

Interview with Frank and Theresia Messer (FM & TM)

Conducted by Brother Placid Gross (PG)

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PG: This is Brother Placid Gross. Today is January 16, 2000. I am at the home of Frank and Theresia Messer in Richardton, ND. Frank, what is your name and when were you born?

FM: Frank Messer. I was born right here in Richardton, ND June 9, 1915.

PG: Theresia, what is your maiden name?

TM: My maiden name was Theresia Freitag.

PG: What was your parents' names?

TM: Frank and Barbara Freitag. My mother's name was [A 10 Meininger]. My mother was from Hungry and my father was from Austria.

PG: Do you know when they came to America?

TM: Not really.

PG: Do you consider yourself Austrian-Hungarian?

TM: Yes, Austrian-Hungarian.

PG: I didn't know there were any Austrians around here. Were your parents married when they came to America?

TM: No.

PG: Where did the Austrians settle here?

TM: As far as I know around Glen Ullin. There weren't very many from Austria that I know that came over, just my dad, and his brother and sister.

PG: Frank, what was your parents' name?

FM: Thomas Messer and my mother's name was Rose Messer. She was a Kuntz.

PG: Do you know where your father came from in Russia?

FM: [A21 Chassel I guess they called it] [Chasselois, Volga, per Ulrich Mertins Handbook].

PG: Do you know your dad's parents' names. It would be your grandparents?

TM: Valentine, I think.

- FM:** I don't think so; you got me stumped on that one.
- PG:** Did your grandpa come to this country?
- FM:** Yah.
- PG:** Your dad's dad?
- FM:** Yah
- PG:** Where did they live?
- FM:** They lived south of Richardton, right along the river. Do you know where Mike Messer lives out there— Betty, right over the hill to the west? Uncle Ferdinand was the oldest, then it was Jake, then it was my dad, then it was John—of the boys.
- PG:** That's your dad's brothers. Who were your dad's sisters?
- FM:** One is out west now; she was [married to] a Schulz. Otto Schulz I guess was his name.
- TM:** Ida Freis. Do they have other sisters?
- FM:** Oh, yes. [A40 ?] was married to one of them. [He can't think of the rest.]
- PG:** Where is your grandpa buried?
- FM:** He is buried out at St. Steven's.
- PG:** Do you know what your grandma's name was?
- FM:** She was an Eckroth.
- PG:** Now, your mother?
- FM:** She was a Freidig?
- TM:** Your mother's mother was a Freidig. His [Frank's] mother was a Kuntz.
- PG:** I meant your mother's mother.
- FM:** F-R-E-I-D-I-G
- PG:** You have that name too, don't you?
- FM:** No, [ours is] F-R-E-I-T-A-G and his was F-R-E-I-D-A-G and his grandmother's was F-R-E-I-D-I-G.
- PG:** How many brothers and sisters did you have in your family?
- FM:** There was Nick, Eva, John, and me, and Ralph.
- PG:** Do you know when your dad came to the United States?
- FM:** That's a long time.
- PG:** You said your parents were not married?

- FM:** No, they weren't married.
- PG:** Your mother lived south of Richardton too.
- FM:** Yah. Do you know where Pete Kuntz lives? She lived about a half mile to the west of Pete Kuntz, and a little north, not a hell of a lot.
- PG:** So they're related to Pete Kuntz?
- FM:** Oh yah, see Pete Kuntz's dad and uncle Victor and [my] mother were brothers and sisters.
- PG:** So you are first cousin to Pete Kuntz?
- FM:** First cousin is right.
- TM:** Small world isn't it? [Laughter]
- PG:** So your grandpa got free homestead land?
- FM:** Yes, that was homestead land there.
- PG:** How old was your dad when he came over? He came over with his parents I suppose.
- FM:** I think my dad when he came over he was thirteen or fourteen years old. Uncle Ferdinand was the oldest of the boys; he was five years older than dad was.
- PG:** Do you know how old your mother was when she came over here?
- FM:** I think my mother was about four years younger.
- PG:** Did your parents ever talk about Russia?
- FM:** They talked about the fruit trees, like apricots and peaches. Such level land they had out there. They farmed out of town quite a ways, and they had the cattle in town though. The barn was built right against the house.
- PG:** I guess the grazing land was around town, so the cows didn't have to go so far. The cows came home every evening, and put them in the barn every night. Early in the morning they took them out.
- TM:** I think that was a pasture that everybody used; they all put their cattle in there.
- PG:** They didn't have very many cows?
- TM:** One or two just for milking.
- PG:** Did they say they had to stay out on the land overnight when they worked in the field, or did they come home every night?
- FM:** They always came home.
- PG:** Some had land so far away that they had to stay overnight. They stayed all week. Stayed till Saturday, came home on Saturday and went out on Monday morning during harvest time or spring's work.
- FM:** Sleep under tents then? [Laughter]

- PG:** I suppose. Under the stars. [Laughter]
- PG:** Do remember anything your mother talked about the old country?
- FM:** No, my mother didn't talk anything about the old country. Not a bit.
- PG:** Now Theresia, do you remember anything that your parents talked about from the old country?
- TM:** My dad used to talk a lot about it. My mother died when I was only two years old, so I wouldn't know anything about that. But my dad talked a lot about it, yes.
- PG:** How old was your dad when he came over?
- TM:** I think he was twenty-three.
- PG:** Old enough to remember everything. Do you remember anything that he said?
- TM:** Yes. It was a beautiful country, and they each had to go to take up a trade. They were taught a trade, you know, everybody had to do that. My dad was a shoemaker. I remember him talking about making a complete set of shoes. All of our shoes as they started wearing out, he resoled them and everything for us.
- PG:** When he came to America then he was a farmer.
- TM:** Yes. When he came over he had about twenty-three dollars left. He stayed with some people in the Haymarsh community there. The first winter they stayed with them, and the second winter he and his brother had a small place that they stayed in, but he said mostly they lived on rabbits, grouse and wild game and stuff like that. They were very poor.
- PG:** They knew they were able to hunt.
- TM:** He claimed a homestead, and they built a sod house on there. They lived in that for quite a number of years. The first five children they had were all born in that sod house. No wooden floor, just a dirt floor. There were no rooms or partitions in there. They hung big blankets to make partitions. Those were hard times.
- PG:** Did your parents ever talk about being homesick?
- TM:** Not really. I don't think they would have liked to go back and live there.
- PG:** Did you get any letters from there? Did your parents ever have contact with relatives?
- FM:** I never heard about any relatives.
- TM:** My dad heard many times until just before World War II, then everything was shut off. I remember about half a year after the war ended, he got a letter from Austria. It was from his oldest sister. She was in her 80s, and I think two or three years after that she died. But she said they had it very hard when Hitler took over.
- PG:** Did you always speak German at home.
- FM:** A lot.[A132 gunsdeustsche] [Laughter]

