

Interview with Gerhard Ens (GE)

Conducted by Robert A. Freeman (RF)

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- RF:** I am sitting with Gerhard Ens here in Calgary, Alberta Canada. It is the 29th of July, 1995. I am going to work with Gerhard and we're going to see if it's going to be interesting to go through some of these questions. So, I'll just ask the questions...say anything.
- GE:** I most likely don't know everything of what you want to know.
- RF:** Of course, that's right. And I think these are just suggestions, you know. Just some lines to think about. Because they start out with things, of course, just to establish. Okay? It asks... What is your name?
- GE:** Gerhard Ens.
- RF:** All right. When were you born?
- GE:** The third of February, 1928.
- RF:** '28? Yeah, just after I was.
- GE:** Yes.
- RF:** Where were you born?
- GE:** In Neuendorf, Ukraine.
- RF:** Ah, Okay. Where is Neuendorf?
- GE:** That is about fifteen kilometers west of the Dnieper. By Saparoshe.
- RF:** Okay, now what was your father's name and what village did your father's family come from?
- GE:** My father's name was Franz Ens and he was born in Noyendorf.
- RF:** Noyendorf also?
- GE:** Yeah.
- RF:** And when and where did he die?
- GE:** I don't know.
- RF:** What do you know about him?
- GE:** All I know is he was thirty-five or thirty-six...
- RF:** Ya?

- GE:** And he was taken away under Stalin... you know, at that time.
- RF:** And he was just taken away?
- GE:** Yeah, we never heard anything from him.
- RF:** You never heard anything?
- GE:** No...no letter, no nothing.
- RF:** Did any other men get taken away at the same time?
- GE:** Oh yeah, there was about thirty or some taken in our town, ya.
- RF:** And what do you remember about it?
- GE:** I remember that only one came back. He was my uncle. He was married to my mother's sister. His name was Heinz Dyek. He wouldn't sign it; they just about killed him there.
- RF:** What, wouldn't sign what?
- GE:** He wouldn't sign it - that he was guilty, you know. I think they tortured him there for about a year, I think. He didn't sign it so they finally had to let him go and he had to promise them not to say anything of what happened there. And he didn't say anything, probably to his wife, ya, but to us you know, to the rest of us he didn't say anything until the Germans were there during the war. Then he said it, then he told the story.
- RF:** He told the story?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** Do you remember them coming...soldiers coming to your house to take your father?
- GE:** No they were NKVO there was no KGB. At that time it was NKVO.
- RF:** It wasn't the soldiers?
- GE:** Oh, no, it was the...
- RF:** The police, the secret police?
- GE:** Geheim Polizei. Secret police.
- RF:** So they came to your house, and what happened?
- GE:** Ja, Ja. They always would come at night. At night they would come and they would say - when your wife wanted to pack everything - he says, 'Don't worry, don't pack anything. He is going to be back tomorrow.' Never came back. That was it.
- RF:** Do you want to say anything more about that? Do you recall anything that you would like to add? Did you hear anything later at all?
- GE:** No, nothing. I heard nothing more.
- RF:** Were any other relatives taken at the same time?

- GE:** Yeah. My oldest brother was taken, too.
- RF:** Your oldest brother?
- GE:** It was Cornelius.
- RF:** Oh, that's when Cornelius was taken?
- GE:** Yeah, he was taken on my birthday. On the third of February, he was taken.
- RF:** And did Cornelius... did you hear from him?
- GE:** No, never heard from him again.
- RF:** Not from Cornelius either...? All right. What is your mother's name and what village did she come from?
- GE:** My mother's name was Maria Dyck, and she came from Neuhorst. That was about ten, fifteen kilometers to the west. It was a small town.
- RF:** Okay... And when and where did she die?
- GE:** She died here in Canada about twelve years ago, I think.
- RF:** And she is buried in Brooks?
- GE:** Yeah, she's buried in Brooks. She died of old age, 93 years old.
- RF:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- GE:** Well, I had two brothers and four sisters, I think, altogether. And a half-brother.
- RF:** So Cornelius was the oldest?
- GE:** Yeah. He was my half-brother.
- RF:** Oh, he was a half-brother.
- GE:** Yeah.
- RF:** Alright, who came next?
- GE:** Susan.
- RF:** She was a half-sister or full sister?
- GE:** Yeah... no, no. They are all half-sisters.
- RF:** Oh, all half-sisters?
- GE:** Then Anna, then Helen, and then my sister - my real sister - Mary, then Frank - he was my brother too, you know - , then me.
- RF:** So you were the youngest?
- GE:** Yeah, I'm the baby.

