**Interview with Helen (Feist) Krumm (HK)**
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**HK:** Hi. *Ich wollte schon lange mal euch eine Aufklärung machen*, where and from your mother came. (I wanted long ago to prepare an explanation for you about - ) So I thought now it's the time but please excuse my German accent. I hope you get a lot of fun out of that. I was born and raised in Strassburg, South Russia, about 60 kilometers from Odessa. The town, or country village like you guys say, its name was Strassburg. My parents were Steffen and Mariann Rothiger Feist. My mother was *aus einem kleinen Dorf Kandel, ungefähr 30 Kilometer* from Strassburg. (- from a small village, Kandel, about 30 kilometers -) She was working for some people and there she met my father and they got married. My father's parents were Steven and Margarete Schlosser Feist. My mother's parents were Franz Josef and Johanna Stahl Rothiger. *Mein Vater hatte drei Brüder und drei Schwestern. Meine Mutter hatte zwei Brüder und* four *Schwestern*. (My father had three brothers and three sisters. My mother had two brothers and four sisters.) And all were living around in that area. I had one brother, Josef. He was two years younger that I am, and I had two sisters, Lydia and Berta. Josef was killed in World War II, 1944 in November. The date we never found out. My father died May 5, 1935, in Strassburg, South Russia. My mother stayed a widow for all that time. We helped her, and we worked together. We were so afraid she would take a stepfather. We were just afraid so she stayed single.

I went to school up to the eighth grade. We could learn Russian and German and we could go in the higher school, like you say high school. But we had to go to Odessa and that was just too far to go away, so we just stayed up to the eighth grade and then worked. My sisters and I loved school, but my brother, no. He always threw his school bag behind a tree, and he hopped on a horse and went out to the field with the mens. It wasn't a law that you had to go to school so my mom said, "Let him go. If he likes to work better than go to school, that's fine too." He never smoked. He never drank heavy liquor or wine, but he loved to sing and to dance, and that was fine with us because we always wanted to go dancing and singing. So he got a lot in trouble with us by Ma, but we got a lot of fun out of that too. In Russia we didn't had it like here. There was no TV, no radio, only newspapers, and that wasn't true what they wrote, and so we made our own game up. We had our own gang. We fixed our dances, our own parties, and had our own groups together. And like here, too, girls went with boys and the other way around too. And sometimes we used to fight and get mad at each other, but it was all fun.

My mother died in November 1973 in Germany. She was with one of my sisters, Berta. She was 80 years old, and her mind was still as sharp as it was when she was younger. She was not afraid to speak up or anything.

So now I want to tell you how it became. When I grew up, I went with a boy too. His name was Michael, Michael in German. He was an only son, and we were spoken for each other, like you say to get married. In the 1941, when the war broke out, the Russians drafted him and he had to go to the war and he was killed. So life took a different turn. Everything went upside down when the war came. We couldn't talk German

anymore. We couldn't see each other anymore, and everything was *real* bad. They took the priests away. Every night they came and took some people away. They took them all to Siberia, and there is not a thing we could have done. I lost two uncles when they took them away. And they never came back.

Then they took our priests away, and we were for seven years without a priest. Can you imagine, seven years? It's just like you live in a jungle. They closed the church and they made a show hall. They took the steeple down, they took the bells down, they took the crosses down, they burned all our church statues and everything. And if we didn't want to go into the show, they came in and said, "You better go or you know what's good for you." What else could you do? You had to live there. You didn't want to starve so you had to go. So we were just working in Communist [Russia] and I was working in where they raised the vegetables. Day after day after day, and we had nothing to show [for it], but we always hoped *someday* we might get help from the outside.

So, then finally I met another boy, our neighbor. And we got along real well and I thought that would be the one. So we thought we're going to get married too. So we said, "Well, maybe we'll wait awhile. Maybe the war is going to start. And in between the war broke out and the Germans came in. They drafted him and all the young mens up to 35 years, and they all had to go and fight with the Germans. So then there you were alone again, but you always hoped and thought, "Well, if the Germans come, they're going to help us. They're going to take care of us." But there was nothing to take care [of] because we had nothing.

