

Interview with William Kretschmar (WK)

Conducted by Orion A. Rudolph (OR)

November 22, 2010

Ashley, North Dakota

Transcription by Orion A. Rudolph

Edited and Proofread by Linda M. Haag

Introductory Remarks

OR: Today is 11-22-2010. I am Orion A. Rudolph. It is a pleasure to conduct this interview for the Dakota Memories Oral History Project in Ashley, ND.

Introductory Questions

OR: Can you please state your full name?

WK: William Edward Kretschmar.

OR: When and where were you born?

WK: Aug. 21, 1933 in St Paul, MN.

OR: Have you ever heard an interesting story about your birth? If so, please share it with us.

WK: I was born by cesarean section, that is all I really know.

OR: Was a midwife or doctor present? Please elaborate on this.

WK: It was in a hospital in St. Paul, MN, a doctor was present.

Environment

OR: What was it like growing up on the plains?

WK: Well I grew up in Venturia, ND a small town in McIntosh County. There probably between 250-300 people living there when I was a small boy in the 1930's- 1940's. Ah... I thought growing up was fine right there. I had a good time. I had friends in Venturia, we played kitten ball, baseball, we had other childhood games, hid-n-seek, kick the can and what have you.

OR: What did you find beautiful and/or enjoyable about growing up on the plains?

WK: I thought it was a good place to grow up. It was ahhh.. not always the easiest of lives we all had our chores to do at home, and ahhh... but I had a good set of parents that took good care of me and saw to it that I got a good education. And ahh... it worked out really well for me.

OR: What did you find bleak and/or unpleasant about growing up on the plains?

WK: Maybe the winters were kind of tough. I always enjoyed playing out in the winter when I was a small boy. As I grew older I find that I don't like winters quite as well, but it's part of living here in ND, and I

remember another thing when I was a small boy in the 1930's, we had really bad dust storms sometimes with strong winds and dust blowing, I didn't like that very well.

OR: Please describe a typical fall.

WK: Fall was a good time, my dad and my uncles loved to hunt. We hunted pheasants and waterfowl. And I could tag along and be with them and be out in the country side along side them finding the birds and doing things as we went along hunting.

OR: What were summers like?

WK: Sometimes the summers were pretty hot, but that was always a good time, because there was no school, and we had a little more time for baseball or other activities that we wanted to do.

OR: Also can you describe a typical Spring.

WK: Springs were always kind a nice, there usually was quite a bit of water running as the snow melted, ahh.. I recall as quite a small boy one time; I was punished severely for getting pretty muddy in this spring run-off.

OR: What was your favorite season? Why?

WK: I think fall the end of summer and fall was my favorite season, because we had good things to eat out of our garden and then hunting season was coming, and school began, I was always glad to go back to school in the fall.

Family: Grandparents on the fathers side

OR: Please tell me about your grandparents.

WK: My Grandparents on my father's side were named Paul T. Kretschmar and Katharina Kretschmar his wife. I knew both of them. My grandfather passed away in 1941 when I was about 8 years old. My grandmother lived until 1975 just beyond her 100th birthday, so I new her very very well. Both of them were find people. My Grandfather ahh.. had moved to Venturia from Ashley in 1912 when he purchased part of the bank in Venturia. And then later on he purchased all the rest of the bank and so he had, was the owner of the bank in Venturia, ahh...right up until his death. And my father continued working in the bank even after that for some time.

My grandmother had come to McIntosh county from South Russia in about 1870....1885. And as a girl about 8, 9, or 10 years old. And she grew up in McIntosh County, worked at various places and ladies in Ashley and Ellendale too. And after she was married they lived in here Ashley and then in Venturia. And ah... she was a hard worker around the house, she was mainly, ahh..I would describe her as a housewife, ahh..actually the heart of the home there. She milked a couple of cows, always had a big garden, and ah....worked up until she was well into her 90's, I can remember going over to see her in her kitchen when she was in her 90's, and it was getting a little difficult for her to walk, and she called to me, she said to me, Billy, if I could just work like when I was 70. And ah... she really worked hard all her life. I told one of my uncles, if grandma has to leave her kitchen and she won't be long in this world, and as it turned out she lived about 6 months after she had to leave her kitchen.

OR: Did they ever share with you any stories about Russia, their voyage to the US, or their journey to across the US to the Great Plains?

WK: My grandmother didn't ever say too much. Her daughter, my aunt Mary, always wanted her to tell her things, but she would never say much about it. She (Mary) said, she remembers kind a being sick in the ocean crossing. But her mother would take care of her there during the ocean crossing. Then they came to ahh....McIntosh Co. eventually. My grandfather was born in NY City, he was... he...his ancestors came directly from Germany. And then he ah...had relatives. He grew up for while in Philidelphia, then he came out here into the Dakotas when he was probably almost 20 years old, high teenager. Because he was old enough to homestead here in McIntosh Co. as both he and his mother did when they came out here.

OR: Where did they live when you were growing up?

WK: They lived across, they lived in Venturia, ND, across the street from my parents house where I lived. And that house is standing there, it isn't occupied anymore, it is used maybe for.... by the person who owns the property now for storage.

OR: What did they do for a living when you were growing up?

