REMEMBERING

Neva Dorene Kainer

August 16, 1924 - August 14, 2020

In loving memory, we mark the passing of Neva Dorene (Ickes) Kainer on August 14, 2020, just two days' shy of her 96th birthday. Predeceased by her spouse of 73 years, Michael, in May 2020, Neva is survived by six children, 14 grandchildren, and 11 great-grandchildren, with another expected in early 2021.

Born on August 16, 1924 to Neven D. and Rachel (Schwasinger) Ickes, the third of eight children, Neva was born on the family farm purchased in 1919 and located southeast of Page, Nebraska. The family of four sons and four daughters lived remarkably harmoniously in an old house of four rooms. The largest bedroom divided into two by a curtain slept the parents on one side and four girls on the other, while the boys occupied the other, small bedroom. There was a kitchen with a wood stove for heat and cooking, and a dining/living room where their mother's piano, sewing supplies, and books took up much of the space.

According to the memoir written on the occasion of her 80th birthday, Neva notes that all the children tried hard to live up to the expectations of their parents by striving to care and share, being good-natured, and unselfish. Growing up in a large family was "a wonderful experience", she says.

Neva's early years were graced by beauty and plentitude. Her father's crops of melon, corn, potatoes, and peanuts thrived. He raised cattle, pigs, and chickens, while a strawberry patch, orchard of apple, cherry, and plum trees, as well as wild grapes and berries, rounded out the family's diet. Neva recalls that because the farm pastures were "lush with grass and beautiful flowers", picking bouquets was a favourite pastime.

The Stock Market Crash of 1929, along with the blowing dust, dry wells, plagues of grasshoppers, and scarcity of food brought on by the Drought and Depression,

changed everything. Whereas those early years had "seemed like Paradise", the 1930s were marked by hardship and loss. While her father remained optimistic, proclaiming after each failed crop that next year would be better, in 1936 he lost the farm to the bank. The family had to rent elsewhere and begin again.

Neva was modest in appearance, with soft brown eyes, a dimpled smile, and warm demeanour. Never one to boast about her capabilities, she was easily overlooked and relegated to the background. Yet she was steadfast, conscientious, hardworking, and dependable. Without considering what it might cost her, she was always eager and willing to help. Neva thought best of people and always gave them the benefit of the doubt, even when they didn't deserve it.

Attending a one-room rural school until grade eight and then Page High School, Neva excelled at her studies. She came third in her graduating class in high school, held office over the years as secretary, treasurer, and vice-president, was Queen of her class all four years, and in her final year was crowned Carnival Queen for the whole school. Neva played the French Horn and did well at festivals when opportunity allowed her to compete.

While all the sons went on to university, the Ickes daughters attended Lincoln School of Business. Later in life, Neva did complete three courses towards a degree, but missing out on university was a life-long disappointment for her. When she had children of her own, she and her husband made sure that not just their son but also all five daughters were given the opportunity to obtain university degrees.

Graduating in May 1942 with a stenographic certificate, Neva took the first job she could get, working at the Lincoln Light and Water Department in City Hall for seven years starting at $75 and leaving with a salary of $180 a month. She was invited to join a business and professional women's sorority, Beta Sigma Phi, where she continued to be a member in Canada after getting married and leaving the United States.

Neva and Michael Kainer were married on April 11, 1947 in Lincoln and moved to Saskatchewan, Mike's home, after he graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1949. Settling first in Saskatoon where Mike completed his professional teaching certificate and their first child, Michael, was born, they went to Edenwold where Mike taught for a year, and then moved back to Regina. Three daughters, Annette, Tara, and Shauna were born before they moved in 1955 to Knoxville, Tennessee at the invitation of Mike's brother and offer of a job. The twins, Jo and Jan, arrived there in 1957.

Neva sums up their life in the 1950s in her memoir: "We moved five times; our five daughters were born; Mike went from being a student to four teaching positions plus working for his brother; I was a mother, wife, housewife, and an office employee. It was an eventful decade."

In 1959, the family moved back to Regina. After their children left home to marry or go to school, Neva and Mike moved to Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, then Penticton and Cranbrook, British Columbia.

Neva's ashes will be interred with her husband's in the cemetery in Regina, Saskatchewan where Mike's parents are buried. Once the COVID-19 pandemic

abates, their children will host a celebration of life for them both.