

Interview with Elizabeth Gross Kambeitz (EK) and Ken Kambeitz (KK)

Conducted by Brother Placid Gross (BG)

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Richardton, North Dakota

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BP: Today is Friday, October 16, 1998. I am Brother Placid Gross, a volunteer interviewer for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University Library in Fargo, North Dakota. We are going to interview, Mrs. Elizabeth (Wendelin) Kambeitz in Richardton, North Dakota. Her son, Ken Kambeitz, is here and he will be talking also.

BG: Your name is?

EK: Elizabeth Gross Kambeitz.

BG: And your birth date?

EK: October 13, 1914.

BG: Where were you born?

EK: On the home place, 10 miles south and one mile east of Napoleon.

BG: The name of your husband is?

EK: Wendelin Kambeitz.

BG: And when did you get married?

EK: October 8, 1940.

BG: Ok. Your father's name was?

EK: Raphael Gross.

BG: Do you know when and where your father was born?

EK: In 1878, in Mannheim, South Russia.

BG: That sounds pretty good. Your mother's maiden name was?

EK: Mary Fiest.

BG: Mary Fiest. Was it Marion?

EK: It was Marion.

BG: Do you know your mother's birth date?

EK: January 1.

- BG:** Do you know the year?
- EK:** I can't tell you. I know she was five years younger than Dad.
- KK:** It was 1883 or 1884. In 1884.
- BG:** Do you know what village your mother was from?
- EK:** Strassburg.
- BG:** What was your occupation?
- EK:** Farmer and housewife.
- BG:** And your father's occupation was a farmer?
- EK:** Yes.
- BG:** And your mother's occupation was a housewife?
- EK:** Yes.
- BG:** Has a family history been published of your family? Your brother Matt wrote some family history.
- EK:** Yes, he did some.
- BG:** And there's the history you wrote in 1970.
- KK:** There's the history that stops about then and there is the history that Brother Placid wrote under Gross history. There is quite a bit.
- BG:** Do you know where your ancestors came from in Germany?
- EK:** That I don't know.
- KK:** It looks like the Fiests' came from Alsace, west of the Rhine, around Strassburg.
- EK:** In what is now France.
- BG:** When did they come to North America?
- EK:** My dad came in 1897.
- BG:** And your mother? They were the Feists?
- KK:** She came at age 16, so that would be about 1900. She came alone.
- EK:** She came by herself.
- BG:** Her parents didn't come with her?
- EK:** No.
- BG:** Where did they go?
- EK:** Oh. They stayed back. Some relatives sent a visa and so my Mom said, "I'll go."

- BG:** Did they come later?
- EK:** Yes. Frances, her sister who was a little older, came the following year, I think. Then her parents came with the rest of the family.
- BG:** Oh, I see. What were the parent's names?
- EK:** Leopold and Rosina Fiest. She was a Schweitzer. We're double related with you.
- BG:** Do you remember how they traveled to this country?
- EK:** All I know is by ship. I don't know what the name of it was.
- BG:** You don't know anything about your mother's travels?
- KK:** She knows an interesting little story about South Dakota or somewhere. Your mother stayed at the depot.
- EK:** Oh, that. Leo and I don't agree about that. He says it different. I thought Ma came to Eureka where she spent the night in the depot. Leo has a different town. I don't know.
- KK:** Most likely they came to Eureka. Everybody came to Eureka, from Minneapolis, to Aberdeen, to Eureka. Then later on, the railroad was built to Ipswich, then much later on to Linton. At first the railroad ended at Eureka, so almost everyone came to Eureka but I don't know if they went on. It depended on where they were going.
- EK:** Then Uncle Joe Fiest came to pick her up with the buggy and horses and took her, I think, to the Grosses in Zeeland where she worked. She had to work off her visa.
- KK:** She was terrified at night in the depot.
- EK:** Oh, yes! There was no light in the depot and she was in there by herself and it was dark and she was scared. The depot agent's wife came and brought her a piece of jelly bread. It was a sad story and Ma cried. How terrible it was.
- BG:** Do you know what the names mean, like what Feist means?
- EK:** I don't know.
- BG:** We know what 'gross' means. It means large but it also means great. So, we are important people. Do you remember when German was spoken in your home?
- EK:** That's all we spoke at home. We didn't speak any English when we started to school, only yes and no. You know, it is surprising how fast a person picked up so that you could speak.
- KK:** I know we don't talk German anymore.
- BG:** Do you know when and where your father died?
- EK:** He died on June 16, 1964 in the Wishek hospital.
- BG:** Where is he buried?
- EK:** At St. Phillips in Napoleon.

