

Interview with Sister Mary Jean Louise Schafer (JLS)

Conducted by Joyce Reinhardt Larson (JRL)

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- JRL:** We are at the St. Francis Convent in Hankinson, North Dakota. I am Joyce Reinhardt Larson, a volunteer interviewer from the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at NDSU Library. At this time I am interviewing Sister Jean Louise, and I will begin by asking her her name, her date of birth and where was she born.
- JLS:** I am Sister Jean Louise Schafer. I was baptized Nancy Jean Schafer. I was born in Elgin, in the hospital at Elgin, in Grant County, North Dakota and grew up on the farm in Flasher. I was born on May 18, 1955. So that puts me in another generation than you are used to interviewing, but I'm happy to share with you about my family.
- JRL:** Well, that will be interesting. What is your father and mother's name?
- JLS:** My father is Adam Michael Schafer and my mother is Helen Elisabeth Engleman Schafer.
- JRL:** Do you know where they came from or where their ancestors came from in South Russia?
- JLS:** My father's family came from the colony of Schweier in South Russia. He told us Landowski County. They came over in 1908, but that's another story. My mother was a German Hungarian who came and settled in New England, North Dakota.
- JRL:** So your grandparents on your father's side were German Russian then?
- JLS:** Yes.
- JRL:** Did you get to know them?
- JLS:** My grandparents, oh yes. My grandparents I knew all through my childhood, but Grandma died in 1973 and Grandpa Schafer died in 1989. So I knew them quite well, especially Grandpa.
- JRL:** So you grew up in Elgin, North Dakota?
- JLS:** I grew up at Flasher. I was born in Elgin.
- JRL:** How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- JLS:** I'm fourth on the list of eleven children. The first two died in infancy, so we counted ourselves as nine usually. Actually I'm the second oldest of nine living.
- JRL:** What made you decide to join the convent?
- JLS:** Well, I had the influence of religious Sisters in my grade school. They taught me. Benedictine Sisters from Bismarck taught in the Catholic grade school in Flasher where I attended through the fourth grade.

And I have an aunt, my father's sister, who is Sister Charlene Schafer, who is a Sister in Teckne, Illinois, and my grandfather, Michael Schafer, had two sisters who were Benedictine Sisters at Richardson, at Sacred Heart Monastery. So we knew.... Sisters were a big part of our life, and prayer and the church was a big part of our life. So it wasn't any real surprise for me to have that desire to follow whatever the Lord wanted me to do. And once I knew it was to be a Sister, then that was simply what I was going to do.

JRL: At what age was that, when you knew for sure?

JLS: Well, I knew for sure, I'd say when I was in high school I knew for sure. Now I didn't want that in high school. I didn't really think that that's what I wanted to do. But I knew that's what God was calling me to do. I remember when I was in high school and we'd be praying in church and I would say, "Lord, I want to love you better. I want you to show me how." Then when I was a senior, an assignment in a composition class was write in a paragraph what you're going to be doing in five years from now. And I wrote, "I'm going to be a Sister." I didn't know where or how it was going to work out, but I just knew that that's what I was going to be.

JRL: So you know you're in the right place.

JLS: Yes.

JRL: Then that's neat. Not a lot of people do.

JLS: Then when I went on to college... I went to a public college at Dickinson State. I was very involved in the church, but I didn't really make a decision until I met the Sisters here, when I was already working.

JRL: Doing what?

JLS: As a professional high school librarian. Up at Lakota, North Dakota. I was there for two years and then the Lord got me.

JRL: Through the influence of the Sisters here at Hankinson.

JLS: Yes. The Sister who is the Mother Superior, the Provincial Superior here right now, was at that time, the Youth Director for the Diocese of Fargo, and she was in charge of a program for youth 16 to about 25, called the Search Program. It was a program of pure ministry on a weekend that involved about 80 to 100 kids, about seven weekends a year. I often worked on the team, helping to put on that retreat for new upcoming students, and there I met her. I was involved with that out in the Bismarck Diocese when I was in high school and college. Then when I moved to this part of the state, I got involved up here with it, and met her. About the second time I met her, I said to her, "I'm interested in your community." And she said, "Great, come down and visit." At that time I did not know that there was a Hankinson, North Dakota. I didn't know that there were Franciscan Sisters in North Dakota, because I had that influence of the Benedictines out in the Bismarck Diocese. But then she invited me to come and visit, and it was maybe five or six months later that I got up the courage to come. And then after that first visit, about two months later I made a commitment to enter. So it was a couple of months before I did actually enter, but I knew that this was where I belonged.

