

## Interview with Sister Magdalen Schaan (MS)

Conducted by Michael M. Miller (MM)

April 10, 1996, St. Francis Convent, Hankinson, North Dakota

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**MM:** It is the 10th of April 1996 and I am Michael Miller, Germans from Russia Bibliographer at the North Dakota State University Libraries in Fargo. It's a pleasure to come down to Hankinson, North Dakota to the Convent of St. Francis and be with the wonderful sisters, especially our sisters who are German-Russian. We are going to do some interviews today and I am now with Sister Magdalen Schaan. Sister Magdalen's original name was Elizabeth Schaan.

**MM:** Where were you originally from, Sister Magdalen?

**MS:** From Rugby, North Dakota.

**MM:** Could you tell me your full name, when and where you were born?

**MS:** I was born in Rugby on April 16, 1919.

**MM:** And what was your father's name?

**MS:** Joseph Schaan.

**MM:** Did he live at Rugby too on the farm?

**MS:** Yes.

**MM:** Do you remember when he died?

**MS:** (Sister Schaan did not have this information at this time.)

**MM:** Is he buried up at Rugby?

**MS:** Yes.

**MM:** In what cemetery?

**MS:** Right in the Rugby [Catholic] Cemetery.

**MM:** And what was your mother's maiden name?

**MS:** Katherine Miller.

**MM:** Did she die in Rugby too?

**MS:** Yes.

**MM:** And she is buried there at Rugby?

- MS:** Yes, right beside my father.
- MM:** Now, were they both born in the old country in South Russia?
- MS:** Yes, they were.
- MM:** Were they already married over there?
- MS:** No, they knew each other and they knew the families over in Russia.
- MM:** They very likely lived in Catholic villages in South Russia which is today the Ukraine.
- MS:** Yes. My mother was 16 years old when she came over and my father was 10, but my father came over a couple of years before my mother.
- MM:** I see. Did they go to Pierce County right away?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** So, they came over with their families?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- MS:** I had 8 brothers and 4 sisters.
- MM:** How many are still living today?
- MS:** Three brothers and the sisters are all living.
- MM:** Now, we are going into the questions specifically about your life as a Sister here at the Convent of St. Francis. Then we will go into some of those other questions. The first question I am going to ask you, what were distinctive religious customs practiced in your home that related to Feast Days?
- MS:** We always said our prayers every day, morning and night prayers together with the family. At Christmas time, we didn't believe in Santa Claus, we believed in a Christ Child [Christkindel]. The Christ Child came to us. She asked us children how we are and if we were good. You know, asked my mother. My mother told her how we were.
- MM:** Now, did someone come to the house and asked you these things?
- MS:** Yes, the Christ Child. Now, it was my cousin. You know, [like] when they receive Holy Communion, they had tinsels down [a veil covering their face and head].
- MM:** Now, do you remember as a child, you had a lot of faith in this?
- MS:** Yes, we believed in the Christ Child.
- MM:** Now when she came and talked to you, was it in German?
- MS:** Yes, everything was in German.
- MM:** So as a child, you didn't speak English?

- MS:** No. But I knew English when I started school because my brothers were older than I. There were 5 older brothers that went to school and they talked English when they came home. So I learned from my brothers.
- MM:** What about Names Days? I remember Names Days.
- MS:** We celebrated Names Day and oh my, that was a great day. And also for the children, they couldn't wait until their Names Days were. My mother's was in November and we had the best food that you could ever think of. I remember my aunt made chocolate date cake and it was just delicious. Us children were really waiting for that food. My uncle played the organ. Mike Schall from Rugby and he was our neighbor not far from us. There was one pedal broken on the organ and he played just with one pedal. And could he play that organ! They danced like everything and my mother could dance the polka. They danced and sang. My mother had 2 sisters and they were just beautiful, beautiful singers.
- MM:** What were their names?
- MS:** Anna and Caroline Miller.
- MM:** And they were all living in the Rugby area?
- MS:** No, Caroline was living around Devils Lake.
- MS:** But you grew up right in the city of Rugby?
- MS:** Not in the city, on the farm.
- MM:** How far from Rugby?
- MS:** Ten miles south of Rugby.
- MM:** What church did you attend?
- MS:** Well, the first time when we had church, it was called Johannesthal [in Reno Valley Township]. We didn't have any church in Balta or in Rugby [at that time]. Then they built a church in Balta in 1926-27. Then we went to Balta because we were closer to Balta than to Rugby.
- MM:** Then the Catholic priest and everything was in German too?
- MS:** In German and English. We had two sermons every Sunday.
- MM:** So, the services were quite long?
- MS:** We were in the church until almost 2 o'clock every Sunday.
- MM:** And what time did it start?
- MS:** It was 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock and we couldn't eat [before Communion]. Well, to get home it would be so late, so took lunch along. Father Boniface [Stuetz] gave the children Holy Communion before mass so they could go out and eat in their car.
- MM:** Is that right? Interesting. The church was very important in your life?

- MS:** Yes, it was and we never missed church. During the winter, we had to go with the sled 6 miles. My mother put a stone in the oven to heat our feet so we wouldn't get too cold.
- MM:** Those memories are real fond to you today?
- MS:** They sure are.
- MM:** Now, did you celebrate Easter in any special way? Was the Holy Week very important to you?
- MS:** Very important. We never missed Holy Thursday, Good Friday or Holy Saturday, never. We had to make nests for the Easter bunny outside behind the house. That was different. Then we put some grass in there, the grass that you buy. Then they put the eggs in there.
- MM:** Of course, you had to make all of your own things. You couldn't go to the store and buy these things?
- MS:** We made everything.
- MM:** Did your mom make any special foods for Easter?
- MS:** Oh yah, she made different Easter breads.
- MM:** Did you learn from your mother how to do those things?
- MS:** Everything how to bake. I was 10 years old when I made the first bread dough.
- MM:** And you made a lot of noodles too?
- MS:** Yes, we did sauerkraut and knepfla and dampfnoodla.
- MM:** Did you make those throughout your life?
- MS:** Oh, yes. Once in a while because the employees when I cooked in Oakes, they liked that German food so much.
- MM:** Even though they weren't German-Russian?
- MS:** No, they weren't. Käseknepfle and all that.
- MM:** Which were cheese buttons. What about New Years Day? Did you have any customs with relatives for New Years?
- MS:** The relatives always got together.
- MM:** What did they do? Did they just have Maistub, did they visit?
- MS:** They played cards, visited and got a little keg of beer. They had cheese, crackers and beer.
- MM:** Where did they get the beer from?
- MS:** They bought it and many times, we had it home made.
- MM:** So, your folks made their own beer and they made some of their own liquor too?
- MS:** Yes.

