

## Interview with Helen (Feist) Krumm

Conducted by Peter Eberle (PE)

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- PE:** Today is January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003. I am Peter Eberle, interviewer for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, North Dakota State University Libraries in Fargo, and today it's a pleasure for me to visit with Mrs. Helen Krumm in Hague, ND. Helen, I'd like to ask you some questions. What were some childhood memories of yours – what chores did you have?
- HK:** Well like all kids we have to feed the chickens, milk the cows, weed the garden, pick the apples and then go to school too you know, but when we come home we had to do some chores too because ma and dad couldn't do everything so we had to do it too.
- PE:** What was your most favorite chore? Did you enjoy most of them?
- HK:** Crawling up the tree and picking apples and throwing down to the brothers and sisters. [Laughter]
- PE:** What were the tasks of the men and women when you were growing up? What were the things that they each did?
- HK:** You mean when we worked in the Kolkhoz or stuff or...oh before...
- PE:** Before that.
- HK:** Well, my father was a carpenter. They built houses and built wagons and all that stuff, and the mothers they had the vineyards to take care and the vegetable garden to care, take care of the chicken and take care of the cows and stuff what we had you know to take care of – so make a living with that.
- PE:** Was your grandfather a carpenter too?
- HK:** Yes, and even the great-grandfather when they came in from Alsace-Lorraine and they were all – Germany had so many people, craftsmen, they did everything like...in Strasburg I'm not sure but there was nine or ten. You know there was Schnieders to make the clothes and there was Schumachers who make the shoes because you couldn't go to the store and buy shoes and the one who make the wagon and the one who build the house. And the ladies you know...like dresses and stuff they were all made by the Schnieder that's what they called him. You buy the material and took it to the ladies and then she took the measurement; they did the coats and everything. And the shoes, you know, you go to the shoemaker and he measured your foot. We had a lot of craftsmen. There was two flour mills in Strasburg. You put your wheat down and they milled it and then we had a big winery because where I grew up there was a lot of people who had grapes; I don't know I would like to say a hectare, I don't know is it...how you say it in English...so many...
- PE:** oh, acres?

**HK:** Yah, and this is Hectare. Well you could put fruit in or you could put apples in or you could put anything in but then the grapes too. The grapes we put in and we made our own wine and everything.

**PE:** Was there a place in the village too, that you could take your grapes to?

**HK:** Yes, the winery; there was a winery. When the time come in October that's when they start cutting the grapes you know. We all went out and then be hired out to other people too who had more grapes than we. So we picked them up and then they put it in big baskets and took it down to the winery and they put it in and squeezed it out and then they put the wine in wooden barrels and then we took it home and put it in the cellar.

**PE:** In the previous interview you mentioned that the men went down to the river and cut the tall grass, the rohr, for the roofs.

**HK:** Yah, the rohr. That [was used] instead of putting shingle on. There was no shingle at that time and they put that rohr and that was ten feet, but they had to go when the river was frozen see, and then they cut it up and make them bundles like that, took it home and let it get dry and everything and that's what they put on the roof. And it was that thick, about a foot thick, never rained through or anything.

**PE:** Did the richer people have that type of roof too?

**HK:** Yah, but then later on there was a factory who made shingles (cement shingle; red shingles) that was in Strasburg too. But the better people had wooden floor, but the poor people had just other floor you know in the houses too then.

**PE:** Were there enough doctors in the village, Helen?

**HK:** No doctors. All the midwives – wives for the babies – and old women like even too they go if you got watery eye or what; what they call Brauche, you know, that was, they took them.

**PE:** Healing doctors?

**HK:** That was – But like Strasburg and then there was 3 kilometer [to] Baden and then 7 kilometer to Selz and see there was a hospital built. Dr. Schmidt from Germany, he came in and he built a hospital but they couldn't cure much whatever you have you know, but if you broke a leg or what they shingled it you know they put some wood around and wrapped pretty good stuff like that. But there was no doctors, no, m-m. And the babies were all [delivered by] midwives – grandmas, there was old grandmas that's all that it was.

**PE:** Do you have any special memories of you school years that were funny or otherwise?

**HK:** Yah, they were funny too you know. We had a teacher and he came from Germany too, Schiller, Schiller and his wife they teached, but then when you didn't behave or what they had a room locked up and they said (A58 Katsacellen) then they had you sit in until you – because you didn't behave as good or you didn't have your homework done or what.

**PE:** What's a (Katsacell?)

**HK:** That was the punishment. The Katsa, it was just like a little jail and then they put you in there until you got...next time you behaved yourself. [Laughter]

- PE:** Did you have recesses?
- HK:** Yah.
- PE:** What kind of games did you play?
- HK:** Yah, like ball and jumping ropes and then we had swings there too you know, yah oh yah. Well you could take different – well like when we were up in the fifth grade you know you had the choice you could take music or stuff like that, different stuff if you want to go to higher school. But the poor people had no chance because they knew we had to go to Odessa and that would cost a lot you know so we just went to the eighth and that was it.
- PE:** Were you done with the eighth grade when the Communists took over?
- HK:** Oh yah, oh yah.
- PE:** Now [from a previous interview] you said they didn't teach religion in that school; you had to go to church to learn religion.
- HK:** Church yah– that was religion, that was taught by the (A70 kurchevater) they used to say. It was the one who played the organ and everything and they called him (kurchevater) and there they had the catechism. And at that time they only made their first Holy Communion, you had to be twelve years old, that long, you know.
- PE:** When were you Confirmed then?
- HK:** Two years after that, fourteen – fifteen.
- PE:** Was there any special celebrations like after Communion or Confirmation?
- HK:** Oh yah, have a little party at home with the (A77 Taufgidle and taufvater/ Godmother and father?) and you have a little party there you know.
- PE:** Do you remember any stories that you really liked as a child like fairytales or stories that your parents told you?
- HK:** Oh yah, like...it's not like here you go to K-mart and buy a big game or what; we made up our own games you know. And like when Easter was and then they said well the Easter Bunny's coming and you got to make a little house and put some grass in and everything and tomorrow morning the Easter Bunny you know. And then we checked on our ma; at five o'clock she went out, she put the eggs in – we didn't know, but we knew what she did, but that was the joke on her, yah. Oh, the Easter Bunny she said, "Get up, we have to look for the Easter Bunny." And then my brother said, "Oh, is he tired, did he work hard" you know and stuff like that. [Laughter]
- PE:** Was there any musical talent in your family or didn't you really have and opportunity...?
- HK:** Singing a lot, my two sisters Lydia and Bertha, and I too. I was in the choir, in the church choir, our church had 40...almost 50 person in our choir. We had a big organ just like Hague has, a pipe organ what they used to call it. And there was man that led; there was music, yah.
- PE:** In your schools did you have a chance to play instruments or was that not available?