- PG:** Do you know any stories, poems or prayers in German?
- TM:** I think the prayers he should remember.
- FM:** Oh yah.
- PG:** The prayers you would be able to say if you had to, huh. How about you Theresia, did you talk German at home?
- FM:** We talked German all the time; my dad could not talk English. But as far as the prayers are concerned, we never learned them in German. The older ones did, but us younger ones didn't.
- PG:** Did they speak a different German?
- TM:** Yes, quite a bit different than what Frank's.
- PG:** So when you got married to these German-Russians you had to learn to talk different, huh? [Laughter]
- TM:** [Laughter] Not really.
- FM:** And I and her never talk German at all here.
- PG:** You mean now anymore?
- FM:** Yah. When we were at home we talked German a lot.
- PG:** But when you were first married you talked German?
- TM:** Oh yah.
- FM:** Not much.
- TM:** He talked so different than we did. [Laughter]
- PG:** I would think it was a lot different. I thought you talked German; I thought your kids learned German.
- TM:** My dad talked the kind of Hoch-Deutsch [high German], and of course my mother talked the Hungarian German, that was different too.
- PG:** Did your dad get married again?
- TM:** My mother was his second wife. He lost his first wife when they had their first child. He remarried then, but not after that anymore. My mother died in 1918 during the flu [epidemic].
- PG:** She died from the flu, really. Where is she buried?
- TM:** Glen Ullin. My dad too.
- PG:** Then you were two years old, and your dad did not get married again?
- TM:** No, the baby was born the 12th of October and mother died the 2nd of November. Her sister took the baby then, and he [the baby] died in February.
- PG:** The baby died.

TM: Yes, my dad raised us then.

PG: You had some older sisters then?

TM: I was the youngest one; there were six others older than I.

PG: There was somebody else in the house to help out.

TM: I'm surprised though, you know dad always had to be out in the field doing this and that, that nothing ever happened—that we didn't burn the house down or anything with all these little kids in the house all the time.

FM: That sod wouldn't burn anyway. [Laughter]

TM: Yes, but later on we had a different house, not the sod house.

PG: Frank, what kind of work did you not like to do when you were growing up?

FM: I didn't have much choice. I had to do everything. [Laughter]

PG: What happened when you did not do your work?

FM: We milked quite a few cows by hand.

TM: Did you like it?

FM: Not really too good, but there was no choice.

PG: Did you carry the milk into the house to separate?

FM: We used to milk sometimes up to twenty-six cows. Of course, there was Nick, John, Eva and me for the milking.

PG: Carried the milk in and separated it and carried it back out.

FM: Yah, my mother and dad helped milking too during harvest time.

PG: What kind of work did you like to do? Maybe you remember that better.

FM: I liked farming straight through. It didn't make a difference what it was, I loved farming.

PG: You mean the grain farming?

FM: Yeah, and ranching you know—sheep and cattle. I liked that.

PG: When you were young you didn't have any beef cows did you? They were they all milk cows, right?

FM: We had some beef cows but not very many.

[phone rang and interview picks up again here]

FM: ...we called that [A185 aglen]

PG: What does that mean?

- FM:** That means a quarter. [unable to hear some]. You know we had some uncles living out in Montana and they was allowed to pick up two quarters of land instead of one.
- PG:** I suppose it was poorer land.
- FM:** Could be, yah. They lived about twenty-five miles north of Glendive, close to that Bloomfield area.
- PG:** Your mother's side uncles or your dad's?
- FM:** On my mother's side.
- PG:** So you still have cousins out there?
- FM:** There were two of them married on my mother's side out there. Uncle Pierce and Uncle Louie Geiger.
- PG:** They were Kuntz' that married Geigers.
- FM:** Yah.
- PG:** You liked the grain farming. How did you farm?
- FM:** Well, with horses for many years.
- PG:** Do you remember the first tractor?
- FM:** The first tractor we got was in 1937. It was a Twin City. That was an old one.
- PG:** It was an old one when you got it. In other words it was a used one.
- FM:** Used one, yah.
- PG:** What did you use the tractor for then?
- FM:** Mostly for plowing.
- PG:** How many bottoms did that pull?
- FM:** He pulled three.
- PG:** Did it have a steel seat?
- FM:** Steel seat, all steel wheels—no rubber or nothing.
- PG:** Was it cold to sit on that seat?
- FM:** You bet it was cold. [Laughter] Dad bought that tractor for \$136.00. That was a used one you know. Bought it right out of Hebron, from [A212 Price].
- PG:** Did that burn gasoline?
- FM:** Yah. We used white gas in it.
- PG:** White gas. What's that?
- FM:** It had no color in it. That's what they use nowadays even for cars—white gas, sure. About five years later we bought another Twin City.

- PG:** Where was that tractor manufactured?
- FM:** See there was a Twin City Tractor, and then they came out with a Minneapolis-Moline Tractor.
- PG:** Same company?
- FM:** Same company, and they switched over to Minneapolis-Moline.
- PG:** I don't know if that was from the Twin cities in Minnesota.
- FM:** They made some bigger ones, Twin Cities, pretty good sized tractors.
- PG:** Even when you had the tractor for plowing, did you do the seeding with the horses?
- FM:** My dad always done the seeding with the horses.
- PG:** How big were the drills then?
- FM:** Ten footers. [Length of the seed drill]
- PG:** Ten footers: How many horses did it take to pull the drill?
- FM:** Four for the drill. For the six section harrow, we used four horses.
- PG:** How wide is each section?
- FM:** They were only about four or five footers; that's about all they were.
- PG:** So that would still be twenty-four feet. That's pretty wide.
- FM:** Oh yah. Then we had a little cart you could sit on. See some of them you used the horse and walked. We had a cart right with the machine.
- PG:** Did you harrow all the land after you plowed it?
- FM:** No, a lot of times when we had it seeded we harrowed it too. And like corn ground we sometimes only took one section of harrow—John took one—and we got on the horse you know, the saddle, and rode the horse, and that's the way we harrowed.
- PG:** One horse to a section.
- FM:** One section then.
- PG:** You had to make the field level so you could cultivate later on?
- FM:** When the corn was about that high we went in with the harrow.
- PG:** Oh, the corn was already up. The harrow didn't pull it out?
- FM:** It didn't hurt it too much. No.
- PG:** So what did you do with the corn then when it got big?

