

Interview with Bertha (Zimmerman) Aman (BA)

Conducted by Joyce Reinhardt Larson (JL)

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- JL:** This is Joyce Reinhardt Larson, a volunteer interviewer for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University in Fargo. It is a pleasure to visit with Bertha Aman at her home here.
- JL:** Can you tell me your name, your date of birth and where were you born?
- BA:** My name is Bertha Aman, born June 3, 1910 and I was born in Romania in Russia.
- JL:** How old were you when you came here?
- BA:** Not quite a year. I was a baby.
- JL:** How old were your sisters and brothers?
- BA:** My oldest brother was thirteen.
- JL:** How many brothers and sisters came then?
- BA:** Well, there were six of us.
- JL:** Can you name them?
- BA:** Yah. There was Gottlieb, Israel, David and then my sister Amelia, and my brother Alex, and then I.
- JL:** Did they have any more children when they came to America?
- BA:** Yes, they had three children. There was Oscar, Ida and Jake.
- JL:** Where were they born?
- BA:** They were born down at Lehr, North Dakota. In McIntosh County.
- JL:** When they came from South Russia, did they come through Ellis Island?
- BA:** Uh huh. Yah. Someplace I have it [written] where my dad got to be a citizen and what the ship was and all. Ya, they landed in Ellis Island in New York, June 10. See, then I was a year old.
- JL:** Did they say anything more about the ship?
- BA:** [Reading from a document]. Was called the "Island of Tears". It was called that because a beloved family member was rejected or sent back and never to be reunited with loved ones. I don't see where it says the ship's name.
- JL:** But all of your family that came were accepted into the United States?

- BA:** No...
- JL:** The one wasn't?
- BA:** No. One had to stay back in New York because he had eye infection. The thirteen year old. No, it was not Israel. He would have been eleven years old [then]. Because they were all two and one half years or so apart. No, he was not permitted to go. It was Gottlieb, the oldest. Because of an eye infection, which was first detected in Bremen, Germany, the port city where they were to board the ship, Kaiser Wilhelm II. That was the ship, that's right. When the infection cleared up several weeks later, Gottlieb made the trip out to North Dakota alone.
- JL:** He did? So when your family got to New York, did they take a train out to North Dakota?
- BA:** Yah. They took a train out to North Dakota because my uncles, my dad's brothers were living there.
- JL:** Isn't it interesting that the thirteen year old could do that? I bet your mother hated to see him have to stay back.
- BA:** Oh yah, but my mother was so sick.
- JL:** Your mother was sick?
- BA:** Very sick on the ship. They didn't think they would get her over [here], and so was I [sick too].
- JL:** Seasick?
- BA:** Yah.
- JL:** So many people had that.
- BA:** Yah, so many people didn't make it. Like my husband's grandmother didn't make it. They lost her at sea. She was buried at sea.
- JL:** Buried at sea. How sad. But I know that it happened.
- BA:** Yah, it did.
- JL:** So they came to North Dakota. Did they have a homestead waiting here for them?
- BA:** No, no. The family left New York by train for North Dakota and my dad's name was Balthasar Zimmerman. He already had two brothers, Gottlieb and Conrad, living on farms near Lehr, North Dakota. They stayed with Conrad and Christine Zimmerman until they made a sod house on a farm about nine miles south and east of Lehr. See, that's where they settled. They didn't live in that house that we were living [in] when I remember. They had built a sod house on the land because them people were still there. They built the sod house a little ways off. About a half a mile over the land. They showed us sometimes where things were laying there yet. I asked them [about that].
- JL:** Then he bought the farm from somebody?
- BA:** Yah. They bought it from some people by the name of Lux, [Luchs ?]. Something like that.
- JL:** Then you moved into the house that they had?

- BA:** Yah, that fall yet. See that was in the summer when we came and they stayed with the uncles until fall. And then they built that sod house. Well, they lived in the sod house with my uncle there for awhile too. That's where my one brother was born, in that sod house. Oscar.
- JL:** Is that right?
- BA:** How sad it was for my mother.
- JL:** Did she ever talk about it?
- BA:** Well, I knew that she was homesick.
- JL:** You do?
- BA:** Uh huh.
- JL:** Did she wait for mail?
- BA:** Yah. The mail came, but that took months [to come] at that time.
- JL:** Who did she have to leave behind?
- BA:** Her parents and all her family, you know.
- JL:** So, none of her brothers and sisters came?
- BA:** There was one brother in Washington state, Gottlieb Wahl. That was the only one.
- JL:** So her maiden name was Wahl?
- BA:** Yah, W-a-h-l.
- JL:** Did they come from the same area in Russia?
- BA:** Well, as far as I know that they did. Although I looked at the German obituary and it says a little bit different. It wasn't the same country, but I mean it was a different county or something. I don't know just how it was there.
- JL:** They lived in villages there?
- BA:** Yah, they did.
- JL:** So your father's parents were left behind too? Where was that again?
- BA:** From Hoffnungstal, Bessarabia. South Russia.
- JL:** Did they ever talk about life over there?
- BA:** Not that I remember that they said much about it. Just what my brothers and sisters said.
- JL:** Were they farmers?
- BA:** They were farmers. That's why Catherine the Great wanted them. Because they were good workers and they could work up that land.