JRL: When was that?

JLS: That was in 1979-80. So I entered here in June, June 7th of 1980.

JRL: And when you came here, then was it hard to get back to see family? Were you restricted to stay here?

JLS: I'll tell you about the steps in religious life and that will help you a little bit to understand about the family visits. The first step is anywhere from six months to two years, and it's called the Postulancy. And that comes from the Latin word meaning "to ask." I asked the community if they will look at me and see if I could live here. They looked at me, and then I looked at the community and asked, "can I live here?" So during that six months time I did not go home, but my family could come to visit me. Now my family lives 300 miles away, so they didn't come often. But they probably came once that summer. Then we have a two year period called the Novitiate, which is a more intense period of prayer and study, where we get back... first years do not go out, and rarely leave the city of Hankinson. So that's a more cloistered time, part of the initial formation but it's necessary so one can really concentrate on the task at hand and not have all the distractions. During that time we were not allowed to go home. Before I entered that Novitiate period, I had a two week vacation at home, and that was in December of 1980, around Christmas time. And then I entered the Novitiate on January 1st, 1981. Or January 2nd, I guess it was, in 1981. And then that two year period of the Novitiate, the first year is spent here at the Mother House. The second year is called an Apostolic year, where we go out more to work in our Apostolates or our Missions. For example, schools, or nursing homes, or hospitals that are run by our Sisters. And we begin to work more integrating religious life, the prayer life along with the work life and community life. All very much a part of our way of life. I worked at St. John's School in Wahpeton as a professional librarian that year, during that Apostolic year. Then, at the end of those two years, that would take us to January of '83, I made my first vows. We make our first vows for three years, and then renew them ordinarily for two years, so it's about a five year period of temporary vows before we make our final commitment. Now then, during this time of temporary vows our family may come to visit us and I went home every summer to visit for two weeks, so that's about what it amounted to. However, if I happened to be in the area for work, and at that time I had a brother in Fargo, so I could go and visit my brother for a half a day or stop into see them. There weren't any restrictions on that, as long as it was feasible.

JRL: How did your family look at that, when you made this commitment?

JLS: To join the convent?

JRL: Yes.

JLS: They were happy, at least my parents, I should say, were very happy about it. But they were very cautious. They did not express that to me very much, so I didn't know whether they were pleased, whether that was something that they thought I should do, or knew I would do. I just really didn't know their reaction, although they were very supportive of me in terms of praying. You know, just keep on doing what you're doing. But not something big and grandiose, which is very common in our family. Not until I made my final vows, did they really make some expressions to me of commitment, or applauding my commitment. And that was, I'm sure because, they said, "well, we don't want to pressure her. It's her life, she has to make her own decisions." But I know interiorly they were very happy. My brothers and sisters found it a little bit more difficult, since I'm the second oldest. Some of them were at home when I had already left for college and working. So I didn't know them quite as well, particularly my youngest sister. Since I didn't know her too well we didn't communicate too much. She only told me later on that it took her a long time to get over anger because I had left the family and made this decision not to come home all the time. Now of course, she is very happy. They are all very supportive of me. Very happy for me. But they all had to work through their own initial reaction to it. I think it was

easier in a way, in our family, because I also have a brother who is a priest. So they followed him through all of those steps of his preparation for the priesthood too, and they realized that this is something very important in our family. So they were then very supportive. And now they are very supportive, although I don't see them often, but I talk on the phone.

JRL: And your brother is younger than you?

JLS: Yes, he's three years younger than I. He is a priest at Mott.

JRL: So your influence, really, for this religious way of life came from your family... you were always involved with church?