- FM:** Picked it, by hand. Some of it we bindered. That was quite a job picking that corn. My dad used to say, [A254 German phrase] "We picked all day but still didn't get no red one." [Laughter] He had no red corn in there.
- PG:** Did you husk it right away?
- FM:** No, we took it off and put it in a building then in the evening we had to go and husk it yet. That's when he [dad] told us [the above phrase]. Sometimes it happened that there was a red one in there but that didn't happen too often—then he could quit.
- PG:** Well, if it worked once in a while. [Laughter]
- FM:** [Laughter] Yeah, once in a blue moon.
- PG:** Why did you have to husk the corn?
- FM:** I don't know. I guess so it doesn't get warm or something like that, when you put it in too big a pile. I think that was the idea.
- PG:** Then you fed it to the pigs.
- FM:** Yah. Then the pigs could eat it better too when it was husked.
- PG:** Did you save the husks for bedding?
- FM:** We saved some husks, some pretty good stuff that we used for the mattress.
- PG:** What about the covers?
- FM:** We had feather-ticks from geese. [stuffed with goose-down from stripping feathers] That's what we used.
- TM:** You almost had to have feather-ticks in those days to keep warm. Those houses weren't warm like they are now.
- PG:** Did you have to sleep upstairs where it wasn't cold?
- FM:** Yeah, we slept upstairs, [A278 German phrase]
- PG:** Did the holy water freeze?
- TM:** It wasn't that cold. [Laughter]
- PG:** Some people said that the holy water froze.
- TM:** Really. I know we had a little hole cut in the ceiling with the register or something in there where the heat would go up and heat up there.
- PG:** Do you remember the first combine? When did you get a combine?
- FM:** About 1932. But dad had a big accident, you know, a big runaway [with the horses]. A big windstorm come up. [tape scratchy -- horses... got crippled up.] The cutting-header was all shot. My uncle hauled him in. He had a few ribs broke and dad said, "What am I going to do now" and uncle Dick said, "It's not that bad." He says Frank Linneman has a couple of new combines over there. My dad had no tractor yet

so he said, "How am I going to pull it." Well he says, "I got one." See, then later on dad bought a tractor too.

PG: How about school? How long did you go to school?

FM: I didn't go to school very long—about fourth grade. That was it! We had to stay at home and do the work in the spring of the year.

PG: How long did you work at home at your dad's place? How old were you?

FM: I was about twenty-seven.

PG: Then you went into the army.

FM: Yeah, I went to the service. Then when I come home I finally went on my own.

PG: Were you drafted?

FM: Yes.

PG: Where were you [stationed] in the service?

FM: In Kansas.

PG: Did you get overseas at all?

FM: No.

PG: Which years were you in the service?

FM: I got out you know. They were short of help at home; they were shearing sheep. I got out for sheep shearing.

PG: Which years were you in the service?

FM: In '41 I went in, and I got out in '42.

PG: So the war was not over yet?

FM: No, but there's lots of them that got out in the meantime—I knew some out of Dickinson—for farming and stuff like that.

PG: Did you start farming on your own after the war? Did you have a tractor or did you also start with the horses?

FM: I used my dad's tractor for a while. Then I got myself a tractor.

PG: Were you farming near your dad then?

FM: Yah, pretty close.

PG: When did you move northeast Richardton?

FM: I moved about 4 miles further in.

- PG:** Or did your dad move up here too.
- FM:** No, see my dad was living northeast of town too you know.
- PG:** Your dad lived northeast of Richardton. First, he was living south of Richardton, and then he bought some land over here.
- FM:** Yah.
- PG:** You bought a combine right away in the 40s?
- FM:** My dad bought a combine; then later on I says, "I'm going to buy it from you." And he says, "Ok." Then I bought it from him, the first year he had it. See then I went out combing. I was going to make myself some money.
- PG:** Did it work? Did you make money?
- FM:** We didn't charge very much, but yah I made money on it.
- PG:** The crops were pretty good in the 40s.
- FM:** That wasn't too bad.
- PG:** The prices were not too bad.
- FM:** From '42 on is when the crops got better.
- PG:** Did you raise sheep, too?
- FM:** We raised about one hundred fifty ewes.
- PG:** That's pretty many. Did you have sheep fences?
- FM:** You betcha, we wired them in, so they wouldn't get out on us.
- PG:** Did you have coyote problems then already?
- FM:** Yeah, we run into a lot of coyote trouble.
- PG:** What did you do with the coyotes?
- FM:** Guys would come around and hunt them. But we had a hell of a time one time. One time we lost as high as forty lambs in one season.
- PG:** Did the coyotes eat the sheep, or did they just kill them?
- FM:** They'll eat'em.
- PG:** Did you have somebody come in to hunt the coyotes?
- FM:** Yah, that was about five and a half miles west of our place. The guy told me that the coyotes that are the main killers are always further away; they're not close by. See, not all coyotes are killers. I was working one time at Joe [A368 koffee] who always had a lot of sheep too, and I watched the coyotes jump the fence and went over to his. And all they did was they caught mice. They never even touched the lambs. So they are not all killers.

- PG:** Did you make money on the wool? Was the wool a good price?
- FM:** Sometimes the price wasn't too bad, but sometimes it was pretty low. Now the wool price is awful low I heard.
- PG:** Did you shear them by hand?
- FM:** Clippers.
- PG:** I mean you did not have electric.
- FM:** When I started out I sheared by hand, but the later years I used clippers all the time. I went out shearing all the time.
- PG:** How long did it take to do one sheep?
- FM:** It took a little while. I and John, we used the razor to shear the sheep you know and sometimes it took us about twenty or twenty-five minutes, some a little bit longer.
- PG:** Even that's pretty fast. Twenty minutes is not too bad.
- FM:** No.
- PG:** What kind of cows did you have? What breed of cattle did you have?
- FM:** We had all kinds of cows. We had some Shorthorns and some Holstein.
- PG:** The Shorthorns were sort of a dual purpose, weren't they?
- FM:** Yah, they were good for either a ranch cow or a milk cow.
- PG:** What color are the Shorthorns?
- FM:** Brown.
- PG:** Were they spotted? Were the shorthorns sometimes red and white?
- FM:** They were completely brown.
- PG:** Some were "Roan" colored I remember.
- FM:** Right.
- PG:** I guess they had all kinds of mixtures.
- FM:** Then they had the Ayrshire breed. They were good milk cows which had long horns.
- PG:** Anything else you want to say about farm?
- TM:** It was tough going is all I can say.
- FM:** Years ago, my dad didn't have enough money to buy wire, so John and I had to herd the sheep all the time.
- PG:** You had to sit out there, huh?