- MM:** What did they make as other kinds of...? Like, just beer primarily?
- MS:** And wine.
- MM:** They made their own wine?
- MS:** Oh, yah. We had little barrels where we had the wine in. My brothers sometimes sneaked out and got some when my parents weren't home. I was suppose to watch them and how could I watch those big brothers? That wasn't so easy to watch them.
- MM:** And you didn't want to tattle on them?
- MS:** No, I didn't. That was the wrong thing to do, not to tattle on them.
- MM:** Now, let's go back to a serious note. What were the strong religious influences in your life that affected your deciding to be a nun?
- MS:** I think my mother's prayers. She was a very prayerful woman, and Father Boniface was a very good priest. He came from Germany too, and was our parish priest.
- MM:** So the home life was very important in the deciding of this? Did you have a lot of encouragement or did you decide this on your own?
- MS:** Well, we got encouraged. But they said, "If you don't want to go, you just stay home." My mother had to make some clothes for us. We had to bring some clothes along. Then she said, "Now is the time to decide whether you want to go or stay home." So, she did not push us or anything.
- MM:** Then, when did you decide to leave home and come to the convent?
- MS:** When? It was in 1936.
- MM:** You were how old then?
- MS:** About 16. I was 18 in the Novitiate.
- MM:** How much education did you have back in Rugby then?
- MS:** I had very poor eyes so I didn't go through high school all the way. I did take high school subjects. I couldn't even see the blackboard. Did you ever hear of Keractacoma?
- MM:** You had a lot of encouragement of course, the parish priest, Father Boniface and the community too and relatives, family members, colleagues, etc. Were there special practices before you came? Were there special prayers when you came?
- MS:** I used to walk to school and I said a rosary all the time on the way home or on the way up so I could become a sister. I always wanted to become a sister.
- MM:** Did your brothers and sisters encourage you also?
- MS:** Oh yah, they didn't have anything against it.
- MM:** What about your family, were they involved with a parish besides going to church on Sunday? How were they involved with the parish?

- MS:** Well, my dad helped build that church a lot and then he was trustee for many years.
- MM:** They were strong supporters?
- MS:** They were strong supporters. My mother did a lot of baking for the church suppers.
- MM:** And those church suppers were important?
- MS:** Yes, very important.
- MM:** They were large, wonderful community gatherings?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Now, what about your religious training? Where did you receive your religious training?
- MS:** In here when I came to Hankinson.
- MM:** And then you were in the Novitiate for some time?
- MS:** One year.
- MM:** So, you received your education primarily here and what did you primarily train yourself for?
- MS:** First, I worked as a housekeeper and I liked that very much. Then Mother Polycarpa asked me if I would be a cook and I said, "Yes, if I have to."
- MM:** So, then you decided to go into that field? Then your life at the convent at St Francis, your working life was mainly cooking? Where did you start?
- MS:** Well, I was half a year here after my Profession. Then after that, I was sent to Chicago to cook and bake there for the Carmelite Fathers. They had a high school there.
- MM:** You were there for how many years?
- MS:** Ten years.
- MM:** Then you came back here?
- MS:** No, then I went to Drayton. It was our first hospital that we started, St. Elizabeth's Hospital. I was there 10 years and then I went to Gettysburg 3 years and then to Oakes where I stayed for 30 years.
- MM:** When you came to the convent of St. Francis, did you find a warm reception and a lot of encouragement? Because I am sure once in a while, a person would get homesick.
- MS:** I was very homesick, very, very homesick. Our novices took me out to the barn so I wouldn't get so homesick. You know when I was most homesick? It was when we did the chores in the evening, when it got dark. It was my worst homesickness I had.
- MM:** Because you were so used to being on the farm and you had barns here? So you went out so that you felt like you were at home again?
- MS:** And I milked in the morning here.

- MM:** So when you came to Hankinson, they still had cows and had a regular farm here? Did you have much communication through letters or could you with home?
- MS:** Not too much, not at that time. As candidates, we could write but not in the Novitiate. We couldn't write too much.
- MM:** I see. Couldn't write too much? Then, how many home visits could you have?
- MS:** Well, when I went to the convent, we could only go home for our parents' funeral. It was the only time. But it changed very fast though in a couple of years. Then, we could go home every 5 years.
- MM:** Every 5 years you could go home?
- MS:** And now, we can go home every year.
- MM:** Could the family come and visit you?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** But in those early years, they couldn't?
- MS:** Oh, yes. They could come and visit.
- MM:** They could come and visit you, but you couldn't go home?
- MS:** We could not go to our brother's house, just to the family home and that was all.
- MM:** Now when you came here, did you need financial support or did the sisters pretty much take care of it?
- MS:** They took care of everything.
- MM:** So you didn't have to request any financial help from home? Then you mentioned your mother made clothes.
- MS:** Yes, we had to bring some clothes along.
- MM:** Now when you got here, did you have to make your own clothes here?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** They had clothes and fitted you here? But now, when you look back into the 30's and now through all these years, what do you see as the biggest difference here at the convent?
- MS:** A lot of changes. Visiting our people and changes in some prayers too.
- MM:** How do you see the future of the convent of St. Francis?
- MS:** I don't know what's going to happen, we don't get vocations. But we are not the only ones, it's all over this way. Like in Germany, they used to have so many vocations and now they don't have any either.
- MM:** I want to ask you a little about the 40's when they had that Anti-Garb Law.
- MS:** Oh, I didn't have anything to do with it. I wasn't teaching.

