

Interview with Sister Reinhardt Hecker (RH)

Conducted by Michael M. Miller

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Annunciation Priory, Bismarck, North Dakota

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MM: It is November 8, 1993, and it is a pleasure for me to be here at Annunciation Priory in Bismarck. This is Michael M. Miller, the Germans from Russia Bibliographer at North Dakota State University in Fargo. And I'm here with Sister Reinhardt Hecker and it was a pleasure Sister that we had a chance to meet you earlier in October of 1993 when Peter Hilkes from the East European Institute was here in Bismarck and spoke at the University of Mary. And at that time I thought it was important that we come back because we want to be sure and visit with Sister Reinhardt who was born in the former Soviet Union.

First of all Sister, give me your full name, date of birth, and where you were born?

RH: I was born in Russia at München [Beresan Enclave, South Russia], March 14, 1901.

MM: And your name was Sister Reinhardt Hecker?

RH: No, it's now. My name was Minne.

MM: How was that?

RH: Minne Hecker.

MM: How do you spell that?

RH: M-i-n-n-e.

MM: That was the full name?

RH: That was my..., that was my [name then]. But when we entered the convent, [then] we get different names.

MM: Right. So your baptismal name Minne? Was that shortened from some other name?

RH: Wilhelmina.

MM: Wilhelmina. Yes, of course, for St. Wilhelmina. And you were born on what date?

RH: March, 1901.

MM: 1901, March. What was your birth date, March...?

RH: Fourteen.

MM: March 14, 1901?

RH: Yes, correct.

- MM:** And you were born in the village of München which I think was located near Odessa?
- RH:** About 40 miles from Odessa.
- MM:** 40 Kilometers?
- RH:** Yes, yes. And the next village was Rastatt, that was the next village. It was an area just half [way] between where the next village started.
- MM:** Right. Now the village of München, was that primarily a Catholic village?
- RH:** That's all Catholic. There were no Lutherans with us and no Russians were allowed to live in that village. Germans kept it [the village] by themselves.
- MM:** Right. If you were born in 1901 and you left at the age of thirteen, did you speak only German?
- RH:** Well, we took Russian in school. But we had German teachers and they did not insist on us speaking Russian. So when the children went out to play, everything is German.
- MM:** But in the classroom, it was...?
- RH:** In the classroom, only [except] for the Russian language [lessons], we could speak German. The rest we had [was] reading, writing, arithmetic, and all that. That was all in German.
- MM:** All in German. So you had German teachers?
- RH:** Ya, we had German teachers.
- MM:** Let's go back to the village and talk a little bit about your family and so forth. What was the name of your father?
- RH:** Leonard. [Leonhard]
- MM:** Leonard Reinhardt?
- RH:** Leonard Hecker.
- MM:** Excuse me, Leonard Hecker?
- RH:** Yes.
- MM:** Leonard Hecker?
- RH:** Yes.
- MM:** And did he..., did he grow up in that village too, of München?
- RH:** I think he did. He did. Because he had to go to the army, he had to put [in] four years. He was the youngest of his family and he had to put four years in the army.
- MM:** Now, do you recall how old was your father when..., excuse me. When was your father born and in what year, do you recall?
- RH:** I wouldn't know, but my mother told me. He was twenty six when they got married.

- MM:** Now, what the name of your mother?
- RH:** Mother was Mary Eve Scherger.
- MM:** Her maiden name was Scherger?
- RH:** Scherger.
- MM:** And they met in the village of München?
- RH:** München.
- MM:** Do you recall your grandparents? Your closest?
- RH:** I remember my dad's parents. And I vividly remember when they died. And I remembered my mother's mother, not the dad. The dad died very young, her dad.
- MM:** Right. What do you...? You don't by chance remember the names of the grandparents?
- RH:** My dad's father was George.
- MM:** George Hecker.
- RH:** I don't know what the mother's name was.
- MM:** What the grandmother's name was?
- RH:** No. Last name, I don't know. [Magdeleen]
- MM:** How about for your mother's parents?
- RH:** My mother's dad was John Scherger. [My mother's mother's name was Anna Mary]
- MM:** How do you spell that Scherger?
- RH:** S-c-h-e-r-g-e-r. Scherger.
- MM:** And they grew up...?
- RH:** They grew up in that village [of München].
- MM:** Right. The village had, of course, all German families.
- RH:** All German people.
- MM:** Do you remember by chance any of your neighbors?
- RH:** Yes. There were some family by the name of Nuss, N-u-s-s, Nuss. And then some family of Heck, H-e-c-k. They were all around there.
- MM:** Did any other families of those families that lived in München come to America at the same time that you did, to North Dakota?
- RH:** No. We were the last ones out from that village.
- MM:** Why was that the case?

- RH:** See my dad was visiting in this country the year before.
- MM:** What year would that have been about?
- RH:** That's [was in] 1913. He was here three months. He had three, no, four brothers here around Dickinson and they all got away [left Russia] on account of going to the army and they got married here. And so he was the youngest one of the family but he had to stay home with his parents. But he had to go to the army at the same time. And so after that, he just took a trip over to America to see his brothers. And when he came back he said, "we are going to have a great revolution [in Russia] and they have started already around Leningrad and Moscow there." And he said, "I'm going to get out. I'm not going to serve again." So that's what happened, he got away. But he and his two brothers out there in Europe, they had a big estate where they all three worked together at farming and each one hired his own hired help. And then they work together and then they stayed out on the farm. They hired all those people and they had three ladies out there. Each one had to hire a lady for cooking, to help [with the] cooking.
- MM:** Now was this near München?
- RH:** Yeah. About seven or eight miles from München. It was between München and this other village there. It was seaport too, Nicholaj.
- MM:** Well, how did they acquire all of this estate land?
- RH:** I don't know. But they said the grandfather had a lot of sheep.
- MM:** Interesting.
- RH:** Yeah.
- MM:** So they had this estate...?
- RH:** Yeah, they had. My uncle, this Uncle Louie, had his own private tutors for his children. He didn't send them to the regular school there. And I was supposed to go to high school but the high school was in the next village, it wasn't to [in it]. It was just in between. But I was supposed to go to this private school for [with] this young man [tutor] that was teaching these children. He had about five or six children. He [my uncle] had his own school house, everything, his own teacher. He [my uncle] hired him and he taught all the grades. Whatever grades they were in, ya know, in high school.
- MM:** That's interesting. So then your father came over to visit his brothers?
- RH:** Yes.
- MM:** So evidently, the Hecker family was quite a large family?
- RH:** Yah. I think there were six or seven boys on my father's side.
- MM:** And no girls?
- RH:** Two girls.
- MM:** So there were about eight children?
- RH:** Yeah, Theresa and Barb.

- MM:** And how many were in your family?
- RH:** Right when we came across [to the US], there was six of us, no seven, and then two of them were born in this country.
- MM:** So four..., no, five of the children were born in München?
- RH:** Yeah.
- MM:** And you were...?
- RH:** I was the oldest.
- MM:** You were the oldest. So there are some..., how many are still living?
- RH:** There are only three of them dead, three boys. And I have a sister in the nursing home. She's going to be eighty-nine Tuesday.
- MM:** Now you have other brothers and sisters that were born in München that are here in North Dakota?
- RH:** Yes. But they don't remember anything [about Russia]. One of them is eighty-five and the other one is seventy-eight, seventy-six I think.
- MM:** So they were too young at that age to remember anything?
- RH:** Yeah right. The one of them was born here.
- MM:** Right.
- RH:** But they don't remember anything. And one of them is in Yakima. He's about eighty three.
- MM:** Now the Hecker family in München had a..., quite a good life. Would you say they lived pretty good?
- RH:** I think we did. We had hired help all year around.
- MM:** Was the hired help for the farm?
- RH:** For the farm and then my mother had some ladies to help her. And on washday she'd always have extra ladies come in. You know everything was so primitive there. You had to rub the wash and do things like that. And so it took a lot of people to work.
- MM:** Those people that came in to work, do you recall? Were they other German ladies?
- RH:** They were German. My mother always insisted on German ladies. But they..., I don't know, she wanted the German ladies.
- MM:** Your father was a farmer?
- RH:** My father was a farmer.
- MM:** What did...? What kind of crops did they raise?
- RH:** They raised wheat, barley, and oats, and they plant a lot of corn and pumpkins. In fact, the cows like pumpkins. The men chopped the pumpkins real small for the cows to eat.

MM: Oh.

RH: And the seeds. I could get some of those seeds and we'd wash them and put them in the oven. You know, we had those big brick ovens. You could put twenty-six loaves [of bread] in the ovens.

