

## Interview with Pauline Munsch Nelson (PN)

Conducted by Betty (BM) & Chris Maier (CM)

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- BM:** Today is April 2, 1997, and I am Betty Maier, a volunteer interviewer for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at North Dakota State University Libraries in Fargo. It's a pleasure to visit with Pauline Munsch Nelson, and we are in Mesa, AZ. We are at her home at the New West Senior Housing Center. And, also, Chris Maier is here, and he's going to be asking Pauline some questions. They are sort of follow-up questions from Interview 1. This happens to be Interview 2, or Part 2 of the interview. So we're going to start with some of the things that we thought of after Interview 1. So Chris...
- CM:** Okay, Pauline, as we were discussing sometime here last week, how many horses did your father have on the farm?
- PN:** I don't exactly know, but it must have been about six or eight.
- CM:** About six or eight horses, and they were used primarily as beasts of burden to do some of the farm work.
- PN:** Right.
- CM:** Did you and your sisters have to go out and do any of the farm work with the horses?
- PN:** I never did, because of my leg being crippled. But my two sisters did. They had hard work, and my mother also.
- CM:** Did you have any riding ponies on the farm?
- PN:** Except those two old ones, Maude and Bill.
- CM:** Was that their names? Maude and Bill? Do you remember any other horses' names? Now the other things that we didn't discuss was what other kind of farm animals did you have on the farm?
- PN:** We had pigs, chickens, ducks, turkeys, geese.
- CM:** Did you have any sheep?
- PN:** Oh yes. We had lots of sheep at one time. They were all over the yard and they kept that yard spic and span.
- CM:** How about a goat? Did you have a goat?
- PN:** Not on the farm, but after they went to town to my grandmother's place in Artis, they got a goat because they were able to milk it for their milk.

- CM:** Sometimes, you know, the earlier doctors prescribed goat milk for some infants and deficient health reasons and this type.
- PN:** Yes.
- CM:** Did you have any dogs?
- PN:** One dog. His name was Sporty, and he was the best dog. He would even be able to go out and get the cows, to milk them. But we were living on that farm where that road was, and he was a very... he'd make friends with everybody, and my mother thought that somebody picked him up one day. And he was gone.
- CM:** So he was used also as a watch dog and also a beast of burden to help with the gathering of the cows, herding cows, and this type of thing.
- PN:** Yes. Sporty was a very good dog. His name was Sporty.
- CM:** How about cats?
- PN:** Yes, we had cats, but they were never allowed in the house either. They were animals that had to be in the barn.
- CM:** They were used primarily to control rodents and other things in the yard.
- PN:** Yes, mice and rats and what have you. I used to play with the cats all the time. Put my doll clothes on them and everything.
- CM:** Did you and your sisters ever have to herd cows in the fall of the year, when all the crops were harvested, did you have to herd the livestock where there are no fences?
- PN:** Sometimes. A cow would get out and some other cow would follow. Yes.
- CM:** I think that's about all I know to ask about animals, unless you had some other exotic animals that you had.
- PN:** Well, when Dad was out for the first time in the spring, he'd often bring home little rabbits that he found as he plowed. One time I had a choice rabbit, and I fed him until he was matured, and my Grandpa Barrett came and gave me a silver dollar for him, and he butchered him and ate him.
- CM:** That was my other question. So what other wild animals do you remember were around the farm during your growing up times? We know that we had the big Jack Rabbits, and how about [? 68] skunks?
- PN:** Yes, they had [? 69] but we didn't have one.
- CM:** You didn't have any around there to pester your dog?
- PN:** I think once in awhile there was the odor of skunks.
- CM:** Did you have a farmyard pond?
- PN:** Yes, a nice pond. It was almost like a little lake that would fill up whenever we had rain.
- CM:** Did you have any wild ducks or geese in the Fall that would stop in for a drink?