- MM:** Because you weren't in the classroom, but you had heard about it? Now, were there any sisters here at St. Francis that were involved with that.
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Do you remember talking to some of them about that? Was it quite an experience for them when they came back for retreats and for the summer? Was it quite different for them?
- MS:** Very much. Now, Sister Barbara Marie was one of them.
- MM:** They were out teaching and all of a sudden, they had to change their clothing? So, it affected some of the sisters at St. Francis also at your schools?
- MS:** Yes, there were a couple schools that they were teaching. They were teaching in Selz and Karlsruhe, [ND].
- MM:** So you didn't have to actually experience it, but you remember the sisters that were involved?
- MS:** No, I had nothing.
- MM:** Now, let's go back to your life back home and what your folk's talked about. Your dad was age 10 when he came to North Dakota and your mother was 16. Did they come with large families?
- MS:** In my mother's family, I think there were 6 that came with the parents.
- MM:** And on your father's side?
- MS:** That was a large family, but they had more children when they were over here.
- MM:** But when they left the villages and they came to North Dakota, did they talk much about life back in those villages?
- MS:** Not really. My mother talked more than my father. They were poor and she told us about the barns out there. They are very close to the house and they said the barns were just as clean as the house, had to sweep it every day. Very clean people in Russia. All those that came from there are really good housekeepers.
- MM:** Did your mom learn a lot of her cooking over there?
- MS:** I think she learned some. She knew how to cook when she got married. She was a very good cook.
- MM:** Was there a strong religious life in the villages too? You don't by any chance remember what village she came from?
- MS:** Well now, my mother said that it started with that war about religion and the only way they could teach the children was go out on the roadside and take the children along and teach them there. They wanted to get out of there before it got worse.
- MM:** Now, on both your father's side and your mother's side, the whole families came to America or did anyone stay behind?
- MS:** No, they all came.



- MM:** Now, did the grandparents come too?
- MS:** Yes. Well, grandpa was sick before he came.
- MM:** And what was his name, do you remember?
- MS:** William Miller. My mother's name was Miller.
- MM:** Then your mother brought her parents along?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Then they came with them and everything was okay when they came?
- MS:** Very poor. My uncle gave them a house to live in for a while. Then grandma stayed with us for 25 years. We took care of her all the time and my father was very kind to her. He was strict with us that we had great respect for her.
- MM:** Now, did you find your mother talking about the ship ride over here?
- MS:** Well, Grandpa Miller died in Bremen, [Germany] on the way over. They had to stay in Bremen, that's the port where they had to get on the ship. They had to go from Russia to Germany to get on the ship. They buried him in Bremen. Grandpa was very sick before they came over to the US. He said he didn't know if he would make it but wanted to get his children over. They had to stay in Bremen for a week because they were afraid they had a contagious disease.
- MM:** Did your mother talk much about that ship ride?
- MS:** Not really too much. They were sick.
- MM:** And then, did they land in New York City?
- MS:** I really don't know where they landed.
- MM:** How did they get to North Dakota? With the train?
- MS:** Yes, with the train.
- MM:** Then they came to Pierce County? How did they ever get land up in Pierce County? Was somebody there before them?
- MS:** My mother's uncle was there in Rugby and they decided to go there.
- MM:** And they found land?
- MS:** Well, my mother's family never had land, but my dad's family had the land. They just worked. My mother worked in a motel in Devils Lake for 25 cents a day doing ironing.
- MM:** Did they hire her out at the young age?
- MS:** Yes, they were hired out.
- MM:** Your mother had to leave home young? So her folk's couldn't afford it, so they couldn't go on to school? Did they all go to the 8th grade?

- MS:** No.
- MM:** They didn't finish the 8th grade and they had to find work?
- MS:** After my mother was married, some people asked her how she liked married life. She said, "At least I have something to eat now."
- MM:** So your mother and her family had a hard, hard life?
- MS:** Hard life, yes.
- MM:** How would you compare your life growing up?
- MS:** It was much easier than what they had. We always had enough clothes to wear, always had enough to eat no matter if it was the depression years or not.
- MM:** Did your mother ever learn to speak English?
- MS:** Yes, she spoke English very well.
- MM:** So, in the house they would speak English and German? Was it sometimes when they didn't want the kids to know what they were saying?
- MS:** Oh yah, then they spoke German.
- MM:** But you always understood them anyway?
- MS:** Sometimes.
- MM:** When you went into town, they weren't all German-Russian in Rugby. There were some other nationalities?
- MS:** There were Norwegians. We had Norwegians around us.
- MM:** How did they react to your German dialect? Did they say, "Oh, your speaking German again or something like that?"
- MS:** Oh, yes. Sometimes they laughed at us in school.
- MM:** Because in school, you had the classes in English. But then at recess, did you speak in German?
- MS:** Sometimes we tried, but we weren't allowed to. We had to speak English.
- MM:** What did the teacher say when you spoke in German?
- MS:** She was pretty disgusted, she checked it out. We always had to speak English.
- MM:** What about religious services? Were they in German or English?
- MS:** German in the beginning. They had study clubs at that time where the young people went together and studied the...? I think it was the Catechism, it wasn't the Bible.
- MM:** Now when you were a child in a large family, did all the children have different chores?

- MS:** Oh, yes. When we came home, we had to carry the water in for the next morning and the coal and everything. Each one had their work to do. They never got bored like now days.
- MM:** Now, did you always have coal or did you use any other fuel? You always had enough coal?
- MS:** We had coal. We had a heater stove in the front room and there was a register went to the upstairs rooms. It was very cold.
- MM:** So, there were mornings where it was pretty cold?
- MS:** Very cold.
- MM:** And did your mother have those big feather blankets and big pillows? Now, were there other chores? Did you have to learn a lot about cooking?
- MS:** Yes, I had to learn. I was with my mother helping her all the time right in the house and the kitchen. I milked cows and that was the only thing I did outside. I shocked once in a while, but not very much. I was always in the kitchen.
- MM:** You didn't have to go in the fields?
- MS:** One time, I went out to pitch hay with my brother. I didn't do it good enough and he didn't want to chase me home. Then he said, "I think mother wants you at home." So, I went home.
- MM:** But you would bring the lunches out to them?
- MS:** Oh yes, always big lunches.
- MM:** Now, were there some chores that you didn't like to do?
- MS:** We had to do it. We didn't think that we didn't like to do it. We just had to do it.
- MM:** You just did it and that's part of living?
- MS:** And we hung the clothes out when it was below zero. They had to go out so they would smell good.
- MM:** That was strict! Did your mother make her own soap? Did you learn how to do that too?
- MS:** I could make it, yes. I made some at the hospital.
- MM:** It's a wonderful soap, isn't it?
- MS:** Yes, good to wash clothes with.
- MM:** Now was there in your family much discipline if the children didn't behave?
- MS:** Well, my father sure had discipline. He just had to look at us and we knew that we had to do it, there was nothing different.
- MM:** There were no questions asked?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** Now, what was it like in school for you? Do you remember going to school?

