



Irene K. Janzen

November 6, 1933 – March 14, 2026

Memorial Service
in Celebration of the Life of
Irene Kathryn Wiebe Janzen
Saturday, March 28, 2026 – 11:00 a.m.
Hesston Mennonite Church

Prelude *Ken Rodgers, pianist*

Words of Greeting *John Janzen*

Prayer *David Wiebe*

Song *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*

Life Report *James Janzen*

Scriptures *Psalm 121 John 1:1-5* *Pastor Kay Schroeder*
Pastor Jess Engle

Meditation *Paul Wiebe*

Prayer

Song *The Love of God*

Closing Words *Jack Janzen*

Prayer for the Meal *Doxology*

Audio-Visual: Phil Hoffman

Life Sketch

Irene, the 4th of seven children of missionaries John A. and Viola C. (Bergthold) Wiebe, was born on November 6, 1933, in Nagakurnool, India, at the mission home of her grandparents Daniel and Anna Bergthold. Beginning at the age of 5 she was enrolled for seven school terms at the Kodaikanal International School in the Palni Hills, approximately 500 miles away from the Deccan area where her parents lived and worked,

In 1936 the family returned to the U.S. for a one-year furlough via the Pacific Ocean route, and then not again until 1946 via the Atlantic Ocean on a converted troop ship which docked for several days at the war-torn city of Manila in the Philippines. This was just one of the many sights and impressions of an early life packed with variant experience.

During this extended furlough, the family lived in Mountain Lake, MN, her father's home area, for several years. Here she completed the 8th and 9th grades before they moved to Hillsboro, KS where she graduated from high school in 1951. These were eventful years for her due to the repositioning and adjusting required to fit into established and, at times, intolerant cultural, social, and educational systems. She learned early on to be resourceful, think independently, and was not one to blame circumstances, rather, find a way around, over, or through them. Her parents and three younger siblings returned to India in 1951, just months before she enrolled in Tabor College. She did not see her parents or youngest sister Marilyn again for a period of seven years during which she had married and had two sons. Brothers David and Paul returned in 1956 to attend college.

For a time after completing college Irene worked as a secretary at an electrical engineering consulting firm in Minneapolis, MN. A fondness for Donovan Janzen then lured her to Tulsa, OK, where she accepted another secretarial position at a division of Standard Oil Co.

Don and Irene married on August 31, 1956, in Hillsboro, but continued residency in Tulsa for another year. They then returned to the familiarity, if not a dream deferred, of Hillsboro where Don, after a stint in the army, attended Tabor, procuring a degree in music ed. in 1961. She, perhaps gleaned in part from her father's boyhood stories of living in a traditional, fun-loving, and God-fearing family on a farm in MN, had come to realize that finding *place*, complete with family, was what she needed and wanted more than anything in life. Three fine sons were born in rapid succession to this blessed union: Jack Dean, 1957; James Keith, 1958, and John Frank, 1960.

The family moved to Shallow Water, KS for Don's first job. Irene, who had majored in English, was coerced to fill an unanticipated vacancy in English and speech. By correspondence she completed the additional hours required for teacher certification while maintaining a full teaching load as well as being a wife and mother of three. In all of the high schools where she taught, she also sponsored extra-curricular activities such as school newspapers, yearbooks, forensic tournaments, directing plays, etc. In early years, by her own admission, she sometimes struggled to maintain a balance between family and a full-time, demanding career. It was family, however, which came first in mind and heart but, admittedly, not always in time. Additional hours to advance her degree and further interests were procured during workshops and/or numerous summer courses primarily at WSU and ESU.

After two years in the western part of the state the family moved first to El Dorado where they lived for eight years; Lyons, Augusta, Inman were also home for a while. She was always able to quickly find a position of her own there or in area schools. Each new home and teaching position became an adventure of sorts filled with its own

positives and learning curves; she really cared about youth: each one was special and mattered. Through the avenue of teaching in public schools, she had ample opportunity to follow the dictates of her heart to defend and support young people. The rooms in which she taught were not hers, but rather theirs, and kindness was paramount. Irene completed her tenure as a teacher at the Middle School in McPherson where they lived for 12 years.

After 30 years in the profession, Irene took early retirement in 1993. The couple moved to a “wonderful place on the edge of town” in Moundridge. After 10 delightful years of what seemed to be a perennial vacation and the ultimate joys of grand-parenting, North Newton, KS became the place to be for a lengthier stay.

Irene thrived on the verbal interchange of ideas. “Yes, but . . . “was frequently inserted into the discussion for she was apt to look at a situation from varied angles. It did not occur to her to unthinkingly follow the loudest voice or easy way out or 'that's the way we've always done it.' Researching topics, a chore for most, was invigorating for she always wanted to know and understand. Finding a nugget amid all the sand of words was deeply satisfying for her.

And finally but certainly not last in the order of priorities, having grown up in a family where the love of God was at the root of every consideration and taught through example rather than coercion, choosing to follow Jesus and His example involved no great awakening on her part, but simply a continuation of a life style of faith and service. Personalizing God's GRACE came later for her as she came to internalize the amazing truth that each one of us matters significantly to Him. We are loved unconditionally by the God of life and light and love. “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.” (John 1:5)

Irene's greatest delight was in each of her children's and grandchildren's unique characteristics and gifts. The bonds of love, support, respect, joy, and loyalty are strong in the immediate and extended family and will remain so.

The immediate family includes her beloved husband, Donovan (Don), North Newton; three sons and their families: Jack and Teri, Augusta; James and Teia, Galva; John and Michele, Hesston. Grandchildren are as follows: Tanner Janzen, Augusta; Jessica Janzen and David Nelson, Olathe; Sam Janzen and partner George, Austin, TX; Eli Janzen, New Haven, CT; Nick and Whitney Janzen-Pankratz and sons Theo and Zack, Greeley, CO and Ben Janzen, Denver CO. Extended family includes one sister: Marilyn and Cole Dodge, Nairobi, Kenya. Two brothers: David, Kearney, NE; Paul and Donna Beth Wiebe, Coralville, IA. Included as family are in laws: Lucy Janzen, Anderson Island, WA.

She was preceded in death by grandson Tyler Janzen and soon to be grand-daughter Jacey Cantrell; Ruth and Herb Friesen, Hillsboro; Lorma Wiebe, Kearney, NE; Esther Wiebe, Hillsboro; John and Carol Wiebe, Arcata, CA; John and Shirley Janzen, Sun Lakes, AZ; Joel Janzen, Anderson Islands, WA; and Ruby and Carl Derksen, Glendale, CA.

~ *Burial* ~

The burial will take place after the meal at Eastlawn Cemetery

~ *Memorial* ~

The family suggests donating to an organization that supports youth, or plant a bush or tree and watch it grow and thrive with your care.