



Karin Vanreenen

April 10, 1937 - June 15, 2026

Karin Margarett Else Lina VanReenen, 89, passed away on Monday, June 15, 2026. Karin was born on April 10, 1937 in Berlin, Germany. At the age of 9, she escaped to America from the Soviet invasion of Germany, with her brother Hans. Karin and Hans had been living in a refugee camp for 4 years prior to being able to escape and make the long journey to America. She was a young orphan who did not know English when she arrived at Ellis Island. She was a warrior from such a young age. They moved out to California, where she was raised by loving foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Woods. There she met the love of her life, her high school sweetheart and husband of 61 years, James.

Her family describes her as being a wonderful mother. Very caring to everyone she met. Karen loved to serve people, she found many ways to do so. Karin was an activities director at an Alzheimer home in Philadelphia. She also worked part time at St. Mary's college serving sandwiches, as well as running the food pantry at 1st Friendship Methodist Church in Maryland. You couldn't stop her from doing what she loved!

Karin is survived by her sons, Sheldon VanReenen, David (Kathy) VanReenen, James (Sarah) VanReenen; daughter, Janet (Eric) Hoffman; 10 grandchildren; 22 great-grandchildren with one on the way; and 1 great-great-grandchild.

She is preceded in death by her husband James VanReenen; brother Hans Prufer; and parents, Willi Prufer and Ilse Boltz Prufer.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the 1st Friendship Methodist Church in Ridge, Maryland.

Below is a testimonial that Karin made:

Wednesday, March 25

A Life-Changing Journey

John 6:27–40

Dear Friend,

As a young girl growing up in East Berlin Germany, there came a time when my invalid mother, elderly grandmother, and teenage brother were faced with a life-changing decision. My brother was rapidly approaching the mandatory conscription age for forced induction into the Russian Army. Our decision was to attempt an escape to freedom through the Berlin Wall. The adults in my family were either too invalid or too old and feeble for such a journey. It was decided that my brother and I should make the risky journey before it was too late. I did not want to leave the only life I had known with my loving Omah, but felt as if I had no choice.

It was a cold and rainy night when we departed our home to join up with a group paid to lead us through the armed border. My brother and I walked

down a dirt road and through the woods. My brother led the way as I struggled to keep up. My boots kept sticking in the mud and coming off. I had to set down my small suitcase full of pictures and two of my favorite dolls, then struggle to pull my boots on over my mud-soaked socks. I was desperately afraid of falling too far behind and being lost.

I kept slipping behind more and more until suddenly out of nowhere a figure of a tall man came swiftly out of the dark. Without so much as a word, he bent down and took my suitcase and grasped my forearm to gently hurry me along behind my brother. We came to a railroad track where I stumbled and fell onto gravel. Out of the darkness of the tunnel we were entering, a stern voice cried out, "Who goes there?" My brother, who was out in front of us, bravely spoke up.

"It is just my little sister and I," he said. "We have no food and she is sick. I am taking her to our Omah's to care for her." Miraculously, we were allowed to continue our journey.

Looking back on this encounter years later, I realized that it was only through the grace of God that we were able to complete this dangerous journey. I am sure it was the hand of God when I was picked up and eased along my path by the stranger in the dark. He was there to shepherd me past the challenges and when I and the others on the journey needed divine guidance past all the dangers of discovery.

When we arrived across the border, we were greeted by friendly British

soldiers who cheered us and brought us food and blankets. They led us to the American sector where we were welcomed warmly. Our journey continued until we arrived seven months later to see the Statue of Liberty. We were processed through Ellis Island and were greeted and welcomed into our new American family.

Many times in life we have severe doubts that we can accomplish difficult journeys in search of unthinkable miracles. Through trials and tribulations in my life's journey, I have felt the hand of God lead me, even as an unknowing child, through periods of deep darkness. I have been fed when there was no food. Thanks be to God for the providence and generosity of Jesus Christ.

From the Bible we are reminded that it was not Moses that led the Israelites through the dessert, but it was the Father. In John 6:27–40, we are further taught:

"...that Jesus said to the crowd who sought bread, 'I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then Jesus said, 'I am the Bread of Life.'"

If you believe in Him, you will never go hungry. I did not yet know Jesus when we embarked on our epic Journey of Life, but I was keenly aware that some supreme force up there was looking out for my brother and me. I wondered if it might be my deceased father. Now that I am older and better informed, I know that our blessing during the Journey flowed from God and the bread of God is Jesus that I did not know then, but whom I have come to accept and

love.

Gracious God. We thank you for giving us new beginnings through Jesus Christ. No matter how long the journey or how far we stray off the right path, give us the courage to approach each next day with hope and love for one another. Amen.

Karin Van Reenen
First Friendship Campus