- BG:** Where did your mother die?
- EK:** At her home in Napoleon, in town, and she is buried beside my dad.
- BG:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- EK:** I have five brothers and four sisters. There were ten of us.
- BG:** Do you have any recollection of what your mother told you about the old country, living in South Russia? Did she talk about how it was in Russia?
- EK:** Well, I think from what I can remember, what it must have been like for her. The companionship, and the climate was so much milder than it was here. They had fruit and nuts. I know that her grandma was a little more well-to-do so they had a wooden floor in their house. Most people didn't have wooden floors, and when you became a little bit richer, then you put a wooden floor in. Otherwise, you would just sweep it nice and put this chalk..., clay on it.
- KK:** They had a lot of clay. They used it in building and they might have used it on the floors.
- BG:** My grandmother said here in North Dakota, her first house and for a long time her summer kitchen, had a dirt floor. Every Saturday they would bring water and fresh clay in and smear it on the floor so it would be nice and smooth.
- EK:** Yes, that's how they did it in Russia.
- BG:** Then sometimes they would get leaves and grass. They then sprinkled it down and pushed it into the mud.
- EK:** For the design?
- BG:** They would make a design in the floor to get ready for Sunday. Maybe that is what they did in Russia, too.
- EK:** I think their ovens were made the way they did and still do in Russia. They build these ovens and put the bread in to bake.
- KK:** They built the ovens out of clay. They would then put the cow pies (the dried manure) in to burn. The oven got hot, then they would sweep the ashes out, put the bread in and closed the door. There was enough heat left in the clay to bake the bread. They didn't have fire underneath like we did later on with the coal stoves.
- EK:** It was really amazing how they worked.
- KK:** The Pueblos in the Southwest still use the old clay oven. They called it Horno. H-o-r-n-o, I think. They got it from the Spanish, as far as I know. Those clay ovens are elevated a couple of feet off the ground, and have a big oval bee hive shape to the top. They are filled with wood that is burned for a while. The wood is taken out once it is burned down to hot red coals. They then put a corn husk into the oven to see if it is ready for the bread. If it burns nicely they put in all the bread loaves they can and close the door. Then they put a big wet towel or something around it, and put a weight against that to kept it as tight as they can. The bread is checked through a hole underneath. They pull the finished bread out, usually quite successfully.

- BG:** Do they use wheat bread out there in New Mexico?
- KK:** Yes. They use white flour, an enriched kind of flour.
- BG:** Do you remember your dad saying anything about Russia?
- EK:** I remember that he worked with the thresher machine and he got his foot caught in the feeder. It cut part of his heel off. He was taken to the doctor and the heel was put back on but gangrene set in so they had to take it off again. He only had a thin layer of skin over his heel. That is why he limped, he walked on his toes on one foot. That is how it happened.
- KK:** I remember the limp.
- BG:** How about your dad parent's over there? Your dad was an orphan, wasn't he?
- EK:** Yes. He was orphaned at the age of 12 and raised by uncles.
- BG:** What did his dad die of?
- EK:** Scarlet fever at the age of 45. He died in the hospital.
- BG:** Do you know what they called Scarlet fever in German?
- EK:** Wasn't it, Scharlah? I'm not sure but I think it was, Scharlach.
- BG:** Then one of his daughters died?
- EK:** Fourteen days after that, his daughter, age 18, died of Scarlet fever, too. I mean Grandpa's daughter, my dad's sister, Franciska.
- BG:** How many brothers and sisters did your dad have?
- EK:** Eddie and Barbara.
- BG:** Eddie came over here?
- EK:** Yes. My dad had him come over. Then he asked his sister to come over but she said, I am 'verlobt' (engaged to be married) and she wouldn't come. Later, she was shipped to Siberia.
- KK:** We lost contact with her. We really didn't have any contact with her.
- EK:** Well, they would write and my dad would send money because they were starving and what not.
- KK:** When I went over there, I talked to a daughter-in-law on the phone. Barbara married a Frohlich and they got shipped to Siberia. His son and daughter came to Germany, then the son died and I talked to the daughter.
- BG:** You are first cousins. Your Uncle Matt has their address, he wrote to her. She would be Mrs. Frohlich.
- KK:** Alois's wife. They lived in Swabish Gemundt. That is a town in Germany. Ask uncle Matt.
- BG:** Yes, I will. Anything else about the old country or about your dad? Then your dad came over here?
- EK:** He came with his cousin, Matt Gross.

BG: He was how old when he came?

EK: I think he was 19.

BG: And your mother was 16? I think you have already said that. Do you remember any stories of things that happened over in Russia?

EK: Now what would be important? Oh! I know the first time my dad's Ma took him to church. He thought the alter boys were angels from Heaven. He didn't know what to think. I think he was a good boy that day in church. That was one story. He and my ma went to school there.

BG: Did they speak in German or Russian?

EK: My dad could speak pretty good Russian. My ma understood some but I never remember her saying anything.

BG: But they learned German in school over there?

EK: Yes, they learned German in school there. Then when they came to America, he went to night school and he learned to speak English. He worked at the Campbell ranch and there he had no choice but to speak English. That is how he learned to speak English real well.

BG: Where was the Campbell ranch?

EK: In Kintyre.

BG: It was right on the east shore of Goose Lake which is about a mile west of Kintyre. It is a beautiful lake full of wild game and things. He learned to speak English from a Scotsman so he had a Scottish brogue whenever he spoke English. It was kind of comical.

EK: He didn't have any R's, like "hoses". He didn't get to church in the winter so they had services in the house with the Campbells.

BG: The Campbells were Catholic?

EK: No, they weren't but they...

BG: They were Protestant and they held services in the house.

EK: They sang hymns like, "Just as I am," and he knew all those songs. So, that was interesting how he learned the words.

BG: What kind of work did he do at the Campbell ranch?

EK: Well he... They had sheep and cattle. He was buying cattle for Mr. Campbell. He sent him out to buy cattle.

BG: How did they ship them? He bought cattle from the farmers and how did he bring them home? Did the cows have to walk?

EK: I don't know. The boys probably know that.

