

Like many people of their generation, Gerhard and Lena did not have the opportunity to obtain formal high school education. When he was 14, Gerhard and his family lived in Ukraine. One night members of the communist party took away and shot Gerhard's father for having Bible study meetings in his home. Gerhard then had to quit school and find some type of work to help support his mother, brothers and sisters.

Gerhard met and married Lena during a time of war which tore many families apart. After the war they fled Europe and settled in Paraguay. Gerhard was 24 years old and needed to learn to make everything they needed by hand, including making the bricks and thatch for a roof for their home. He and Lena had enormous faith in God and trust in their community which sustained them during these difficult years.

Seeking a better future for their children, Gerhard and Lena moved with their seven children to Canada. They arrived in Winnipeg with nothing and rented four small rooms on the second floor of a two story house on Lipton Street (sharing a single bathroom with their landlady). Here they had another two children but no one thought about how crowded it was, how poor they were or little they had, but instead, felt blessed by God.

Gerhard did what he had to do and worked hard as a day labourer carrying sacks of coal (heating fuel) into homes. Even while working 10 hours a day (6 1/2 days a week as was the practice then), he made time to go to school to learn English in the evening and subsequently a trade. Lena sewed and patched clothes for the children, made noodles, bread and buns. They were very frugal and in two years they had saved enough money to pay off their travel debt as well as have enough for a down payment on a house. They now felt they were in a better position to help others: they supported and paid for other immigrants to come to Canada, they visited the aged and the ill, they were active in church, and they hosted guests and visiting preachers who came to Winnipeg for conferences held at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University). They tithed to the church faithfully during their lifetime and in their death which has made this fund at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate possible.

Gerhard and Lena Dyck believed that education would give a greater depth to knowledge and felt that education was the key to making a better world. They valued the skills that were attained with education but were also convinced that education without kindness was a terrible thing and encouraged a combination of education and compassion. This is reflected in the criteria for the Gerhard and Lena Dyck award which is to recognize a student attending Westgate Mennonite Collegiate that has shown the greatest growth since they started at the school, whether it is in character, attitude, initiative, service etc., demonstrating that the student has learned to think beyond themselves in finding value and worth in caring for others.