

Interview with Elizabeth Mastel Fischer (EF)

Conducted by Michael M. Miller (MM)

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Transcription by Dorothy Denis

Edited by Mary Lynn Axtman

MM: Good afternoon. It's December 26, 1993 and I'm in Bismarck, ND at the home of Elizabeth Mastel Fischer. This is Michael M. Miller, the Germans from Russia bibliographer at North Dakota State University in Fargo. And first of all Elizabeth, I would like to say, "Merry Christmas to you."

EF: Thank you.

MM: I am one day late, but it is a real pleasure. And it's a real coincidence that Elizabeth and I have just met for the first time and [also] her son, Peter. I got to know Elizabeth through her daughter who mentioned that Elizabeth knew Lawrence Welk. But we will talk about how you knew Mr. Welk a little later in our conversation.

MM: Elizabeth, first of all, could you give us the date when you were born?

EF: May 13, 1899.

MM: You were born in what community?

EF: In Strasburg, [ND].

MM: Oh, you were born right in Strasburg? And what was the name of your mother and father, Elizabeth?

EF: My father's name was Kasimer and my mother's name was Elizabeth.

MM: Your mother was a Mastel?

EF: No, Nenninger.

MM: I see. Now your parents, were they born over in Russia?

EF: Yah.

MM: They came from a colony. You don't happen to remember what was the name of the colony over there in Russia where they were born?

EF: No.

MM: We'll look that up in the family history and see if we can find that.

MM: So you were born in Strasburg. How big of a family did you have? How many brothers and sisters did you have?

EF: I have 3 sisters and 5 brothers.

- MM:** You have 3 sisters and 5 brothers. Now, your father and mother, Were they married over in Russia or were they married over here?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** They were married over in Russia. How many children did they have when they came over to America?
- EF:** They had four.
- MM:** Four children. How old was the youngest one when they came?
- EF:** Well, I am the youngest one.
- MM:** Oh, you are the youngest one? So, were you born here in America or over there?
- EF:** Yes. I was born here.
- MM:** You were born here, but they had four children when they came from Russia to North Dakota?
- EF:** Yah, yah.
- MM:** What did your father do for an occupation, Elizabeth? Was he a farmer?
- EF:** He was a farmer.
- MM:** Where did they live? Where near Strasburg? Did they live right out of town or where was the farm?
- EF:** We lived east of Strasburg, and as far as I know, he was always a farmer.
- MM:** He was always a farmer. Of course, you went to school and your mother raised quite a large family. Did your folks ever talk about the old country?
- EF:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** What did they used to say about it?
- EF:** I don't remember.
- MM:** Can you remember anything about the old country?
- EF:** Well, the neighbors and them, when they were together, they talked about Russia. But it didn't interest me.
- MM:** Did your father and mother speak only German? Did you ever hear them speak Russian?
- EF:** Yes, they spoke German.
- MM:** You never heard them speak Russian though?
- EF:** No, no.
- MM:** So, you grew up speaking only German.
- EF:** Yah.

- MM:** When your father and mother would get together with the neighbors, do you remember who those neighbors were?
- EF:** Kraft.
- MM:** What was the first name? Do you remember?
- EF:** Ferdinand.
- MM:** Ferdinand Kraft.
- EF:** There were Bosch and Goldade's. They were all neighbors. Germans.
- MM:** Now Elizabeth, you grew up in a house. Was it a wood house or a sod house?
- EF:** It was a sod house.
- MM:** Do you remember how big it was?
- EF:** Three rooms.
- MM:** And what were those rooms?
- EF:** Well, they had..., there was the bedrooms and then the kitchen was in the center and it was big. We didn't all have a room by ourselves.
- MM:** There were eight children?
- EF:** Well, I don't remember because I was the last one born.
- MM:** You were the baby.
- EF:** Well, we had a rollaway bed that I slept on in my folk's room. The other ones slept in the other room.
- MM:** What about the heat in the wintertime? Did they have coal or what did they use for heat?
- EF:** Manure.
- MM:** Manure. What did they call it?
- EF:** Chips, chips.
- MM:** Do you remember the chips?
- EF:** Yes. When they cleaned the barn, it was all put on one strip. And in the spring, they hitched up a couple of horses and trampled that down hard. Then they cut it in square pieces and that was heat. Later on, we had coal.
- MM:** Did you have to go out and gather the chips once in a while then?
- EF:** Well, it was in the wintertime and they [the animals] were in the barn.
- MM:** Of course. The cow chips were used for heat and your mother had to do a lot of cooking I'll bet, with all those children?

