

## Interview with Josef Dillmann (JD)

Conducted by Michael M. Miller (MM)

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**MM:** I'm Michael M. Miller, the Germans From Russia Bibliographer at North Dakota State University in Fargo and it's the eighth of November, 1993. I'm in the home of Joe Dillmann here in Mandan, North Dakota. It's a real pleasure Joe, to speak with you, especially because you have such vivid memories of life in the German colony and the Ukraine and then leaving the Ukraine and coming to Germany and so forth. And first of all, I'd like you to tell me, what was the date of your birth?

**JD:** My date of birth, July 3, 1926.

**MM:** And you were born where, Joe?

**JD:** In Schoenfeld. It was called Losef [sp. ?] but eleven kilometers from Nikolajev and close to the River Bug, only about five kilometers from River Bug and the Rayon. In those days they called it Rayon, which means the county was Landau.

**MM:** So you were..., how far were you from Landau?

**JD:** About twenty-seven kilometers.

**MM:** Was this colony primarily German villagers?

**JD:** Our village was at one time before the Revolution [it] was German all the way. But after the revolution there was a lot of Ukrainian people [that] moved in, Ukrainian people moved in the village. So I would say there was about three quarter German and about one quarter Ukrainians.

**MM:** Were they mostly Catholics?

**JD:** Our village was primarily all Catholic, [those] Germans [in our village] were all Catholics.

**MM:** So you were seventeen before you left this village?

**JD:** Yes.

**MM:** What was the name of your father and mother?

**JD:** My father [was] named Josef Dillmann also.

**MM:** Josef. And when was he born?

**JD:** Father was born in 1897.

**MM:** And your mother, what was her name?

- JD:** Mother was Catherina, Catherina Hummel and she was born 1888.
- MM:** And they were born in this village too?
- JD:** My mother was born in Schoenfeld and my dad was born in Katharidental. Katharidental they called it.
- MM:** How do you spell Schoenfeld, the village?
- JD:** S-c-h-o-, two dots [umlaut], oenfel, feld, Schoenfeld.
- MM:** When you grew up Joe, in your home, how many children were there?
- JD:** One sister. I only have one sister.
- MM:** One. And what was her name?
- JD:** Isabella.
- MM:** Isabella. Now did you grow up speaking only German?
- JD:** Yes. We grew up only speak [ing] German, but as you know in this 1937 Stalin had some fear in Russia, there was some government problem and he closed all the German schools. Maybe you heard it already and we had to all go and start to study Russian. Actually [when] we were in the school we had three languages, German, Ukrainian, and Russian. And most of the German students in those days they couldn't understand, couldn't follow [learn it]. My sister went three years in the fourth grade and she could not get [learn] the Russian language and [also] the Ukrainian. After that they kicked them out and they had to go to work in a collective farm. Well, I could handle it [learning the language] very good, but I was there [only] one year and [then] I graduated after the seventh grade. What they call the middle school.
- MM:** So you were..., when you started to take the Russian language in school, when it was all in Russian, you were about eleven years old?
- JD:** Well, it was in 1937. Something like that, yeah.
- MM:** All right, you were about eleven years old. But in the home you still spoke all German. Did your folks ever learn to speak Russian?
- JD:** Oh yes. My dad was supervisor, was a..., what ya call [a] foreman, [a] supervisor. And he was in the Russian army, the Czar Army. He was drafted there and he spoke real good. He had..., o.k. come back, backtrack a little bit. My dad had come from a big family and his dad died very young and there was nine children in the family, so the three middle ones [children] they [were] put [in] what they call a Catholic school in Karlsruhe where the girls supposed to become nuns and dad supposed to become a priest. So [they] had very good education in that school. But he got drafted and got in the Russian army and when the war, the [Russian] revolution, the war was over he came back home, then come back. He couldn't go back to his own little town where he lived, Katharidental, so he came to SchÀ?\_Ànfeld and he was hiding. That's where he met my mother and then they got married there. It's a long story.
- MM:** Why couldn't he come back to the former....? [village]

**JD:** Well those years, in those years [when] they came back to that part, [that] southern part of Russia, [it] had changed so much. One day, what you call them, the communists were there, the next day the Germans. Then the next days were the German-Austrians combined, they were there. And then the White's [Army], used to call them the Czar's [Army], they go in [there]. They were the White's and the Red's, and the Czar's people came in there [also]. So all those different military [armies] tried to get those young people, tried to get them to go with them. Tried to make them work for them, tried to have them serve them. So that's why he went into hiding. He was hiding and he was dressed as a woman. And he worked on my grandparents, mother's side, he worked for them milking the cows. And my mother, which he met later on, noticed that there was something wrong with him, that he's not a woman. So that's when they met. But anyway then he got away, he didn't get captured, and finally [the fighting] all settled, got things settled in 1923. Everything got settled in the southern part of Russia in '22 [1922], '23 [1923]. Stalin and Lenin finally got a settlement of the whole matter so they finally settled [quit fighting]. The Polish, they were so used to be [moved], every week or two somebody else moved into the village. You know, the Reds or the Whites or the Germans or the Hungarians, they didn't know what's what. They finally got all settled around '23 [1923], '22 [1922], '23 [1923], they got settled. And they got married and stayed in Schoenfeld and didn't go back to his...[village].

**MM:** Interesting. Those years..., of course you were born in 1926 until 1944, so there were seventeen years of your life in this German village. How was life there? Was it a good life or was it pretty tough?

**JD:** O.k. Life as far as I can remember back..., in the thirties was real [tough], what they call like in the United States [the Depression]. The thirties were real rough, really rough. And my family like I said, all I had [was] a sister and my dad had [a job]. Like I say, he was a supervisor/foreman. We had no hunger or bad foreclosing, he took good care of us, no question about it. But there was families with..., large families with children, that was bad. A lot of them died, malaria came around and killed a..., the people. My mother came from a little well-to-do family. She had some of those gold crosses and rings and everything. She'd take it all into Nikolajev to the `torokzin' means like a pawn shop. Not the pawn shop, you get flour, food, sugar, flour, whatever you know, for to eat. She get all the gold, the golden cross, her wedding ring, everything in there to keep us [fed]. But it was bad in our village. I can remember back, a lot of those children couldn't come to school in the winter time, they had no shoes, no clothes. Then it start getting better, then after 1934. When I remember back, 1933, '34 [1934], it got better then. You know the crop came and the people got a little better.