- KK:** Maybe they had to bring them with horses. There weren't that many fences in the 1890's. The railroad runs right by that ranch, through Kintyre, then right past the lake.
- EK:** Maybe the farmers had to bring them.
- BG:** How long did he work on the Campbell ranch?
- EK:** I believe it was four years.
- KK:** I thought it was more like two years.
- EK:** Isn't it in the book?
- KK:** I don't think so.
- BG:** So, there were English speaking Campbells. Then when he got married, then he took up his 'Deutsch' life.
- EK:** Then he took up the homestead in 1900 and he got married in 1904.
- BG:** Where was the homestead?
- EK:** Ten miles south and one mile east of Napoleon.
- BG:** Whose land was that later on?
- EK:** Leo, his son. He lived on the farm.
- BG:** Is anyone living there now?
- EK:** No. There is nothing left.
- BG:** What stories can you remember from your childhood that you can still repeat.
- EK:** One was..., I will never forget. The letters from Russia about how poor they were, and how they were starving. Then on Saturday night when the "Nord Dakota Herold" and "Der Staatsanzeiger" newspapers came, there were all the letters in there from different people. They were all just about the same thing: how they were starving and can you send them some money. We had to sit there and be quiet. Ma was crying and Dad held back his tears. That was very depressing for me. It was hard for me to sit still.
- BG:** Was that in the 1920's?
- EK:** I was young. I was born in 1914, so it must have been in the 1920's because I remember it.
- BG:** Was it in 1922-23? There was a famine in Russia around 1922 and in 1923.
- EK:** That was when it must have been.
- BG:** Did your parents ever wish they were back in Russia?
- EK:** No. My ma got very homesick because she thought it was more beautiful there than here. She had good memories and she got over being homesick. She used to think if she could just see through those hills and see the country again. I asked my dad one time, "Haven't you got a desire to go back to Russia?" He said, "No, I'm glad I'm here." He never wanted to go back.

- BG:** So, they waited for news from relatives in Russia? We already have said that they got letters.
- EK:** Yes, sorrowful ones. I never looked forward to those evenings when those letters would be read because we had to sit still and it was the hardest thing for me to do. We couldn't leave the room. We had to sit there and listen to this and it used to make me so mad because my sister could sit still. I never could understand how she could sit there and listen to this and I would whisper. Dad would give me a look. That wasn't a good memory. I didn't like that depressing time.
- BG:** Which sister was this?
- EK:** It was Bertha. She was younger than I.
- BG:** Can you still speak German?
- EK:** Yes.
- BG:** Do you make an effort to teach your children some German phrases?
- EK:** I'm trying. Kenneth is trying to learn because he wants to take this trip to Germany. It's kind of hopeless, it seems like. (laughter)
- BG:** What childhood chore did you not enjoy doing? What kind of work did you have to do that you did not enjoy doing?
- EK:** My job was to get those blocks. I think you call it blocks of 'mischt' to start a fire. The problem was that I always put it off too long. If I would have done it when the other girls did their chores, it would have been alright. But I put it off until it was dark and the girls went out to check, "Did she get the manure?" Then, of course, I had to go to the summer kitchen where it was stacked for the winter and get it. It was totally dark at those times. Nobody would go with me but I had to go and get them. There were ghosts, and devils and what not chasing me, I used to think. I never learned to get it in time. I can't complain about it.
- BG:** Did you take a lantern with you?
- EK:** No, I guess not and I don't think... I don't know if there was a flash light. They just told me to get it.
- BG:** Did you have a yard light?
- EK:** (Laughter) No electricity, nothing. Pitch dark and I had to go. I was scared but I never told my parents. I thought they wouldn't care because I was suppose to do my work on time.
- BG:** What work did you like to do?
- EK:** I liked to sing and to play. I did my school work, though. I never had to be told to do my school work but I didn't like to get that stuff.
- KK:** You said you liked kitchen work.
- EK:** I liked to wash dishes and I washed my brother's diapers. I enjoyed that. I was a good baby sitter.
- BG:** Did you have to milk?
- EK:** Yes.

- BG:** Did you wear a dress when you went down to milk?
- EK:** Yes. Most of the time it was a dress.
- BG:** Did you have a special milk dress? A special dress to put on over your other clothes?
- EK:** No, I never put one over. I don't remember how it was. Later on, we did put pants on.
- BG:** Did you work in the field?
- EK:** Some.
- BG:** What kind of work did you do in the field?
- EK:** I had to get on the haystacks and stack. I had to get on the top of the stack and stomp it down. The boys helped a lot. They made the corners and the front part we stacked. So most of it was just walking around on it, for me, I guess.
- BG:** What about the heddering? Do you remember the heddering? What did you do with the heddering?
- EK:** Yes, I remember. I would drive the horses. Not too much of that, but I did some.
- BG:** With the hedder box?
- EK:** Yes.
- KK:** I think you liked to kill gophers too, didn't you?
- EK:** Yes, that was our pastime. We would go to the pasture and catch gophers.
- BG:** How did you catch them?
- EK:** With traps and strings. We would make those loops, snares. We would put it over the gopher hole. Then we waited until he stuck his head out. Then you would kill them. It doesn't look so funny now.
- KK:** Didn't you have to sit on a gopher hole once?
- EK:** I wish you didn't put that one in. (laughter) We used to watch out for the gophers. My brother, Raphael, went to get a pail of water. He told me I had to sit on the hole until he came back, so the gopher wouldn't come out. The gopher came up and bit me on the butt. I got off that hole and I wouldn't go back anymore. It was really funny.
- BG:** The gopher wanted out?
- EK:** Yes. He wanted out and he bit me.
- BG:** Maybe he was hungry. Did it hurt?
- EK:** Well, yes!
- BG:** What did you do with the gophers? Did you get money for them?
- EK:** Sometimes a penny, sometimes two cents from the county. The county paid. That wasn't a bad price. That was what they were paying us in the early 1960's, the Farmers Union was paying us that.

