

## Interview with Isidor Miller (IM)

Conducted by Michael M. Miller (MM)

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Flasher, North Dakota

Transcription by Ann Grausam

**MM:** Good morning! It is December 28, 1993, and this is Michael M. Miller the Germans from Russia Bibliographer at North Dakota State University in Fargo.

I am here in Flasher, ND, visiting with a relative of mine, Isidor Miller and it is a real pleasure Isidor, during this holiday season, to be in Flasher. It has been a long time since I have been down here. We are going to chat a little bit about your life in Flasher where you grew up and a little bit about your parents and your recollections of your childhood to the present time.

First of all, Isidor, I wonder if you can tell me when you were born?

**IM:** In 1906, October the 25th.

**MM:** October 25, 1906. Where did you grow up, Isidor? Where were you born?

**IM:** I was born south of Strasburg, but I grew up here by Raleigh, North Dakota in Grant County.

**MM:** So, you actually were born near Strasburg?

**IM:** Yah, yah.

**MM:** How old were you when you left there?

**IM:** Well, I suppose I was about eight years old.

**MM:** What was your Father's name?

**IM:** Egidius. We used to live where Silbernagel lives on the place now. It is south of Strasburg. John Silbernagel's son, Adam.

**MM:** Adam Silbernagel.

**IM:** He lives on the place now.

**MM:** So, your Father's name was Egidius Miller. Do you know where he was born and in what state?

**IM:** He was born February 14, 1877. He died October 2, 1949.

**MM:** Right, when did he get married?

**IM:** He married on March 9, 1905.

**MM:** He married Natalia Volk.

**IM:** Yeah, yeah.

- MM:** Your Father, was he born in the old country?
- IM:** Yes. He was a young man when he came over, maybe fifteen or sixteen years old.
- MM:** What was your Grandfather's name?
- IM:** My grandfather's name was Mike.
- MM:** Your Grandfather's name was Michael?
- IM:** That was on the Volk's side.
- MM:** Your Grandfather's name on the Miller side I think was Peter Miller.
- IM:** Yah, yah.
- MM:** Your Mother's name?
- IM:** My mother's name was Natalia Volk.
- MM:** Natalia.
- IM:** Yeah.
- MM:** And she was a Volk.
- IM:** Yes, Volk and her father was Michael.
- MM:** When they came over you were eight years old. You were born over here in Emmons County and your Father farmed. Do you still have memories of those years?
- IM:** Yes I sure do a little bit. Not great but I remember where we lived and I remember when old Joe Bachmeier used to come and visit us. I still go over to the place we used to live once in a while. I've been over there a few times in the last two or three years. Bachmeier was still there. And still the little mud place and Blotsky, who used to live southeast. Bachmeier is west of there. There's an old house and part of a windmill. Yah, I remember when we came over here. We came over here on the boat and we had a dog. The next morning the dog was gone. The dog was found over at Joe Bachmeier's swimming in the Missouri River.
- MM:** So, when you came over to this side, you didn't go around Bismarck?
- IM:** No, we had the ferryboat. Horses are all they had. There was nothing else at that time. We drove horses. No cars, no trucks or nothing.
- MM:** You came over here on the ferryboat?
- IM:** Yeah.
- MM:** What made your Dad decide to come over here?
- IM:** Well, it's was kind of crowded over there and my Grandpa wanted us to come over and there was more land around here, too. He was the only one to come over at that time. Then later on John Bachmeier came over. He farmed west of there. See, there it was kind of crowded so the first thing they did was

mixed some mud and they made those blocks. They were about so long and this high. That's what the house was built on.

**MM:** So, you remember when the sod houses were built?

**IM:** Well, I remember ours.

**MM:** Do you remember seeing it being built?

**IM:** Yah. I remember ours being built. I was right there when they built it. They had to work pretty early. I remember. I built one myself. It's still standing. Part of it is on my farm and is still standing. Later, I'll take you out to see it, to see the farm.

Afterwards, I built one of them myself. Part of it, on my farm, is still standing. I'll take you out if you want to see my farm.

**MM:** Yes, that would be very interesting.

When you came over here at the age of eight, who else was born over there in your family? Your brothers and sisters.

**IM:** There was a girl born, but she died. She would have been older than me had she lived. She died when she was an infant. Over here Rophina was born, and there was Agnes, Mike, Adolph, Gabe and Pete. Everybody was born over here [in America].