WK: My grandfather was in the bank, and my grand mother worked at home, had a big garden, and did many many things. She was kind of ah... in those days ahh... we call it today part of the welfare system. I know poor neighbors would come to her and she would give them ahh... pail of potatoes, or maybe a gallon of milk or something that would help them a lot, ah... she never received any compensation for those things that I know. She was always good to her neighbors.

OR: How often did you visit with your grandparents?

WK: I didn't visit I was with my grandparents some as a small boy. I didn't really visit too much with my grandfather. He was....you know, in my judgment an elderly man, and I didn't say too much about him. One of the stories they used to tell about it when I was about 3-4 years old, I loved to go over to see my grandparents, and my grandfather would be playing solitary at the dinning room table, and he would let me sit on his lap and turn the cards. And I loved to do that. And one time I went over there and my grandfather wasn't home, but there was a minister visiting my grandmother. And I'd go in and I said, grandma, I want to play with the cards, "we have no cards, grandmother said." And I said, oh yes grandma, there they are in the cupboard, I can see them...oh no, no, we have no cards. Well that day I didn't get to play with the cards. But that was one of the incidents they told me about.

OR: Were your parents religious?

WK: My parents...or my mother was Catholic came from Minnesota, my father was grown up in the Lutheran Church. But when...I ...my recollection of it, he never went to the Lutheran Church, he faithfully took my mother to the Catholic Church. But he really wasn't religious himself. Later in life he...?... about the time, while before my mother passed away he did join the Catholic Church, my father did.

OR: How many children did they have?

WK: My parents just had myself, one child.

OR: Were there any other relatives of the older generations in your family (great-uncles and aunts) that you were close to?

WK: I remember my grandmother's brothers and sisters that lived out on the farm NW of Venturia where that family homesteaded in the 1880's. There were two sisters and two brothers who never married. And they lived out there on the farm. Actually they lived in a sod house. That was one of the sod houses that I remember playing in as a small boy. And actually they tell me, it was the sod house in which I played was their second sod house. The first one they had built?????

OR: Is there anything else you would like to add about your grandparents or others from their generation?

WK: I think ah...thee ah... the members my dad's family, he had two brothers and one sister, they were two uncles and one aunt and they were all very nice persons to me and I especially my aunt Mary was a school teacher over in Venturia for a while...didn't taught me, but I knew her all the rest of her life, and she was always very very good to me. My two uncles, one in Venturia and one in Eureka, SD, and they were also always very good and helpful to me as I grew up and was in college.

Family: Grandparents on the mothers side

OR: Please tell me about your grandparents.

WK: My grand parents were ahh... natives of Minnesota. My mother grew up in Litchfield, MN. Her father was a lawyer in Litchfield. His name was Edward Peterson, my grandmother was Jenney Peterson. Both of them were deceased before I was born.

OR: Did your grandparents come over from Russia?

WK: No they did not. My grandfather came from Sweden. My grandmother was born in Minn. somewhere.

OR: Where did they live when you were growing up?

WK: Well.... they were deceased.....

Extended Family -- Uncles, Aunts, Cousins, etc.

OR: Please tell me about your uncles and aunts.

WK: On my father's side I had two uncles and one aunt. We mentioned briefly before. But they were good influences in my life, especially my aunt Mary who was a almost pioneer school teacher here in McIntosh Co. And then ah...for many years she lived with her mother in Venturia, with my grandmother. I had two uncles one lived in Venturia, ND and ran a lumber mill, and he lived just across the street, I knew him very, very well. And another uncle lived in Eureka, SD he was a lawyer down there, he influenced me to become a lawyer also.

OR: How often did they visit?

WK: Well, my uncle across the street, they were together quite a bit. My dad and he were partners in business so they worked together all the time. My uncle from Eureka would come up to visit his parents every once in a while. My dad would go down there and I would go along with him sometimes to see them in Eureka, S D, which is only about 20 miles away from Venturia.

OR: Who was your favorite aunt/uncle?

WK: My favorite aunt was certainly my aunt Mary. I would say both my uncles were my favorites too.

OR: Please tell me about your cousins. How often did you see them?

WK: I saw, quite often, I had cousins in Venturia, and I'd see them very, very often. Some cousins in Eureka, SD and would see them on occasion. And ah... and over the years I'd see them quite a bit. Quite a few of them have now passed on, and there still are some I don't see them as often today as when I was younger, and maybe I should.

OR: Who was your favorite cousin

WK: I think my favorite cousin was my cousin Paul. He was ah...about was about 3 or 4 years older than I was. I looked up to him, he was a good basketball player, I inherited bicycles from him, and he loved to hunt, we both loved to hunt and so we got along real fine.

OR: Please tell me about any large family gatherings. How did the families stay in touch with each other and so on?

WK: I can remember the holiday season, we'd have thanksgiving dinners together and Christmas dinners together, and those times there'd be most of the family together, as the children grew up, some went away, but there was a lot of family gatherings during the holiday seasons.

OR: Is there anything else you would like to share about your extended family members?

WK: They all ah...did well by me, I enjoyed all of them, ah... that is not to say that we might not have had arguments once in awhile, or had rivalries in athletic teams and different sorts, but generally, as a general rule we were always good and close.

Parents -- Father

OR: Please tell us about your father. Where and when was he born?

