

## Interview with Sister Jeanette Werner (JW)

Conducted by Joycelyn Renner Tang (JT)

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Sacred Heart Monastery, Richardton, North Dakota

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- JT:** It is February 1, 1998. I am Joycelyn Tang, a volunteer interviewer for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University Libraries, Fargo, North Dakota. It is a pleasure to visit with Sister Jeanette Werner in Richardton, North Dakota at the Sacred Heart Monastery. Sister Jeanette, do you know where your ancestors came from, in Germany or in Russia?
- JW:** My great grandparents came from Russia in 1888, and they landed in New York City. They then lived east of Hague, North Dakota. Where Hague is now, at that time I don't think it existed. In 1900, they moved to Vetter Ville. I don't know what they call the village now. My great grandparents, and my grandparents moved there at the same time. That was the year my mother was born. When they moved there, there were no buildings or anything. The reason for moving was there was no water in the Hague area. They had to find a place where they could find water. Daniel Vetter is now living in the same house they built in 1900. I was born in that house.
- JT:** So, someone has lived in that house to this day?
- JW:** The great-great grandson is living there now. It has never been empty. My great grandparents moved there and my grandparents lived with them until my grandparents built another house. When my parents got married, then they moved in with my great grandparents. That was in 1919. When my great grandfather died in 1925, my mother couldn't take care of her grandmother because she needed special care. From 1929 until 1937, my parents lived in the house alone. In 1937, my mother's brother moved in with my parents, and lived there. After that, a cousin moved in. When he moved out, other cousins moved in. That was August Vetter, Fr. Austin's parents. Now August Vetter's son is living there, he would be a great, great grandson. The building has never been empty, except one time, for maybe a month, until the next relative moved in.
- JT:** Where is this, in southwest North Dakota?
- JW:** It is in Emmons County, about eighteen miles east of Linton. That's where my great grandfather started and that was in 1900.
- JT:** Do you know what area of Russia they came from? Was it from the Odessa area or a specific village?
- JW:** I would have to look it up. I have the family history book but I know it wasn't Odessa.
- JT:** Why don't you give me your full name, date of birth, and where you were born.
- JW:** My baptismal name was Mary Ann Werner, and I was born the first of January, 1922. I was born in the family house. At that time, they didn't go to the hospital.

**JT:** Now the name of your father was what?

**JW:** Andrew Werner.

**JT:** And he was born in America?

**JW:** No. I found out he was born in Russia but came over as an infant. I think he was two or three years old, not more than two. My father was illegitimate. At that time, they didn't keep strict records, but I do know that he was born April 22, 1900. By the time my grandmother remarried it was 1902, and she was still living in Russia.

**JT:** Now do you know where he is buried, and when and where he died?

**JW:** Oh yes. He died in a farm accident in 1961, and he was 61 years old. He is buried in the Linton cemetery in Emmons County.

**JT:** What is your mother's name, and what village in South Russia did your mother's family once live?

**JW:** Well, I don't know. It is in the family history.

**JT:** What was your mother's maiden name?

**JW:** Vetter. Anna Mary Vetter, and she was born on right on that farm in a sod shed. The house wasn't built yet when she was born. They had put up a sod shack, house to start with.

**JT:** Do you know where she is buried?

**JW:** She is buried beside my dad in Linton.

**JT:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?

**JW:** We were six girls and four boys, so I had five sisters and four brothers. I had a sister who died as an infant.

**JT:** Do you have any recollections of what your parents or grandparents told you about living in the old country, in Russia?

**JW:** They used to talk about that. They had little villages. Someone would come and deliver things to them and pick up their milk. That's all I can remember. They got very homesick for Russia when they came over. My mother said when she was seven years old, she stayed with my great grandparents, her grandparents. She would hear my great grandfather say to my great grandmother, "Frances, are you awake?" Then they would talk about Russia, "Do you remember when we did this or that." Then when my parents got married, my mother said to my dad, "I don't know. Grandma and Grandpa always had something to talk about." My dad would say, "Well, we never were any place." "I mean something to talk about the past," my mother said. I do remember when I was about seven years old. My grandfather, after my grandmother died, would come and sit in our kitchen. He would talk to my mother and say, "At home, it was this way and at home it was that way." When Grandpa went home, I said, "I don't know Ma. Isn't Grandpa at home over by Uncle Joes?" And she said, "He's talking about Russia." So, I guess they were homesick. I can't remember what she said. All I remember about Russia, was my father always said, "It will happen here like it did in Russia." And when we asked, "What happened in Russia?"

He would say, "When the government tells you what you are allowed to do, and what you are not allowed to do."

**JT:** That was one of the questions. Do you remember times when your ancestors wished they were back in their homeland, and we just talked about that. Do you remember the ancestral village names or nick-names of the towns in Russia?

**JW:** I know that when my Grandma Werner came, they said she was from Elsas. If you want anymore information of Brother Placid's, he is the historian and he has everything back to the 1700's. For this part, he would be better. If I can find the family book, I will give you the book. Besides, I don't think I mislaid the Vetter book and it has everything in it.

**JT:** Do you recall your family ever receiving letters from relatives in the old country?

**JW:** Not mine.

**JT:** In what language did you speak as a child? Was it German or English?

**JW:** German. We started school and couldn't speak a word of English. I still do to this day. I could explain this better in German than in English.