- BG:** Did you need to whole carcass or just the tail?
- EK:** No, just the tail. We took a rock and laid the tail on it. Then took another rock and hit it, and the tail came off.
- KK:** I heard our neighbor Fettig girl, Johanna, she caught the gophers, cut off the tails and let them go so they would have more young ones and she could get more gophers tails. They were raising gophers too. We were saving the tails. We had them in a coffee can where they stunk so bad that when we would take them in, they would take our word for how many were in the can.
- BG:** If you did not do your chores, what kind of discipline did you get? Did they spank you?
- EK:** Well, I think, I just never... Got by. They didn't spank me. They just hollered at me. I just had to go and get it. There was another chore. Our bread box was back quite a ways. You had to go through a hallway and, of course, everything was dark. I had to take whatever bread was left-over from the meal, carry it into that hallway and put it in that bread box. There again, all these awful things were after me, I thought. At Christmas time, it was Santa Claus and I used to wonder how big my eyes were when I walked through that hallway.
- BG:** Santa Claus wasn't just a good guy?
- EK:** He was the Belzenickel. I never looked forward to that Belzenickel to come. I was glad when the Christkindl came, she was better. You know, that was so dumb. I should have told my parents that I was so scared. Maybe they would have given this job to one of my older sisters.
- KK:** That wouldn't have helped. They would have made you do it anyway.
- EK:** I used to wish that they would eat all of the bread so there wouldn't be any to take back. Sometimes I got by, they ate it all.
- BG:** Where did you hear this about the ghosts? Who told you they were there?
- EK:** Oh, sometimes... No, we didn't tell these ghost stories. You picked them up from company. I would hear these awful stories about ghosts and that really scared me. It also came from the other kids.
- BG:** What about school? How many years did you go to school?
- EK:** The eighth grade. I passed the eighth grade.
- BG:** Did you go to school nine months or how many months?
- EK:** No, it was only seven months.
- BG:** Did you begin in October?
- EK:** Usually. Sometimes they couldn't get a teacher early enough. We had to wait to get a teacher. Then when school was out, German school started. Where we learned to read and write German, catechism, and instruction for Holy Communion and confirmation.
- BG:** So, there was the religion school and they were teaching German at the same time?
- EK:** Yes. We learned the (German) A B C's. I went to the third grade. I quit after the third grade.

- BG:** In the German school? Later on, we called it catechism school but in early days it was called German school but it was really catechism.
- EK:** It really was. We had Bible stories.
- BG:** Who taught the school, the priest?
- EK:** No, the school master taught us to read and instructed us.
- BG:** Who was the school master?
- EK:** Martin Braun. After Martin Braun, I didn't go anymore.
- BG:** Was Martin Braun a good teacher?
- EK:** Well yes, he must have been.
- BG:** How many students did he have?
- EK:** More than a hundred, like a hundred and nine or so.
- BG:** Can you imagine what it would be like to teach over a hundred students?
- EK:** No.
- BG:** It probably helped that it was religion and German.
- EK:** Well, he really had control. He knew how to do it.
- BG:** Did you have upper level, from the little kids up to the bigger kids?
- EK:** Yes, we had different grades. We would have to come up and read. Those in the first book had to come up and read, then the second, then the third, on up to the sixth grade.
- BG:** When I went to catechism school, we had two classrooms: the little kids in one classroom and the big ones in the other classroom.
- EK:** No, we were all in one. It was just one room.
- BG:** Did he have some students reading sometime while he would instruct at a different level?
- EK:** No. He had to do it all at one time.
- BG:** It was all one deal, everybody went together.
- KK:** He must have been a busy teacher.
- EK:** No wonder he got headaches.
- BG:** When you went to winter school, how were the teachers there? Did you have good teachers?
- EK:** Pretty good.
- BG:** Are there any special memories from the school, from the winter school? Did you have to walk to school?

- EK:** We walked to school because we lived close by, about a fourth of a mile.
- EK:** Didn't you have a teacher stay at your house at one time, since your house was the closest to the school
- EK:** One teacher spent all winter at the schoolhouse. Miss Kelly stayed at the schoolhouse. That was before I went to school.
- BG:** It was just a one room school?
- EK:** Yes. She had some kind of a bed. I wasn't going to school yet when that happened.
- BG:** Where did the teachers come from?
- EK:** I know there was one from Virginia and one from North Carolina. They must have come by train.
- BG:** Most of them were not German Russian?
- EK:** No. They couldn't speak German.
- BG:** There was a lot of school teachers who came from the East. They met men here and married here and then they stayed.
- EK:** Then later on, we didn't get those from far away anymore. The farthest away was from Kulm. Her name was Amy Johnson. She came from Kulm. She was my fifth or sixth grade teacher.
- KK:** Mrs Barnes. I think she was one of those teachers that came from the East and married here. Another, I think, was Bernstein.
- EK:** You know, I think those girls were better educated than the teachers we had from around here. We had too many.... there were some who only went through the eighth grade, but we didn't have any of those. I had one, my seventh and eighth grade teacher, with only two years of high school.
- BG:** Were there other nationalities in your classroom?
- EK:** It was all German.
- BG:** Just German Russian? Did you speak German when you were outside at recess?
- EK:** We were forbidden to. We had to try to speak English.
- BG:** What did they do if you talked German?
- EK:** I can't recall if anybody got punished, but we were told we couldn't.
- BG:** We always got punished. We had to write, "I will not speak German anymore," about 500 times or we would have to stay after school and write, "I will not speak German anymore." That was punishment for me. The main discipline problem was getting us to always talk English. She was always catching us because we were talking German.
- For every teacher, every year that was always the biggest problem. Now the Indians complain that the missionaries made them talk English and they were not allowed to talk their Indian language. Now they are mad about that. I would like to tell the Indians that I was mad too. They were not the only ones that suffered.