- MS:** Oh, yah. We had to walk in spring when it got warm. But my dad made a bus where we could sit in the inside and there was a little window where we handled the horses.
- MM:** Now when you went to school as a first grader, you spoke primarily only German then already?
- MS:** I could understand English already.
- MM:** But there were a lot of children that were not necessarily all German-Russian?
- MS:** No, we had Norwegians around us.
- MM:** Did you go to a farm school?
- MS:** Yes. You'd be surprised at what smart children they got out of there and they had all the classes. Couldn't do it now anymore.
- MM:** Was school 9 months?
- MS:** Yes, nine months.
- MM:** And your folk's were quite determined each day that you get to school?
- MS:** Oh, yes. They didn't like us to miss any.
- MM:** You couldn't stay at home to work at all?
- MS:** No. I never stayed home to work. I don't think I missed any days in my 8th grade.
- MM:** Was baptism and confirmation important in your family?
- MS:** Very important. We didn't wait long for baptism after the child was born.
- MM:** Did your folk's ever get involved with founding a church? You mentioned a church that was started.
- MS:** That was called Johannesthal and that was not too far from our house. It was a country church. That is where we started to go to church.
- MM:** Now, you remember when someone in the family or a relative passed away? That was a very serious event, wasn't it?
- MS:** Yes, it was. My brother, the first brother that drowned. He went to school in Minot for a teacher, teachers college. Then they called home that a serious accident happened and we weren't sure. Then in the morning, they called that it was my brother Joseph. They shipped him with the train to Rugby and my brothers went in with the truck and they brought him home. They brought him through the back door and we had him for three days there in the house. Can you imagine how hard that was? Was awfully hard.
- MM:** How old were you about?
- MS:** I was about 13.
- MM:** So, you remember that clearly?

- MS:** And I always had to make cakes and cookies and things like that and send it along when he came home. Sometimes, he came home for weekends.
- MM:** So, you missed him a lot?
- MS:** Oh, I missed him. Oh, my! My mother just about had a breakdown at that time. That was during the depression years and we saved every penny to get him through school. He went to school at St. Johns University and then went to teachers school.
- MM:** Did anyone else in your family go off to college?
- MS:** Yes, one of them, Danny. They all had high school, most of them.
- MM:** So, your family in dealing with death, it was very difficult?
- MS:** It was very difficult. It was so difficult because we had to have them right in the house.
- MM:** Did they sing those old funeral songs in German?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Do you remember some of those?
- MS:** I can't remember. There is one, "Der Todt With Eina Versoshen." That one I can remember.
- MM:** You will never forget that?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** Now, up in that Rugby, Balta area are those beautiful iron crosses.
- MS:** Yes, in the cemetery. My grandmother has an iron cross and my brother Joseph. Both of them.
- MM:** Do you remember anyone who made those?
- MS:** I don't know who made them. Somebody in Balta made them.
- MM:** We should find that out if there are any living relatives of someone who made those iron Crosses. Let's pursue that later. Now, were you able to keep from your mother or family any family heirlooms, artifacts, or anything that was passed down to you? Frames, religious items that you took with you?
- MS:** Yes. I had that "Agony in the Garden" picture but I don't have it here. I gave it to my niece.
- MM:** Were there any of those pieces that were important that would go down to the son or daughter?
- MS:** Well, I got a shawl and I gave it away too. You know, a person should never give things away like that. But, it's beautiful.
- MM:** That your mother brought over from the old country?
- MS:** Yes, they brought their shawls and things over. They were very important to your mother.
- MM:** Did your mother have time to do a lot of embroidery work?
- MS:** She didn't do any embroidery work. She was too busy. She did all our sewing, so she had enough to do.

- MM:** How was Christmas celebrated in your family? Was there a St. Nicholas and the Angeles would come to your house?
- MS:** The Angels didn't come, the Christ Child came. Then my dad brought our things in from outside, pretended that he got it from outside. Then they divided it, each one had a plate. Then my mother divided [out to] each one on a plate.
- MM:** Was there a Christmas tree in the house?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** But during the depression years, in those 30's when you were growing up, Christmas wasn't celebrated that big because there wasn't much available?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** What about a Belzenickel?
- MS:** Yes, I remember when they said, "The Belzenickel kummed!"
- MM:** And the children were afraid?
- MS:** Yes, they had to be good.
- MM:** Was marriage an important item? When someone got married?
- MS:** Yes! They had a wedding for three days.
- MM:** What did they do for three days?
- MS:** Dance and eat. They always had chicken for a wedding. They always had chicken soup for a wedding, I know that. They had German potato salad for a wedding and had wedding Kuchen, Hochzeit Kuchen.
- MM:** What about meat? Did they make their own sausage?
- MS:** Yes, always sausage. We ate sausage all the time. Then we canned our meat because we had no refrigerator. We canned chicken, beef, all our own vegetables and fruit for the winter. We always had enough to eat, fruit and vegetables. My mother always saw that we got our vegetables.
- MM:** Then if they knew if there was a wedding in the spring, they had to do even a lot more?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Did they sing a lot of songs?
- MS:** Well, we never had big weddings. Our family didn't have big weddings.
- MM:** So, there wasn't much German singing?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** But they would have an accordion, wouldn't they?
- MS:** Yes, and the organ.