**JT:** Do you know what dialect it was?

**JW:** Sister Rita used to say it was Kanishta? I don't know for sure what that would be in English either.

**JT:** So, you can still understand the dialect and you know the German language that you spoke as a child?

**JW:** I would rather speak it this morning is what I am trying to say. I could explain it much better in German.

**JT:** Do you want to say something in German? Go ahead.

**JW:** Ja, desh garht gut, I mean, ich Kann besser deitsch reda vie English. I g' misst nicht, so fiela schoks uff a deitsch. Mir gedenka nock ohlles grad vie vanz g'sht g'west vehr. Ich Kann noch deitsch beta un ohlles. Mirn imma g'sagt "Ich bin Klei, mei hartz ish rei, kann niema drin vona als Jesu allei." Dat vie start saying venn vie schtart talking. That we started to say when we started talking.

**JT:** Was that a nursery rhyme?

**JW:** No. It's a prayer. Now, I got a book last week where they had all their sayings in there in German. They had this one, "Ich bin klei". That means, I am little and my heart is pure and nobody can live in it but Jesus. I mean similar to that. I'm not that good at translating. And we said a lot of little German sayings in our games. We didn't have all kinds of entertainment.

**JT:** What were some of your childhood chores that you enjoyed doing and maybe there were some you didn't enjoy?

**JW:** You may laugh at this, but I loved to pick up cow chips because it got me out of the house. I was the oldest of ten children and my mother was sickly. She said I had a brother who was three years younger than me, and if I didn't get to the cradle when he moved or woke up, she couldn't stop his crying. He was colicky. My great grandfather was very sick at the time so she didn't want the baby crying. Of course, she said if I didn't run when that cradle moved, then I got it. Well, I don't remember that

anymore but I can see what she meant. At that time, she had three children and the great grandparents were living with us in the same house. It was just a two room house. I mean two big rooms with a smaller bedroom and a longer bedroom. That is where the two families lived. Like I said, my brother and I were three years apart and my next sister in between. All I remember from my childhood was work. I mean you washed diapers as soon as you could. My mother would carry in the water and I would have the tub ready. Then I would rinse the diapers because there was no running water. I remember washing dishes when I was five years old. Father Walker stayed with us when I was five years old, and that's how I remember how old I was. They would put the dish pan on a chair, and I would wash and Father Walker would dry them. That doesn't mean I had to do them everyday, but I know I did the dishes. I started milking cows when I was seven. I enjoyed milking because, I think, I enjoyed getting out of the house. I mentioned Father Walker before, and I'll explain why Father Walker was at our place. He was our teacher in Catechism and he had no home because he came here from Germany. Bishop Wurhle asked if anyone could give him work for the summer. Well, 1926 and 1927 were poor years; especially 1926 was very hard. Being we all lived near-by, my father, two uncles and my grandfather, and my grandfather's brother lived about one half a mile away. They decided to hire him to herd cows for all of them. I don't think they had much. They couldn't afford to hire anyone separately, so they all chipped together. He stayed at our house. Grandfather's brother was Balzar Vetter and I don't think they had him much. In 1927, when Father Walker was ordained a priest, they put up tents around our church, which was just a little mission church. They moved Uncle Adam's garage and put kerosene stoves in it. Then, they dug a well by hand. They had their first Mass out in the country church in 1927. That is how Father Walker was at our place and I was what they called at that time, "his bride." I was five years old, and we had to say prayers at the Mass. I was too small to say it alone, so they put Sister Leona and Cecilia Vetter, who were two bigger girls with me, and two girls who were my size for flower girls. I can remember that day yet.

**JT:** What was a bride, like a May Day bride?

**JW:** A bride is like when you get married. This was something different. I had a special pillow to carry. There was a chalice on the pillow. I suppose now they would just call them flower girls. You know now at a wedding you would have a witness or something. I don't think it was a witness at that time.

**JT:** Was someone getting married?

**JW:** No, but they pronounced it the same as when someone got married. I don't know enough to explain it. We just said, "Brout Madel". I don't remember any more about it.

**JT:** Do you have any memories about school? How many years you went to school, or where you went?

**JW:** I remember when I started school and the year. I remember every teacher. I started school in 1928 when I was six years old. We had school for seven months. At that time, we had to furnish our own books. There were no books in the school.

**JT:** Did you stay at the school?

**JW:** No. We were about three quarters of a mile from the school.

**JT:** Was the school taught in English?

**JW:** Yes. The poor teachers had between 22 and 30 students all the time in all the eight grades. At that time, when I started to school, none of the schools had written exams yet. At that time, I think they just went to school until ....? I know when I started school, there were boys in school who were 16 years old because during harvesting, they were kept home. Then, in the winter time when they had nothing to do, then they came to school. I remember my uncle and the other older boys who were in school and how old they were. I don't remember any older girls in school at that time. I think the girls had something to do in the winter time and the boys didn't. The first boys that wrote state exams were Joe Baumstarck and Joe Vetter. I'm not sure what year they wrote the eighth grade exams. Then they found out they had not written the seventh grade exams. They were the first from that school who tried to go to high school. That is why they had to write exams. Before that, I don't think anyone went to high school from that school.

**JT:** So. you walked to school?

**JW:** We always walked to school.

**JT:** Even in the winter?

**JW:** All winter long unless my Dad saw a storm coming or he thought it was too cold, but that was only once or twice a year. They watched, and then they would come with the team to get us. But that was very seldom.

