

Interview with Monika (Heiser) Huck (MH)

Conducted by Michael M. Miller (MM)

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Bismarck, North Dakota

MM: It's June 18th, 1993 and I'm in the home of Monika (Heiser) Huck in Bismarck, North Dakota. It's a real pleasure Monika to be in your home and for you to invite me and visit a little bit about your life, not only in Bismarck, but your early life, and I know that you were born in the former USSR or the former Soviet Union. I wonder if you could give us your full name and when you were born, the date and so forth.

MH: My name is Monika Huck and I was born in August, the 31st, in 1924, in Nilobinski, Siberia.

MM: Nilobinski, Siberia.

MH: Yes.

MM: In 1924.

MH: Right.

MM: And what was your family name?

MH: Heiser.

MM: And what were your parents' names?

MH: George and Joanna Hoff Heiser.

MM: So your mother's maiden name was Hoff?

MH: Hoff.

MM: And you were in this area of Siberia for how long?

MH: Um, well, I was there until I was six years old.

MM: From 1924 to 1930.

MH: 1930. Yes.

MM: And why did you move from Siberia? Monika, in 1930, you were in Siberia as a child, the age of six, then your parents decided to move to where?

MH: To a, well we was going to move to (Ukrania ?), but we stopped at a, at a (Daskenrosental ?) For over the summer to work a little bit so we would have money to travel further then, and a, from there we moved to a (Hurski ?).

MM: To where?

- MH:** (Hurski ?). That's in the Ukraine. It's a Russian village and from then on we moved to (Kateritintal ?). And from then on we moved to (Kateritintal ?).
- MM:** The village of (Kateritintal ?)?
- MH:** Yes, and that's where I went to school.
- MM:** Now do you remember or did your folks ever say why did you leave Siberia in 1930?
- MH:** Well, it was during the time when the Bosheviks took over and the land was all taken away and so we moved away. We thought it's going to be better out in the Ukraine and still the old fashioned way there.
- MM:** Right. Now, do you remember when you left Siberia, were there many other German families that left with you?
- MH:** No, we went all by ourselves.
- MM:** How did you, how did you, what kind of transportation did you have?
- MH:** We went on a train. We went to the next big town was (Hustinaï ?). That's why we went on the train. And from there we went on to (Gersken ?) And from then on to a Ukraine.
- MM:** Now, in a, when you were in Siberia you were a child of course, don't remember everything, but your parents must have had a home and all of their belongings. What did they do with all of their items?
- MH:** That stayed all there. We didn't take no furniture along or nothing. Just all our clothes. That's it.
- MM:** Did you think they gave them to other German families, then the items.
- MH:** I wouldn't a.....
- MM:** It's hard to know that. So how many children were there in the family when you were living in Siberia?
- MH:** It was ten of us.
- MM:** Ten children?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** And what were their ages, about, at the time?
- MH:** Oh gosh, I don't know.
- MM:** You were like six years old.
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** And there were some older?
- MH:** They were older. I was the youngest of the family. They were all older.
- MM:** Were they all still at home at the time?

- MH:** Yes, umhum. No, when we moved two of them were married. They stayed there.
- MM:** They stayed in Siberia?
- MH:** Um-hum.
- MM:** And until this day, there are in Siberia?
- MH:** Yes, um-hum.
- MM:** That's very interesting. We'll have to visit about that later but um, when you grew up then, did you grow up only speaking German?
- MH:** Yes, um-hum
- MM:** No Russian was spoken?
- MH:** Not so far. When we came to the Ukraine, I spoke a little Russian. I even start Russian school--the first grade, I start Russian, but we didn't finish because we moved to (Karpenhendahl ?) from there.
- MM:** So let's talk now a little bit about better memories after age six when you were in the village of (Katerintal ?). How far was that from the Black Sea? Do you remember?
- MH:** God, no. I don't. I don't.
- MM:** Was it too far?
- MH:** It was over a hundred miles.
- MM:** Over a hundred miles?
- MH:** Oh yes.
- MM:** So you lived in this village in the Ukraine until what age? How old were you when you left the Ukraine?
- MH:** I was, we left in '44.
- MM:** 1944? You were about 20 years old. So you went to school there.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** So let's talk a little bit about your schooling. That's interesting for our German-Russian people to know about. You started school age about age six then?
- MH:** No, I was eight.
- MM:** You were eight then?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** You went to a German school?
- MH:** Yes, yes.