- MM:** Did you ever participate in a shivaree?
- MS:** No. I know what that is. Now, is that before the wedding or after the wedding?
- MM:** That was after the wedding. Now, what about the bridal clothes? Did they go out and buy the wedding dress?
- MS:** Made it. Everything was made.
- MM:** Everything was made? For the man too?
- MS:** No, they could buy shirts and suits at that time.
- MM:** But the wedding dresses were handmade?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Would someone in the family make them?
- MS:** Yes, I had an aunt that was a very good sewer. Mrs. Frances Job.
- MM:** What was her maiden name, do you remember?
- MS:** Schaan. She was a Schaan. She was a sister to my father. Frances Schaan Job.
- MM:** What about flowers? Were there flowers there at the wedding?
- MS:** Oh, I think they had flowers but I can't remember what.
- MM:** How would your brothers and sisters meet their future spouses? Was it arranged or did they meet them on their own?
- MS:** Our's were never arranged, none of them.
- MM:** But did you ever hear of that?
- MS:** Oh, yah. Kuppla? Yes! Mr. Black in Balta, he always Kuppled.
- MM:** What was his name?
- MS:** Black.
- MM:** Well, how did he get that assignment to arrange marriages?
- MS:** He took it himself.
- MM:** Was he German Russian?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** So, he would check them out and decide who should be going with who? Then how was that arranged? How would they meet each other?
- MS:** Well, he took care of it that they meet each other.

- MM:** I wonder how he arranged all of that? What did women have to do outside primarily? Other than in the house, did they have outside chores too?
- MS:** Well, lot of women worked very, very hard outside. Now, my mother didn't. My mother never pitched hay. My dad always said that the women should be inside. She did go out for shocking a little bit, just to get out of the house. She milked cows. She and I milked 20 cows when the others were in the fields, then we were home. I had to stay home most of the time and help her.
- MM:** Now in the home, when it came to decisions on finance, did your mother have much to say?
- MS:** No, not with the finances. But if my mother wanted something, she told him. He was very good that way. He was a good provider.
- MM:** So, you would say it was a good marriage?
- MS:** Yes, very good.
- MM:** So, your mother was a strong participant in the family affairs?
- MS:** She always was. Now, my dad didn't come home for supper sometimes and she held his supper until he came home. Sometimes, it was 9, 10 o'clock. He was out for business. He was a cattle buyer.
- MM:** Now in the winter months, it wouldn't be quite so busy and the children would come together in the evenings. What did they do in the evenings for entertainment? Sing? Read books?
- MS:** Read religious books. My dad read the Bible and we had to sit there and listen. Then afterwards, he asked us and we had to tell him. But we had to be quiet and we knew we had to be quiet and listen to it.
- MM:** He would read to you in German or English?
- MS:** German. Another thing we did, we said the Rosary many a time together in the evening. When our neighbors came, my brother said that they would be there, and when they came, [German phrase], they can pray with us.
- MM:** What about music? Was there much music in your family?
- MS:** Yes, very much. Two of my brothers played the organ. Christmas Day, my parents never went away and when we were all together, sang with our parents.
- MM:** There were a lot of songs and a lot were in German?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Was there ever an accordion in your family?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** Were the children encouraged to learn an instrument?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Did they get lessons from someone?



- MS:** No, they just picked it up by themselves. Our family was very musical. My sister that's here that has Parkinsons, she used to play the guitar very, very well. But now she can't do much anymore.
- MM:** What about dancing? Did they learn how to dance?
- MS:** Yes, yes. My mother taught my brothers how to dance. She was a dancer. She did the polka, the jumping polka when she was 72 years old. They all learned how to dance from my mother.
- MM:** Were you encouraged to dance? To go to dances?
- MS:** Yes, yes. Not too many before I went to the convent.
- MM:** But that was a good place for young people to meet?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Now, when they would have these big names day parties, then what would the children do when the parents were playing cards and so forth?
- MS:** We could stay up, but not all night. We had a certain time where we had to go upstairs. My dad, all he had to do is go like this to us.
- MM:** But did you play games or what did you do?
- MS:** We listened to them, we were right there. We could be around.
- MM:** Now, what about these dance halls where they would go to dances? Was that okay to go to dances?
- MS:** Oh, yes. My brothers went to every dance there was.
- MM:** But what about the other ethnic groups, like the Norwegians, would they go?
- MS:** I don't think they went much to dances. It was mostly the German Catholics.
- MM:** Were there ever any barn dances?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** On your farm too?
- MS:** No, not on our farm.
- MM:** Where were those barn dances?
- MS:** Oh, they were our neighbors.
- MM:** Then they would get some people together to play music?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** What about meeting other young people? Where would that usually happen, like names day parties or at dances?

**End of Side One -----Missing Words----- Beginning of Side Two**

- MS:** Do you know how they played with nibs? They had 2 sticks, a small one and a large one and they made a hole. They took that nib, that stick and put it across the hole and they hit it with the large stick.
- MM:** That you remember? Any other games?
- MS:** Oh, hide and go seek. They played things like that.
- MM:** What about fairy tales? Did you have any books at home and read a lot of those old fairy tales?
- MS:** Oh yah, we had that.
- MM:** So, they would be encouraged to do a lot of reading in the family?
- MS:** Yes. Now my mother, she was sitting with us a lot and telling us things about Russia but not my dad. He never talked about Russia.
- MM:** So, your ma would sit around with you and talk about Russia?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** And the children learned from that? So, they did learn some things about back in Russia? Did she tell you about what games they played there?
- MS:** They danced a lot. They danced out in the yard. That she told us.
- MM:** What about your parents and grandparents superstitions? Did they ever bring this into light, like they bogeyman or hooting owls, anything like that?
- MS:** The bogeyman.
- MM:** What about if someone was sick? Was there any healing techniques your mother used at home?
- MS:** Oh, yah. A mustard plaster.
- MM:** What was mustard plaster used for?
- MS:** For a cold, a chest cold. That was really good, but you had to be very careful. You stirred it up with flour and dry mustard and put it on. It really helped a lot.
- MM:** Any other kinds of healing techniques?
- MS:** I suppose there were some but I can't remember all of them.
- MM:** Do you ever remember somebody there around Rugby, like a healing woman or somebody where they would go when somebody was sick?
- MS:** A midwife. We had a midwife all the time and she came. You know what they said? The stork brought the baby! They never told us little children how the babies were born.
- MM:** Do you remember who that midwife was?
- MS:** Yes. Walburga Schaan.
- MM:** She was a Schaan, too?

