

The immigration story of Alfred Kies

- Written by son Richard, November 2025

My father, Alfred Wolfgang Kies, was born on February 26, 1936 in Wiersdorf, Germany. He grew up in a farmhouse in Rhadereistedt, in the rural Niedersachsen district of Rotenburg (Wümme), situated about halfway between the city-states of Hamburg and Bremen. “Fred” as he was known, was one of seven sons and two daughters - Friedel, Gunther, Rudolf, Gerhard, Manfred, Helmut, Fred and sister Anita - born to Richard and Olga Kies. One older sister, Hildegard, passed in childhood. Olga died in the early 1950s, and his father later remarried.



Photo. Fred and siblings, Germany, 1990s

Fred was a young boy during the Second World War; it began when he was three years old and ended when he was nine. After completing his primary schooling, he began an apprenticeship at the “Molkerei” (dairy) in the nearby town of Rhade. Shortly after finishing his training at the age of 19, he decided to emigrate to Canada, following in

the footsteps of his older brother Helmut who had left for Canada in May of 1953.

My Tante (aunt) Anita stated that at the time of Fred’s emigration, many of their neighbours were also being actively recruited and were leaving for Canada or the United States, in search of greater employment opportunities and a better quality of life. Life in Germany at that time, about ten years after the war, meant rationing, shortages, and poverty for many, whereas Canada was experiencing an economic boom. This created a demand for labor, which Canada was actively seeking through immigration from Germany and other European countries.

In late 1955 Fred traveled to the port city of Bremerhaven, accompanied by his parents and younger sister. On November 26, 1955 - exactly three months shy of his twentieth birthday - Fred boarded a ship called “Seven Seas” from the Europe-Canada Line, bound for Montreal. It was a three-week journey to Canada. The ship sailed first to Le Havre, France, then onto Southampton, England, before crossing the Atlantic Ocean to the east coast of



Canada. After landing in Montreal, Fred traveled to his final destination of Winnipeg, Manitoba, where he reunited with Helmut. According to the ship manifest, the total cost of his journey was \$192.30 - \$160 for the ocean fare and \$32.30 for the inland transportation to Winnipeg. In today's dollars, that cost would be more than \$2,300. The record shows that the money was loaned to him, but from whom is unclear. The record also lists his occupation as "dairy farmer."

Photo: passport photo of Fred Kies

From 1956 until the spring of 1964, Fred and Helmut traveled together between Vancouver and Winnipeg, working as cement finishers at various construction sites across western Canada. Helmut and Fred were the only two of the siblings to emigrate from Germany, although Tante Anita revealed that she had gathered all the necessary paperwork in preparation to emigrate to Canada as well. However, shortly before she was supposed to leave, she decided to stay in Germany. She said that it took several years after my father emigrated until she finally heard from him again.

In 1962 Fred and Helmut were working in Regina when Fred met his first wife, my mother Lilian Auramenko. She was from a Ukrainian family and had moved to Regina from the family farm near Sturgis, Saskatchewan. They were married on June 15, 1963, with Fred obtaining his Canadian citizen about a month before the wedding. My older sister Anita (named after her aunt) was born in 1967, and I was born in 1970, named Richad Daniel after my German and Ukrainian grandfathers.

In 1964, Fred returned to his original vocation and began working at the Regina City Dairy. He worked for various dairies until 1976, when he became a driver for Kingsway Transport, making deliveries and pick-ups throughout Regina of general merchandise with a three-ton company truck. Fred took a lot of pride in his Class 1A driver's license and spotless driving record.

In a letter Fred wrote to his father and stepmother in 1967, he apologized for not writing more frequently and confessed that after a long time in Canada (at that time, 11 years) he was having problems remembering some German words and phrases. He commented that his brother Helmut was experiencing the same challenge. Despite this, Fred retained his "German-ness" throughout his life and in fact, never lost his fluency in the language. The

many return visits he made no doubt helped him retain his language and cultural connection to his homeland.

Although he had been old enough to have childhood memories of the Second World War, the subject was rarely discussed with us around the family dinner table. Like a lot of German immigrants to Canada after WWII, it was something that just was not talked about. One memory of the war that he could not escape would occur in the summer months, during a Saskatchewan thunderstorm. The rumble of thunder caused him great angst, as he said it reminded him of the sound of Allied bombs dropping. Otherwise, Dad never really spoke openly about his life in Germany before emigrating, or his early experiences as a German immigrant in an Allied country. Whether he faced other kinds of trauma from the war years, or suffered forms of discrimination as a newcomer, remains a mystery.