- PN:** There might have been, but I don't remember that. Because we used to have them go overhead.
- CM:** Now, do you have any recollections about coyotes?
- PN:** Yes, when there was a coyote in the neighborhood, Dad would call other neighbors and they would go out and shoot it down.
- CM:** In your younger days, do you ever remember seeing any deer?
- PN:** No.
- CM:** Deer just were not around in those earlier days. We didn't have any up where I grew up either, until I imagine I was about 10 years old, at the beginning of the Depression, was the first deer I ever saw at Beaver Creek up there.
- PN:** But that was close to a river. That makes the difference.
- CM:** Yes, and deer were very, very scarce during those days. That's all I have Pauline, so I'll turn the mike over to Betty.
- BM:** Okay, we're going to follow the questions that are on Part 2... courtship, marriage and relationships. Those that you want to answer, you answer, but if you don't feel you want to, that's fine too. What did your parents or your teachers tell you about marriage? Did they discuss anything like that?
- PN:** My dad was the only one that never wanted me to be married. Because of my crippled condition.
- BM:** So that was the only opinion. Your mother didn't say anything?
- PN:** No, Mother was the quiet one.
- BM:** Did you learn anything from your parent's relationships?
- PN:** Not too much, because love was not displayed before children. There was hardly ever any kissing done. So that was their own relationship.
- BM:** How did your marriage differ from your parents' marriage?
- PN:** It was more modern, I think.
- BM:** There was more affection shown, wasn't there?
- PN:** Right.
- BM:** Were your parents' or grandparents' marriages arranged? What's the word I want to use, Chris?
- CM:** [? 108]
- PN:** [? repeats the word] No. Dad and Mother went together for awhile before they got married.
- BM:** How did they meet?
- PN:** Well, on the farm, you see, it was only five miles to Artis, and I think it could have been in church, or just gatherings of groups in the area.
- BM:** What were some of the most important traits or virtues you learned from your parents?

- PN:** Well, offhand, I don't know.
- BM:** Patience?
- PN:** No, because I didn't have a family to begin with. Hard work, honesty, and many responsibilities.
- BM:** And I suspect you also learned what caring meant for others, because you were cared for by your parents, and I see you as being a concerned person, too. Were husbands and wives equal in authority, and rights in making decisions? Think back on your mom and dad.
- PN:** My dad did most of the deciding as to what to do. Mother just went along with him. She knew what he wanted to do, but there was one time that he bought a John Deere tractor, and Mother was so afraid. At that time some of them got killed in the fields. You know these tractors would tip over and they'd find them gone. So she cried for days, because she was so afraid that Dad would be killed. That was her concern.
- BM:** How about the difference between inside and outside decision making. Like your mother making decisions inside the house, what was to be done there, and did your dad do the outside decision making?
- PN:** Yes. Right. But you see, we were considered a poor family. We didn't have all these beautiful things that they have now. We were very common, and there weren't very many decisions to be made in the house. There were no electric appliances. Nothing like that.
- BM:** Were you able to express your feelings when you were growing up, like anger, sadness, fear?
- PN:** I don't think so. I think we kept that mostly to ourselves.
- BM:** How about criticism?
- PN:** Well, criticism is good sometimes, if it's taken the right way.
- BM:** But you didn't do it as a child, then.
- PN:** No.
- BM:** How were children disciplined?
- PN:** Well, my dad would just look at me and I knew what it meant. I didn't have to have one word from him. But when it got to be serious enough, he would talk up and with looking, his features, and saying what he did, that was my discipline. Sometimes, even in my crippled condition, he would spank me.
- BM:** How about your mother. Did she discipline you?
- PN:** Yes, that was a little bit different, though. That was more or less just patting you on the head or giving you a little lecture.
- BM:** Were there any changes from your grandparents' generation to... did you know your grandparents? Were they in the home?
- PN:** No. My dad's were already gone. His father died in 1910 and I was born in 1911, so I never knew him. And of course his mother had been gone quite a long time. But my mother's mother - I knew her very

well, because Mother was sick and had to have surgery, and they'd put me with her and I stayed with her, sometimes months.

**BM:** So did you see a difference between your grandmother and your mother then, in handling problems, or in affection, or...

**PN:** Yes. There wasn't any affection seen in the grandparents either.

**BM:** There wasn't?

**PN:** No, that was her second husband. Her first husband had died in Russia. That was my mother's father. So I don't know anything about him. But there was never any affection shown.

**BM:** How about disagreements in the family? How were they settled?

**PN:** Mostly by talking it over. Never to the point where they'd say, "we're going to get divorced." That was not mentioned at all, and it was not even considered.

**BM:** Did they ever go outside of the family for advice or help?

**PN:** No, not to my idea.

**BM:** Were any of the older people consulted in settling some of the problems?

**PN:** I would say they would often go to the minister and ask him what would be the advisable thing to do.

**BM:** How about farming practices? Did they go to any of the neighbors or anything? Do you remember your dad talking things over with neighbors?

**PN:** I imagine they did, because we were kind of related to a lot of them. And they'd find out how do you do this, or how do you do that? They might have seen a good crop. Well, what did you do for it? I remember one time Dad was out in the field harvesting. And a thunderstorm came up, so when it got close enough, he sat down by the haystack, and before his eyes, that grain was just beautiful and thick and very... I mean lots of grain in it. And he saw it all go down. Well, he couldn't accept it for awhile. And he mentioned that in church. Because other farmers had kept their crop. We were wiped out.