MM: Oh yes. I've seen pictures of those.

RH: Yeah, those big ovens. And when the bread came out, we would shove in some of those [pumpkin] seeds. It [the oven] had no thermometers or anything. I don't know how much heat it needed. But those seeds or hams, we'd baked them, we never cooked the hams. We always covered 'em up with a dough, wrapped them and baked them like that in the oven for two, three, or four hours.

MM: So the farm had quite a few livestock?

RH: Oh yeah. Now we only had about five or six cows. Just enough milk for the family. You couldn't sell anything like that. And had our own butter. But the hogs..., in spring.... My dad did not go out to raise hogs but in [the] spring he pick up at the market a dozen at a time. When they were maybe a month or two months old. Then they were fattened up until fall and then they killed them. They had men for everything. Butcher would come in with these men and kill the hogs and make sausage in the fall.

MM: Then the sausage was for the winter months?

RH: Yeah.

MM: Where did they store this sausage?

RH: Well, they had a smoke house. They had them smoke in there and the hams too. But when they had the [butchering], they used to use to put those hams in brine [first], in big barrels. And they took them out and then after they were smoked, they left them hanging there. Occasionally they would make a little smoke again. But they kept [were preserved] until summer time. And the bacon was smoked and the hams. And the bacon, they didn't fry it like here. They cooked it and then they took the skin off and let it cool off. Then they'd slice it and those men would have rye bread, would eat rye bread and that bacon, [was] cooked. That was their lunches in between [meals].

MM: Did they ever have like a root cellar?

RH: Oh, we had a big root cellar. My dad had two vineyards and so he had quite a big one. We had all our own wine [in] barrels. And at certain times the grapes were cut and brought then to the village. Their vineyard was a little bit, maybe a mile out of town or two. And then we brought 'em in and they made the wine right in the yard there. Two men had to go around with a press, press them out. But [then] with pails they took the juice down the cellar to fill up the barrels. And I noticed that my dad would put sugar in those barrels to make it work. And of course, when the wine was fermented, they closed the barrels. And that start fermenting. [Then] that [barrel] was closed. And when it was time to put a spigot in at the bottom and you could get all the wine you [want]. It was [in] my childhood. I was just a kid and I had to go around and fill those jugs with wine. And then we had wine on the table all the time. So that when we came to this country, my mother..., we stayed with my uncle and then they served water at [the] tables. She said, "what kind of a habit have these people got that they have water, drink water at [the] table?" Of course we didn't do that. So my uncle was at the other end of the table and he said, "yes," he said, "here in America we drink water because we haven't got the money to buy wine."

- MM:** Oh, they couldn't raise it either in North Dakota.
- RH:** No. [In] North Dakota they couldn't.
- MM:** Did they ever sell some of the wine or just for the family?
- RH:** No. They just used it for the family.
- MM:** Just for the family?
- RH:** Yes. And I think some of those barrels were..., I don't know if they emptied them all. But whenever it was time I'd tell 'em it's empty, to put another spigot in. They had great big barrels.
- MM:** So they had a lot of vineyards. What about watermelon?
- RH:** Oh, they.... Now that's another thing. My folks did not go out for gardening stuff. My dad said he needs the people for out on the farm. But we buy [bought] melons, big melons, five cents a piece. So then those Russians, [there] was a Russian village right across the river. They come with wagon loads of melons, five cents a melon. So my mother used to tell me, "go out to the village and call melons, melons, melons!" So my mother told me, "go out and tell them to come in with that wagon [and] unload them." She only took, buy [bought] the whole load of melons.
- MM:** Oh my.
- RH:** But we had those hired people. Also did the same thing with cucumbers. The next load, the Russians come through with their cucumbers and my mother would buy sometimes a whole load of them. And she hired ladies to put them up in barrels for pickles.
- MM:** A lot of canning?
- RH:** No canning. They didn't can anything.
- MM:** They didn't.
- RH:** No. And the cherries, they [were] about three cents a pound, those big cherries. They [the Russians] come through with those wagon loads too. So the people go out and buy [bought them]. They had the scale with them to buy all that. And we used to put up cherries in those gallon jugs and then put sugar on and set 'em in the sun. And the sun would melt that sugar and keep those cherries just perfect. We didn't have to cook them or anything. And then we used that juice for tea. We used a lot of tea. Then you put juice in your tea, cherry juice. When this juice was all gone, then they put vodka on there, on those cherries.
- MM:** Oh, I see.
- RH:** They put vodka on there and they serve it then as a cocktail. But it was nice and rich.
- MM:** It was very good too?
- RH:** Yeah. [It] almost killed my sister and my brother. I was the oldest one and I think they was sitting on the blanket and I was [with them]. I got some of those cherries and fed them. I think Elizabeth was only about a year old and my brother John was about three years old. And I fed them those cherries and they almost died. My mother stayed up all night [with them] but she didn't know [what was wrong with

them]. Then she screamed and the neighborhood came together. So the one man told her, "they are drunk" he said, "put 'em to bed."

MM: Because you were too young to know and you thought these cherries, that they'd like them?

RH: I didn't eat any. [I] was feeding them.

MM: What other crops did they have, sunflowers?

RH: No.

MM: No sunflowers.

RH: That's another thing. My folks would go to the market, to Nikolaj or Odessa and she, my mother, would buy a whole gunny sack full. I suppose..., I don't know, big gunny sack full of those seeds. That's for the winter when they [the neighbors] come [visiting at our] home. Then the ladies got together and for visiting and they eat sunflower seeds. And you should have seen the floor!

MM: So when they got together to visit, did you ever go with your mother? For visiting?

RH: No. They come to our house.

MM: They came to your house. What did they do, just visit?

RH: Just sit there and visit and talk and eat those things [seeds]. Once in a while they brought knitting along or something. But I don't think much was done.

MM: But the women ate a lot of sunflower seeds.

RH: Yeah. They had a great time, you know.

MM: And in North Dakota they used to say, "they're eating those Russian seeds again!"

RH: Yeah. They thought it was terrible. You know when I started my work in the hospital during the war, the Americans couldn't figure it out how those poor peasants could make a living [stay alive] during the winter months cause they didn't work. And they found out they were eating a lot of those sunflowers and those pumpkin seeds and that kept them going. So they found out how wonderful they are because they contain oil and protein. So they..., and now everybody seems to eat them.

MM: Right. And of course there's very popular soy beans and all kinds of things. Sunflowers are used a lot in North Dakota.

RH: Yeah and beans. See my dad always felt they haven't got time for all those little things, so they bought everything. They bought the cabbage to make sauerkraut and because it was very cheap. We made barrels of it and added whole apples in it to give it a good taste.

MM: Did your mother do a lot of cooking?

RH: Well, we had two maids always. But she helped with the cooking and then sometimes she had an extra girl yet for the babies too, to carry them around and fuss with them.

MM: The cooking they did, was there a lot of dough used?

- RH:** Well I don't think so. 'Cause they always felt this take so much time. But they used to use make those noodles, roll 'em out and cut 'em to make those. And now here too [in ND] they make this knepfla soup. I hate stuff like that. I used to make noodles. I wanted to cook all the time when I was small. And so they let the maids give me some dough I could make [use] and I cooked a little to feed to the ducks when they came home from..., see the river was just about two blocks away.
- MM:** What river was that?
- RH:** A river from the Black...
- MM:** Black Sea?
- RH:** Yeah. It's just a branch, not the whole [sea]. And they come home and those ducks were hungry and the geese. My mother had geese and ducks all the time and chickens. And so I used to..., that was my job. I used to cook that [dough] to make them fat real fast. And the Jews bought up all the geese and ducks and they used that fat for their cooking 'cause everything had to be kosher. They didn't use any pork or anything like that. And so they always wanted those fat things. That's the only thing my mother sold. She'd keep as many as she wanted and the rest she'd sell. They'd sell on the market. They had a market, they all went out every Thursday. They had a market in summertime and then the people would go up and buy their vegetables. I know some people had gardens around there but we didn't. We'd buy the vegetables. Big bunches of beets and carrots and onions and what ever you wanted. And live chickens, see they didn't kill those chicken or geese. They could buy [those at] on the market every Thursday. And hogs, they had hogs there to sell too.
- MM:** Do you remember going to the market?
- RH:** Yes I do. And I used to like to go there.
- MM:** Was this right in München?
- RH:** No no, five miles away.
- MM:** In what village?
- RH:** Between. It was a Russian village and it was between Odessa and our place. Was only about five or six miles from München.
- MM:** So once a week everybody would go to the market?
- RH:** Yeah. Whoever wanted to but people that raised their own [produce] didn't go. But my folks just took the wagon and went up and did the shopping and then came home. And then when my dad run out of food, see he used to take the food along to the farm for all those people [hired help]. And then he'd go to Nickolaj and pick up food. See, it was just in between.
- MM:** Now these people that worked for your father on the farmland, were they Germans?
- RH:** No. They were Russians, all...
- MM:** They were Russians.