WK: He was born in Ashley, ND on July 1st 1900.

OR: How did your father express his emotions, such as fear, love, and anger?

WK: He expressed them, not, he didn't express too much, he was a quite man, and ah... in some ways I was kind of scared of him, but he, I loved him and he loved me, I'm sure...he he.....ah provided a good family for my mother and me that is for sure.

OR: Describe your relationship with your father. What was his profession? How did your father cope during hard times?

WK: My father ran the bank in Venturia when I was a small boy, as I was growing up, and during the 1930's the bank had some rough times because of the drought years here in this area of ND, but he coped with that. He and my uncle came through those times and their businesses in Venturia

OR: When, where, and how did your father die?

WK: My father ah...contracted Alzheimer's disease, although they didn't kind a call it that then yet. For the last 9 years of his life he was confined in nursing homes and so forth. He died ah...of Alzheimer's disease in 1983 in Ellendale, ND.

Parents -- Mother

OR: Please tell us about your mother. Where and when was she born?

WK: She was born in Litchfield, MN, June the 3rd 1896

OR: How did she express her emotions, such as fear, love, and anger?

WK: Oh she would talk about-them, she was Irish, and so she expressed her, oh! by her actions and by her language and ah... ah...by her expressions too.

OR: Describe your relationship with your mother.

WK: We were very close that's for sure, she ah...ah... taught me, I tell people today, I was home schooled by my mother, but I had to go to the public school too.

OR: What was her profession?

WK: She was a teacher.

OR: How did she cope during hard times?

WK: Well, she was with my father and they kind a got through them together.

OR: When, where, and how did she die?

WK: She died in Rochester, MN of ah...after surgery for cancer. Death was of cancer.

Parents -- Father & Mother

OR: How many children did they have?

WK: One

OR: Who was the strict parent -- your mother or father?

WK: My father.

OR: How would they discipline you?

WK: When I was a very small boy, I would be at times spanked, on the rear end, with a ruler. I was also, ah... as I grew...got older I was punished by being confined to our yard or to some place for a period of time, that I couldn't get out to be with my friends. That was punishment for being mean that's for sure.

OR: Who influenced your life more -- your mother or your father?

WK: I'd say it's about equal.

OR: How did your parents meet?

WK: They met at a TB sanatorium in Minnesota.

OR: How long were they married?

WK: They were married in 1932 and my mother died in '69, and my father in '83.

OR: Please describe their marriage.

WK: I thought it was.....well, it was marriages as they were in those days, people lived together even...and they settled their differences and got along. They loved each other very much.

OR: What types of things did your parents do for pastimes?

WK: Oh they loved to play cards, at times they went to movies quite a bit, other times they would ah.....when I was in college, they went South for several years and lived in Texas and Florida for some winters a while, but would come back in the summer time, you know.

OR: Were your parents involved in politics when you were a child?

WK: No, they were not.

OR: Do you have anything else you would like to add about your parents?

WK: I do not believe so.

Only Child

OR: Please tell us what it was like growing up an only child?

WK: I think it was typical of other kids in town, ah...I had to obey my parents, I had to go to school, I had chores to do at home, ah...if I got out of line, I was ah....punished.

OR: Why didn't your parents have anymore children?

WK: My mother was not in good health, and I think that was probably the reason.

OR: Did you want a brother or sister?

WK: No, I did not.

OR: Is there anything else you would like to add about growing up as an only child?

WK: ahnnnn..... other then that it is a good way to grow up I guess.

Play

OR: What type of activities did you partake in for fun, inside or outside?

WK: We played a lot outside, and there would be hid-n-seek or games that you chase each other, pum-pum pull away, ah....different ones that we kind of invent; and as I got older then we got into baseball and things like that, and we got to high school we played basketball and things like that. But ah...indoor games we played cards, I know we played monopoly a lot, even in the summer times in a tent. But ah.....so we had all kinds of games to play as children.

OR: How did the weather influence the games/activities you played?

- WK:** Well, it was always easier in the summer when the weather was nicer. In the winter we would do indoor things, and...there were quite a few that we could do.
- OR:** Do you remember playing any games/activities that your parents/grandparents learned to play while they were living in Russia?
- WK:** No.
- OR:** What type of toys did you play with as a child?
- WK:** Oh...I had trucks, and ah...I remember having little farm animals, and farm things to play with....and ah...well, balls and things like that. And just I suppose typical gift...kids....toys that kids would play with.
- OR:** Were these toys store-bought or homemade?
- WK:** Mostly store bought.
- OR:** Do you still have any of your childhood toys?
- WK:** No, I do not.
- OR:** Who did you play with?
- WK:** I played with the kids that were our neighbors, and most of the kids in town. We used to have junior high kids, there were enough boys. We had baseball teams East and West. We divided the main street in Venturia. If you were west of there, you were on a team, if you were east of there you were on a team. We had a couple of teams going. That is how we played. It worked out pretty well.
- OR:** Did your mother and father play with you?
- WK:** Ah.....not those kinds of games, but we played lots of cards together.
- OR:** Where was your favorite place to play?
- WK:** I think the baseball diamond, or ball diamond.
- OR:** Did you ever play with the farm animals?
- WK:** With real ones??? No... I didn't live on a farm. I played much as a little boy with toy farm animals.
- OR:** Did you go hunting as a child?
- WK:** I would go with my father, I was. Ah....oh I suppose 7 or 8 years old before I did that.
- OR:** Did you go trapping as a child?
- WK:** ah....in high school I did some trapping, not below high school.
- OR:** Did you go fishing as a child?
- WK:** When Hoskins Lake got some water in it, and then we fished...we kids, we kids would go over there and fish some, catch a few bullheads, that's all that was in there then.
- OR:** Did you have any favorite rhymes or sayings? Can you please share them with us?