- FM:** Watch the coyotes and keep the sheep from getting into the wheat fields. We herded sheep every day. The neighbors did the same thing.
- PG:** Were the sheep hard to herd? Did they obey or did they run away?
- FM:** They really weren't that bad. They kind of kept their own.
- PG:** Did you have a good dog to help you?
- FM:** Yeah, we had dog. That helped a lot.
- PG:** Do you remember "headering"?
- FM:** We had a binder.
- PG:** What would you rather do "bindering" or "headering"?
- FM:** I didn't mind headering that much. When you binder, you got to do some shocking, you know. ["Shock" is a stack of eight or ten bundles.]
- PG:** Headering was hard work. [Because draft horses pushed the long "cutting bar-sickle" in a large apron in front of the horses.]
- FM:** Yah, but when we used the binder, my brother John took one side and one end [of the field]. Then I took one side and one end. We waited until we had three rounds made and then we shocked. There was a creek alongside, so we run down there quick and took a good swim down there and then we came back and started shocking again.
- PG:** So you cooled off a little bit. When you were shocking, did you use a pitch fork to set the bundles up or did you bend down by hand?
- FM:** By hand, no fork.
- PG:** Did you have gloves?
- FM:** Bare hands.
- PG:** Your hands got tough after while...
- FM:** We couldn't afford no gloves.
- PG:** The gloves would wear out and get holes in them right away. Do you remember taking the wheat to town with horses?
- FM:** Right, we hauled lots of it in town by horses. We put an extra horse alongside, a triple horse.
- PG:** Oh, three horses. How many bushels could you haul at one time?
- FM:** About fifty-five bushels. Then when we put on a triple box we could put a little more on. It was about sixty-five bushels then.
- PG:** Did you grow rye, too?
- FM:** We seeded some, but not too much.

- PG:** I know some people would grow rye and pick out the black kernels and sell them.
- FM:** What the hell.
- PG:** Yah, there were some people that picked all winter long. They'd get a pail full to the shed and sort and pick out those black ones.
- FM:** Was that supposed to be good stuff then or what?
- PG:** You could sell it. Somebody bought it. You got quite a bit of money for it, but you didn't get many pails full.
- FM:** That took a long time.
- PG:** But whatever they had they got some pretty good money for it.
- FM:** They must of had some medicine in there or something.
- PG:** I think it was used for some kind of a medicine.
- FM:** Hmhm, that's a new one on me.
- PG:** How about at Christmas time: did you have a Belzenickel? We are talking about when you were little, when you were growing up at home. Did you have a Christkindel?
- FM:** Yes, the Christkindel used to come around and try to scare us.
- PG:** Did you get any gifts?
- FM:** Very little. Sometimes maybe a popcorn ball or something like that and that was about it.
- PG:** Did you get an orange?
- FM:** Sometimes an orange or apple besides that.
- PG:** Quite a bit different than nowadays, huh.
- FM:** I should think so.
- PG:** What did the Christkindel look like?
- FM:** She dressed in white and she had a bell and rung that bell a little bit. That's what it was.
- PG:** Did she have a little whip?
- FM:** Yah, some had a whip along yet—a small bull whip you know.
- PG:** Maybe a willow branch.
- FM:** [A515 bullabatch] bull whip.
- PG:** Did you have a Belzenickel too?
- FM:** A few were around, but not too many. Then he used to have a chain, you know, and try to put it on you. He done that on my oldest brother one time. He got scarer than hell.

PG: When you were young, were you able to go to Midnight Mass? [on Christmas Eve].

FM: Oh yah, with the horses and sled we used to go.

PG: How many miles did you travel?

FM: Close to eight miles; it was quite a trip.

PG: Did a lot of farmers come in with the horses?

FM: Yah.

[End side A] --- [Begin side B]

FM: [B1 Maudoodlenuch] [Laughter]

PG: Harmonica. Did you ever play with a [B2 comb and a cigarette paper]?

FM: We tried that every once in a while. They used to have these little pipes that were hollow in the middle and then at top they had a deal that you could put paper in there. Then you blew through there and that made a nice sound. But that got lost one time and that was all we got then. They wouldn't by us another one.

PG: Was it made out of wood?

FM: That was made out of tin. That was a factory made one. See they had a deal right on top that you could pull that out, just like a [B10 cover]. Then you put that paper in and you pushed that down, you know, into there.

PG: Did you have dances when you were a teenager?

FM: Not much dancing going on, no.

PG: Did the old people dance?

FM: Some. They used to have a dance every year on name's day. That's the way our old neighbor used to do that.

PG: What kind of dances did they do?

FM: They had some square dances going on there. [B16 russa codachok] they used to dance; my dad used to dance that to beat hell. All his brothers danced that.

PG: The Russian dance?

FM: Yah.

PG: What did you call it?

FM: [B17 Codachok], they used to get a hell of a bang out of that.