But then when the Germans came in they brought their own priest in, and then we had the priests again after seven years. The church was restored, and then some stuff was put back the way it was, but it never was the way it used to be. The priests, they were chaplains from the army and well, they took care of seven years' damage what the communists did, you know. They baptized for a week, they heard confession for a week, they went to the graveyard for a week, they married [people] for three days. People went around and they married in groups. I tell you it was just one big of a change.

People hardly could [believe it]. So we thought, "Well, maybe now our lives are going to go back to normal again." No sooner we had the land divided - people got land and got a little machinery and a little horses again - then the war got worse. And they said, "Well, all the German people have to go. We have to move." And people said, "How do we move? We have nothing, just a couple of horses." Well, they just didn't care. It was the commander from high up. We just have to go. So people, after three years, in 1944 on March 23rd - there came the commander. We have to leave. So, all we could take along - clothes and a little food. What can you take along, what did we have? Like smoked meat and baked bread, but how long does that last? And we didn't know where we had to go or where we want to go, because they told us, "Just follow each other." And in Russia the roads are not like here. There's no highways there. It's *black* dirt. It's just like you smeared butter on the road. And the horses, they weren't that good, fat or anything. How are you going to [bring] so much food along for the horses?

And so finally, on March 23rd, my mother and my two sisters and us put our little stuff we had on the little wagon, a covered wagon, and followed all the people. And you should have seen the cats and the dogs and the animals. Everything was standing out in the street and meowing and crying, the church bells were ringing. And it almost looked like there was a cloud over the sun. It didn't want to shine I guess, I don't know. And the Russian people, they once were our friend, they came and they cried. They said, "Don't leave us. Don't leave us!" But we had no choice, we had to leave. So the first day we only made 10 kilometers with the horses. It was raining and snowing. You hardly could see and we had to walk. We just had to walk. And the next day 10 kilometers, and we were supposed to go 95 kilometers till there was a

river to Bug, B-u-g, Bug. And from there the ferry was supposed to take us across to Romania. And when we came there, the river was frozen shut and all the people that went before us were waiting for eight days already to get over and couldn't get over. So we had to wait, and then the Russians came with the bombs. And they bombed the river and they bombed the ferry. Oh God, it was just - impossible! And then finally the river opened up and then people just - everybody wanted to go over first. Everybody thought they should go over first. Then a lot of wagons and horses jumped in the river. And that's where they lost all our church books, all our records. Everything was in one main wagon. And the man who drove that wagon flew in the river with everything and never recovered anything.

Well, we finally made it to Romania. When we came over to Romania the people, they went after us with the stakes. They didn't want us. They said, "What do you want to hear? We don't need you. We have no food for you. We have no food for your horses." And when we asked the German soldiers they said, "Well, you're out on your own. We just can't help you any more." So we begged people. We exchanged some scarves and some little clothes, little crosses. My sister had such a beautiful ring. She sold it to a guy for two sacks of oats for the horses. And the horses, they didn't want to go anymore. And I remember it was Easter Sunday morning when we came out and one of our horses was laying and was dead. And Ma said, "What are we going to do? We cannot go with one horse." So the neighbor man said, "Well, we'll take your horse and leave you a wagon and you put your stuff in our wagon and you can walk with us." So that's what we did. Then we walked all through Romania. It's almost like you walk here from North Dakota up to Montana. Maybe it's even farther. I'm not sure, but it's about like that. Then we came to Hungary. That's where the war is now, what they show you in TV, them pictures. When we came there, there was half of the horses died on the road. And *everyday* two or three people dead on the road. Little children died. They just wrapped them in a blanket, made a little hole and buried them. There was no time to stop for *anything*, and nobody stopped for you either. We were just standing beside the wagon and sleeping because we couldn't lay down. There was no nothing. There was not even straw. It was March and it was sleeting and everything.