- RF:** How did your parents decide on the children's names?
- GE:** Usually since there was only one name, you know, like Gerhard -
- RF:** No middle name?
- GE:** No. They would take, usually, the oldest boy, when he was born; he adopted the father's name. And the oldest girl came after the mother's name, you know.
- RF:** Oh, is that the way it works?
- GE:** Yeah, that's why Cornelius...he was the oldest, actually. But [my father] thought he could get some more boys, you know, so he named [Cornelius] after his brother.
- RF:** His brother. I see...
- GE:** Yeah, Cornelius Ens was my father's brother.
- RF:** I see. Did the name show importance in some way?
- GE:** I don't think so.
- RF:** Yeah, except that Cornelius was named after your father's brother. Okay, it asks about middle names and nobody in the family had middle names.
- GE:** No, no. For some reason nobody did.
- RF:** Well, did your mother tell you anything about the old country in South Russia? [Laughs.] Well, you were there...
- GE:** Yeah.
- RF:** So this question isn't relevant. What do you remember?
- GE:** I probably was too young to have known much about it, you see. (A089).
- RF:** Did you have any grandparents living when you were there?
- GE:** Yeah.
- RF:** Did you see them ever?
- GE:** Oh, yeah. I had a grandfather.
- RF:** Did you?
- GE:** His wife had died already. But, I think she was dead already, well, long time before I was born.
- RF:** Was it your father's father or your mother's father?
- GE:** It was my mother's father.
- RF:** So he was Dyck.
- GE:** Yeah.

- RF:** Okay, what do you remember about him?
- GE:** Well, he didn't live in Neuendorf. He lived in Neuhorst, you know. That is where my mother came from. All I know is that he never remarried. Since my mother was the oldest, he told her he would let her take over the family. She raised all us kids.
- RF:** She raised the kids?
- GE:** Yeah, there was ten alike fifteen kids. (A097)
- RF:** Did you ever visit that place?
- GE:** Oh, yeah...we visit it lots. Actually, you had to walk.
- RF:** Did you?
- GE:** Oh yeah.
- RF:** You walked?
- GE:** Yeah, you walked all the time. What else would you do?
- RF:** Ten miles?
- GE:** No, no, it wasn't that far.
- RF:** Oh, it wasn't? All right.
- GE:** I would say about three or four kilometers.
- RF:** Oh, three or four kilometers? Well, that's still a long way.
- GE:** Oh ya.
- RF:** Okay. [Can you] describe Neuendorf a bit? Do you remember what it looked like at all?
- GE:** Ya. It was nice big town, nice houses, mostly brick.
- RF:** Mostly brick?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** And did it have...how many people would you say?
- GE:** About a thousand seven.
- RF:** A thousand people?
- GE:** Oh yeah, a thousand and seven hundred, I think.
- RF:** That's a very big town.
- GE:** I think that was the biggest town there, you know. Neuendorf was a big town.
- RF:** And did it have a church in the town?

- GE:** Oh yeah, big church.
- RF:** What kind of church was it?
- GE:** Mennonite church.
- RF:** It was a Mennonite church?
- GE:** Yeah.
- RF:** Okay.
- GE:** Two-story church.
- RF:** Oh yeah. And what did it look like that you recall?
- GE:** It was made not from brick, but the big pieces of stone.
- RF:** Stone? Stone church?
- GE:** Yeah, stone church...with the bigger ones, you know, not like the bricks you see here.
- RF:** Interesting. And did it have any kind of stores, or a school near the church?
- GE:** No no, the school was about a kilometer away from the church. Because we lived there, every day we would walk a kilometer to school and back.
- RF:** Did the school serve people in other villages, or just people in Neuendorf?
- GE:** Just Neuendorf, but once we got a higher education, then they came to Calgary and then to town to learn.
- RF:** I see, okay. Now what kind of terrain was it around Neuendorf? It was near the river. Near what river, what was it?
- GE:** Well, it was just a river...more or less just a creek, you know.
- RF:** Oh, it wasn't...
- GE:** Ya. There was water there all the time. Not a huge river, like you see the Volga or something like that.
- RF:** That was not the Dnieper...that was quite a ways from it.
- GE:** Like I said, about fourteen or fifteen kilometers.
- RF:** I see. All right. And when you say that they had big brick houses...anything else that you remember of what it looks like?
- GE:** It was a nice town, you know.
- RF:** Yeah, nicely kept up.
- GE:** And they brought the delegation, like from France, or Italy, you know. The communists, they were always bringing to our town because it was nice there, you know. They would never bring them to the Ukraine villages. Then they'd say 'That's how we live', you know.