- RH:** All Russians and Polish people. And this one day I went along when my dad was hiring people. My brother and I could go along. We were just little kids. And they were all sitting on that grandstand, just rows and rows, boys and girls or men who were the hired people too. And so my dad would walk back and forth and watch and then he'd point to someone to come down [and he hired them]. And he only paid 'em eighty-five rubels for about three months, that's all the pay those men [received]. And I said, "how come the pay is so little?" After we came to this country I asked my dad [why and] he says, "well, that's the way everybody did." So those men for three months [worked] for that money and then when September 29 [came, that] was the date they all left the villages, the Russians. And they'd go in rows just like soldiers. Go through the village to the next village to take the train [home], about forty miles away.
- MM:** Oh. So they would come in the spring only.
- RH:** They come only [in] spring. And then we had the ladies, [the] German ladies. We hired 'em any time, whenever mother needs somebody else [extra help].
- MM:** How did your father communicate with these hired men?
- RH:** Russian.
- MM:** So your father did know Russian?
- RH:** Oh yeah, oh yes. Of course he was in the army four years. But we were not, we kids, we couldn't go close to them.
- MM:** Now where did these hired people stay?
- RH:** Out on the farm, on that big estate. They had a big farm and they all stayed there. Sundays I often thought, "they never went to church, those poor people." They stayed there Sundays on the farm and didn't work. My dad would come home, [on] Saturday nights he would come home and on Sunday nights he would go back again with all the food that he needed for the week.
- MM:** So he would stay out there all week then?
- RH:** Yeah. He'd stay out there all week. He and my Uncle Louie, he was the oldest one. Well, he'd just drive around with his carriage and check. But they had a good farming business there.
- MM:** Did they have a lot of horses?
- RH:** They had a lot of horses, but we had a couple barns [in the village]. Barns were all built with stone, cut 'em nice, not like they do here. One of them was almost finished, another barn he put up. And they had those red tiles for the roof so you could catch rain water if you want to and stuff. We had a cistern in the yard and a big well in the yard. And everybody else did too. Those yards were all together. Always a stone wall in between [the houses] and some of them had it so that one well [was] between [the walls] so they could..., so two farmers could have water for their cattle if they wanted too.
- MM:** Out on the farm land? This was out on the farmland or in the city?
- RH:** No, in the city, in the village. They had men there working, [to] take out the cattle in the morning. The cows, cow herd they call it. All at once they would come through the village [to] take the cattle out. And then, the next came the horse [herdsman to] take the horses out for grazing. That was every morning in summertime. Then of course, in fall they..., I don't know what they did with all [them]. I know the cattle

was always in the barns, no I mean horses. We didn't have too many in town where we lived, but we kept them and fed them always in the barns all winter long. They didn't turn 'em out like here. They didn't [the] cows either.

MM: So each day they would bring in the cattle and the horses?

RH: Yeah. Usually [an] old grandpa and a little boy would bring 'em in. And if it rained hard during the day, they'd come any time of the day.

MM: So there was a lot of livestock running around in the village?

RH: Yeah. And of course, the streets were very wide. They were laid out [that way]. See the Russians laid 'em out. My mother told us [that] my grandpa had the first house, started the first house building. See the government build 'em, help them with some money when they came in, [moved into Russia, my] great grandpa. And so each one had the house and they had big, big yards. I think at least an acre or so long. And that's why some people had some big gardens in the back [yard]. My folks didn't want that because they hired these people during the year, is [was] enough. They can buy, food was cheap.

MM: Now the village of München, did they have a bazaar?

RH: Bazaar?

MM: Yeah.

RH: No. That was when we go [went] into the market eight, seven, six miles away.

MM: So there were no stores or anything in...?

RH: Oh yeah. We had a store and we had a butcher shop which the Jews were running. But you only could buy veal or lamb, nothing else. But everybody did their own butchering and had their own chickens. And so if they had too many, some people sold some. My mother never sold any chickens or anything but some of the geese. They got a good price. They got about three rubles for one big goose.

MM: Now your mother raised the children alone a lot of the time?

RH: Well she was practically alone all the time and especially in the summer time. That's why she had to have help, some [help] in the house.

MM: Now as fall came and of course, they did the butchering and everything. Winter was a little more quiet.

RH: Yeah. And then they took it easy, the people, because there was no t.v.'s, no telephones, no electricity of any kind. It was that primitive. And so all they did..., the men would get together and play cards by the hours.

MM: What did they play? Do you remember what kind of games?

RH: I really don't know. I never played with them. My mother used to be so disgusted. She said, "tonight [you] go out, go to the neighbors." She said, "I don't want those guys to come in and smoke." She didn't want that smoke, her curtains get [got yellow].

MM: So what did the..., did the women come along too?

- RH:** Yeah. The women would come along and they'd sit together in a ring and talk and talk and talk.
- MM:** And then they'd eat their sunflower seeds?
- RH:** Yeah, eat sunflower seeds.
- MM:** But the men...?
- RH:** And the men, they had wine on the table and smoked and played cards.
- MM:** So the men would not eat as many sunflower seeds as the women?
- RH:** Oh no. They didn't bother with them.
- MM:** So at the end of the card playing and so forth, did they ever make some food then?
- RH:** Once in a while if it was a name day or something like that. They observed name's days, not birthdays out there.
- MM:** Name's days are very important?
- RH:** Oh yeah.
- MM:** What did they serve on a name's day?
- RH:** Oh, they usually had potato salad and ham and wine. You could get beer too but they didn't go out [to drink]. They had a beer parlor right there in town too, but you could not drink in there. You had to buy your beer and go home. It was a beautiful [place], nice floor and everything nice in [there], bottles all over. And you come in and ask for it and he'd hand you over what ever you ask for. You paid for it. But you had to take it home so there was no way of [for] the men going [to go] in there and drinking. They had to take it home. They had a party [at home]. Well, then they did. That was their [get-togethers].
- MM:** So we talked about name's days that were real important. What about the other holidays? What do you recall about Christmas?
- RH:** That was a great feast. Nobody worked, not even my folks. No washing was done until after the sixth of January because then the feasts were over. But it was one party after the other. They go [went] from place to place and have a party. And of course, sometimes they'd start dancing. We had a great big room. My dad played the accordion.
- MM:** Oh, your father played the accordion?
- RH:** And they had a few dances, just friends that come in. You didn't invite anybody, they came by themselves.
- MM:** This was for Christmas. But before Christmas did they do a lot of baking like they do today?
- RH:** Oh, they did a lot of baking. I still remember the month they made Zuckerkuchen and just stacks [of it]. And in the attic there we had a big trunk lined with tin and there this [baking] was stored. All this..., the fancy bread and all that Zuckerkuchen and all that stuff. And I had to go up and get it sometimes. Once in a while I had to count [to] see how much there's left. By the time those feasts days were over,

everything was gone because they used them for parties and for everything. And cookies..., they didn't bake many cookies with those ovens. But we could buy very nice cookies there in the store.

MM: Now this [brick] oven, was it outside or inside?

RH: Inside. We had a great big kitchen. They didn't cook in the house for our help. That was an extra kitchen and there they had the big stove right in the kitchen to cook [on] and all the big space. That big space and of course, that was heated for baking extra bread. We also had a smaller oven but that was in a place where it was covered. You couldn't see it when you come in the kitchen. It was extended to another room and that oven only held about six to eight loaves of bread. But they used it for cooking more in winter time. They cook sauerkraut and pork and everything was in the oven. Big kettle with soup, put it in there, you didn't see a thing on the stove. I know I come home from school, I think [I asked], "don't we have anything to eat?"

MM: Talking about soups, what kind of soups did they make?

RH: Lot of bean soup, bean soup and noodle soup. Noodle soup was the Sunday dish. And of course, they used potato soup, pea soup with peas, those dry peas with ham in. They used the bones from the hams and cooked that.

MM: What about vegetable soup?

RH: Oh, we made the borscht, we made it good. Not like the Russians. You know the real Russians made borscht with cabbage and beets and it's clear. And the Germans had all different kinds of vegetables and put cream in at the end [of cooking]. They put tomatoes in and cream and everything and that's what makes it good. And they cook a big kettle full. If there was enough left for the next day, well then you used it up. But that was the main dish really. About our most [frequent meal for] the German people. But they made their own, not like the Russians did.