- JL:** And they were pretty successful.
- BA:** Yah. Some of my dad's relatives were real well-to-do. The one, I guess, was a millionaire. One of the uncles, I guess.
- JL:** Really? That was in Russia? In doing farming?
- BA:** Ya. They had a big farm and they had lots of hired help and so. He was kind of rude with his hired help.
- JL:** Is that what you heard?
- BA:** Uh huh. That he would have the whip after them if they didn't go ahead and do what they were told.
- JL:** Is that right? Interesting that that was told.
- BA:** Yah. It was interesting that it was told. And still, I suppose he was one that wanted to get ahead and get lots of [property of] his own.
- JL:** So, you had six brothers and two sisters.
- BA:** There were nine of us.
- JL:** How do you think your parents decided on children's names? Was there any special way in your family?
- BA:** Now like Israel. That's in the Bible and [also] David. I don't know about the others but [except] the youngest brothers Jacob and them. I remember when Ida was born. She was eighty years old now last Sunday, a week ago. I remember yet when she was born and that they asked us what we wanted to name her, and we decided on Ida. I was only four and a half years old so it's pretty hard to remember.
- JL:** Interesting that they asked the family?
- BA:** Yah. Well, we had to go and see the baby, of course. And usually there was a midwife and she helped along with asking and wanted to know. Of course, we were so bashful.
- JL:** Was the midwife a relative?
- BA:** No, no. Not at that time. I don't remember who she was. But later, when my youngest brother was born, I knew that lady. But she was not a relative. She was just a neighbor that they went and got her.
- JL:** So, all the kids were born at home?
- BA:** Oh, sure.
- JL:** And no problems with your family?
- BA:** No problems. Well, my three were all born at home too. But I had a doctor.
- JL:** A doctor came to the place, then?
- BA:** Yah.
- JL:** How old were you when you left home?
- BA:** I was seventeen. Young. Too young.

- JL:** What did you do when you left home?
- BA:** Get married.
- JL:** Right away you got married? Who did you marry?
- BA:** John Aman.
- JL:** Was he a neighbor there, then?
- BA:** He was a neighbor a few miles from us. I got to meet him at the school, I guess. Some doings at the school.
- JL:** They were farmers in that area, too?
- BA:** Yah.
- JL:** How many children did you and John have, then?
- BA:** Three.
- JL:** What are their names?
- BA:** Well, the oldest one was Larry, Lawrence. Then the daughter, Lillian Gladys, and then Rupert James. That's the one living in Moorhead [MN]. Larry, the oldest one passed away in 1983.
- JL:** What did you and John do then?
- BA:** Well, we farmed at first. But our oldest son worked for Western Union. He was in the service and after he came home from service.... Well then, after awhile..., I don't remember. He was young when he went into the service. He had only graduated from high school, but then he worked for farmers and that. After he got older, he went out to work. He worked in Fargo then when he met his wife. He did carpenter work and different things. Whatever he found at that time. It wasn't so plentiful.
- JL:** So none of your children took over the family farm?
- BA:** No. We didn't have a farm then. Well, we did farm but Larry didn't want to farm and so he went into the Western Union for telegraph.
- JL:** So in those days, with your parents now, how was property inherited? In your parents or grandparents generation? Do you know anything about that?
- BA:** All I know is [that] they had land over in the old country. How they got that, [I don't know]. Usually, they had a dowry for women, but would that be for a man too?
- JL:** Probably not.
- BA:** Well, they all got something from home. Like my folks at home, now they gave them horses and different machinery so they could start out.
- JL:** Was it pretty equal between the boys and girls?
- BA:** Well, they tried to. See, like when I got married, I got some cows and my furniture to start out [with]. What you had to have. So that's the way, [what] went on. Just what [the parents] could do.

