



Berry Friesen

January 17, 2018

Berry Friesen, 69, of Lancaster, died on Wednesday, January 17, 2018 of advanced Renal Cell Carcinoma at Hospice & Community Care, Mount Joy. Berry was born in 1948 to the late John V. and Blondina (Blanche) Friesen in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. The third of three boys, he grew up on a farm in Cottonwood County where he tended chickens, swam in nearby lakes, and planted soybeans row by row with his dad. He met his future wife Sharon Klassen in Sunday school at Carson Mennonite Brethren Church where both families attended.

He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Sharon; his two daughters, Amber Friesen, married to Rehan Hanif of London, England, and Emily Burkholder, married to Guy Burkholder, III of Lancaster; six granddaughters, Saffiyah Friesen Hanif and Anna, Elena, Addie, Olivia and Clara Burkholder; and one brother, LeRoy Friesen. His brother, Marlyn Friesen, and nephew, Chad Friesen, predeceased him.

Following graduation from Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas in 1970, Berry volunteered with Mennonite Central Committee as an alternative to the draft; he and Sharon spent three years in Jamaica (1970-1973) teaching in a local secondary school. Berry continued to teach after returning to the US, until deciding to pursue a law degree at the University of Minnesota, where he graduated Juris Doctor cum laude in 1979. After graduation Berry joined Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services where he spent ten years advocating for Native Americans, Hmong refugees, farmers, and families on

social benefits, and also leading the Minnesota Family Farm Law Project. During those years in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Berry and Sharon had two daughters, Amber and Emily, and were active members of Faith Mennonite Church. He loved to play pickup basketball, sing and play his guitar, tease his girls, and watch the Minnesota Twins lose ... and then win big.

Berry left his legal career in 1989, in order to continue his work for social justice within a faith-based organization. The family moved to Lancaster where he worked for Mennonite Central Committee, first as Director of the U.S. Service Program (1989-1992) and then as MCC's Director of Administration (1993-1997).

From 1997 to 2007 Berry was the Executive Director of Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, leading the advocacy organization's work related to food security. In the years following he worked for several other non-profits, the last in 2016 when he was appointed President of the Nazareth Project, which supports health care and health education services in Nazareth. Berry resigned that position after receiving his cancer diagnosis.

Berry spent his career working for people and causes he believed were important, and his passion for peace and justice infused his life. He was an avid reader, bird watcher, writer and blogger. He authored two books which have been published ("Water from Another Time" and "If Not Empire, What?"), many articles, opinion pieces and letters to the editor; prior to his death completed a third book written for his granddaughters titled "Believing in god". Berry was committed to following the way of Jesus, and was an active member of East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster and also the 1040 For Peace organization.

A memorial service will be held at East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church, 432 E. Chestnut Street in Lancaster, on Monday, January 22, 2018 at 10:30 a.m. The family will receive friends at East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church on Sunday, January 21, 2018 from 4:00–6:00 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, Berry would welcome donations to The Nazareth Project, www.nazarethproject.org.

Tribute Wall



“ *The Groffs Family Funeral and Cremation Services Inc. created a Tribute Video in memory of Berry Friesen*



The Groffs Family Funeral and Cremation Services Inc - January 19, 2018 at 11:45 AM

SK

When I remember my Uncle Berry, I think of a man who epitomized kindness and gentleness. He was the type of person who listened when you spoke and cared about what you said. He loved children, and I'll always remember him holding my son David on his lap helping him play the guitar and sing. I grieve the loss of my uncle, but I'm so thankful that he is in heaven free of pain and sickness. My sincere condolences to all those who grieve his passing.

Stephen Klassen - January 21, 2018 at 07:52 PM



“ *Berry Friesen*

October 22, 2023 at 11:34 PM

JS

“ *Berry and Sharon were our beloved neighbors a few years ago. Best neighbors ever. Their property was a haven of calm, grace and beauty. Rest in peace in the Father's care, Berry. Siang Hua and Joanne Swords-Wang*

Joanne Swords-Wang - January 22, 2018 at 12:31 PM



“ 4 files added to the album *Life Tributes*



The Groffs Family Funeral and Cremation Services Inc - January 21, 2018 at 11:47 AM