- MM:** And there were many other German families in this school?
- MH:** Oh yes, oh yes, there were lots of them. It was a village.
- MM:** A village? Katarinintal. And do you remember what you learned in school?
- MH:** Well, we learned mostly just reading, writing, arithmetic and then we had sometimes a little sports or something. We had that too.
- MM:** Any games? You play any special games?
- MH:** No, nothing.
- MM:** And how many months did you go to school there?
- MH:** I think it was about nine months.
- MM:** Nine months?
- MH:** Yes, like here.
- MM:** Summers you had off?
- MH:** Yes.
- MM:** Did you, you came from a large family and there were eight children still at home, did everybody have their chores after school?
- MH:** No, nothing belonged to nobody anymore there, except the government.
- MM:** Even in 1918? This was between 1920, after 1930?
- MH:** Oh ya. Nothing belonged to nobody anymore. It was the government. And then just me and my brother Christ, he's a four years older than I. We're the only ones who went to school there. (The other ones went to school in Siberia)
- MM:** I see, so they went there already?
- MH:** Uh-hum.
- MM:** In Ukraine, did you ever have to learn or did you run into people that spoke Russian only?
- MH:** That was toward the last. Not right away when we moved there, was everything German. But slowly Russian families moved in and so we did run into it but we did learn Russian there in Katerinintal.
- MM:** Right because you were there between 1930-1944 so it's 14 years, a very important part of your young adolescent life, and you went to school until what age then?
- MH:** Oh, I don't know.
- MM:** Did you go through 8th grade and high school?

- MH:** No, no. Just through 7th grade. I started 8th grade but I didn't finish it. It was poor. We were, you know, not just us, but everybody was. The clothing was. We didn't have no shoes. We had no shoes to go to school. I couldn't go. I went till it got cold and then I had to stay home.
- MM:** That's because you didn't have....
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** Shoes.
- MH:** And it's not just us. It was everybody like this.
- MM:** It was difficult?
- MH:** Uh-huh, it was very difficult to buy clothes in Russia.
- MM:** What kind of occupation did your father have then?
- MH:** He was working on the land.
- MM:** He was a farmer?
- MH:** Um-huh, well, there was no farming. I mean they (hoghos ?). That's what it's called-- (hoghos). The whole village was one, it was called (goghos ?) And everybody worked.
- MM:** At that time were they really working for the state?
- MH:** Um-huh, ya, ya.
- MM:** In 19., in the early 1930's. So they would go out each day to a land.
- MH:** To the fields.
- MM:** To the fields to do a certain thing.
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** Did some of the other family members do this too?
- MH:** Yes. Everybody done the same thing. Everybody, all the families they did the same thing.
- MM:** Your mother too?
- MH:** Well, the mother was old enough, she had to stay home and do the housework.
- MM:** Right. Did you ever have to go
- MH:** Oh yes, toward the last. Ya, I was a few years, I don't know, I think it was about four or five years I worked too there, um-hum.
- MM:** And you had no choice, I mean that was the direction, you had to do that?
- MH:** Yes, oh yes, I had to do that.

- MM:** Do you remember what kind of work you did?
- MH:** Well, we were in the field, we were hoeing and then whatever has to be done in the field. Mostly hoeing for the summertime because all the corn and the potatoes that had to be hoed and all by hand.
- MM:** So there were a lot of it, of course in the Ukraine is a rich soil so there were a lot of vegetables. What about vineyards? Were there any vineyards?
- MH:** Yes, we had some vineyards.
- MM:** And did they, did the Heiser family, your parents and the rest of the family, did you have your own garden?
- MH:** Yes, we had a little garden but on the back yard.
- MM:** Was there always enough food for the family?
- MH:** Ya, we had food, but not enough meat. It was not too much meat there to eat. We had flour and potatoes and in the wintertime there was no vegetables then either because we couldn't store.
- MM:** So you ate a lot more of noodles and things like that?
- MH:** Um-huh, ya.
- MM:** Like what they brought over, a lot of the noodle recipes they brought to North Dakota. So you went out each day and was it a long day for work? Did it start early?
- MH:** It, ya, it in the summertime it was sun-up to sun-down, ya.
- MM:** So when you got home you were tired?
- MH:** Tired. We went to bed right away.
- MM:** Did, you lived in town. Did you have any chickens or....
- MH:** A few chickens.
- MM:** Or a horse or cow or anything?
- MH:** No, no horse. We had a pig and a cow and then a calf.
- MM:** Now, do you remember, Monika, some of your neighbors in your village, some of the neighbor families?
- MH:** Ya, I knew the next door neighbor, ya.
- MM:** What was the name?
- MH:** Zimmerman.
- MM:** First name.
- MH:** Gee, I forgot already.