JLS: Yes. Family, and from teachers I would say... those early teachers in school, a very strong parish community on campus at the college, and this search program that I mentioned before, was a very strong influence in keeping my faith alive and spurring my faith development that led me to pursue whatever the Lord was calling me to.

JRL: What are some of the distinctive religious customs practiced in your home?

JLS: In our home we prayed together often. Every day at mealtime, of course. We always ate every meal together. I grew up on a farm. So in a rural family you just arranged your schedules that way. So we prayed together before, at meals all the time. Morning prayer... and prayed the morning offering which was really something special. Our evening prayers were private. Our night prayers that we said for ourselves, we didn't do those in common. During Lent, during Advent, we prayed the rosary together, followed the Stations of the Cross, reading from the Bible, so we did that specifically during Advent and Lent. And sometimes May, because May is the month dedicated to the Blessed Mother. So we prayed the rosary together on the evenings in May. So those three times of the year specifically when we prayed formally together.

JRL: What about Name Days?

JLS: We did not have that tradition, and I think since I'm already one generation removed, the only thing we did for Name Days, was I remember that my father, whose name was Adam, would get a gift from his dad on December 24th, because we grew up knowing, or hearing that it was a German custom that Adams celebrate... the Name Day for Adam was on December 24th. Now I've heard that from other Sisters here too, in this community, but I've not heard it formally from people who are not of German background. Anyway, the Feast of St. Adam, or Adam, would be December 24th, because of its connection to Christmas and the Holy Light coming into the world and the rebirth of civilization, Christianity. So Grandpa would bring Dad a gift on Christmas Eve. But other than that, in our family we had no Name Day customs.

JRL: And I think it has gradually gotten less through the years.

JLS: However, in our religious community here, we celebrate Name Days as much as birthdays. In fact, even more. It's still a German custom from the native Germans, to celebrate Name Days. Very much, even more so than birthdays. But at home I know we did all know our Name Day. We knew what day our Patron Saint was. But we didn't do anything.

JRL: So were the German traditions practiced in your family? Was it talked about? The German Russian?

- JLS:** Not really. See, because my mother was of German Hungarian descent. And my father German Russian. So we, in my generation, spoke only English. And I know we would ask Mom sometimes, "How do you say this?" It was for a certain word. And "say it in German." And then we'd ask Dad "say it in German" and they'd have two different dialects. And so we just all said, well, I guess they don't really communicate with each other, and we just kind of dropped it. So we really did not talk at all about our German Russian heritage, because we knew that they were a little different.
- JRL:** There wasn't that community in that area.
- JLS:** Right.
- JRL:** So are you familiar with the Anti-Garb legislation that happened in the 1940s? Or you were too young.
- JLS:** I wasn't even born. No... not until the mid '50s, so I really have no experience with that at all.
- JRL:** So what was it like in your growing up years on the farm?
- JLS:** It was fun to have a large family. We got along very well. To this day we're a very close family. A number of the brothers and sisters were living out of state, but all have moved back except one family who is in Wisconsin. But the others have all moved back, so that we could be closer together. And most of them are in western North Dakota. We were a very close family. We spent a lot of time together; our recreation mostly was together. Every Sunday afternoon from March through October, practically every Sunday, we would take a drive to the pasture to check the cattle. And we would all get on the back of the pickup. One kid would get in front with Dad, and Mom and the rest of us would get on the back, and we'd sing and just have fun. Those were really family community times. We would have lots of fun on the back of the pickup... drive two or three hours... just drive out there, have fun, check the cattle and come back.
- JRL:** So you did some singing. Were you in a musical family?
- JLS:** Not formally. Just singing, oh, "Red River Valley," those kinds of things... "Home on the Range." That was a favorite of my dad's.
- JRL:** As you were driving on the range.
- JLS:** Yes. It was great. So the pastoral life was very important to us.
- JRL:** Did you have to work pretty hard?
- JLS:** Well, yes, we did our share of work. We milked cows, so we had to... some of us did morning chores and some of us did evening chores. My mother had a big garden. I was the baker and cook during the summers, because my oldest sister... the oldest one in the family was a girl, but she loved to be outside did all the raking and mowing until the boys got big enough. And then there were five boys and a little girl. But she still went out... Kathy and all the boys were out in the fields and Mom was in her garden, so I was the one who did most of the cooking and baking.
- JRL:** Did you do a lot of canning and preserving too?
- JLS:** My mother did all the canning and preserving. She did can and freeze vegetables and fruits and berries... rhubarb...