**JT:** Do you remember if there were students of other nationalities in your class room?

**JW:** Yes, there was one family.

**JT:** Where were they from?

**JW:** They lived in our area. I think they were English and their name was Lovell. They couldn't understand German and we couldn't understand English. They were not Catholics, but when their first daughter got married, she married a Catholic. Then the family moved away. Their son came back and also married a Catholic. They were real good neighbors and we would visit back and forth. I remember her telling the story once about when they moved there. Their cows got away or was lost. She walked around looking for them and said something. Nobody could understand her. She would go and ask if they saw any strange cows and they would just look at her. My great grandfather had a foster child, but he never adopted her. She was the only one in the area who Mrs. Lovell said could understand her. She was the only one who could understand English. One time, she went to the neighbors to borrow some thread. They took everything out of the cupboard and it was not the right thing. Finally it dawned on her, so she took her apron, scraped out a piece of thread and showed them. She said she never forget how to say thread in German. That was what they went through. I don't know where they came from. They have all died except the oldest daughter.

**JT:** Do you recall any play ground experiences, or games you played on the play ground at school?

**JW:** Anti-I-Over and Hide and Seek. The boys would go skating, and sled riding. The girls didn't do those things that much. There was an old building across the road from the school and Cecilia Vetter would take us over. We would fix up a room like it was a house, like a play house. Another thing we did was square dancing in the barn. That was the girls fun. Cecilia Vetter was the caller. Anti-I-Over was what we played a lot.

- JT:** Do you have any special memories about any of your teachers?
- JW:** Well, the first one was John Rosedale. He was a old teacher with a mustache. He liked to spit.
- JT:** He liked to spit?
- JW:** Yes. Those old guys were always spitting. We had John Rosedale, then Mary Elliott. I don't remember much about her. She was not a Catholic, I do remember that. Jerome Walstead, he was not a Catholic. John Rosedale came from the Hague area. Then, we had Reeve Johnson for three years and we just loved her. When she left, many of us cried. She was a good and dedicated teacher who came from Montana and wasn't a Catholic either. The teachers before that, I can't remember very well. I think they were ok. We had Mary Boone and I liked her. She was hard working. She wasn't liked by the other kids because she was strict. Her father taught my father. She was the last one I had before I graduated from the eighth grade. At that time, we wrote state exams, in January.
- JT:** Do you remember what discipline they used?
- JW:** It depended. Sometimes, they hit us with a ruler across our hands. Making us stand in the corner was the most common kind of discipline. I remember the sixteen year old coming to school. One got in a fight with the teacher once. He went home and his parents brought him back and made him apologize to the whole class. The reason he ran home was he tried to start a fight with the teacher because the teacher was correcting him. Another thing about Mary Boone. When the students tried to talk German, she would make them write, "I will not talk German" as much as 500 times. We were so used to talking in German, it came natural. She was sure she was going to make us learn to speak English. She was a little to hard on us. One time, a boy before he had the 500 times written, he had to add another 500.
- JT:** Now, I am going to ask you some question about weddings, Christmas, and holidays. Can you remember anything about how Christmas was celebrated in your family?
- JW:** In our family we had what we called, Christkindl. When we were small, our older cousins, an uncle or somebody would dress up in ribbons. They would go house to house and we would have to say a prayer or sing a little hymn. Then we had a Christkindl, an Essel and a Belzenickel.
- JT:** Will you explain.
- JW:** I would almost have to go back to the history book. Now, the Christkindl was dressed all over in colored ribbons. Someone would guide him because he couldn't see through the ribbons. They had a little branch from a willow tree to use if the children were bad when the children came forward to get their gifts. The mothers would slide the gifts to the floor when the children were not looking. You had to go up there and get your gift. Then when you got there, the Essel would go zzzzz and, of course, we would run. The bell they had ringing and that's what scared us. Then the Belzenickel would take you along if you were mean. They had a big chain but they never had to take the children out. They were there just to scare the kids. That part wasn't all that good.
- JT:** Do you remember anything about special Easter activities? Coloring eggs or an egg roll?
- JW:** Yes. Because we all lived so close together, when they colored the eggs, we kids didn't know. That all came from the Easter rabbit. We didn't know that they had anything to do with it. When I started to help color the eggs, we colored between 300 and 500 eggs. There were three houses in our yard and we

put a little nest in each one. We took pie plates or shoe box covers or something. In our house, we usually used the pie plates. My mother would give us the sewing material scraps left from her sewing. They were too small to make anything else. We would then put those baskets out on Easter morning. We would go to each house and the mothers would give us whatever they had to make the nest. On Easter morning, we would go from one place to another and got what the Easter bunny had left to put in the nest.

**JT:** What would be in the Easter baskets?

**JW:** We used to have those nice big eggs. The egg would have a special design, and that would be the special egg at your house along with about six colored eggs. When I started helping my mother, she would say, "Now you put those colors together. Just make it look nice." We put those little sugar candy eggs in the nest. We just made it real colorful. At the other houses, we got two eggs and all kinds of candy, also.

**JT:** What did you use to color the eggs with? Did you buy those little dye tablets?

**JW:** We had some of those when I started. We did lot's of them using onion peeling and a purple pencil. Some we did with crepe paper. At that time, we didn't know about germs and getting poisoned.