**BM:** That was due to hail?

**PN:** Yes. There was hail in that thunderstorm. And everything was knocked to the ground. Couldn't get anything out of it, even the seed.

**BM:** We've seen that.

**PN:** Yes.

**BM:** So you were in church and the neighbors sort of...

**PN:** Sympathized and prayed for him.

**BM:** How were grown up children treated when they had conflicting religion or marriage decisions? You maybe didn't have that happen in your family, did you?

- PN:** Yes, very sternly reprimanded. Sometimes they would go out with the boys that the family did not agree with.
- BM:** Were they cut off from the family then?
- PN:** One time I remember my sister was temporarily.
- CM:** Grounded, huh?
- PN:** Yes.
- BM:** You said that your grandmother was part of your family on your mother's side. Did she live with you at any time?
- PN:** She could not live alone anymore after my Grandpa Barrett [?] had died. So Mother and Dad moved to Artis with her, and I think they were down there about seven years. As soon as she died, they, of course had to relinquish ownership.
- BM:** So they took care of her until she died.
- PN:** Oh yes. In fact they were there when she passed away. Right in the home.
- BM:** Did your parents have other friends outside of the relationship?
- PN:** Oh yes. Dad was the kind that could talk to anybody, and just go on from one subject to the other. Mother was an introvert. She wouldn't open up unless she knew the person.
- BM:** But she did have friends, though.
- PN:** Oh yes.
- BM:** Maybe not as many as your dad did. How did your parents and your grandparents view relationships? Did they ever say anything about... is it.... you say it Chris.
- CM:** [? 261] Everybody's got [? same word].
- PN:** Yes, [? same word], that's right. Yes, we all have that.
- BM:** Were you close to aunts and uncles and cousins?
- PN:** Oh yes, very close. We had so many aunts and uncles it wasn't even funny. Because, you see, my Munsch grandpa married three times. And he had so many of them from his first wife, then he married the second wife, and she had children that she brought into the family, and they had three together. Then he married the third wife. Now he didn't have anymore children from her, but her children would marry his brothers and sisters. So that's the entanglement that my family cannot get through there.
- BM:** You're right. It is an entanglement. But it's possible to sit down and figure it out, I'm sure.
- PN:** Well, I told my dad one time, I said, "you've got to sit down and start with the very first one." I wish I still had that paper. And he did, and from then on, I was straight.
- BM:** If you or someone from your extended family moved away to another state, was it important to keep in touch?

- PN:** Oh yes. And it was mostly by just one visit a year. My Aunt Sophia Mabeus, she married into the Mabeus family which was his third wife's family. And they moved to middle [? 288] South Dakota. And that was where there were a lot of Indians around. It wasn't a reservation. We'd go over there at least once, if not twice a year to see them.
- BM:** Did they come to see you too, then?
- PN:** Not too often.
- BM:** Who made the money decisions in your family?
- PN:** Mostly Dad. Mother would always go along.
- BM:** And was that true in your own family too, between you and your husband?
- PN:** I made most of the decisions.
- BM:** I should maybe clarify here, that Pauline was married to a Norwegian and this interview also happens to be Norwegian, Swedish and Danish, so some of the cultural traits come out because that would be true in my family too. The mother, the female always took care of the money matters in the family.
- PN:** He was not a figure-head. I was, I've always been.
- BM:** You were a bookkeeper.
- PN:** Yes.
- BM:** Were there other ways of borrowing money, other than from a bank?
- PN:** Not to my knowledge. I don't think Dad did too much of that.
- BM:** He managed on what his income was.
- PN:** Yes, and the same thing with us. My husband and I, we wouldn't buy even a house without having the money. Or a car.
- BM:** It was always cash.
- PN:** That's right.
- BM:** What were some of the most important religious teachings in your home?
- PN:** You mean the doctrine of the church?
- BM:** I suppose. My next questions are going to be, "did you find comfort in them? And were you frightened by them? Or were you encouraged or discouraged by them?" So that would have been the teachings that you experienced within your family.
- PN:** Yes, they were very, very good. I mean like, we were raised infant baptism, but when I got to be older and knew the Bible, I was baptized immersion, because Jesus was.
- BM:** So you followed those teachings within your family as well.
- PN:** Within my own, yes.

**BM:** Were you able to question some of the religious teachings?

**PN:** Of my folks?

**BM:** Yes.

**PN:** Oh yes. My dad and I, when we'd get home, we'd sometimes talk until two and three o'clock in the morning, and it was mostly on Bible questions. Because he was a good student of the Bible. I remember one time, I said, "what would you think in Heaven if one of us would not be there?" And he thought for a minute, and he said, "well, the tears are all going to be wiped away, and I think that God is not going to reveal that."

