

## **Bertha Marie Emde nee Figge**

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Some years ago, when my friend informed me that her mother had passed away, my thoughts went to this lady and then to my own mother who had died some years before. These two women, like so many others, had left loved ones and friends, and come to this new, young country. These words flooded my mind as I thought of our mothers, their strengths and sacrifices, and what they experienced in their new land.

My friend's mother came from Romania to the Wood Mountain area in 1916 and raised a family of six boys and a daughter. My mother, Bertha Marie Figge, came to Canada from Germany on September 10, 1927 on the Empress of France to Halifax, Nova Scotia. From there she travelled by train to Midale, Sask. She said it was an endless trip. My mother came to marry my father, Friedrich (Fritz) Emde, who had come three years previously and was somewhat established. They married on November 15, 1927 in Macoun, Sask. and established a home and subsequently raised my brother Verner and myself.

My mother became acquainted with farm life very quickly, driving four horses in the field, although she had never driven a horse in Germany. Her father had been a blacksmith in a small village. She, like other farm women, was a great help to my father. She milked cows, sold cream and butter, raised a big flock of turkeys and chickens and also cooked for the hired men. Because we lived along highway 39, many men that were out of work in the Depression would stop in and hope for a meal or some food and she always fed them.

Not knowing the English language was a huge obstacle for immigrants, unless they had neighbors that came from the same country as they did. One incident I remember my mother telling me happened about a year or so after she came. One day a fellow, who was walking to town, stopped in and asked if he could bring her the mail. "No thanks," she said, "I have lots of mehl"- mehl being the German word for flour! How she would have loved a letter if there had been one!

When I got old enough, she would read the letters to me that came from her family in Germany. Through these letters I got to know cousins whom I would meet many years later. Sometimes the letters had photos of a wedding or baptism gathering she would have missed, and sometimes the letters were edged in black. Almost always there would be tears in her eyes. Until these women had children and families of their own, the ties to the homeland were very strong.

Although women like my friend's mother and my mother would never be well-known or prominent, they contributed with their lives in their communities and in the province to make this country what it is today.

Poem in memory of Bertha Emde

She has gone home  
This valiant traveler of life  
It has been a long journey  
That began across the sea  
In a land I do not know  
That land was such a part of her  
And she a part of it.  
It formed her  
And she would measure  
All of life by it.

She journeyed on  
To this new and distant land.  
To give it of her grace and toil and dreams

She helped to build this land  
With sons and daughters of her own,  
And with her life.

She journeyed well – faithfully and honestly  
Always steady in her walk.  
She felt it all – joy, pain, grief, and toil  
And the loneliness of the unknown tongue  
That would often isolate her  
Among her new people.

And now she rests  
Within this new and distant land  
Beside her kin,  
Whom she loved and nurtured well.  
Blow gently western winds,  
Here lies a faithful pioneer  
Who gave so much  
To make this land so rich and fine.  
And chose this land  
To honor and to love.  
Blow gently.

Margaret E. Peterson

This was taken from a book called “Dear Grand Mother – Recollections of Love” and reprinted from  
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My grandmothers were strong.  
They followed plows and bent to toil.  
They moved through fields sowing seed.  
They touched earth and grain grew.  
They were full of sturdiness and singing.  
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers were full of memories  
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay  
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands  
They have many clean words to say.  
My grandmothers were strong.  
Why am I not as they?

Margaret Walker Alexander  
Lineage