- RF:** I see. So they brought them to a German village.
- GE:** Oh ya.
- RF:** And said that's...
- GE:** And they were a communist delegation. And I don't think from...I don't think from Germany.
- RF:** So, they were trying to make believe that...
- GE:** Oh ya. That's how we lived.
- RF:** That's how they lived, huh...? So, when you were coming into the town from the outside, say from your grandfather's town, what would you see when you came into town? What did it look like?
- GE:** Well, There was a windmill there. They broke it down later on. The same windmill that they got in Orloff right now? They broke it down, I think, when I was three years old. So they must have broke it down in about '31 or '32. They took it down.
- RF:** Took it down? But it was a working mill?
- GE:** Oh ya.
- RF:** And what did they mill? Was it for milling grain?
- GE:** Ya, that's what that was.
- RF:** So they made their own flour?
- GE:** Ya. Oh ya.
- RF:** In town?
- GE:** Yeah. And there was a big steam mill there, too. It was farther down. They took that down, then they made a high school out of that, you know.
- RF:** And what did they have...I suppose it was a steam-run mill?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** It was a mill for flour and things? And it was run by steam. And they stopped that, and built a school. What about any of your ancestors, grandpa or something...do you remember them ever talking about wanting to go back to Germany?
- GE:** No, I don't think so. Nobody talked that much. Everybody was scared.
- RF:** So you didn't really dare talk about it?
- GE:** No, no.
- RF:** Because if you had talked about wanting to go back, it would be unsafe.
- GE:** I remember there was a guy; he had a blacksmith's shop. Naturally, they took it away. But, he was a German citizen and he went back to Germany in thirty-something. He came back to visit there, and they

locked him out. 'Cause at that time, I think in '29, they closed the border. Nobody could go or come. So then, lots of people came to Canada in the 20's.

RF: When your father was taken away, it sounds like you couldn't even talk about it, because it would be dangerous. So what happened to you? What happened when your father couldn't-

GE: I was so young then, you know.

RF: You don't remember what...

GE: No.

RF: How did you... Where did you stay? Did you stay in your own house?

GE: Ya, and my mother had to go to work. That's what they did. There was fifty or sixty men taken away in our town, and the women had to work...to make a living.

RF: Your father was running a farm?

GE: Ya, before.

RF: Before.

GE: When they were taken over there-

RF: Then the women had to run the farm?

GE: No no, there was no more farm.

RF: Oh, they took it.

GE: It was all collected by that time.

RF: Oh, by that time.

GE: Oh ya. It was in '28 or '29. That's when they took all the farms away already, you know. Collective, you know, everything was collective. You had to go and work there, your horses were gone, all your machinery was gone, all down there and you had to work there.

RF: Now, did your father work there?

GE: Ya.

RF: He worked there until he was taken away... Do you know if your family received letters and things from Germany when they lived there?

GE: No. No, I don't think so.

RF: You don't recall?

GE: I don't think we had anybody in Germany.

RF: You didn't have...?

GE: We had uncles here in Canada.

- RF:** What about life before the communists took over? And how was property inherited? In other words, did it come down from father to...Who would get it after a death?
- GE:** Most likely the youngest boy. He would get it, and he would have to take care of his farm for the rest of his life. I mean, that's around there, that's how it was.
- RF:** Yeah, that's what I understand. That's the life. And the older boys would have to be out on their own.
- GE:** Yeah. And they were all married.
- RF:** Had their own (families).
- GE:** And so the boys got it and, of course, each child did not inherit equally because the youngest one got the farm.
- GE:** Yeah well, since I was born in '28, I don't know too much about it, you know, because nobody did own anything by that time.
- RF:** Yeah, you would've gotten...
- GE:** But the land was all in collective, and you worked there.
- RF:** And you would've gotten the land.
- GE:** Most likely, ya.
- RF:** Because you would have stayed and took care of your father and mother... Now did you speak German as a child? Of course you did...
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** And did you know what dialect you spoke?
- GE:** It was a Low German dialect, it was Low German.
- RF:** It was so-called "Low German"?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** What other names did it have? Was it like Schwabisch? Or was it...
- GE:** No no, Plattdeutsch.
- RF:** It was Plattdeutsch?
- GE:** Yeah. If you wouldn't know good German, you would only know... you would only catch about half the words, you know.
- RF:** Because it was so different. Like my German... But now, did your people come from the low country in Germany?
- GE:** No, we came from...well, let's see... Friesland. That's where Menno Simon was.
- RF:** Of course, of course.

