

Interview with Alma Herman (AH)

Conducted by Joyce Reinhardt Larson (JL)

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- JL:** This is Joyce Reinhardt Larson interviewing Alma Herman who lives in Bethany Homes here in Fargo, North Dakota. We will be talking today about Alma's life and her family and so forth. So Alma, tell me your full name and your date of birth and where you were born.
- AH:** My name is Alma, my middle initial is M. for Miranda Herman. I was born on April 20, 1908, in Pomona View Township, six miles east of Kulm, North Dakota.
- JL:** What is your father's name?
- AH:** My father's name was Friedrich Herman.
- JL:** In what village was he born, in South Russia?
- AH:** He was born in the village of Beresina. Both of my parents were born in the same village.
- JL:** Are they buried over there, too?
- AH:** No, they are buried here. They came to America and were pioneers in North Dakota and they are buried in the Beresina Cemetery east of Kulm, North Dakota.
- JL:** What was your mother's name?
- AH:** My mother's name was Johanna. In German, Johanna Bälde, but we Americanized so many of these names and words and so we always wrote her name Belter. But it was spelled with an ä umlaut, Bälte. Johanna Bälte.
- JL:** What village was she from?
- AH:** She was in the same village as my father. They were both born there.
- JL:** They met and married there?
- AH:** Yes. They were both there.
- JL:** Where is she buried now?
- AH:** She is also buried in that same cemetery, east of Kulm.
- JL:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- AH:** I had six sisters and five brothers. We were twelve all together.
- JL:** A big family. Can you give their names in order of their birth?

- AH:** Oh yes. You'll be surprised. They all end in a, I think.
- JL:** Okay, all twelve of them?
- AH:** There was Matilda, Maria, Johanna, Amalia, then there was Jacob, my brother. There was Rosalia, Martha, and my brother Richard, Frederick, Harry, and William.
- JL:** Oh, that's nice.
- AH:** Oh, yes.
- JL:** Are any of them living yet?
- AH:** There are just three of us of the twelve. We have a sister in Chicago who is completely disabled. She's in her nineties and she's in a nursing home. I have a brother Harry, my second youngest brother, is in a suburb of L.A. in California, and I'm here. There are just three of us left of the twelve, and one is disabled.
- JL:** I suppose you don't get to see them too often.
- AH:** No. No, because it's so far and so hard to get there and Chicago is a big place.
- JL:** Do you have any memories of what your mother may have told you about the old country? Did she say anything?
- AH:** My parents were reticent about talking about Russia, because of the Czar and because of their leaving the country. Because they were so unhappy with the government and you know all of that. So, my father hardly ever talked about it because he was just not a talkative person about that. But my mother told me some very interesting things. There was a beautiful landscape that my mother often talked about. That was about the Dniester River. That Dniester River was near their home and there was a moat around it. There is a history of why they had moats around their grape arbors and they had moats around them. And oh, she loved that arbor. It was kind of her project because my father was a carpenter and cabinetmaker and he took care of all the things that needed to be made in the village. He worked on the wagons, he made all the furniture, he made the cradles for the children, he made the coffins. He made everything.
- JL:** Is that right?
- AH:** But, he was a master carpenter. He had done seven years of apprenticeship and he did not want to leave the village of Beresina because he loved his neighbors. He loved it all. But the reason they came is really a long, other story about why they really came.
- JL:** Do you know the history about the moat around the arbor?
- AH:** Oh, yes. Because marauders came and would ruin these grape arbors and they would get in there and well, they do harm. And so, almost all of the people who had these grape places that they used for wine. They made so much wine. They drank wine at their meals. They didn't drink coffee or milk or anything and they were healthy. They lived a long time.
- JL:** Did the children drink wine too?

AH: No. When they left Russia, there were only four children. Four little girls came with them. So, four of the twelve came with them. So, four of them were born in Bessarabia.

JL: So, it was in Bessarabia then?

AH: Yes, it was.

JL: So, your father didn't tell you too much about the old country?

AH: No. My father was very unhappy with the fact that in the first place they had to leave his business and everything. Now, there were four brothers who came with my grandfather's family when they came here and all four of them were farmers. And they didn't have enough land, they didn't have enough of anything, but my father was perfectly happy. He had his own business. He was the only one out of the boys that wanted to stay and continue his own business there. But when they all came, my grandfather said that whoever didn't come to America would be disinherited and they did have money. Mother didn't want to stay behind and my father felt he shouldn't either and let her family go away, so he came. But, he was heartbroken. He was never happy over it. So, he hardly talked about it. He hated the Kaiser, he just hated the Kaiser.

JL: So many times, it's the women who resent being here, even more so than the men.

AH: That's right, that's right.

JL: But in this case, it was a little different.

AH: In this case, it was my father. My mother was the one. There's a story, but again, these stories are so involved, they would make this too involved, they would make this too long. There are so many, little stories.

JL: I'll come back some other time and hear some of the stories.

AH: Yes, then we'll get some of the little stories.

JL: They make it interesting.

AH: Yes, they do.

JL: Did you know your grandparents?

AH: Ah, I do not remember my grandmother. My grandmother belonged to a family that had a wool-dyeing business.

JL: Is that on your mother's side?

AH: That is my father's side. I don't know anything of my grandparents of my mother's side. She told me, but I forgot.

JL: Yes.

AH: But my grandmother died because she had TB when they came, and lived only about, well, less than a year. But she was not strong at all. They had to lift her up onto the train, and onto the ship and all. So, she died very soon after. But my grandfather lived near where we were on the homestead. He was a

very..., almost gruff man. As I remember him, he was not a gentle person. Nothing like my father, so I do not remember him other than that he was just gruff.