**MM:** Did you have some chores you had to do at home?

**JD:** No. See in the time of..., o.k. coming back in the time [of].... Remember when [during] the communist [time], we only had one cow. I didn't do much of chores because there wasn't much there. My sister, she was older and she took care of my mother. I loved school and I didn't do much chores at all. I loved school, I loved to go to school and I never missed any days at school. But most of the [other] children had to do the chores at home. But then when the Germans occupied us in 1941, the Germans come in and what it was.... [happened], the people wanted to divide everything, the land. But each one, each household got so much land because there was [had been] collective farming up to that [time] and nobody had anything. So you get [the] horses and it [they] was divided. They tried to divide those plows and whatever you call them [that] you need to [work] the farm. But people worked on their own land so each one got twenty hectare of his own in our village. But they got together anyway and they worked it collectively because neither one had anything. So they had to work everything collective, together. And

they did pretty good, crops were good and that's when I had to help them [with] chores. We had three horses, two cows, pigs and chickens and everything else. Had a pretty good life and then the Russian, the [Russian] front came closer in 1944, so we had to pack everything on wagon and our horses and left March the 4th. Left there and it was spring and a lot of those people loaded too much on the wagons and the horses. There was no roads you know, you just had to go across the field. They got stuck and it was a mess. And the Russian Air Force was above us. The front at one point got very close, we could hear the shooting but we got away. We got into Bessarabia, crossed the Dniester, got into Bessarabia [and] then we took a rest for awhile. The Germans were with us, the German troops and German guards were with us and guided us you know, in through Bessarabia [and] then into Romania. The Rumanians didn't want us to go through there but I guess the Germans negotiated and we went all along the Danube River, the valley of Danube River, to get up to Budapest. We got to Budapest on May the third, 1944. We [were there] for sixty-two or sixty-one days on the road and then they put us on a train in Budapest and we left the horses and wagons all there and they settled us in part of Poland, what they call Warthegau. That's where we settled again.

**MM:** What year was this then Joe?

**JD:** '44. May, '44 [1944]. We got there [and] they give us a home. They brought us there and they give us a home on a small lake. The home was empty and we got in there and I snooped around. Went down to the lake and there was a little cottage and there was two people, older people in there. The man was handicap [and] he was making baskets and chairs out of those..., what ya call this thing [reeds]? He made baskets you know, he was in a wheelchair. That was their place. That was their home so I told my family and my dad went down [there]. He could speak, we all spoke. I spoke Russian and could understand very good [the] Polish. My dad went down and they told him, "that was our home." And [dad] said, "well sorry, but the Germans put us in here and here we are." They said, "that's fine, that's fine." Well, I didn't have too much [time there]. I was there for about..., well it was the end of May, June I think it was, but it was forty days or forty-five days, [something] like that I remember. Then got drafted in the German army and I left.

**MM:** You were seventeen then?

**JD:** Seventeen. Became eighteen in the army, July the third.

**MM:** July the third, 1938.

**JD:** '44 [1944].

**MM:** Oh excuse me, 1944.

**JD:** Yeah. I celebrate my eighteenth birthday in the basic, in the boot camp.

**MM:** So you went off with the army then in '44 [1944] and where did you go to?

**JD:** O.k. First went to Prague, Czechoslovakia [in] those days, and we was there for three weeks. From there we went to Ovwitz [sp. ?], the boot training. From there they shipped us to Italy. We left for Italy in October, 1944, [maybe the] end of September and we were there in Italy till Christmas time in '44 [1944]. We celebrate Christmas in Italy yet. And then from there we got orders to get out of Italy and get into [the] East Front. We left [there, and] we got into Natzkaneizer [sp. ?], which is on the border between Austria and Yugoslavia. And there..., we cooked there, we were there for two weeks or..., to

get everything ready, we supposed to..., [prepare and] we did. The attack followed on March the third. The Germans pushed, tried to recapture some of the territory but there was no more food, there was no ammunition, there was no more gasoline, it was a disaster. We had to go back, all [the way] back into Austria and [also] our unit, who ever was in there. There we surrendered because we..., the Tito's [the leader of] which was the Yugoslavia at the time, they wanted to get us in prison but we wouldn't go in [their] prison. Then [we] went to the prison of the British which was in Spittal, Italy. So they put us in trucks and took us down to Italy, [to] the prison camp. In the beginning the prison camp was tough. They didn't treat you bad but there was very, very little food. As time [went on, when] the war ended with Japan, and [then the] British got more supply from the United States, the food got better and they put us in working battalions. And like I said, I was with the British Air Force from December nineteenth, no, no, January, 1946. Till I got discharged I worked with the British. We cleaned up all the airports with the British from [the] southern part of Italy to Rome, to Venice, to Udina. We cleaned up all the airports for the British. Then I got discharged and went to Germany.

**MM:** You were like a prisoner of war for how long then?

**JD:** Well..., from May the eighth, that's when we surrendered in 1944, until September, 1947.

**MM:** Then what? When you were discharged what happened?

**JD:** Like I said, I went to Germany to a farmer. My cousin sponsored me there.

**MM:** How did you find your cousin?

**JD:** Through some..., through some correspondence. You know, when you're in a prison camp you try all kinds of deals, try to get correspondence wherever you can. Through a friend, and he was there and he found my cousin and the cousin sent me a 'Schutzunggenehmigung'. What this means is authorization to move into that little village. And I got discharged through that and from there went to Hamburg, Germany. Like I said, found a job up there, worked up there, and wrote this Mrs. Kress here in North Dakota for some clothes.

**MM:** How did you find Mrs. Kress?

**JD:** Through some lady, another cousin of my mother in Germany. She knew her address and she gave me it, that address from over here. I wrote to her.

**MM:** What was her full name, the lady here in Mandan?

**JD:** Mrs. Matilda Kress. Matilda Kress, her husband was Mike. And they sent me a package with some clothes, which was..., everything was too big and [the clothes] was sewed into two dish towels. There was two bars of soap, two pairs of socks and that was it. Like I say, a friend of mine, he made this [suit], was a sporting outfit for some, made all [everything] smaller. Made me a jacket and pair of pants and out of the dish towels made me a shirt. He also made me a little bow tie from the left-over [material]. And they wrote me a letter and they said that if I want to come to the United States they would sponsor me. Well, I thanked them very much for the clothes, for the package and I said, "well, o.k." And that started in '48 [1948], in January, and it took till March, '52 [1952]. Then we left for the United States.