- EK:** That's for sure.
- KK:** I've told my students that sometimes. Even when I went to school, there were a number of kids who still spoke German as their first language, in 1957, in my first grade year. The nuns told us, we were not going to speak German or they would wash our mouth out with soap. I think it was done at times with certain kids.
- BG:** What kind of games would you play at school?
- EK:** Baseball. That was the best one.
- BG:** And when there was snow on the ground?
- EK:** Fox and geese, sleigh riding, ante-i-over and stuff like that. Sometimes, we played in the schoolhouse. On the stormy days, the teacher would play games with us.
- BG:** I think we have already talked about this but what kind of discipline did the teachers use? How did they make you behave?
- EK:** Standing in the corner was one thing.
- BG:** Did you think the town kids were smarter than the farm kids? Did they get a better education or were they better off?
- EK:** In some ways, I think so. What was bad was when the farmer's kids would come to town to school. The other kids would kind of laugh at the farmer's kids because of the way they spoke English with the German brogue and the way they were dressed.
- KK:** I know. I used to think... I don't know how old I was, if I lived in town, I would not have to study English in school because town kids already knew English. So, I would not have to take that English course. I thought if I lived in town, I wouldn't have to study it because I would already know it.
- EK:** Well, there was a lot to learn.
- BG:** In what way was religion and church education important in your up-bringing?
- KK:** It was greatly important?
- EK:** Yes, it was. You know what I think sometimes? We had to learn the German prayers, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Ten Commandments, and that was so very hard because of the words. The German language is so much harder to speak than the English. Don't you agree?
- BG:** Like when you learned...?
- EK:** Like when you say, the Our Father, that is hard. Even if I can still say it. Then I think, I was able to learn that because it seemed so hard to me, while the English is so simple.
- BG:** You said it in High German. You couldn't say it in your dialect.
- EK:** Oh no, we couldn't.
- BG:** I think the reason it was so hard was because we spoke one language and we learned to pray in another. The prayers were in the High German which was a different language from the dialect we spoke.

- KK:** And that always was, all the way back to Russia and even back to Germany. In Germany, they must have used their own dialect for their prayers and such.
- EK:** No. You had to learn it like it says in the book. The school master made you learn these prayers.
- BG:** The way it was in the book and not the way we talked?
- KK:** So, there was no Bible other than the High German Bible, and that went for all the rest of the religious writings and teachings.
- BG:** Do you remember when Church switched from German to English?
- EK:** Yes. It happened when Father Weberholdt came to St. Anthony. The first sermon he gave was in German and he didn't know it was not so great. It didn't go over so good for him. He went back into the parish house and he cried.
- BG:** What about baptism and confirmation, was that a big thing?
- EK:** Relations would come together. With my brothers and sisters, I don't remember. I was one of the youngest. But later on when my brothers got children, then it was a kind of a celebration.
- BG:** Did you get the baptismal certificate framed?
- EK:** Yes.
- BG:** Were your parents and grandparents involved in starting a new church?
- EK:** Yes, they were.
- BG:** Did they talk about it?
- EK:** They talked about it, but you know how it is when you are young, you don't listen good enough. I know they were involved.
- BG:** How did your family respond to or behave towards death? When somebody died?
- EK:** It was quite different than it is now. It was very solemn. It was scary, it was more sorrowful, especially in St. Anthony. When they buried a person, they immediately lowered the coffin into the grave. Then the men would start to throw the gravel on the coffin and it would make such a noise. That was horrifying. It's much better now. That's better that they don't put them in the grave right away.
- BG:** And did they sing that song?
- EK:** Oh, that song. That Schicksal? That's terrible.
- BG:** Did everybody cry?
- EK:** Oh, yes. That's what they wanted, I think. I think they were looking for that and the people would start crying. We didn't understand death then as we do now. I know when my sister died, I was fourteen and she was eighteen. That was very hard and you know, we don't ever get over it because it wasn't explained to us. I couldn't get over it. I had all this homesickness for her and all this grief. I never went to my parents and told them how I felt.

- BG:** They wouldn't listen to you any how?
- EK:** Probably not. I don't know.
- BG:** At that time, children were just ignored. When somebody died, the children were ignored?
- EK:** There was no counselors or no one to explain to us or pay attention to the children. The children had to cope with whatever they could.
- EK:** And then I would get so terribly homesick, and I never told my parents how homesick I was, and why I was.
- BG:** For your sister, you mean?
- EK:** Yes. Then I didn't sing for a long time and it was getting to be sometime toward fall. Alois said to me that I should sing with him. I said, "I can't." Then he told me our sister was better off in Heaven and that helped. My parents could have helped me with this, but I never went to them. I just held it all inside.
- BG:** You were how old when your sister died?
- EK:** I was fourteen.
- BG:** What did your sister die from?
- EK:** She had a sore throat all winter, she had very bad tonsils. Then she got an ear infection and lost part of her hearing. Dr. Simon used to wash it out, there were no antibiotics at that time. After a while, she got awful tired of those ear-aches. She pestered Dad to have her tonsils out. Dr. Simon said, "Don't do it. She has infection and it will kill her." My dad finally gave in to her and the week before Easter, he took her to the hospital. They didn't do anything about the infection but they just took her tonsils out. Then she got pneumonia, double pneumonia, and Easter Saturday, she died. That was a hard time.
- BG:** Was it really from the tonsils?
- EK:** Because she had infection, they should not have cut on her. That was a big mistake they made. Dr. Simon must have been a wise doctor and he said, "Don't do it."
- BG:** What kind of wake did you have then?
- EK:** She came home by train...
- BG:** She was in Bismarck in the hospital?
- EK:** Yes, she died at St. Alexius. They brought her home by train and then on a truck to the farm. Of course, that was very painful for us.
- BG:** To have her in the house on Easter Sunday?
- EK:** Easter Monday. Was she buried Easter Monday? I think it was Tuesday.
- BG:** Did a lot of people come to the house?
- EK:** Yes, a lot of people came and there was prayer.
- BG:** Did they bring food?