JL: He was strict with his family?

AH: Too strict. Too strict and that kind of made a difference to all of them.

JL: Did they ever talk about the churches in the village there?

AH: Well, not my parents so much. But my oldest sister Matilda, who was eight years old, a very bright girl. She used to tell me how she couldn't wait on Sunday mornings to go to the church. They had a very beautiful church. She couldn't wait to get there. She loved school, she loved church and the nicest thing, she thought, was that in the entry in the ceiling, they had painted an angel with bright blue wings and she always told about that and oh, how pretty that was. When she could go to Sunday School and see that angel in the ceiling.

JL: Was that a Lutheran or Catholic church?

AH: It was Lutheran. They were very against the Catholics. Lutherans and Catholics were not so good together.

JL: You knew that? They must have made that known?

AH: Oh, yes. They made that known.

JL: Even your parents?

AH: Yes, my parents too.

JL: So, if you would have married a Catholic, that wouldn't have been so good?

AH: Oh, no. That would not have been good.

JL: I wonder, do you have any idea of how big their home was in the German village?

AH: I only know from.... I've done a lot of research for the library and a lot about Beresina village, so I know generally how the houses were built and how they were generally styled. And then much later, I saw a picture that those people who didn't come to America, [they] had sent a picture of the house. Because my Uncle Rudolph, who was my mother's brother, he had the house. It was a nice large house with large windows and a picket fence.

JL: So, they must have had some money, I mean they....

AH: Yes, they were comfortable. They were not poor.

JL: Do you remember anything else? Any other special features that they may have told you? Or your older sisters or your grandmother may have told you?

AH: About the house? Well, the very special feature was that my father was also an artist. He had a wonderful hand. He could do German script in paint. He was just a very, very artistic, able man. He was the carpenter who built our little country church.

JL: Out in Kulm?

- AH:** East of Kulm, in the country. We have always had this little, wonderful thing that he did over the doorway of it in German script. He had written with black paint, "How Lovely are Thy Dwellings" from the 84th Psalm. We treasured that so much that when they took the church away and made a funeral chapel out of it in the town of Kulm, my brothers took those boards that my father had painted on and they had my brother Harry, who was also an artist, retrace it all. So, it's at home on the homestead, from the church. The church has long since been dismantled and [is] gone.
- JL:** Does someone live at the homestead now?
- AH:** No. Nobody lives there now, but it's still in the family.
- JL:** But that art is still there?
- AH:** Yes. That is in the house and in the summertime, they move it outside in the garden. It's so pretty.
- JL:** That should maybe be given to a museum.
- AH:** Oh, I hope so. I hope so, because that was done way back. They came to North Dakota in 1898 and my father was the carpenter for the church. They built it, I think, the fourth year after they were there. So, it's old.
- JL:** Do you remember speaking German as a child?
- AH:** Oh, none of us knew English. But there again, there is a long story that makes this interesting to me. They a small, little sod house. They had two sod houses. One wore out, and then they built another sod house before they could build a frame house. When my oldest sister, who was eight, she is the first one who went to a country school there, and we couldn't talk any English at all. Because the folks couldn't either, but they were learning though. They were very, very interested in education and they learned very fast. My father did.
- JL:** They pushed education then?
- AH:** Oh yes. I remember when they were discussing it one evening. Many times, they didn't know those kids were all over [and listening]. They couldn't have much privacy with twelve [children], although they were never all there. The first half was gone and married by the time the second half came along. But sometimes when they talked, they would sort of let their hair down, and then we would be listening. I remember my father saying that he knew a way how to help the kids learn English in a hurry. Mother said, "how?" Father said, "we'll have the teacher board here and he can teach them." But mother said, "Not for very long. I haven't any room for the kids. I can't have anybody [else]." But he [the teacher] was there for long enough so that my oldest sister, who was a very smart kid, soon learned the English language and she taught all the rest of them, right down the line. We taught each other, so by the time they went to school, there was no problem.
- JL:** Did they continue to speak German in the home then?
- AH:** Oh, yes. Yes.
- JL:** Even though the kids knew it...
- AH:** But my mother always used to say that she wasn't going to speak it. She didn't want to sound so..., you know, they speak with a brogue when they have to learn it that way.

- JL:** Right, right.
- AH:** She said, "I'm not going to talk like that! I'm going to talk German." But one time, there was a family joke. She was alone and somebody came from the neighborhood to borrow something. He happened to not be German. So, he spoke to her in English and whoever was there in the house said, "I heard her and there was nothing wrong. She spoke English just fine." But she wouldn't do it when we were listening.
- JL:** Do you remember your neighbors around there? Did your family associate with the neighbors?
- AH:** Oh, yes.
- JL:** Were they all Germans?
- AH:** Yes, they were all Germans. It was a strange thing. There was the town of Kulm, which was built really around a flour mill. And all around [to] the north and west were all Swedish people. And all south and east were all Germans. But when they came to town and mixed, even though they couldn't speak together, there was never a problem between the Swedes and Germans. There was never a problem.
- JL:** So, your parents didn't have any resentments against other nationalities?
- AH:** Oh, no. They were never prejudiced.
- JL:** We were talking about the German language. Do you remember them reading the Bible at home?
- AH:** Oh, my father read the Bible every day.
- JL:** The German Bible they brought with them?
- AH:** Yes. There was a chair, a rocker, by the west window in the living room and there was a sewing machine beside it. It closed up and there was a top there and my father's Bible was lying on that sewing machine all the time and the chair was beside it. When he was through with his work, he was in that chair reading his Bible. He was also a "foresteher," in German, they call it, of the church for many many years. He was a Sunday School teacher for forty years and he knew his Bible very well. The pastors were his friends. He was well educated in the Bible. My father was very strict.
- JL:** He was?
- AH:** Oh, yes. He was very strict.
- JL:** Did he read the Bible to the family and teach it to the rest of the family?
- AH:** Oh, yes. Usually, he read out loud. Mother always wanted him to read while she was busy working, sewing, mending or something like that. He read a lot then. They knew all the Bible stories. I still know them from the way my father told them.
- JL:** Were you confirmed too?
- AH:** Yes, we were confirmed. We had to board in town because the roads weren't suitable and we didn't have transportation. So we would board and room in town for three weeks. In that time, we memorized all the special passages of the Bible, we learned to write German script, and we knew all the books of the Bible.