**MM:** So what did you do in the meantime, for those four years then?

**JD:** [When] I went [left] from there, I worked in the factory and I went to school over there but again..., to learn the German language more, better and a trade, or worked. Worked as ... a what ya call it, like a cabinet maker. Not a cabinet maker, woodwork you know, woodwork in the shop. But also we had to [work] with the machine, lathe machine and all the different machinery you know, these saws and everything. And I had one year left to go to get my journeyman's license but I said, "well, I'll go to the United States and see what's what." But in the meantime, what really..., I found my father then in '48 [1948]. In the fall I found my dad. He was blind from the war, he was drafted in the army also. He was blind from the war and he was in a blind institution in Berlin. I found him through some correspondence from people you know, they'd write. I found him there and I went over to visit him and he encouraged me to go over to the United States because he said, "the Russians, they're going to capture us you know, we are going to be [taken]. [That's] not too good because you're going to go to Siberia." And we knew at that time that my mother and sister was taken back to Siberia from Poland and he encouraged me [to go]. But as time went on, in '52 [1952] when time came for me to go, I went over to visit him and he said, "well, things have changed and maybe it's best that you stay here, I would like to have somebody here." Well I promised him, I said, "I'm going to the United States and if I don't like it over there, I'll come back." But when I got over here and things weren't too rosy, like North Dakota in '52 [1952], and he wanted me to come back and I promised I will come back. But before I could get money saved up to go back, he died in '54 [1954], passed away. So I make up my mind, "well, may as well stay." When I came over here I worked for a grocery store and a farm. Then I worked in a grocery store and then I start a plumbing apprenticeship. I start the plumbing apprenticeship in 1953 and I started as a plumber in '52 [1952]. But the apprenticeship in January, 1953 and made my plumber's license in 1957. So that's my five year apprenticeship and got a job in northern Minnesota then. And I got married in '57 [1957] to my wife and....

**MM:** And your wife's name?

**JD:** Florence Haag, Florence Haag, H-a-a-g, Haag.

**MM:** And where did she grow up?

**JD:** She grew up..., she was [from] around Strasburg, [ND], down there. She is from some farm. They moved twice, one farm to the other, and she went to school in Strasburg, to the sister school and then, later on then, they moved to Hague, [ND]. They lived in Hague, North Dakota.

**MM:** And how many children did you raise, Joe?

**JD:** We have four children, three boys and a girl. David, the oldest one, is a civil engineer. He's in Dallas, Texas. He works for Peter Kiewitz [sp. ?], is with fiber optics. Tom, I took this morning to the airport, he's with the army. He's with the reserve, he's a army man, you know. They left for San Diego. Delores is our girl. She's a lawyer [and] works for the Justice Department in Washington D.C. Been there now since eighty, yeah, '87 [1987]. And Donald is the youngest, he got married this year in Richmond, Virginia. He's a CPA, works for Media General. He's an accountant or comptroller or whatever you call it.

**MM:** Now let's go back to those war years. Because when you left and joined the army when you were eighteen and then you mentioned that your father joined then too.

**JD:** Yes. He had too, they had to [join]. My father, they took him. He didn't join, they took him. In October, 1944, as the war came closer to Poland, all the eligible men of age had to serve, you know they had to

go in. And he had to go in there also. And he was..., and he got hurt in East Prussia, East Prussia there. They took him up there and he got hurt up there through a bomb blast from the air. Heavy bomb covered him up completely and they dug him up. And through this blast he lost his vision, you know his eyes.

**MM:** Right. Now what..., your sister's name was?

**JD:** Isabelle.

**MM:** Isabelle. And your mother?

**JD:** Catherina.

**MM:** And where were they during this time?

**JD:** During this time they were..., o.k., come back. My mother and sister, they stayed in Poland until the fall of 1945. Now the Polish people didn't want those German Russians, the Germans there so the Russians put them on trains and took them back to Russia. And they put them out to Siberia, Omsk. And from there, when Khrushchev finally came into power, they stayed I think for eight years, yeah. Khrushchev came into power and then opened up things so they can move around a little bit, so they get out of there. They were out in the forest and all they did work, work, and live together in them wooden barracks, you know. "Their life was terrible," sister says. But when Khrushchev came in and he opened [allowed more freedoms], then they could move. Then they moved out of there and they moved down to Altaisk Kreis [?] because there were some of them [Germans] from our village [there]. Some [German] people lived there and so they got a little more..., you know from home, people from home. And they [then it] got better sister said, "it got better." My mother passed away then in November the thirteenth, 1963. She passed away from [out] there and she's buried out there. So my sister left and there again, she found an uncle from my dad, my dad's brother in Alma Ata.

**MM:** What was his name?

**JD:** Johann Dillmann.

**MM:** Johann Dillmann.

**JD:** Right. And she went down to Alma Ata and there she married a man. [He] was a widow man. He had three children, his wife passed away and she married him. And she raised all the children and they lived there until '89 [1989]. In '89 [1989], the whole family and everybody came out to Germany. She's in Germany right now, lives in Germany.

**MM:** So she just came back to Germany too then?

**JD:** '89 [1989] right. She came to Germany.

**MM:** Did you have correspondence through all these years with your sister?

**JD:** Yes. We had..., like I say, I found them. What we did..., I found them then. No, I didn't. The Red Cross did a great job in Germany, they found my mother and my sister. In '54 [1954], my dad past away on August the ninth and I got the letter in October that they [were found]. I've still got the letter some place. The Red Cross said that it should be my mother and my sister you know, but I should write to them and identify [them], [if they are the] real [people] you know, [or] if they are not. Which I did and it was my

mother and sister. So over the years we helped them as much..., not so much as long still as Stalin lived. [Then] you couldn't do nothing, you know. But when, like I said when Khrushchev came in, we could help them. We sent a lot of packages and clothes and money over there to help them along. As time went on, it got better there too, things got much better. But there was a lot [of German Russians], a lot of [them] down there at that Altaisk Kreis [?], village Malavodnia where they lived. There was a lot of German Russians there, a lot of them. Half of them had..., again they have to have.... To get out of Russia you have to have a sponsor again, you know to get into Germany. If you didn't have a sponsor, it was very hard to get out. But they had sponsors and so they come out. But they left a lot of cousins and a lot of relatives behind there.

**MM:** So today you still have a lot of relatives then in Kazakhstan?

**JD:** A lot of them.

**MM:** Primarily in Kazakhstan?

**JD:** Kazakhstan and what was..., my mother's brother like is [there also]. When they..., coming back to those years in the twenties [1920's] when they was occupied already then, the village SchÀ?\_Ànfeld from the Russian Reds [Army], the Russian Whites [Army], and the Germans. The Germans came in and took my mother's brother. He was [taken], took him with'em, the Germans and he went to Germany. [And he] came back home in 1926, they let him go back home, discharged him. When it [the fighting] was all settled again, he got back home. The communists, they didn't trust him. He was taken away [from there] right from the start. I guess [in] 1927, '28 [1928] they took him away out of [the village] to Siberia already, to Novosibirsk. His name was Franz Hummel. But one thing, later on through those years in Russia they got to find each other and he found my mother and they got to visit each other. And she found out that another brother's [wife], she had orphans, he was dead and she found out some of the things. So my mother's side, Uncle Frank what we called him, all his family still over there in Novosibirsk. They all out there.

**MM:** Dillmann family?

**JD:** The Hummel. From the Hummel, from the mother's side.

**MM:** From the mother's side, Hummel.

**JD:** From the Dillmann..., the Dillmann side there are a lot of them over there too yet, a lot of them, cousins, you know.