- GE:** And from there, we came to around Danzig. And then from there, we emigrated on the invitation of Queen Katherine the Second... She was German, and she knew how good all the German farmers, and then she let in anybody that was for freedom of religion. No going to war, and so we went there.
- RF:** Do you know if the whole group of Mennonites went together to form Neuendorf? Or how did that work?
- GE:** I don't know exactly how that worked, you know. I don't think I ever heard that. Nobody came from there. They all was born in the Ukraine already.
- RF:** Sure. By the time you came along.
- GE:** Ya. Well, even my parents were born in... Even, I think, my grandfather was born there.
- RF:** Yeah. Well, what did you do as a small child? Did you have chores and things you had to do?
- GE:** Well, when I was six or seven years old, I went to school already. And summer time. There was no fences there, no barbed-wire fences. I was herding calves, you know for the collective. I had to watch so they wouldn't go in the grain and stuff like that.
- RF:** So you had to work for the collective.
- GE:** Oh yeah, there was no such thing as a limit to work. I worked there in the summertime.
- RF:** That's right, you never worked there when it was...it was communist before you were born.
- GE:** Oh yeah. I was born in '28, and in '18 or '19, there was communism there already.
- RF:** So already the collectives were established before you were born.
- GE:** They started later, ya, that's right. But they started later in Ukraine. They started in the '20's in Russia.
- RF:** The '20's, I see. So what kind of chore did you just not like to do at all? What did you dislike doing as a child?
- GE:** Hmm...I don't know.
- RF:** Hard to say?
- GE:** It was long ago.
- RF:** Yeah, you don't remember the bad things.
- GE:** No, no.
- RF:** Yeah.
- RF:** If you didn't do the work which was assigned to you, how did they discipline you? The boys that didn't do the work...what kind of punishment did they get?
- GE:** I don't think they got much punishment. They did what they had to do.
- RF:** But you say that you were scared to death, anyway.

- GE:** [Laughs.] At that time we were so young, you know, we weren't scared much. The older people were scared.
- RF:** Yeah. When did you start raising rabbits and things?
- GE:** Umm... In... '34 or '35.
- RF:** '34 or '5?
- GE:** Ya. Once my brother and me were big enough, you know.
- RF:** Yeah. After your dad was gone, you had to-
- GE:** Ya. Well, even after that, we had no other meat.
- RF:** So you were required to bring meat to the market?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** Not to the market, to the collective.
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** There was a collective that required it?
- GE:** Ya. You had to bring so many pounds of meat.
- RF:** To the collective?
- GE:** Ya. (A291.5) Say you had one cow, and you had to bring so many liters of milk there.
- RF:** Liters of milk?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** Hmm. Well, let's see... So you went to school, and your first school was – you were able to stay in a German school?
- GE:** Yeah, we learned two years with all German.
- RF:** Two years?
- GE:** Then the third year we went to school, it was all Russian. Like you know, there was one half an hour, weekly, that was German, you know.
- RF:** Only one half-hour?
- GE:** Yeah, and one half-hour was Ukrainian, the rest was all Russian. And there's quite a bit of difference between Russian and Ukrainian, you know.
- RF:** Yeah.
- GE:** Because some people think it's the same.
- RF:** Oh, no.

- GE:** The Ukraine language is closer to Polish than it is to Russian. You see, alone when you say... In Ukraine you say Papier. And in Russian you say Bumata. And in Polish and Ukraine, you say groshi, you know. And in Russian, you say gayne. That's "money".
- RF:** So, different words and terms.
- GE:** Completely different words. There's a whole bunch.
- RF:** Oh yeah. Did you learn to speak Ukrainian too?
- GE:** No, I never...well, what do you learn in half an hour a week or...you know, you don't learn. I never learned it. Everybody spoke Russian. Yeah well, everybody did, like I say - four hours, or five hours when you went to school, (A315.5) everything's Russian.
- RF:** Oh yeah. Now tell me about this collective. Was there a central place where you had to take things, or how did that work?
- GE:** It worked like...our town was so big that seven brigades, ya know, whatever you were closer to - it was (A320.5), you know. And farther down things were was so big, that some villages had seven brigades your brigade and that's where you worked.
- RF:** And who did you report to?
- GE:** Well, we went down there in the morning. We went down there, and they'd tell you what to do.
- RF:** Who ran it?
- GE:** There was a brigadier.
- RF:** A brigadier?
- GE:** Ya
- RF:** So he was an – Was he an army person, or...?
- GE:** No no no, he was one of the town leaders. They voted him in, I think, or something like that.
- RF:** So he was somebody from your town?
- GE:** Ya, I think so. Yeah.
- RF:** Was he German?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** He was German?
- GE:** Ya. He was uh...
- RF:** He was assigned to that?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** Was he considered one of your people, or was he considered as, like, an enemy?