- HK:** No, not that time no. You had to go to private teacher who give you the music lessons.
- PE:** What were the most common types of dances at a wedding?
- HK:** Polka, polka, yah. And that was the nicest; not the nicest thing but you know the floor was just ground floor and it was so dusty, when you looked at your shoe you didn't know if they were black or gray.  
[Laughter]
- PE:** Yeah, you had to drink a lot of water to get the dust down then, huh.
- HK:** Yeah, and a lot of wine; we had our own wine you know. There was never – you bought never drinks like root beer or anything but just wine you know, plain wine. But see that was natural grape juice, there was nothing in, you didn't get drunk.
- PE:** Oh, I see, I was just going to ask that.
- HK:** Yah, you didn't get drunk.
- PE:** Was there dances that were common outside of a wedding celebration?
- HK:** Oh yah, well see there is like...each...I don't know we'll say each street or what had a club like from fourteen to fifteen and then from fifteen to twenty, each one had their own when they want to have a dance or singing or what they got their own club you know and that's what they did.
- PE:** Was the same type of music played at each club?
- HK:** Yah they played the harmonica and everything you know; there was lots of musician. And all what they did like Sunday afternoon they sit out a whole bunch around, chewed some sunflowers [seeds] and dranked wine and played and sing. There's no show hall or nothing, you couldn't go.
- PE:** You talked about celebrating your Christmas and Easter traditions in this previous interview, were you able to celebrate them when the Communists took over too or did it have to be more private at that time?
- HK:** That was the end of it when the Communists took over. I think the last time when we had Christmas you know each street had their – there was five-six girls and the boys and they went around to each house and brought the gifts to the kids, but after that then it was it. Well see everything went in Russian, you couldn't talk German anymore, it had to be in Russian, everything. You not even could have like a cross or a holy picture on your wall, nothing.
- PE:** But before the Communists you could do that, right?
- HK:** Oh yah, oh yah.
- PE:** Put your Christmas tree up.
- HK:** The Christmas tree and like I said so many times like in the Easter time you know. Here too you know when Christ died and got buried, there the Mass server had to stay at the – how do you say it – watched – so that the body didn't got stolen or what.
- PE:** Now we'll kind of switch gears a little bit – I know that in the kolkhozes they used tractors but when you were farming outside of the kolkhozes before that did you use tractors or horses?

- HK:** No, that time no, no, just horses you know, but see when the kolkhoz and then they had the tractors with all steel wheels and stuff, but all that stuff came from the United States and from Germany, see Russia bought that you know. But before there was just with the horse and two-share plow you know and then the threshing too you know they cut the wheat and put it in bundle and then they hauled it home and then they made a big, they said (A128 flushblutz) then they put it on and they had the horses going around and around and around; they took the straw off and the put the wheats [kernels] together; that's the way it was you know.
- PE:** Did you have to help a lot in the fields then too growing up?
- HK:** No, no. We had enough to do with the vegetable garden and everything you know.
- PE:** That's another thing – when you had the vegetable garden you said the Jews would come in and contract...?
- HK:** Yah, see the rich Jews came and they said well I'll give you so much for your apricot tree or for your apple tree or your nut tree, that's what we all had and when it was time to get them down then they came and we had to pick'em up and then they paid you and they took it to Odessa and that's where they sold it.
- PE:** Was that only before the Communists came that you were able to do that?
- HK:** Yah, oh yah.
- PE:** After that the Communists...
- HK:** After that, no, then everything you have to work for the Communists at that time you know. Then the Jews couldn't come out anymore and from us to Odessa it was sixty-five kilometer and they had the horses and wagon and they loaded in grapes you know they took it to Odessa, but they paid you right there and then they made a deal with you, next year if everything is nice they can come again.
- PE:** Could you leave the villages when the Communists were there? Could you go like to Odessa if you wanted to?
- HK:** Oh yah, oh yah. You could go, you could go; well you drive with the (A145 Kucherhannachtan) that's where the train stopped see and it's only maybe a half an hour you can walk, get the ticket, go to Odessa, go shopping and come back home again.
- PE:** You were able to go see Odessa than a lot huh?
- HK:** Oh yah. And the Black Sea. I had an aunt and she lived in Odessa and she just lived not too far from the Black Sea and when you look at the Black Sea it is dark, it's just black but when you go in with your feet barefooted it's clear you know. Oh yah, we seen a lot, Odessa. Well there's a lot of rich kids from ours you know who became teacher and they went to Odessa for school.
- PE:** From the Strasburg area?
- HK:** From the Strasburg area, but the parents had to pay themselves; the government didn't pay for that you know because if the government paid then they sent you where you had to go, but if you go by your own you could find your own teacher's job or whatever.