- JL:** Did the older sons have a different inheritance than younger sons?
- BA:** Well, that I don't know. They lived closer to home and I moved away from home. So they could go home and mother would bake bread and they got different things like that. Meat and things that the folks had. I didn't get it because I was too far away. So I lost out on some of that.
- JL:** You had to do that yourself, didn't you?
- BA:** Yah. Look out for myself.
- JL:** Of course, by the time you got married, you knew pretty well how to make bread, I'm sure.
- BA:** Well, that's what I had to learn.
- JL:** Oh, you had to learn it?
- BA:** Oh yah. I had to make bread because my oldest sister got married and my mother wasn't well. Then I had to mix bread and wash clothes and everything.
- JL:** So when you started out, you knew how to do all that?
- BA:** I knew how to do all that. School wasn't necessary for girls anyway. And boys neither. Just so they knew some arithmetic.
- JL:** Did you go to school? How many years of school did you have?
- BA:** I didn't pass the seventh grade. Then I was taken out of school because my sister got married and my mother was sick. So my dad went to the school superintendent and took me out. I loved school and I would not have had to take all the subjects either if I would have gone on to eighth grade.
- JL:** But he needed you too bad at home?
- BA:** Yah. They needed me too bad at home. So what could I do?
- JL:** How about the boys? Did they get to school more than you?
- BA:** No. Some of the boys only had third grade and my one brother Alex only had third or fourth grade.
- JL:** How did you feel when you were taken out of school? Do you remember being unhappy?
- BA:** Well, I felt kind of bad because I wanted to go to school and, at least go through the eighth grade. But then, I didn't dare say anything.
- JL:** Why not?
- BA:** Well, you didn't tell your parents what you preferred.
- JL:** You knew it wouldn't happen anyway?
- BA:** You knew it wouldn't happen. But they needed me.
- JL:** You could see what was happening at home?
- BA:** Yah. My mother couldn't do the work, couldn't clean house, couldn't bake bread.

- JL:** What was wrong with your mother?
- BA:** When I was five years old, she lost a kidney and she was never well. Later on, she was diabetic. So she was not well.
- JL:** So she needed all the help she could get at home?
- BA:** So, it was alright in a way. I learned to do a lot of things. I learned to cook and all that which I didn't do before, when my sister was at home. Then I helped outside more.
- JL:** Yes. So, some of the things you had to do at home. What did you enjoy the most as far as chores that you had to do?
- BA:** I loved to clean house or do varnishing or painting. I loved to do that. I didn't like to feed pigs. I wanted to learn how to milk cows. I cried [because] I wanted to learn to milk cows when I was nine years old. After I was married, I said, "I wished I had never learned to milk!"
- JL:** Everybody learned how to milk cows, I think. You were all needed.
- BA:** Yah, we were all needed.
- JL:** How far were you from town?
- BA:** Eight miles.
- JL:** So you sold cream for your income?
- BA:** Yah. They sold cream and fed the skim milk to the pigs to sell them and [also to] raise our own meat.
- JL:** Do you remember the butchering?
- BA:** Yah. I remember butchering very well. But I never stuck around when they butchered the pigs because they squealed too much.
- JL:** Did you do that [butchering] too when you got married?
- BA:** Uh, huh. We usually went together with some of my husband's relatives. They lived there where we lived on the other side of town. So we went together.
- JL:** So, if you didn't do some of the work that was expected of you, how were the kids disciplined in those days?
- BA:** I did my work because you were in trouble if you didn't!
- JL:** What kind of trouble?
- BA:** Get a spanking.
- JL:** From dad or mom?
- BA:** Dad. I never got a spanking from my mother. I had one spanking from my dad. After I got older, I understood that I had it coming.
- JL:** So, was your dad strict?

- BA:** He was pretty strict.
- JL:** Did you raise your family not as strict as your parents?
- BA:** No.
- JL:** You didn't believe it that?
- BA:** No, I didn't.
- JL:** What made the men so strict in those days?
- BA:** Well, that's the way they were raised.
- JL:** They really were, weren't they?
- BA:** Yes, that was common. You didn't talk back to your parents.
- JL:** But then, you sure couldn't express yourself, could you?
- BA:** No. You never could give an opinion.
- JL:** That must have been frustrating.
- BA:** Well, it was hard. I don't think that all the parents were like that. Well, the one uncle we lived with, I don't think they were that way. They were a little bit different. Like when we went to school, we couldn't talk no English. And then we had to learn the English. If we said anything in German, then we had to stay in for recess. But at home, we were not supposed to talk English.
- JL:** Just the other way around?
- BA:** Yah. Then my aunt got to be older and she was in the nursing home in Bismarck. We went up to visit her and she said, "she don't understand why they were so foolish, that they didn't learn with us when we went to school." The English language. My dad had to learn to get to be a citizen, but my mother never [did]. I never heard her say an English word.
- JL:** I know in those days, they sometimes had moonlight schools. Were you familiar with that?
- BA:** What do you mean by that?
- JL:** Well, I guess they would have school in the evening. You know, for the adults to learn English.
- BA:** Not around there. Not that I know of. Unless they did in town or something like that.
- JL:** Well, no. I think it was in country schools. Well, some people just didn't want to give up their [German] language.
- BA:** Well, no. That's why they didn't want to give it up when the churches started to have the English. The older people didn't want to give their's up.
- JL:** You remember that?
- BA:** I remember that. To myself I thought, "why not cater to the young people [so] that they come to church, instead of giving up the church when they go on their own? Why not do things for the young people to

keep them coming to church?" Instead, they [the older members] wanted it their way, because they were the boss.