- JRL:** Do you remember picking berries?
- JLS:** Yes. We had choke cherry trees on the west side of the house in the yard, and several patches out in the pasture. Juneberries, mulberries, or were they buffalo berries?
- JRL:** Did you really do something with those mulberries?
- JLS:** Oh, yes. They make the absolutely best jam or jelly. Mulberry jelly.
- JRL:** And you waited until late fall when they were very tart?
- JLS:** Yes.
- JRL:** Even then, I think they were, but after a frost.
- JLS:** Yes. Yes. Dad said never before August 15th. You never pick those until August 15th. Because, I suppose, it wouldn't freeze before then. But once it froze, they were easier to get.
- JRL:** They weren't so easy to pick, were they?
- JLS:** No they weren't.
- JRL:** With the little prickly...
- JLS:** So we didn't can quarts and quarts of that. Just enough to get a little taste for Dad because he loved the jelly and jam.
- JRL:** And Juneberries. Wasn't that a treat? What did you make from Juneberries?
- JLS:** Well, we hardly... we couldn't preserve them, of course, because they didn't last that long. But my mother would make a custard pie, a Juneberry custard pie. That was, to this day, makes my mouth water.
- JRL:** Even Juneberry kuchen. You freeze the Juneberries and...
- JLS:** Oh yes, that's right. Or else put them in ice cream. My dad loved ice cream, and so he'd just throw some, or even frozen ones into the ice cream after you'd dish it out there, for a topping.
- JRL:** We're not going to get that now, are we?
- JLS:** No, no.
- JRL:** What was your school experience like? You went to a town school?
- JLS:** Yes. I went to St. Lawrence grade school for the first four years, through fourth grade. And then it was the time when Sisters were leaving, getting out of the schools and going into other Apostolates, about '65, '66. There were fewer Sisters, plus there were more kids in our family and we couldn't afford the tuition. So by the fifth grade, I had to go and went over to public school. I think when I was in sixth grade that school closed. It closed just because of lower enrollment, and because of the fact of the Sisters leaving. My dad drove the bus for quite a number of years when I was in grade school. In the early days for the fact that, if he drove the bus then he could pick up us kids and take us to the Catholic school, even though he drove the bus for the public school, so that we would have that transportation. And when I was in first grade, my older sister and I stayed with Grandma and Grandpa in town, so that we

could go to the Catholic school, because we had no bus. So we would stay with Grandma and Grandpa from early Monday until about 4 o'clock on Friday.

JRL: How far were you from town?

JLS: Thirteen miles. But bad roads, muddy roads, and we lived on the edge of a county, so sometimes it was the last one to be plowed out or kept up or something.

JRL: Were there kids of other nationalities in your school?

JLS: They were mostly German or German Russians as far as I know. There were some German Lutherans in the public school. Missouri Synod, I think it was, Lutherans in our school. And the Congregation... Congregation United Church of Christ, and American Lutheran. But I think most of those were at least partially German background. There were a good number of Hansons and Johnsons and names like that.

JRL: Scandinavians down there too.

JLS: Yes.

JRL: What did baptism and confirmation mean in your family?

JLS: That was always a very important time, signal in one's life. We weren't too aware of it as children. We just knew it was very important to be baptized. It wasn't very long, or you didn't hesitate. You just did it as soon as Mom came home from the hospital, and the next Sunday was baptism. I remember confirmation was very important. I, myself, was confirmed in third grade, which is not the tradition now. Now they are at least 15 or 16 before they are confirmed. But I was confirmed in the third, or fourth grade, excuse me. Because I remember the play that our teacher wrote about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and all, so that we could get it all in our minds. As a teaching, then we presented that play to our parents. It was a very big day. I was confirmed in May. It was very muddy. These are my recollections of it. It was very muddy and everyone else was disappointed because they could not go. The only ones who could go to my confirmation were my parents and myself because we had to go in the pickup. So the rest of them stayed home. But otherwise, had we been able to go in the car, everyone would have been there.