**BM:** You remember that so clearly, don't you?

**PN:** Yes.

**BM:** How did your family get along with people that weren't Germans from Russia?

**PN:** Fine, because that's what they were.

**BM:** That's what everybody was around there.

**PN:** Right.

**BM:** Were there any other people like Germans from Germany, or Jewish people?

**PN:** Now, Jewish people, yes. Because if you remember way back, every little town had a Jewish store. A general merchandise and also groceries. Zeeland had one. My mother would go in there for shopping. So, being that I was a sick child, the lady that was Jewish, she would always send home some candy or popcorn or peanuts, or whatever she had and say, "now this is for your Pauline." And I shall never forget that, because they were so good, and all of a sudden they were all...

**BM:** They all left didn't they?

**BM:** How about Indians?

**PN:** I was afraid of Indians because I heard them talk about Custer Battlefield. And the fighting that went on. We didn't have them around us as neighbors, but they would come to the fairs, like at Eureka, and they would put on these dances, and they'd slaughter a cow or calf, and to me, I'd sit on my mother's lap because I was afraid of them. And to this day, I have a little fear there, which I should not have. But I can't help it. It's that childhood expression.

**BM:** Were you ever afraid to say that you were German?

**PN:** No. Now, I'm going to ask you... does my speech reveal that I am German?

**BM:** I cannot detect it. No.

**PN:** My two sisters, Minnie and Emma, they had very much of that brogue, or whatever they call it.

**BM:** Did they not stay in the community, though? Emma, I know did in Napoleon.

**PN:** Yes, and Minnie in Wishek.



- BM:** And that makes a difference.
- PN:** Yes. And being that they were not used to carrying on a conversation in English, they would always go to the German language.
- BM:** And you didn't when you were in Bismarck, I'm sure.
- PN:** No, because I left home when I was 17, to go to Bismarck. So, it stayed with them, and in a lot of places they couldn't pronounce what they wanted to say.
- BM:** Which goes on to my next question. Have you felt comfortable expressing your German-Russian background, even in the times of World War I and II?
- PN:** There we had to be careful, but you see, in 1918, I was only seven years old, and that made a difference. Now when I first went to school, we were not allowed to talk German, and I didn't know English. So even if my teacher, who was German, but she wasn't able to talk to me in German. That was forbidden. So I had to learn and learn quickly.
- BM:** Yes, so those who wanted to learn English did have the opportunity in school to learn English. But I wonder about those who were not going to school, like your mother and your father.
- PN:** That's why. Mother had never learned the English language. That's just what she picked up from us kids. So she was more comfortable with German. Now Dad could talk a little bit more in the English language. He was more favorable with it, and more relaxed in it that Mother ever was.
- CM:** Did your father go to any schools here in the States?
- PN:** Well, of course he was only three years old when he came over from Russia, but I don't remember anything about his schooling days. He must have gone to school, but you see again, that would have been in German, not English.
- BM:** So when he read the Bible, he read that in German.
- PN:** Always.
- BM:** So he had to learn it from somewhere.
- PN:** Well, he would talk to people, to help him explain himself. Now the way... he used to be a manager of an elevator in Zeeland, and he would just write out the word according to his way of pronouncing it, and he got along okay.
- BM:** Because most of the other people were German and they understood it?
- PN:** They understood. When a wagon of grain came in, he was able to talk to the man who handled it. Everybody was German.
- BM:** What do you think about the survival of the German language in our German-Russian community? Do you think it's possible for the next generation to continue to learn?
- PN:** No, because even the next generation to me didn't pick it up. They can't speak it. They can't write it. They can't talk it anymore. Because they've been so involved with the English language now that there is no need for them to speak German. Now we were together on Sunday, and nobody spoke German.