**MM:** When you were eight over therein the home, you always spoke German, right?

**IM:** Yah, yah.

**MM:** You were only eight but do you remember if those people over there spoke a little bit different German?

**IM:** Yes, they spoke Litchuk, a different dialect.

**MM:** Yes, they could be, or depending on where they were over there. Some of them spoke that Schwabich .

**IM:** I don't know. In my country, I really didn't get too far. When Joe Bachmeier and Blotsky lived down there, they talked just like my Dad did. They came from the same place in Russia.

**MM:** I think they came from the Catholic village of Krasna.

**IM:** Yah, they talked about that quite often.

**MM:** Did you parents talk about the old country?

**IM:** They talked a little about the dorf and stuff. Dorf, that was the village. They didn't talk that much. My Dad wasn't that old, you know. I guess he went to school for one year over there.

**MM:** Did your grandparents on your father and mothers side of the family come over too?

**IM:** Yah, on the Volk's side they were already living over here. They moved earlier. They must have come over here in the 1800's because that was the reason my parents moved over here. There was a bunch of land right west of them. They kept their eyes on it. They drove over in the buggy once and then they must have homesteaded it. They bought the land then. Then they broke the land with horses and my

Mother's cousin, Adolph Riehl, he worked with horses and he walked behind the plow. They had 4 horses on the plows and broke the whole works by hand, you know. It was by the quarter. My Dad used to hire the men by the year when he started farming. They couldn't pay them much in those years. Sometimes they maybe got only room and board in the winter.

**MM:** When you were over at Strasburg, when you were eight years old, did you go to school?

**IM:** No, I started school right here.

**MM:** You started in the first grade?

**IM:** Right. North of us there was a school. It was in a different district. They built a school south of us later on.

**MM:** When you went to school, did the teacher speak only English?

**IM:** Yah.

**MM:** So, what did the children do when they couldn't speak English?

**IM:** After a while we learned it. You see, the teacher boarded at our place for some of the first years.

**MM:** Who was the teacher, do you remember?

**IM:** Martin Schmidt. That's where I got started in photography, you know. He and I got some books and sent away for chemicals. He went to the drugstore and got these little bottles and we mixed it altogether. You couldn't but it like you can now. We started that. We made a darkroom too. He taught us for quite a number of years. We used to walk to school two or three miles.

**MM:** When you were on the farm, did you would speak German with your folks?

**IM:** Well, yah. At home we talked German because my folk's didn't like us talking English, but when we got married we didn't talk German anymore. Our boys, Don and Vern, not Vern so much. But Don was a principal in the school down there for a long time and he and his wife talked both German and English. Then Darlene taught school too. They would say, "We can tell everyone of them that talked German at home, by the way they talked in school. There was a difference." They didn't care. They didn't even listen to us when we talked German. Don especially, he can talk German.

**MM:** Did your folk's learn English?

**IM:** No, but they understood it. My wife she talked English. When we started out and we had kids, we quit the German because the kids didn't like it. When they grew up and they went to school and later on they talked and learned English in school so we talked it at home. They went to St. Christal school down there and that priest didn't talk German either. He was a German, but he didn't talk German.

**MM:** Let's go back to the farm, Isidor. Of course, your Dad broke the land, the sod, and homesteaded it. Do you remember those days on the farm?

**IM:** Oh, yes.

**MM:** What did they have on the farm? What kind of animals did they have?

**IM:** Oh they had a few chickens, a few cows, a few pigs, and horses too.

**MM:** It wasn't easy in those early years I bet. When they came over, of course, there was no house on the land. Did they build that sod house right away?

**IM:** Yah, yah. They built a sod house right away when they got married. My Dad used to work for the Styles Ranch. They lived south of Polack, SD. Do you know where that is? I went down to Polack a couple of years ago. They moved that out of the river. There are no more Indian there. When we lived there, there was a lot of Indians. The Indians are over in Fort Yates now.

**MM:** Before I forget, Isidor, how did the families over there get along with the Native Americans? Did you have any troubles with the Indians? Did you learn from each other?

**IM:** Pretty good. I can remember, before the Indians were kind of bad. They killed a whole family over there, Spicer family. The Indians took them over to Fort Yates and hung them. They killed the whole family. I read that book about it, but I think Don's got it, now. Charlie Spicer, who lived over here, that was his brother that was killed.

The Styles Ranch always had a lot of sod buildings. He was a big sheep rancher. My Dad used to work for them at that time.