- EK:** I don't recall.
- BG:** Did somebody stay up all night?
- EK:** Yes, somebody stayed up all night.
- BG:** Somebody stayed up by the coffin and prayed all night?
- EK:** Yes. My grandmother would come and some neighbors.
- BG:** Do you remember those iron crosses in the cemetery?
- EK:** Yes.
- BG:** Does anyone in your family have one of those iron crosses?
- EK:** No.
- BG:** Does your family cherish any heirlooms or objects of sentimental value that has been handed down to your generation? Have you got anything from Russia? Does anybody in your family have anything that came from Russia?
- EK:** I don't think so.
- BG:** Do you have a shawl that your mother had?
- EK:** Yes. Bertha has one. I don't have anything much. She has the shawl, my mother's shawl.
- BG:** With the long fringes?
- EK:** Yes. I think she made it here. I don't think it came from Russia.
- BG:** Do you know how to make that shawl?
- EK:** I haven't made one. I have an idea. I used to sit and watch Ma do it.
- BG:** The Weinachten? How did you celebrate Christmas?
- EK:** In a way you look forward to Christmas, then again, there was that Belzenickel that scared me. Although he never did anything to me, I was still scared. So, I was glad when it was over with. I got my doll, we always got a gift. We always got something, goodies and a toy.
- BG:** Did you make baskets?
- EK:** Yes. We lined them. The outside we put wallpaper, there was always samples of wallpaper that my ma had, and we would fix up our baskets. We would put handles on them, and put wallpaper around it. We thought they were pretty, maybe they weren't.
- BG:** Where did you buy the paste?
- EK:** We made our own paste with corn starch. Our teacher showed us how to make it.
- BG:** How did you do it?
- EK:** You mix a little water with the corn starch, then you add boiling water to it and it is kind of transparent.

- BG:** Could you use flour?
- EK:** We never wanted to use flour. We always used cornstarch, it looks prettier. They would put little clove spices in to make it smell good, that was our paste in school.
- BG:** It made it smell?
- EK:** Yes, a little cloves made it smell good.
- BG:** What did you do with those baskets? You made them before Christmas?
- EK:** We made them before Christmas, then after Christmas that was what we put our goodies in. There was another problem with me, I wouldn't eat my stuff. That made the other kids angry because I didn't eat mine, I saved it. One time, the boys were searching until they found it and they ate it all up.
- BG:** You were saving it until you were really hungry?
- EK:** Well, I'll tell you, sweet stuff like candy never agreed with me. It was not a hardship for me to save it. I got stomach aches if I ate too much.
- BG:** Who put the goodies into the basket?
- EK:** Well, Ma did but the Christkindl had it under this material that was hanging over her, and she would give us these baskets. First, she had this stick in her hand and we would come there and we didn't know whether she would hit us or not. That wasn't nice either. So, she finally gave in and gave us the baskets. She had material and ribbons on her head, she was decorated. I thought she was pretty. I don't think that any more, but then I did. I thought it was pretty.
- Now, do you remember the Essel, the donkey? I was scared. It had a face like a mule, but it was all white with big designed eyes and had strawberries hung on him. You could buy those candy strawberries at that time. I thought that was so pretty. Then they put a stick back, somehow didn't they? A stick in back and covered with a sheet. He would come up to you and go, "gggurrrk". That scared us. Christkindl has a present and the Essel comes along and does this. Why did they go and put us through this agony?
- BG:** What was the purpose of the donkey?
- EK:** I guess to try to help the Christkindl to scare the kids like, "gggurrrk". That scared me.
- BG:** I suppose that goes way back to when Mary and Joseph rode on the donkey, and everybody rode the donkeys.
- EK:** One year we had such a good Christkindl. I think it was the good weather, they couldn't come to our place and my sister was dressed up as a Christkindl. She was so nice, but of course, we didn't know it was our sister, Margaret. We were so happy because there was such a good Christkindl that year.
- BG:** Did you hear those stories before?
- KK:** Not really. I'm still wondering how the Christkindl could put the things in the baskets. You didn't see it when that happened?
- EK:** No, but Ma had done that earlier.