JL: And they lived in America. Didn't they feel that, now that we're in America, we are going to learn the English language?

BA: Well, I don't know how they felt about that. They really should have felt that way. That we are Americans now and we have to learn American things. We still can work our way but still do it the American way.

JL: Now in your family or the people you were around, they didn't feel that way, that you know about. They wanted to really hang on to the old traditions.

BA: Yah, the old traditions. They were strict about that.

JL: That was common then.

BA: Oh, sure. It was not just my family.

JL: Oh, I know. But there were some though. I talked to one man and their family must have been different. But my family was like yours, too. In that area where you were raised, were there other nationalities around you?

BA: Well, not right around us. But [by] my husbands family, there were Jewish people around.

JL: Oh. How did the German-Russians feel about other nationalities? Like the Jewish people?

BA: Well, they got along with them, you know. But not that they thought much about them. They thought they were not workers like they [the Germans] were.

JL: So, you think that's the main reason?

BA: I think that was the main reason. They didn't keep things up like the German people did. That was one thing that they kind of felt they were lower or something. Which shouldn't have been, but that's the way it was.

JL: Were those Jewish people farmers?

BA: Uh huh. There were some farmers. But we had one man there in Lehr, in the store that was a Jew. Ashley had some Jews that had stores.

JL: What church did you attend?

BA: At home, I attended the Baptist church. But my folks were Lutherans. I was seven years old when they turned over to the Baptist church.

JL: Why did they change?

BA: Well, my uncles were there and they went to the Baptist church. In the Zimmerman family, they were Baptists in the old country already, but my folks were Lutheran. Because they went to the church that John's folks went to first.

JL: Oh, a little Lutheran country church?

- BA:** Uh huh.
- JL:** Then a few years later, they joined the Baptist church? Did they have to drive a little farther to that church then?
- BA:** No, it wasn't quite as far.
- JL:** Was Baptism and confirmation important in your family, for you and the [other] children to become Baptized and confirmed?
- BA:** Not at that time, as I remember it. No. Some of the older ones were baptized, but I don't know if they were confirmed. I got confirmed after I was married. Because there was no Baptist church around where we moved to or anything, then I got confirmed in the Lutheran church. As far as I understood, I was baptized as a child. But I'm not too positive.
- JL:** Is that right? When you had younger sisters and brothers born, you had three of them. Were they Baptized, that you remember?
- BA:** No.
- JL:** So, religion maybe wasn't really important to your family?
- BA:** It was important to them. That was one thing. We had our Bible reading in the morning and the prayers all the time.
- JL:** Every day?
- BA:** Every day. All the time. At harvest time or anytime. Even if it was short [the prayer], but it had to be [said].
- JL:** Like at the breakfast table?
- BA:** Uh, huh.
- JL:** Did your dad read from the Bible then?
- BA:** Yes. My dad read from the Bible and we had prayer and mother bet [prayed]. Yes, that was always.
- JL:** Before you began a days work?
- BA:** Yes. That was very necessary.
- JL:** You kids had to sit and listen?
- BA:** Oh yes. We had to sit then and listen and learn. We went to our Sunday School class [too]. The later years then, when I was still going, they had half in English and half in German. Then we could read it in English [also], but we did not have an English Bible at home at that time.
- JL:** Do you still know German?
- BA:** I can talk it but I can't read it too well. Like if we go to any place where there is German singing, I can't hardly follow it, because I don't know the words anymore.
- JL:** You kind of lose it?