**JT:** What do you know about an egg roll?

**JW:** We had Easter bread, or golosha? They made little snails, and all kinds of Easter rabbits with bread dough. They would braid the dough to look like a nest. Then the would brush it with beaten eggs to make it look shiny.

**JT:** Can you remember anything about marriage ceremonies? What was special about marriage ceremonies or wedding festival? How long did they last? Did they go for days?

**JW:** I think years ago they did go on for days, three days they used to say, but not in my day. One of my aunts is still living and she said she remembered when my grand aunt got married. When they drove her away with the wagon, they took dishes and broke the dishes on the wagon wheel.

**JT:** Why?

**JW:** I guess for good luck or whatever. She said she didn't know either. They must have been old dishes. I remember my aunt telling that after my parents got married, they had a lot of fun the next day, just fooling around. Putting a wash tub on a stoneboat and hitched up to the horse and then ride in there. Stuff like that. They had their own fun. I think the first thing they did before they went to church was the parents gave the blessing. I remember yet when Sr. Leona's sister got married, the best man led the "Our Father" before they left.

**JT:** Do you remember any special foods served at the wedding?

**JW:** Always had chicken soup at noon. The mother would buy a new wash boiler for her daughter and the chicken was boiled in that boiler for the chicken soup. Chicken soup and big apples were one of the things. One of my aunts who used to cook for weddings said that they put the apples on top of the stove and partially get done that way.

**JT:** Do you remember any German wedding songs? Did the guest get together and sing songs in German?



- JW:** When we had our reunion, they went through the whole thing as to how they did it, but I don't remember. Brother Placid would know but I don't. They sang the songs and when you greeted them, you always greeted them in German instead of congratulating you. Did you ever hear that?
- JT:** Was poetry used in verbal invitations to the wedding?
- JW:** I don't think so in our area. I don't think I understand the question. Will you say it again?
- JT:** Did they send wedding invitation or did they go over to someone's home and invite them to a wedding verbally, and if so, did they use a special poem?
- JW:** No, I think they invited them verbally, way back. Later on, when we went through my mother's things, she had a lot of invitations where the people invited them. It was postcards. Before that, I don't know just how they invited them. I just remember when my cousin got married, she said, "Can you get an apron ready for yourself for my wedding? I'd like you to be table waiter."
- JT:** Do you know what a "chivaree" is? Is that when they broke the dishes?
- JW:** No. That is when they would hang a bunch of cans together behind the car and make noise. They took kettle covers and things and made a lot of noise. I don't remember ever being to a "chivaree" but I know about them.
- JT:** Do you remember any of the bridal clothing that maybe your mother or your aunts talked about? What they wore when they were married.
- JW:** Yes. My mother had a navy blue dress and so did my aunt. The pictures are around. They wore a long dress and usually navy blue, and they had a veil.
- JT:** Have you ever heard of "liesband" sash?
- JW:** No.
- JT:** A special wedding sash or attaching ribbon streamers to the wedding couple?
- JW:** They did on the cars, and I think they still do.
- JT:** Now we are going to talk about some of the games you played in your house? Did you play a musical instrument?
- JW:** My uncle played the harmonica. When they had Name's Days, he would play the harmonica. My dad had an accordion. He didn't play it that much, but he did have one. We had those pedal organs and phonographs. We got our first radio in 1928. It was run on a battery charger. My dad made a battery charger for it. We didn't have a phonograph, but Uncle Joe's did. We had a record called, "Aloha," and that guy always laughed. I think we wore the record out.
- JT:** Did your grandfather or uncles ever sing songs or play music from the old country?
- JW:** Yes, and they still do. My youngest brother belongs to a group of German singers. I think they sing songs from the old country also.
- JT:** Do you remember any games or puzzles you played as a child, or any fairy tales?



**JW:** Yes. In German I could tell you.

**JT:** You can say it in German if you want to.

**JW:** Ja, we said "Hoppa, hoppa, rohss, im boada schteht as schloass Im bohda sch teht ah \_\_\_\_ haus, duen drei schoena buba raus Ahna schpinnt seida, ahna schpinnt veida, ahna schpinnt a rohte rook Fer unsra lieba Hansel..

**JT:** Are these fairy tales or songs you are saying?

**JW:** Just little rhymes. I think it would be something like, "Hae diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle," or something like that. There were lots of them.

**JT:** Were there any superstitions that your parents or grandparents had?

**JW:** Lots of them.

**JT:** Like what?

**JT:** One that I think that was really unusual. They said that if you look in the mirror at night, the devil would be there. Another was if you bake bread, then three days before Lent somebody might die because they used to mix the dough in some troughs shaped like a coffin. Then there would be a coffin in your home. There was a lot of superstition in our homes. Those are two that come to mind off hand, but I think there were lots of them.