- KK:** Didn't you put the baskets outside? Did she put the baskets outside earlier?
- EK:** They must have. I suppose they were put somewhere in the entry way. Of course, we were too scared to go in the entry way that night because you never knew when Santa Claus would come. When Santa Claus came, he was shaking heavy chains and making lots of noise.
- BG:** That was the Belzenickel. Did you ever see the Belzenickel?
- EK:** Yes. He would come and knock on the door. Then he would try to get in. Ma was trying to hold the door shut. She would say, "Should I let him in?" Then we would all scream, "No, no." She wouldn't let him in, and he had to go away.
- BG:** So, this was a local person who had come to your farm? They would go to several farms?
- EK:** To scare the kids and make them happy. I don't know why the scary part had to be.
- BG:** Was the Christkindl also a roving around person, usually? Somebody you didn't know or an uncle?
- EK:** Yes. They went around like that on the sled to get to the farms.
- BG:** Did this happen every year?
- EK:** Yes.
- BG:** So there really was a Santa Claus for you guys.
- EK:** There really was a Belzenickel.
- BG:** That was before Midnight Mass? In the evening around supper time?
- EK:** Yes. We would eat supper and then they came. First, we would have supper. No doubt we all were nervous and not eating much.
- BG:** What did you get in the baskets?
- EK:** Oh, nuts, candy, an apple and a orange. It was unusual to get an orange so that was special. Another thing, I would save that orange for a long time. Very seldom did I get to eat it.
- BG:** Was the candy hard ribbon candy?
- EK:** There were some different kinds, including ribbon candy.
- BG:** Was it 'boughten' candy, was it bought?
- EK:** Yes, it was bought. Candy was so cheap then. You would get marshmallow cookies. That was some of the stuff we got. Something different than you usually got.
- BG:** Did you get any toys?
- EK:** Yes. We always got dolls and little tea cups and stuff.
- BG:** Were the toys bought? Did they buy them in town or what?

- EK:** I don't know. I don't know where they got them, possibly ordered them. There were a lot of wind-up toys. A guy that would jitter bug and things like that. Cars that would run. It was interesting what the boys used to get but we all got a gift. Then you'd get a harmonica or a horn to play.
- KK:** What do you call those things. A top?
- EK:** Those tops, that was quite interesting.
- BG:** Were you already married in 1930? When did you get married?
- EK:** I got married in 1940.
- BG:** During the Depression, you were still home? Was there enough money for the toys and gifts?
- EK:** There was always something. We always did get a gift from our parents.
- BG:** Was there anything special about Midnight Mass?
- EK:** There were the Christmas songs and the Christmas tree. What used to be funny was your grandpa had to watch the Christmas tree. There were wax candles on the Christmas tree and you never knew when one of those candles would tip over and the tree would catch on fire. So, he had to have a rag, I think it was a wet rag. He must not have been able to attend Mass very well because he had this tree to watch all the time.
- BG:** He was standing by the tree?
- EK:** He was there by the tree in the front pew. As soon a candle tipped over, there he was putting out the fire. That was interesting to me. I thought the trees were decorated so pretty.
- BG:** Was it a big tree?
- EK:** Yes. They were big trees.
- BG:** I wonder if they had live trees already then? Where would they get a green tree?
- EK:** Yes, I wonder. They did have artificial ones at that time.
- BG:** They probable did have an artificial. They were so cheap.
- EK:** They probably ordered them from a catalog.
- KK:** What other decoration were on it besides the candles?
- EK:** Glass balls. There were balls already and other things.
- KK:** Did the balls have long strings?
- EK:** Yes, they had nice decorations. The women decorated it. It was nice, and there were icicles on it.
- BG:** There was?
- EK:** Yes, there was stuff like that.
- KK:** We called it the tannenbaum or did you ever get the name?

- EK:** Christbaum.
- BG:** What about Easter? Did you make Easter eggs at home when you were little?
- EK:** Yes, when we were little. We didn't get to see them do that when were little. That was a day when we had to stay outside. We couldn't understand why we couldn't go in the house. The older girls saw to it that we stayed outside.
- BG:** What did you color the Easter eggs with? Did you use cake dye or what colors did you have for the Easter eggs?
- EK:** I think it is very much as it is now. I don't remember but it was different color.
- BG:** Did your mother make dye?
- EK:** No, she bought the dye.
- BG:** Some people made it from onion skins.
- EK:** That's a hassle.
- KK:** We never did but we saw people who used onion skins.
- EK:** We were always able to buy the dye.
- BG:** Were there any special activities at church, special Easter activities?
- EK:** They sang the Passion. You know, the passion of the Lord, they sang that. That was nice. I enjoyed listening to it.
- BG:** What about weddings? Do remember any weddings from when you were little? Did you get to go to any?
- EK:** Yes. One thing, the bottles were set on the table and they could help themselves with this red eye all day long. I guess some would get too much. Oh, the feast. You would have a shot of red eye and then you would eat. Most of the time it was Chicken noodle soup and that's about what it was. **KK:** At the church kitchen or the church hall?
- EK:** No. At your house. The weddings were in the houses.
- BG:** Maybe they didn't have church halls then. The German school could have been used. They did start to do that then. They went to the Octagon in Napoleon. That was later.
- KK:** That was much later.
- BG:** When you got married, what did you do? You got married in 1940.
- EK:** We went home to my parent's house to eat and then maybe have some dancing.
- BG:** Did they dance in the afternoon?
- EK:** Yes, in the kitchen.
- BG:** Was your house big enough for dancing?

- EK:** Yes. Somehow, it was always big enough. No, it wasn't so big but the weddings weren't so big in the house. You couldn't have too many people, closest relatives and some neighbors.
- BG:** The accordionist sat on the table, maybe?
- EK:** Yes, it was set on the table. The table was pushed in the corner and he was on there.
- BG:** Was it an accordion or did you actually have a....
- EK:** They played an accordion.
- BG:** Did they have a pump organ?
- EK:** No, just an accordion.
- KK:** An accordion and a drum.
- EK:** I suppose so. There was a drum.
- BG:** Did you ever have a fiddle?
- EK:** No.
- KK:** Who played when you had a wedding?
- EK:** I think it was Frank Sperle.
- BG:** Did they ever have an dance in the evening?
- EK:** Until about 10:00 o'clock. The dance was at the house.
- BG:** You didn't go to Bernstead?
- EK:** No, just right at the house. There was a noon meal and a supper. Then we danced a while and it was time to go.
- BG:** Did they sing at the wedding? Did they sing any German songs at your wedding?
- EK:** I don't remember at my wedding but I remember at some weddings they did sing.
- BG:** Did they sing the 'bride's song' and then did they cry?
- EK:** Yes. I never knew that song, I never knew the words.
- BG:** My brother John come up with it. It was a song giving advice to the bride. Pretty soon the mother of the bride would cry, then pretty soon, all the women would cry.
- ET:** What a wedding!
- BG:** Can you remember any German poems?
- EK:** Not really. Not anything worth repeating, I don't think.
- BG:** Did you have any special food at your wedding? You had chicken soup?
- EK:** Kuchen I guess, and a cake.