- PE:** Now did your family have to join the kolkhoz right away or did you kind of want to wait and hold off from joining?
- HK:** Well, you had no choice, you had no choice. When the Communists took over they took the rich people, the Kulak, what they called the rich people, took everything what they had, sent them to Siberia and then the kolkhoz said, "Well, if you live or you want to starve, you come follow us." That's what it was, yah. Then you worked all year and they said well you worked so many hours stuff like that you get twenty-five hundred rubbles and that for the whole year and then you had to wait till the next year again.
- PE:** What did you buy with that money then?
- HK:** Well, we need some clothes and stuff and keep the houses up and everything yah, but we had no horses for our own or nothing, everything was kolkhoz you know. We just could have two cows, couple of chickens and a vineyard and stuff but that's all what we owned.
- PE:** You got to keep your own house though when you...?
- HK:** Oh yah, oh yah.
- PE:** You talked about there was millers in town, did everyone take their grain to the millers to get milled or did people mill their own; make their own flour too?
- HK:** No, no, everybody went to those two flour mills you know. There were two brothers, one on that end and the other on the other end and there was a small mill where we put the sunflowers where they made the oil, to press the oil out. They had a lot of sunflowers, a lot of corn and stuff like that.
- PE:** The sunflower oil, what did you use that for?
- HK:** Just cooking, yah.
- PE:** Did it cost a lot or not very much to get that milled, or the oil pressed out?
- HK:** No, no, not too much.
- PE:** What were your heating sources, Helen, for your houses?
- HK:** Heating? [Laughter]
- PE:** Yeah, how did you heat the houses?
- HK:** Cow chips and then like with the sunflower stalks or the corn stalks they were cut up and chopped up. And the stoves, you know, they were baked in the house you know and you stick it full and then some dead trees were cut up and stuff, that's the way we heated the house, yah.
- PE:** Can you tell me some of your memories of the first time you seen electricity or cars or radio or television?
- HK:** No, there was no television, nothing. Once in a while you could hear you know Germany has a car they not even have to put gas in, there was lantern on and everything but that was just a picture show but nothing real, nothing real.

- PE:** So the first time you seen a television was when you came to America?
- HK:** Yah, yah. Yah.
- PE:** But you had radio growing up though, or some of the time?
- HK:** Yah, we had radio but if they figured out that you listen to the radio then they took it away, they took it away, yah. And like traveling you know you had to go by horses, there's nothing else; like if a couple got married or what they had to get with the horses or somebody died you know they took you to the graveyard with – all horses, yah.
- PE:** Did you think that things were similar to your situation then outside of Strasburg because you weren't hearing anything else from the news or did you realize that you had it harder?
- HK:** Well the people talked to each other, the people get to know each other and be married like from Strasburg to Baden from Baden to Kandel, they know each other but you couldn't say nothing, you couldn't do anything you know, that would be against the party. And like if they have a big meeting you know, they got around, they ring the bell then you had to get out of the house and you better go to that meeting if you want to be here next week.
- PE:** Did you know people personally then that the Communists took away?
- HK:** Yah, my – got three uncles. They were sitting out in the steps one evening and they were talking about – one had three boys and the other one – and they said, "Yeah it would be nice now if we could each one give them a farm and some land so they could start on their own, but now with that Communists..." Two days afterward all three of them were gone. And you not even could ask, they came in the house and they said, "Well, John or Joe you put your cap and your coat on and you go with us" and that was it.
- PE:** But you think your uncles were taken because they were talking about...?
- HK:** They were talking about that, yah.
- PE:** Talking about doing something on their own and that was dangerous.
- HK:** Yah, and you not even could come like in the office and ask them where they took them or how long – are they coming back? Nothing.
- PE:** Now before the Communists took over was there a lot of problem with like burglary or...?
- HK:** Oh yah, oh yah. There's a lot of Russian were lazy bums you know and stuff like that. When the man folks put the horses in the barn they had two iron on the door, one up and one [lower] so they couldn't get – and they locked that so they couldn't get the horses out. But see that time they took the horses out to the prairie overnight over the weekend, but they had to watch; they had to ride around, ride around so they didn't come and steal the horses, oh yah, there was a lot of them.
- PE:** So Russians would steal and Germans would steal too, everyone would kind of steal huh?
- HK:** Yah, there's a bad one all the time, yah.
- PE:** Was there like police in the village then before the Communists were there too?

- HK:** Well they called it – not the Marshal – but they called something different you know, but they took them up and they looked them up and said, “Don’t do that anymore” and stuff like that “you pay five ruble” and then he’s free again
- PE:** Not like here.
- HK:** Put them in jail or anything, no.
- PE:** Was there even a jail in Strassburg?
- HK:** Yah there is a jail but see the rich people who got robbed and stolen stuff couldn’t say nothing because the Communists said, “That’s just ours just like yours” so they not even had nothing to say, nothing.
- And see like when the Communists took over we had a lot of rich people you know and stuff like that but they took everything what they had. The Communists took it and then when they were done with eating or what and they didn’t work anymore then they had nothing either, see, that’s the way the Communists...
- PE:** So then you were the last one to get the food - get what was left?
- HK:** What was left, yah. And it’s like that you know they said, if you worked in a big – like a vegetable garden then there was cooked [food] for the people who worked there you know, but like old grandmas and grandpas and stuff like that, they didn’t mean nothing to them you know you had to get food for them ready at home so they could eat too and stuff like that.
- PE:** Now I’ve read that in the cities like in Odessa there wasn’t the starvation that there was in the countryside. Did you know that or did you think there was starving all over?
- HK:** See the big cities that’s where all the Communists, the leader will live, so they lived off the rich people. But like outside Strassburg and different towns and everything there was hunger. In 1920, my ma told me (I was born in 1920) my ma told me in 1920-21 was the hungriest year, what they called, of the world, people were just laying outside on the street blown up and stuff like that. There was enough wheat, there was enough everything but the Communists took everything so they couldn’t have anything. They even came and opened your drawers and took the last piece of bread out.
- PE:** Now that was even when you were part of the kolkhoz they took that?
- HK:** Yah, in 1933 that was the biggest hunger. People got so hungry people went out and start picking leaves off the trees off the trees and stuff but then they just blow up. They had wheat in the sheds and everything but couldn’t take it.
- PE:** Did you know people then that starved too?
- HK:** Yah, some of our neighbors and some relatives too.
- PE:** Do you know what happened to letters and packages that were being sent to people in Strassburg from other areas?
- HK:** They never got nothing. There was only one newspaper who came and that was the Communist, the propaganda, but there was nothing and then people who got some letters or packages from Germany or from America they took them away.