- PG:** Can you show us how they did that? [Laughter]
- FM:** I've never done it. [Laughter]
- PG:** Did the men dance alone or did he dance with a partner?
- FM:** He danced all by himself.
- PG:** Yeah, those Russian men, they jump quite a bit. I mean it is quite...
- FM:** Yah, see Uncle Ferdinand could do that and Uncle John and my dad; they all three could do it real easy like and fast.
- PG:** That would be interesting if we could have a video of that now.
- FM:** That would be the real McCoy, you know it.
- PG:** Did they do polka dances like they do now days?
- FM:** Oh yah. Then on a name's day you know. The ceiling wasn't too high. They always took them and lifted them up to the ceiling. My dad always had to bend down. They couldn't get him up, you know, he was pretty heavy too. But they got him up anyway. He had to touch the ceiling.
- PG:** You mean other men took a grown man—a big man—and lifted him up.
- FM:** Yeah, there were about three of them that went together to try to lift him up.
- PG:** Was that part of the dance?
- FM:** They done that just for the hell of it, you know, it was his name's day. When it was twelve o'clock they done that.
- PG:** I wonder why they did that. [Laughter]
- FM:** Just for a joke I guess.
- PG:** Was that for good luck?
- FM:** I don't know.
- PG:** Ok, your dad's name was Tom. When is that name's day?
- FM:** [to Theresia] What month would that run about?
- TM:** Right after Christmas—I think the 29th of December.
- FM:** And you never missed that. You always had a dance going on then.
- PG:** Well, they pretty much celebrated all the name's days in the wintertime. I don't think there were too many parties in the summertime.
- FM:** No, there was nothing going on in town. They never had dances in town.
- PG:** Well when you were young, was there a place where you could go, where young people went? Was there a hall?

- FM:** Well, some had barn dances going on. We used to go.
- PG:** Neighbors. Was the barn clean enough or smooth enough?
- FM:** Well, they had it upstairs you know, they had that cleaned.
- PG:** You had to do that when the barn was pretty new, so that the floor is level, not so wore out. How about games, what games did you play when you were young?
- FM:** Oh, like horseshoes we used to play. We took them from the horses.
- PG:** Do you remember any superstitions? Did your parents talk about superstitions, stuff that happened?
- FM:** Not right off hand. [to Theresia] Do you know anything about it?
- TM:** I know my dad did.
- PG:** Ok Theresia, what did your dad believe?
- TM:** Well we had this kerosene lamp with this big reflector in the back you know. All at once that reflector just cracked and flew to pieces, and he said somebody died. Later on he heard that—I don't remember if it was his mother or his father had died. And he said right away that somebody died, somebody dead.
- PG:** And the one that died, was it in this country or what?
- TM:** No, over in Austria. That was the only thing that I really remember.
- PG:** There was a lot of stories like that. You hear stories. A crucifix fell off the wall or somebody knocking on the wall, then they knew that somebody died.
- TM:** That was the only thing that I can remember though.
- PG:** Do you remember brauche?
- FM:** I heard about it. I've never seen it done.
- TM:** I would have liked to go to that.
- FM:** You were sick that time you couldn't go, otherwise we might have taken a chance at that.
- PG:** You mean at Glen Ullin, when they talked about it.
- TM:** Yes.
- PG:** But you don't remember doing it in your family or if somebody did it?
- FM:** No, no.
- PG:** How about home remedies. When you got sick, did your mother or aunt or somebody have and home remedy treatments or how did they cure you if anybody got sick?
- FM:** Well, we used to have some home brew; we used to use that.
- PG:** Homemade whiskey?

- FM:** Yes, Schnapps. [Laughter]
- PG:** Now days they call it redevye.
- FM:** Redeye, yah
- PG:** Hokseit schnapps. I suppose you drank chamomile tea.
- FM:** Yah, we had chamomile tea.
- PG:** No matter what ailment, they gave you chamomile tea. What if somebody broke an arm or broke a bone?
- FM:** I had one broke right across here one time.
- PG:** Right across the thigh, huh.
- FM:** There was a guy living south of Richardton. His name was John Brown. Dad hauled me out there, and he took care of me. He done a hell of a good job. See later on his son was a doctor up in Dickinson—over in New England I guess. Nick Brown. He was 88 years old when he passed away.
- PG:** How did you break your leg?
- FM:** My brother done that. He roped me and he pulled me, and I told him I had my leg broke. I was only four years old. I fell on a rock about that size; that's what snapped that. I remember that real good, you know, where that place was. There was a Goetz—old Nick Goetz had a sale out there and it was on this side of the river, and I looked across the river and I says to one guy, "Isn't that where John Brown used to live." And he says, "That's exactly it, right where you're pointing to." He used to have a hell of a bunch of horses. His son always brought them in—right in the yard. And he made his own medicine. He done that at midnight, where he mixed his own medicine himself, put all kinds of stuff in there.
- PG:** Was he like a doctor then?
- FM:** He was a doctor. You could have your whole finger cut off and he'd go and put that together and you could use it like that. It worked. How come those doctors can't do that nowadays.
- PG:** Was that something that he learned on his own?
- FM:** He learned that on his own. He picked that up in the old country over there. He had a beard on him—you wouldn't believe it. [Laughter]
- PG:** Was he allowed to have a beard at that time.
- FM:** Well, he had one. Well there were quite a few old-timers who used to wear beards.
- PG:** Do you remember other sicknesses? Did people have other sicknesses that they don't have now or did they have different kinds of illnesses?
- TM:** I think they have a lot more now than they did then.
- PG:** In the thirties, do you remember the drought?

- FM:** Oh yah, back in '36 especially, and back in '35 also. There wasn't nothing. You know, in 35, the wheat didn't have nothing in it. It got so hot and burned the whole wheat right up.
- PG:** In '35 you had a crop but with no heads in it.
- FM:** Nothing in it. You could go out and thresh a half a day and you wouldn't even get a half a wagon box full of wheat. That was just like nothing.
- PG:** Could you use the straw for the cows then? Did the cows eat the straw?
- FM:** Well, they ate the straw. But we quit threshing entirely you know; there was nothing coming out. Wasn't worth it. The only thing we had was corn; you know corn grows in poor years; even when it's hot. If we wouldn't of had that corn we could never have made it you know.
- PG:** Do you remember grasshoppers?
- FM:** Ooiyahoy, I should think so. [Laughter] We used to come home from headering, you know, and we had a lot of turkeys and they jumped up in the header box and they ate the grasshoppers while I was eating dinner. They were just loaded—grasshoppers—oiyahoy.
- PG:** Do you remember those big grasshoppers that flew?
- FM:** You know, the sun had a whole ring around it of grasshoppers; you could see that for a long ways.
- PG:** How often did those grasshoppers come? I don't remember when the grasshoppers came like that when they flew, but did they come more than one time?
- FM:** Oh yah, they had a few years when those buggers come in. '35 and '36, that was bad, that was terrible.
- PG:** Did they eat your garden or not?
- FM:** Oh yes, they clipped her down. Even the prairie grass, they eat that down too.
- PG:** Prairie grass.
- FM:** Well they call them grasshoppers, they have to eat something. Fence posts—they had holes in there all over.
- PG:** How about in '36, when nothing grew, did you have enough feed for the cows?
- FM:** Not really, we had to get [B125 done] in time to have some hay shipped in from Medina down there and all over.
- PG:** Was that baled?
- FM:** That was baled—wire bales.
- PG:** How heavy were the bales.
- FM:** They were pretty damn heavy. They weren't light.
- PG:** Probably a hundred pounds a piece?