JRL: And you probably would have had a big dinner at the house.

JLS: Right. Right.

JRL: Did you have a lot of relatives close by too?

JLS: We had one set of cousins in Flasher, and then my grandparents lived in Flasher. But we had about five or six sets of cousins on my dad's side in Bismarck and Mandan. And every year, in the summers they would often come out, different ones, and sometimes we'd have everybody together for a family picnic. And my mother, to this day, is very adamant about having family picnics in the summer. We don't call them reunions, but whoever can come comes. This is a day when all of the A.M. Schafers are getting together, and this is the day when all of them... Adam... A.M. would be our family, but M.J. is my grandpa's family, so it is "the M. J. Schafers are getting together this Sunday," and "the A.M. Schafers are getting together this Sunday."

JRL: A strong sense of family. That's neat.

JLS: Oh yes.

JRL: Are you familiar with wrought iron crosses.? Is that something in that area?

JLS: I really couldn't say, although I know that we visited the cemeteries, and I know that there are some, but I really don't know too much about them. I don't even know if they have them on the graves of my grandparents. I don't know much about that.

JRL: Who are the keepers of your family treasures? Do you have some old things in the family?

JLS: Yes. We have some things right now that are stored in my parents' house, stored in their basement, from Grandpa Schafer when he died in '89, and he was 93 years old. Since my father lives in the farm home that all of his brothers and sisters grew up in, they would be the keepers of the family treasures. I remember when my grandpa died, the word was spread to me, or told to me, "now you're going to be the one in charge because you are a librarian and you can put everything in order." Well, that never really materialized because we didn't know what we were going to do with the things. But Grandpa's daughters live in Bismarck, three of them, and two sons up there, so I'm not sure whose got all the photo albums and things, but I know some of the other things, my parents have.

JRL: Are you related to the governor, by any chance?

JLS: No. Our names are spelled exactly the same, but there's no relationship.

JRL: There are a lot of Schafers.

JLS: Many Schafers, but not many who spell theirs like we do.

JRL: More with two "f"s?

JLS: Yes, or "ae". But ours is just plain S-c-h-a-f-e-r. I did look on an old map of North Dakota that we had in our house when Medora became popular, I supposed we'd be back in the '60s when I was becoming map conscious and things like that... I noticed on a map a little town out in western North Dakota called Schafer, and it was always my desire to find out about that. Then when I read about Harold Schafer restoring Medora and all of that, I thought there must be some connection, because it's very close to Medora. Well, it may have been one of those early post offices that was on land on the farmstead of a Schafer, and that's why it got the name Schafer. And it probably was the family of Harold Schafer, the governor. But we have no relationship to them.

JRL: Did you get to Medora?

JLS: Oh, yes. I've been there a couple of times. It's fun.

JRL: Do you remember going to wedding dances when you were young?

JLS: Oh yes. I grew up learning to dance at the wedding dances. Now, my family... my father is somewhat shy and retiring. I wouldn't call him shy, but he just doesn't like crowds. He would much rather be at home on his little domain, on his little land. My mother, however, is just the opposite. She would like to go more often. But many of us inherited that tendency of my father's, to like to stay on the land, and if we get out, that's okay. So we didn't go to many wedding dances that were not our relatives. For all of our relatives we were there, but we didn't go to many others in the community. And consequently, I learned to dance with my uncles at these wedding dances.