**JT:** Is there anything about a boogie man or a hooting owl?

**JW:** No.

**JT:** Do you remember anything about folk medicine or Brauche?

**JW:** Yes, and I still believe in it?

**JT:** What is it? What is your view or how did your family view it?

**JW:** Certain people had healing powers. Not everybody could do it. You would take the sick to those people and they would pray over them. A lot of times, people got help from them. Our priest scolded us about it. One time, my uncle after the priest was scolding us, came out and said, "Now you know it is wrong." Then he got what is called, 'eild fire', and we did not know what it was. My mother said she thought it was the shingles, because later on, when people got the shingles, she said that was what she thought they used to call 'eild fire'. When my uncle had this, he tried everything to cure it and nothing worked. A neighbor said, "I'm going to take you to this man for help if I have to tie you in the buggy." This uncle wasn't going to go because he had said, "Now, you heard it is wrong." "I'll be near and I will take you," the neighbor answered. He took my uncle, and by the time they got back home, my uncle said, "Now I believe."

**JT:** Do you know what type of healing techniques they used? Did they do anything else besides praying? Did they use herbs?

**JW:** For the ring worm, they used the skin of a hen. Dr. Keller has a book out called, "The Second World." He has all those old remedies. He is putting the next book out already. I have seen his book and he has he

has all those interesting things. The thing that is most interesting is the people he talks about are the people who I knew.

**JT:** Do you remember about the role of midwives?

**JW:** Yes. My grandmother was a midwife. They used to tell us they found the babies here or there and we would believe all this. I asked her once after I knew where babies came from, "It would be useless for you to tell us that you found a baby here or there. We don't believe all that anymore. What do you get when you go someplace and you bring them their babies?" "As a rule, they usually give me three dollars, and if they are better off, they might give me five, and if they are poor, I don't take anything," she said. I remember one time we were at grandma's house and the neighbor came and got her. I thought it was so awful, it was on Christmas. My grandmother went along. I thought I would not have gone.

**JT:** Was she gone a long time?

**JW:** Well, it depends. I think we went home before she got back. I know when my mother had babies, it usually took two or three days after I once knew where the babies came from. Before that, I didn't know. We were just taken to Grandma's house. When we came home, there was a baby.

**JT:** So, a midwife would come to your house but you weren't there?

**JW:** Yes. I didn't find out until after my sister who is ten years younger than I am. I only found out actually after she was born. I know that my grandmother was there the next morning. A lot of times, my mother had the doctor besides the midwife. When my youngest brother was born, my mother's aunt was there, I think about three days. Finally, they got the doctor. I think my aunt was there in case the midwife needed her. My grandmother went a lot. Later on, when my grandmother was living in Bismarck, we got another lady. With some of my brothers and sisters, my mother didn't have the doctor, but sometimes they would get the midwife, and then they would have to get the doctor afterwards.

**JT:** Were they ever paid in anything besides money, like a chicken?

**JW:** It's possible. I wouldn't know. This I asked my grandmother after I was older, and she said, "Sometimes." My mother said when one of my sisters was born, we didn't have a decent place for the midwife to sleep. The poor woman had to sleep on the davenport. So, she must have slept and just watched. Because like I said, my mother always had a hard time.

**JT:** I am going to ask you some questions about funerals. Is there anything that you remember about funerals?

**JW:** Yes, today is the day my grandmother died, on February 1, and she was buried on February 4th and it was so cold that day. In those days, the pallbearers had to dig the graves by hand, and that was one grave the guys never forgot. They had to dig it inch by inch, and they nearly froze. What was hard at that time was that they just put ropes around the coffin. They didn't have drop boxes for the coffins, usually the coffins were homemade. They put the coffin in the hole with ropes. When the priest would put dirt on and the pallbearers would start filling the hole a little, the people would start to scream sometimes. Hearing the dirt falling on that box made everybody cry out loud, especially the family members. They always sang a song, what they called, "Schicksal," and in the song they said, "Today, it's me, and tomorrow, it might be you." As if the person themselves were talking.

- JT:** Did they sing that in German?
- JW:** Yes, they did and in some places, they still do.
- JT:** Do you remember it in German?
- JW:** I don't, but there is still a copy of it around, and some of them are translated. That Wald book I got this week, I think it is in there.
- JT:** After your grandmother died, was she laying in the coffin in your home?
- JW:** She was in her home, but with the sickness she had, she should have been embalmed and she wasn't. The last night, they couldn't even keep her in the house any more, and they couldn't take her into the church.
- JT:** What sickness did she have?
- JW:** She had dropsy, but she had been sick for so long. There was an old man there, but he left her on the feather tick where she died instead of laying her out on a board. He was the one who made the coffin. It was the heat. They didn't have a cold enough place to put the coffin. They didn't have a fire in the room and there were wash tubs of ice under the chairs where the coffin was laying. You see, the coffin was different, it was a homemade coffin that just sat on chairs. She had outside overnight and they couldn't take her into church. When my grandfather died, Sister Leona and I were cousins. We slept in the same room where the coffin was. I don't think he had been kept as long, and he had been sick for a long time. I just remember sleeping in the room. People were awake all night. Neighbors would come and I remember them reminiscing, telling stories, and such. Then we would have lunch at midnight.
- JT:** So, did they have a funeral Mass in the church then?
- JW:** Yes. When my grandmother died, they couldn't take her into the church but they still had the Mass.
- JT:** Now, where your grandparents were buried, are there wrought iron crosses as grave markers?
- JW:** No. There were two, but they took them out and put in the regular granite markers. There were some of those who died in 1918 of the flu epidemic who had the iron ones. I think there were only two.
- JT:** Some families have special designs in their crosses, or grave markers. Do you remember if your family ever did?
- JW:** Just their names, and they had their pictures in them. My parents don't have their pictures. By the time my parents died, there were other methods. They took them to the funeral parlor right away. Another thing they did when my great grandfather died was they took him to the church, but two people walked ahead of the procession. I don't know why but I think that was the custom. I think that was the way it was supposed to be. Because when my great grandfather died, they had a truck all ready and the people walked ahead. When my grandfather's uncle died, I remember that too. They just barely moved.
- JT:** In what way was religion and church education an important role in your spiritual up-bringing? For instance, did family prayer play an important part of your everyday life?
- JW:** Right. Like I said, we said that little prayer as soon as we started talking. Then, we just knew that you prayed in the morning when you got up, and you prayed at night when you went to bed and before