- JL:** Was this all in German?
- AH:** Yes, this was in German. They wanted to keep their habits and things. This is what was so much trouble in Russia. Because the government was taking everything away from them and they said that the queen had promised them that they wouldn't have to give up any German. And then, when it happened in history, they had to give up so much. That's another reason they just wouldn't stay there.
- JL:** If their religion was touched, it was a very sensitive thing?
- AH:** Oh, yes. That was very important in our house.
- JL:** Did you say that your father was a gentle man?
- AH:** My father was a very strict man, but he was also a gentle man. He was a man of few words, but when he spoke, he had already thought. He never spoke without thinking and when you heard my father make an announcement or speak, then we knew that, "this was it." He was a wonderful, wonderful speaker. He spoke at church conferences and he was a man of God. The reason that he was so strict was, when they came to America on the Kaiser Wilhelm, that great, great boat. I have pictures of it. Oh, I have everything. When they came, they came in a storm. He had his four daughters and a whole group came [together]. There was a violent storm at sea and my father went somewhere privately. My mother told me this. He prayed that his family would get safe voyage to America. When he came back from that, the storm was over. He told my mother that he had an experience and that he was converted. He had promised God that if God would let him bring his family to America safely and outlive this storm, he would serve Him forever. And he did it, he did. He served in every capacity. He was a brilliant man. If he could have been educated, he would have been outstanding.
- JL:** How about the discipline of the family? Did he do that?
- AH:** My mother did that. If she sent us to my father, he didn't have to say much. All he would have to do is look you straight in the eye and say maybe one or two things, like "why did you do that?" or very few [words]. And my father, never in the world, touched me. I was never spanked by my father. I was slapped on the bottom once in a while by my mother, but my father never, never ever spanked me.
- JL:** There was none of that in the family then? He treated your mother well then too, I suppose?
- AH:** Oh, yes. Well, he didn't dare other than treat my mother well, because she stood up for herself.
- JL:** You sometimes hear about these German families where the father is the ruler...
- AH:** Oh, the father was. Yes.
- JL:** But in your family would you say that is was a mutual agreement, as far as discipline and even other family decisions?
- AH:** Oh, when it came to big decisions, my mother would really would turn it over to my father. But generally, just living in the run of the mill and the exchanges between the children and all, there she didn't usually didn't send us to my father. She would handle it. She was quite a woman. She had a beautiful soprano voice, lovely lyric voice.
- JL:** Did she have a change to sing?

- AH:** Well, not like she would have if she hadn't been out there where there was no opportunity.
- JL:** Right.
- AH:** All twelve of us sang and there is a story that they told us. When my second oldest sister was old enough, in those days, you know, the girls would "work out," they used to call it. They would go to neighbors houses, who needed help with their children or something. My sister Johanna went to work for a wonderful lady who had an organ. She was a good musician and a good singer. This woman made an agreement and said to my father, "if you let me have the girl for the winter, I will teach her to play the organ." And she worked the winter and helped the woman with her housework and came home in the spring and she taught every one, down the line, to play the parlor organ. Every one of us played some. Some played better. Some, later on in school, went to take music formally, but there was not a person in my family of twelve that couldn't play the simplest little song.
- JL:** You had a parlor organ then?
- AH:** Yes, we had a parlor organ. Later, my sister who was working in Minneapolis, sent us a second-hand piano for Christmas. The people she worked for, when she told them how much we sang, how good the voices were, this woman said, "I want a new piano. You can send this home to your farm." We were the first in the whole neighborhood that had a piano. Hally sent that to us.
- JL:** Isn't that nice.
- AH:** Before that, we had the organ and then, for awhile had both the piano and the organ. My father played the accordion in the old country and my mother said that he used to play for dances. But he didn't bring his accordion. I don't know why. We never saw his accordion, but they said that he was good. So, that's where it came from. My mother's lyric, beautiful voice and my father's ability to play the accordion. Everyone of us sang.
- JL:** Isn't that something.
- AH:** We had a family quartet, we had a mixed quartet, and sometimes the whole family sang for Sunday Evening services and things. We all sang very well.
- JL:** What did you sing? What are some of songs you sang?
- AH:** Oh, we sang all the wonderful songs. I can't think of the German songs now, but one that we always liked to sing is "Gott is de liebe."
- JL:** Oh, I even know that song.
- AH:** Everybody sang that. We knew all the songs. Do you know what I'm doing here now [in Bethany]? I always played. I always took music in school, so I was good on the piano and I had voice lessons. But I had never played an organ. I had the little parlor organ, I played that. That's where I learned, but not a real church organ, until I came here. Then one day, they brought in an organ into one of the rooms and do you know that I have played this organ almost every day since I came here two years ago? People just like those old songs and that's what I play. Every morning after breakfast, I go to the recreation room and I play some hymns or songs, and I always have a little audience.
- JL:** Do you play by ear?