MM: As far as borscht is concerned?

RH: Yeah.

MM: Vegetable soup.

RH: Yeah.

MM: Lets go back to Christmas again. You were thirteen so you must have some memories of Christmas Eve.

RH: Oh yes. We had Midnight Mass those days. And the churches were not heated out there. You had no heating system in any church, next village or wherever you went. They had those big churches. The people came of course, but not the children. [They] are supposed to be..., go to bed. And on Christmas evening the Christkindchen came. [This was] a girl was dressed all in white with a veil with all kinds of lace and ribbons over her head and with a gold crown. And she would come into the house and ask if the children were good and ask if the Christkindchen could come in. My dad said, "yes, come in." They made us pray, then gave us a basket which consisted of toys, candy, and nuts. After I was older I caught on, my mother would stand back and she had those baskets for each kid. And afterwards, they had another thing going on, the men would dress up. One of them was a tailor and one of them was a beast. Was an ox or something. He had horns and had put on those big fur coats over them [that] they'd walk around in. And they dance and they had all kinds of fun. My mother, I think, only had them twice or

three times as long as I remember. My mother wouldn't have it 'cause they..., they make everything so dirty. They come from the snow, come to house and get the floor dirty and she didn't want it. But they always ask if they could come in. And then they give..., the mother would have a dish full of goodies, nuts and peanuts and apples and stuff for those people. That's what they bring from house to house, the young folks in the oxcoat. So the..., it was just a hilarious time all the way through.

MM: The Christmas Eve included then going to Midnight Mass?

RH: Yeah.

MM: Did the children go too, or they stayed home?

RH: Oh no. We [children], they had to..., we went to bed. But when I got older I could go along [to mass]. And when they came home there was a ham on the table and big knife and everybody got to start eating again. And at Christmas night they had a brass band playing in church on the balcony and singing. They had lanterns hanging all around. See our church had a big..., had wall around and the parish house [too], and they had all those lanterns [lit] so you could [see where to] go. 'Cause there was no electricity so they had..., so those streets were [all lit up] with hanging up of those kerosene lanterns so you could [see to] go to church. And of course, they practiced with singing. They had all the German singing. They had their choir master, he taught the people to sing. And the next day they had high mass again, just like they did it in this country.

MM: Did you do a lot of singing?

RH: Cleaning?

MM: Singing.

RH: In school, German. We had a couple Russian songs. [Those] we had as soon as we got to school. We had to sing a Russian song, *God Bless the Czar*, the Kaiser. That was in Russian and then we had to pray for the Kaiser [leader]. And then the next subject was tables [mathematic] in Russian. But you see your tables makes no difference whether it's English or German or Russian, it's the same thing. But its..., I mean..., but we had to memorize all those things [the tables]. And then we had reading and arithmetic, history, and geography about different [lands] and of course, about Russia. Yeah, I still remember that when our teacher would say about the Chinese. The Chinese and the Russians were always arch enemies. He said, "De Chinese, der böse". And [about] the Japs [Japanese], "the Japs, it was their underhand work, [their] underhand working." You know in 1906 they sank the whole fleet [ships] of Russia, the Japs [did]. [In] 1906 that's when they had war with the Japs. And of course they don't forget that. And of course, there was always a skirmish between..., on the border line with the Chinese. So already they [the Russians] had got that started against [other] nations. And then in [WW1], course the Russians they would say [and also] the Germans would say, "the Russians is the bear." "He such rubbish," you know. [would say about each other]

MM: The Christmas time was very important to a family like..., a Catholic family?

RH: Oh yes. Everybody, everybody stopped working and instead go [went] to church. In the morning go to church and then loiter around all day 'cause there wasn't much work. There was nothing else to do except playing cards or something.

- MM:** And then they would celebrate New Years too?
- RH:** Oh, New Years too. They celebrate New Years. They usually have dances. They had a dance on New Years. And when the priest heard about it, oh he was awful put out [upset] about it.
- MM:** He didn't like the... [dances]?
- RH:** Yep. He said that the dances [are] for the bad ones and he said pray [instead of dancing]. He said the dancers were all going to be punished some day. And he scolded in German!
- MM:** What was the name of the priest? Do you remember?
- RH:** His name was Wolf, Father Wolf. He was a boy from the old colonies that came over. See we called them the old colonies because they were the first ones to move in [they were the first immigrants to move into Russia beginning of the 1800]. Like these people in Hague, [ND], these old [ones], you can tell 'em. I can tell what part they came from because when they talk they have that [different] dialect. And then they [the priests] had to do that [scolding]. They [the people] enjoyed them, those dances. It was just in the homes. I mean they didn't go and have a big [community] dance. In fact, we didn't have a place [to dance in], only the school. They didn't have a hall to dance in or anything like that. So when they have weddings, then they put out the extra floor for dancing.
- MM:** Were the weddings pretty big?
- RH:** Oh yeah, three days. My Uncle Louie, that oldest one, when his daughter got married, he had a three day wedding. He had about twenty girls as brides maids.
- MM:** Twenty girls as brides maids?
- RH:** Yeah. All dressed up and boys too, with big sash on here. We little ones, the three of us, we had a bouquet of roses. But the first ones, they had [the] young men leading us but we took the street. Was no..., not [any] sidewalk. We took the middle of the street and then the bride and the groom followed us. We..., but they all had to walk to church and then the relatives. And they parade us to the church and of course, the people were all lined up to watch the whole business. And the brass band took us to church and [also] when we come out after the wedding was [over], when they was married, the brass band took us back to the home. And of course, they had put an extra place for dancing in his yard and they served [the meals] family style in the wedding. I know they had a meal. They'd always started off with soup. When I think of it, when I cook so much in the hospitals, how much hot tempers [there] must have been [to] get ready all that food for those people but they did. But they had those big [brick] ovens and they'd shove it in there and bake it. It was good and so much. And then at the end we had jello too, but it was made with wine. They didn't put [any] fruit in the jello, they just dished it out nice in those glasses, nice and red. They dished it out [so] that we never [had other food] mixed into the jello. But it was put up [made] with wine. But they had..., otherwise they had nuts and candy and Kuchen, potatoes and meat and always had coleslaw, cabbage salad because that was the one they could take [keep] over. They had tubs full of coleslaw made up. That was easy to keep overnight because they had no refrigeration system. And of course, the table was set [with] all the bottles of wine. They had..., everybody could pour it and [help themselves].
- MM:** Now when they had a wedding, was everybody invited in the village?

RH: No. Just the relatives.

MM: Just the relatives.

RH: Just the relatives. Relatives and I suppose some friends. I know this particular Theresa was married, she got married to a wealthy fellow. He was an only child but he was from a different village. And they had a big wedding. It lasted so long, for three days. But I could only go one day. Of course I had to go to school. And your kids are not ordered around the next day. All they do is sit there and talk and eat and drink.

MM: What about Easter? What was Easter like?

RH: Oh Easter. See they there were supposed to fast [follow certain dietary guidelines] in [at] Easter time. But we, the Germans in Russia, were excused. Pope Pius IX gave them permission [not to fast] when they moved in there [to Russia] on account of the country being so severe. [The Russian people were under the Ukrainian rite, therefore, the Pope had nothing to say about them]. Not where we lived but the whole other place [area]. They didn't fast but they could eat three times a day anytime. But they couldn't have no meat all during lent, no meat. [those of the Ukrainian rite]

MM: During the whole time.

RH: Yeah. And of course they had fish and herring, lot of herring was used, eggs and cheese. But the real Russians they couldn't eat that. You know the real Russians they couldn't have eggs. They had a different lent [diet]. They couldn't have eggs or cheese or anything. I don't know what they lived on. Now Catherine the Great said they had [could eat] mushrooms and pickles. There's no food value in mushrooms and dill pickles. What have you got....? But he said they got very lean during lent, the real Russians. But the Germans were [had] different [guidelines]. But two years before we left Russia it was put out [announced], the Pope said that we can have meat on Sundays during lent. So that was the last [we had over there]. When we came to this country we didn't know, we just ate meat all the time. And then they said you [should fast]. People told us, "you are supposed to fast," but we didn't do that. In fact, when I came to the convent and here your supposed to fast, start at [age] twenty-one fasting. I didn't know how to fast because we always ate just everything but I learned how to do it. We were excused [in Russia] on account of the climate. But the climate wasn't that bad where we lived because we were [in the] more westerly part, not towards Moscow and Siberia.

MM: The Easter then as a child, do you remember getting Easter eggs?