- FM:** Pretty close, maybe about 80 pounds, all of that. I had a wire bale myself one time. That made a bale about that wide.
- PG:** How does that work, do you have to feed the wire in by hand.?
- FM:** The ones I had—as you baled, it wrapped itself.
- PG:** Automatic.
- FM:** Yah, that just made one ring like this; you could stick your finger in there and that just went zzzzt and just like that the wire was tied. That was a Moline baler. On a John Deere baler, every bale had two ties in there—two extra ties. This one didn't; it was just one tie. One here and there—it was two wires running through.
- PG:** But to begin with, was the wire on a big spool?
- FM:** Yah, a hundred pound spool. That had a whole mile of wire on there—one spool. See a John Deere baler had four spools in there. I don't know what the idea was of that.
- PG:** I never saw wire bales. I've heard of it; I know they made them.
- FM:** They're making some now with wire and with string with that big wide bale only about that wide, eight feet long.
- PG:** Oh that square bale?
- FM:** Yah, that Fischer down here has got something like that.
- PG:** Does that tie with a string?
- FM:** String. I think that puts strings about that far apart.
- PG:** Oh, so there's more than two strings.
- FM:** I think there's about five or six in there.
- PG:** When you were young, did you have a windmill?
- FM:** Oh yah, always had a windmill. That windmill was only 20 feet high. See most of them got them high windmills.
- PG:** Was that well dug or was that drilled?
- FM:** That was drilled with the horses.
- PG:** Do you remember that? How did that work? How did you drill?
- FM:** The horses kept going around and around and around. That well was only 48 feet deep and you could not pump'em dry. My dad got on a place, they had a well that was 140 feet and that well always went dry, so my dad had them drill here. It was two Swanson brothers that dug the well from Taylor; they were running the store at the same time.
- PG:** How big a hole was that?

- FM:** That was an 18 inch. They made it up to 36 inch. If you wanted bigger ones, they made bigger ones.
- PG:** Did you have to lay rocks on those walls or not?
- FM:** My dad had to go to town; they told dad to go into town and get some two-by-fours and then they wrapped a wire right around it and stapled it. That wood is still in there now yet, as far as the water goes. When the water doesn't go on top, that's where it goes haywire though. You understand what I'm talking about?
- PG:** Underwater it stays...
- FM:** Under water it stays, yah, but when it was on top then you have to put some nails in there.
- PG:** Well what do you mean they wrapped wire around. They had four two-by-fours or what.
- FM:** No, they had a whole bunch of two-by-fours—a round circle. See they laid the two-by-fours, then they brought it through a round ring and made a twist in the wire and down it goes.
- PG:** So the wire was around the outside of the two-by-fours.
- FM:** Yah, on the outside of the two-by-four. That's the way that worked.
- PG:** How far apart were the two-by-fours?
- FM:** Tied together.
- PG:** One against the other one.
- FM:** One against the other one.
- PG:** That would be like having a solid wall.
- FM:** I think when they he had them cut in there. He had them cut on a deal that you could go and wrap it right around. Around it would fit, you know what I mean?
- PG:** They cut them at an angle so that they fit tight.
- FM:** At an angle, right.
- PG:** Be kind of like making a barrel to make a round thing like that.
- FM:** That well was dug in 1918. I was only about three years old, and I remember that real good. Real good.
- PG:** How many horses did they use for that?
- FM:** Just one horse; that's all they used.
- PG:** Did the dirt come out just like an auger?
- FM:** See that brought it up then they swung it on the side, then dumped it and put it back in.
- PG:** The dirt didn't come up by itself? A man had to be in there to bring the dirt up?
- FM:** No, no. They had a deal where you could wrench it up somehow.

- PG:** I wonder how that worked. Do you remember getting a radio, or did you always have a radio?
- FM:** I guess in 1935 my dad got a radio.
- PG:** When did you first see a radio?
- FM:** Well, I'd say about 1927, somewhere around there. You know Frank Linaman, he was selling International, and he was handling the radios too yet. And my uncle went out and sold it for him. He sold one to old Lee Hoff; he had quite a bit of money you know, so he sold him the first one. Then he sold him a wind charger later on too. That Wansnick used to live in town here. One lived over in Mott; he was selling the wind chargers—they big ones.
- PG:** If you had a wind charger you could have electric lights, right?
- FM:** Yah, right. 32 watt off of what he had.
- PG:** Do you remember any of the very first programs you listened to on the radio?
- FM:** Well, not really, but I heard about it. It was Fred Hoffert and Mark Talson. Mark Talson made his own outfits, and Fred Hoffert went over to our neighbor who had a telephone. He didn't have no telephone so they called each other up, and he got it. It sounded real good. They kept it up and then he got shut off later on. I guess he had to be licensed, and I guess he wasn't licensed. Mark talson is still living yet; he lives in Dickinson.
- TM:** Amos and Andy was one of the first ones that I remember.
- FM:** Oh yah.
- PG:** I think I even remember them yet. I remember Fibber McGee and Maude.
- FM:** Yah, that was another one.
- PG:** That was my time, so that was a lot later I guess.
- FM:** Yeah right.
- PG:** Tell me about your turkeys. You said you raised turkeys.
- FM:** My dad did, and my mother.
- PG:** How many turkeys did you have?
- FM:** Oh, I'd say right close to 50.
- PG:** How many hens did you start out with—10 or 15?
- FM:** I'd say around that or more.
- PG:** Did you have to watch them? I mean did you have to pick up the eggs, or how did that work? Or did you let the eggs lay out there and have the turkeys sit on them?
- FM:** Yah, they sit on there themselves you know.
- PG:** Did they? Or did you pick them up and give them to the clucks?