- PE:** You guys couldn't send letters out either?
- HK:** No, no. Everything you know had to be the Russian you know, a lot of those older people they not even knew Russian and stuff like that; they could not even go and ask for a meal or get a loaf of bread or what, they not even looked at them.
- PE:** So now you learned Russian in School, right?
- HK:** Yah up to the sixth grade was all German and after that – and if they caught somebody out the street who talked German they put him in jail, you had to...everything Russian.
- PE:** Was that like that too from the time ever since you can remember or was that just later on?
- HK:** No, my ma too said you know in the early – when she was younger too when they talked to each other they whispered in German.
- PE:** I'm curious then, how did you ever learn English? Did you know any English when you came over to America?
- HK:** Well see I was a nut for reading you know, I just loved to read. We get some books you know so I would know real good and then when I came to Germany, well that I knew, but when I came over here and said, well I know Latin you know, English and the radio and I not even went a day to school [to learn English], nothing.
- PE:** So you kind of knew that then when you came over already, from books.
- HK:** Yah, but I always say the worst thing I made, I should went a year to school here; see the spelling is different here like from the Russian and the German and the English, you know, everything is spelled a little different. Now when I write letters I always have to have the dictionary. [Laughter]
- PE:** Helen, do you have any stories that you'd like to share?
- HK:** Yah I'd like to. We had my mother here for a year for vacation and Paul and David, you know the oldest one, they were kind of like you say (A300 Bolshtatty) – how you say that in English...
- PE:** Mischievous or something like that.
- HK:** Yah, and my ma didn't know English and they didn't know German you know, so they were sitting up in the tree and my mother said, "Paul, you go down, you tear your pants, then I have to fix'em." And he said, "In America we don't fix pants, we buy new ones." And then grandma said, "Well, well that's something that you don't see in Germany." And he said, "Well if you don't like it here why don't you go home." [Laughter]
- PE:** [Laughter] He told her huh.
- HK:** [Laughter] He told her, yah. So it's kind of...you know. But she came over here and she could not believe it, she said, "Look at that wide road you have. In Germany they could build trees here and there and then she said to Joe, "You wasted so much land on the highway" [Laughter] and stuff like that you know, she was kind of interesting. So we wanted to talk her in, we said, "Well ma, you can stay with us, you don't have to go back." "No" she said, "you know it's so hard to transplant a old tree."

- PE:** Do you remember your parents telling you any stories about your grandparents or your great grandparents?
- HK:** Well they didn't do that much you know. You had to be obeying and stuff like that; like when there was company coming the kids would shoo in the corner, they didn't had to ask any questions you know, but we listened sometimes and figure it out, but they were pretty good you know. Like I said too with the spanking in school, you know, once in a while we got a little ear twisted and stuff like that but they didn't mean so mean you know like here you cannot touch your kids, you cannot do this and stuff; well you had to obey.
- PE:** Kids knew that then?
- HK:** Yah, um-hum.
- PE:** What were some of the punishments like if a little kid...
- HK:** You had to kneel on corn in the corner. They put corn on the (A331 Hatgatsit), God's corner, and they put corn there and they had to kneel, but with no pants on they just...
- PE:** The kernels?
- HK:** Yah, yah, you had to kneel with the hand up and sometimes it went down a little, "Put your hand up!"  
[Laughter]
- PE:** That was in school or at home too?
- HK:** That was at home, yah.
- PE:** But at school they'd uh....
- HK:** (A336 Katsabach) That was just a corner and it was just like with railings and you could see out and everything but as long as the teacher thought you didn't obey then you had to sit in there. [Laughter]
- PE:** And I'm sure they wouldn't laugh while they were in there.
- HK:** No, no.
- PE:** Ok, we can start talking about a little bit more towards the World War II if you don't mind. In '42, when the Germans came in, was that a big relief to the people in Strasburg?
- HK:** We were waiting for that you know so the German come. Most of what the people wanted was the church. The steeple was down, all the windows were knocked out and it made [into] a show hall and then they said well if Germans coming in they gonna help us so they had their own chaplain with them, so they figured that all out and stuff like that so they helped us. They brought an altar in the church and they cleaned the church and painted it and everything.
- PE:** I imagine the people were very, very happy for that.
- HK:** And it's not just that; seven years from '35 till '42 we were out a priest. Can you imagine how many people died, how many buried, how many got married and everything. So those priests, those chaplains and even Bishop (Klosser?) for three days that's what they did. One day they heard confession and the next they baptized all and the third day they married all; they set them around – I don't know how many

there were and they married them again the right. Then they went out to the graveyard and blessed all the graves; the people who died all those seven years. Like in our graveyard like here too there was no wooden grave, everything iron crosses; even my dad died in '35 but he made his cross before.

**PE:** Was there a priest there when he died too?

**HK:** No, he was the last one to be buried, [by] Fr. Koop, he was the last one to be buried and the next night they took the priest away. See they took the priest away, then they took the teachers away and then they took the doctor or smart people you know. They took them one by one by one, see then we poor people we had no chance.

**PE:** So when the priests finally came in – that the Germans brought in, some of the children were seven years old before they were Baptized and some of the people were married for a while.

**HK:** And another thing like they say we make an act of Contrition and then those priests say we know you went through a lot so much so they have a whole community – like here we go to confession for Christmas something like that – you know you just hold hand and they blessed you and stuff like that.

**PE:** That was for Confession?

**HK:** That was for Confession and for Marriage and for Baptism and everything; like for all those seven years people got married; they made holy water on their own see then the Godmother and the Godfather, they married you; they put two candles on and holy water and then they said I take you so-and-so. That's what the people did and them priests said that was a good job you did, yah.

**PE:** That's good.

**HK:** And we made our – there was no rosaries so you know the barley bread is kind of hard after a while, the flour, so people made rosaries out of them – pray the rosaries, yah.