- MM:** Any other family names that you remember? Like who were some of your best friends, teenage friends growing up? Do you remember any of them that maybe you corresponded with later?
- MH:** No, no, when we left after the Russians took over again, you know, when the Germans came down, then we left and we didn't have no correspondence.
- MM:** No correspondence. Now, let's talk a little bit about those years especially between 1930 and 1944 because that's when you were age six and on, all the way up through age 20. Let's talk a little bit about going to school, we've talked about that. Let's visit a little on the celebrations. I realize that there was not a family who had much, did you have time, was there a church that you could go to?
- MH:** No.
- MM:** There was no church at the time?
- MH:** The church got taken away. I don't know what year. I think it was, I don't know what year no more. '35 or something.
- MM:** You were of the Catholic faith.
- MH:** Yes.
- MM:** So was there a church you could go to in the thirties? Was there a priest in the village?
- MH:** Ya, in the thirties they're was still there. Oh, ya, there was a priest, Uh-huh.
- MM:** You don't remember his name, by chance?
- MH:** Kreiner. Father Kreiner.
- MM:** And he had service in the church or in the home?
- MH:** In the church. There was still a church there.
- MM:** And do you remember when the church closed?
- MH:** Um-huh, Um-huh.
- MM:** What year was that about?
- MH:** I can't remember.
- MM:** Probably the late thirties?
- MH:** But it was a sad, sad year. The people went around from house to house and had signing it, signing a paper.
- MM:** A petition?
- MH:** Ya. And then we didn't sign it. We're laid off, didn't get to work and so it was kind of bad if you don't work and then you don't have nothing, so our family had it pretty hard there because my dad was really strict.

- MM:** He was very Christian?
- MH:** Ya, and he didn't sign. He didn't want the children to suffer and we couldn't say that he he told us not to sign it. It was if we would have told them that he told us not to sign it, he would have been in jail right away. So he ah.....
- MM:** So what was the reason for signing it?
- MH:** The church gets taken away, you know. No more church.
- MM:** It becomes part of the state, the building?
- MH:** Ya. It there was made out of theater, you know.
- MM:** Later on.
- MH:** Ya, uh-huh.
- MM:** You still remember when it was changed to a theater?
- MH:** Oh yes, uh-huh.
- MM:** It was a sad day for the people, right?
- MH:** Very sad. Well, most of the people, I guess, they just took it as that's the way it is.
- MM:** And then you, did you find other buildings changed to something else, or primarily the church?
- MH:** The parish house was changed to the I don't know how to, the call it Silsoviet, where the main people are in there, in the office.
- MM:** And was there a fear all the time with this new....
- MH:** Ya, when they took everything away, ya. There was a lot of fear. Lots of, I don't remember. I been to school and usually once in a while one of my classmates came, their parents got taken away. They would be without parents. At night, the KG
- MM:** The KGB?
- MH:** They came and just took them away and there wouldn't don't know where they went to, (never found).
- MM:** So they didn't come back?
- MH:** Hm-mm.
- MM:** There was a fear of that. So what happened to these young children? They just lived their own or did they go with relatives?
- MH:** Well, there was older ones. They had older ones. It's usually when they came they took the men. The woman usually stayed.
- MM:** Do you remember this actually happening?

- MH:** Yes, oh yes.
- MM:** Do you know or did you ever hear at home your father or mother or anyone say, 'Well why were they taken away?' ?
- MH:** Well, sometimes that's why my dad was strict, but we couldn't say he that did it because that's when they got taken away. Maybe some of the children slipped maybe and something about their parents and then they came and took them.
- MM:** Do during these years when the church closed and so forth, did you have prayer in the home, then?
- MH:** Well, we did. Ya, we did. I don't konw the other ones. Nobody could tell that they prayed because it was
- MM:** Private?
- MH:** It was private. And they always said we had freedom. It really was not freedom. We couldn't do it or we would have been outcasts, I guess.
- MM:** But those times when the church closed and everything then you still continued to go out in the field and work everyday.
- MH:** Oh yea, uh-huh.
- MM:** And did the children get paid? Everyone got paid for this work?
- MH:** Oh yes, uh-huh.
- MM:** And it was enough to survive?
- MH:** Yes, uh-huh.
- MM:** So that continued up through 1944.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** Before we continue on in your life, in '44 and those difficult times, what other memories do you have, like what I'm wondering about is how did you celebrate, for example, during those thirties and the early forties---the holidays, for example, Christmas? Did you, could you celebrate Christmas? Even in the early thirties before they closed the church?
- MH:** No, we couldn't. There was no way that we could buy any gifts or something and the food was always the same. There was nothing special really.
- MM:** What about Easter? Did you celebrate Easter in any special way?
- MH:** No.
- MM:** Did the holidays.....