**MM:** Joe, today are you still having correspondence with anybody in Russia?

**JD:** No, no. I had correspondence. My sister has correspondence [from them] in Germany. She writes me now and tells me that cousin so and so, Cousin Leo and all, you know cousin..., Uncle John, Uncle Nikodemus, and Uncle Nicholas, those cousins [write] lot over there. She gets more letters over there than I do so I don't write over there, but she does. She writes to me and says that so and so is came [come] out and so and so is still over there.

**MM:** When she writes to them in Russia or in Kazakhstan, does she write to them in German or in Russian?

**JD:** Russian.



**MM:** She writes to them in Russian.

**JD:** Yes. And she..., now she improves with the years and we used to write [it] you know. Like I said, she had four years in..., back home in German language school. Four years and then when they switched us over into the Russian, she couldn't grab the Russian language. She went for three years in the same grade and then she finally got out of it and [learning it] didn't work. And now she writes better Russian and speaks better Russian when she come out [has left] from Russia. She was over and visit in '89 [1989] [and] she could speak better Russian than German. But now [that] she's over there in Germany and they put'em through school. The Germans put all those people, when they come out [of Russia] for six months schooling, everybody had to go to school. And the German now is getting pretty good.

**MM:** Where does she live in Germany?

**JD:** In Moers.

**MM:** That's located where?

**JD:** By Ruhrgebiet and that's by Duisburg, [then] DÀG\_Àsseldorf and [then] that's Moers.

**MM:** Yes. What we'll have to do is make contact with your sister because on June 18, 1994, in Stuttgart they're going to have the large Bundestreffen. That's the Germans from Russia gathering.

**JD:** From Russia [the] German Russians. She knows already.

**MM:** Yes.

**JD:** She knows that.

**MM:** And I'm going to speak there at that event.

**JD:** Oh, you are?

**MM:** Yes, in...

**JD:** In June, '94 [1994]?

**MM:** June of '94 [1994], yes. Were going to take a delegation from North Dakota.

**JD:** We're planning on to go over there. The wife and I in..., sometime next year.

**MM:** Maybe you can join us for this because were going to have.... There's about twelve people that are going to go and we're going to be at this Bundestreffen and we're going to have a big building....

**JD:** It's real interesting. German Russians have to travel over there.

**MM:** When we're finished with our conversation we should talk about that, because it's new information for me [that] your telling me. But on August seventh of 1993, just this past summer, I was in Hannover at the Landestreffen.

**JD:** Where's that?

**MM:** Landestreffen and there were ten thousand people there.

**JD:** Oh yes.

- MM:** And it was quite interesting. What was so interesting for me was when we were finished with the conversation I had to give a talk. But they preferred I give my talk in German rather than English and I can speak pretty good German.
- JD:** Well that's....
- MM:** But I speak Swabish, you know the old dialect.
- JD:** The old dialect German, right.
- MM:** Right. And of course the people understood me much better they said....
- JD:** German Russian [people].
- MM:** Than the political people who were speaking because they speak high German and I spoke the lower German and of course those older people understood that. But many people didn't understand any German because they don't understand German, a huge number of those. But it was very interesting. But I think that we need to visit about that because I'm also interested in the Dillmann name because we have received letters at the University looking for Dillmanns. And I wouldn't doubt that they've read in "Neues Leben", the newspaper from Moscow that we can help them here in America and I wouldn't doubt it [there] could be some of those relatives that don't know how to make contact and they've written to us. And also by chance, when Bishop Werth was here, did you have a chance to see him?
- JD:** No, no. We were out to..., was someplace, no. I see they were [coming]. We were going somewhere and no.
- MM:** But you know he lives in Novosibirsk?
- JD:** Novosibirsk, correct.
- MM:** And Father Al Bitz from Fargo who was at St. Mary's Cathedral at Fargo has resigned. But he's planning to go over to the dedication of the cathedral in Novosibirsk which would be on August seventh of '94 [1994]. But we have to make contact. I have to tell him to come and see you because that would be wonderful if he's in Novosibirsk, he can maybe ask about your relatives.
- JD:** Well, there should be some Hummels, no Dillmanns. There should be Hummels. Like I say, that was a brother to my mother, you know Hummel. There should be some cousins there. He had..., I don't know how many children. There should be some [there].
- MM:** And maybe when we're over there, if I'll have a chance, you could interview your sister. But what we could do is if it would work out next summer, we want to do a number of interviews. Maybe we could interview your sister when you're over there.
- JD:** What...? Sister..., you know she has problems with the back and the knees through [from] all the years in the Siberia. She already had an operation on her knee. I don't know if [she could travel there]. I can write her and some talk and say we talked about it. If I come over and gonna take her down there but I cannot say if she's gonna [go].
- MM:** Well maybe we'll have to wait and see at that time. Let's go back to the village life in the Ukraine. Do you recall..., like going to school? Did you sing songs in German or do a lot of stuff in German? Like play games in German?

- JD:** Ah..., o.k. See here we go again you know. Until the [government] change came in '37 [1937] we had German schools there. We had German school up that time. We had German [language], we had Russian as a foreign language. But Stalin changed this whole system then and we all had to study Ukrainian, Russian, and German. In the fifth grade our foreign language was German. We also had to study the Ukrainian and Russian because [since] you lived in Ukraine, the Russian language was the intellectual language for the Russian. So we had the three languages and that's when a lot of the German students couldn't follow.
- MM:** They had difficulty?
- JD:** Difficulty with it, with the languages. But we, like I said my sister went to four years German grade school. Four years and then, like I said she couldn't get the Russian in the head, make it.
- MM:** Right. Was there a church in your..., in the village?
- JD:** Yes. Had a beautiful church in Schoenfeld.
- MM:** What was the name of the church? Do you remember?
- JD:** I have to ask my sister. No, I forgot already.
- MM:** Forgot the name of the church, but they had a parish priest?
- JD:** They had it [a church], but I don't remember them with a parish priest. By the time I grew up to go I never remember [going] to church. Parish priests used to come from HochstÀ\_\_Àdt, there was a village that had maybe two [priests]. I remember they used to come and I got baptized and everything in time but I don't remember.
- MM:** Too much about that.
- JD:** No.
- MM:** Did you go to visit some of the other villagers?
- JD:** Oh yes.
- MM:** Other villages nearby? What were those villages nearby that you'd go to visit?
- JD:** Well, we used to.... I love to travel, used to [go to] Sulz, Karlsruhe, and Landau. I was in the..., no secret. My sister was in..., we were in the Pioneer, you know the Russians youth organization. Vacation in the summer time used to go to summer camps up in Landau. I loved Nikolajev, the city and Steinburg was the German village on the Bug River and the Speyer, Karlsruhe, Katherinental, Molov [all] surrounding there and down in that other part..., all around [the] state, all around here.
- MM:** What was this youth camp? What was that all about?
- JD:** Communist youth. And the Russians they used to.... Stalin wanted the young people more than anything and he wanted to train you. They had all privileges if you were a good student in school, which I was. In the summer months you could go to a camp, Pioneer camp and the camp was pretty good. But the whole thing was.... Number one in the camp is that there's no such a thing as a God and there was no religion. Religion was dope. The Russians..., the communist tell to us that religion is dope you know.