**PE:** Put a thread through them?

**HK:** Yah, a thread through, yah.

**PE:** Did families get together to pray or was that too dangerous?

**HK:** Well, when the Communists was we couldn't get together you know because you not even could have a holy picture on the wall but later on you know then we had church for three years and then well then that's all.

**PE:** When the priests came in two years was it or three?

**HK:** Well they brought them in in '42, and '43, and '44 that's when we had to leave. But it was such a sad day, I said it rained and snowed, the cats and the dogs were sitting in the entrance and they were meowing, the church bell was ringing and some Russian people came [and said], "Why do you go away." My ma and other people [said], "Well you can come in our houses now." "Well we were such good friends, why you go away." But we had to go away so that's.

**PE:** Now at what point were you married to your husband then if you wouldn't mind talking about that?

- HK:** In January, yah and see when the Germans were in a year, then in '43 they start to drafting, up to my brother, my husbands, relatives, cousins. There was only man life like we say from 45-50, the rest of them they all took.
- PE:** 45-50 years old?
- HK:** Yah.
- PE:** Then the younger ones they took?
- HK:** Yah, the other ones, then the German. See before when the war started the Russian took some of them, but the Russians thought well they didn't need the Germans but then when the Russian got bad, and the Germans came, so they took all those young ones, yah.
- PE:** So the Russians took your brother first and then later on the Germans took your husband?
- HK:** Yah, he come home then and he was home maybe two months and then they mobilized everything.
- PE:** Oh, so your brother came home for a while but then he had to go with the Germans.
- HK:** With the Germans, and my husband too. They took'em all to Poland, the Germans, that's where they trained them you know and never came home, none of 'em.
- PE:** Now did the people in Strassburg know what the German Nazi forces were doing to people in the concentration camps?
- HK:** No, no, no we didn't know it. And even if we knew we thought that's impossible, that they can't do that. But see when we went away and then we lived in Poland; well we were two months and twelve days on the road, well there was no more shoes no nothing, but you could not believe that, how can Hitler or the German people [be] that rough.
- PE:** Was there rumors then about that kind of?
- HK:** Well the people who took us in from Germany, they told us all what had happened, what Hitler did to them and stuff like that so we knew it you know.
- PE:** Oh, the people who took you in when you made it to Germany.
- HK:** Yah, in Germany.
- PE:** Well, that's a question I was going to ask you. In a previous interview you talked all about it and you don't have to go into all the detail you did there, but could you tell us anything more that you can recall about your journey out of Strassburg to Franzfeld you said and then from there you crossed the Dnieper river to Romania, to Hungary...
- HK:** Yah, to Hungary and then to Poland.
- PE:** Now it was at Hungary where the German soldiers said you're on your own and that there's a train that will take you...
- HK:** Yah, because there was no – the horses they were all died, we walked.
- PE:** The horses were dead already.

- HK:** The horse were dead and then they said in five days there comes and train and they take you to Poland and it took us five days; they were just cattle trucks, they were kind of cramped. And then when we came to Poland they put us in a...it's almost like a concentration camp; first they deloused us and disinfect us and whatever you know and uh...
- PE:** Did you feel extra scared at that point when the Germans said that you're on your own? Did you feel somewhat safe when you were with the soldiers?
- HK:** Yah, we were, but they didn't know what to do either. There was no food. And the people like we come to Hague or to Zeeland they not even let you get water from the well or nothing.
- PE:** They wanted to keep it – they needed it for themselves.
- HK:** For themselves and stuff and it was...it was terrible.
- PE:** Going back just a little bit, when the Germans came into Strassburg and things were back to normal, were those good years?
- HK:** Well see when they came in and then they built like – then they appointed a mayor for...that we had to [do]... and the land you know we didn't know whose got who and whose got what and then they give you so many acres you know you could start your plowing. But you had no horses, you had nothing, you not even could do that [plow], yah, so.
- PE:** When you were in Poland you said you worked in some factories there for the Germans.
- HK:** Yah, for the German army – sewing clothes. Yah, that's what we did.
- PE:** Then on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1945, that was the day when the Germans came and told you you had to leave.
- HK:** Germans came and knocked on the door and said, "Get everything what you have together, the Russians are twenty-five kilometer behind you. But we cannot help you, there's no horses, there's no cars." And they walked with us the soldiers, but you could hear cannonball and everything, ahh it was terr...and cold, cold; when you blow up in the air icicle came down, that cold it was.
- PE:** If you don't mind be asking or if you feel comfortable talking, what was going through your mind and heart during that time? Did you think you were ever going to get to safety when they were behind you?
- HK:** Well, we thought...everybody said we got to stick together and stuff like that, but people come from all kinds of corner, not just German; the Poland and the Czech and everything, but...there was nothing there you come into those little villages and they were empty already; those people were gone already and we thought how do we make it to Germany you know and they said its well...I don't know how many kilometers they said, but it took us sixteen days to go to Germany. And we came to Germany and Germany was bombed out; they had nothing themselves you know; a person could not believe it you know.
- PE:** Now when you came to these little villages on your journey, was there anything there that you could utilize, like supplies or food that you could...?
- HK:** There was cats and dogs running around and stuff but no food. Once in a while they said well there's a train coming and he give some packages food but the train never made it. We always starved you know, the feet were swollen just like you know.

**PE:** In January that would have been?

**HK:** Yah, and that was cold at forty-five below.

**PE:** Did some people freeze their feet and stuff like that?

**HK:** Oh yah and not just that, every once in a while you see a body lay on the side, a blanket covered up; and we just walk by.

**[End Side A]**

**PE:** Now Helen, when you finally came into Germany and you realized that they were bombed too by the Americans, Russians, and so on, what was your attitude towards the Americans at that time, or towards those forces?

**HK:** See what we found out what those German people went through then we thought maybe it's good they came and get rid of Hitler and all that stuff you know. But all those people who left home, they had no home and the Germans said, "Well we cannot take you up, we have nothing." We were like a homeless people, you have no country, you're nothing.