- EF:** Yah.
- MM:** Do you remember some of the food she used to make?
- EF:** Sauerkraut. Sauerkraut and ham.
- MM:** I'll bet some noodles, once in a while?
- EF:** Yah, noodles.
- MM:** What kind of noodles did you make?
- EF:** Well, all kinds of them. Out of raised dough and out of plain dough.
- MM:** Do you make some of those noodles yet?
- EF:** No, I don't make them.
- MM:** Did she ever make plachenta?
- EF:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** And cheese buttons and käse knepla? Did you ever make these?
- EF:** No. 'Cause I don't like it.
- MM:** Now, your family grew up speaking only German. Do you remember if your folk's learned English?
- EF:** No, they didn't. My folk's couldn't talk English.
- MM:** Did they get any newspapers? German newspapers?
- EF:** Oh, yes. What's that name...? Northwestern?
- MM:** Did they get the Dakota Freie Presse or the Nord Dakota Herold?
- EF:** Can't remember.
- MM:** You probably read some of those too when you were younger?
- EF:** Well, yah. It was a German paper but I forgot the name.
- MM:** As you were growing up, how far was the school from your house?
- EF:** Two miles.
- MM:** So when you were 6 years old, you went off to school? Could you speak English then?
- EF:** I had to walk.
- MM:** You walked to school?
- EF:** Yes. And I was in the choir and I walked there.
- MM:** Did the choir practice at the school too?
- EF:** Yah.

- MM:** When you went to first grade, did you speak English?
- EF:** No.
- MM:** Just German?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** What about the teacher? Could the teacher speak German?
- EF:** Well, she had a hard time getting along with all of them. They couldn't talk English.
- MM:** Oh, that was interesting, huh?
- EF:** Everybody was German there.
- MM:** So, they insisted you speak English though?
- EF:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** So when you had recess, you would speak German in the school? When you'd go home, you'd speak English or German?
- EF:** Well, us kids we talked English. But when we'd come home, everything was in German.
- MM:** So, how long did you go to school? How many years?
- EF:** Gosh, I don't know.
- MM:** Did you finish through the 8th grade then?
- EF:** Yah.... No, no. I don't remember.
- MM:** You went some years. Now, when you went to school, you went about 6 months?
- EF:** Yah, yah.
- MM:** Now, you mentioned the choir and that's interesting because I had never heard before that they had choir practice at the school. Was the teacher the choir teacher? So, there was some beautiful singing then?
- EF:** Yes. His name was Leopold Kuhn.
- MM:** And he was the teacher?
- EF:** He was the teacher and he was the choir director.
- MM:** Then when you would practice, where would you sing? At the school or in the church?
- EF:** In his house, we had practice. The church was out in the country.
- MM:** What was the name of that church?
- EF:** St. Aloysius. It is still there. There was a little schoolhouse and then they built the house for the choir [teacher], this Mr. Kuhn. That's where the practice was, twice a week.

- MM:** Now, the songs that you would sing, were they in German or in English?
- EF:** German. Oh yah.
- MM:** Do you remember some of them?
- EF:** Well, sure I do.
- MM:** Which one is your favorite? One of your favorites?
- EF:** Well, Grosse Gott.
- MM:** Can you sing it for us?
- EF:** No!!
- MM:** But you remember it though?
- EF:** Oh, you betcha!
- MM:** Oh, yes. Your prayers were in German too, weren't they?
- EF:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** So, after you had your choir practice, where would they perform? Like for special occasions, like Christmas and Easter and so forth?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** At St. Aloysius?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** That was beautiful, I'll bet. Especially at Christman time.
- EF:** Yes. Yes.
- MM:** Now, we have just witnessed Christmas of 1993. How do you remember Christmas at your house when you were a child? What was Christmas like?
- EF:** The Belzenickel!
- MM:** The Belzenickel. What did he have to do with Christmas?
- EF:** Well, if you weren't good, the Belzenickel is going to get you.
- MM:** And when did he come?
- EF:** One Christmas Eve, my dad had a coat that was curly [fur] inside and somebody would put that on inside out and crawl up there and scare you. Oh, I was so scared of that guy and here it was always one of my brothers. He was the Belzenickel.
- MM:** You thought he was the real one?
- EF:** Why sure. You can't imagine what he looked like. He looked ugly. That was the Belzenickel.