- BA:** You lose it. And I'm not among German people here at all. Mostly Norwegian and Swedes and they talk Swedish. My neighbor, she talks Swedish sometimes. And I say, "Well, if you talk Swedish, I'll talk German and see if you understand that." We tease each other. But she was married to a German man so she does know a few German things that he always said. I said, "You can't criticize the Germans because you were married to a German." She must have seen something in the Germans to get married to one.
- JL:** How about holidays in your family? Were they celebrated in a big way? What was Christmas like?
- BA:** Well, my kids asked me this Christmas [about that]. My grandchildren and great grandchildren asked me what I got for Christmas [then]. I said, "I remember one year when my sister and I got blue velvet bonnets for Christmas gifts." And on Christmas morning, we had a soup plate full of nuts and candy and figs and dates, which was a treat. And probably an orange, which we didn't get all year long. Apples and pears and grapes, that we had. My dad would buy apples in the fall for school and all that.
- JL:** But oranges were a treat?
- BA:** Oranges were a treat. I don't remember bought'en bananas in the house. We must have had some to put in jello when I got older. When I made jello myself.
- JL:** Was there Santa Claus?
- BA:** Well in school, when we had programs, there was a Santa Claus, but they didn't have a Santa Claus suit. You took an old sheepskin and turned it inside out. You know, that looked [awful]. That scared the little ones. That I remember!
- JL:** Like when you had a Christmas program in school, what was it like?
- BA:** Well, we had to say pieces and things. We had to say a verse and sing. Sometimes, three of us girls that were in the same grade, we'd sing together. I remember one year, we sang "Red Wing," and we had paper dresses on and they were pretty short. I felt so embarrassed.
- JL:** Paper dresses?
- BA:** Crepe paper. I don't know why, but I always loved to be in programs and learn poems. I loved school. I could memorize and all that. Now, I look at the phone number and turn around and it's gone.
- JL:** Sounds to me like you could learn pretty easily?
- BA:** Yah. That's why I liked school.
- JL:** Did you sing at home? Was there music in the family?
- BA:** Yes, there was music in the family. My one brother, Israel, the second oldest, he took organ lessons after we got an organ and my dad played accordion.
- JL:** He did!
- BA:** Oh, yes. He played some real Russian dance music for us. And hymns. That I remember real good, when I was a kid. I loved that on Sunday mornings, when I looked nice in the summertime, we would sit outside before we went to church. Dad would play the accordion and we'd sing hymns. That I enjoyed.

- JL:** Did you sing along?
- BA:** Oh, what I knew. Then I would sing along. When they would have company, like when my uncles were there and neighbors, then they would stand around the organ and sing.
- JL:** What nice entertainment.
- BA:** Yah. Otherwise, the front door was closed. We were in the kitchen. We could be seen but not heard. You know, that was the way [it was then].
- JL:** How did you feel about that?
- BA:** Well, we didn't know any better. You know Joyce, when you are brought up that way, you felt it had to be that way.
- JL:** But I talked to my Dad and he said, "I just wish we would have been allowed to be with the older folks, because I would have learned so much more."
- BA:** Why sure. I know they laughed so much. They must have told some jokes, because they laughed so in the front room. But we couldn't be in there.
- JL:** When the singing was going on then, too?
- BA:** Then the door was open, but we had to be quiet.
- JL:** You couldn't sing along?
- BA:** Well, that was the older people that sang then. Later on, it was not that much anymore.
- JL:** Do you remember any of those songs?
- BA:** Oh, ya. They are all the old time songs that we'd sing then over here in the midweek service. All the old hymns.
- JL:** Name some of those hymns.
- BA:** Oh, goodness. I'd have to have a book to read the titles.
- JL:** Some of those Russian songs. Do you know any of those?
- BA:** No. That was just dance music.
- JL:** What made you think they were Russian?
- BA:** Well, my dad said they were Russian. What did they call them...? Circle dances or something, really fast.
- JL:** So that was not a German tradition at all?
- BA:** No. That was not German. But they told us that they danced in Russia.
- JL:** They did?
- BA:** Yes. But we were not supposed to dance after we were Baptist.
- JL:** Took some of the fun away, then?

- BA:** Oh, we went anyway and we danced at home. When we had company, and when somebody came along that could play the accordion. Then my youngest brother played the accordion from five years old on. He could hardly see over dad's accordion. He learned to play.
- JL:** Did some of them have lessons?
- BA:** Well, the one brother did. Israel, the second oldest one had lessons to play the organ.
- JL:** Where did they go to take the lessons?
- BA:** Well, they had to go to Lehr to a lady that gave them.
- JL:** And your mom and dad were willing to do that? To take time out of their busy lives?
- BA:** Yah. Well, he was old enough to go by himself. Drive the team at that time.
- JL:** So they encouraged that?
- BA:** Oh yah. Because they liked music. Oh, they could really sing, those older people. They sang real nice. I always enjoyed music myself.
- JL:** Do you wish you could have played yourself?
- BA:** Oh, yes. Many times and even now, I wish [that]. Now, my other brother Alex, the one next to me, he learned by himself. He played the mouth organ and then he played the organ. He had an organ in his later life. He'd sing. I have some of the tapes of his that [on which] he sang.
- JL:** Was there more encouragement for the boys to learn some music than the girls?
- BA:** Well, it seemed that way. Although one of my cousins, one of Uncle Conrad's girls, she played the organ in church. She learned at the same time when my brother went to Lehr.
- JL:** Do you remember any folk healing methods that were used at home? What was used for a doctor in those days?
- BA:** You were your own doctor. Just put a warm towel around your neck, rub it with camphor or something. Whatever you had on hand and put a warm cloth around or lay on the water bottle. I laid on the water bottle a lot because I always had earache when I went to school. When it was so cold. My hands and feet got cold and then I'd have an earache at night.
- JL:** So that was the remedy and that helped?
- BA:** That was the remedy and it helped. When it got warmed up, then I could sleep. Otherwise I would lay there and cry.
- JL:** Did they use any plants for healing?
- BA:** No. The only thing that I really know was camomile tea. That's still in use. You can buy that in the store. You probably bought it, too.
- JL:** I like it. We always picked it at home.
- BA:** My sister still has it and you can buy it in the bag.