**PE:** Displaced people right.

**HK:** Displaced people, yah.

**PE:** Did that make you feel really sad too because you never...you didn't have a home?

**HK:** Right. We didn't know where to we belong. Like you go, I don't know what...like they say they give you so much money for a pair of shoes, a coat or a pair, or a shirt of whatever it is, but what those people, those farmers, didn't have much either and their money was gone. They changed our money, they got nothing for their money too, they had to all start all over again.

**PE:** That must have been a very good family then to take you in.

**HK:** Oh yah, they were good, they were good those people. I said too, I said I never forget them as far as...and they took a lot of our side in but they couldn't take everybody in either you know, and like they had a law you know when they were butchering they had to butcher at night you know they had to be careful so nobody reports them, you only can have so much.

**PE:** Was that a Christian family then that took you in?

**HK:** Yah, they were Lutheran people, but I said, Peter, I don't know like in Germany the churches – each family had their pew, they paid for that and stuff like that and we had about seven miles walk to a Catholic church, but the town Hermatausen that was Lutheran, but we walked to that Catholic church and I don't care, maybe God seen it too, we had to stand on the aisle even if the pew is half empty because that was their bench and that was it. So you knew you were a outsider, you knew you were a outsider.

**PE:** Was there a number of people then that were in your situation that...?

- HK:** Oh yah, oh yah, there was a lot of them there, my two sisters they worked for people and they said - they had horses, they could give us a horse and a wagon, "No, the horses have to rest." So we had to walk, but we had to work next Monday too again.
- PE:** So every Sunday you walked that seven miles to church.
- HK:** Seven mile to church, yah, m-hm.
- PE:** That was a good sacrifice for God, huh.
- HK:** Yah, yah it was.
- PE:** What would you do then during that time you were in Germany like on Sunday afternoon, did you have to work then too or I'm sure they gave you the day off.
- HK:** They gave you off, yah, yah. Well, if they need you if they had company or what and fix supper or what, they ask you nicely you know. Then if we had nothing to do we went out for a walk, in Germany they always go walking so much out in...it was nice you know.
- PE:** Did the family that you were with, did they have a family too? Like kids and...
- HK:** Their son, their only son got killed in Russia and the daughter got the farm then. So I still get Christmas cards and write to them too, yah, m-hm.
- PE:** At that same farmyard they're still farming there, huh?
- HK:** Yah, yah, m-hm.
- PE:** So it's the daughter that's living on the farm right now, the parents are passed on.
- HK:** Yah and when I figured out to come to America then Grandma, Grandma Lena said, "No, Helen, what do you want to do in America, they gonna kidnap kids and sell them kids, the Indians." So I said, "Well, I got to make a different, you know, different start you know."
- PE:** What was that name again, you said krama?
- HK:** Gra-ndma.
- PE:** [I still wasn't sure what she had said at the time] That was their names or...
- HK:** You mean the lady? Lena was her first name, but she said, [B43 german phrase] They kidnapping the kindle, the Indians, [Laughter] they hear them stories and stuff like that.
- PE:** At this time too Marie was growing up with you.
- HK:** Yah, she was six, yah.
- PE:** One question I was gonna ask – from your previous interview you mentioned that you and your mother had plans to go find your aunt Josefa, but the bombs came, did you ever think about continuing with that plan after you came to that farm or were you happy there and satisfied?
- HK:** We were happy there, but my mother went once to visit her [aunt Josefa], but she was older than my ma and then later on she died. She had one daughter and they lived in Byan, you know in Germany.

- PE:** How did they ever get into contact with her?
- HK:** My ma knew where she lived, before, see.
- PE:** So she went to visit her sometimes?
- HK:** Yah, m-m. But that was luck too because otherwise I said you know the front train was bombed and the back, and the middle we were sitting and didn't get hurt at all.
- PE:** Wow, hmm.
- HK:** Maybe that had to be like that, I think so too, you know, I don't know.
- PE:** Maybe you wouldn't have found that farmer otherwise, you would have went to your aunt's. Now you said that that family accepted you, but other Germans in general didn't except you because you were Russians and came to Germany.
- HK:** Yah, they called us Russian you know and they wouldn't – and see the worst thing was when we were [there] two- three years and then some of the [German] boys, one went with my sister Lydia and the other one with Bertha too, and they said, "They don't have no [B63 arpda]." They didn't think they could get anything you know.
- PE:** Oh, like when you get married.
- HK:** Get married you give you something. "They have no arpda," you know and them boys said, "That doesn't matter, we're going to get married to them anyway." And so they both got married to them German boys, yah, and they did good.
- PE:** That's good.
- HK:** Yah. They didn't get nothing; we couldn't give them nothing, you know, ma could give them nothing. "They get no arpda," you know. [Laughter]
- PE:** So one of the reasons why you couldn't have that pew in church too was because – was it only because of the money or was it because you were outsiders?
- HK:** Outsiders, outsiders, yah.
- PE:** Did this farm family ever treat you like that?
- HK:** No, no, they were good. They were so good with us, you know. I don't know but you always have to think, you're still a outsider, you know. Like when I clean the house once in a while there was twenty marks laying here and [later] there was another money laying here and I always said, "Grandma, here I found that money." "Oh, must be forget it." But that was a test.
- PE:** Oh, I see, they tested you.
- HK:** They checked, yah.

No, they were real good those people. They treated us right, but in 'all over,' the country, you know, didn't accept us, no matter what, you know. But then later on I know my one sister she worked for the

build the airplane and the other one too she was a midwife and stuff like that, but they had to work themselves up themselves you know.