RH: Oh that was a great feast again. The people just colored eggs and eggs. And then children who were baptized, they had baptism...? They had a man and a wife take them to church. What did they call them...? Their Godfather. Every child went to his Godfather, Godmother on [during] Christmas, on [during] Easter time. And of course they'd have eggs and candy and they called it an Easter gift from their Godparents and [also gave them] a bought piece of bread or Puska. [Ukrainian Easter Bread]

MM: What was that?

RH: Puska. That's a real..., that high. I'm sure you had some. That was made out of eggs and it looks real yellow. And they put [it] in..., they bake it in pail, a round pail. Then they cut it down that way so you got a big hunk of that and eggs and candy for Easter [gifts]. And so every child went to his Godfather and Godmother to get something. And then..., see since the [church] bells didn't ring in Easter time. I mean

those last three days [before Easter] so the young kids, youngsters from school, they had kind of a thing [wooden device] that made a noise. They go to the village and [sound] the first call for church and they'd ring and they'd holler that first call for church [instead of ringing the church bells]. And so they'd [those who called the people to church this special way would] go around on Saturday evening before Easter to collect their gifts from the people. They had a great big basket and then people gave them Easter eggs, colored ones. Then they divide them up in the end. So that was their pay for those three days for calling the people to church. Otherwise they always rang the [church] bells] but for [during] that time was nothing [no bell ringing]. They had to be called.

MM: So they would have these..., some young boys would go around the village?

RH: Yeah.

MM: And knock on the doors?

RH: Yeah. They did that too. The bigger ones, they would come. And then my mother would recognize some of them. I didn't know some of the kids but she...[did]. They always gave them something. And also on New Years Day they went around and wished them a happy New Year. And they'd give 'em a drink and something to eat and next they moved on from place to place. On the sixth of January the Russians would come from the next village and they were dressed up [were the three kings]. One was dressed up like a bishop, they were all dressed up. And they'd go from place to place to bless the barns and the houses of the German people. But they never gave them anything, they just come through. And that other one [the bishop], they were dressed up like in vestments. I don't know why they came to the German village to do that. Some of the later years when I was bigger [older], some ladies came from the Russians to wish a happy New Year and they'd spray [threw] some corn just near the house. So..., and I was alone with children at home, the others were all in church and all at once..., they didn't rap, they just walk in. So here [they] was! I knew that my folks always gave them money, gave money when somebody come wish 'em happy New Year but I didn't have any money. So there was a big blood sausage lying there on the board of the cabinet. And I didn't know if [I should] so I took that [big blood] sausage and gave it to those two ladies. When my mother..., when they come home and they saw that corn on the floor and I says, "yep, two Russian ladies came and I didn't know what to give 'em." "I give 'em that sausage," and they had the biggest laugh. But they were happy to be rid of that blood sausage. But they come over [to] wish the Germans a happy New Year, some of those Russian people. 'Cause we had some hired men from that village too. And one of them we brought along over to this country. He was the foreman of our people [hired help], so we brought him along. We brought a couple young people along. Men that got away from service, they ran of from kinda serving [not to serve in] the army. And we got two girls, brought 'em along [also]. But when we came to this country there was nothing [for them] to do. So my mother had..., we did our own work and so they hired out. It didn't take very long, about three, four months, they got married already, the girls. But this one young man from that village, he died during the flu in eighteen [1918], got the flu and he died. And he worked so hard, he was going to help his parents and his brother come over to this country and then, he just died.

MM: Now when they do this baking..., and in the winter months like we talked about, like it was January and so forth, what did they use for coal? Did they have coal or what did they use to burn?

RH: No. They had chips. You know they had manure and lots of straw in [it] and they mixed it up on..., like a threshing floor and they had it about that [four inches] thick. They had the horses run over it with a big

stone to make it even and pack [it]. And in a couple of days [cut it] in pieces like this and stand up two of them, stand up like this to dry. Finally they make big [stacks] and [then] made bigger stacks and then they piled 'em up in..., like a straw stack. And they used that for fuel and straw, a lot of straw. Because whenever we hired some people they asked my dad for that [so] much money the daughter was working for. For a year she got eighty-five dollars, this girl. And her dad wanted that many loads of straw [also], and so they had to pick up straw and take it to her dad, whatever [had been agreed on]. I suppose they used it for fuel too. 'Cause the area we were [living] around, there was not much, not too many trees, no lumber, all stone. They had..., that's why they..., it was slow [progress]. You could buy coal in Odessa if you wanted to but to bring it way out [to the village was too much of a distance]. But this [that's] how those villages got along.

MM: Well did they go out and gather all these..., these chips out from the fields?

RH: No. You know they had the cattle always in the barns.

MM: Oh, so they'd have the manure from there?

RH: Oh yeah. They cleaned [the barns] every day, [daily] it was cleaned out. And so they had a big stack and then they spread it with a lot of straw in [it].

MM: Did you ever have to do that kind of work?

RH: No. I never did anything.

MM: What were your chores?

RH: I had nothing. I still was playing with my dolls.

MM: Did your mother do a lot of sewing?

RH: She did some. But [before] we came to this country we got..., she hired some Jews. A Jew trade tailor with his two daughters. And they came in the house and they sewed for days on end. We had a Singer sewing machine but they brought one along too. They sewed clothes for us youngsters. And my dad said, "don't buy so much clothes because they have a different style over there." But my mother insisted on having all new stuff.

MM: Before you had left?

RH: Ya before we left. So we had so much clothes [made]. And my dad had suits made. They always had suits made by the tailors and usually Jewish. Jews were making up those [suits]. They [my parents] bought the material and took it there and they [the tailors] made them up. [And then] charged [for their work].

MM: So what was it like in the home relating to religion? Did you have a lot of prayers in the home when you were growing up?

RH: Well, not too much. I went to school every day but we didn't have..., once in a while we said the Rosary. And especially during Lent, everybody said the Rosary during Lent. And of course we had the priest come to school for religion class, the priest from that village there. And so it was.... And he also offered books for us to read. He had all kinds [of books], those magazines from missionaries and so on. And he ask if anybody wants to come and we had to come in to his house, to the rectory and get the books and write down what we took and so on. And of course it was all German too.

MM: When it was announced in the family that you were going to come to America, what was your reaction?

RH: Oh I was..., I was so happy to go. I wanted to see all that [America], I was very happy to go. But our priest told me he was put out [angry] about it that my dad would leave the country. And he told me, "does your dad think the roasted doves [food] are going to fly right into his house [home]?" He was so put out about it. He didn't want us to go. And my mother was terrible upset, she didn't want to go. So my dad said, "I heard enough that we are going to have war." And he says we are going to go [and] when their [the Russian] storm is over and [we will] come back. He [had] bought a farm in Belfield, [ND] [the year before when he was visiting], five miles north of Belfield. It was only a hundred and sixty acres. So that's where we went when we came here. Was a huge barn there and a pump where you get the water and a house. Not a tree, just like prairie, everything like a prairie.

MM: Did it look a lot like the Ukraine?

RH: Oh no, it was worse! We had trees [there], we had all kinds of things. You didn't see anything like that over there. Oh scared, I was scared stiff. And then I was supposed to cook. Well, I never cooked and my folks would go away to visit their friends and she [mom] said that the house would burn down [told me, "don't let the house burn down."] I was frightened to death to have a wooden building. We never saw those buildings like that [in Russia]. And I'd make a fire in the stove and come out and see if the place is burning up.

MM: Now lets go back to München when you prepared to leave. What did they do with all of the items in the house? They couldn't take everything along.

RH: No, no, they sold all the items, what we had. All the equipment what dad had and the house. But not..., they did not sell the land nor the vineyards 'cause my dad said, "it probably be a year or two till they get settled." See the Russians they want to over-throw the government at that time already. And so if it wouldn't have been for the first world war, see they were not ready [for revolution yet]. Then they had to stop and go to war [first]. And so they didn't go through with [the Revolution] until the 1917, eighteen [1918] and twenty [1920], around there. But my dad said, "they are not prepared for war. The Russians, they have no training what so ever." He said, "and they feed the people [soldiers] so badly, it was terrible," in those camps. He said, "and then most of the time they have nothing but horse meat," very poor [food]. And he said, "they took all the people in, the real Russians, Cassocks and all these other nationalities." And he said, "out in the camp they had two places [where] they undressed them." Clothes and everything they just threw everything on a pile and set fire on 'em. And they took 'em in and shaved their heads and cleaned them up before they ever let them into the camp because they had so many lice all the time. So they had..., it was awful. That's why my dad wanted to get out before another war comes.

MM: Now when you left the village, that was in 1913?