People get doped up and that's all. But when you came home to your parents, your parents tell that there is a God and things and you a little confused.

**MM:** Aha.

**JD:** You didn't know what was right and what was wrong but with years you're going to make your own judgement and you'll find out what's real. But the camps were real..., we liked them. Was two years in the camps [and] enjoyed them. Not some of those psychological [things]. You know things they tried to put into your head. A lot of them, they did.

**MM:** A lot of sports there and so forth?

**JD:** Sports, yes. We played soccer. We played all kinds of other games. We had schut surche, surche [sp. ?] and different kind of games.

**MM:** What was that?

**JD:** It's a game. You know you put that down..., they make a wooden deal and there's numbers on there, score numbers. And you lay it down and you hit it with the deal. Just like a ball game but we had no ball. It's Surche [sp. ?], called Surche.

**MM:** How do you spell that?

**JD:** I wouldn't even know how to spell it.

**MM:** Is that a Russian word?

**JD:** Surche is Russian, yeah.

**MM:** Aha, interesting.

**JD:** And we played those kind of games and..., but we always sang and...

**MM:** Was there a lot of singing going on?

**JD:** Oh yes in the camps. In the camps there was a lot of singing. All Russian songs.

**MM:** All Russian songs?

**JD:** Uhha. Russian, Ukrainian.

**MM:** What do you remember most about German, Russian or Ukrainian songs? What do you remember most?

**JD:** Well, I remember so many of them.

**MM:** Russian ones too?

**JD:** Uhha.

**MM:** Really. Do you remember one now?

**JD:** You bet I do.

**MM:** Can you sing one?

- JD:** Now I sing it. [sang verses of a Russian song]
- MM:** You've got a good voice. What about a Ukrainian song?
- JD:** Ukrainian song? Oh I think I've got one here... Just can't get [it].
- MM:** What about German? Did you sing a lot of German songs?
- JD:** Oh yes. We sing a lot of German songs.
- MM:** Lots of German songs. Was there much...? Like were you able to celebrate holidays? Like was Christmas celebrated?
- JD:** All those years, even in the Russian..., Russian time, in communist time they always celebrate Easter, Christmas, all those. And the folks used to get together for name's day and I didn't know what [that was]. And they finally told us that it was saints, saints there like St. Joseph, St. John. The birthdays wasn't celebrated but name's days were celebrated. But they did it in quiet, not [in public]. Just the folks get together with the neighbors and they celebrated. But we knew when it was Easter and we knew when it was Pentecost, we knew when it was Easter time. And then the Russians finally came out [with]..., I try to think now the years they came out with the New Years celebration with a Christmas tree. Was for the first New Years day. They call it `elka'. A Christmas tree was decorated and all. We had to go around and sing Russian songs around the Christmas tree. But there was still..., couldn't take it away from them, the German Russians, those holidays. They couldn't [eliminate them] no matter what they....
- MM:** Was there a little fear? It was real quiet?
- JD:** Yes, there was always a [fear]. My mother was [fearful] because my mother came from a well-to-do family. What they call Kulakin, maybe you heard the name. The [word] Kulak means a fist and all interpreted as ruling the people who had possessions and land and that they was called Kulakin. My mother was a Kulak, they were well-to-do. Like I say, all her brothers, they were put [out] to Siberia and she was many, many times picked up by the NKVD. Maybe you heard the name NKVD.
- MM:** What did that NKVD stand for?
- JD:** NKVD, That means national committee for an inner system. It was like a police. Like the Germans had the Gestapo and you have CIA or whatever it is, or FBI. So they used to come and question her many, many times.
- MM:** You remember that? When they would come?
- JD:** Oh yes, yeah. They used to come at night and then had to close the windows, close the windows up, put the light on [so] that they used to search [the place]. I don't know what they was searching for. They used to find some old Bibles, German Bibles and all those [kind of things]. They used to take them along then, what they found. She got them back again. I know one thing. My mother had a..., [picture of] the holy father. I don't know which one it was in the picture but [a] Pope and they took it along and we never got it back. They took that along and searched the house for everything, for some correspondence. We had some German letters from Germany which I never got to talk [about] anymore [because of] my mother. I don't know who they were from [in] Germany but I think it was her brother. He was in Germany at that time and the Germans took him along.

**MM:** At that time when you were growing up, you had no correspondence from America?

**JD:** No, no, no, not at all.

**MM:** There was no contact from America at that time yet?

**JD:** No. We had.... When my dad..., like I said he was in Karlsruhe [at] that Catholic orphanage school or whatever you call it and he had two sisters. [His] sisters Wilhamina and Monica. They [were] supposed to be nuns but when they [the government] come with [political] change and all, they [his sisters] were all very educated, good educated. They went to Moscow and they worked for a German Councilor in Moscow. And I think through that they had correspondence. You know my mother and my dad had some correspondence with those [relatives]. The German Councillor used to take them to Germany and took them back to Moscow and we don't know.... Later on when the war broke out what ever happened to them. We don't know what ever happened. Maybe the German Councillor took them back to Germany or whatever happened we don't know. They worked for the German Councillor. Remember one time they came back home in '36 [1936] or '37 [1937], those years. We looked up to them because they spoke real high German [and were] all dressed. They came home and... [then] went back again to Moscow to work for [him].

**MM:** When you were in those village years, the kinds of foods you ate. Was it primarily German or did you have Russian food too?

**JD:** Oh, [we] had Russian food too. Yes, we had Russian food.

**MM:** A mixture, huh. What were some of the things they ate?

**JD:** Well, borscht [soup] was a Russian dish, kasha is a Russian dish.

**MM:** What was that... kasha?

**JD:** Kasha is..., it's like made from barley and it's a..., what would come close [be similar] from here [in this country]? Just like a cereal you know, it was real small. Only they was boiled and they put some cream over the top [and] butter. Kasha. You heard of mamalyga, that's corn flour. You know [when] they lived together in that small camp, [learned] from the Bessarabians, from the Romanian people. They ate a lot of corn bread. And piroshki. Maybe you heard the name piroshki?

**MM:** What was that?

**JD:** Piroshki is a dough and they fill it with all different kind of..., they fill it with a liver or sauerkraut cabbage or regular hamburger meat. They call it piroshki. They were real good and I loved them. And then the German..., they had some German dishes there. But a lot of those dishes what..., what the German Russians brought over, [like] borscht soup [was] a Russian dish, Ukrainian Russian. Piroshki is Russian and those cheese buttons, what they call kÀ\_\_Àse knepfla, they are mostly Russian dishes. But the German people in Germany, when you go to Germany now, you don't find no kÀ\_\_Àse knepfla, no dampfnoodla. You can find kloesse, kloesse is about the..., a mixed potato and dough, is kloesse. But those [others] are Russian dishes. The Russian people liked dough, the Germans liked potatoes.