- AH:** Half by ear. I can play some by ear, but I do need the music as a guide or otherwise, I get lost. Sometimes, I play for Vesper services. Sometimes, they ask me to substitute somewhere. I just love it. I do it all the time.
- JL:** You just have the music right in you, don't you?
- AH:** Well, I was just born with it. We all were born with it. Both my mother and father were beautiful singers.
- JL:** That, sometimes, made the way a little easier, when they had something like that. When people came to a new country, they had their music.
- AH:** Oh yes. There was always music in our house. If it wasn't someone singing alone, it was a group singing somewhere in the evenings. I remember so well the evenings, especially after we had the piano, and it was wonderful.
- JL:** Did you ever play in the town hall or some place like that in Kulm?
- AH:** No, they didn't have anything like that. But they had the Kulm church and if the pastors could get us to come to the Sunday Evening services, they were in their glory because we all sang. Or special days, we always went to town and sang in the choir there. Because there was no choir in the little church. There were so few people.
- JL:** So, the big Lutheran church in town is where you sang?
- AH:** Well, this was no.... They did not form a Lutheran church. They formed a Congregational church. They wanted complete freedom and they made their own [church]. They belonged to the Congregational board and they wanted to make their own rules. They didn't want to be.... Well, they had some of this experience in Russia about being dictated to and being told how it must be done. But they said, "no, we won't." They formed their own church. When the pioneers came, they all formed Congregational churches. There was a whole state full of these Congregational churches. They wanted to be away from the Lutheran or the Catholic.
- JL:** Is that where the Congregational comes from?
- AH:** That's where it comes from, because the congregation is in control.
- JL:** I didn't know that. How far were you from town?
- AH:** Six miles. We were only about a mile and a quarter from the country church. Oh, it was a beautiful little church!
- JL:** Do you remember in the graveyards, where there any wrought-iron crosses there?
- AH:** Those we didn't have at all. I noticed there is a question in here and I know Mr. Miller is so interested in those iron crosses, but no, we didn't have anything like that. We did have though, probably what was the closest to it. We did have a wrought-iron fence and a large iron gate to the cemetery, and I think that was probably the closest to those wrought-iron crosses that they had in the western part of the state.
- JL:** I think that maybe, it was more Catholic, too?

- AH:** Yes. I think so.
- JL:** Did you have to do a lot of work on the farm?
- AH:** Oh, dear me. Dear me, we all had lots of jobs to do! Everyone had their jobs to do.
- JL:** I suppose, like milk the cows?
- AH:** Milk the cows, separate the milk, feed the calves, and wash the separator, which had about forty little disks that had to be washed separately. Oh, I hated to wash them! That's what we had to do.
- JL:** Just think of all the housework that you had with twelve children.
- AH:** Yes, yes. But there were always one or two older sisters at home and I was the youngest of the seven girls, so I didn't have to do much housework, really. Because there was always someone there that was older than I was. They babied me in some ways, but not in all ways. My family was good to me, very good.
- JL:** Well, you went to school, I guess. Did all of your family go to school? Did your brothers and sisters have a chance to go to school? I suppose when they first came, there wasn't a school there?
- AH:** Yes, there was a school there. There were some earlier settlers that had a very small school where my oldest sister went and where that teacher taught, who stayed at our home, so that my older sisters could learn enough English. We didn't have room - it was in the sod house. I wasn't there. There were only a few there, but they didn't have room. But my father said it was the best way for them to learn English and it was a good idea. But we had no problem. All of us knew [English] by the time we went to school. It was not the problem that some kids had.
- JL:** So, some of the kids didn't have to stay home and work on the farm? The parents made sure they went to school?
- AH:** Well, not quite. The older boys..., actually the school system was tailored to them. Because they were so restricted in the old country, that they said, "we're going to have our own township rules, we are going to take care of our customs in the way we want it." The school board would allow the boys that had to stay home and work in the fields in the spring, they would let them go only a few months in the winter, when they weren't needed at home. It was all agreed that they didn't have to go the full time. Our school was only open eight months. All of them [schools were the same way] in those years. Then, when these boys would have to stay home, they got about five good months during the winter when they went to school. Other than that, they were at home working on the farm.
- JL:** But the girls pretty much went?
- AH:** Yes, the girls went. But I was the first one who graduated from the eighth grade. All the others either didn't care to go anymore or it was that they didn't have to go the eight years until they finished the eighth grade. Maybe the sixth grade is what a lot of them finished. I was the first one who wrote eighth grade examinations and got an eighth grade diploma in the whole township. I was also the first one to go to high school from the township. I was a pioneer in that way. I did of things.
- JL:** Did you really want to do that, or did your mother want you to do this?

AH: I wanted to very much, because I had a wonderful teacher when I was in the eighth grade. Harry Stephen was his name. He died only about two years ago in Wisconsin. Ever since I was in the eighth grade, that man kept in touch with me and sent me Christmas cards all those years, until two years ago. Because he saw something that he thought that I had. On the last day of school, he made me promise. He said, "you must go to high school!" Because he knew I had potential. I said, "I can't do that. No one goes to high school. We have no money." He said, "you must promise that you will find a way to go to high school." I went to my father after I had finished the eighth grade and asked him whether it was possible that I could go. He said, "I can't give you a penny. I haven't given any money for school for anybody else," and I was the ninth child. I said, "if I can find a way, will you let me go?" He said, "when you're eighteen." I was only fourteen then. He said, "you can go to high school when you're eighteen, but you have to be home with mother until you are eighteen." So, I abided by that, waited for the time. Harry Stephen, from Wisconsin, kept writing me letters, encouraging me, telling me what to do. Because the schools were out in eight months and the teachers went home and away and so there was no one to do examinations and no family that cared whether any kid took an eighth grade examination. So, they just stopped going to school and didn't graduate from the eighth grade. But, because of this teachers interest and since he was such a good coach for me, he had also told me, "you can go to another district. You could go to town to write examinations if your school is out." And so, my school was out. I sold a story, a little story once, about walking to town the morning I wrote examinations with the town kids.