meals. After meals, it was forgotten more often. We didn't leave the table at the same time or when we were supposed to. Prayer at morning and at night was a must. I remember my mother would say night prayers with us. My father, especially after we got the radio, he would listen to the radio, but no matter when he went to bed, he said his prayers and we saw him. Sometimes we wanted to ask him something, so we waited because we knew when he would do this [hand motion], he was just about finished for the day. We got to ask him anything when he was through. When he didn't have the radio, he had the newspaper. Then, he always went over to grandpa's every night because we lived so close and my grandmother had died. Grandpa had a glass window in his door. We would look in and see my dad, grandpa, and my uncle sitting there, reading the paper. It was just the idea that they were together. During Lent, my father would read the Bible history to us, and that was in German. He would read that part so far, then he would ask, "Do you know what that means?" If we didn't, then he would explain. The rosary was said every night during Lent.

**JT:** Do you remember any special festivities relating to baptisms or confirmations?

**JW:** The godmother and godfather came and took the baby. The godmother took the baby and sprinkled it with Holy Water.

**JT:** In the house or at the church?

**JW:** Before they took it to church, before they left the house. For confirmation, you had your confirmation sponsor.

**JT:** Did you have to go through confirmation classes?

**JW:** We had six weeks of German religion instruction in the summertime by lay teachers. Every other Sunday, we had High Mass and then Father would teach. It was mostly questions and answers out of the Catechism. That my dad had to do for us because we couldn't read German. So, our Dad taught us our Catechism. You know how you wait until the last minute? The night before we knew the priest was going to quiz us the next day, we studied a lot. That was what our school was like too, we had to memorize everything. A lot of times we didn't know what it meant, but later on, we wanted to know. You always prayed for a happy death, and always prayed to the Sorrowful Mother. In German, sorrowful is such a big word. I didn't know what it meant.

**JT:** Now, I am going to ask you some questions regarding your decision to become a Sister. These are questions specific to men and women in the religious life. What were some of the strong religious influences in your daily life? We just talked about some of that. How did you decide to enter the religious life, and who influenced you?

**JW:** My mother had a cousin who was at St. Joe's. I remember she came when I was a very small child. I remember Sister Emelda, when she came, she was a big influence on me. She was from our parish and belonged to the same church. I heard Father say once the he wanted to get more Sisters, or they just didn't have enough. Then I thought, what if nobody goes to be a Sister? At the same time, a bunch of girls went to Hankinson to school. I decided I wanted to go to Garrison because of Sister Emelda. Our people always spoke highly of the Sisters, when anyone had a Sister or Priest in the family. I did like to pray and go to church, but I think what I really wanted to do was teach children to pray. I couldn't go to high school because I was needed at home. One time my mother said, if I wanted to be a Sister I could get my schooling. I told her, "If I had to be a Sister to go to school, it wouldn't be right." I always thought

she needed me. After I heard what Father said, I thought I could at least try it. Sister Emelda was always saying, "We need more Sisters." I don't know, but I think that is why I told her I would try.

**JT:** How old were you when you went away?

**JW:** I was twenty-one. I entered in the fall, and I would have been twenty-two in January. By that time, I knew I needed to do something.

**JT:** What was your family's reaction when you told them you wanted to try to be a Nun? Were they in favor of it?

**JW:** They were in favor but only my mother was always crying. She said she couldn't let me go. She wanted me to be a Sister, but she didn't want me to leave home. In those days, the rules were much more strict. You couldn't come home, but once in five years. I think my father was somewhat proud and he was encouraging.

**JT:** So, you could only come home once in five years?

**JW:** That was once in five years, and that was for ten days, including your traveling days.

**JT:** Could your family come visit you?

**JW:** They could, but when we were novices, they weren't suppose to come. After that if they did come, you were not allowed to eat with them. My mother could never understand why I was not allowed to eat with them, ever. When I was home on vacation for those ten days, we did a lot of eating. My mother said, "After we brought you up, and everything, and now we can't have a meal with you," but that the way it was.

**JT:** Where did you go to be a Nun?

**JW:** I went to Minot.

**JT:** How did you get there?

**JW:** With the bus. We were so excited, we had never been on a bus. Sister Leona and I went together. The tires were rationed at the time so the parents couldn't afford to take us. Later on in the fall, tires were more available to the priest. Then the priest brought my father, mother, and Sister Leona's mother to see us.

**JT:** This was during World War II then? Is that why the tires were rationed?

**JW:** Yes, 1943 was when we entered.

**JT:** Were you able to write letters to your family, or could you get letters from family or friends?

**JW:** We could get letters, but they opened them. We never got an sealed letter.

**JT:** Did they read your letters that you mailed out?

**JW:** Yes. If they read them or not, we were not able to seal them. We were allowed to write every two months. I didn't even get that much done but my mother wrote every week. I don't remember how long that went on that I got an unsealed letter.