WK: Well we always had to learn some poems in school. I don't remember all of them all the time. I kind of remember... "Under the spreading chestnut tree the village smith man stands, the smith mighty man is he, with large and sandy hands"... can't go much further than that anymore.

OR: Please tell me about any superstitions or scary stories you grew up with?

WK: There weren't too many of those, we weren't too superstitious.

OR: What were your favorite songs as a child?

WK: Oh... I think Christmas carols and things like that, patriotic songs.

OR: Did anyone in your family sing or play musical instruments?

WK: My mother played the piano...

WK: Oh yes I was, I played in the high school band, that was about the extend of my musical experiences.

OR: Did you take lessons or were you self-taught?

WK: I ah..well ah...my aunt Mary gave me some piano lessons, but other band lessons I took were taught to me in high school.

OR: Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your childhood pastimes?

WK: I do not believe so.

Grade School

OR: What did you want to be when you grew up?

WK: I really had no ambitions....just to go to school.

OR: Where did you go to school?

WK: Grade school, grades 1 thru 8, I went to public school in Venturia, ND

OR: Was this a one-room school house?

WK: No it was not.

OR: How did you get to school?

WK: I walked from my house.

OR: How long did it take you to get to school?

WK: It was about a 3 to 4 block walk.

OR: What were your schools like? (Size of classrooms, # of teachers per school, supplies, etc.)

WK: Well they were I suppose typical small town ND schools.

OR: What was the composition of the school population? (Males to females?)

WK: It was about half – n – half, boys and girls.

- OR:** Did your teachers treat children from different social backgrounds or ethnicity differently?
- WK:** I did not notice that if it was, or did happen, I don't think so.
- OR:** Did children treat other children from different social or ethnic backgrounds differently?
- WK:** I don't think so; we got all mixed up and played together.
- OR:** Please describe the attendance situation in your school.
- WK:** Well... all the kids came, that's about all I know.
- OR:** At times, did you have to stay home to help with work?
- WK:** No, I did not.
- OR:** What is your favorite memory about going to school?
- WK:** I think ah...recess, playing ball at recess, or reading in the time I could in school, I enjoyed reading a lot.
- OR:** What subjects were you taught?
- WK:** Just about all the grades, Mathematics, History, English, and ah.....grammar, different things like that, Social Studies. I really loved Geography.
- OR:** Were you a good student?
- WK:** Hope I was, I think I was.
- OR:** Did you have homework?
- WK:** Ah...I really didn't do too much homework.
- OR:** Did you parents and/or siblings help you with your homework?
- WK:** Well.....my mother would help me if I needed it.
- OR:** What books did you read at school?
- WK:** Oh...I suppose I can remember reading ah...books that my ah.....grandfather and my aunt had at their house. Rover boys adventures, and ah...there were a couple others, Tom Swifts adventures, those type of books were kind a series of adventures of young people and I liked to read those.
- OR:** Did you get into trouble at school?
- WK:** Usually not at school.
- OR:** What language did you speak in school? Could you speak German?
- WK:** English. I learned German from my grandfather/mother and father, but I never spoke it in school.
- OR:** So when you started school you knew how to speak English.
- WK:** I did.
- OR:** During recess or noon hour did children speak German or English?

- WK:** It was a punishable offense to speak German on the school ground in Venturia where I went to school.
- OR:** Did you help teach your parents English?
- WK:** No I did not.
- OR:** What did you take for lunch?
- WK:** ah...in Venturia I'd go home for lunch.
- OR:** And, how did you take your lunch to school? never did...
- WK:** No, not in Venturia.
- OR:** Did you change country schools or go to a town school?
- WK:** I went to town school for grade school, than I went to Ashley for high school.
- OR:** Which school did you like better – the town school or country school?
- WK:** No remark.
- OR:** Do you remember your teachers?
- WK:** I do, yes
- OR:** How often did you get a new teacher?
- WK:** Well in Venturia, school we had three rooms and if you went to a different room you usually got a different teacher.
- OR:** Were the teachers male or female, young or old?
- WK:** The... Smaller grades they were females, and then when I got in upper grades was a man teacher.
- OR:** What social activities were allowed during "recess" and "noon-hour"?
- WK:** Oh....we did, we played marbles at times, we played ball, kitten ball at a lot... and ah... things like that.
- OR:** Did your schools have parties to celebrate the holidays, such as Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine's Day?
- WK:** Yes, we did.
- OR:** Can you describe these occasions.
- WK:** Well, at Christmas there would be a program...they put on down town. These other holidays we just had a little party at the school for the students.
- OR:** Were you encouraged or discouraged from going to high school?
- WK:** Oh, I was encouraged to go.
- OR:** How important was getting an education to your family?
- WK:** It was very important to my parents that I got educated.