JL: You did? You wrote a story and sold it?

AH: I wrote a story and the name of the story was, "Who Took My Shoes?" It's a wonderful story. Oh, there is so much. I have done quite of lot of writing and have sold a few things. I used to write little stories for REC Magazine [Rural Electrification Magazine]. That's where I have used my talents. A little bit, that way.

JL: I'm curious about the title, "Who Took My Shoes?"

AH: Well, it's so long until I get to that part of it, but if you want me to take the time about it, I will. The boys and father were all in the fields by the time it came to write examinations in town. My county superintendent, who had been instructed by this teacher in Wisconsin, he had written to him and he had told him, "that here was a promising kid" and he should help her write examinations. So, it was arranged with the town school board that some of us from the country that were ready, could come and write eighth grade examinations with the town kids. Well, the morning came for me to go and write eighth grade examinations. That had all been prepared for me. That morning, father took all the horses to plow. We only had so many horses. They had three plows. Otherwise, I would have ridden horseback, but the horses were all in the field. Mother and I did the milking.

Well, it just so happened that I had two pairs of shoes, one pair was beautiful black patent leather, my Sunday shoes. I loved them. The other pair was some old buckskin shoes that I used for the farm and milking. This particular morning, mother took me aside and said, "don't make a fuss about it." We had an old Ford and she said, "you can't drive the car and there is no way I want you to miss this." "You are going to get up early and walk to town." The six miles! "But," she said, "first you have to help me with the milking." Other times, the boys and father helped, but they were all in the field. So, we went out to the barn to milk. And wouldn't you know, we had an old Holstein cow that was very clumsy and very big. She wasn't like the others at all. I was sitting there, milking like crazy and making a sound in the milk pail and suddenly, she just decided to.... I was sitting on an old bucket upside down, and she just decided to take some steps over to my side and tip me over backwards. Just while I was milking! I didn't care so

much otherwise, but the milk that I had in the pail tipped over and poured into my left shoe. I had intended to walk to town with these buckskin shoes and carry my patent leather shoes. But, there was a problem now. How could I go with this milk soaked shoe and appear there with these kids in town? I was just a farm kid. Now, coming with a wet, dirty farm shoe would never do. So, here is what I did. I found an old sock or two and put them on and then put this soggy shoe on and took my patent leather shoes and put them in a paper bag and walked. Mother said, "You go on. I'll finish the milking, go on. Take care of your shoe and see that you get there." So, I did. I cleaned up. I remember that I had a dress that had a midi. One of those sailor midis. I just loved it. I got myself all fixed up and I kept my old shoes on and I walked to town. When I got to the edge of town, there was a turn into town and under there, there was a culvert. I thought, "Ah! I'll set my shoes into the edge of that culvert and put my patent leather shoes on and nobody will ever know the difference." And that's what I did. There was a little bit of grass over the opening of the culvert. I thought no more of it. I walked down the street as proud as you can imagine. I had no trouble with the examinations, because I had a good teacher.

When it came evening, my father came to get me. When they came home from the fields and had supper, they came to get me because they wouldn't want me to walk home again and it was evening, anyway. So, they picked me up and my brothers were along. When they came to the edge of town, I said to dad, "would you please stop?" I didn't say please. We didn't say, "Bitte" in German. We didn't say please in those days. They didn't teach us those things, so much.

JL: Not so many manners?

AH: No. I wish they had. But anyway, we were polite, but we didn't say "bitte". We didn't say please. I don't remember. So, he said, "what in the world for? What do you want me to stop for?" He talked in German. I said, "You'll see." So, he stopped the car and I ran over there to the edge of this culvert and reached in and the shoes were gone! And when I came back, I had to tell them. My brothers laughed. My father said, "How in the world could that be? That somebody took those shoes there?" Well, there were houses not far [away]. They must have seen me do this and they looked to see what I had set in there. Do you know to this day, I never have learned who took those shoes out of there and I didn't have work shoes. I had to wear my patent leather [shoes] for the rest of the time, until it was Christmas. Then we got new shoes.

JL: I suppose you had to shine them up on Sundays as best you could.

AH: Oh, the shine was gone, but I still took good care of them.

JL: Farm life was kind of hard on them, wasn't it?

AH: Yes, but, "who took my shoes?"

JL: How about the cooking done by your mother? Do you remember some of the ethnic foods?

AH: Oh, yes. My mother made wonderful foods. Egg noodles. Wonderful egg noodles and we used them in casseroles, in soups. We used them with butter over them. Oh, we ate a lot of egg noodles. Do you know anything about knepfla?

JL: Oh, yes. I love them.