- JRL:** And what did you dance?
- JLS:** Oh, the Butterfly, the Two-Step... what else? I don't really dance the Polka very well. And waltzes, of course. I love to watch them dance the Polka.
- JRL:** Yes. It's very tiring. What kind of foods were served at weddings, then?
- JLS:** Well I remember at the reception, we'd have the bottle of that little... was it Red Eye, or was it...
- JRL:** Yes, hochzeits schnaps.
- JLS:** Yes.
- JRL:** But it was Red Eye.
- JLS:** Whisky. Burnt sugar, Grandpa would say, it was just burnt sugar.
- JRL:** With a little alcohol.
- JLS:** And we didn't know what it was as children, but we were very happy that they included us and that we got a little drink. That was the only time that we ever had any alcohol in our house. We just didn't have anything in our house, but we saw it at the weddings. Other than that, I don't remember any specific foods. I know that Grandma did make kuchen, but not that this was the famous Wedding Kuchen. Although it may have been, but I was not aware of it when we were growing up.
- JRL:** And they always had such good kuchen, like at Midnight Lunches, I do remember that, and probably sausage.
- JLS:** Now see, I don't remember that we were there long enough to be at a Midnight Lunch, because the cows probably had to be milked, so we had to get home and do it.
- JRL:** Or at least get some rest before you went. So what about German foods in the home? Did your mother cook anything ethnic?
- JLS:** Yes. She made homemade sausage when I was very young. But it's very interesting how one's life is influenced by the preferences of a parent. Now my dad hated to butcher, hated that job of butchering, and so they would put it off until the very end, until there was absolutely no meat in the house. Then he'd butcher again. But he hated to make sausage, so we didn't always make sausage. Maybe we had someone make it for us in town, but I don't really remember that. I can only remember two or three times that we made sausage. And my dad didn't like dough dishes, made out of dough. Or he just simply couldn't eat them, couldn't digest them or whatever. So my mother brought all these recipes from home when she was married. In her recipe box, she has all these recipes that she wrote out to make all these dough dishes that her mother made that are just wonderful. And us kids love them, but my dad couldn't eat them. So she rarely made them, unless my dad was gone. He was a rural milk carrier substitute, when we were growing up, as well as an electrician. He would sometimes be gone on trouble-shooting calls for the neighbors. If he was gone over a noon meal, like in the summertime or something, or on Saturday when we were home from school, then we would talk Mom into making one of those dough dishes.
- JRL:** Like what?

- JLS:** Well, like schoop noodla. That was our favorite that Mom made. People talk about Käseknepfle (Cheese Buttons), and we didn't have that because Dad didn't like it. So really the only thing that I can think of is those schoop noodla, or else, when we make scent dough to bake bread... then Mom would take off the top, pinch off a bit of the raw dough and cut it off, and then fry it, I think, or boil it.
- JRL:** Fry it. Deep fry it.
- JLS:** Well, no, not deep fried. She would steam it. She would have potatoes and onions steaming, and then she would drop these little balls on top to cover the potatoes, and then that would steam it in a big black frying pan.
- JRL:** Like dumplings.
- JLS:** Yes, dumplings, but they're made out of that raw dough.
- JRL:** Oh, I know, and not everyone makes them like that. I did another interview and the lady gave me the recipe for her dumplings, but they are way different. My mother made them from dough too, and usually on wash day. I don't know why, on the busiest day, that she'd have to make a kettle of maybe pork chops and then lots of potatoes and onions. And then she'd also make bread and cut off that dough and maybe roll it like this, or maybe round, lay them on the top, and that was dumplings.
- JLS:** And then you couldn't lift the cover on the kettle because they would fall. So we grew up not liking those things you make out of Bisquick... like dumplings, bread biscuits or whatever you call them. Because after you ate those bread dough dumplings, what else... you can't eat anything else.
- JRL:** Nothing takes its place. What about Käseknepfle?
- JLS:** We did not make that in our family either, and I think it's because my dad did not like it. We didn't, that I recollect, make sauerkraut, which was really rare. But I don't ever have a recollection of them making it. I know once in a while we would talk Mom or Dad into making some rhubarb wine. But I can say maybe two or three years we made that and then we'd just have a little sip of that. Other than that, I can't remember other things that we made.
- JRL:** Were there barn dances in your day?
- JLS:** No, no. That was earlier.
- JRL:** What are some of the games that you played as a child? There were so many of you in the family.
- JLS:** Oh, we played Red Rover. And I heard someone mention Anti-Over. Dad taught us that, I remember. There was a little game called Nep? Just with Sister Alberta...
- JRL:** Oh, the one that might be interviewed.
- JLS:** Sister Barbara Marie. We played that, especially when my uncles, my dad's brothers would come. They would carve the... whittle the sticks and whittle the little "nep" that you played with, and someone would say, "Let's go. Let's start a game of Nep." So they taught us that when they'd come home for these family picnics. But I can't say that us kids sat down and played that by ourselves. We played baseball.
- JRL:** How do you spell Nep, do you know?

