthing skills. Swedish was spoken at home and with neighboring relatives, but all the siblings were American first but with lasting ties to their Swedish ancestry.

The Peterson children were all expected to participate in the daily operation of the farm and lessons learned growing up were hardened into their long belief in the benefits of hard work and personal determination. Russell, at the age of 15, followed two of his older brothers, William and Stanley to the Peace River region of northwestern Alberta, Canada. There they homesteaded the "free land" that Canada was offering in order to encourage immigration and development of its northern territory. The training they received from their father and willingness to work hard in spite of the hardships resulted in the creation of two successful family farms that are still owned and operated by family members.

Russell, though, was not interested in farming. He had matured into a very able young man with many skills, and with the consent of his guardian brother William he pressed northward in search of adventure. He was an experienced "cat skinner"(meaning he could operate a steel tracked tractor) and this got him a winter job operating on of these machines on a remarkable supply mission delivering drilling equipment to Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories. They made their own road as they went along, his skills as a mechanic and welder put to frequent and sometimes innovative use. The combination of very cold conditions and rough terrain resulted in many breakdowns. Their successful destination arrival was a noteworthy event.

He navigated the entire Mackenzie River, from Great Slave Lake to Tuktoyuktuk on the Arctic Ocean. In the village of Yellowknife on the Northwestern shore of Great Slave Lake he worked as a hard rock miner, working more than a mile underground in one of the worlds' largest gold mines. While living in the north he was able to often pursue his passion for hunting and fishing. As these were lean times his skill as an outdoorsman also meant he was able to provision himself and others with the bounty of the land. Caribou meat, wild fowl and fish were staples of everyone's diet.

The entry of America into World War II came after the December 7, 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. When the news reached Yellowknife many there were uncertain of where Pearl Harbor was and subsequently one of the locals even reported seeing a periscope in the Great Slave Lake waters near town.

The turmoil going on in the world led Russell to decide to return to the United States to visit home and family after a twelve year absence. This reunion was tempered by the uncertain security of America and after discussion with his younger brother Martin they decided to enlist in the military. Russell chose the Navy and Martin became a Seabee, the famous construction battalion.

Following basic and then advanced training in diesel engineering Russell departed San Francisco for Saipan, Mariana Islands, in the South Pacific. Again he approached this experience with a sense of adventure and his stories about his life as a sailor were fascinating. Following the surrender of Japan and a hospital convalescent stay he was discharged and both he and Martin returned to Minnesota, both arriving at home on the same day without any preplanning.

Living back on the home farm was not his long term plan and he hoped to return to the far north. Upon his return to Minnesota he did reacquaint himself with another local farming family and following a traditional courtship married Alice Weiss. She was a young farm girl who had never been out of the state but when he announced plans to head west she put her trust in him and off they went.

Russell and Alice traveled to Seattle where he had a job interview with a large construction firm hoping to be sent to a job site in the far north. The interviewer was ready to hire Russ but he said that living conditions were not appropriate for a young bride. His hopes dashed he was relieved to be offered a job with the company in eastern Washington. So it came to be that Russ and Alice Peterson settled in the small town of Ephrata, Washington.

Russ soon switched to regular employment with Empire Concrete and worked for them until the late 1970's. Russ and Alice had two children, Donald born in 1947 and Donna in 1952. The family made frequent trips to both Minnesota and Canada visiting the many aunts, uncles and cousins. Unfortunately and with great sadness to many Alice was diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer in 1975 and died on July 4th, 1976.

Following this family tragedy Russ chose to travel the northwest and western Canada, visiting those areas where he spent earlier and happier times. This was for him a largely solo journey and a very lonesome time in his life. Eventually, entering into a working partnership with his son Don, an old ranch in the Methow Valley of northeastern Washington was purchased and was followed by fifteen years of enjoyable, though often hard work, refurbishing the land and buildings.

During this time Russ came to know his two granddaughters, Kate and Lacey, the children of Don and Eileen Peterson. They, in turn, got to know and see their grandfather in a surrounding that suited him far better than their home in Seattle. Everyone had a horse, cattle were bred and born and a time of family reestablished.

The remaining void in Russell's life was filled when he met and eventually married Sue Black. He became a much more mellow and socially graceful individual again. They traveled to Canada and Minnesota, enjoyed the company of each other and were welcoming hosts to many. With the passage of the years and the inevitability of health decline Sue continued to provide the care and support necessary to allow Russell to remain at home until just several weeks before his death on February 8, 2011, just a month shy of his 95th birthday. His was a life of adventure and accomplishment, full and long. I have little remorse, I know he would have little as well. By Don Peterson

Russell was preceded in death by 5 brothers, Bill, Thure, Stan, Rudolph and Martin, two sisters, Thyra Peterson and Vera Sidney.

He is survived by his son Don (Eileen) Peterson, daughter Donna (Gene) Rowe and two granddaughters Kate and Lacey Peterson. His wife of 22 years Sue and 3 step-children, Mark (Laurie) Steed, Susan (Steve) Manning, Gerrie (Paul) Harmon. Nine step grandchildren and four step-great-grandchildren who loved and respected him very much. Also numerous nephews and nieces

who were a very important part of his life.

At Russell's request no services will be held. Memorials may be made to the National Rifle Assn.

Tribute Wall



“ *Russell had a good life and we all know where he is now. God Bless* **imported-begin** *Mary Hashbarger* **imported-end** ”

February 15, 2011 at 03:31 PM



“ *To Russ's wide spread family here in Ephrata and in so many other places. Russ was an amazing man. So strong right up to the end. His precious wife was such a wonderful care giver and oh how she misses her Russ. So glad to know Russ will be waiting for all of us to join him in heaven someday. We wish all of his family peace and joy at all the wonderful memories you all have of Russ.* **imported-begin** *Donna and Mac McKim* **imported-end** ”

February 14, 2011 at 04:01 AM



“ *As a World War II veteran you will always be a hero in my eyes. I stand a free man because of men like you.* **imported-begin** *Gene Rowe* **imported-end** ”

February 09, 2011 at 09:18 PM



“ *We love you Dad.* **imported-begin** *Gene and Donna Rowe* **imported-end** ”

February 09, 2011 at 08:29 PM