**MM:** So, you remember that sod house. How many rooms were in the house?

**IM:** When I was little, at first there were two and then they built on with wood lumber. Most of them, like Kulps had a house north of us and they only had two rooms. Later on they built a shed on. I didn't know how they could live with seven or eight children. The houses all fell down by now though.

**MM:** Yes, small surroundings. Did your folk's have a summer kitchen too?

**IM:** After while, yah. I called it the fly kitchen. There were so many flies in it.

**MM:** Did they have a well and a barn?

**IM:** Yah, they dug a well by hand and they built a barn in 1917.

**MM:** The barn was built with wood though?

**IM:** Yah, yah. That barn was built with wood and was just torn down just this past summer. Not tore down but my nephew lives on it, my brother's son. On the place where we used to live. That barn was built in 1917, and my brother went down and looked at it and then they come over here and asked me when that barn was built. I told them when and who built it. John Goodwin built it and I remember they had those, 2x8's and 2x4's. He laid them flat and while they all argued, you know, the guys, they would say, "Do it this way or no let's do it this way." There was one Norwegian, John Goodwin, and he says, "Aw, the Germans, they don't know nothing." His hired man was Anton Welk, he's dead now, but he helped him. He said, "The Norwegians don't know nothing." It is still that way. I went down and showed them what that was. They argued because they wanted to set them up but he laid them down, John Goodwin did. Now that's tore down, the part that he built, John Goodwin, he's a builder. He built over that. I got a pickup, a four wheel drive so we won't get stuck if you want to take a look at it later.

**MM:** Those days on the farm, we talked a little bit about farming, but did you get involved in helping on the farm quite a bit?

- IM:** Oh yes, when I was about 10 years old I was on the plow with five horses. Of course, my Dad would walk in the back. You know, five on the plow and one on the drag. From there on I was on the farm everyday. I did a lot of hard work and then we drag the header in our crop. I had to fix the header box when I was twenty years old. You know, unload them. Built a stack too.
- MM:** While you were farming, could you go to school too?
- IM:** Oh, yah. I didn't get much. You see, my Dad raised horses and then we had to help on the farm so I didn't get over fifth grade. The teachers weren't very good either. Not as good as now. About all you learned reading and arithmetic. In the wintertime we had a bunch of horses to break.
- MM:** Oh, you raised horses.
- IM:** There was always one of them that was lame. Yah, we raised horses and a few cows, too. They raised more horses than cows them days. Horses were good business in those days. People needed work horses. My Dad, I bet, his still money coming from people that didn't pay him.
- MM:** So, they raised horses to sell for work?
- IM:** Sure. The tractor came on later. My Dad bought his first tractor and he wouldn't use it unless we got behind. He wouldn't use it otherwise. Of course, it went pretty slow. It only went 3 miles an hour or so. Then when we got behind he would take the tractor and plow a little with the tractor. We usually worked with horses though.
- MM:** What did they do for fuel for that Allis Chalmer (tractor)?
- IM:** Gasoline. The first one that hauled out gasoline was hauled out with horses. He had a gas tank wagon and a team of horses to pull it.
- MM:** The horse was very important then?
- IM:** Oh yah. That's the only thing they had. They were used for riding, and for the buggy and plow, and to haul wheat or grain to town, and to harvest. Until later on when I started farming, I started with the tractor. In 1927, I started farming. I had horses too, and my dad had that old Allis Chalmers and he said, "You better take that." It took you a half a day to get a half a mile around field though. Later on I bought a 1530. In 1945, I bought my first M tractor and I still have four tractors myself. I got two garden tractors and John Deere and a Husky and little Bee and an M and a 660. Some are down in my garden and some are over at my son Oscar's place. Last year, we had them down at the Prairie Learning Center, you heard about that didn't you? That was quite a deal.
- MM:** Yes I did. Of course it got cole in the wintertime, what did you use for fuel in the house in the early years?
- IM:** Cowchips and we went down to the river, we were about 10 miles from the river. We would go down in the fall, and used a saw and cut wood. You know, they cut the trees and your arms, you couldn't lift them to carry the wood home. That was hard work.
- MM:** Hard work to get that wood. How did you bring it home?
- IM:** We used a wagon box. We sawed and hauled it home. Sometimes we hauled the whole tree home. They got coal in the early days. They went to the hills. There were a number of places around here,

south, where you can dig coal. Well, there's still some mining, like up by Hazen, that's where they mine. That's where my son-in-law works. Have you ever been up to that plant?