- AH:** Oh, they were so good. She made those very well. Kuchen of every kind. And our favorite topping was sour cream and prune on kuchen. And lots of sugar too. If anyone asked my mother, "how do you make such wonderful good coffee cake?" She would always say, "when you use too much sugar, then it's enough." She would take handfuls and there was wonderful crusty sugar topping on the coffee cake. That was her secret, too much sugar. She made a wonderful topping for toast out of sour cream and onions. Cooked up sour cream and with onion cut in. Oh, that was good over toast.
- JL:** Oh, I have never heard of that.
- AH:** And the toast we made on the back of the stove. We didn't have a toaster. So, she always cleaned off the back of the stove. I can see her now, and she would lay these pieces of bread there and made toast in the morning.
- JL:** Homemade bread, right?
- AH:** Homemade bread, yes. And she made homemade bread three times a week.
- JL:** Lots of mouths to feed.
- AH:** Oh, yes. Yes. Let's see, what else did she make? Mumlich. Did you ever hear of that?
- JL:** No, I haven't.
- AH:** It's made of corn meal. Oh, it's a wonderful thing. She would make a big pot of corn meal and she would stir it and have it real smooth, with no lumps. Then, she would quickly turn it over on a large plate and she would have a large mold, like a molded cake and over the top of that. She would pour fat and oil of the bacon or pork that she had fried, she'd pour that right over the top. That was so good with the cornmeal.
- JL:** Now days, we wouldn't eat that anymore, would we?

END OF SIDE ONE -----Missing Words----- BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

- JL:** Do you know much about the school system in Russia?
- AH:** I know much from my sister Matilda, who was a bright girl and she soaked up everything. She loved school, and when they were beginning to talk about going to America, like I said before, my grandfather said that whoever was not going to America would be disinherited. Well, that takes care of that. When they were already planning to leave Russia, they had to plan ahead. They had to get the schedules for their ocean voyages; they had to find ways to go on the smaller boats to Berlin Harbor where they went on the big Kaiser Wilhelm, the biggest ship at that time, about the biggest in the whole world. It was a very fancy ship, but they were in steerage, you know, down below. They weren't first class.
- JL:** They were on there with many other then, weren't they?
- AH:** Oh, yes. Many, many. I think, right at that time, in one period, there were over four hundred in one ship that were all leaving Russia at the same time. Now, where were we [in our conversation]?

JL: About the education.

AH: One day, my mother was making new clothes for the kids, the four little girls that she had. Blankets too. They wove their own wool, they made their own blankets. They did all their own stuff. She was very, very busy with all that. So, she said to Matilda that she had to stay home from school and had take care of the three younger children so that mother could stay very busy getting ready to go to America. That's all they could think about, "we are going to America." They knew a lot, because some earlier relatives had come to America and were in Oklahoma, and so they had been writing back and forth. They knew a lot about America. But they didn't know what they should have known about North Dakota. They didn't think it was quite as cold and as quite as hard a place to live. These others were in Oklahoma where it was warmer, so they had the wrong impression. There were some surprises there. But this particular day, after mother had said that Matilda should stay home and take care of the babies, she did stay home. And the next day, when she went back to school, she came home and came in the door crying and she held out her hand and it was all swollen and it had a cut in it. The Russian professor had asked her why she was absent from school. She said, "I had to help my mother take care of the babies so we can go to America." It sparked something in him. He must have resented the idea that they were leaving and didn't like what there was in Russia. He took a ruler that had an edge and had her hold her hand out and hit her so that the edge cut open the skin in her hand. Well, when mother saw that she said, "tomorrow you are going to stay home again, but father is going to go to school to talk to that professor." So, I don't whether it happened. He probably didn't, but that was when they worked faster to get ready to go to America. Before that, the settlers there in the villages had all their own professors. They had a wonderful education system under the German system. But when the Russians came in to take it all over, why that all changed. They would change the professors, the officers, the town's elected people. No wonder they couldn't stay. They didn't want to stay. They wanted to retain the customs in their homes, their language. Everything they had, they were happy with and they did a good job.

JL: Did your sister have to learn Russian?

AH: No. No, they didn't have to learn Russian. Of all of us, everybody, because we belong to the Germans from Russia, everybody thinks that we speak Russian. I don't know a single Russian word.

JL: But I thought your sister, maybe having gone to school and because she had a Russian professor, she learned Russian?

AH: Yes. She had a Russian professor and went to school with children that spoke Russian, but our kids didn't know any Russian words at all.

JL: So, that Russian professor who hit her hand, was he teaching in German?

AH: Oh, yes. They had to. They insisted on that.

JL: Even though they knew he was Russian?

AH: Oh, yes. They knew he was Russian.

JL: I think, in time, they had to learn Russian.

AH: Oh, I'm sure that they did, but my people didn't. Oh, there were a few words that my parents knew that they picked up. But they weren't taught or learned any Russian.