Chores

OR: Please tell us about the chores you did as a child.

WK: Well, it would be chores around our... I know we had chickens in our back yard, and I was ...ah ...I would have to gather eggs and then feed them and do things like that, give water to them and stuff like that, and then I was charged kind a with mowing the lawn sometimes. I was an older boy then, older grade school boy.

OR: Did you help around the house like cooking/cleaning/washing dishes etc?

WK: Not very much.

OR: Did you help care for your family's garden?

WK: A little bit, not very much.

OR: Did your father help with the household tasks?

WK: Ah...very seldom.

OR: How would your family do laundry when you were growing up?

WK: ah...we ... do... ah... my aunt across from the street helped us a lot in that... and ah... they had wash machines... and ah.. .big ah... 'veschkubel' they called it,... washtubs I should say.

OR: Where did you hang the clothes in the winter?

WK: They still hang some of it... they did hang cloths outside if it was a breezy day, but they hang them in our basement too.

OR: How often did your family do the laundry?

WK: Maybe I suppose once a week, maybe once every two weeks.

OR: How would you iron clothes?

WK: Well, we ...I ironed some that's for sure, they tried to teach me to do that, I did iron some of the things, but ah...I wasn't really an expert ironer.

OR: Did your mother work out in the fields or outside the home when you were growing up?

WK: No.

OR: Which chores did you enjoy?

WK: Well gathering the eggs I kind a liked.... ah... ah... feeding the chickens and stuff liked that.

OR: Which chores did you dislike?

WK: I didn't like mowing grass.

OR: Were their differences between winter chores and summer chores?

WK: There were some... yes there were....

OR: Were you ever hired out to work for a neighbor or relative?

WK: No... I was not.

Daily Life -- Family Home

OR: Please tell us about the house you grew up in. How many rooms did it have? Where did all of you sleep in the house?

WK: There were five rooms ah... two bedrooms, parents had one room and I had one room.

OR: What was the furniture like?

WK: It was just average furniture, my mother had brought some furniture from Minnesota, and from time to time he purchased several pieces of furniture.

OR: How long did your family reside in this house?

WK: I still reside in this house.

OR: Who lived in your home when you were growing up?

WK: My parents and me.

OR: If your family moved, where, when, and why did they move?

WK: Didn't move.

OR: How did your family keep the house warm in the winters?

WK: With ah..ah...fuel oil furnace.

OR: How did your family keep the house cool in the summers?

WK: It was a well insulated house and ah..open the windows at night and doors, and close them up in the morning so that the cool air would....coolness would stay in the house during most of the day.

OR: How often would your family entertain guests in your home?

WK: Oh....friends would come in..... and couple of times a month, I think.

OR: Please tell us what it was like when your parents entertained guests.

WK: Oh...the people would come over and they'd visit, then we had lunch...and that's about it.

OR: What language did you speak at home?

WK: English.

OR: Were you allowed to speak English at home?

WK: Yes.

OR: How did your family feel about speaking English?

WK: Well that was their native language.

OR: Where did you go to the bathroom?

WK: We had a bathroom in our house...we had ah...we had kind a...ah... cesspool and stuff, we also had an outdoor biffy that we used certainly in the summertime.

OR: Please describe this building (location, toiletries, etc.).

WK: You mean the toilet.....Well, it was a farm, you know just out door toilets.

OR: Please tell us about bathes. How often would you take a bath?

WK: In ah..growing up..on...Saturday night we had baths, that was it.

OR: Did you make your own soap?

WK: My aunt and my grandmother made soap, but I didn't.

OR: How did you heat the water?

WK: Ah....for the bath....well on the stove some of it.

OR: How often did you change the water?

WK: In the bath...or what.....I was first, then my mother, then my father, and it was the same water.

OR: How often were you supposed to brush your teeth?

WK: Every day.

OR: Did your mother have a garden?

WK: My father had a garden.

Food

OR: Who usually prepared the meals in your family?

WK: My mother.

OR: Where were the meals usually prepared?

WK: Usually... in our kitchen.

OR: What about during the summer months?

WK: Yeh...in the kitchen.

OR: Where did you store food to keep it cool during the summer?

WK: We had a refrigerator.

OR: How would your family have their meals?

WK: Well...we'd eat when it was meal time.

OR: Would you always sit at a table together?

WK: Generally yes.

OR: Were there assigned seats?

WK: Yes.

OR: Were you allowed to talk while eating?

WK: Yes.

OR: What types of food did your family usually eat?

WK: Well....the primary food like chicken, beef and a little of everything.

OR: What were some of your favorite meals?

WK: Well, I like German cheese buttons, kase knepfle they called it.

OR: What were some of your least favorite meals?

WK: I did not like spinach.

OR: What were the traditional German dishes that you had growing up?

WK: Cheese buttons and dumplings and strudels to some extent. That's about it.

OR: Did your family make ice cream?

WK: Yes.

OR: How would you do this?

WK: Well we put in...we had an ice cream machine, fill it with ice, and we had to turn the handle until it was frozen and so forth....we only did that in the winter time, and keep it outside and keep it cold.

OR: Did your family do their own canning, butchering, and/or sausage smoking?

WK: Yes.