(A331.5 to A335.5 is blank)

RF: (A335.5) Mennonite people. About that time, was the church stopped?

GE: Ya, there was no more church.

RF: They stopped the church?

GE: Ya. I think in about '31.

RF: About '31? You were very small.

GE: Ya.

RF: When they even stopped the church?

GE: Ya.

RF: So by the time you were young, the church building was used for something else?

GE: Yeah, in the summertime. In the summertime was kindergarten, you know. Because they had to put the kids someplace, because the women had to work. They had to work, because men were gone.

RF: Took them all away.

GE: Ya, they all had to work.

RF: So did your mother work in the collective too, or did she...?

GE: Yeah, she worked in the vegetable garden. They had a vegetable garden and that's where she worked.

RF: So, how long did you stay in school? Were you staying in school until the Germans came?

GE: Ya.

RF: Then you were switched to a German school?

GE: No, there wasn't anymore – no more school.

RF: You didn't?

GE: There was hardly any teachers there, and the teachers that were there... they had first and second graders there, you know. And ninety percent of the time, there was German soldiers in the school anyway.

RF: Yeah, living there?

GE: Ya.

RF: So, what did you do when the German soldiers were there?

GE: Uh... I worked.

RF: The collective was still operating?

GE: Oh ya. It was in the same thing.

- RF:** It was the same one?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** But it was
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** Bringing food to the German side?
- GE:** Oh ya.
- RF:** Interesting... So you went from one dictatorship to another.
- GE:** [Laughs.] Yeah well, we didn't consider that it was a dictatorship. We didn't know... Didn't know that it was a dictatorship.
- RF:** It was just nice. It was just -
- GE:** All the soldiers themselves were nice, you know. They were just ordinary soldiers.
- RF:** Yeah, they were just... Okay... Now about church and so on, but that was pretty well not operated in when you were around. So, were you alive when it was your – You were in Neuendorf when your grandfather died?
- GE:** No. He died already after he came here.
- RF:** After he came here?
- GE:** Ya. He died in... Most likely in '45 in January, you know. That's when we were on our way.
- RF:** What country... It was –
- GE:** No, '44.
- RF:** Oh, he was still in –
- GE:** No no, it was '45 already. Because the war was over in the summer, you know.
- RF:** And he was staying in his village?
- GE:** No, he was there in our house. We had a big house, you know there in Poland, and he stayed in our house.
- RF:** Now where was this – This was in Poland?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** So he, when you –
- GE:** Well, it was at that time in Germany, is when where... Ya. It was Warthegua then that they called it.
- RF:** But you went back with the German troops? And the grandfather went with you?
- GE:** Yeah.

RF: So you all went together?

GE: Yeah.

RF: And you were all living in Poland?

GE: Yeah. And we couldn't – Our wagon was too small to hold us up, so they had – there was an older guy, you know - so they put them in a different nice wagon, you know. And then my sister, you know, says she wanted to come in that wagon. And later on she wanted to come anyway she could, you know, in our wagon. He said no, and there was hundreds of wagons, and we lost them, and we never found them.

RF: You lost your grandfather's wagon?

GE: No, no.

RF: Your sister's wagon?

GE: No no, the grandfather, the grandfather went on ahead. We lost it. There were hundreds of wagons. They were all loose. All around, you know. We lost sight of it we never found it. Neither the wagon, or my grandfather.

RF: Oh, I didn't know that. He never got there?

GE: No.

RF: He never got west with you?

GE: Ya.

RF: He never got out of Russia with you? He just disappeared?

GE: Oh no, no, he came back in Westfol I mean not in Westfol. That was in Warthegau – Oh, he came to Germany with us.

RF: Oh, he came to Germany?

GE: Ya.

RF: So, then what happened after that?

GE: Well, in '45, right after Christmas when the Red Army so was close, we all ran. Ran farther west, you know.

RF: Farther west?

GE: Ya.

RF: And that's when you lost him?

GE: Ya, that's when we lost him.

RF: Oh my. He and your sister together?