**MM:** Hum, interesting.

**JD:** Yeah.

**MM:** Your mother was a pretty good cook?

**JD:** Yes.

**MM:** Did a lot of cooking? Lot of canning too?

**JD:** Yes. She canned. She made the fruit, she dried fruit and she put cherries in the bottles. I don't know what else, you know.

**MM:** What about...? Do you remember how the house was built?

**JD:** How house was built?

**MM:** In the village.

**JD:** The village. Most of the homes we had [in the] village was stone, the stone walls were very thick. They were warm in the winter time and cool in the summer. And our roof was with straw. The roof was made from pressed [straw], pressed together with wide [bunches of] straw and long [bunches] of straw and they put it [up there]. It was very nice. There was a vorderstub [and] a hinterstub. What they call a living room and a back living room, the entry way and the kitchen. That was a typical home of German Russians.

**MM:** And the bedrooms?

**JD:** Well we slept in the same room, the bedroom. In the summertimes we kids slept in the hinterstub. Sister and I and mother and dad slept in the front when it's winter time. To save [heat] we all slept in one room.

**MM:** All in one room. What about the barn? Was the barn separate or attached?

**JD:** The barn. The barn was always..., was attached to the house and later on when the Germans came in, we had another one built, another one that was attached to the house. It was a long deal.

**MM:** Was there a wall or anything around it? A fence around the house?

**JD:** They had..., no, no, there wasn't. In the front..., the German villagers in our town [but] not where we were lived, there was nothing. Most had out of stone, [had] built a fence on the streets, [on] both sides. The streets were very wide and they were all wide and they had your gate to go in. They was made out of stone and painted white. But it [the gate] was hot yet, real metal. Everything that was a fence was made out of stone and made a little gate to get in there. But the streets were very wide, that was....

**MM:** What did they use for heat?

**JD:** Heat. [For] heat they used most of the manure what was from your cow, your horses. You know that was stomped [with straw]. In spring they mixed [it together]. It was squared up and then it was cut and dried. And was [like]..., what you call them? German Russians here in this country, they went out in the field and picked up, well you know... this?

**MM:** Cow chips.

**JD:** Cow shit out there. Also straw was burned and weeds. Weeds were dried up and put in a pile. Anything you could get a hold of for the winter time was burned.

**MM:** Was there always enough heat?

**JD:** We always had enough, always had enough to [keep warm]. The ovens were built..., I don't know how to explain the oven, you know the heat [system]. They had those built out of stone. You come into the living room and what they call..., your heating deal was about forty inches wide and about six feet long and it went up to the ceiling and inside there was an oven. That oven was used to bake your bread in the winter time. You put that manure into [it], that dried manure went in there. You know, make it [the fire] in the morning and [burn] the dried manure in there. And you cook and then it was used for that and kept it warm, kept the house warm.

**MM:** What about the cattle? Were they kept inside then always during the winter time?

**JD:** Well see, yes. They would feed them inside and the winter..., now in that part where [we lived, the winter] was not as long as here. You had the cattle out [in pastures] still in the late October, November some time. You know it was still pretty good to go out there [to] the field. And then came December and January, [those] was your hardest months. Sometime was pretty nice then too, you just was feeding [them]. [In] middle of February already the snows would melt, ice used to go out. In March then grass was coming out [growing] there, in middle March. [By the] end of March, depends from year to year, cattle went out there to the field already. So actually, you were only feeding them for three months, that's the longest. And then there was straw. Then you tried to make your summertime hay, tie it up and whatever.

**MM:** Did your folks ever make any wine?

**JD:** Oh yes, oh yes.

**MM:** Lots of wine on the table.

**JD:** Yes. We had wine into the communist time, we had wine. They had little..., what you call'em barrels, barrels you know. I used to go over there, they measure by the pail, used to buy a pail. And this was kept [at home]. And we as children, we always had that. I remember back not all the time, they had Sundays [when] we had a glass of wine with the folks. It was a treat. And we had a lot of wine.

**MM:** What about other liquor? Did they make any beer?

**JD:** Other liquor? Through the communist time [that] was forbidden. You couldn't do anything with the communists. But when the German occupation of [Russia] by the Germans, they used to make this home brew with corn from the..., barley and I don't know what else they used. They used to make this homemade brew. Then they mixed it with some cherry flavor for color. We always had something to drink. Vodka you couldn't get and by the communist time you could get vodka but it was very expensive so you couldn't afford too much of it.

**MM:** During the time when you were growing up there in the village, was the church always open or was it closed?

**JD:** No. The church, our church was converted into a theater, a beautiful theater. We had plays, some plays, did some plays in there, some school plays in there. Our church was one of the first ones from around that was taken down. The steeple was taken down and was made to a theater. That was a beautiful theater. We used to play a lot of performances there and later on movies came. The silent movies came



in there and they kept the inside pretty much up. And when the Germans came in, then we converted it back to church again.

**MM:** Converted back to a church.

**JD:** Yeah. The stage was taken out. They [had] built a stage in the front and all that was half round. They made a stage out of it and curtains and everything. Then when the Germans came in, then we put it back to a church.

**MM:** Interesting. The village, did it have a bazaar?

**JD:** No. We were too close to Nikolajev. Our village didn't have a bazaar. We took all our stuff..., like I said we were... To the River Bug was five kilometers into Volovadoka [? sp.] which is right across from the Bug. On one side was Nikolajev, across [from it] was Volovadoka. We used to carry our baskets and everything [there]. I know many times I help my mother to carry stuff. We used to sell eggs and whatever it is... [to sell].

**MM:** You would bargain, barter?

**JD:** You took the eggs to town. To Nikolajev and the bazaar and you sell your eggs and then you buy your clothes or whatever you needed. Eggs and whatever else..., was butter, mostly eggs and butter. That's all you could afford. Once in a while she, when it was cool in the fall and she butchered some chickens and cleaned them up and took them in and used to sell chickens to get some money for...

**MM:** So when you think back Joe, you have a real vivid memories and I can tell you know in great detail of those early years in that German village there. What do think back about? About what's happening today in the former Soviet Union and what life must have been like then and so forth? What are your visions looking back to life as a young..., as a young teenager and a child in the Ukraine?

**JD:** O.k. Like my own [life]. I didn't like to be a farmer, didn't like it, wanted to go. Then I got out in 1944, come back.... In 1944 [I] graduated from the seventh grade. You had to go, in Russia you had to go to the middle school. You finished your [diploma ?]. I went to Nikolajev and then they accept me in what is called shipbuilding. Nikolajev had two factories where they build ships. I wanted to get in. I loved the sea, still love the sea. I wanted to be a sailor. I wanted to be on the ocean some place. Loved Odessa, loved the Black Sea, love water and I still do. And I wanted to be a sailor so I get in what they call [? Russian words] where they build ships. I started there [then]. On June the fifteenth was accepted and then the bombing first hit Russia. War broke out on the twenty@second and Nikolajev got bombed again the twenty-sixth of June.