When we came to Hungary, they were even worse, them people. They were *mean*. We couldn't park in a little town. We had to park outside the town, and then if you wanted some water or something – You know, they just treated us like we were the enemies. Then finally we drove *way up*. It's almost like from Romania to Hungaria, it's just like you go from North Dakota to Montana. That far again, and then now they said, "Well, now you're all going on a train." And they brought a cattle train where they hauled cattle. The horses were all dead already. They had no more hoofs, and we had no more soles in our shoes. There was nothing there. We were all barefooted and had lice. So they put us all in a train and they said, "Now we're going to take you to Poland." And it took five days riding with that train. The bombs were flying back and forth, but they never hit us. I don't know, maybe God saved us for something else. So on March 23rd we left, and then we were on the way to Romania and Hungaria. We were on the way till May 22nd, walking. And from May 22nd, five days till May 28th, we were on the train until we came to Treustedt, and that's in Poland.

So they unloaded us there and they *desinfiziert* (disinfected) us. That means we had to walk in just like you keep the cattle down in the stockyard, because we had lice and everything. And they just washed us. It was just *boiling* water, you know, people hollered. And then we got some clothes. It was almost like you got clothes like the [next] person, all the same. So then they finally put us in a big camp. There was no mattress, nothing, just straw on the floor, and each one had his place assigned. Then they cooked for all the people together. Finally it took about a month till people got recovered, while they assigned them then to a

factory to working for the German Army. We had to make some clothes, that's what we did. And people were sick and people died. Nobody paid any attention, nobody knew where everybody was. People got apart and older people didn't know where their children were. You couldn't ask nothing for nobody.

So finally when we were there and worked at this factory, my two sisters - they both had to work in a different town. It was about 59 kilometers from us. And they worked in the same factory, but it was a different town. They had no chance to come home to me and to Grandma. And in the meantime, Eugen came home from Hungary, and then he left again, and then I found out I was pregnant. And I was *so* worried about it, so worried about it. The war got worse and worse and worse. My brother, you know, we never heard nothing from him. And Grandma, she was just sick. We had nothing to eat and everything we got, we got on a cart. No good milk, the milk was just as blue as water. Soup, we only got bone meat for soup, and it was real bad.

Then finally it came on January 20, 1944. The word got out we all have to leave. German people have to leave Poland. And where do we go? We're supposed to go to Germany. How do we go to Germany? Well, you have to walk, you have to crawl, and you have to go. There's no other way, because we had no horses, we had no cars, we had no trains, and nobody cared. Everybody looked out for himself. And we just took our blanket and put the clothes - whatever we had we put on, and we walked out. We walked out on the street and walked after other people. And there were a couple of our friends yet from at home. We tried to stay together. And it was so cold, if you blow your air out it made ice crystals. And how in the world are we going to go? We could take nothing to eat along, because there was just nothing there. So we walked and walked. And the Russians came and the Germans came, and they fought with each other with the airplanes. One day we were walking, we walked the wrong way. We walked against [towards] the Russians, then we had to turn around again and then we lost our two sisters. We just couldn't find them anymore. Then finally after three days we found them again, then we were together.

And we kept walking for *16 days*, January 20$^{th}$ till February 6$^{th}$. We could see the German border. People crawled and some of them got dragged over the border just to get into Germany. Everybody was so afraid. "If the Russians get you," they said, "they raped the ladies, and they do that and that." So finally when we got there they put us in a school. It was a big school, but everything was bombed out already in Germany. But they finally fed us and said, "You're out on your own, whatever you want to do, you can go. You're on your own. There's nobody here that can help you." And that's where my ma came up. She had a sister, Josefa was her name. She was married to a German man in World War I, and they lived at Augsburg, Germany. So she knew the town, but she wasn't sure if the aunt was still alive, so she said if she could still go on the train and go to *Tante* (Aunt) Josefa, maybe she could take us up. So finally my one sister, she arranged with this one soldier - he put us on this one train. He hided us and put us on the train. When we were halfways there, then the bombs - they bombed the train out. That car where we were in was not touched. We were safe, but we had no place to go anymore because the railroad was bombed. Everything was burned out and we four were alone.