**MM:** Yes I have. Did you go out and gather some cowchips, too?

**IM:** Yah, for cooking and stuff. Anything that would burn. Some people would cut these back brush and tied them together. Some people probably chopped all their wagons when they didn't have any fuel. Yah, it was hard living then, I'll tell you. Not like it is now. There was no electricity. Probably go into to town and got a sack of sugar and a thousand pounds of flour and ten gallons of kerosene or so, and probably after Christmas, in February they went to town again. They didn't go to town everyday like now.

**MM:** So, you didn't get to town very often?

**IM:** No, no. I didn't get to Bismarck until my Dad bought a car in 1926. He bought a Model-T. We went to Bismarck once a year and I had to drive. It took us all day to get up there.

**MM:** You weren't a young boy anymore, when you went to Bismarck for the first time.

**IM:** Yah, yah. That was once a year. We went there to do some paperwork or something like that. Went to the capitol or something and we took the Model-T. We went home, and sometimes we stayed overnight. There was a guy over there between Mandan and Flasher, by the name of Burgess, and they kept people overnight. We sometimes stayed there.

**MM:** We have just celebrated Christmas. How was the Christmas celebrated on the Miller farm?

**IM:** Well, I'll tell you where we celebrated Christmas, as far as I can remember was on the Volk's farm. They all came home and we had that kuchen, about that thick. They had that homemade beer and homemade wine.

**MM:** Oh, they made homemade beer and wine?

**IM:** Oh, yah. They would buy that malt, you can still buy that. It taste like yeast. They bought those grapes and chokecherries and made wine. They made chokecherry jelly too.

Lawrence Welk used to tell about what it was over there and it's the same way over here. When there was a wedding they started in church in the morning and then they went home and ate soup and chicken and kuchen. Then they started dancing until midnight. And the next day they came again and then the next day they went all day until night again. Tom Woodenberg, he used to play over there and over here we had Anton Welk and Harry Guiden who played the violin. Anton Welk played the accordion.

**MM:** Who played the violin?

**IM:** John Goodwin. He was a Norwegian. He just lived with the Germans. He was pretty well mixed in with our people, you know. The boys went to school with us.

**MM:** How did they celebrate New Years?

**IM:** About the same. They went around shooting. I don't know if you remember that or not? Like here, Christmas Eve they went out, I never did like the idea it was so cold, you know, but they went out to

every farm and then they wished them Happy New Year. Then they shot a shotgun. They took the blanks out and shot it. I only went one time. It was so cold, you know. A lot of them used to do that.

**MM:** Now, at Christmas time did they have a Santa Claus?

**IM:** Well, once in awhile, not like now. They didn't have toys like now either. They didn't buy or exchange presents. You'd probably get an orange or a couple of peanuts or something. Not like now at all. Now everyone has presents. We went to the midnight mass.

**MM:** Where did you go to midnight mass?

**IM:** St. Gertrude. It is still there. Of course, they built a new church since. That's where Prairie Learning is. They bought all that. They had a school and a dorm there and had a big gym there too. It's still all there. These guys bought it. I think, they have 40 boys right now. Dennis, he was a good friend of Oscars and Otegaras too. I was the first one to haul them out. They broke down there and I went down south and I had one of my twins, and an old van and a trailer with some stuff on it. I said to Danny, that's my grandson, "We better pick them people up." That was the guy that moved down there. They were hauling stuff there. They are very good friends to me.

**MM:** Yes. Many of our German-Russian people lived in this area. Do you still hear German spoken once in awhile?

**IM:** I'll tell you, the only one that used to speak German is Pete Deiehart. He used to be the Chevrolet dealer. He is down in Arizona and then his brothers, one lives in Bismarck and one lives in Mandan. If you talk English they will, but most of the time it's German.

Rachel, my daughter-in-law, she teaches high school here, she is German. They are from Germany but their high German. She wasn't Catholic until she married but she's Catholic now. Well her Dad could talk German, and she understands it but she doesn't talk German. At home her Granddad had German books.

**MM:** Now, in the Miller house, was there much singing? Did you have a lot of music?

**IM:** No, we didn't but the Ternes family, they were in the church choirs. They used to sing a lot. Rudolph Miller, he is no relation to us, he used to sing quite a bit. He is dead now. They had those old pump organs.

**MM:** Did they sing in German?

**IM:** Oh yes, that's all they sung.

**MM:** When you were a kid, you grew up reading German then?

**IM:** No.

**MM:** Did your folk's get a German newspaper?

**IM:** Yes. "Das Staatsanzeiger" and the "Vieden Friend", they got that. They both got shut down for some reason. That one was in Bismarck, that Staatsanzeiger. Do you remember that?