- MM:** But did the Santa Claus come too?
- EF:** Santa Claus never came to my house. That was Christkindel.
- MM:** What about the angels? Did they ever come?
- EF:** Yes, we had angels. Whoever went around to each house. It was the older girls and boys dressed up like angels. It was nice. Was different then than now.
- MM:** Your mother used to do a lot of baking for Christmas?
- EF:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** What did she make for Christmas, do you remember? She must have made some special cookies and stuff.
- EF:** Well, what was special, that was made out of bread dough. She had a recipe that made a special dough and then made cookies.
- MM:** Did they make some pig's feet?
- EF:** Huh?
- MM:** Pig's feet. Golodets. That was pig's feet. You never had that at your house? I suppose they had ham and so forth. And then they'd have a Midnight Mass?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** How would you get to the church, with the buggy?
- EF:** With the team of horses and sled. Yah, we had Midnight Mass [there].
- MM:** Who was the priest when you were out there?
- EF:** Father Decker. That's the one I grew up with.
- MM:** That's where you had your First Communion?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** You mentioned Elizabeth, later on you must have gone to Catechism or summer church school.
- EF:** I went to Strasburg then for 3 months in the spring before I made my First Communion.
- MM:** Did you stay in town then?
- EF:** Yah, with my brother. My brother lived there.
- MM:** So, you stayed in town then. How old were you about then?
- EF:** 11 years old.
- MM:** Then you went to school in Strasburg. Was this with the Ursuline Sisters?
- EF:** Sisters...? I can't remember what their name was.

- MM:** Uhhuh....
- EF:** Nursula...? Ursula...?
- MM:** Ursuline Sisters.
- MM:** So, you went to school for 3 months and who were some of the other pupils that you were with?
- EF:** Senger. But I can't remember her [first] name. But her last name was Senger.
- MM:** Who else was there? You mentioned Mr. Welk. You knew him then too?
- EF:** Yah.
- MM:** Did he go to this school too? The summer school?
- EF:** Yes. We lived on the east side of town and they lived on the west side. But they didn't celebrate birthdays but they celebrated names days. These older people were always celebrating names days.
- MM:** You remember some of those, I'll bet?
- EF:** Why sure. Mine was one of them.
- MM:** That was a big event.
- EF:** 19th of November.
- MM:** Yes, St. Elizabeth. Let's talk a little bit about your childhood. When you got to be a teenage girl and you stayed at home and worked on the farm. Then you stayed at home until you were what age? When did you leave the farm?
- EF:** I don't remember the year. I was 19. Nineteen years old.
- MM:** You went off to another town?
- EF:** Yah. We went to Kansas City after we were married.
- MM:** You got married to whom?
- EF:** Carl Fischer.
- MM:** Carl Fischer. He was from where?
- EF:** From right there. He was from the same place where I was.
- MM:** He grew up in the same area? So, you were married at the age of 19?
- EF:** Yah.
- MM:** Then you went down to Kansas City?
- EF:** He went to the automobile school.
- MM:** I see. Did you start a family then or did you work too then?
- EF:** No, I didn't work. But he had the mail route for a while. Then we went to Hazelton, [ND].

- MM:** You were in Kansas City awhile and then you came back to Emmons County. Then you lived in Emmons County for a while and you raised a family too?
- EF:** Well, up here. Yes.
- MM:** How many children do you have, Elizabeth?
- EF:** Nine children.
- MM:** Nine children. So you raised a big family. Do you remember all the grandchildren you have?
- EF:** No.
- MM:** Quite a number, huh?
- EF:** Yes. Quite a number.
- MM:** And a great-grandmother too.
- EF:** I don't remember all of them [the names].
- MM:** Let's talk a little bit about how you knew Lawrence Welk. You had mentioned earlier that you remember getting to know Lawrence Welk. How did that happen?
- EF:** Well, we went to school together and he was so bashful. When I was down there this summer, I looked at that corner and I could just see him standing there. You had to go in the church, and then you turned to go downstairs in the schoolroom and there was a corner. He would stand there.
- MM:** This was at the church in Strasburg?
- EF:** Yah.
- MM:** In the church basement?
- EF:** No, we didn't belong there. We had a country church, [St.] Aloysius. But I was out there going to school, to the Sister school. Because my folks wanted me to go to a Sister's school. I stayed with my brother. Of course, Lawrence Welk, they lived on the west side of town and we lived on the east side of town and we all went to the same school then, for a few months.
- MM:** So, that's how you got to know him then. Through going to that school there in the spring?
- EF:** Yah.
- MM:** Did you keep in touch? Did you get to know him or see him after that?
- EF:** Lawrence? Oh, yes, yes.
- MM:** How did that happen then?
- EF:** Well, they celebrated names days and they were together in town when they shopped. His uncle had a general store and everybody shopped in that store. It was groceries and everything.
- MM:** The Bazaar?
- EF:** The Bazaar was Baumgartner's.