- JL:** It's convenient in the bag. What did you use it for?
- BA:** Well, for drinking when we had upset stomach.
- JL:** And besides that, it tasted good, didn't it?
- BA:** Yah, it did. But my mother used peppermint. "Green drops" it was called. It had another name but we bought it. We bought it sometimes [here]. When White Drug was up here and there was a guy from Ashley working there. they had it too. That was good for upset stomach, too.
- JL:** Are you familiar with "heil blatter"? What it is..., it's a leaf from a plant in the garden that was used by some people for healing.
- BA:** What would it have been?
- JL:** I would like to find out. One person told me about it but she didn't know what the plant is.
- BA:** The only thing I knew they used was horseradish leaves for when they made pickles. Cucumbers were washed nice and the [horseradish] leaves that were not all chewed up and broke up and they used them for the pickles. It gives the pickles flavor, 'cause with the horseradish and all. It kept them nice and crisp.
- JL:** I never heard that. Did they use dill too?
- BA:** Oh yah. See that [dill] was laid on the bottom before they put the pickles in and then in between [also]. Like if they had a big crock or a big barrel. They made big barrels of cucumbers. Then it was laid on top too for a cover 'cause the leaves had to be washed off. Because they would turn kind of white and a scum on there. So they washed the leaves off if they were any good and they would put them back on. Because there would be a scum on there when it would start to work [ferment].
- JL:** Were they good pickles? Did you like those pickles?
- BA:** Well I used to, yah. But I don't use much pickles because of an ulcer in my stomach.
- JL:** How about some of the German foods that you made?
- BA:** Like strudels, dumplings, knephla. I don't make it. I like it, but it's all heavy food and it's not for my stomach.
- JL:** Did you make a lot of kuchen, then?
- BA:** Oh, yah. That was a must. Every week.
- JL:** Kuchen right along with the bread, huh?
- BA:** You made the sweet dough. Sometimes you made some out of bread dough, but it's a little bit tougher to cut and so on.
- JL:** What other German pastries are there?
- BA:** Oh, kuechla. You know what that is? Now, they said the Indians make it from bread dough. They made those stretch kuechla.
- JL:** Indian tacos.

- BA:** Well, fried in fat. You make them from raised dough. They make them up here at Trollwood when they have the German's day. Haven't you been up there when they make them?
- JL:** You mean..., they call those the Indian tacos?
- BA:** No, they are the German kuechla.
- JL:** No, I haven't had them up there. My mother made them.
- BA:** Ya. My mother made them and a whole dishpan full. They had to make such big batches of dough, of course. My sister-in-law, my oldest brother's wife, she never made them and oh, he just loved them! He'd come home when mother would make them.
- JL:** Was that a sweet dough?
- BA:** No. That was from bread dough and you would make it out [form them] into little buns like. Then you would make your fat hot and then you let them raise a little bit. Then you stretch them, and when you put them in the fat, they would get all bubbly.
- JL:** That sounds good, doesn't it?
- BA:** Yes. But if I made them, we always ate too many.
- JL:** What did you make them with? Like I remember having them with sausage.
- BA:** Well, with prunes is what we had them with. With sweet things, because they were [also sweet]. Well, I suppose you could have them with sausage, but we didn't have them with sausage.
- JL:** But it was more of a dessert?
- BA:** Yah, it was more of a dessert. You know, because they were nice and crispy and bubbly.
- JL:** Then you ate prune sauce with them?
- BA:** Yah, and sprinkle a little sugar on them. And then they made..., what do they call them? Fattiman. My mother made some kuechla, but they had quite a rich dough. Made them and cut them with a cookie cutter that was scalloped. Then they made slits and turned them kind of in.
- JL:** That's Norwegian when you call them fattiman.
- BA:** Yah. But my mother made them and she was not Norwegian.
- JL:** I wonder...? Was that was called schlitz kuechla?
- BA:** Yah, it was.
- JL:** So, that was a rich dough?
- BA:** Yes. Similar to a doughnut but not as rich. But it was similar. More like a raised doughnut.
- JL:** When you had weddings and festivities like that, what kind of foods were brought to those kind of affairs?
- BA:** Well, they were more the kuchen and kuechla.