- GE:** No no, my sister got back. But what she tried to, after that, she went there once to see him and found him comfortable in a nice wagon. But there was more people in the wagon so he wanted to stay there. But the next time she couldn't find him anymore and we never found him again.
- RF:** So when you say "wagon", this was a horse-drawn?
- GE:** Yeah, they all were horse-drawn.
- RF:** Horse-drawn. So you were all going west?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** With a horse-drawn wagon?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** What about religious ceremonies and so on in Russia? Well, you didn't do them.
- GE:** No.
- RF:** When Christmas came along, what happened? Did you have any special –
- GE:** No, we had... First of January, we had the same thing what they had on Christmas. Christmas tree and everything, and they called the guy Jeoeskomarova, which means Gross Father that's frosty. What call here Santa Claus. He's the very same thing. Everything, just a week later. And if Christmas didn't fall on Saturday or Sunday, we had to go to school and the people had to work.
- RF:** But you could still celebrate Christmas?
- GE:** Well, we couldn't.
- RF:** In the communist time?
- GE:** No. Well, celebrate in the parlor. We didn't go to church or nothing, you know –
- RF:** But you – You could have a Christmas tree in your own home?
- GE:** No, well, we didn't have – There was no – We never had a Christmas tree.
- RF:** No?
- GE:** There was no pine there, you know. But some reason, there was very little wood, all the fruit you could eat. And no other trees either.
- RF:** So, you were now living in, of course, a communist country in the early 30's. And your father was gone and then your mother was working in a collective, and so on. And you say when Christmas Day came along, you'd have some kind of celebration in your house?
- GE:** Well, a little bit we usually invited sisters, you know, and stuff like that...for dinner, you know. In fact, we never had to throw the Bible away, but you had to hide it. They could throw you in jail for having a Bible. We always had a Bible.
- RF:** Okay, so then it was different when you got back to Germany?

- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** Of course, when you were back in Germany, it was wartime?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** So you were lucky to still be -
- GE:** Ya, oh ya there was a church there.
- RF:** Let's see, when you were still living in Russia, when you were living in communist times, did they have arranged marriages at all? Or how did you...did you see any people get married?
- GE:** Ya, people got married, but they didn't get married in church. They had to go to the city hall.
- GE:** And they put you there together, took you there for five or six minutes for that you know.
- RF:** Ah. And were the husbands and wives chosen by the family, or...?
- GE:** Oh no, no. We never chose them...I don't think so.
- RF:** You don't?
- GE:** No.
- RF:** Okay.
- GE:** That's why, when the Germans came in, our church was open again and there was a whole bunch of people then that got married there in church. However, you had already one or two or three kids, you know, and they still got married in church to make it, you know, to make it real.
- RF:** Sure.
- GE:** They figured it wasn't anything, you know. Put two together there, and that was it.
- RF:** That's right... Well, what about German foods and so on? Well, it sounds like you didn't have much food at all.
- GE:** Well, I'll tell you one thing, I was born in Russia in peacetime. And when we went to Germany during the war as aliens, you know - we had no citizenship there yet - we ate better there during the war than we ate in Russia in peacetime. Not that you wanted to eat exactly, but you had enough to eat so that you never went hungry, you know.
- RF:** Yeah, no food... It said that what Stalin was trying to do during the 1930's was to starve all the people in the Ukraine. Is that...?
- GE:** Ya. Actually ya, that's the way it was, because they didn't want us first. Ukraine was the last one he got under his thumb, you know.
- RF:** So he really wanted to starve -
- GE:** Oh ya, he wanted to -
- RF:** Everybody?

- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** But, did he pick the Germans especially, or was it the Ukrainians, or everybody? Who got...?
- GE:** I think everybody, I think.
- RF:** He took all the food from any farmer, huh?
- GE:** Ya well, he didn't take the food, but he never gave you any, see?
- RF:** Yeah, well I mean, the collective took the food?
- GE:** Ya, and they shipped it away.
- RF:** Right, that's what I've heard about taking away the food; so there was nothing left for you to eat.
- GE:** That's right.
- RF:** So, did they talk about the fact that they were being starved?
- GE:** Well, I don't think so.
- RF:** You were pretty young?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** You didn't know anything about the politics?
- GE:** Ya. I mean, the only thing that really kept us alive was that we had lots of sugar beets. We had... And we ate sugar beets.
- RF:** You always grew sugar beets?
- GE:** Oh ya. And we made...well the rabbits, we fed them sugar beets in the wintertime, you know. And then we made - in the fall - we made sugar beet syrup from sugar beets. I had about five or six pails full of syrups for the winter, you know. And that's what kept you alive. I know we had to go out of there, you know, and there was a syrup stand there, and I would always take a spoon there, you know. So I went by there, that's why she had a stand there.
- RF:** Sure, so everybody could take a spoon.
- GE:** Oh ya, sure. They were big ones, you know. And well, it didn't taste – I probably wouldn't drink it now you know, because I get it better.
- RF:** That was wonderful.
- GE:** Oh a. Well sure, it kept you alive, you know.
- RF:** So, how did you do that? Did you boil the sugar beets?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** And then maybe the beets got fed to the rabbits, and then you ate the sugar? How did it work?
- GE:** No, no. You pressed.