So not too far from that place, we could see there's a little town or a little orchard, like you say, little farm orchard. I couldn't walk anymore because I was pregnant seven months. So Ma said she and me were going to stay, the two sisters supposed to walk there and find out. So they walked, I don't know how far it was. Pretty soon we could see horses coming with the wagon, and then they came and they found a farmer, a *Bauer*. And he said, yah, he'll take us in this little orchard, and we could stay there. And he'd see to it until we could get a room, until we can help ourselves or know where we want to go. So we went there and then

people came and found us a room. They bought us food and they bought us clothes and then finally they said, "Well, if the girls each one want to come and work for some people, they can go." And me and Ma could stay there in this one place, by this farmer, you know. And the girls said, "Yah. That sounds good." So the girls went. Each one went to a farmer, and I and Ma stayed by this one farmer. And Grandma, she washed. She helped that lady wash, patching and iron. I did some work for her, too, watched her kids when she went out to the field and stuff like that. But we were all alone. We were cut off from all friends, from all relatives. We didn't know where they all went or what happened. There was just –

So finally the time came [when] I should to go to the hospital. I never seen a doctor all while I was going with Marie. But then there were no cars. Germany, they had no gas to drive the cars. So Grandma, she hired a man with a horse and a buggy. So he took me over, but we had to take a white flag and wave it because, see, the war was still going on and there were Germans and there were Russians. There was everybody on the road and in the air, so we had to wave the white flag so we were not the enemy so they didn't shoot at us. So we went over and we went to the hospital. Then finally, just as we went into the hospital, then the alarm came. The *Tieffliegers* (low-flying aircraft), that means the ones who throw the bombs are here, so they had to rush me down in the basement and then finally Marie was born. And at that time you had to stay eight days in the hospital. And I didn't know what happened in the meantime. I was out. I just didn't know. Then finally Grandma and one of my sisters came and they got me. My sister, she borrowed some horse and a wagon and they took me home.

So we stayed for a whole year with them people. Then my sisters, because they both were good with everything, they found out that they could go work in factories and make a little more money. So they finally found different place for us to live, so we went to a different place, and that's where I stayed until I came over here. I stayed six years with them people, but I worked for those people. But Grandma, she just took care of Marie, and the two sisters went to school. The one sister went for midwife and the other one, she worked where the disturbed people were. She worked for them. And they both had good jobs and they finally met them boys from there. After two years each one got married and they went away. Then me and Ma were sitting alone by them farm people, but there was no way I could make headways or anything.

And then when America took this territory over, the part where we were fell to West Germany, so the Americans took care of all them people. There were some Catholic Caritas from over here and they collected packages, CARE packages, and they sent it over to Germany. And we were one of those people who got one of those CARE packages. There was some rice and sugar and needles and everything what you needed - Crisco. We put the Crisco on the bread. We thought that was butter and because we never had any butter all through *Krieg* (war). We never had any sugar all through the war and all that stuff.

In that package there was a letter and it said, "Whoever gets this package is suppose to write back." So when I opened that letter and the address on it was Josef Krumm, Sr. and Katherine Krumm, Hague, North Dakota. So Ma said, "Yah, you write thank you." I finally write back and then the next month there's another package came. It was all clothes and I remember it was from the Penney's store. It was shirts, blouses and underwear, stockings, and needles and thread and bandanas. Anything we needed for - soap, all the stuff we couldn't get. And then he explained it. He said that he had 17 families in Germany and every month he sends a package to those families. He belongs to that group, to that Catholic Caritas, and it's run by Monsignor Aberle from Dickinson. So he said, "Whenever you get one of them packages, be sure to let us know, so [we know that] you got it."

That went on for a whole year, but then the time was better and we said. "Well, he doesn't have to send so much anymore. We're working now and the time is better." We can buy a little stuff, but not so much, but we were satisfied what we got. And then after about two or two and a half years, there was a letter and he said, "How would you like to come over to America to us? We have no family, no kids of our own. You could work here and your kid could go to school here. Just come over for a year. If you don't like it then you can go back again." And I don't know. It just hit me. I thought, "Why should somebody across the ocean care so much for a person that they don't even know and even see?" Finally we exchanged some photographs and they were all so excited. Then finally my mom said, "You better write, that would be good chance. If you stay here you're going to be a maid for the rest of your life. You have no money. You cannot get married here. You have nothing. You cannot send Marie to school or anything. You just go and go to America. I think that's the best thing that can happen to you. And I said, "But Ma, then I have to leave everybody." And she said, Yah, that isn't the worst." She said, "If I know you are out there and you are safe and you're taken care of, that's worth it."