- JL:** Let's say...? An everyday dish at home, a week night maybe. What was a common meal?
- BA:** Well, at suppertime, I don't know. But, like for dinner at noon, we would have sauerkraut and pork. You know, pork ribs or what we called pork chops. They would even have them, but they would be trimmed out pretty much. Because the meat was used more for sausage. So they had not as much meat on it as we have a pork chop. Then they would cook those backbones. They were sawed up.
- JL:** Were they put in the oven for a long time?
- BA:** No. They were cooked on top of the stove in one of those black iron kettles.
- JL:** And mixed with sauerkraut?
- BA:** Simmer them for quite a few hours until the meat was nice and tender and the homemade sauerkraut. I could eat big plates full and I never had any trouble.
- JL:** Not then, huh?
- BA:** No. But I can still eat sauerkraut and it doesn't give me trouble.
- JL:** Did you have mashed potatoes with it?
- BA:** Mashed potatoes or any other kind of potatoes. It didn't matter.
- JL:** But always a potato with that, then?
- BA:** Uh, huh. So, that was an everyday meal. Then mother made some..., well, it's corn meal mush. She made that sometimes. Then if there was some leftover, she'd slice it and fry it. But we always used bacon or grease from ham. It was always pork. There was no bought'en fat. I never know that we had the oil or any bought'en stuff.
- JL:** When you fried those schlitz kuechla then, what kind of fat was used?

End of tape-side one

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Beginning of Side Two

- JL:** It sounds like you think that education is pretty important for everybody.
- BA:** Very much so. I really do believe education is important. I always said to my kids and grandkids, "it's something nobody can take away from you." "Go to school as much as you can."
- JL:** Not only the boys, right?
- BA:** Yes, girls too. If you don't teach [that] when you have a family.... Say you have two children and they start school. Then you probably want a job and you need an education to have a job. To work yourself up and things.
- JL:** So, do you feel that anything you would have done would have been easier if you would have had more school?
- BA:** Very much so.

- JL:** You had to learn on your own?
- BA:** Yes. I did alterations and all that on my own.
- JL:** Yes. Now, you worked at deLendricies? What did you do there?
- BA:** Yes. Alterations and tailoring, mostly men's clothes. I do like men's clothes better than women's clothes. Women's have too many curves and too much different material. They got such different kinds of material, where'as men's clothes was more heavy material and easier to work with.
- JL:** How long did you work there?
- BA:** About twelve and a half years. And then I retired at sixty-two. Then I went over to Moorhead, [MN] to Northport Clothier's and worked in the men's alterations and helped up north at their other store. Then I took some in at home. After I didn't work full time any more, I took some in at home. 'Cause I had my customers from the store.
- JL:** I believe it. It's very nice to have someone that you can call that can do a few things.
- BA:** I don't do it anymore. There is some ladies that I did some things for here, but I don't like to make a habit of it. My eyes aren't what they used to be and I haven't got the patience anymore.
- JL:** Do you still have your sewing machine?
- BA:** Yah, two of them. A portable and my old one yet, my Singer. I don't want to give them up as long as I can do any. I do go over to church to do quilting on Mondays. I didn't go this week. They had it again. They started again after Christmas, but I didn't go because it was so cold yesterday morning.
- JL:** You learned to sew at home?
- BA:** Yah.
- JL:** Did your mother or you do quilting?
- BA:** I have done some quilting now since I'm retired, but I didn't do [that then]. No, I don't know that my mother did [either]. No, she just sewed. Bought quilts and then she made covers for them with material. Sewed it together to make covers. So you can take the covers off and wash them.
- JL:** How about other things? Like German sewing and textile type things? Are you familiar with bobbin lace?
- BA:** No, not that. Well, I did some tatting and so did my older sister. And I did some hairpin lace. I knew how to do that, but I didn't make much of anything.
- JL:** Is that German?
- BA:** Well, I don't know. My husband took some wire and you had to have some wire that would bend. Then you crochet around the wire and took it off. But he made a wire for me. I have that. I lost my tatting shuttles. I had two of them and I lost them after my sale, because I didn't have my things sorted out when I moved. And I was in the hospital when they moved my things around, so I lost some things through that. They were packed in other boxes where I didn't think of it at the time either.
- JL:** I believe it. So you made clothes for your family too, I suppose.