- JLS:** I don't know. Probably just how it sounds, n-e-p.
- JRL:** Do you remember anybody in that community who did Brauche, or folk medicine?
- JLS:** No, I don't know anything about that.
- JRL:** Did your parents use any expressions in any other language?
- JLS:** Oh, once in a while they had a few little German things that they said in German, but we didn't know what they meant, and it wasn't very much, no.
- JRL:** Did your family watch Lawrence Welk?
- JLS:** Yes. For some years. We couldn't always get it on the television station. So it wasn't a common thing in our house. Although, when we could get it, after a while, oh I just mean for two or three years we could get it. But often at noon after dinner would be ready and we were waiting for Dad to come in from the fields, Mike Dosh played organ music, polkas and waltzes, over KFJR in Bismarck. The Mike Dosh Hour.
- JRL:** You remember that?
- JLS:** I remember that, and Mom would pick one of us kids up and dance around the kitchen with them, while we were passing the time waiting for Dad to come in. When I was very little I remember that.
- JRL:** I can't help but think how that instilled the rhythm in you as young children. When you're older, if you didn't have the experience, it's just harder to learn.
- JLS:** Right, right.
- JRL:** So how was your family history and culture being passed onto the next generation?
- JLS:** Well, it's hard to answer that. However, my grandfather told us these wonderful stories. Not such a variety of them, but every time we'd see Grandpa in his later years, he would tell us the same stories. So I remember when I left for the convent; I left in June and then came back in December as I mentioned before, as a Postulate... during that home visit there in December of 1980 I said to Grandpa when I saw him, "Grandpa would you please tell me all the details, because I don't know of anybody else who is going to write it down, and I want to know." So he gave me this, and I have it dated here, 12-15-1980. And it was actually about three times as many slips of scratch paper that I wrote down all these notes on, from stories that he said. I said, "Now Grandpa, you always talk about all the different jobs you had after you retired from farming. What were they?" So he made me a list of all the things that he's done. And he had this wonderful story about when he was in the war.
- JRL:** Which war?
- JLS:** First World War. He came over from... do you want to hear all this, about when he came over and all this?
- JRL:** I think so.
- JLS:** Okay. Michael J. Schafer came over from the colony of schweier in 1908 they immigrated. He was born in 1896, so he would have been 100 in February. And he died in 1989. But when he was about... well it was in 1918. He was inducted into the war in February of 1918. He was a blacksmith and in charge of

about 104 men. He said they were in an Infantry Supply division, where they would do the horseshoing, the shoeing of the horses for the Army, for the Infantry. He was a foreman in that blacksmith shop. So there were 52 forges and two men working at each forge, and he was in charge of them. Well, when the influenza came, it swept through the camp too, and he felt it coming to him one day that he needed to go to the doctor. So he took his registration papers and his identification and he had them in his hand, and he was standing in line to see the doctor. While he was there, he collapsed in line. So there was such a large number of people who needed attention, that someone saw him, that he had fallen... they took his papers out of his hands and pinned them to the inside of his shirt and took him to the warehouse where they stored the dead. Because they said there are others who need more attention than he does. He woke up after three days, is how I remember he told me this story. Now, that's what we heard as children. But when he gave me all this information for sure, he said he woke up after a day and a night. He moaned in there for a day and a night, and he thought, "By God, I'm too young to die. I got lots to do in my life yet." So he caught the attention of someone who was bringing in more dead bodies, and got their attention and told them he wasn't ready for this place. By that time he had double pneumonia, was checked into the hospital, and spent 31 days in the hospital. In fact he was so close to death that the chaplain was asked to come give him the last rites of the church, the Sacrament of Anointing we call it today. But after 31 days he was better, and they didn't actually discharge him, but they made him an orderly. Gave him a First Aid course, where he was taking temperatures and respirations and so forth. He said he was finally discharged from the hospital on Armistice Day, on November 11th, 1918. So then he went back to his Infantry company, and later spoke to the same chaplain who had given him the last rites. He was discharged from the Army in February of 1919.