- JT:** Do you recall the anti-garb law?
- JW:** Yes. I was in Hague when the Sisters had to change the first time.
- JT:** What was the anti-garb law? Did it start in the late forties?
- JW:** We were not allowed to teach in the public schools with the garb on.
- JT:** And the garb was?
- JW:** The full habit. We had to be in lay clothes.
- JT:** So if a Nun went to teach in the public school, they could not wear their habit?
- JW:** I was in Hague when it happened the first time. I remember when they changed, and poor Sister Scholastica was very conservative. It was obedience and all had lay clothes. They would come home from school, change into their garb before they would go to prayers because they could not pray without the garb. Then at night when they went to school to do their school work, I think they kept it on. You know, as long as they were not teaching, they could wear the garb.
- JT:** So, you would wear dresses?
- JW:** Yes. Then, like Sister Scholastica who had been in the community for twenty-five years, tried to fit something on, but she did. She did have her hair done once, but then she wore a turban. She was not comfortable, so she wore that. A kind of a cap.
- JT:** Do you remember how the community felt or thought about this legislation?
- JW:** They felt bad, but they thought in obedience, that's what they had to do. I think they sympathized with those who had to do it and prayed for them. Father gave a sermon to the people before school started. He said, "You are going to see the Sisters dressed different. You are going to see the Sisters dressed like you are, and I hope that you respect them. Put yourself where you had to be, dressed like a Sister and go to school, what it would feel like. They are doing it for you because it became a law." They think it wouldn't have happened, but the way it was written up, people didn't understand what it said. It sounded like it was for it but was against it.
- JT:** What was the purpose of the law? Why didn't they want the nuns dressing like a nun.
- JW:** The legislators did it that way. I think they thought if they were getting paid by the government.
- JT:** Separation of church and state?
- JT:** Yes. So, they were not allowed to wear the habit. We had one neighbor north of our place in our township, and he always came around and helped, and he worked there. Election day, he didn't appear, and so my dad went to get him. He thought because he was the only Protestant in the area and if there was that one rule against the Catholics, they would think he did it. My dad told him, "You come, we need you, and you don't have to worry about that." They found out later that a lot of people thought they were voting against it but actually for it. The wording for yes or no was so opposite of each other and so it passed. They had to wear the lay clothes.
- JT:** Now, tell me about the God's Corner.

- JW:** Every home had what we called a God's Corner. There we had three big pictures. In the middle, we had the crucifixion, then on one side, the Sacred Heart, and the other, the Blessed Mother. We had a little shelf in the corner, and that had on it a crucifix, candles, and sometimes, little flowers or something. If you had a statue, you would have it there. We didn't have a statue there until later on, I remember. Then you put the nicest cover you could make on the shelf to make it a very special place. When Christkindl came, that is where we sit, at the God's Corner. Then when we prayed, that's where we looked to, our God's Corner. It was like our altar. Nearly every home had that.
- JT:** I want to ask you about religious customs practiced in your home, like feast days or names days.
- JW:** Name's Days we celebrated, but like my name, Mary Ann, there was no Name Day, so we didn't have a special day for that day. We celebrated my birthday. All of the cousins in the neighborhood came and they brought a holy card or a piece of candy. Oranges were rare, so we usually got them for Christmas. They brought some little thing, and they wished you a happy birthday. My other brothers and sisters, Kunigunda, John, Andrew and Julia had a Name Day, and we kept them. Caroline and Annie were twins, and we kept their birthday.
- JT:** So, you had special foods and a party either on a name day or a birthday.
- JW:** I was the oldest and maybe I was spoiled, because for my birthday, we had special things. After we got older, we had a little dance. Before that, I had candy to pass around, or popcorn or something to give them when they came. The others, they just came and brought you something and then they went home.
- JT:** You said you had a little dance when you got older.
- JW:** By that time, I was maybe 18 years old, and my cousin played the accordion. It wasn't like it went all night. Otherwise, like my dad's Name Day always fell in Advent, so they didn't dance, just sang, played cards, and ate a lot. They kept passing food around all night. Later on, my mother said, "Let's have your Name Day on the tenth, there is a St. Andrew on December 10th, then his brothers can come from Bismarck and they can have a dance."
- JT:** You had a barn dance?
- JW:** No. We had it in the house. In the summer kitchen, when we moved to the other place. Otherwise, we had it just in the house. My father just didn't like it. He felt his real Name's Day was on the 30th. I had a sister who had a birthday on the same day. He didn't like the day changed, but they changed it so they could celebrate.
- JT:** The Name's Day was on the Saint's Day?
- JW:** Yes, after the saint who you were named after. Like now, my name is Jeanette, so I chose Joan of Arc. You try to learn about them. Usually, if the husband's Name's Day was in the winter, then they celebrated the husband's. For instance, August Eberle's is in August, and Katherine's was in November. In August, people are too busy, so in November, they kept Katherine's. The Millers, I don't know when St. Gabriel was. They kept their Dad's birthday. But they tried to keep it in the winter.
- JT:** Do you remember any special customs or festivities that were practiced on New Years Day?