- BA:** Yes. That's where I learned to sew. Because I would look in the catalogs for patterns and then I'd cut them out on newspaper or whatever paper I had. I would make a pattern and sew for my kids. I made clothes for my daughter when she went to school from old coats. I made coats over.
- JL:** Is that right? That was the beginning of your alteration days?
- BA:** Uh huh. To make do with what you had and to patch overalls. In them years, during the depression, not only my kids wore patched overalls, but other people did too. I got compliments from the teacher [on] how nice I patched them.
- JL:** Is that right? Nice small stitches?
- BA:** Yah. That had to be just so. What patching is done now is done with a sewing machine.
- JL:** Or iron on?
- BA:** Yah, ready made patches. Like overalls and all that, you'd take..., when one patch was worn through, you'd take that off and put a newer piece on from the back of some pants and make a bigger patch.
- JL:** Who handled the money in your family? Do you remember that? Did you mother get some money to spend?
- BA:** No. She bought stuff in the store and dad would pay [for] it. I don't know that she got money to keep. Well, she wouldn't write a check [because] that would have been English and she couldn't do that. But he would pay [for] whatever they needed. Whatever she would buy in the grocery store.
- JL:** So that was kind of traditional, that the men would handle the money?
- BA:** Yah, they'd handle the money.
- JL:** Was it that way in your marriage, too?
- BA:** No, not that much. Well, my husband, at first when we had checking account, he did write the checks. But not that it was a must. But we changed [that], so I could write checks too.
- JL:** Did children get allowances at home in those days? Did you?
- BA:** No, no. We got for the Fourth of July or if there was something that [when] we went to in town. Then we'd get a quarter. For the Fourth of July, we probably got a dollar. Well, then you could buy ice cream cones and candy for a nickel.
- JL:** You could buy quite a bit then.
- BA:** Yah. It was different.
- JL:** What about firecrackers?
- BA:** Well, that was not my line. But the boys liked that. The bigger ones helped them with that then.
- JL:** What did you do for the Fourth of July?
- BA:** Well, went into town for the parade and hear the band play and walked around to see everything that was going on.

- JL:** So, it was a big celebration?
- BA:** Oh, yah. And we looked forward to it. And we could go if we had the corn hoed by that time. By the Fourth of July time, the corn was about knee high and it had to be hoed. It was not great big fields like they have now, but it had to be hoed. Because we raised corn for the pigs. So it had to be hoed before that time.
- JL:** That gave you a real goal, didn't it?
- BA:** Yah. That had to be done.
- JL:** Did all the kids have to hoe?
- BA:** It was the kid's job until they got older. Then they complained to dad, they didn't want such a big cornfield. They wouldn't hoe it.
- JL:** What did your dad say to that?
- BA:** Well, he wouldn't plant that much, but the field got pretty big anyway.
- JL:** So they dared tell him, "Dad, I don't want to do this."
- BA:** Then you had to husk it in the fall by hand. It was so cold after it was frozen stiff, that your hands froze. You were so stiff that you could hardly do that.
- JL:** Did you have a corn bin then, where the cobs went?
- BA:** Well, there was always something to put them in. If nothing else, it was the header box. Do you know what a header box is?
- JL:** Well, kind of. I remember my mother saying she never liked a header box.
- BA:** I didn't either. I passed out on there, one time. I got sun stroke.
- JL:** Is that right?
- BA:** It was too hot. My dad had a black man for a hired man at that time.
- JL:** He had a what?
- BA:** A black man. And that black man went home. It was so muggy and so hot, he said he couldn't stand that. So he went home, but my dad kept on. He wanted to get that field cut, so that if hail would come or something. Then I was on the header box and my brother [too] and the one brother was driving the horses and my other brother was there [also]. Then I passed out because it was just so terrible hot.
- JL:** So even the hired help couldn't take it, but the kids still had to do it?
- BA:** Yah.
- JL:** How did he ever hire a black man? It must have been unusual at that time.
- BA:** It was unusual at that time. I don't know that he stayed either. I don't remember. But he went home. He said he could not take that.

- JL:** Where was home for him?
- BA:** Well, to our home. He stayed there, but he slept out in the grain bin. In the lean to by the barn. He slept out there. They fixed it up for him.
- JL:** He was just a summer helper then?
- BA:** I don't know that he was there very long. If it was just that one day, or if that's all I remember.
- JL:** That's interesting.
- BA:** Well, we had dark men. My husband hired dark men. But that wasn't too unusual at that time anymore on the farm. We had two hired men that were black ones. They were good workers. The one was an older one and he just had a few teeth in front. Our oldest son was probably two years old and he would look at him and he would gag. It wasn't nice.
- JL:** He was being honest.
- BA:** He was being honest. I guess he couldn't help it.
- JL:** What about marriage in those days? Did parents talk to you girls or boys about marriage and what to expect?
- BA:** I was as dumb as you come.
- JL:** You were, huh? No training from home in that area?
- BA:** No. There was nothing explained or anything.
- JL:** I think that's just the way it was.
- BA:** Well, I just feel it was not right. I think you have to know something about a woman and what goes on in your life when you grow up and start to change and all. You should have some things explained or something.
- JL:** Well, this has been so interesting, Bertha. I sure thank you for your time.
- BA:** Your sure welcome. It's been nice talking to you.
- JL:** Maybe I'll think of more things to ask you and maybe come back.
- BA:** Well, you can come back and visit anyway. Come for coffee or something.
- JL:** Okay.

END OF SIDE TWO