- MM:** I remember hearing about it. We've read it since then, but I'm interested in the other title. What was the other title you mentioned?
- IM:** It was "Vieden Friend" they called it. It's German too.
- MM:** What was in those newspapers? Do you remember reading some of them?
- IM:** Well, most of the reading was from the old country. You know, they put in from the old country.
- MM:** So your folk's were really interested in seeing what was happening over there?
- IM:** Yah, my Dad read that until he they shut them down. They shut them down for some reason, they did something wrong you know. Something was not right. That was printed right here in Bismarck. I remember the guy. I've seen the guy on television, the guy that used to print that.
- MM:** Isidor, what about dances around here?
- IM:** There were dances on Sunday afternoons. Well, when I grew up I played golf. That was my interest and that's my boys interest too now. Either basketball or baseball in the summertime. I didn't [lay much baseball. I played softball, slow pitch.
- MM:** Did you come into Raleigh to play?
- IM:** Oh, yah. We went to several places. We come to Fargo, too.
- MM:** Did you go with the horses?
- IM:** Yah. I've got an in-law by Almot. He's dead now. He was a baseball player. He played on a different team. His wife used to say he hauled oats and horses all week to go to Raleigh or Flasher to play ball. It was about 30 miles away. My other in-law, Cane, Rachel's dad, played bal. Like Oscar's wife he played ball too. He said, "We either play, pitch ball or pitch hay.
- MM:** You pitched ball or hay? That's interesting.
- IM:** My Dad said, "You are very interested." And I and my brother said, "Only one interest really big enough." And soon as he had dinner, at hitting time and we got the baseball and the mit and pitched the ball. Yah, I liked to play ball. Now, all my kids are interested. Most of them play basketball or football, or volleyball or whatever they have.
- MM:** I know that around Strasburg, names days were pretty important.
- IM:** Yah, yah. Well, the first year it was, but later on it faded away. Yah, my Mother, her names day was always after, what the heck is it, it was in the Fall sometime. She always had a big doings. A lot of people came. Yah, Strasburg, that was quite a doings for names days. A lot of people came when they used to have names days. I remember that. They had homemade beer and wine.
- MM:** What about butchering, was that important?
- IM:** We always butchered in the fall. Quite a few pigs had fat on it about that thick. That's what they had all winter. There was no other meat there. They went and saved it up and smoked it. There were no freezers, you know.

- MM:** When spring would come how would they keep ice since there was no fridge?
- IM:** Later on we got ice cellar. We dug a hole in the ground. We took straw and put ice in; about that much straw, and that lasted pretty well all summer.
- MM:** They put it deep into the ground?
- IM:** Yah, yah in the cellar. It kept until August or September. The ice chunks were about that wide and about that long. The railroad did that too. The Old Milwaukee used to run through Raleigh and they had a depot there. They had a icehouse.
- MM:** They had a icehouse too?
- IM:** Yah, but they shipped that in. The town of Raleigh had a big icehouse. I used to go and help cut in one town. They hired guys to cut the ice.
- MM:** What did they use that ice for then?
- IM:** Well, to keep the water cool or something like that. They made homemade ice cream those days.
- MM:** Of course, on your farm there was no radio or telephone?
- IM:** No, nothing.
- MM:** Do you remember the first time when the radio came into the scene?
- IM:** Yah, we didn't have one right away. In 1931, the first radio that I noticed, they had that Coronado that Gambles used to sell. My uncle and some other guys had one. We didn't have one though. Later on, I bought a Crosley. Then the television came in 1950 or something. For a while there was no radio, no nothing. All we had was a cookstove and heating stove in the other room sitting in the middle.
- MM:** So, what did they do to pass the time? They had no phonograph records either?
- IM:** No, no. Well, I'll tell you, I wondered a lot of times how they could pass it. My Dad was a little different. We had to get the hell out and clean the barns. We had horses. My Dad and my Grandpa they would sooner let you go out and die than let the horses die. Then outside, after you had the cows milked, you had to manure loose and put it on the wheelbarrow and haul it on a pile. You always had something to do with the horses, you know. Then if there wasn't anything else you had to go out and curry them, you know. Curry them everyday. I know my Grandpa, when he saw a guy trod a horse he'd tell them. Whether he was a relative or not, he just told them off. Sometimes, he got into some pretty good fights when he would tell somebody that you had better just walk that horse, it's got life too.
- IM:** Yah, we always had something to do, and I trapped quite a bit too. I was quite a trapper as soon as I got big enough to trap. I trapped and hunted. I hunted a lot of coyotes when I was older. I got a 30-30. I sold it at a sale. I had a 25-22 also a 30-30 and a bunch of 22's. I still got one left. I kept that 22, the rest I sold at the sale. I had a bunch of old guns. I know my grandson bought one. He paid a hell of a price for it. I didn't know that he wanted one. I would have sold it a lot cheaper to him than he paid at the sale.
- MM:** They found time to have some free time didn't they? Did they play a lot of cards?