- TM:** We picked them up until the turkey hens would set; then we'd give them the eggs and they'd hatch'em.
- FM:** Then in the fall of the year we'd butcher them up and send them out—put them in barrels.
- PG:** You sent them to Chicago, huh?
- FM:** Yah, [to Theresia] that's where it went, not?
- TM:** I don't remember.
- PG:** Well tell me about butchering the turkeys. How did you do that?
- FM:** We hung the turkey up, with its head down. They always used to pick. We took the handle off and used that for a weight to keep the turkey down real tight; then you feathered them. [to Theresia] Is that the way you done it too?
- TM:** We didn't raise that many turkeys.
- PG:** Did you take the guts out?
- FM:** Oh yah. Gutted them out and everything.
- PG:** Then you put them in a big barrel or a box and shipped them.
- FM:** Yeah, shipped them out.
- PG:** Did they get moldy or rotten?
- FM:** I don't know what happened on the other end. [Laughter]
- PG:** [to Theresia] Is that the way you done it too?
- TM:** We didn't raise that many. We butchered them and dad took them to the butcher shop in Glen Ullin and the butcher sold them to people in town. But we didn't have that many.
- PG:** When you bleed the turkeys, they kind of let their feathers go, huh? The feathers come out real easy.
- FM:** Yah, I think they do.
- PG:** I think they stuck a knife into the brain, and while the turkey is dying the feathers come loose. They come off pretty easy and you do it right away.
- TM:** There was a certain place they had to hit with the knife so the turkey would bleed. I don't know just how it was done.
- PG:** A certain place in the brain or in the head.
- FM:** We gave the turkeys a lot of corn and stuff to kind of fatten them up.
- PG:** Did you save turkey feathers for pillows?
- FM:** No, we didn't save any of them. [to Theresia] I think they are too rough, not? You never saved any turkey feathers?
- TM:** No, not turkey feathers.

- FM:** Ducks and geese.
- PG:** You also raised ducks, huh?
- FM:** Yah, my mother used to have sometimes as high as a 160 of them. I like that duck meat. Oh boy, that was good stuff!
- PG:** Did the ducks sit on the eggs?
- FM:** Yeah.
- PG:** Did the ducks have to hatch out their own or did you give them to the clucks?
- FM:** Yah, we had an extra dam. We had the crick right close by, but my mother didn't like that—having the ducks in the crick, because we had so darn much minks and muskrat, and they ate the eggs and killed the little ducks. She trained them ducks [to stay] right close to where the windmill was that pumps the water right down the dam. She had all them ducks there and they didn't go down to the dam no more. That's how well she had them trained.
- PG:** Did your mother work in the field too?
- FM:** Oh, yeah, when we were short of help. See a lot of times she set the header stacks.
- PG:** That was the women's job—setting the stacks. Did your mother wear pants when she went out on the header stacks, or did she wear dresses?
- FM:** She wore pants at that time. Piece cut off right down here you know.
- PG:** Was there anything that we did not talk about? Is there anything that you want to tell me about old times that we did not talk about yet?
- FM:** That's [B284] I think, huh.
- PG:** How about you Theresia, do you want to tell us anything?
- TM:** All I can say is times were hard.
- PG:** Were you allowed to go to school?
- TM:** Oh yah, but at our place it was a different thing because our mother wasn't there, so the older ones had to take turns going to school, and the other ones stay at home with the little ones. When I was four years old they started taking me along to school, and I'd sit in the desk with some of the others and fall asleep. Then they'd carry me home. That's the way I started school. But I went through the eighth grade. The older ones didn't, but the four younger ones of us all went through the eighth grade.
- PG:** Did you do a lot of canning when you were young yet? Did you can vegetables?
- FM:** My mother did a lot of canning. They canned corn, tomatoes, peaches, pears, plums,
- TM:** Big barrels of sauer kraut, pickles, pickled watermelons
- FM:** A whole barrel full. A 30 gallon barrel of watermelons.
- PG:** Pickled? How do you pickle watermelons?

- TM:** Oh the same as pickles, cucumbers, except those days they put them in big barrels, but now days they can them just like pickles in jars.
- PG:** What do you put in there? Dill?
- TM:** Dill, and salt, vinegar...
- PG:** How do you know when you have enough vinegar in there?
- TM:** I don't know about that. [Laughter] Took a chance I think.
- FM:** With the peel and all they put them in the barrel. And that peel is actually good when you eat it. You don't have to eat it if you don't want to.
- PG:** Did that vinegar go all the way through to the middle?
- FM:** Must of, yah. Funny how that got through there, gah. You know through that solid skin there.
- PG:** Watermelons never got moldy, huh?
- FM:** No, never got moldy. No way.
- PG:** And the cucumbers they put in there too, huh?
- FM:** No the cucumbers they kept extra.
- PG:** Yeah, in a different barrel, but they kind of did it the same way.
- FM:** Yah, right.
- PG:** They knew how to do it with vinegar.
- TM:** I think, really, they used a lot of salt.
- PG:** Where did they get the vinegar?
- TM:** From town. Maybe some of the older—way back, farther back than we remember—they probably made their own vinegar, but I don't remember that. I know we bought all of it.
- PG:** How can you make vinegar? Same as wine, huh.
- TM:** Yes.
- PG:** If the wine turned bad then you could use it for vinegar.
- TM:** Right.
- PG:** Did you have a [B336 bashdundt]?
- FM:** Oh, yah, you bet.
- PG:** [to Theresia] Did you have a [bashdundt]
- TM:** What is that?
- FM:** Watermelon patch.