**MM:** What year was that?

**JD:** 1941. And all those students over there..., the war broke out with Germany and the students [were] supposed to go inland to Russia [from that] school. Well then I went home. The teacher told us, "you better..., you go home." "Who wants to go home can go home, who wants to go to school can go." Well, I went home and stayed home then. Well the Germans came in then. But looking back over the years I was there, school was tough, school in Russia was very hard. I don't know if still is but those years [it] was. What Stalin wanted to do, he wanted to get very bright people up [promoted]. That [school] didn't cost anything, the school was free. If you made your test, if you continued on, school was free. You could go and he wanted those people. And you, as you grew up, you were confused. I was. Many

other children was confused [on] account of religion and communism. And when you think [about] communism, what they tell you [is that] everybody's equal, everybody should share, everybody has this [the same things], and everybody's equal and all that. As you grow up you find that this is not going to work because people, we all different and not going to work. That's what is the fall down of communism. I'm surprised that it took that many years to find out [that]. That it's a thing that's not going to work. We all created equal we say, equal created but we're all different people. And communism, the way we grew up, there was a lot of what you call, injustice. The party, the communist party, the people who were communist, they had everything. When you look back, when I look back at my school years, the Czar time in Russia, [they] was the rich people, had everything, and the poor was the one that was repressed. They was [were the people the rich] didn't care about [them]. As you look back, later on in my years, everything changed much. The people who was the well-to-do there, the lords and the kings and the knights, whatever they call them at the time, the Grafts and things, later on the communist party came to power and they was the ones saying things needed to change, but still the people were poor. They were poor under the Czar, they were poor under the communists yet. Things hadn't changed much. And I was so surprised that it took so long finally to realize that it's not a good system. Those the years when you grow up you don't..., you see one side, you see the other side, but you...[don't know].

**MM:** Would you ever want to go back and visit your homeland village?

**JD:** Not really. I talk with people over there, what it is [like] when you leave a village. I want to leave it in my mind, my memories [of the] way it was. When you go back everything is changed. Our village was really changed, pretty much [everything]. There's nothing there now. Things have changed and everything, so... A lot of people, even the cemeteries they took away. Beautiful cemeteries, metal crosses and all those things that..., everything's changed. You go back, even when I first... I was in this country for sixteen years and went back to Hamburg, Germany and was surprised how it had changed.

**MM:** Even in Germany?

**JD:** Even in Germany.

**MM:** Now, you mentioned those..., those wrought iron metal crosses. Those crosses that you remember in the cemeteries there. In your German village near the church, of course. Were they similar to the ones that you see in North Dakota?

**JD:** Exactly. The pictures of it. Yep, same kind, same...

**MM:** So they must have..., so all those..., the art of those people. Iron crosses you see around Mandan of course, and especially down around Strasburg and Emmons County, they're similar to those then?

**JD:** Oh yes, yes they are, yep. Even those marble stone crosses they had. They had..., how to say it..., they put a lot of...[money], even the poorest family, they put a lot into, in the cross. Had to be a cross, you know.

**MM:** I forgot to ask you about..., do you recall how a wedding was celebrated in the village?

**JD:** Well, wedding was celebrated! The Ukrainians celebrated wedding for three days and well, the Germans tried to do it similar to this, but it [was] usually for two days. It was not what you call a German tradition. The German Russian adopted Ukrainian, you know. They celebrated for three days, [the]

wedding, but the Germans did it for two days sure. It was quite an occasion. Everybody brought [what was needed] the first day. And then the second day and [they] brought some chickens and potatoes and everything else and celebrate again. You know there was quite a feast.

**MM:** A lot of food and a lot of drinking?

**JD:** A lot of food.

**MM:** Dancing too?

**JD:** Oh, a lot of dancing most of the time. Most of those people [danced]. [During] the communist time they didn't have no [dances]. The floor was made out of hard clay. Compacted clay and they used to dance on that. By the time the wedding was over, the floor [was ruined]. Whoever had the [next] weddings had to start all over again [and] put new floor [in].

**MM:** So you never had wood floors over there?

**JD:** Well yeah, we had. But the wood was hard to get in that part of the country. We finally got a wooden floor when the Germans came in. You know, we finally got our roof [replaced], straw came off and we put some clay shingles on there, red ones, and we put wood floor in there. But during those days, a wooden floor was a lot.

**MM:** When you were growing up?

**JD:** Yes.

**MM:** What about...? How do you recall when there was a death in the family or a death in the village? Was that a real somber time?

**JD:** Yes it was. The people were really [helpful]. They pitched in and helped, like here. Everybody brought something too. [Brought] food because the relatives came and everything was quite.... The village, everybody pitched in and everybody was cooperative and all helped along. It was a sad matter, whether it was old or young, whatever it was. I know, I remember very good when my grandparents on my mother's side, I don't know how I old I was, I think it was '33 [1933] or '34 [1934] when they passed away. I'll have to ask my sister some time. I know I was young, I remember it very good. It was in hot July and they passed away. They both passed [away]. My grandpa one day and my grandma the other day 'cause we buried them both in our town Schoenfeld. The whole small town was at the funeral, everybody was there.

**MM:** So during the communist time there, when [the] Stalin era came in, could they have...? Was the funeral in the church or how? What did they do?

**JD:** No no, no no, not in the church. Nope, no. They just..., you had a heck of a time to get wood to make those wooden boxes [coffins] to put them in. It was very hard to get wood. And then they used to get the soot from the chimneys and then they smeared it on there and make it black. And then put some wood shavings inside and put some clothes [then] and laid them in there. And they had to be [buried quick], you couldn't keep for long. I know they, I think my grandparents I think back, they already..., the smell [began]. There was no church or nothing there. But when you came to a cemetery to put them down [bury them], still somebody..., couldn't take it away [from the people], they said the prayer. There was always somebody who would.

**MM:** Was there some singing too?

**JD:** And some singing.

**MM:** What did they sing? Do you remember?

**JD:** Gosh, I don't know. There was..., it was religious songs.

**MM:** You were pretty young yet, then?

**JD:** I don't remember what.

**MM:** Do you do much German singing still?

**JD:** When I go to Germany I do. Oh yes.

**MM:** Have you seen your sister since she came from Kazakhstan?

**JD:** Oh yes, yes. She came out [here] in '89 [1989] and we went over there. She came in March [then] we went over to see her in July and that's in '89 [1989]. Went back in ninety [1990] again and visited with her. Went over there twice and we planning [to go again]. My wife's at work, she wants to quit, going to retire next year. That's what she tells me, I don't know. Plan to go over there next year again, to visit.