- MM:** Now, did Lawrence play the accordion at some of those names days?
- EF:** No. He was too young yet.
- MM:** But later on, do you remember some of it?
- EF:** Well, he went to Yankton, South Dakota and we got him over the radio. It was just like now. I won't miss a Lawrence Welk show. That's the way it was then, when the radio came out.
- MM:** Do you remember a time when you didn't have a radio?
- EF:** Well, ah...
- MM:** Do you remember the first time you heard a radio?
- EF:** No, that was too long ago.
- MM:** But you remember hearing Lawrence for the first time on WNEX, huh?
- EF:** Yah. I can remember, but I don't remember the year.
- MM:** Right. That was in about 1924 to [19] 27.
- EF:** I think it was earlier than that.
- MM:** Well, he left the farm in 1924. He was 21 when he left the Welk farm. Did you ever get over to the Welk farm where he lived?
- EF:** I don't remember.
- MM:** What about going to some dances where he would play?
- EF:** I don't remember.
- MM:** So, you left the farm and went down to Kansas City and then you came up to Hazelton and then you moved to Bismarck?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** About what year was that?
- EF:** About 1933, 1934.
- MM:** You raised a lot of your family here in Bismarck, huh?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** So now, when you think back to those early childhood days. Your folks came over from Russia and couldn't speak any English. What do you think about those early days?
- EF:** I can just see everything.
- MM:** What do you think about sometimes? I know it's hard to talk about it.
- EF:** Well, I get lonesome.

- MM:** Do you think those things?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** What do you miss the most about those days?
- EF:** Well, I used to play the accordion, no, the pedal organ and we sang. The whole family would sing. And after that, we played cards. There was only one paper. What was the name of that paper? In German...? Staatsanzeiger?
- MM:** Der Staatsanzeiger, yah. Came from Bismarck here. It was wonderful that your folks got a newspaper and they would read it. Bet they could hardly wait until that newspaper would come in the mail. They enjoyed getting that newspaper, I'll bet.
- EF:** Once a week. Once a month, maybe.
- MM:** It is interesting Elizabeth, you mentioned that you played the pedal organ. So there was a lot of singing in your house? Did your folks sing a lot too?
- EF:** We all sang.
- MM:** Primarily in German?
- EF:** German. And we had good neighbors, Kraft. That man would come every day to visit. He would read the paper, whatever. I get kind of lonesome for those days.
- MM:** Oh, I'm sure. Was your family quite religious? Your parents quite strict about religion?
- EF:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** Did you have prayers in the evening and so forth?
- EF:** Yes. And before meals and after meals.
- MM:** And then you went to school in town. To go to the Sister's school before Communion and so forth. Did you have to say the Holy Rosary in evening?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** The church was very important in your life?
- EF:** Oh, you bet. Always. And still is.
- MM:** Those days, when you think back, do you remember that everyone had their chores? What were your chores when you were growing up as a teenager?
- EF:** Yes. I milked the cows.
- MM:** You had to milk the cows? Did you ever have to work out in the field?
- EF:** We had a lot of cows to milk.
- MM:** And then your ma would use that milk in the house, or would they sell the milk?
- EF:** Oh, yes, yes.

MM: She did a lot of baking and cooking with that?

EF: Yes.

MM: She made her own cheese and everything?

EF: She made her own cheese? Did they ever make wine or beer or anything like that?

EF: Yes, wine. No beer.

MM: What about a wedding? Do you remember, when you were growing up and then some of your older brothers and sisters got married, I bet that was a big event too, huh?