In the summer of 1983, we made a highly anticipated family trip to Germany to meet our aunt, uncles, and many cousins. All my father's siblings have remained in the same region of Niedersachsen where he grew up, so we were able to visit meaningful places like the dairy where he apprenticed and the cemetery where his father (my Opa and namesake) was buried. It was a very memorable trip that had a life-altering effect on my twelve-year-old self, sparking my lifelong interest in German language, culture, and history. It also helped form strong family bonds that have been passed down to the second and third generations, and which remain active and intact to this day.

After 23 years of marriage, my parents divorced in 1986. Later in the '80s, the Canadian trucking industry went through a consolidation and Fred went from full-time work to casual employment. But he didn't become bitter or angry about the situation; he showed his adaptability, resilience, and typical "stiff upper lip." He simply changed careers and became the live-in caretaker at the Frontenac Apartments, a beautiful heritage apartment building in downtown Regina. This required him, in his mid-50s, to take training at SIAST (now known as Saskatchewan Polytechnic) to obtain the certification required so he could safely operate the building's steam boiler. I can recall visiting him at his tiny bachelor suite provided to him by the Frontenac, seeing pages of the hand-written notes he diligently took in class, and the way he wrote the number "seven" with a dash through it (a common practice in western European countries).

Fred became a popular face amongst Frontenac's many long-term tenants, who showered him with gifts, spirits, and home-made baking on special occasions like Christmas. They, like family and friends that knew him, appreciated his generous nature and wacky sense of humor. He continued working at the Frontenac until his retirement in the mid-1990s but

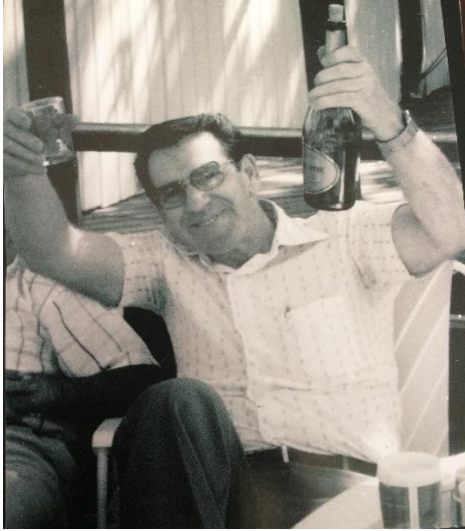
gave up the small bachelor suite and purchased a duplex on Regina's west side, living in one half and renting out the other side. When he married for the second time, he and his second wife Jan purchased a larger home in the city's southeast University Park neighbourhood, where he lived out his remaining days.

Over the years, his father, brothers Gunther, Gerhard, and Manfred, and his sister Anita all made visits to Saskatchewan, either alone or with their own family members in tow. A particular memorable visit happened in the mid-1970s when Manfred, Helmut, and Fred made a long, western trip along the Trans-Canada Highway, stopping in Banff on their way to British Columbia and back. When Manfred died unexpectedly in 1977, not long after his visit, his sudden loss hit my father particularly hard.



One of Fred's greatest pleasures was music. He was a self-taught guitarist and in the 60s founded a "Kapelle" (band) that also featured an accordion player and a drummer. Playing old-time waltzes, polkas, and some 50s rockabilly, they were a popular outfit at various venues around Regina, including the lounges at the German and Austrian clubs. He enjoyed the weekend outings, playing music and then having a schnapps (or two) with bandmates and friends between sets or after the show. As the years went on, he made a point of reducing the band's playing schedule, as he said it cut into his time to go out dancing! He enjoyed being on the dance floor as much as he did being on the stage.

In July 2005, Fred was diagnosed with cancer of the bladder. Over the next few months, the cancer spread to other parts of his body and on January 29, 2006, he passed away peacefully at home.



My father was in many ways just an unassuming, humble, kind man. However, he had an adventurous spirit that led him to leave the familiarity of his homeland and cross the Atlantic ocean to a foreign land where he didn't speak the language, Although he followed the footsteps of his older brother, it was his own hard work, determination, and guile that allowed him to overcome the hardships and challenges of forging a new life in Canada. After living here for nearly 50 years, he left behind a legacy in his two children, three grandchildren, a few deep friendships and many acquaintances that admired his musical talent. And he accomplished this while never forgetting his roots or losing connection with the land or the people that he came from.