- JL:** I wonder how many times that intermarriages between Germans and Russians happened.
- AH:** I suppose sometimes, and that would make a difference. I do remember one time, they made so much about prayer meetings in our little church. They would have their morning worship service and then they would stay and have a little prayer meeting each time. One time, because we were still there from the regular service, I was still there when the prayer meeting started. My Uncle Gottlieb and my Aunt Sophia and my dad and mother got up and surprised everybody by singing a part of the Russian anthem which they had picked up. They didn't have to learn it, but they knew it. The only Russian words I could possibly say were [? Russian song words]. That's just the first part of that song. And they surprised everyone that they knew that song. They had lived among them for a long time. So, that's the only Russian I know.
- JL:** I suppose you wouldn't know how to spell that for me, would you?
- AH:** No, but I have it written somewhere in my notes, in my own spelling. I do remember that, because I was only about so big [and] it made such an impression on me. The folks sang Russian! The folks sang Russian in church today! It was big excitement. But that's all they knew. A few words here and there I think, but we weren't aware of it.
- JL:** Do you remember any of the games that you played as a child? Was there time for games?
- AH:** Oh yes, after supper on summer evenings. We always played throwing something over the granary, like ante ante over. We played that. Or, in the wintertime, we would be out running. Those of us who were of a similar age would be out running. We had a path that we followed, a certain way that we ran and we would run in a long string. The first one, the oldest one would lead us and the littlest one would follow. We would run all through the familiar little spots in the evening in the moonlight.
- JL:** In the fresh snow?
- AH:** The nice fresh snow. And after awhile, if it didn't snow right away, we'd get a little path. We just ran for the sake of running.
- JL:** Do you remember any other games?
- AH:** Not really any formal games, except in school. There we played pump pump pull away, we played drop the handkerchief. I don't remember the names of the games, but we had a lot of games. But there were not enough of us to play those at home. Often times, the boys had their own little ideas.
- JL:** Was there much storytelling, songs, or fairy tales told?
- AH:** Mother told us the fairy tales or the nursery rhymes. Father only told the religious stories from the Bible. He just stuck very close to that. But you know? They have given me so much leeway here at Bethany. They will let me do almost anything. Somebody started the idea that I should [do this], because I was playing the organ, and everybody likes to listen. Somebody said, "why don't we start a program called, "Name that Tune"? And you play the organ and we will get an audience and they can guess the name of the song." That used to be on the radio years ago. We started that and I got tired of playing just the songs. So now, I make up programs. One of them, for an example, I gave clues to Nursery rhymes. I give about three clues to see if they could guess which nursery rhyme it was. I had fifteen of them, with four

clues for each and they only missed two. They know all their nursery rhymes here. They can't say them, but they can identify them.

JL: They are up there in their heads, though.

AH: You know, we had the biggest fun over Humpty Dumpty. They couldn't guess Humpty Dumpty. Now, these were not German nursery rhymes, but these were in English. So, everybody here knew them. I'm having another one, a patriotic one, where I'm using things like, Patrick Henry said, "give me liberty or give me death." The whole thing is, "who said that?" Or, like I'll say, who said, "ask not what your country can do for you," or, "we have nothing to fear but fear?" All those quotations by historic figures. And then I'm going to have a section in there where I'll play patriotic songs that are not all known and they have to guess the name of the song. That's my next program. They are letting me write my own programs. I have copies of it on record in the Activities Department. I'm having a wonderful time here. I have time to schedule what I want to do here. I don't have any assignments. I don't answer to anybody. They just turn me loose on a project. I just love it. I really do.

JL: That's just wonderful. That's how these years of your life should to be spent.

AH: That's right. But I am doing too much. I really have more irons in the fire than I really want. I used to be so very busy, working until three o'clock at night, working for Mike, when I was translating.

JL: You'll have to just choose what you really enjoy the most, and turn down the rest.

AH: You know, the other nice thing is, that if I'm in the middle of something and I'm tired, then I think, "oh, where is it written on the wall that I have to do this now?" I leave it. You can't do that when you're in the business world. I'm having a second life here, I really am. Because I worked hard all my life.

JL: I believe it. How about when someone would get sick in the family, on the farm miles away, was there a doctor close by? Were there midwives?

AH: My Aunt Christina was really wonderful, almost a nurse.

JL: Was she like a folk healer?

AH: Yes. I think that all, except one of my sisters and brothers and the four that were born in Russia, all the others, she was the midwife and helped with the delivery. But we kids didn't know anything about it. We always were sent away to a cousins place or something, because there was no privacy in the home. I don't know anything about anybody being born. I don't know anything about that. But we did have Aunt Christina, who I think, delivered more kids than many doctors. They had a wonderful remedy that nobody really knows about and in German we called it "heil blätter." Heil for healing and that word blätter, with an ä umlaut, for leaves. It grew wild in the corner of the garden and it was a leaf. Almost this large and it grew close to the ground. It was like a vine almost, growing close to the ground. We called it heil blätter because it came from Russia. They did that over there.

JL: It was healing leaves?

AH: Healing leaves and what those leaves did, you wouldn't believe. If you had a cut, and we got a lot of them, but you know, out of those twelve kids, there never was an infected wound. We never had an infection that I know of, because if you were bruised, if you had a cut, if you stepped in some glass when you went barefoot, or whatever you did, mother would say to one of us, "bring me a heil blätter." Out

we'd go into the garden and bring one or two of these leaves. She would wash them clean. She would wash the wound, and she would put these leaves on there and then tear a dish towel and make a bandage out of it and put it on there and maybe two or one day later, she would take that off of there and it would be all white and clean. It healed right away.

JL: I wonder what that's called in English?

AH: I have no idea. I wish I knew. It was a weed. I would recognize it if I saw it again. But, I have no idea. We called it "heil blätter." But, it was a wonderful remedy.

JL: I wonder if your mother took some in for the winter and dried it maybe?

AH: No, it had to be green. It was..., whatever was in it, drawing out of poison or if a little dirt got in or something. I remember seeing them take the bandage off my brother's finger one time when he cut himself, and the finger was all white. This thing had cleaned out the skin and cleaned out the wound. It was a marvelous thing. Then we had camomile tea. That grew in the corner of the garden. When somebody had a tummy ache, mother would say, "go get some camomile," and then she made a tea.

JL: Did you pick it for drying too? Sometimes, we would have it at meal times.

AH: No. We really didn't do that, but we used it for healing. Let's see, what else? Then we had a salve that a peddler brought once a year. Oh, there's a whole story. I must write that someday, about that peddler. How he came every year and how exciting it was. He sold a salve that was really for the horses. My father bought it and I can't remember the name of it. But, if a horse got cut by barb wire or they would get cut in the barn somewhere by the wood or something, they had this salve, a great big container of it. And we got so to use it, if we had a wound or something wrong. My mother would put this salve on there and tie it up and it would do the same thing as this heil blätter. Then, they used vinegar a lot for cleansing. They would clean the wound with vinegar and oh, did it burn! But it served like a mercurechrome.