**IM:** Cards, yah. There was a lot of cards played.

**MM:** Did your Mother do a lot of cooking?

**IM:** Yah, she always puttered around. She was busy, there was seven of us.

**MM:** What did she cook? Did she cook a lot of noodles?

**IM:** No, the biggest deal at our place was knoepfle soup. You know what that is?

**MM:** Yes.

**IM:** A guy in Mandan there, we come out of the clinic, it was an eye doctor, Dr. Schmidt. He came out and he said, "I got to go home and get me some knoepfle soup," and said, "I bet you don't know what knoepfle soup is?" I said, "I bet I ate more knoepfle soup than you ever did!"

**MM:** Oh, yes. I like it too. In fact, during Christmas now, I had some of those cheese buttons.

**IM:** Yah, yah.

**MM:** At my brother's house, they had those cheese buttons. They have knoepfle too.

**IM:** Yah, yah. Well, they have them, all that stuff. Knoepfle, yeah, all that stuff that's all we lived on. We didn't have no fancy meals.

Some people, I can't see how they passed the time though. There was a few couple's there, neighbors, I used to go up visiting. They would sit in front of the stove, they would smoke and she would knit or something. They would sit from morning till night. Way until midnight and never moved. I couldn't do it. I sit but I move around a lot.

**MM:** What year did you retire in Isidor?

**IM:** In 1978, in there. But I still farmed a few years on one quarter. I just put in some oats and stuff, just to pass time. See, I got the tractors, I had a combine them days.

My wife died in 1980. Before that, I used to go out and farm a little bit. Then, when she died I didn't have nothing to do. So at More Grass Mow, that one guy that quit, well, he got pretty old. They wanted me to come there and renew my driver's license, but they wanted to board us out, and they wanted her to clean. She didn't like that at all. When she died then they called me right over, the same fall. I started working for them. So, for the first winter, it was too late to mow, so all I did was just help count the inventory and stuff like that. I moved here before New Year. **MM:** Now, when you look back to those early years, when you think about when you were six or seven years old, over in Emmons County, south of Strasburg. When you think about coming over here on the ferry and settling around Raleigh and so forth. When you look back to those early years, what do you think about?

**IM:** Well, over there again, we went to Grandpa Miller's for Christmas, by Strasburg. I have some of the pictures where the house was built. Do you remember the house over there?

**MM:** Well, I remember the sod house, as it is now.

- IM:** No, it was not a sod house. It is was a stone house. I've got some pictures of it. It still stands yet. I know there's beer cans around it in the picture and I'm sure they didn't drink beer out of those cans when they were there.
- MM:** You remember going to that house?
- IM:** Yah. I remember Grandpa Miller. I remember him real well. And her too. And I know the house in Strasburg where they used to live. I know that house. I drove over there last summer, it's on this side of the river. It's kind of an old high house. That's where your dad used to live.
- MM:** Grandma and Grandpa, were they pretty strict?
- IM:** Yah, yah. I'll tell you, your Dad. I used to drive over in the mud sometimes and when we got a little bad, why they chased us to church to pray. That church was where you kneeled on just 2x4's and when it was kneeled on it bent down in the middle. Later on I went out to some funeral where they were going and I said to your Dad, "That's just like it was when we were young and ornery." Yah, when we got a line, especially the old lady, I mean your Grandma, they would punish us.
- MM:** I never knew my grandparents on the Miller side. I was too young yet. They were deceased by then, but you remember them. Now, you would go over for a month or so you said?
- IM:** Yah, sometimes I'd go for a week or so.
- MM:** Just to do a little work or what?
- IM:** No, no. I and Pete, ran around. Afterwards he bought a car, a Model-T, and we went around and drank beer.
- MM:** Oh! Because you were about the same age right.
- IM:** Yah, yah. He was quite a mixer, that Pete. Your dad was and they had that homemade beer and I was there in the summer, one time. It was nice and cool in there and we went down and drank beer.
- MM:** Did you guys go to dances too then?
- IM:** I went a couple of times. The dances were kind of drinking dances over there at that time. They all got drunk. Schwabs and these guys and well, Amelia Bachmeier, John, he was no-good-for-nothing, and Pete was no-good-for-nothing too. They liked to drink, so we didn't mix too much.
- Amelia was your Grandpa's second wife. He got married over in Russia for first time. Then he married this Bachmeier. He had that Amelia Bachmeier and a bunch of boys. John and Elizabeth, and Rosina died and Pete is out in Montana. John died too. The boys, they always got drunk.
- MM:** Do you ever remember going to any dances when Lawrence Welk was playing?
- IM:** Not over there, but over here I did.
- MM:** He came over here? How big a band did he have?
- IM:** Just a drum player at first. All he had was a drum player and himself on the accordion. Later on he had a bigger band. Maybe four or five of them. He would come to the bars and stuff. When he first used to come he would come for weddings. For a wedding dance, just a drummer and himself on the acordian.