OR: What was your family's attitude toward alcohol?

WK: My mother was strictly against it. My father was not a drinker, but he would take an occasional drink.

OR: Did your family make their own root beer, beer, wine, or liquor?

WK: No.

Clothing

OR: What type of clothes was common when you were growing up?

WK: Just...well we wore.... jeans, overalls shirts, that's about it.

OR: Were your clothes store-bought or home-made?

WK: I think they were all store bought

OR: If you had store-bought clothes, were would your parents get your clothes? Stores or catalogs?

WK: Usually catalogs, Sears or Montgomery and some in stores too.

OR: How often did you get new set cloths?

WK: Well...I suppose once a year maybe.

OR: If you had home-made clothes, who would have made them for you?

WK: They weren't, they were mostly store boughs.

OR: Did you ever have to wear hand-me-down clothes?

WK: I got some from my cousin.

OR: Did anyone in your family sew, embroider, or quilt?

WK: No.

OR: How often did you get new shoes?

WK: Ah... well.....every year when school started.

OR: How many pair of shoes did you have as a child?

WK: Usually, a day time pair and then a Sunday pair.

Technology

OR: When did your family get electricity?

WK: Had it all during my life time, I don't remember ever remember being without electricity.

OR: When did your family get its first car or truck?

WK: My dad had cars before I was born, we always had cars.

OR: When did your family get a telephone?

WK: In our house it wasn't until about 1951.

OR: How did this change your life?

WK: Well, you could call people on the phone that way, it helped communication.

OR: How important was the radio in your family?

WK: It was very important. We used to listen to the radio a lot.

OR: What were some radio programs that your family listened to often?

WK: Oh...Jack Benny, John McCarthy.

Farm Life

OR: Describe the...

- WK:** We did not live on a farm.
- OR:** Where was the closest town from Venturia?
- WK:** Ashley, was 11 miles away.
- OR:** Did you ever experience any isolation?
- WK:** Some winters we used to stay in Venturia, Yah.
- OR:** What were the farm kids' feelings toward the town kids?
- WK:** I think they all thought that town kids were kind a rich. There was a little rivalry between in our school between the town kids and farm kids.
- OR:** What was your family's attitude toward farm people?
- WK:** I think they were well exposed toward them, yes.
- OR:** What social classes existed when you were growing up?
- WK:** There weren't a great many social classes that's for sure.
- OR:** What ethnic groups were included in your community?
- WK:** Well, there were....it was principally German people over there, Germans from Russia, there were a few others that came in, that's about it.
- OR:** What was your family's attitude toward different ethnic groups, such as Norwegians or Scandinavians?
- WK:** They were fine.
- OR:** Were there places that your parents wouldn't let you go or children they wouldn't let you socialize with?
- WK:** No.

Town Life

- OR:** Describe the town you grew up in.
- WK:** Well, as I said it's a town of about 250-300 people.
- OR:** Who founded the town?
- WK:** Basically the rail road came through there and the local area people founded the town.
- OR:** What was the population when you were growing up?
- WK:** 250-300.
- OR:** What is the present population?
- WK:** 16.
- OR:** What businesses were there in town?

WK: Usual businesses in a small farming community in town.

OR: How many churches were in your town?

WK: Four.

OR: What denominations were they?

WK: Lutheran, Baptist, Holy Rollers they called them, and then the Reformed.

OR: Who were your closest neighbors?

WK: They were just next door across the street.

OR: How close did they live to your family?

WK: Well....across the street.

OR: Did they ever look after you?

WK: Well everybody kind a looked after each other, not specifically.

OR: If you stepped out of line, would they discipline you?

WK: My family would usually do that.

OR: What social classes existed when you were growing up?

WK: There really weren't any social classes that existed.

OR: Were there other ethnic groups in the town you grew up in?

WK: They were principally German.

OR: Describe some of the "characters" you remember in town.

WK: Oh....there was a couple of people who were....ah...maybe... ah...drank too much in our town, and they were kind of characters in the town. There maybe were a couple of ah....that didn't work as hard as some people thought they should, and they were characters around town, but that is typical of most ND towns.

Religion

OR: How important was religion during your childhood?

WK: It was important, yes.

OR: How often did your family attend church?

WK: My mother wanted to go every Sunday.

OR: What denomination were you raised?

WK: Catholic.

OR: What church did your family attend?

- WK:** Well, in the beginning it was over toward...Zeeland I think. Then as I was about 8-9 years, old we started going to Wishek.
- OR:** Please tell us about the seating arrangements in the churches.
- WK:** Well, there were benches and sat down in them, that's all.
- OR:** Males on one side and females on the other side?
- WK:** Not so much in Wishek, Zeeland was kind of that way.
- OR:** What were some of the religious activities that you participated in while you were growing up?
- WK:** There were not many at all because...ah, we had to drive to Wishek to do anything.
- OR:** Were you baptized and/or confirmed?
- WK:** Yes.
- OR:** Did your family have a celebration after your confirmation?
- WK:** I think a little bit...just....
- OR:** Were you able to question religious teachings?
- WK:** Yeah, Yeah, think I could sure.
- OR:** What did your parents restrict because of religion?
- WK:** I don't think really much of anything... but it was strict, my mother always wanted to go to church every Sunday, that I know.
- OR:** Was Sunday dinner or supper different from other days of the week?
- WK:** Yes, it was.
- OR:** What was the typical meal for a church celebration?
- WK:** Well...ah.... you mean at church or ah? (OR) At the church, yeah, at the church.
- WK:** Well there usually chicken, mash potatoes and gravy and not what.....
- OR:** Where was the nearest church? That you said was Wishek....is that right?
- WK:** Wishek, that's right.
- OR:** Was the German language used in church worship and prayers?
- WK:** It was in Zeeland, but not in Wishek.
- OR:** How did your family respond and react toward death?
- WK:** Well...they accepted it...and were saddened by family members that passed away.....those things happen in this world.
- OR:** Please describe a typical funeral.