**MM:** Did..., when you got together with your sister, did you talk at all about village life?

**JD:** Not, not from back home [in Russia]. We talked more..., she wanted to know my life. How I..., what all happened with me, how we got to America and she wanted to know about dad. My dad passed away and he's buried in Berlin and I wanted to know [the same] with ma. How the life was there, you know. But one incident I would [talk about]. When the Germans come into the village, a lot of those people when they lived there, some of these had ties to the communist and some worked for the communist. And there was quite a few people which, Ukrainians, they came into the village and they were, what you call, one hundred percent communist. When the Germans came in, those people had to leave their village, [became] almost all German [again]. The Ukrainians moved into a smaller town, [?] Putat] they call it up there. There was an incident. My mother, when she was twenty, when she was always harassed through the years by man named Nickoli Heitchmakov [sp.?]. His daughter and her and I went to school together. We were good friends. When we graduated from the seventh grade, he got drunk and he ripped my mother's blouse open and he called, "she should be out in Siberia with brothers" and all that. But then when the Germans came in, all the people, the Germans who lived there and [then they] somebody made it miserable for them, the communists. They report them to the commandant, the German commandant. A lot of people got shot. And I think back, that was without any judgement, without any..., just o.k., come up and said, "this guy, he was so bad," you know, "so bad." That commandant would come up from behind and shot him. That's true. Well, this Nickoli Heitchmakov came to my mother and he said, "I made it rough for you over the years," and she said to him, "Nickoli, go home, what's done, what was is done is gone." Said, "I will not report you and that's fine whatever happened." And many times we think back, we should not look for revenge, we should forget and try to do new. And it happened that my mother was out in Siberia in Altai, when she came out of Siberia, his son Nickolai Heitchmakov went in the Red Army and [when] he come out and visit my mother out in Siberia and brought greetings from his dad and he still thanked her that she saved his life. Because if she would have reported him, the commandant would have shot him, just like that. So many times I think

back and said that too, and try to get revenge and something like that. He brought her greetings and she was tickled. She was real surprised that he came. Yep.

**MM:** Do you think Joe, as we close our conversation, do you think it's important that a person like yourself needs to help us and the culture. We're all part of this German Russian heritage. You of course lived there and remember village life but what is your feeling about the importance of documenting this history on the German Russians?

**JD:** That's.... And it's o.k., it is great. It is great that you [know about the] pioneers. What we call the pioneers, those Germans [who] moved away [to Russia]. And I've read a lot of history from [of] Germany from the nineteen [century], 1816 and all the way on from Napoleon after the war. My great grandparents I guess, were supposed to have come [to Russia] in 1832, [or] from there on out, they moved into the Ukraine. They worked hard, they were farmers by heart. They know their agriculture and they made this country Ukraine blossom. There was orchards, there was grapes, there was beautiful fields. Communism came along and some people were well-to-do later on. Early Germans came in there, they worked very hard and some came to the United States. I think they should keep it up [study of that history]. We were, like I always say to the people when they ask me sometime [about] when I was in Russia. When I went to school in Nikolajev for the shipbuilding technicum, I was a German, number one I was a German. In Russia there was such a thing [that] you were [a] citizen of Russia but your nationality was still in your past one, Pollack or German. And then when war was over, I came to Germany and when I got discharged from prison camp, came to Hamburg, Germany, went to school there. Well now, I was born in Russia. They said, "you were a Russian." I said, "I'm not Russian, I'm a German!" Well here, when you came here to the United States later on, the German Russians came in here. If you were a DP, [even if] you're not a DP, everybody called you DP, a displaced person. Which I guess we were, displaced. Most of the people down here didn't know what a DP stands for, a displaced person. So the German Russian heritage when you look back, those people were pioneers and there's a lot of German Russian in Australia. I had some good friends and they moved to South Africa, and there's a lot of them down there. There's some in Brazil, the United States got more. And it is quite a history.

**MM:** You have had contact with people that went to other continents?

**JD:** Yes.

**MM:** When you came to North Dakota to the Mandan area, were you well accepted by the German Russian community?

**JD:** Yes, I got no complaint. I was accepted.

**MM:** And until then you spoke no English?

**JD:** Nope.

**MM:** So you learned English in 1952?

**JD:** I spoke a few words when I was in Italy prison camp. The English prison was run by the English Royal Air Force. But the English wanted to speak Italian and we wanted to speak Italian, so our communication was in the Italian language. I spoke Italian at one time about forty percent [of the time]. Still know some very good. Now it wouldn't take me long to catch on [again to] the Italian language. But as far as the

English was concerned, I never had [any] when I was in prison camp. [If I] thought I would have to learn the English language, could have learned it [then] but....

**MM:** So how did you learn in English over here in North Dakota?

**JD:** Well when I came over here. Like I said before, I started my apprenticeship as a plumber and I went to night school [for that] and I also went to night school for a citizenship. You had to go to become a citizen. You had to be in this country for five years, you had to pass a test for citizenship and I was in the school to learn the English language.

**MM:** So you went to English school then?

**JD:** And I got my..., later on in English school, I got my Mandan, North Dakota high school equivalency diploma. Passed in 1970. I still don't know how to spell much. [laughter].

**MM:** Did...? Were there any other..., I wouldn't call them displaced persons, but other people that you knew. Did anyone else come over to North Dakota that you knew? That was from your village?

**JD:** Not from my village, no. I was the only one. But then a lot of them came from a different area around there. There's some people here from the different [areas]. There's Chris a good friend of mine, he's from Speyer and there's some [others]. A lot of them moved away, a lot of them in '52 [1952]. There was a lot of them here. They moved to bigger city from here, to Milwaukee, [WI].

**MM:** But there were others that came and then they resettled.

**JD:** Yes. But from my village, not that I know anyone from my village that came here, not here. I have a friend from my village, the only one I know so far. Some live in Canada from my village and there's one of them [who] lives in Chicago and one lives in Denver as far as I know from my village. That's about the extent of it.

**MM:** What I need to visit with you about is. Sometime we need to get those names because I think that would be interesting for them to know what we're doing. See all the articles that we publish and so forth are all translated into German, into Russian because there all..., we're sending them to newspapers in Germany and in the former Soviet Union for publication, like in "Neues Leben" because we think it's very important that all those Germans who are living in the former Soviet Union, that they learn more about their brothers and sisters living in the United States. Because for many years they didn't know anything about it. They couldn't have any [communication], there could be no contact. We're going to end our conversation today. It's November eighth, 1993 and I'm in the home of Joe Dillmann. And who knows, maybe the next time when we meet Joe, we'll meet in Germany or will have to invite him to the University in Fargo so he can come and see our collection. Which by the way Joe, our German Russian heritage collection is one of the biggest now in the world and we concentrate on books on the Bessarabian Germans and the Black Sea Germans. And we have over fifty percent of the collection is in German. It's not in English because we get books from Germany. Thanks so much and it certainly was a pleasure to be here at the Dillmann home.