JL: Do you remember anything called Brauche? Do you know what that is? It's a German folk healing and I wondered if you knew of anybody that did that? It involved the rubbing of the area afflicted with something.

AH: Was it like massage?

JL: Yes, a little.

AH: No. I saw that in your notes. We didn't do anything like that. I wish they had used more massage. But there was one thing. I don't know whether anybody else did. But I used to have terrible cramps with my period. Nearly died. My mother would take the largest dinner plate that she had, she'd put it in the oven. Make it very hot. We didn't have a hot water bottle or a heating pad or anything like that. But, whenever I would get these terrible cramps, I remember sometimes in the middle of the night, I would hear her downstairs, she would know if I was sick. I would hear her down there, she would heat this platter, make it just as hot as she could, and she would wrap it in a towel. And I remember hearing her come up the stairs and I would think, "oh, mother hurry, I can't stand this! Put that hot plate on my stomach." She used that for tummy aches for the little ones and it was our heating pad. She took this plate, heated it in the oven, wrapped it in a towel and laid it on your stomach. It felt wonderful.

- JL:** I remember my mother taking a pillowcase and filling it with salt. She would heat the salt in a big kettle on the stove and put it in the pillowcase.
- AH:** That was similar.
- JL:** It was done when we had the flu or a headache or something like that.
- AH:** Sometimes, if it didn't work with a plate, I remember once, she came upstairs and she had a flat iron. We used to iron with flat irons. Remember, they had the handles to put in and heat on the stove? She had heated the flat iron and wrapped it in the towel. I didn't care what it was, just so it was hot when she put it on my tummy. Very warm, that helped a lot. Then, we had this peddler that came once a year. He had a wonderful, wonderful suitcase that had all little compartments that had all his salves and all these things. When he came, we were just in our glory because he would show us these suitcases full of these wonderful things that all fit in there so nicely. He would always come to our place around supper, and stay overnight. Then, he would give something to the family, before he left in the morning. He was a wonderful friend. I can't remember his name either. That's awful, one should have those names. Anyway, we had this horse salve that we used, and we had some tonic, Wasatusa, it was called. It must be an Indian name. We would put about a tablespoonful of it in hot water and they would have us drink a whole cup of it. It worked wonders for stomach aches or what ails you. They used it all the time.
- JL:** What about green drops?
- AH:** No. Peppermint candy, father used to keep. If we had a stomach acting up, then he would give us one. I think that's about all the home remedies that we had.
- JL:** So, no one ever got sick enough where they had to go to the hospital? I suppose there wasn't a hospital for quite a distance?
- AH:** Neither my mother nor my father were ever in a hospital in their lives. My mother had all her children, I don't know about the four that were born in Russia, but all the others, Aunt Christina delivered and was there for the birth. Except Harry, and we always laugh about it. My second youngest brother Harry, whom I still have in California, and we write letters. We are so close. I am so afraid of who's going to go first, because there are just the two of us left. Anyway, we have wonderful rapport, and we write letters and it's just wonderful. He didn't want to be born and it was in the middle of the worst winter. I think it was a breach, but they didn't know anything about that in those days. All the others were somehow delivered by Aunt Christina or just born by themselves. But, all the others were without a doctor. But this was in the middle of a bad, bad cold spell and Harry just wouldn't be born. Aunt Christina came, but she couldn't help and then my mother started to hemorrhage. Some of the neighbors got together in a sleigh, and the roads were closed. It was bitter cold, but they went to bring the doctor. But, that was the closest that anyone, our children, came to dying or the mother dying. All the rest, no doctor ever.
- JL:** That's pretty good, considering there were twelve children.
- AH:** But then my father died under anesthesia, in the hospital. He had a very simple operation for a hernia. But, he had a long trip to the hospital in Bismarck. It was very cold and they took him to have an operation, they were afraid it would rupture. You know how they protrude. So, he was still very cold and very tired from the trip to Bismarck, which is quite a distance. They immediately put him under anesthesia to take care of this and then he didn't wake up.

- JL:** What year was that?
- AH:** It was in 1943. My mother died in Kulm at my brother's house. She had never been in the hospital in her life. She gave birth to twelve children and she had very wonderful, healthy children. Never had a doctor for a kid. That's amazing.
- JL:** Yes, it's amazing.
- AH:** But, I did have a wonderful sister, Martha, who had eye trouble since the time she was an infant. What do you call it when everyone gets this eye trouble? Sore eyes? I think they used to call it trachoma, a dangerous thing. My oldest sister was in town, in confirmation school. And this broke out in town. The kids in confirmation school in town got this eye disease. My sister Martha was only about six weeks old. Matilda came home and had this eye trouble and this little Martha got it and it damaged her eyes so badly, because they didn't have no remedies and they didn't know what to do for it. The doctors didn't know anything about it either. It ruined her eyes for her whole life long. She saw very little. I was her right hand, her ears, her eyes, I was with her all the time. She was the only one who had anything, any kind of thing wrong with her that required a doctor. All the rest of them got old, most of them into their nineties.
- JL:** She didn't get old?
- AH:** She died at 84 and she was here at Bethany. I was here with her every day for almost a year.
- JL:** Well, Alma, this has been very interesting. I think we will continue some other time.
- AH:** But you must edit all of this, throw out what doesn't fit.
- JL:** It all fits.
- AH:** Oh, I'm full of information.
- JL:** I'll be back sometime. Thank you so much. This is Alma Herman with Joyce Reinhardt Larson interviewing her.