WK: Well...people came and there was a service at the church, then there was usually a lunch afterwards and things like that. In the really very early days I remember when my grandfather died, the....the body lay in the family home for a day or so before the funeral.

OR: How did your family view other faiths?

WK: Well...ah...my mother was strictly catholic and....and ...ah I can remember when I was a little boy, I wasn't suppose to go to any other church. But those things are kind of different today.

Holidays & Celebrations

OR: What was your favorite holiday?

WK: I suppose Christmas.

OR: Did your family celebrate Christmas Eve and Christmas?

WK: We celebrated Christmas.

OR: Did your family celebrate Easter?

WK: Not as much, it was usually family dinner.

OR: Did your family celebrate the 4th of July?

WK: Oh yeah, usually towns each had celebration, celebrations was more with the town.

OR: Did your family celebrate birthdays?

WK: Yes.

OR: Did your family celebrate names-day of your saint?

WK: No, not in my family.

OR: Did your family participate in sausage parties, communal butchering, or quilting parties?

WK: There was butchering, a few people, yeah.

OR: Please tell us about any holidays that your family partook in during your childhood, such as Halloween or New Years.

WK: Not so much, my parents would go to New Year's party sometimes, I knew that, but I wasn't really involved in that.

Youth Activities

OR: What types of pastime activities did you participate in during your teenage years?

WK: Well, that was mostly athletic things, baseball, basketball.

OR: Were you involved in any sports or clubs?

WK: Ah...baseball and basketball.

- OR:** What were some of your favorite radio programs?
- WK:** Oh....I enjoyed Jack Armstrong, then I enjoyed...ah some of the other kind of action, the Lone Ranger that was another one.
- OR:** Did you go to the movies?
- WK:** Yes.
- OR:** What type of movies did you see? How often? Who went with you?
- WK:** Well....we'd see mostly westerns, three Stooges things like that. My friends from Venturia went with us..a few guys..
- OR:** How are the customs of courtship different than today?
- WK:** Well ah...I don't know what they are today, but in those days you dated a girl ... you know, I don't know how long you dated her.....that's about how it worked.
- OR:** When you were old enough, did you date any girls?
- WK:** No, I did not.
- OR:** During your young adult years, did you ever attend parties?
- WK:** Not very much.
- OR:** Did you go dancing?
- WK:** No.
- OR:** Who attended these dances - young people, older couples and/or families?
- WK:** Everybody usually.
- OR:** What day were these dances typically held on?
- WK:** Usually Fridays or Saturdays.
- OR:** What was the attitude of the older generation towards dance halls?
- WK:** When they built a dance hall by Hoskins Lake, the drought came, and the lake dried up. The older people said that's why the lake dried up, because of that dance hall out there.
- OR:** Was there a community-meeting place for people to socialize, whether in town or someone's farm or school?
- WK:** There'd be places in town yeah.
- OR:** How and what did you learn about married life? From parents?
- WK:** Well, just observing their lives.

High School

- OR:** Please tell us about your experiences in high school.
- WK:** Generally they were good, I learned things, I made new friends, ah....got along pretty well.
- OR:** How old were you when you started high school?
- WK:** Twelve.
- OR:** Where did you attend high school?
- WK:** Ashley North Dakota.
- OR:** Did you have to board in town?
- WK:** Yes.
- OR:** Tell us about this experience.
- WK:** I was quite homesick from it, but I survived.
- OR:** Please tell us about the transition from grade school to high school. Was it hard?
- WK:** It was different, I wouldn't say it was hard, but it certainly was different.
- OR:** What classes did you take?
- WK:** Well, what ever the high school kids took.
- OR:** What was the school like – class size, teacher to student ration, supplies, rooms, etc.?
- WK:** Well, typical small town school North Dakota classes were maybe 30-40 people.
- OR:** What was the composition of the school population – males to females, ethnic groups, etc.?
- WK:** Mostly all German but it was probably half-n-half boys and girls.
- OR:** Did teacher treat children different if they belonged to a low social class or to a minority group?
- WK:** Not that I was aware of.
- OR:** What was the attendance like in high school?
- WK:** Oh.....Good, I think.
- OR:** What is your favorite memory from your high school years?
- WK:** Oh...I think ah...probably playing baseball.
- OR:** Did you participate in any school activities – sports, clubs, etc.?
- WK:** Well...ah...Sports.
- OR:** What was the coursework like in high school?
- WK:** It wasn't the hardest thing for me, but you know, it was harder than grade school.
- OR:** How would a student be discipline, if he/she stepped out of line?