RH: Fourteen. It was in May, no, the end of April I think. 'Cause we were about three weeks on the road 'cause we had to wait in Hamburg for three days. They were still loading on the ship. And then we had..., I think ten or eleven days on the sea. Then we had a terrible storm for one day, a terrible storm. We were all [sick]. They wouldn't let us come out on deck or anything.

MM: Do you remember the name of the ship?

RH: America.

MM: The ship was called America?

RH: America. And it was a new ship and it was the largest at that time in 1914. Was the largest ship [at that time] to go..., to sail across.

MM: Now you left München and went all the way to Germany. Did you go by train or how did you get there?

RH: By train. We left München and then we took a train about forty miles away and we went through Russia, went through Poland. I still remember Warsaw when we went through there 'cause we had to cross the whole town on..., like a stage, not stage coach, it was like a little buggy. Was all made up with velvet, the red velvet and you ride in just like carriage. And we had to cross the whole town to get a train for Germany. And there was a funeral, some archbishop had died, and we had to sit there and wait until we could cross. But when we get to Germany.... They had poor trains in Russia, just benches along side, benches, nothing comfortable and Poland was just like that too [just straight benches, most uncomfortable]. But when we got into Germany, they had nice upholstery, like here, like the Americans did. And then the conductor, I still remember the conductor in Germany, whenever we had to change trains, he'd come in and says, "Donnerwetter, aussteigen." That meant that we had to leave the train. So then we had to get out and take another train. So it was waiting here and waiting there, you know.

MM: So when you finally came to Hamburg, [you] had to wait there and then you left on the ship?

RH: Three, three days yeah. We could go out and go to the park and listen to music and so on.

MM: Well on this ship, were there a lot of German families coming to America from Russia?

RH: No. There were quite..., maybe one family was there [about two families] and two little Jewish boys with big signs on them where they want to go, where they supposed to go. But this one German family, that one man had a bunch of trouble with his mother on that trip. But it was crowded. We were..., I don't know how many hundred people, hundreds of people on that ship.

MM: How many were in your family again that came over? Your mother and father?

RH: Yeah and six children.

MM: Six children.

RH: So that was a lot cause my grandmother came along and this girl, those girls that we brought along to kinda help. But they were all sick on the boat. It was all right for the first two days. See after we left Hamburg we crossed the channel to England and from there [a different] way out. And they got off and said we could. In fact, you should see the dining room we could go to dinner. Maybe couple of people were there. Myself and my dad were the only ones from the whole family who could go [and eat].

MM: To eat...?

RH: And they had..., we had snacks that you could go up and eat anytime, buy some snacks. You know I just lived on those herring. My dad said, "your going to get sick." I never got sick. But every day I went up for those herring and I had to eat them up there 'cause once I brought 'em to the room and they said, "get out of here with those herring." They just couldn't take it [the smell when they were sea sick]. But the

food was good on the ship and you had to hang on [to your dishes]. When it was so stormy, you had to hang on to your dish, otherwise you got it all in your lap. It just went like that.

[The movements of the ship]

MM: So then you finally landed in New York?

RH: We landed in New York. We...[came to] this Ellis Island. And so all the trunks, the luggage from every family, that was all unloaded. Every family had to stand by their trunks and they had to check what you brought along. But my folks had trunks and trunks 'cause my mother took feather beds along and pillows and all that she wanted. And they rolled everything [and packed it tight into the trunks] and well..., they smuggled a lot of things in too. Put it in between in their [the pillows] when they rolled it up. But when those two guys came up to you and said, "are those all yours?" He said [to] us big kids and I said, "yes." And he went like this [move on], he didn't check in our trunks. But next, next one was two Jews and they had a trunk and you know what they did? They sliced the pillow and all the feathers come out and they got bottles of whiskey or whatever, the brandy, what [ever] they brought in. And they cried 'cause they brought it over here for gifts. And you know what they did? [The immigration men] just threw it out in the water, in the ocean, all their drinks. But we were just lucky because there was so many kids [in our family], you have enough kids that you need that many trunks.

MM: What did you decide to take along from your things to remember [Russia]. What..., when you had to decide...?

RH: Oh clothes.

MM: What am I'm going to take along?

RH: Clothes. Clothes and some pictures we took along. But the glass was broken too [on the pictures] even if they had it all wrapped up. Glass was broken. But we had gifts for the relatives they had brought along from out there.

MM: So how long were you in New York, at Ellis Island then?

RH: Oh I think just about a day, not even that long. Then we were put into a big [building]. We were..., see you had to come from the big ship into a smaller ship to get to the Ellis Island. And then from there they took us off and put us in a big building. And there we stayed, we stayed overnight. And of course they fed us, they had food there to feed all the people. And then before we left for the train they give each one a big box of bananas and apples and sandwiches. Each child got one. I don't know why they did that, but anyhow, we didn't know how to eat bananas. So we'd bite into it [and thought], oh they're no good, they're no good. So on the way up I saw some people, a couple sitting there and [saw that] they peel those bananas. I says, "you supposed to peel them." And then they start [to eat them], they [were to just] throw out the peel. Then we learned how to eat bananas 'cause we never saw those in Europe.

MM: You never saw a banana before?

RH: No. We had all kinds of fruit, but no bananas. We left New York and we stopped in Chicago, we had to change trains there. And I never forgot. We got out of the train and we had to walk upstairs and there was a other train standing. When we came up there they told us to go on such and such train. So then from there on we stayed on [the train] until Dickinson.

MM: So you came directly to North Dakota then?

RH: Yeah

MM: From Chicago?

RH: Yeah, from Chicago. Right straight on to Dickinson [ND]. And when we got to Dickinson, there was some relatives [who] were there meeting us. Then we stayed with some relatives for a while. My uncle lived about seven miles from town [Dickinson] and he had a big farm and a big house and we stayed there for ten days or so. Until we moved out of [to] that Belfield area.

MM: And still, until then you only spoke the German language?

RH: Yeah. Everybody did, you know. That's another bad thing. They should have mixed up [learning languages] better in school. I mean they should let the children [learn] the Russian and use it and not just when they got to the army [that] they had to speak Russian and do all that. It was hard. But that's the way it [was] because they [the Germans] didn't want to be so mixed up with the Russians, you see.

MM: So you were fourteen then, or thirteen then when you arrived in Dickinson and then Belfield?

RH: We were.... I think we got there at the end of May and I was thirteen in March.

MM: After you got to Dickinson, the family settled on this farm north of Belfield and they continue to farm?

RH: Yep. The farm was leased out to somebody [else] so we couldn't do anything there. We had no garden, no nothing. But my mother got things from the relatives and the neighbors. They give [us] some vegetables and things. But we didn't know how to make a garden, I didn't know anything about gardens.

MM: So it was a lot of new things for your mother and father?

RH: Oh yeah.

MM: Did your mother sometimes say, "I wish I could go home again?"

RH: Oh, she cried all the time. I thought that's why my dad would take her and go out visiting and the kids would be staying alone. It was so hard to sit there without nobody [else] around. So I often think how terrible it is to go to a country when you don't know the language. We couldn't understand English or nothing. So after about a..., some months, we had to go out. They had to go to town to buy furniture, they had to buy everything, my folks. And then she forgot. [Once] she wanted a saw [using the German word] to cut the ham in half. There was some neighbors across the road a little ways [and] she says, "you go over and ask if they have a saw for this." But I said, "I have a catalog from my cousins." I says, "well it says saw in here but I don't know." I says, "I don't know if that's the right word, if that's the way [to] pronounce it." So I took the scissor and cut out the [picture of the] saw and I went over to those [non German] neighbors and I told them what I wanted. And so those young men, they had two boys and they were home from college and he said, "that's a saw." Well I thought to myself, "now I knew it was correct to say that, a saw." That's the way we started out in this country. It was hard. We didn't know the language, we didn't know people. I mean some neighbors would come [over to visit us] occasionally, but it was really [hard].

MM: Loneliness was real hard?