EF: Oh, you betcha!

MM: What was the wedding like? Was it just a one day affair or was it more than that?

EF: Well, it would start on a Sunday, and on Mondays there was the wedding. Sunday night it started. I don't know why, but it was always Mondays.

[Comments from Peter Fischer]: That's when the beer joints opened. When they got married, they went from Hague, Strasburg, or Zeeland to get the beer. Where did you get married?

EF: St Aloysius. In the country. That's what my church was.

MM: So, you had a big wedding. I bet you remember your wedding day?

EF: The 6th of November. After that, a couple of weeks, we went to Kansas City. My husband went to school for automobiles.

MM: And of course, by then, you spoke good English though?

EF: Yes. When you are in the big city, you couldn't talk German.

MM: How did you get down there? Did you have a vehicle by then? You had a car?

EF: We went down with the train.

MM: With the train from Strasburg?

EF: Yes.

MM: You didn't have a car yet?

EF: No.

MM: I bet you got homesick?

EF: Yes, I did. Very homesick. You couldn't go out alone. Well, I do a lot of handywork.

MM: Still do today?

EF: Yes. I'm always busy.

MM: Wonderful. Did you learn that from your mother?

- EF:** Yes. Some of it.
- MM:** I know our German people from Emmons County have always been known for their handywork.
- EF:** My mother did a lot of knitting. She knitted stockings and scarves for the boys and the girls. That's where I learned it.
- MM:** Did your mother and father bring many things over from Russia? Did they bring any pictures or any kind of scarves or anything like that?
- EF:** I don't remember any. I don't think so. Well, I got my dad's picture downstairs. A big one.
- MM:** Now, did your folks, when they'd sit around sometimes at night and the neighbors would come over and so forth....
- EF:** They would play cards.
- MM:** When they would have some maistub or talk, did they ever talk about the old country? Did they talk about how beautiful it was in the Ukraine with all the vineyards and everything?
- EF:** Yes, yes.
- MM:** But, why did they come over to America? Did your folks ever say why?
- EF:** Why they came over? I don't know. On account of the war.
- MM:** Now, you were born over here already, but you said 4 children came along with your parents, on the ship when they came over to North Dakota. And of course, they came probably to New York, and then they came by the train. Did they come by Eureka, South Dakota? By the train to Eureka?
- EF:** I don't remember. I think it was Eureka.
- MM:** When you were a young child, how far were you from Strasburg? How far in miles?
- EF:** About 8 miles east.
- MM:** Did you get to town very often?
- EF:** About once a week or twice a week. We had to take the cream in.
- MM:** You got to go along?
- EF:** Sometimes, yah.
- MM:** That was always a treat?
- EF:** Yah.
- MM:** Where did you go in Strasburg? Did you always go to some of the stores? The Bazaar?
- EF:** Yah. Just walked around.
- MM:** But you never went to school in the town? Always in the farm school?

- EF:** Well, like I said, when I made my First Communion, I went to town for three months. That's where I was with Lawrence [Welk].
- MM:** So, you went to the Sister's school, but did Lawrence Welk make his First Communion with you?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** Oh, he did? Evidently, Lawrence made a his little later because Lawrence was a little bit younger than you are.
- EF:** Oh, yes. I made my Holy Communion out in the country church and he made his in Strasburg.
- MM:** Right. Did you ever get to know any of Lawrence's brothers and sisters?
- EF:** Oh, yah. Not real good, but I knew them.
- MM:** And you knew the parents too then?
- EF:** Yes, yes. They were in the store there all the time.
- MM:** So, Lawrence was a very shy young boy?
- EF:** Oh, yes. Very shy.
- MM:** Did you ever get to see Lawrence in life perform with the accordion? The orchestra?
- EF:** No. I hadn't seen that man for years and years.
- MM:** When did you see him last?
- EF:** Oh, I don't remember.
- MM:** But you did see him perform with the show? You still watch him today?
- EF:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** What makes you watch Lawrence Welk? Why do you like that show? What do you like best about it?
- EF:** Because I like his type of music and that I knew him before. He was just like one of the family. Those people were all different than they are now. They celebrated names days and played cards.
- MM:** You'd be there and the kids would get to go along to those names day parties?
- EF:** Sometimes.
- MM:** Lawrence would be there too with his folks. Then you guys would play too? What did you do?
- EF:** Played cards. We got to play our own games.
- MM:** What were those?
- EF:** Well, I don't remember.
- MM:** Later on then in your life, did you speak primarily German or English?
- EF:** German.