Well, I thought and thought and thought. Then finally I said, "Well, I could try. Come over for a year and then see if I like it." And then he wrote back and he said, well, they have to pay from over there up to here for a year. They're responsible for a year if I were to get sick or anything. But after that year I'm on my own. And if I wouldn't like it then I would have to work and pay my own fare back. And I said that's fine. So we started working on the papers. You have to get a lot of papers, you know, go a lot through the government and everything. And it took almost two years. We started in '48 and it almost took till '50 that we had all the papers and they had to do over here too, you know. So finally we got everything done. Then the paper came and it said, "You're ready to go, your ship leaves on –" That was in 1951, and it was in May when I got the notice that said that the ship leaves in October. That's when I have to leave. So I had all summer to get ready, but it was here faster than I thought, you know. I got me a little different clothes, and got everything straightened out, and quit working and stuff like that. But I never thought about it - how you say goodbye or what. But my mother never shed a tear. And I think that's the first time she hugged me, but that doesn't mean she didn't love me but that wasn't in her nature or what.

So we left October the 10th and had to go to Bremerhaven, that's where the ship was in the ocean. We stayed there till October the 23rd, till everything was [ready]. We had our shots and all that stuff. Well, when we were ready to go it was October the 23rd, that day they started loading us up. It was foggy and raining, and nothing you could see except water and heaven, water and heaven. And I thought, "Well, no matter where you go, you go on that ship and there is no way out anymore. Because if you're on that ship and it goes down, well, where you want to go?" But then for three days we were real seasick. We didn't make it up on the deck, we stayed down there. Everybody threw up. There were 1,600 people on that ship, all displaced people like me. They all came here, but they went all in different places in the United States.

So the fourth day we came up, and then finally you could take a little food in. They had good food, they treated the people real nice, and they told us it takes nine days until we come to New York harbor. November the 1st we could see the lights in the harbor. We could see the Statue of Liberty, but then they took us to Ellis Island. There we stayed overnight, but in the ship, not out. The next morning, well, they led us just like you run cattle through. They put a stamp on your wrist, and they give a passport in your hand, they put a tag on your shoulder – "That's where you are going now." And there were some people set up, and they knew where they had to take you. They took us in a real big hall, and they had breakfast setting there. They had everything there that we wanted to eat, spaghetti and meatballs and anything, and *big* water glasses and we all thought, "God, what should we do with them water glasses?" People said, "Well,

they thought [if] they'd give us big water glasses, we don't eat so much food." But that was just a joke. So they put us on the train to Chicago, and from Chicago we went to Minneapolis, and then from Minneapolis we went to Fargo, and from Fargo we went to Bismarck.

Then Father Nebler and your dad were up there and there was snow, you hardly could see. Snow as high as the houses up in Bismarck, but I didn't see much of Bismarck, just the depot. And then Father Nebler was walking down beside the train and he said, "*Ist der eine Helena Feist hier*?" (Is there a Helena Feist here?) And then the conductor had my number so he waved it to him, so finally me and Marie came out. They took us to Pearson Hotel, that one on the corner there beside the depot. We had dinner there and then we drove home. And when we came here to Hague it was evening. It was dark and *snow*, *snow*. You hardly could see anything. You couldn't drive in the yard. Your dad had to take my suitcase. I only had two suitcases, that's all what I had carried in.

When I came here it was November 5, 1951. When I came in the house, well, his wife had had supper done. Father [Nebler] eat here too, and he talked and talked and he said, "Now you have a good night's sleep, Helena. Tomorrow everything looks nicer and don't dream about homesickness," he said. "Don't dream about it, then it doesn't come." So we went to bed and they let us sleep the next morning. I don't know how long because we were kind of out of place. Well, then finally we had to get used to how to talk again. So I stayed with them people and went to church with them and everything. People were kind of nosey here. They came and they wanted to see, "Well, is she a lady just like us? Is she speaking just like us? How she has her hair combed just like us." You know how people are. But, well, you had to take it. You were a newcomer *und* that was it.