- RH:** Huh?
- MM:** Being so lonely out on the farm like that?
- RH:** Oh, it was awful. We didn't have no lent [church services] and then we had mass only every three, third week they had mass out there. Priest came out there and said mass in the country 'cause we had nothing but a buggy and horses when we came to this country.
- MM:** Well, did you continue on to school then?
- RH:** I went to school. That year when we started [at] our school and the rest of my brothers and we didn't know a thing. I didn't know a word. Here I sat in school, had a little lady teacher. Well she gave me a book and says, "I see a cat," and I said, "is it?" And I thought, "that's so dumb." I didn't know how..., I couldn't express myself at anything [in English]. And so the boys went up [to the board to do] arithmetic and they stood there and she stood there with the book and [they all] just stood there. So I get out of my seat and I went up there and I showed 'em [explained in German] how to do it, how to figure out those [problems]. And of course, she didn't correct me at all. When I think of it, my goodness that was an awful thing to do. But I couldn't go along with it, they were eighth graders.
- MM:** Was this a country school?
- RH:** Country school.
- MM:** And were there children that spoke English?
- RH:** There was sixteen, sixteen youngsters there and she had every grade, first through the eight.
- MM:** And they weren't all German students?
- RH:** No. They were those Ukrainians, some Ukrainians.
- MM:** Well did they speak Ukrainian then?
- RH:** Well some of them did. And my brothers, the little kids, they picked up that language just like that. And before the year was up we could talk English and we'd be talking as good as we could, even at home. And my mother didn't [understand what was being said]. She says, "what in the world are we going to do, the way they talk?" "We don't get to hear anything."
- MM:** Did your mother and father learn to speak English?
- RH:** No, not much. My dad especially.
- MM:** Didn't learn to speak English?
- RH:** No. He said, "that's the worst language he ever heard." But he didn't associate with other people that speak the [English] language. But my mother picked it up from the kids.
- MM:** So you went to the country school how many years then?
- RH:** Well, I only went one or two years then I went on to Richardton. I start working there for Mr. Muggle.
- MM:** And you were how old then?

- RH:** Well, I think I was about sixteen.
- MM:** Sixteen when you left the home?
- RH:** Yeah. And I was working there. I worked there for three years for that family. He was a banker, [John Muggle] and Norbert Muggle [was his son]. I took care of him when he was a baby. I don't know if you know him, he was a judge and a lawyer.
- MM:** And so you were a...?
- RH:** Then I went to the convent.
- MM:** When you were nineteen?
- RH:** When I was twenty. And I went to the convent and of course [in] the convent we study all the time about something, about this old church, church and religion and all this and that. So I had to just work myself up. And then when I had to go to the hospital as a dietitian, I didn't have my credentials. I did work with the dietary department but I came out here and I took over in this [St. Alexius] hospital here. And the doctor waited on different ones and the world war was on yet. And so then [I was there] until about 1920 or 1925. We were..., we had no [dietitian] credentials. We just had to work ourselves up [learn on our own]. The doctors had to give us books and we just followed everything for the clinics, for the diets. Ulcer diets and reduction diets and other diets.
- MM:** Now when you were here in Bismarck and of course, you had joined with the sisters, were you able to get home very often to Belfield, to the farm?
- RH:** No. Only once in five years and that was for ten days. That was all figured out. And that is if your people [relatives] paid for it, then you got home. If they don't, then you don't, then you stayed there. And I know some of the nuns came from Germany to the convent. They never got back. Like Sister Philberta, she was a nurse here for more than forty years, she never got back to Germany, never got to see anybody. But that was the custom at that time.
- MM:** Did your folks come and visit you here in Bismarck?
- RH:** No they don't [didn't]. They had a car but they didn't [come out]. They had one of those Fords that they bought but they didn't come. So we just left [each other]. And when I see now [that] the sisters are running all the time [now]. Its hard to believe change [that took place].
- MM:** Times have changed, a new life? When you recollect about [your life], when you sit here at the beautiful setting here at Annunciation Priory and you reflect back on your age of ten, eleven, and thirteen, as a teen, as a child and then as a young teenager in Russia which is now the Ukraine. And of course, as you know today there are many of those people aren't there anymore. Do you reflect on the village and so forth? What do you often think about? What are the fondest memories you have of that village life?
- RH:** Well I feel very happy that we got out of that country at that time. The suffering they had to go through. And I wouldn't want anybody to ever [have] to go back there. I mean..., it was wonderful to live there but look at what's happening [today]. You cannot tell from one year to another one what's going to happen with that government what they have. Like this bishop that was here from Russia, why his mother was from around there where I came from. But they were all set [placed] out in a land in an

entirely different area, not in Siberia. But I thought to myself, "and they have such a hard time getting food."

MM: Now did you..., when you came to North Dakota and also your parents and their family, not all the German families came and left Russia. Did your [family], did they all leave or did you have correspondence back and forth with families?

RH: We did. But that uncle of mine, my dad's [brother], the second [one], the younger one, my dad was the youngest of the family but John I mean. He was shot down by the Bolsheviks right by his house. And my other uncle was sent to Siberia, Louie, and he had a son who was a doctor. They grabbed him and made him go along with those Bolsheviks. He [had to] take care of [them]. And we heard from him. He said, "please" we should get him over here. He said, "I'll do any kind of work to get out of here." But we couldn't..., we couldn't get in contact anymore with anybody. And my Uncle Louie was sent to Siberia and then he got out and [got] somewheres [else] in, but his next son was shot down because he couldn't find my uncle. And that's the way they killed the family. And then the youngest daughter of his, Rose was her name, she was a nurse and they said she was in a hospital near Siberia there, as a nurse, but that's all we heard.

MM: So to this day, you never had any communications?

RH: No. And now this uncle that was shot, that little girl, those children were not born when I left, when we left, but she is living in Germany and she's coming next spring to Canada. She has relatives up there and this man told me that he's going to bring her down to see me. But she wouldn't know me. I didn't..., 'cause her brothers and sisters were all killed.

MM: Did your father..., your parents when they came to North Dakota, did they subscribe to any newspapers? Did they get any newspapers? German newspapers?

RH: Oh yeah. They had *The Wonderer* and they had another paper from Richardton. Richardton used to put out a paper, a German paper. But they only had German [ones], they only invest [bought] German newspapers and stuff [magazines] like that.

MM: Did they get, you recall, the *Nord Dakota Herald*?

RH: That's right, they had that too.

MM: What about the *Dakota Freie Presse*?

RH: I don't remember that.

MM: Don't remember that title. Now your mother raised these children a lot of the time alone in München and then they were more together, mother and father on the farmstead in North Dakota. But would you say that your mother had equal opportunity in making decisions in the home?

RH: Oh, I think she was the boss of the house. I really think she [was]. My dad give in a lot.

MM: So she was a pretty strong woman?

RH: Yeah she was. She was small but she was very going, determined to get things the way she wanted it, you know.

- MM:** So their final years in living out here in western North Dakota, did they end up having a pretty good life?
- RH:** They had a good life, they did. All the children grew up and they got married and left the home. And at the end my mother sat all alone out on the farm. And so we brought her in and put her in the nursing home in Dickinson. Then she said, "I should have done that a long time ago." But she didn't want to come [when still out there on the farm].
- MM:** Did she reminisce a lot about living in Russia?
- RH:** No. She didn't hardly ever. I says, "to this day I'm sorry that I didn't ask her more about things what went on." But they just simply didn't talk about it.
- MM:** Why do you think that was?
- RH:** I don't know. I know my dad suffered a lot when he came over here 'cause he wasn't use to working like that.
- MM:** Manual labor?
- RH:** Yeah, manual labor. And he had a [difficult time here]. My brothers tell me, "yah, pa didn't even know how to hitch up the horses in this country." 'Cause it was different down [out] there [in Russia]. I says, "well I didn't know that." But I know he tried to show me how to hoe potatoes. Before you knew it, I hoed my foot. But he suffered, I know he suffered a lot. He was very quiet, he didn't say much and my mother would yak, yak, yak, but he didn't say much. Once in a while he'd pick up and go outside.
- MM:** Your mother was a very strong person it sounds like.
- RH:** Oh yeah, she was.
- MM:** And when they came to North Dakota, were they very faithful with their religion as well?
- RH:** They were. They went to church and we prayed and did everything what we did in Russia.
- MM:** So many of the people were not German?
- RH:** No, the Ukrainians.
- MM:** Did they [your parents] speak Ukrainian?
- RH:** They speak Ukrainian but I couldn't. See, I took the Russian [language] like we did in school. But my folks could get along, they got along pretty good with the Russian and the Ukrainian.
- MM:** How did they communicate with the German Ukrainian?
- RH:** Ukrainian, of course. Those ladies couldn't talk the German so they talked Ukrainian.
- MM:** And then your parents could understand them?
- RH:** Yeah. They used to come and visit but I didn't pay much attention 'cause I couldn't understand it. Once in awhile I got a word. But the Ukrainian language is different from the Russian.
- MM:** So they..., but the Germans and the Ukrainians got along quite well?