- MM:** Do you speak some German today?
- EF:** No.
- MM:** So, if we talked a little German today, you would understand me though?
- EF:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** [348?]
- EF:** Me? [348.]
- MM:** [349]
- EF:** [350-]
- MM:** I wanted to talk a little German because I wanted to hear your dialect. That is interesting to me, if they have changed.
- EF:** Well, it isn't high German.
- MM:** No. It's of course, our Schwabish Deutsch. Did you have your First Communion in German?
- EF:** Yes. We had a German priest that came from Germany. His name was Father Decker.
- MM:** He came from Germany?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** He spoke only German?
- EF:** He was out in St. Aloysius, on the farm where I was raised. I was one of his... pets.
- MM:** So, you had to do a lot of work at home, of course. There was a lot of work to do in the house? Do you think your mother had a real busy life, a hard life?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** Did your folks retire in Strasburg then?
- EF:** Yes. I was down there not too long ago and I was sick a whole week afterwards. Homesick.
- MM:** Is that right? That's interesting.
- EF:** I saw the house and church.
- MM:** The church is beautiful, of course?
- EF:** Oh, I was in the church and my friend Father Ekren, he was one of my friends when I worked down here in the parish house. He was assistant [priest] there at that time. He comes up once in a while.
- MM:** Father Leonard is real good to the community and they are so fortunate to have him because he is really interested in this German-Russian heritage. And Fr. Leonard, he also serves on the board of directors for the Welk homestead. We work together quite closely. He still has relatives in Germany that are German-Russians and they have come back from Russia.

- MM:** Let me ask you this Elizabeth, before I forget. As far as you know, did your folks ever talk about any one of your relatives who didn't come over from Russia? Did anybody stay?
- EF:** Oh, yes, yes.
- MM:** Would they be on the Fischer side or Mastel side?
- EF:** Mastel. On the Fischer side, no.
- MM:** But on the Mastel side. So there are some that didn't come over? Did you have correspondence with them through the years?
- EF:** I don't remember that.
- MM:** You were too young.
- MM:** Did you ever remember hearing of letters that would come back and forth?
- EF:** Oh, yah. Yah.
- MM:** You wouldn't know of their names or anything?
- EF:** No, no.
- MM:** That's something we have to discuss with your family. Because that's why we're doing a lot of work is with trying to find those relatives. Because they are writing to us and they are looking for the names. In fact, we have a name, we have had a letter from a Mastel and they don't know exactly any information from over here. So we have to put this together in some way.
- EF:** Well, what Mastel did you hear from?
- MM:** Well, I would have to look up the first name to find that out. But I made contact with some Mastels in North Dakota to find out and they weren't the same relatives. But we'll have to check into that. That's why I'm interested in your family history.
- EF:** There were 2 different Mastels down there where I was living. They were related from a distance.
- MM:** I forgot to ask you. Your grandparents on your mother's side and your grandparents on your father's side, did they stay in Russia? They never came over? You never knew your grandparents?
- EF:** I never knew them.
- MM:** They stayed over there. Did your mother ever say if she had any brothers or sisters that stayed?
- EF:** Not over here.
- MM:** I mean, that didn't come over from Russia. She had some brothers and sisters that stayed?
- EF:** Yes. They didn't come over here.
- MM:** But your father's, they all came?
- EF:** Yes.