**MM:** Was he pretty popular when he played over here?

**IM:** Well, he played little more popular music than they did here. Here they didn't have a very good orchestra. A orchestra east of Bismarck used to come over there with the piano-accordion. Dietrich used to come, east of Bismarck. His grandson lives right out of Bismarck. When you drive out there's a bunch of sheep is on the north side of the road. That's where Dale is, his grandson.

**MM:** How did Lawrence get over here? Would he come over here with the ferry?

**IM:** I don't know but later on he had an old car. I still have a picture of that old car someplace in the book. He had a lot of money then, pockets full of money before he got married. Then later on I read his books. I got one here and my daughter has one in Hazen. He didn't have too much money in between there. He pretty near went broke.

See, the people wouldn't hire him because he couldn't talk English. The bigger places wouldn't hire him. Until he got in with a guy that kind of lead. He talked here Sunday night about that he lead them because Lawrence couldn't speak and he could speak both English and German. So, that's how they got in. Then they got into bigger places.

They played in Yankton, SD, and then McCleod, he was down there. He used to be over the radio here. He was with him down in Yankton. I didn't know that here a couple of years ago. I was at his chiropractor and he come in there and we talked about it. He said he was 50 years here and about five years down in Yankton.

**MM:** Is Bob McCleod still living?

**IM:** Yah, yah.

**MM:** Oh my! I didn't know that. We'll have to pursue that.

**IM:** He was a couple of years ago. I haven't heard that he died.

**MM:** That is interesting because of our Lawrence Welk collection at North Dakota State University. Maybe you know of his archives? We are interested in collecting materials and speaking to people that knew Lawrence, way back in the WNAX days. I remember Bob McCleod on KFJR radio and TV too.

So, when Lawrence would come over and play, would he only speak German then?

**IM:** Yah, yah. But later on when he come with a bigger band he could talk a broken language. You can still hear his accent right now. He's dead but when he talked it was like the accent in Strasburg. See, they talked German in Strasburg even longer than we did here.

#### **BREAK IN DIALOGUE**

**IM:** They came over to our place. I forget who it was, but they could not talk English yet. They were going to but something in Raleigh. And in Raleigh there is a guy by the name of Leonard, Cecil Leonard. He had a store and he talked English; he couldn't talk German. He was going to buy something in Raleigh and his word was just like German and he said, "I don't know how to pronounce it." My dad says, "Say what you want."

Then when we have those German days, there was a bunch of German people here. I got the pictures from that. Germans from Germany here and then we went over to that Strasburg Church and they had church there and Kramer, that's the priest, you know him don't you?

**MM:** Yes, Father Kramer.

**IM:** Yah, he's in Dickinson now. He was pretty sick here earlier, but he's pretty fair now because Donna's mother goes to that church and he's getting along pretty good. He lost all his hair.

Anyway, the guy said, "That's all German here," to one of the Kramers. "Everyone talks German around here. If you don't talk German you don't talk." And then, all the Kramers couldn't talk German at the sermon but he had a heck of a time. He hadn't talked it in so long you know. It makes a difference. Just like my boys you know, Ralph, he can talk German but he has a heck of time you know. He used to talk German at home but now he's the oldest one in my family. He has a hard time talking German. And then he said, "Over there they all talk German yet." Right now they talk German the same.