- BG:** You had a cake? Who made the cake?
- EK:** I don't know.
- BG:** Did you have a Hochzeit Schnapps?
- EK:** There was red eye, I know. My folks served cider. You bought it in barrels, about a 30 gallon barrel of this cider and it was red. It was real good stuff, people liked that.
- BG:** Was that alcohol free?
- EK:** Yes, it was alcohol free.
- BG:** Did they have a special cook?
- EK:** Yes, I think it was Mrs. Matt Bitz, Sr. was the cook.
- BG:** Did you have a white dress and veil?
- EK:** Yes.
- BG:** Who were your bride's maids?
- EK:** Frances Sperle and Maggie Kambeitz were the bride's maids.
- BG:** What relation are Frances Sperle and Maggie Kambeitz to you?
- EK:** Frances is a second cousin to my husband and Maggie is Wendelin's sister.
- BG:** So, both of them were related to Wendelin and you didn't get to pick one for yourself?
- EK:** Maggie was my confirmation sponsor. So, I picked her.
- BG:** Was she older than you?
- EK:** Younger. I was her sponsor, I mean.
- BG:** You were her sponsor instead of the other way around. Who was your best man?
- EK:** Wendelin had his godfather, Wendelin Werner. He was their hired man when he was born so he became his godfather and the other one was my brother, Alois.
- BG:** Did you have any special flowers?
- EK:** No. I didn't even carry flowers. I carried a rosary. I didn't want flowers. I wanted to take a rosary.
- BG:** Did you take pictures?
- EK:** With the camera. We didn't have a photographer.
- BG:** Did you two have a wedding picture?
- EK:** Yes, I do.
- BG:** What social event did you have when you were a teenager? Where did you go? It would have been in the 1930. What did you do?

- EK:** There were dances at the community hall, at St. Anthony's. We also had them in the granaries, clean them out, and at people's houses. We also had birthday parties. We went to town to dance at what is now the Golden Age, and we also went to the Miller Hall. We went to movies. Later on, when there was no more theater, we went to dances there, and to Bernstead also. There was a hall in Bernstead where you could go to dances.
- BG:** So that is where you met your husband, he was a neighbor?
- EK:** No, it is not where I met him. He would tell me, from when he was nine years old he always knew I would be his wife. I wasn't interested in boys at that time. If he would have told me then, I would have said, "Get out of here." He told me when he was in German school he picked me to be his wife.
- BG:** He had a very good eye. What outdoor work was expected of women to do?
- EK:** Milking cows. You mean when I was at home? Some women had to work hard in the fields.
- BG:** Did you have geese, chickens and ducks?
- EK:** Yes. We raised chicken and ducks as our projects, and we had a garden. We made pickles and sauerkraut in the cellar.
- BG:** Did you girls have to butcher anything?
- EK:** The chickens and all of the poultry.
- BG:** Did you learn how to butcher?
- EK:** Yes, I did.
- BG:** And you cut off the chicken's head?
- EK:** I did.
- BG:** Did you look the other way when you did it?
- EK:** No, I didn't. I was tough, just like when I caught a gopher last year in a trap and then I had to kill this gopher. It wasn't fun anymore like it used to be. I started to get feelings. I did it though. I had no choice. I was here alone and I had to kill him. It's not funny.
- BG:** Do you remember any special German food that your mother made and do you remember the smells of her cooking?
- EK:** Yes, I do. I remember I liked the dumplings. It was a good smell when she made the dumplings. When she made that custard, Kuchen, that I thought was really good.
- BG:** Do you still make the German food? Do you know how to make Borscht?
- EK:** Yes, I still cook the German food including the Borscht and the Blajenda.
- BG:** Can you make Halupsy?
- EK:** I can but I don't make it anymore. I make egg noodles. You call it 'rham' cream noodles.
- KK:** The egg noodles you used to cut by hand.

EK: I didn't do much of it. I used to make it but not much now.

BG: Do any of your children make any of the German foods?

EK: They make the dumplings.

KK: Some of us make Kuchen.

EK: The Wedding Kuchen type.

BG: Did you have a lot of music in your home when you were young?

EK: Yes, we did. My brothers were musical. Leo played the banjo, the organ, and the guitar. Alois played the guitar and the organ. All of us could play a little.

BG: Did your father play?

EK: No, but he got us the organ and the phonograph. We danced with each other. He made us sing a lot and he would sing with us. There was a lot of music in our home which was good.

BG: Did your mother sing?

EK: No. All she would sing was when she would put the baby to sleep but otherwise, she didn't sing.

BG: What did she sing?

EK: "Schlof, Kinder, Schlof." Those kind of [German] songs from Russia.

BG: Do you know the rest of it? That is interesting?

EK: [Sings German song. Not translated into English]. Now that is one of the songs she would sing.

KK: Were the songs self taught or did someone teach you, like Leo? He is pretty good at music.

EK: Well, it was self taught.

-----**Abrupt end to the interview here**-----