- RH:** Oh they did. I mean, they'd come to [visit] my mother whenever. You know we lived right on the highway so they'd often come see her or she goes to them. She'd go to them to see how they plant the gardens and all that.
- MM:** She learned a lot from the Ukrainians then?
- RH:** Yeah.
- MM:** The Ukrainians had settled here. They were here earlier?
- RH:** They were here before we came, [here] for a long [time before]. And so when I was home visiting, I asked [my mother about them and she said], "they all gone," she said, "they all died," those older people. And the young ones moved away.
- MM:** What did your parents think when you decided to leave home and then you were in Richardton for a while?
- RH:** Well they didn't say anything. But when I told [them I want to] go to the convent, 'cause I had a cousin that was in the convent [at] St. Ben's and she was home visiting. I never met her but she was home visiting, so they talked about [that] they had nuns in Russia too and [in] Odessa. Only you didn't
- MM:** He felt it was your calling and you decided you wanted this life as a career. Was it hard for you those first years?
- RH:** The first couple of weeks with dressing. But they teach you how to dress [and live the convent life]. At that time we had coifs [head veils] like Sister had.
- MM:** By that time you were speaking English?
- RH:** Oh yeah, I could get along. I read books and I did everything. We had access to the library, could go and get any kind of books.
- MM:** Now were there some other German Russian sisters at that time?
- RH:** Not from Russia but their parents were [from there].
- MM:** Parents. Would you remember their names of those early sisters? Some of the parents who were German Russian?
- RH:** Well Sister Harlinda Sue Fischer, her parents were from Russia and lots of those parents were young [when they came to the US]. They grew up here. And then we have Sister Mary Leo, her parents were from Russia or grandparents or something. Most of them were from [Russia], the grandparents [side].
- MM:** Now did you speak German in the convent at all?
- RH:** Yes. We even had meditation in German. And we had..., we were twenty-six in my class and there was another nun, she was from St. Paul and myself. We two were the only ones that spoke German and could read German. These other ones, these younger ones couldn't read German so the two of us always had to change about, to go out to middle aisle and read all the [German prayers], the rule and all that in German. So I wasn't handicapped with German. Then they had Latin, we had our Office [daily

prayers and devotions] in Latin and I had some of it in Russia [the Latin]. We got a little bit mixed up with that. So I had no..., I didn't have a hard time. I could memorize it just as [it was written].

MM: But there were a lot of the sisters that didn't know German at that time?

RH: Yeah, that's right.

MM: Other sisters have joined though?

RH: Yeah. See they had twenty minutes of German reading, [then another] twenty minutes of English. At the same time they had to sit there and wait until they [got to the English version], until that got read.

MM: And that was until what year when they stopped reading the German?

RH: Oh, I think I was..., it must be around twenty-seven [1927] or twenty-eight [1928], around that time. You know we had to say Matins [part of their daily prayers] and all the [other] prayers like [that]. Then they cut out Matins which that took almost an hour. They had those great big [prayer] books, we'd take [say the] Latin, it was all in Latin. Then they came out with a copy with half [in each language], it gives you part German, I mean part English and Latin. So [then] we had that Office and now we have everything in English, everything turned into English.

MM: Did you do some German singing?

RH: Yes, yes. The sisters did a lot of singing in German. Those people down there from Sterns County [MN], they were mostly from Germany, [German] people too. And so they called them "Sterns County German People," German people.

MM: When you joined the sisterhood, were you at St. Ben's [St. Benedicts] or were you here?

RH: No, I was in St. Ben's.

MM: Oh. So you went down to St. Joseph in [Minnesota].

RH: Oh, oh, yeah. You had to put in so many years down there before they put ya [elsewhere].

MM: I see. What songs do you recall singing in German?

RH: Oh, I could..., all these little [hymns] they used to use. Du, Du liegst mir im Herzen and then all those songs. They had some nice [songs] and even in the choir and chapel for All Saints Day they used a beautiful German. Then they played [instruments], one nun played the harp, others played the violin, and the organ. They sang beautiful when I came to the convent first, in German. But all [that], everything [German] disappeared shortly.

MM: Why do you think that happened?

RH: Well, its because these younger ones came in and they couldn't read, they couldn't read German or any [writing of it] but they understood German. They talked, they could talk German. But now you don't hear a word in German here.

MM: So were you at St. Joseph, Minnesota at St. Benedict. When did you come to Bismarck, in what year?

RH: 1938.

- MM:** You came to Bismarck?
- RH:** I came to Bismarck [then]. I was there at [St. Alexius Hospital] for fourteen or sixteen years in Bismarck. Then I was out in Garrison, that hospital. From there I went out to..., I was sent out to Flasher to put [set] up the lunches for the school children. And then from Flasher, I was there I think six months. Then I was sent up to Bishop Hacker as a housekeeper and cook [in Bismarck].
- MM:** What year was that?
- RH:** In fifty-four [1954], I think.
- MM:** Nineteen fifty-four. And how long were you with this Bishop Hacker?
- RH:** Oh it was two months less than twenty-six years.
- MM:** Oh really.
- RH:** I got acquainted with a lot of priests, bishops, and cardinals. They had big doings [occasions] all the time. And I enjoyed cooking and doing [those] things.
- MM:** So you learned to be..., you had to do a lot of cooking?
- RH:** Oh yes. I cooked everything. I didn't buy much ready-made food.
- MM:** Did you make a lot of German food?
- RH:** Not too much because Bishop [Hilary] Hacker, I don't know, he was German but they was just different. He was always on a diet, always on a diet. But once in awhile I'd make something German.
- MM:** And you retired in what year?
- RH:** When I was eighty-three.
- MM:** Eighty-three [years old], you retired.
- RH:** Then came out here and I'm sewing and doing that kind of work. I don't want to cook anymore. I go down, we have a trailer down here about a mile away. I go down [there] if I want some [German food] and I cook what I like.
- MM:** Oh you have a place nearby?
- RH:** Yeah. Cause we have kitchens there too but then too many come [to eat], come in there. I want something before you have nothing left. They all want a taste but I do like to do some cooking.
- MM:** Let's reflect a little bit more. We talked about your recollections as a child and those recollections are quite vivid to you I can tell, of München and then what you hear today. And of course when Peter Hilkes was here he talked about what's happening to our people that stayed in the former Soviet Union. And who knows, maybe you even have relatives that are still over there.
- RH:** Well I'm sure there must be some relatives there, but they changed their names. So many of them changed their names for fear of the Russians, so you wouldn't know what [their names had been]. We children, we had a nice life. [They] give us that little park, that's [where] we could swim, bathe. And then

in winter time there was ice. All that was great fun [to] be on ice. And then we had those vineyards, we could go anyplace like around there without any danger of any kind.

MM: Did you visit any other villages?

RH: Oh yes, we usually [did]. My grandmother, my mother's mother got married a second time 'cause her husband died so early. And she married a certain Mr. Zimmerman in the village of Sulz. See there was Speyer, Landau, Katherinental, and Sulz [all German villages in that area]. We go [went] through all those villages to go down to see grandma which was maybe about fifty miles [away]. 'Cause we had to [travel with buggy and horses] 'cause there were no cars. The only cars [there], our teacher got a car the last year I was out there. But it made so much noise and in Russia they had no roads for cars, no paved roads around there. And the dust was just thick and those cars didn't work very good. So my..., our childhood was wonderful.

MM: Yes. We've talked about a lot of things. And about your life in the..., at the Annunciation Priory.

RH: I had a very good life and I got along with everybody, didn't have much trouble with anything. And our religious [life], as a religious, we say our prayers and do every thing together. But now you're on your own. I mean some people if they don't come to prayers, it's there own hard luck. I mean if they don't get their prayers in and so on. But when we're home [here], I don't miss a thing. Everyday we have two masses, one of the priests comes over here from college and says mass at nine or ten o'clock in the morning and we have one at seven. So I take everything in and I says, "at my age I shouldn't waste anything because I should be ready."

MM: And you still keeping yourself busy?

RH: I keep myself [busy]. I do a lot of sewing.

MM: Wonderful. Your eyes are real good?

RH: I have had cataracts removed but I can see. But what happens here, some of their mothers die and they have all kinds of yardage material left, [then] they bring [it] over [here]. Nobody wants it, these young people don't sew. So they bring it in and I make them aprons. We furnished the aprons for everybody who works here. So I make aprons and I make anything, pillow cases and do some mending with sheets. We have a lot of company here.

MM: Wonderful. I think we're going to close our conversation today. It's November 8, 1993 and I'm in Bismarck, North Dakota at Annunciation Priory. It was a real pleasure to visit with Sister Reinhardt Hecker who was born in the village of München, near Odessa by the Black Sea, in what is today the Ukraine. It's been a real pleasure to visit with you. God bless you.

RH: Thank you.