RF: Oh. You had a press the sugar beets?

GE: Ya, you made the sugar beets, but fine, you know.

RF: Yeah, you ground them?

GE: Ya. And then, we had something there, a kind of a press. And that was on there, then you put the big rocks on there, and that's on the board. And here we had this bag with the mash in there, and that's how we pressed it out of it.

RF: Squeezed the juice out?

GE: Ya, squeezed the juice out.

RF: Did you have to cook the juice?

GE: Oh ya, then we had to, you know we never had one of those, you know, it was as long as this a bout this wide and that deep. That's where we...all we had was straw (in fuel) that's what we cooked it in. You had to cook out two thirds of the liquid.

(Side A ends, Side B begins)

GE: And then you had to watch, right at the end. You had to watch; know it was too thin. And then of a sudden thought it was too thick. You had to watch that because if it was thick, then it was no good. You really had to watch that.

RF: Was it in the buckets?

GE: Ya.

RF: Did you have to keep that hidden?

GE: No.

RF: It was just down in the basement or someplace?

GE: Ya.

RF: So, at this time, was there any music or entertainment? It doesn't sound like it..

GE: No.

RF: No music or anything in the 30's?

GE: No... Well, there was some music and entertainment. I was too young.

RF: But they did teach songs in the school when you were going to school?

GE: Ya.

RF: German songs?

GE: No, the ones that were in seventh grade it was all Russian songs.

RF: Do you know what kind of songs they were? Were they patriotic songs?

- GE:** Oh, ya...mostly patriotic. International.
- RF:** Oh, yeah, I bet you know that in Russian.
- GE:** No, it was so long that somebody translated that into German. And I knew even words in German of that, you know. It's so long – the same as most of them Russian songs, like the Wolga Boat song. You must've heard about that. I think that's fifteen versus.
- RF:** Is that right? Fifteen versus?
- GE:** Oh, ya, that's a long song.
- RF:** [Laughs.] Did you have to learn that kind of thing?
- GE:** No.
- RF:** Not in school, huh?
- GE:** You have to learn a lot of poems, you know.
- RF:** Oh, you learned poems?
- GE:** Oh, ya, the teacher would give you poems, and then you'd take it home, and then in two days time you'd have to say it.
- RF:** These are Russian poems?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** I bet you remember some of those even now.
- GE:** Ya, the songs and then the poems. Some of them I remember.
- RF:** Did you have any favorites that you liked?
- GE:** Ya...songs.
- RF:** Songs? I could never remember anything like that. How about, was there a community meeting place for young people? But, you were too young...
- GE:** Ya, they had a Serbut, they called it. It was a big place. It was right by the downtown. That's where you could go.
- RF:** What kinds of things were downtown?
- GE:** Well, by this time in the 30's, they had six trucks and they added a brick building and would put the trucks in there.
- RF:** A place for trucks? What would they use the trucks for?
- GE:** Well, to haul everything, you know...grain and everything.
- RF:** This was for the collective?
- GE:** Oh ya.

- RF:** I see. So this was a garage for the trucks...they repair them and everything.
- GE:** Ya. It was right there by the city hall.
- RF:** So they had a city hall. What else did they have downtown?
- GE:** The Serbud was downtown. Well, we had no industry actually.
- RF:** Nothing else down there?
- GE:** No.
- RF:** Any place to buy things?
- GE:** Ya, there was a store to buy things. There was hardly anything to buy.
- RF:** Can you recall any games that you played when you were a child? Did you play card games or -
- GE:** No, I don't think so. I don't know of anybody that had cards; they couldn't buy any cards. Well we played, sometimes, a little soccer you know.
- RF:** You had a soccer ball?
- GE:** Ya, we had a soccer ball.
- RF:** Was it organized at all?
- GE:** No, no. It was just the boys...we'd get together.
- RF:** Did you have any boys your own age?
- GE:** Oh ya.
- RF:** Did you ever see any of those? Did they ever get out of Russia?
- GE:** Oh, ya. They all came out. I don't see any of them no more because -
- RF:** Where did they go?
- GE:** All over Canada, and a whole bunch went to Paraguay, you know - the ones that had nobody here to... no relative or somebody to take them out here. They went to Paraguay.
- RF:** Is that right?
- GE:** Ya. In Paraguay anybody could go to Paraguay, but here to Canada, if you had something wrong with you, they wouldn't let you into Canada.
- RF:** But you could go to Paraguay?
- GE:** Ya. There, anybody could go, but not to Canada. You had to be healthy.
- RF:** Have you ever had any kind of letters from those people that went to Paraguay?
- GE:** Oh, ya. Not me but my mother, because one of my uncles, one of her brothers, went there to Paraguay. He, later on, came to Canada. One uncle came here to Canada, and after he was here so long, then he

made an application and got him out of Paraguay. Then he came here. He's dead now but he came down to Canada.