- MM:** So probably, if there are any relatives over there, it will be on your mother's side? Children of her brothers and sisters. It would be your cousins that probably came. That could be.
- MM:** Do you remember your mother saying that some of her brothers and sisters didn't come to America?
- EF:** No.
- MM:** Was she the only one that came?
- EF:** I guess so.
- MM:** You never heard? Did you have any uncles or aunts over here? Down here in Strassburg? Did your father have any brothers or sisters? Remember?
- EF:** No, not over here.
- MM:** Your mother's side either? They came alone? That's very interesting.
- MM:** Did they ever talk about when they came over on the ship?
- EF:** Oh, yes. With the neighbors, the Krafts. That Mr. Kraft, he was reading the paper, the German paper. What was the name of it? We got the Staatsanzeiger.
- MM:** Der Staatsanzeiger.
- EF:** Yes. And he would come in the evening with that paper. Once a month I guess they got it, or once a week. It was too long ago and they would read it.
- MM:** And they would talk about it then a little bit. How it was coming over [to America]?
- EF:** Yah.
- MM:** The children, of course, your brothers and sisters, the older ones. When they came over, they were still babies when they came on the ship, I bet? They were pretty young yet.
- EF:** Yah.
- MM:** How many are still living in your family, Elizabeth?
- EF:** Just me.
- MM:** You're the only one that's still living? You're the last one? Did they all get to live such a full, long life like yours to the age of ninety-four [94]?
- EF:** Pretty good, yah. I'm the last one.
- MM:** So, you have fond memories of those earlier years east of Strasburg there, near the school and the church? I bet sometimes you can just see it like it's just yesterday, huh?
- EF:** Yes, yes. I was down there this last spring.
- MM:** You were down to Strasburg?
- EF:** Well, out there where I lived.

- MM:** Oh, at St. Aloysius? You went to the farm too?
- EF:** The farm is gone. The Fischer farm is almost gone too. But the church is there and the house is gone. Everything. The school is gone.
- MM:** But the memories are still there. You can see it as if it were just yesterday, huh?
- EF:** Oh, yes. They had a little store there when I went to school. By the name of Mastel. They were distant relatives of my folks.
- MM:** What was the first name? Do you remember?
- EF:** Thomas.
- MM:** Thomas Mastel. What was your mother's maiden name again?
- EF:** Nenninger.
- MM:** Did she have relatives that came over too?
- EF:** No, no.
- MM:** She was all alone?
- EF:** She was alone here. Well, yes. She had a sister.
- MM:** That came?
- EF:** By the name of Fettig. A weird name.
- MM:** What was her husband's name?
- EF:** Frank Fettig.
- MM:** They lived down in Emmons County too?
- EF:** Yes.
- MM:** Do you think your mother got homesick for the old country once in a while?
- EF:** I don't know.
- MM:** She never shared it with you?
- EF:** She did a lot of reading.
- MM:** She did a lot of reading, huh? Wonderful! German books?
- EF:** The Bible. I got the book down in my trunk. She had a big book. During Lent, she would sit by the lamplight and read out loud for us kids.
- MM:** Oh, beautiful.
- EF:** Yah. It was different than now. There was no TV.
- MM:** No TV, no radio and you had kerosene lamps too.

EF: And no radio.

MM: And there was no lights either? There was no electricity, right. What about the bathroom, did you have an outhouse? Did you have to go outside to the bathroom?

EF: Yup.

MM: Got a little chilly in the winter time?

EF: Yes.

MM: Anything else you'd like to say Elizabeth? What we're going to do after our conversation is, I'd like to look at a photo or two. If you have any of those old photos and we can reminisce a little bit about those. That always brings up some memories. Let's do that.

MM: Elizabeth, we are going to end our conversation today. It was a real pleasure to visit with you. And for me, it was very interesting because, as I mentioned to you earlier, I grew up in Strasburg and left Strasburg to go off to college in 1961, but of course that was way after your time. But I grew up remembering Lawrence Welk when he would come home to visit his sisters and family in the 50's and 60's and that's how we got to know the family. And then later on, I got involved with bringing the Lawrence Welk collection and all of his archives from California. Perhaps you know now that everything has been brought to the University in Fargo. We are also interested in memories and memorabilia, and items. And even the people that knew Lawrence Welk. This is probably the first time that I have ever talked to anyone that went to school and went to the Sister's school with Lawrence Welk, so it was real interesting for me. We always heard that Lawrence Welk was a shy boy [when] he was young and now I know it for sure, because you told me that.

EF: Yes, it is so. He would never get into trouble or anything. He was always kind of by himself.

MM: But you would talk to him once in a while?

EF: Oh, yah.

MM: Would you talk in German then?

EF: Yes.

MM: Not much English?

EF: No, just at school. But when we visited, we talked German.

MM: I want to thank you for our visit today on December 26, 1993 and I'm in Bismarck at the home of Elizabeth (Mastel) Fischer who grew up in Emmons County and has such fond memories at the age of 94. And I'm hoping that you're going to have a wonderful 95th [birthday] coming up pretty soon.

Thanks so much, Elizabeth