- PE:** It was many years since your ancestors were first in Germany, you said they were in Alsace-Lorraine. That was your great-great-or great grandfather. You wouldn't remember what year that was when your great grandfather came?
- HK:** No, I don't. That I don't, you know. I just remember you know when pa said you know his dad told him you know and when great grandpa came in to Russia and there what they said when they drove out in the field they turned around right away and they made the horses and the wagons stay that ways otherwise they wouldn't get lost, that high, everything was grown with weeds and stuff.
- PE:** Where at, now?
- HK:** In Russian – in Ukraine, by Strassburg, yah.
- PE:** Oh, ok, because there was no houses or anything yet.
- HK:** There was nothing built, there was nothing there, but then they turned around so the horses and the wagon go like that and they worked the weeds and cut and stuff like that, and they plowed with wooden shares, wooden plows, yah, m-m.
- PE:** When you got those care packages from Joseph, did you get a number of those packages from them before the letter came that asked if someone wanted to come over here?
- HK:** Well see those packages came, like Msgr. Aberle and Msgr. Lauinger and Msgr. Neibler they got this group of people together and they said well every month each one is suppose to donate twenty five dollars and they buy rice and sugar and needle and all that stuff and then just send it over and then over there the Catholic church found a family who was in need and stuff and they divide it. And this package what we got put the address in a shirt inside and that's how we get to know each other. So we wrote back you know and after awhile – see they had no children Joe and Catherine, and then they thought well would you mind come over and stuff like that. It took two years till I made my mind up but I still you know am glad I did it.
- PE:** Glad you came, huh. Do you ever wonder – I suppose you don't wonder too much now – but at the time wondered what your life would be like if you decided not to come over?
- HK:** But you know I said too so many times there's hard times and sad times and good times but in Germany I would be a single person maybe for the rest of my life and raised Marie, she would be out on her own and who do I belong? Here at least I have a family and I said too, I said I could stayed in Germany too, but its just would be such a hard start.
- PE:** So you knew about the opportunities available here then?
- HK:** Yeah, but you know I was homesick too, you know sometimes thought I was going to walk home, but where is home? Monsignor Neibler said, "I was homesick too when I come over here, that's gonna get better." So...[laughter]
- PE:** Oh, he came over too.

- HK:** He was from Germany too, Msgr., yah. And he was here 38 years and he said don't feel bad if they laugh when you talk English, I still make mistakes and I've been here 38 years already," he says, [Laughter]. But I know when I hear some people talk, I think I talk better than they do.
- PE:** Maybe it kind of helps you remember about your past too when you talk the way you used too.
- HK:** Yah, right.
- PE:** Did the people from this community make you feel welcome?
- HK:** Yah, but [B128 german word] what is it, ah...trying to find out everything you know, and there was these people living across the street. Lipp, Mike Lipp and he was an older man, but he come over lots of time and he said, "You're a Catholic [B131 german phrase, da bish kadolish,] you know he said. And I said, "yah" and he said, "In Russia did they have two epistle too in the church." See in the early days there was two..
- PE:** readings?
- HK:** Reading, one over here and one before the church went out and he says, "Yah, now I know you're kadolish." [Laughter]
- PE:** Kadolish? What's that?
- HK:** Catholic. He thought maybe I wasn't and I just pretend and he said, "Now I know da bish Kadolish." [Laughter]. And there was a couple of women in town here, older ones you know. They said they were the leaders like the Altar's society and everything and then they came up once, Joe and Catherine went someplace, I not even know, and they said, "Can we come in." I said, "Yes," Yah, and can I say it in German now, it sounds good.
- PE:** Go ahead.
- HK:** Then they said, "[B143 german phrase] [laughter] Yah, I had my hair permanent and everything, "Yah" I said, "I'm a [B144 german phrase]. I'm a lady just like you are. [Laughter]
- PE:** They didn't have the hair the same way you did.
- HK:** No, no. But I mean it's kind of funny people getting thinking you know why did she came all over here, and stuff like that.
- PE:** Did you ever meet other people who came from Germany that were from Russia originally over here in this area?
- HK:** No, nobody, nobody. You know when we came to New York, and then well they give you your ticket where you gonna go and you get a tape, "North Dakota" and this one lady said (she went to Chicago) she said, "Oh my God," but she said it in German, "you go to North Dakota, oh my God." I didn't know what's what and then when I came and see all that snow and then I said oh that's why that lady said oh my God. [Laughter]
- PE:** She knew it was cold and snow up there.
- HK:** Yah, snow up there you know, yah.

- PE:** Did you know that there was a town by the name of Strasburg near Hague before you came here?
- HK:** Yah, Joe wrote, he wrote [that] there's a lot – and when I came a lot of Strasburg people came down and they wanted to know if you know uncle John, uncle Carl, uncle Joe and yah I knew a lot of them, but see I knew Msgr. Aberle's mother.
- PE:** Oh...over in Germany then?
- HK:** No in Russia, in Russia, yah. And when I came then he came and he wanted to know – see all his brothers got to the concentration camp, he knew that before. But I knew his mother real good.
- PE:** Msgr. Aberle was one of them from Strassburg too who...
- HK:** ...who came over here. Well see his parents sent him over to study history, not history – what you call it now?
- PE:** Theology?
- HK:** No, bank and business, something like that, and then when he was [here] a year he changed his mind and he wanted to become a priest and that's what he was, yah. And see he came to Zeeland there, well see his mother had an aunt in there, and see that's where he came over here so.
- PE:** That's all the questions I had written down here but is there anything else that you'd wish to share about your life in Russia or your coming over to America or your life in America?
- HK:** Well, Peter, I always say like the older people used to say you know not every country, government is right, you cannot please everybody and I said when we came over here we came to New York and everybody, people kneeled down and they cried and they kissed the ground and I said and I wouldn't go back, they could give me whole Germany or whole Russia, anymore. I said, but people have to accept stuff like that too you know, you cannot deal with everybody you know and sure there is trouble in Germany, there is trouble in England, well America cannot fix everything either you know, but I would not go back for anything in the world you know.
- PE:** That's good.
- HK:** Yah.
- PE:** Your memories, just a little bit more about your childhood I guess if you don't mind me asking? Were you one of the younger sisters?
- HK:** No I was the oldest and then was my brother, we were just a year apart, and then there was Lydia and Bertha, yah.
- PE:** So you played when you were younger. Who did you play – did you play with all your siblings or?
- HK:** No we had different friends, yah, different you know, you got your own club you know and you know who you get along with and stuff like that or do something to get them back [laughter] or something like that you know.
- PE:** You mentioned that you'd play like ball and stuff like that in school, but what kind of things would you do outside of school? Could you get together with your friends outside of school?