- MS:** Well, she was married to a Schaan.
- MM:** What about folk medicine or Brauche? They would go to an older woman and she would pray for healing?
- MS:** No, nothing there.
- MM:** So, we talked about midwives. Would they come to the home then?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** And that's how they delivered many babies?
- MS:** Yes, all our babies were born that way. The only ones that were born in the hospital are three, I think, all the rest were born at home.
- MM:** And so, the mother would be in bed for some time?
- MS:** Nine days.
- MM:** Did you ever remember your parents speaking certain German sayings? Any special German sayings?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** What about the newspapers? Did they ever get a German newspaper in your house?
- MS:** I don't think so.
- MM:** Never had a German newspaper? 'Cause there was like the Nord Dakota Herold, that was from Dickinson and the Dakota Freie Presse. You don't remember seeing those?
- MS:** I don't remember them.
- MM:** Now, let's go the time when you start remembering there was electricity. 'Cause you remember when there was no electricity?
- MS:** Yes, I sure do. We had to clean those chimneys on the kerosene lamps and they had to be just clean. My dad watched us when we washed them. They had to be washed with soap and water and when there was a streak, he told us, "You better get that streak out. It's not clean."
- MM:** So, when they had those names day parties or other kind of events in the evening, how would they play cards then? With those kerosene lamps?
- MS:** Well, they put it right down. We had a lamp, it was called a gas lamp that you could hang up with those mantels on. Do you remember those? That's what we had and that threw a lot of light.
- MM:** But do you remember as a child already, having a radio?
- MS:** I didn't. Not a radio.
- MM:** Later on, that came out? So you remember when the first radio came into being?
- MS:** Yes, we had an old phonograph. I remember when I fell down the porch. We had those outside porches with those beams on and my grandmother told me to.... I was suppose to stay home. They all went out

and picked the bugs from the potatoes with the kerosene in a can and I stayed home to make the bread dough. I didn't want my grandmother to know that I was up there playing the phonograph. I just loved music, any music that I could get a hold of. I crawled down that porch and I fell down and I broke my collarbone.

**MM:** So, you got caught?

**MS:** But I crawled down that many times and never got hurt, but something broke off.

**MM:** So, you remember those days when electricity came into the picture?

**MS:** Yes, I do.

**MM:** Like, you remember the first time when you listened to the radio?

**MS:** Yes. And my mother was always after us to put the light out as soon as we had a light on. It wasn't necessary.

**MM:** What were some of those old radio programs? Do you remember those early ones?

**MS:** Lawrence Welk was one on sometimes.

**MM:** You heard him already then? He came from WNEX in Yankton. So, you remember way back then?

**MS:** Then, yes.

**MM:** Well, that's wonderful. Then you must remember when T.V. came into the picture?

**MS:** Oh, yah.

**MM:** Then you were already out working?

**MS:** Yes, I was out then.

**MM:** You remember those early days of T.V.?

**MS:** I was gone by then.

**MM:** I mean even when you were in the sisterhood, you remember when they had T.V.? Were you able to watch T.V.? They permitted your watching T.V.?

**MS:** Oh, yah. At recreation, when everybody watched.

**MM:** Were they able to watch it Saturday nights for the Lawrence Welk show?

**MS:** Oh, yah.

**MM:** Now, if you think back to your family, who do you remember best? Your mother, your grandparents, a brother or sister, who do you have the best memories of?

**MS:** Of my mother. I was very close to her 'cause I worked right beside her all the time.

**MM:** And you learned so much from her?

**MS:** Yes.

- MM:** And you stated earlier that she encouraged you to go on to the religious life?
- MS:** Yes. I mean, she didn't push us.
- MM:** Is anyone in your family preserving your family heritage? Has the family history been written or is there anyone in your family that's saying, "We should learn from you and we should write this down?"
- MS:** They are trying to make one but I don't know what they are doing now. One of my sister-in-laws was working on it.
- MM:** On a family history to publish it? So, she is getting in touch with you also? Well, that's wonderful. And to include pictures?
- MS:** Yah.
- MM:** Now, let's go on to some questions I would ask a woman specifically. Was there anyone in the family who had a talent such as sewing, textiles, weaving, or bobbin lace?
- MS:** Nobody.
- MM:** Not in your family?
- MS:** Not in my family.
- MM:** Do you think that was partly because of the...?
- MS:** Too much work and large family.
- MM:** Did your sister's learn from your mother how to make clothes?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** You made almost all of your own clothes at home?
- MS:** Yes, they were all made. Everything.
- MM:** Where did they get all of the material? Did they order it or buy it in a store?
- MS:** They could get it. Well, I tell you. We had some Jews coming around and they sold a lot of material. We bought quite a bit from them.
- MM:** Would they come right to the farm? Did they have a truck or something?
- MS:** Yes. Well, they had something. I don't know what they came with.
- MM:** Then when the clothes got older, then did they reuse the clothes and make them for the other children?
- MS:** They were always handed down 'til they were darned. I was the oldest one and my other sister who is here, who is a Sister, she had to take mine and now she will not take a hand me down clothes anymore. I think it just got to her.
- MM:** She probably remembers from childhood. Did you ever have in your house some of those quilting parties?
- MS:** Yes.

- MM:** They made quilts? That they made though in your home?
- MS:** That they made. Their own quilts.
- MM:** Was that important to pass those down? Did they want to make one so each one had a quilt? Could you take one along to the convent?
- MS:** I have one. My mother made quilts with the wool that we sent away and got it cleaned and then they sent it back. That's what she made the quilts from.
- MM:** Well, did they have their own sheep on the farm?
- MS:** Yes, we had a lot of sheep. Beautiful sheep. We made good money with the wool.
- MM:** What about your mother? Did she ever get some of those recipes, if she wanted a new recipe, did she ever find them in magazines?
- MS:** Never had a recipe.
- MM:** Never used a recipe? Nothing written down?
- MS:** No, nothing. She made the best oatmeal cookies that you ever ate. Never had a recipe. She had everything up here.
- MM:** Well, do you still make those oatmeal cookies?
- MS:** I couldn't make them as good as she did. I made them for dad and she told us how to make them but they were never as good as mother's. So, we just didn't like to make them anymore.
- MM:** What were some of the most important foods that your mother made that you remember?
- MS:** Schneidla noodla, chicken noodla, dampfnoodla, sauerkraut and knipfla, käsenipfla. And did you ever eat grumberre wurst?
- MM:** I have heard of them. Yes, I ate some of them.
- MS:** Did you eat some of that? We made those.
- MM:** Now, as a remembrance about cattle, your father was a cattle buyer? Would he have to go away and not come home some nights?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** Sometimes, for a long time?
- MS:** Not really. A couple days, two or three days.
- MM:** He would never go far?
- MS:** He shipped his cattle down to St. Paul.
- MM:** Well, did he run a farm too?
- MS:** Yes. Then he had to go along. You know, he did that after my brothers were old enough to take care of the farm outside.