JRL: Where was he at?

JLS: He was at Camp Custer in Battle Creek, Michigan. That's where he was working in the Army.

JRL: That's a very interesting story.

JLS: We heard it hundreds of times as children. That was Grandpa's story. He has another story he told about when they came over from Germany, or from Russia. They came over in 1908, so he was about twelve, or he was fourteen years old. There were eight people in their party: his parents, John Louie Schafer, and his mother Magdaline, and then his older sister, Mary Eva, and then there were these three boys - Michael John was my grandpa, Louie John, and then Jerome John. Did you ever hear about that custom about naming all the sons in the family... giving them the middle name of the father?

JRL: Well, even my family... the males didn't even have middle names.

JLS: Oh. This I find in all of the records that Grandpa gave me. He was Michael John, and then his brother was Louie John, and Jerome John. And they always see John as their middle name because their dad's name was John. Now in my dad's generation, the same thing happened to some of the boys. Grandpa was Michael, and so my dad was Adam Michael, and there's Otto Michael and Leo Michael, and the youngest son, James Michael. But about three boys in between there did not receive Michael, so it was already starting to change in the late 20's and 30's.

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JRL: Your grandpa told you this story.

JLS: Yes. When they were coming over from the old country, that there were these three boys, Michael, Louie and Jerome, who were about... Grandpa was fourteen, so I suppose the others were twelve and ten or something like that. When they were in Canada... the records say they came to Halifax, but I always heard it was Regina, so I'm not sure exactly where this happened, but I think it happened in Regina, that they got separated from the rest of their family, at the train station, I suppose it was. Grandpa says that he and his two brothers wandered around that city for three days, and finally found their way back to the train station, just as their family, who had not given up hope, was ready to board... was waiting for them there at the train station. So then they all got on together and came on down to St. Paul and then came out to Mandan. And then south to Conclear was where they homesteaded.

JRL: Is that out there by Carsonz?

JLS: It's west of Mandan and south of St. Anthony. If you follow No. 21 down there, you pass St. Anthony, and there's a junction of No. 21 and 6, and then west yet on that highway about three miles north, there used to be just a big church yet, and that was the site of the city of Belham. Now in the last ten years, they've even moved the church, so there's actually nothing there. But my grandparents homesteaded down there. That was in 1919 when my grandpa and grandma got married. But my dad was born in '25 and he was born west and north of Flasher. So somehow they had a fireplan there, by that time.

JRL: Well, that's very interesting. Did any of your family succumb to that influenza then, do you know?

JLS: No. Not that I know of. Because I never heard anything else about those who were living out here. Of course, our family only started with Grandpa here, in 1919 when he got married. Just let me say this too, about who he married. He married a woman named Barbara Fix is ok and she was from the same village, the colony of Schweier in South Russia. He knew that her family had come over here, and they were settled up north by Halliday and Werner. There was a little town called Werner, and Anton Fix was her father's name. Genevieve Wanner was her mother. I suppose Grandma was about... if Grandpa was 22, so she must have been about 18. They did not know each other, but Grandpa knew of their family. This is the story I heard, that he went up to Halliday one day to get her, to decide that she was going to be his wife. He was discharged in February and then they were married in July, so sometime between February and July, he went up to Richardton and got her. So it must have been just in July, because they were married at Richardton Abby, in Richardton on the way home. Then he brought her back. But they lived at Flasher.

JRL: Well this has been a most interesting interview. I sure thank you for taking your time to do this for NDSU, and we'll get this transcribed and get a copy to you.

JLS: Okay, thank you very much.

[end of taping session]