- BM:** Your nieces and nephews don't speak German at all, do they?
- PN:** No. They've forgotten what they did know.
- BM:** Do you speak to them, ever, in German? Just to teach them a nice word?
- PN:** No. I should have on Sunday. [laughter] Easter Sunday.
- BM:** How available were your educational opportunities? Now I know you had unusual opportunities, by going to Bismarck and going to the Business College, but for your sisters that were behind... did they have any chance to go on to school?
- PN:** No, because you see next would be Ashley. And at that time they did not have transportation for those that wanted to go to high school, and there was no high school given at Zeeland. So my oldest sister only went to fifth grade.
- BM:** And your other sister?
- PN:** My other sister graduated from eighth grade. But that's all she had.
- BM:** So there weren't very many opportunities there then.
- PN:** No because it was too far to drive.
- BM:** If they had gotten more education, do you think their lives would have been different than they were?
- PN:** I don't know. I really don't know.
- BM:** I know yours was different.
- PN:** Oh yes. But theirs... you see they were in that community and that's where they grew up and that's where they married, and some of them even lived with their parents until they could afford it or find a place of their own. That's what happens. And in my case it was altogether different.
- BM:** I'm going to switch subjects now. We're going to go on to politics.
- PN:** Oh yes.
- BM:** Were your parents interested in politics?
- PN:** Dad was. But Mother just took what Dad said. I think they were interested in prohibition and in having women's right to vote. I remember Mother going for voting.
- BM:** Did they go to any of those political rallies?
- PN:** I don't recall of anybody even having one in our neighborhood.
- BM:** Did you frequently vote?
- PN:** I voted from the time I was of age.
- BM:** So, do you remember your first time that you went to vote?
- PN:** Not exactly.

- BM:** You don't remember who you voted for, for President?
- PN:** No, no.
- BM:** Was there a President your parents felt strongly about?
- PN:** I think there was, but I've been trying to think of who that is, or who it was. I don't recall.
- BM:** But it was discussed in the home, though.
- PN:** Yes. Whenever there was an election for President, they would discuss it between themselves, and then, of course, we'd hear.
- BM:** If you had to categorize your parents, what political party would you say they belonged to?
- PN:** Republican.
- BM:** Were you ever involved in certain political issues?
- PN:** Not outright, but of course I'd be careful. My husband was one that would study the whole voting procedure and the issues and all of that. I'd kind of go along with him.
- BM:** This question hasn't been asked before, but I'm going to ask it of you, and if you want to answer it. When you worked in the state capital, was there any political reason why you didn't discuss or discuss political issues?
- PN:** Yes. Because I was there for 13 years in the capital of North Dakota. During that time we had different sides, different political groups, so I had to be very cautious. But I always made it somehow, somehow. I was in Berta Baker's office for a long time, until I got married. And the highway department.
- BM:** Well, that concludes our interview. Are there some things that you maybe want to add to some of this, that you've thought of, about the country, or your community, or your growing up years?
- PN:** Well, I'm very happy that this is going on. I mean they're picking up the old timers and having this information for everybody to read or research, because there is a lot of researching going on right now, as to what family you belong to, who's related to you, and it was very interesting to me for a long time. But now I have to kind of back away from it because it gets to be too involved.
- BM:** We have so many more generations, don't we, as we get older?
- PN:** Oh yes. We could add a whole bunch to all of this. And I tried it at first, but now it's gotten out of hand.
- BM:** So we're going to leave that to the younger generations, to keep all those records.
- PN:** But I am very upset about the divorces. You know, we're almost half and half. And that to me is very heart-breaking at times. We've had it in our family, which I never thought would happen, but it did. And I think every family can vouch for that. So when I was growing up, there was no such a thing as divorce. If we'd ever hear of a family that wasn't living together and was going to get a divorce, we just didn't think that they were very nice people.
- BM:** How do you think it's going to affect our families? Those divorces.

- PN:** It will affect it until we straighten out from generation to generation, because the generation that's in process now have too many parents that were not raised like we were. Religiously, especially. And morally, as well. So I don't know what's going to happen. It's up to God to straighten it out, because we can't straighten it out.
- BM:** The children are going to suffer for it, aren't they.
- PN:** Yes.
- BM:** Thanks, Pauline. This has been one of the very, very interesting interviews.
- PN:** I'm glad I was able to before I get to the point where I can't do it anymore.
- BM:** Well, you have a marvelous memory, and all the details of growing up in North Dakota.
- PN:** Yes. Thank you.
- BM:** Thank you.
- PN:** I have a little devotional book that was my granddad's book from Russia. His name was Andrew Munsch. He gave it to my dad, Christian Munsch, and I have read it through cover to cover. It's about 3" by 5", and it's very dilapidated, you might say. Sort of like a leather cover on it, and it goes way back to 1716, which I would like to present to the Historical Society at Fargo. So I'm giving it to Betty to do that for us. Then we may have a few more that we're going to add, like that shawl. So I'll give it to Betty right now and she can present it to you later.
- BM:** Thank you, Pauline. You are very generous. This will go to the North Dakota State University Libraries, and it will go to the area of the Germans from Russia Heritage Center. We thank you very much.
- CM:** This is the end of the interview, and we are on side A of this tape, and we are almost at the end, so the side B of this tape is going to be blank. And that's all there is. Adios.