- HK:** Oh yah, oh yah, hm-mm. Then we'd get together and have a little party. Like we'd have thanksgiving, in Germany you say, [B191 german word] and then when the fruit and everything is done and then there was a big...three days party you know, you could dance and have food and stuff like that.
- PE:** But like you say when you got home from school, did you have to do chores right away?
- HK:** Yah, we had to do chores, and in Russia too you know. Yah, the yard had to be swept you know and everything clean.
- PE:** Leaves raked off
- HK:** Leaves raked, and another thing [was] we have to go and get the fire wood and stuff like that and the manure, I don't know how you say it in English, but they pressed it down with some and then they had to cut it and then put it in a big pile and then in the winter you put some in and stick it in the oven and that was our...
- PE:** That's how it burned, huh. Did one of those blocks last a while?
- HK:** Oh yah, yah, and then they had a bakofen see and then the bottom was the fire and in the top you baked your bread and baked popcorn and everything. [Laughter]
- PE:** So when you had school was there nine months of school like we have in America or...?
- HK:** Right, yah, right three months off, right uh-huh.
- PE:** What were some of the things like...at nighttime did you do a lot of reading?
- HK:** That I have to tell you another story. I just loved to read. When I got books, and at that time you have the kerosene lamp, but you only have so much for a month, and I then I said, "just one more page mom, just one more page." "Turn it off!" "one more page" and I was sitting and reading and the lamp [was there] and my mom took her shoe off and she hit it too me [Laughter] and then the kerosene lamp fell and I said, "now look what you did and now the lame and everything is gone, and I still had my book. [Laughter]
- PE:** You really wanted to read that book, huh.
- HK:** [Laughter] Yah, "one more page," I said, "one more page."
- PE:** Were your brothers and sisters like that too. Did they like to read?
- HK:** Joseph not, when he had to go to school he put his books behind the fence and he went out with the guys out the horses, so he wasn't much [for reading], but the girls were ok.
- PE:** If you could explain to me again, when did you start getting into contact with English books, where you would learn English?
- HK:** Well see in Russia there was a library you know you could check out books. But you have to check those books out, but you couldn't check out something against the country you know.
- PE:** So you would check out some English books then and try reading on your own.

- HK:** Yah, hm-hm. Oh I love to read. Now days too I just read, I just love to read. Well I think if you read you educate yourself. Yah, I know like even when you read a book and then you go over it and say well that should be like that or that was like that and then you educate yourself. All my kids they all love to read, they all read, yah.
- PE:** Now the radio, when were you able to listen to that?
- HK:** When I came over here.
- PE:** Just when you came over here?
- HK:** Yah.
- PE:** Did you enjoy that more than the TV when you first came over or did you have a TV?
- HK:** At that time we didn't have no TV but a radio, then and a station came in from Yankton, SD you know and there was stuff like that and then later on when the kids – Joe bought a TV, I remember Philco or whatever it was you know.
- PE:** Did you enjoy the Lawrence Wellk show?
- HK:** Yah, hm-hm. And can you imagine he was over 80 years old and he still had that German accent, you know, [Laughter]
- PE:** Well that was – Thank you very much Helen for sharing with us and doing this interview.
- HK:** You're welcome, you're welcome. If I remember something or you want to know something just give me a call. I love to talk about it. Sometimes I think it is even good if people know what a person went through and stuff like that. I have to tell you this when I got arthritis so bad on my knee I had a doctor's appointment and Dr. Groovy said, "What brought that on with your knees." I said, "Don't you know, mileage," I thought he fell off the chair, he laughed so... yah I said "that's mileage." Can you imagine you walked two months and a half, just walked and walked and walked. Stood beside the wagon and fell asleep and the next day you going again.
- PE:** Now was there anyone that was able to jump on the wagon and ride or was that just for...?
- HK:** You couldn't. That was just for we had little clothes and the horses they not even could pull the wagon anymore you know and then there was mud like that you know. Do you remember "Wagon Train" that movie, there you go that's the same thing, that's the same thing.
- PE:** And the older people had to kinda walk too or did they...?
- HK:** Well some grandmas and grandpas were sitting up there and we sometimes got stuck and we had to push the wagon out and then we had no more feed for the horses. My sisters had such a beautiful scarf, she went in town and she traded up for a sack of oats for the horse, yah, it doesn't last for more than two days and then. The horse had no more hoove, nothing, it was just terrible.
- PE:** So by the time you were going to Germany then there was no horses or anything?
- HK:** No, nothing, they were laying beside the road and I said there were so many people just beside the road and being buried and stuff like that.

- PE:** No you said from Poland when you walked to Germany there was people from all over like Czechs...
- HK:** From all over, there was Czechs and Poles and Russian and German soldier, they even tore their clothes off and put lady's clothes on sometimes, and we always said, "didn't you hear it, 25 mile, the Russian 25 mile behind you."
- PE:** Did you walk as a big group then?
- HK:** Yah, groups, people got stuck together.
- PE:** How big would you say the groups would be?
- HK:** Oh...maybe 25-30 people you know and that's when we lost one of my sisters. She got mixed up with the wrong group and then finally three days afterwards we found her again.
- PE:** Were the groups close to each other while they were walking?
- HK:** Yah, yah. They helped out each other. They helped out each other, yah. And then they said people are going to take you in the train and the train came, got the cars there and the engine drove away. They never even picked the people up.
- PE:** Is there anything else you'd like to share about that?
- HK:** No, I think that's ok. I'm glad you came
- PE:** I'm glad you were able to do this. This will conclude our interview [with Mrs. Helen Krumm] on January 7<sup>th</sup> 2003 in Hague, ND.