**MM:** Less and less but you do hear some German?

**IM:** Oh, yah, yah. See, these Germans were from Germany, West Germany. And then they had church over there in that church, in that Krasna church.

**MM:** Now, were you at Strasburg when they had that Miller reunion?

**IM:** No.

**MM:** That was in 1980.

**IM:** No, I wasn't there.

**MM:** You didn't get over there.

**IM:** I think that was just when my wife passed away. I wasn't there for that. I was over there when the Germans were there. They had that Kramer reunion.

**MM:** When you came over here at the age of 8, you mentioned you went over there once in awhile and were over there with Pete Miller and so forth but did your folk's get over there very often?

**IM:** Why sure, every summer with the buggy. They went over to Ft. Yates and went south and north of Ft. Yates. They drove over to our place there to Silbernegels. The 29<sup>th</sup> of June that Pete and Paul, they went over there every year.

**MM:** That was a big event then.

**IM:** Oh, cripes yes. They had a band and they had a parade. That was a big deal there on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June.

**MM:** Was that even bigger than the 4th of July?

**IM:** Oh, yah, yah. People came from all over the area. They had a band and a big meal and stuff. That guy that played for Lawrence, that Klein. His dad was lead in the band over here and he come with Lawrence Welk, he played the drums with Lawrence Welk.

**MM:** Yes, Jack Klein. His father was in the post office at Strasburg.

- IM:** No, that was some of his cousins. No, no. His Dad was older. I remember him. He was married to a Kramer, that Klein was married to one of her sisters. That guy in Linton, that Kraft, the funeral guy, he's married to another one of the sisters.
- MM:** Yes, you mean the Bakers?
- IM:** Yah, I was over there when he died. I went to the funeral. That guy that worked in the post office. I knew him before that.
- MM:** He's Leo Klein.
- IM:** Leo, yah. His dad was the one that lead the band. And then that guy that played, anyway this was either a cousin or a brother that played for Lawrence Welk. They told me that their Dad led the band in Strasburg. At that time I didn't know it of course that they had a band player.
- MM:** When Lawrence had the dance over here, how late would the dance go at night?
- IM:** He had pretty good turnouts and especially in town. He played for a few weddings. Then it was just a drummer and him. Old Klein played some, once in a great while. I think he played only one wedding out here. That red-headed guy he played the weddings over there where I went to the wedding. Like Kramer, Anna Kramer, do you remember her?
- MM:** Yes.
- IM:** She lives in Bismarck now. She was married to a, I don't remember, well anyway they live in Strasburg now. I was the best man when she got married.
- MM:** Tom Goodenberger?
- IM:** Do you remember him?
- MM:** No, that was before my time.
- IM:** He died.
- MM:** Did he ever play with Lawrence?
- IM:** No, no. He never was in a band. He had an acordion, that's all. Later on he used to give lessons to people in Bismarck.
- MM:** Do you remember listening to Lawrence on WNAX?
- IM:** Yah. We didn't have a radio at home at that time. In the winter, there was a neighbor by me, a big rancher by the name of August Dolly. I went over and helped him all the time. They had one of those radios with a bunch of batteries and a storage battery. You would listen and sometimes they would come in and they would fade out and come in again. I think he had a horn and a drum player at that time. He didn't have a very good band then.
- MM:** Later on when Lawrence was down in Yankton, did he ever come back with the band?
- IM:** Yah, he would come through here. In the bars in Raleigh and Flasher in the bars. Then they had the bar and dancing all together.

- MM:** People did a lot of dancing during those years?
- IM:** Oh, yah, yah. Some of the older people didn't like Lawrence's music because he played more modern music. They wanted the old waltz and the polka. They like Goodenberger better because he always played the old time music.
- MM:** Lawrence played all kinds of music?
- IM:** Yah, yah. More modern music. After he got more playing with him. Some older people didn't like that either, the modern music.
- MM:** Do you still watch the Welk show today?
- IM:** Every Sunday night. He is a little bit older than I am. He was born in 1902 or something like that. I was born in 1906. He died in May 1992. I go over to that place every time I go there, to Strasburg. I've got a lot of pictures of that place. I haven't gone over since they redone it.
- MM:** We are going to close our conversation today. It certainly has been a pleasure, Isidor, to come down and see where you live. Maybe now we can get a chance to see the old homestead.
- IM:** Sure we'll see it. We'll go down there.
- MM:** I want to wish you a Happy New Year and the best to you in the year 1994.
- IM:** Thank you very much. Glad you could come.
- MM:** Thank you, Isidor.