WK: You had to sit in the Superintendent's office.

OR: Did your high school have school pep rallies and dances?

WK: Yes, they did.

OR: Were you encouraged or discouraged from attending college or a normal school?

WK: Oh...I was encouraged.

OR: Is there anything else about high school that you would like to share with us today?

WK: I don't believe so.

Health Care & Funerals

OR: Please tell us about the health care that was available when you were growing up.

WK: Well there were doctors over at Ashley that you could go to, there was a hospital at Eureka, SD that could...ah...people in our community used... That was about the extent of it.

OR: What kind of help could they get?

WK: Well, there were those doctors in the hospital.

OR: Do you recall any home remedies or cures?

WK: Ah....no.

OR: Where was the closest doctor's office?

WK: In Ashley, ND.

OR: During your childhood, did you ever visit a dentist?

WK: Yes, in Ashley.

OR: During your childhood, did you ever visit an eye doctor?

WK: Yes, in Bismarck.

OR: Did anyone in your family pass away during your childhood?

WK: No.

OR: Did you have a funeral for him/her?

WK: Well...my grandfather passed away, but that wouldn't.....?

OR: Is there anything else you would like to add about health care and funerals?

WK: No, I don't believe so.

Historical Events -- The Dirty Thirties

OR: How did the Depression affect your family?

WK: Well, it was hard on my father and his banking business, but we came through that, they just had to live day to day and try to get by, and ah...some years there was not much of a crop in our area, some years there, years at times there were dust storms that were miserable. But each year the people thought it would get better, and eventually it did get better.

OR: Did you experience any problems with grasshoppers, jackrabbits, or other animal pests during these years?

WK: I remember my father going along the foundation of our house with a blow-torch to kill grasshoppers.

OR: How did your parents keep food on the table during the Dirty Thirties?

WK: Well my father worked at the bank and ah...I had some salary, it worked out.

OR: Do you remember the WPA?

WK: I do not....No.

OR: Do you remember the CCC's?

WK: No...I so not... although there were young men in our community that went of and worked there.

OR: Is there anything you would like to add about the Dirty Thirties?

WK: No...I'm glad they're gone.

World War II

OR: Please tell us how the outbreak of World War II changed your life.

WK: Well...there was...we started to have rationing in WWII, and then one of my older cousins had to go in the service. And that's about how our lives changed.

OR: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

WK: I was living in Venturia, ND

OR: Was anybody in the community drafted?

WK: Oh, yes.

OR: Was anyone in your family, or cousins volunteer to serve in the war?

WK: Some did, yeah.

OR: Did you serve in World War II?

WK: No.

Korean War

OR: How did outbreak of the Korean War affect your family or you?

WK: Huuummm....it didn't.

Vietnam War

OR: How did the outbreak of the Vietnam War affect your family?

WK: It didn't.

World Trade Center Attack

OR: How were you affected by the attack on the World Trade Center?

WK: Personally not.....it was bad for our country.

Childhood Memories Conclusions

OR: What was your most stressful childhood experience?

WK: Oh, I think living in the 1930's.

OR: What is your happiest childhood memory?

WK: Oh...I think living in Venturia, ND.

OR: What was the most adventurous thing you did during your childhood?

WK: hmmm...probably just playing around in Venturia.

OR: Is there anything else about your childhood memories you would like to add that we have not asked yet?

WK: I do not believe so.

Higher Education

OR: Please tell me about your college experiences.

WK: I went to college at St. Thomas College in St. Paul, MN. Received a very good education there and ah...later went to University Minnesota Law School.

OR: What did your parents think about you going to college?

WK: Well, they wanted me to go to college.

OR: Who funded your education?

WK: My parents.

OR: Where did you go you said?

WK: St. Thomas College in St. Paul, MN and then University of Minnesota Law School.

OR: Were you awarded a degree?

WK: Yes.

OR: If so, what degree?

WK: Bachelor's degree from St. Thomas, and bachelor's of law degree from University of Minnesota Law School, although now they call it Juris Doctorate.

OR: What is your favorite college memory?

WK: Oh I think...ah... participating in ah...actual class room work and work in the college.

OR: What is your most difficult memory?

WK: Oh... some of the toughest courses I had to take.

OR: While you were at school, did you have any part-time jobs?

WK: Yes, I did.

OR: Is there anything else you would like to add about your college/higher education experiences?

WK: Well...they were good experiences and ah... I was fortunate to receive a good education.

Concluding Insights & Reflections

OR: Why do you think it is important to tell your life story?

WK: It is good...for ah... a person to reflect back life times. And tell things that happened in their lifetimes. Ah... people really ambitious write them in books, but doing it this way is a very good way in our state to get stories of just ordinary people who live here in North Dakota.

OR: Are there other thoughts or observations you would like to share?

WK: I think this program should be continued. I hope NDSU will find the funding for it in some areas in their operations, I'm sure there are many stories from people in North Dakota that should be cataloged like this.

OR: Is there anyone else you would like to suggest for us to interview?

WK: Not anyone that I know of right now.

OR: I guess this concludes our interview with Mr. William Kretschmar, and we sure do thank him for sitting down with me and ah, we went through these questionnaires and he responded to the questions and we think we did a good job.

WK: Thank you very much.