- MM:** Some of your brothers then in your family, they stayed and took over the farm?
- MS:** No, not one.
- MM:** None of them stayed on? None of them became farmers?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** So, the farm where your parents lived, is that still in the family?
- MS:** No.
- MM:** It was sold then, later on? Now, there are three in your family still living today?
- MS:** Three boys and five girls.
- MM:** And what are their names?
- MS:** The girls? Celestine, Theresa, Agnes, Sister Mary Ann, the one that is here, and me.
- MM:** Now give me your brothers.
- MS:** That are living? Jack, Pete and Dan. Bill is gone.
- MM:** How many are still living up in the Rugby area of Pierce County?
- MS:** My oldest brother lives in Willow City. He used to be a very good carpenter.
- MM:** And his name?
- MS:** Jack Schaan. He still lives in Willow City.
- MM:** Now, you brought some pictures with you today. What a beautiful picture. This is your mother?
- MS:** Yes. She was engaged to my father on that picture.
- MM:** Where do you think this was taken, in Rugby?
- MS:** I think so or Devils Lake maybe. It's not written on there.
- MM:** What a gorgeous picture. You look a lot like your mother.
- MS:** Yes, I do. Very much so.
- MM:** Your mother was a beautiful woman, wasn't she? But on this picture, she was very thin, wasn't she?
- MS:** Very thin.
- MM:** It looks to me that your mother dressed very well for special occasions. Dressed very well? A very proper woman?
- MS:** All the time. Everything had to be just perfect all the time. Her hair had to be just perfect all the time.
- MM:** Even in the house?

- MS:** Our hair always had to be perfect. Her hair? There couldn't be any hair out of the shawl. She was so strict and really proper all the time.
- MM:** Now when you went to church, did they still have that fashion, men on one side and women on the other?
- MS:** Yes, and the girls on one side and the boys on the other side. In Balta church, they have that. And this is grandpa. That was taken in Russia and was the last picture that was taken before he died.
- MM:** This is taken in Russia?
- MS:** He died in Bremen and they buried him there.
- MM:** Did your folks talk a lot about grandpa?
- MS:** Yes, my mother did. That's my mother's father.
- MM:** That must have been hard to leave him behind like that?
- MS:** Very hard. Grandma had to live with the children for twenty -five years.
- MM:** You remember grandma very well? Was she pretty healthy?
- MS:** She was pretty healthy. She didn't have any teeth and she didn't want any. My dad was going to pay for it.
- MM:** About how old was your grandma on this picture?
- MS:** I would say about 70-75.
- MM:** Now if you look at this picture, it looks like she had a hard life too?
- MS:** She did have a hard life. Now, don't you think it's hard to live with the children all the time when you are that old and all the noise and everything? She spoiled my brothers and they liked her so much. She did everything for them, polished their shoes and she spoiled them.
- MM:** Oh my, she really spoiled them. And what was her name?
- MS:** Her name was Magdalen Miller. And this dress my dad bought her and she was so proud of that dress.
- MM:** And she is buried at Rugby too?
- MS:** She is buried in Balta.
- MM:** Does she have an iron cross too on her grave?
- MS:** Yes. Grandma has an iron cross and my brother has an iron cross. Joseph, the first one that drowned.
- MM:** Now, these are your brothers?
- MS:** And this is the oldest one.
- MM:** And his name?
- MS:** Jack. This is the second oldest, the one that drowned. This is Bill and he died about a year ago.



- MM:** Now according to these pictures, they made sure they had beautiful suits.
- MS:** Yes, they had beautiful suits. And this was the fourth oldest and this is Frank. He was in the Navy. This is Daniel, lives in Arizona. This is Paul.
- MM:** How many of your brothers served in the military?
- MS:** Three. Frank, Paul and Pete.
- MM:** They served in World War II? Did they have to serve overseas too?
- MS:** Yes, Pete was in Turkey when the war ended.
- MM:** Is this the picture of the farm?
- MS:** No, but I have a picture of the farm. I have it in another album.
- MM:** In the convent, you always developed close friendship with some other sisters. Who were some of the sisters that you remember through all the years that you were closest to?
- MS:** I was close to a couple of them, close to Sister Martha and she died.
- MM:** What was her last name?
- MS:** Sister Martha? Hunck was her last name.
- MM:** Was she a German-Russian too?
- MS:** I am not sure about that.
- MM:** And the other Sister?
- MS:** Sr. Jubulata. She was from Germany and just died not so long ago.
- MM:** So, your closest Sisters are gone now?
- MS:** A lot of them, yah.
- MM:** So now, you work with the Sisters that are here. These are all current pictures of the family and looks like they always send you some pictures.
- MS:** Yah, they do.
- MM:** How many nieces and nephews do you have?
- MS:** About forty.
- MM:** Do they keep in pretty good touch with you?
- MS:** Oh, yah.
- MM:** This is a very interesting picture here for me.
- MS:** This was the first kitchen I cooked in.
- MM:** Where was this at?

- MS:** That was in Drayton, North Dakota. It was our first hospital.
- MM:** But now, your outfits are much different.
- MS:** I still wore this. Look how tall I am there, but I shrunk.
- MM:** You look very distinguished here.
- MS:** Do I?
- MM:** Yes, its a very nice picture of you. I'd like to get a copy of that picture.
- MS:** You can have that picture.
- MM:** And here are some pictures of the family, lot's of pictures. Now, this is an interesting picture. What picture is this now?
- MS:** I think it's our Jubilee or was it Father Henderson's Jubilee? It could be with our chaplain's Jubilee.
- MM:** Did your mother...? When they came over from the old country, did she bring any old pictures along from Russia?
- MS:** I don't think so.
- MM:** Do you have a picture of your parents when they got married?
- MS:** They had one. They had a big wedding picture.
- MM:** I am looking for those old wedding photos for those exhibits.
- MS:** I don't think we had small ones, we just had big ones. I don't even know where it went.
- MM:** Now, what books did you bring along?
- MS:** Oh, those are the cook books.
- MM:** This one is interesting.
- MS:** I thought you could order them.
- MM:** Yes. This cook book here I have, "Food and Folklore" from the German-Russian Heritage Society. Are there some pretty good recipes in there?
- MS:** Yes. I didn't write recipes. Because if they ordered this book, then they can have all the recipes that I make.
- MM:** Now, this is a good one. This one we don't have. That's from the chapter at Rugby.
- MS:** I think you can order that. You ask Sister Bernadine.
- MM:** I am interested in this one. I see you got this from a Margaret and Adam [Axtman].
- MS:** That's Sister Bernadines' sister. That's Sister Bernadines book.
- MM:** That's Sister Bernadines' book?