LW

“ *Our deepest sympathy to your family from our entire family. May God's love give you strength and may you cherish forever all the many wonderful memories you have as you celebrate Berry's life of giving and service.*
Linda and Rocky Watson and Family

Linda Watson - January 20, 2018 at 06:01 AM

JN

“ *It was my pleasure to work with Berry during his years at the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center: I was a Board member and, for a while, President of the Board. Berry's compassion, faith, and devotion to hungry people was inspiring. He was a gentle, kind man who lived what he believed. My deepest sympathy is extended to his family and friends.* Janet Ney

Janet Ney - January 19, 2018 at 04:44 PM



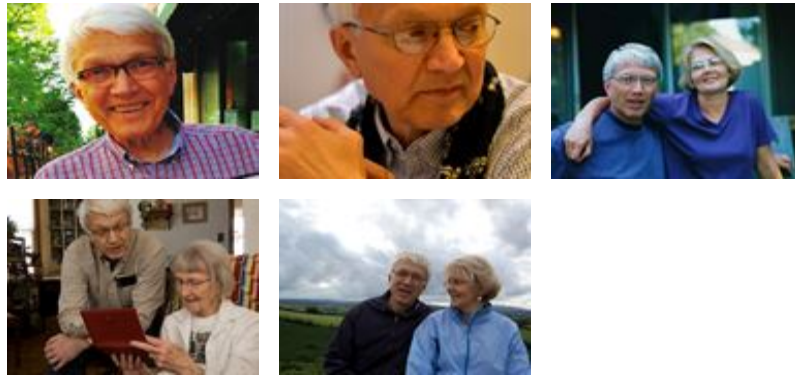
“ *Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Berry Friesen.*



January 19, 2018 at 11:48 AM



“ *113 files added to the album Life Tributes*



The Groff's Family Funeral and Cremation Services Inc - January 19, 2018 at 10:36 AM



“ *Dear Sharon and family - I am so sorry to learn of Berry's passing. I loved being a colleague and a neighbor! May you sense the love and care of family and friends during this time of loss and grief. ~ Fern (Kuhns) Habecker*



Fern - January 19, 2018 at 08:43 AM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Berry Friesen.*



January 18, 2018 at 09:18 PM



“ *My compassion & sympathies go out to the Friesen family & all of those who loved Barry, especially to my fav TC roommate, Mary Friesen Seitz. May God's love & peace be in your hearts during these very difficult days.*
Gail Wiens Vanderberg

Gail Vanderberg - January 18, 2018 at 06:58 PM



Berry was one of a kind, speaking truth kindly to his kind. Referred to as a prophet from the platform at MCUSA Phoenix, he resisted convention and accommodation to culture wherever he felt compelled to do so, risking rejection and earning the respect of those who learned to know him. Let us honor him by remembering his voice.

Bruce - January 19, 2018 at 03:47 AM



Love and hugs to Sharon and the entire Friesen family. Berry was such a nice man and did so much for so many organizations. He has definitely left his mark here on earth and now rests in the loving arms of his Savior. Barb Dorsey

Barb Dorsey - January 19, 2018 at 10:12 AM

PD

Berry was just a great human being. He was a tireless fighter for justice, particularly for those less able to fight for themselves. He was a truthseeker who was admired by all he touched. I feel fortunate to have been one of those who were able to walk with him for a part of his journey. - Pat Druhan

Patrick Druhan - January 21, 2018 at 11:10 AM

MT

Sharon, family,

What we once enjoyed and deeply loved we can never lose, for all that we love deeply becomes a part of us. --Helen Keller

May you find comfort in the numerous ways you walked with, stood by, loved and cared for Berry in the joys and challenges of life.

Mel Thomas & Geneva Rufenact

Melvin Thomas - January 22, 2018 at 09:24 AM

CC

I met Berry when he worked at the Hunger Action Center and had great respect for his tireless work, his compassion and his kindness. My deepest sympathies and prayers to his family.

Christine Caldara - January 23, 2018 at 09:29 AM

 Jane Jones

I was a high school classmate of Berry's and always had the greatest respect for him. I may have seen him at a class reunion once but mostly remember Berry and you, Sharon, together....the perfect couple! May our Lord bring you continued comfort in the coming years. My deepest condolences and prayers for you and your family!

Jane (Doerksen) Jones

Jane Jones - February 08, 2018 at 01:00 AM