And then I stayed with them. Joe and his wife, they milked some cows and they seeded a little land. Then after a while he said, "Anytime you want to leave -" But I had to stay a year and then after that he said, "If you know the language and anytime you want to leave I'll help you find some place to live and I'll help you out. But if you want to stay, we'll pay you wages and you can stay here then we two [can] take it easy and travel." And I said, "Well, I like it here." It was quiet and I enjoyed it and so I stayed there and everything worked out real nice. Marie went to school. She just started school then and there were still sisters here so they gave her special help in English. She mixed in real good with the kids.

Sometimes I got homesick. I always thought, "Oh God, I just should put my coat on and walk home, but which way is home?" There was just no way you could go home. So all we had to do was, well, make the best of it. So after three years, when Joe's wife died, that was the turning point. Then he said, "I cannot stay here anymore." Because he's now a single man and I'm single and it's just not appropriate for that. And I said, "I understand." He said he's going to look for a room and a house someplace and I said, "That's fine." And then all his brothers and sisters came home that summer, and he had a sister who was a nun and she kept on looking and got always such funny ideas and then she finally said, "Josef, I think you should ask Helen to be your wife." And he said, "I can't. I'm twice as old as she is." And she said, "There's nothing to matter. You're going to make a good husband and she is going to make a good wife and you got somebody to take care of her and you're going to look after her little girl and herself, and there is nothing wrong." And he said, "What do the people say?" And she said, "What do you care what people say, do people help you out?" Well, back and forth. Even Father [Nebler] came over and he said, "Well, that's not such a bad idea," he said, "if she's willing to."

If you understand, like I said, there was no real love like you guys call love now, but I mean he was a good provider, he was a good man. He took care of us and respected me, I respected him. Then finally he asked

me if I was willing to marry him and I said, "Yah." And Marie didn’t like it, she just didn’t like it but I didn’t ask her. He and his wife, they had no children; they adopted four of them. Well, I mean, first three and then he adopted Marie when he got married to me. So finally when we got married January 13, 1955, and he found out afterwards when I got pregnant and he said, “Oh, my God, that’s going to be nice. I thought I have the world when I adopted them other children, but now I’m going to have my own. That’s going to be something!" And he sure enjoyed it. Sometimes them older men asked, "Joe, how can you stand all them kids?" And he said, "Oh, the more the merrier. If I get a thousand, I’ll put a fence up and put them all in." He just loved it and we lived 15 years together or what. We didn’t go much away; we were just a family, a regular family. And that’s the life story. You know the rest of it, how everything went and how everything became. And if you would ask me now, and I have to tell you the truth, if I would do it again, what I did, and then I would say "yes." There's not a thing I would change it whatever in my life. I just accept what I cannot change and go on, because that's the only way you can make it. But I wouldn't change one thing, whatever happened in my life. Maybe we weren't that high-fashion people, but we got along and we loved you, all you children. And that was all what was counted, you know.

And now I want to tell you about your dad's brothers and sisters. Your dad had nine brothers and three sisters. Two, Magdalena and Alice, they had a different father, because Grandma Krumm was married twice. But then there was Alice, Magdalena, John, Joe, then Wendelin, Frank, Louie, Jake, Mike. Wendelin and Magdalena never got married and so too Mariann, she became a nun. Uncle John's, they had twelve children, nine live ones. Uncle Mike had nine, Jake had seven, Enden had eight, Elizabeth had nine, Louie had three, and Frank had no children at all. He married real late, when he was in the fifties. He had no children. Then Wendelin and Magdalena did die single. And Sister Amalia, she died in the convent. Their parents came *aus* (from) Russia too; they came in 1886 to America. They came from a town - Elsass, South Russia, too, a little ways away from Odessa. Uncle Frank, he went to school and wanted to become a priest. He got real sick and had to quit school. *Alle* (All) of your dad's brothers and sisters are dead. There's only two aunts alive, Aunt Barbara and Aunt Katie. But you've got a lot of cousins, nephews and nieces around this area, so that’s all I know from your dad's side.