- TM:** Oh! We used to have great big watermelon patches.
- PG:** [Bashdundt] is a Russian word. That was the garden that was away from the house, away from home. That was just where the watermelons were and the pumpkins, and sweet corn maybe. It was out in the field somewhere, you know, way out in the wheat field.
- TM:** We used to have such a big crop of watermelons. They'd go out with a wagon and come home with just about a half a box of watermelons. What wasn't used was thrown out to the pigs and the turkeys.
- PG:** So they kept their own seeds all the time? The best.
- TM:** Oh yes. The good ones we opened up. If they were no good, we threw them away and the turkeys ate them.
- FM:** I and John walked home from school one time—I could tell you a story. Old John Berger, that was Walter Berger's grandfather, [B355 German phrase] and I and John wasn't gonna tell him. Then [B356], he wouldn't let it out, and then finally he come [B358] [Laughter] Then they go and told him, you know, and then he knew it.
- PG:** Did you get the [B62] then. Did he buy it for you?
- FM:** Yah, sometimes he gave us some.
- PG:** Did he go and steal the watermelons?
- FM:** No, he didn't really steal any, not as far as we know. They only lived about two miles away from my dad's place.
- PG:** I thought maybe because he wants to know where it is, I thought maybe he wants to steal the watermelon.
- FM:** He was all full of [370 dickets] all the time.
- PG:** Did you remember did your dad make homemade brews?
- FM:** Oh, yeah, you bet. I even made some myself, I and her. We sure did.
- TM:** Out on the farm.
- PG:** Maybe you could show me how to do that?
- TM:** We don't have the utensils anymore. [Laughter]
- FM:** I had a hell of a good still one time. I wish I would never have—I smashed it up because there was a lot of stuff going on. I thought maybe I should smash the sucker up. But the way I had it fixed! I bought it from a guy. He told me if you give me a lamb, I'm gonna give you an old still—and that was a homemade still. That only had a hole on top, about that much, otherwise you had to always use that—what do you call that, nut top, where you put the whiskey in, I mean the stuff.
- TM:** In a Barrel.
- FM:** No, I mean the other way, when you put it on top of the stove.

- TM:** Jugs. We put it in jugs after it was done.
- FM:** No, you know where you put that brew in when they still it.
- TM:** Oh.
- FM:** [B391 schnappskissel] [Laughter]
- TM:** Yah.
- FM:** And at home we had a deal on that big [B392] about that long, and you had to go and put dough around it, and that one only had that little piece there when you put that in. That's the way you could dump that old works out then. Then you had the pipes running out to the barrel. Cold water, put some ice in there.
- PG:** What do you start out with to make brew?
- TM:** We used wheat.
- FM:** I think we made some out of corn.
- TM:** I think we made the first batch out of wheat.
- FM:** But the corn was actually better.
- TM:** See Frank had an old cousin in Dickinson and she had all the equipment. She was married to a man that liked his little schnapps every morning. She said that stuff is so expensive. What do you say if we set up a batch out at the farm at our place? So she came out, she had a fifty gallon barrel—put it down the basement. She made the stuff and they came out when it was down. She brought all her equipment out. We had a stove downstairs and we cooked it down there then. I think we had close to 20 gallons of the stuff. While we were cooking it, not even the kids knew about this, and they were always around down the basement and all over and they didn't know what was going on. When she came out to cook it one evening, we had company, and we were still cooking that downstairs, and she had made a big kettle of bortshct soup and that kind of covered that smell of that stuff cooking down below. Here we got the house full of company while we got that cooking, and he went down to check it all the time. None of the people that were there even dreamt what was going on downstairs.
- FM:** Ted Mosser was our neighbor, and he come over. He was from Beulah but he lived on Selz ranch that time, and he come along over and they played cards—ten of them. I was talking to them other fellers, you know, I didn't even know how to play pinochle at that time in the first place. And he went down and checked it out, old Mr. Roach you know, and we never got caught. Could of happened.
- TM:** We set two batches—two 50 gallon barrels of the stuff that time. I think we had over 20 gallons ourselves and then she took her share. That was just about 90 percent proof, which if you put it in a spoon and put a match to it, it lit.
- FM:** We still got that test up to now yet.
- PG:** That's how she tested it. If it burns, then...
- FM:** Yeah, 90 percent.

- TM:** And that was...well the kids were all in school already so that must have been in the late 50s or early 60s.
- FM:** See then later on we found out that you could make it for your own use as long as you don't sell it. I wish I wouldn't have smashed the damn thing up. You know what I mean. [B445 German word]. You know he told me if you give me one of those lambs out there, I'll give you that still. So I told him I'll pick you one out so we gave him a lamb—we butchered it up for him and everything. He liked lamb meat so much; he didn't have no use for the still.
- PG:** I know the people were scared that the agents were gonna come around and find it, but it really would have been legal for yourself.
- TM:** That's why he went and destroyed the thing—he got scared. But that wouldn't have been necessary. That stuff that we had, when you browned that sugar and put it in there, that was a good drink. The whiskey you buy now, that stuff stinks. It's got such and odd smell, but that had a good smell, a good taste.
- PG:** And I think it was healthy for you.
- FM:** I think one of my neighbors new something about it, and he says, [B465 German phrase] I know what he meant.
- TM:** Well my dad had his little drink of whiskey every morning as long as I can remember, and when he went to the nursing home, he missed it, so we asked if he was at old St. Ben's or Dickinson. We asked the nun up there whether he can have it. She said, "Yes, just give it to me; he can't have it in his room; I'll see that he gets it every morning." And he had his little drink of whiskey every morning while he was in the nursing home. And he lived to be 96 years old.
- PG:** 96, really. That's pretty old for them days.
- TM:** I'm not gonna be that old. [Laughter]
- FM:** And her brother Pete, he took that still down at his place and made a big batch too. He never got caught either.
- PG:** Did you also make beer?
- FM:** Oh yah, we made beer, and made root beer also. Straight beer.
- PG:** How do you make beer? Do you start with barley? Do you have to buy some stuff for beer?
- FM:** No, we didn't use no barley or nothing like that.
- TM:** I think they used to buy this little beer extract, and they started with that if I'm right. We never made it.
- FM:** [Hopa, Hops] that what makes it a different taste.
- TM:** Hopps. With hopps. I think, I don't know we never made it.
- FM:** You never did. We did. We made a lot of wine, in barrels.
- TM:** Yah, we did too.

- FM:** My dad used to get a whole 50 gallon drum shipped in from California that was just juice. Then they had to even show you how to make the wine, so we put a glass on top by the pipe coming out and filled the glass with water. That water went right in. When it started percolating, you know—glup, glup, glup—then when it quits you can seal the barrel; then it is done. Made right in that 50 gallon barrel that was shipped in. That was easy to make. There were lots of them that bought that. That whole barrel of stuff for wine, ready. That was cherry juice. And I think that was tame cherry juice, no chokecherry.
- PG:** That was shipped in with the train, huh?
- FM:** Yah.
- PG:** When you made your own wine, did you have chokecherries?
- FM:** Chokecherries. And some rhubarb wine.
- TM:** Small plums, grapes.
- FM:** You know I had a hired man out there for a little while, and we had some wild plum and made some wine out of it. He was walking and she [Theresia] could see that he was kind of staggering I guess, and she says, “How’s your wine coming along?” “Oh, I think I should drain it,” he says to her. [Laughter]