RF: So did he have children that came, too?

GE: Oh, ya...a whole bunch. He had six or eight...

RF: Now they're all in Canada?

GE: Ya, they're all in Canada.

RF: Do they live nearby?

GE: No, mostly around Vancouver.

RF: They're farther west?

GE: Ya, my uncle came here to Alberta for about four or five years. Then he went down to (B075) and bought himself a berry farm, you know, a strawberry farm. Then he moved down there after he had enough money. Then he brought his brother from Paraguay then. They had a whole bunch of kids, eight or nine after.

RF: So those people you see when you go to Vancouver.

GE: Ya.

RF: So do you remember any stories they told when you were a child, like fairytales and things? Did they tell stories that they had been told by their parents? Or... the family was broken up and you didn't have that type of thing?

GE: No.

RF: So what did you do in the evening when you came home from school and your mother came home from the collective?

GE: Well, there was a lot to do. She only worked in the summer time actually.

RF: Did you work at home at all?

GE: Well in the summertime, when she was working, she came home at noon all the time, you know. So I had the water boiling, whatever it was, when she came home. She used it to make lunch, you know. Then, she lay down a little bit. I washed the dishes and everything.

RF: What sort of thing could you have for lunch?

GE: Not much.

RF: Sounds like more sugar beets.

GE: Ya, something like that.

RF: Could she bring some things from the collective sometimes?

GE: No.

- RF:** Because it sounded like the collective was a farm.
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** So there would be farm things that you could get, but I guess she couldn't pick them.
- GE:** Well we had a garden where we could grow everything.
- RF:** Different vegetables?
- GE:** Ya.
- RF:** I see. So you had lots of different things but no meat to speak of, except your rabbits. Were your parents or grandparents superstitious? Did they have superstitions?
- GE:** I don't know.
- RF:** You know, sometimes they say you don't step on a crack in the sidewalk, and break your mother's back.
- GE:** Ya, or the black cat runs in from of you can't walk underneath a ladder. I don't believe in that stuff at all.
- RF:** No. Did they have that sort of thing?
- GE:** Oh, no. I don't think so. I don't think they even knew about them before we came to Germany. [Laughs.] Or even here to Canada I think.
- RF:** So what about any kind of medicine. Did they have some kind of special healing techniques?
- GE:** Well, it was so close to the Dnieper and there were so many mosquitoes and they were all Malaria carriers. Three summers in a row I had the Malaria. And then, they would give you quinine.
- RF:** Ya.
- GE:** And that is the bitterest stuff that you can imagine, because it was clear! I was talking to a doctor once and asked, 'what did you do with the quinine because it was so bitter?' They coat it. And if they ran out of pill, then they have powder with that. That was worse yet! And you took that taste in your mouth the whole day, then you have to take it again. At least in the summertime, when the cherries were ripe, you took a cherry and you put it there, you know, and swallowed it. [Laughs.]
- RF:** So you have to take quinine here too, huh?
- GE:** Oh, no.
- RF:** No more? Oh, I thought it lasted a lifetime.
- GE:** Well, they say you can't give blood. That's what I have been told because I was sick at one time, you know.
- RF:** So after Malaria, it doesn't bother you anymore?
- GE:** No. The third time you got it one day, then it would stay away one day, then come back again. When it'd come back, first you'd put as many blankets on you and you were still cold. You were shakin' like a leaf. And then you got hot. And then you'd take them all off and you were still sweatin'. And then you got a

headache. And then that would last 'til about two or three o'clock in the afternoon, and then it was over. Then, for a week, you could hardly walk. Then, the third summer, I was getting it every day.

RF: Really.

GE: Yeah. It must've been in '36 or something. I got it every day. Quinine wouldn't help anymore and we had no doctor. There was no doctor in our town but there was one nurse. And Mom came home at noon and borrowed a wagon. I couldn't walk anymore. She borrowed the wagon and she had to drag me on that wagon for about a kilometer or so. And there was this thing there. I was so skinny – all too skinny! Here on the buttocks, it was the only thing. So she gave me a needle there, and the next day she gave me a needle there. It hurt! And from then on I never got the Malaria again.

RF: Do you have any idea what she gave you?

GE: I don't know. That helped, whatever she did.

RF: What year was that, that you got the shot?

GE: I would say about '36 or '37.

[End of Tape]