- JW:** Yes. After midnight, they always went around with their shotguns, and shot them and wished everyone Happy New Year. They usually had some kind of special saying, kind of in the form of a prayer, that they recited together. It was maybe four or five neighbor boys.
- JT:** Do you remember these sayings?
- JW:** I remember the New Years wish we always wished was a long one too. I don't remember it all, but it was said in a kind of a poem. My mother always put goodies out the night before. They usually got a little drink and a plate of all kinds of goodies. Those who were coming looked forward to the evening, and it was special for those who were waiting for them. Usually, it was the men who would come. They came in the middle of the night, after midnight.
- JT:** Can you remember the name of any German newspapers you received in your home?
- JW:** "The Statsanzeiger" and "The Nord Dakota Herold".
- JT:** Did the whole family gather together to read, or just your dad?
- JW:** Just my dad. If he read anything he thought would be of interest to everybody, then he would mention it.
- JT:** Do you ever remember reading the funnies or comics in the newspapers?
- JW:** I never did, and I don't to this day. I didn't have that kind of time.
- JT:** What do you remember most about when your family first got modern conveniences?
- JW:** I had already left home by then.
- JT:** Even electricity?
- JW:** Yes, I was gone.
- JT:** You talked about the early days of radio. You had a battery powered radio?
- JW:** Yes. I think it was about 1928. When Father Slagg used to talk on Sunday nights, our neighbors would come over. My dad would always listen to "Amos and Andy", and he would also listen to the news. We tried to be quiet during that time.
- JT:** Do you remember your mother in the evenings sitting around doing sewing activities or making bobbin lace?
- JW:** She made those black shawls with the long tassels. I don't remember how many, but it seemed about six spools of thread going at the same time. You had to knot them a certain way. She was the only one around there who could make them. They were made with black silk thread.
- JT:** What were they called? You said a shawl, but what is the name?
- JW:** A "holstu". She would put those knots in.
- JT:** Do you remember the tasks that the women specifically did, either outside or in the home or with food?

- JW:** Well, the women did everything. The women did the cooking, the washing, taking care of the babies, and my mother was lucky because my dad would help whenever he could. Like if the baby was sick at night and she would have to get up many times, then he would get up sometimes and things like that. They had to cook with whatever they had. So, they made a lot of meals with just flour.
- JT:** Do you remember any German foods, like Borscht?
- JW:** Yes. Borscht we would have in the spring, when the first garden vegetables came in. We usually got the tops of the beets and carrots. We would make the Borscht soup, and on Sundays, we made beef soup. On Sunday, we had to have soup. In the winter time, we would have beef. They would butcher a beef, and maybe we shared it with someone else, when the family was small. We always had soup on Sunday. We always had sausage for breakfast. My father brought the sausage in and put it on the stove, especially when we went to school. We didn't get much to eat at school at noon. We were never ever allowed to go without eating. Sometimes, we would have oatmeal or grapes, but we had to eat breakfast. Maybe all we had at school was jelly that had soaked up the bread because they didn't have Surejel. We sometimes had to stretch our food. We usually had an apple. Beside soup, once in a great while in the winter time, we would have what you would make pork chops out of now, but those days they left the whole backbone together. We would have that with sauerkraut and boiled potatoes. My dad wanted real sauerkraut and potatoes together. Now, they would have mashed potatoes.
- JT:** Do you remember if the women ever did field work?
- JW:** They did the milking. As far as the field work went, they mowed hay, rake hay, stacked the hay stacks, and they helped stack the grain, and hedder stacks. When we couldn't afford to hire someone, and we didn't have enough horses, we took the hedder in together, just to have enough man power and horse power. One of the mothers would baby sit, and the other ones stacked. When they had it at our place, my mother would cook, and my aunt would stack. When they were at my aunt's, she would cook and baby sit and my mother would stack. It was just understood that the women had to stack the grain and the manure piles for the winter. The manure was in special blocks, and that was the women's jobs. The kids, later on, did the shocking. I don't think my mother did any shocking. I think she did more heddering.
- JT:** What is heddering?
- JW:** I just got a book lately with the picture in it. You cut the grain and auger it up into a box. Your hedder box was different than a hayrack. It was lower on one side. Someone was on the box and stacked it. Then they unloaded it and the women made stacks, and men threw it. Then in the fall, then came the threshing machine. They always had 2 stacks, so they throw two stacks in the threshing machine. Then the straw was hauled home and it was put on one pile.
- JT:** Sister Jeanette, we are going to close now. Are there any other observations you want to share?
- JW:** Well, there was no baby sitters hired. The mother was always home, and when she had to go into the field, the oldest child was responsible. When we were about seven or eight years old, if they went away, they would leave us at home, and maybe take the baby along. So, they never needed baby sitters. When my mother had a baby at home, they would hire a girl to come in until mother got out of the bed. At that time, you usually stayed in bed longer. They never hired a carpenter. They had one man to supervise, they paid him a little. The neighbors came either with a saw or a hammer, then they worked

until they had the building finished. At the end when they were finished, they had a barn dance if the barn was big enough. There was no hiring, it was all volunteer. The neighbors, when they knew someone was building, automatically they helped each other. You would hire someone to supervise and the rest was all volunteer help.

**JT:** Do you have any other comments?

**JW:** No. I don't think so.

**JT:** Well, thank you. It was a wonderful interview.