- MS:** I gave mine away and am sorry I did. I make all those things that are in there.
- MM:** Now, when you are here in the Convent, I see you are pretty active yet. Are you doing certain assignments?
- MS:** Sometimes, I help in the bakery. Whenever they need help, they ask me.
- MM:** Now, did you have to help for Easter?
- MS:** Yes. Was a whole week in there.
- MM:** What did you have to do?
- MS:** I made cookies and I made 'Grantz Brot', Christmas bread. And I made some cloverleaf rolls for Holy Saturday evening.
- MM:** Did you make some special cookies too?
- MS:** No, just these.
- MM:** So, usually you have to do a lot of cooking at Christmas time and Easter?
- MS:** Yah, sometimes. And I made good white bread.
- MM:** Do the Sisters here usually have their own homemade bread?
- MS:** Yes, they do.
- MM:** So for lunch today, we will have some of that wonderful bread? Now the Sisters here, a number of the members of the Convent are gone. They are out working?
- MS:** Not too many anymore. We have Rugby and that's about all. Some are in the hospitals. So many sisters died and they are all getting old.
- MM:** And how is your health?
- MS:** Bad arthritis! I had about four or five surgeries since I am here.
- MM:** Now, do you have time to do a lot of reading?
- MS:** I do reading and I make 'Noels' to sell.
- MM:** And they are sold in the gift shop?
- MS:** Yes. I have orders to make five. I have four done and am starting on the fifth one.
- MM:** Now, we will have to take a look at those. Here at the Convent, they usually have a wonderful craft sale. Now, when is that held each year?
- MS:** It's going to be in October.
- MM:** We'll have to come down for that. Is it usually on a Sunday?
- MS:** Saturday, I think.

- MM:** We'll see about that. What we need to do also, we need to make contact with Sister Mary Louise Schafer to get in touch with the Sisters that aren't here for interviewing. There are some of our German-Russian Sisters that are still out working.
- MS:** Sister Agnes is one of them.
- MM:** What's her last name?
- MS:** [Schneider]. She is in Rugby, but in August they all come home.
- MM:** And then, how long are they here?
- MS:** Not too long. Three weeks maybe.
- MM:** Well, maybe we can come down in August. It's getting close to lunch time so we can have lunch with the Sisters. What other memories do you have? What I want to ask you, do you think that it's important that we preserve this German-Russian Heritage?
- MS:** It is very important. Are they going to have that in Oakes in August?
- MM:** Yes.
- MS:** I'd like to get to that. I hope I am home.
- MM:** Yes. Ann Braaten, our curator of the Emily Reynolds Costume collection, she came with me today. I want you to talk to her because she will be the presenter with Mr. Gage in Oakes and that will be August 4. Hopefully, that will coordinate with the Sisters being here.
- MS:** Who is he?
- MM:** Mr. Gage was with me here last fall.
- MS:** Oh, yah.
- MM:** And he and Ann Braaten will be there on a Sunday in Oakes.
- MS:** On a Sunday? That's a good day.
- MM:** Right, and we brought some reading material for the Sisters. There is a wonderful article in the spring addition of North Dakota Horizons about the Kempf exhibit. We are so interested in the future because in 1998 we want to prepare this traveling exhibit on German-Russian weddings. That's why we are looking for those old pictures.
- MS:** It would be interesting.
- MM:** So, we need to make contact with the pictures and we are also interested in making contact with the rest of your family members. I hope you can share your brothers and sisters addresses with me later. Which you can send to me also.
- MS:** All right.
- MM:** When you look back to your life on the farm in Rugby, you were eighteen when you left?
- MS:** I was sixteen.

- MM:** Do you still have some fond memories? Do you think about when you were back on the farm?
- MS:** Yes.
- MM:** What are your fondest memories when you look back?
- MS:** Well, I always liked to cook and bake. I was in the kitchen most of the time. And iron. And we had those irons that we had to carry back and forth to the coal stove. We warmed the iron on the coal stove and then carried it back to the table and ironed.
- MM:** And all of the learning how to cook was all through watching your mother? Nothing written down?
- MS:** That's right, she had no recipes. She made it by experience, I guess. Later on, we wrote recipes down.
- MM:** Would you consider yourself as maybe one of the best cooks in the family?
- MS:** I think so. Laughter. They are all good. Now, Tracy is a RN. I have two RN's in the family, two sisters. They are all good cooks.
- MM:** So, many of your brothers and sisters went on to further their education? They went on to be nurses and other fields of profession. So, did your folks encourage education?
- MS:** Yes, they did.
- MM:** They thought, it's important that everybody goes on to get educated for a better life? Anything else you would like to say before we close today? We talked about so many different subjects and then when we are done, we will probably think of something else.
- MS:** That's right, you always do.
- MM:** I think we had a wonderful time this morning. I am going to close our conversation this morning and thank Sister Magdalen Schaan. Her original name was Elizabeth Schaan and I am here at the Convent of St. Francis. I need to ask, how long have you been a sister of the Convent?
- MS:** I was in the Novitiate in 1938.
- MM:** So, you celebrated your 50th anniversary? You are in what year now?
- MS:** I did already. I am gonna celebrate my 60th in 1999.
- MM:** In three years you are going to celebrate your 60th? We will have to remember that big occasion. We are here again at the Convent of St. Francis in Hankinson, North Dakota and today is April 10. I want to thank Sister Magdalen for this time and this wonderful opportunity of sharing her pictures and her wonderful life. Thanks so much.
- MS:** You are welcome.

**END OF SIDE TWO**