- MH:** They didn't believe in Easter. My sister, you know, she's been writing since, oh, it was in the eighties she started to write and they still didn't have no Christmas cards over there When she sent me a card, it was always a New Year card. No Easter card, no Christmas card.
- MM:** Your sister's name?
- MH:** Elizabeth Hulka.
- MM:** Elizabeth Heiser Hulka.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** Did she marry a German?
- MH:** No, she married a Russian.
- MM:** She lives where?
- MH:** She lives in (Nikoliath ?).
- MM:** Oh, yes, we've had correspondence from her. Has she written and said have they gone to church again?
- MH:** No, no church.
- MM:** At this point, still no church.
- MH:** Now I don't know anymore because she hasn't for awhile. She's waiting for me a few months. She's old and she isn't feeling well.
- MM:** Right. So you, how many children are still living in your family? Your brothers and sisters, how many are still living?
- MH:** Four.
- MM:** Four are still living.
- MH:** Three girls and then my brother in Germany.
- MM:** You have a brother in Germany?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** His name?
- MH:** Christian Heiser.
- MM:** He lives where, in what city?
- MH:** In (Sili ?).
- MM:** In Germany?
- MH:** Uh-huh.

MM: Near what part?

MH: Hammelburg.

MM: Near Hammelburg, how interesting. So until '44, there was some fear, I can gather from what you're telling me, it was a difficult time.

MH: In school it was a lot of fear because they had, there was all organizations, you know, where kids should belong to like October Kin, you know, when they are little, before you go to school, you are October Kin. That's all the communist and then (Pioneer ?) And I was suppose to join too, but my Dad never let me.

MM: What group were you suppose to join?

MH: Pioneer. That is a little higher, you know, when you are in first, second grade and up.

MM: And what did they do in those organizations? Do you remember?

MH: No much, but they had nice, they got some clothes. They had a uniform to wear. I was always there. Once, I remember it was real painful. I had to get up and out of the class because just the ones who belonged to the Pioneer can stay in there and I didn't belong so I left. Ya.

MM: You were about eight years old then?

MH: No, I was about ten at that time, ya. Maybe even older. I think I was in fourth grade.

MM: So, most of the children, the parents had the children join these groups.

MH: Ya. Some of them were not too strict with their religion but my Dad wouldn't, he wouldn't bend.

MM: And probably for the better today for all that.

MH: Oh yes, oh yes.

MM: And so then you course finished through the seventh grade?

MH: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

MM: Then you weren't able to go on to high school. Did many go on to high school?

MH: No, very few. I don't remember any of my class mates that went to high school.

MM: Did you learn any Russian at all?

MH: Towards last, I guess it was a couple years, one or two years they wanted to put the Ingersprall. I don't know how to say it.

MM: Mother's tongue. Mother tongue.

MH: Ya. It was suppose to be Russian. So they were going to take the German language out of school and put the Russian language, but it was hard for us to learn, you know, and we were in the upper grades already, the higher educated.

MM: Maybe if they were younger to start.

- MH:** Yes, like the first grade it was okay to start, but we were up there and I was in the sixth grade when they started.
- MM:** This was still in the 1930's, later 1930's that this was happening. So then in 1944, what happened?
- MH:** Well, I guess that was the year when the Germans came in.
- MM:** Right, the Nazi forces came, came to these villages. But did you, were you still living in the villages or did you already have to leave then?
- MH:** Oh yes. No, we still lived when the Germans came in we stayed there because there was going to go to the Russian. Everything was pulled toward the West, you know, everything was pulled.
- MM:** So it was quite fearful, all of a sudden did you know they were coming?
- MH:** We didn't know what the Germans are and how they going to treat us or something.
- MM:** At that point though, the Russian forces and the Russian government had left the community.
- MH:** Well, it was slowly, ya. Not without a fight. We had to go out and dig some of those big ditches that they can lay in and shoot. I don't konw what they called it.
- MM:** Oh, you were forced to do that for the Russian military?
- MH:** Ya, uh-huh. Then we slipped away and came home and hided ourselves at home and we stayed there until the Germans came.
- MM:** Were many families like this?
- MH:** Ya, just about all of them. All of them stayed there, the German families, in Katarinintal, which they all were.
- MM:** They stayed there then? The German forces came in. The Russian forces of course retreated.
- MH:** They retreated.
- MM:** They came so you were under the hands of the Nazi forces, and did they welcome you?
- MH:** Very much, very much.
- MM:** Did they come to the homes? Do you remember that?
- MH:** Oh yes. They were good and when they came in there, they were really good because they were German and we were Germans.
- MM:** So you were kind of glad to see them?
- MH:** In a way, ya, in a way. Well, we didn't know how Hitler was.
- MM:** Right.
- MH:** We thought Germany is our Fatherland.

MM: Fatherland?

MH: Yes.

MM: So, you stayed in Katarinintal in 1944. Once the German forces came, how long were you still there before you left? Was it quickly, you moved quickly?

MH: Ya, when we went back. Ya, uh-huh.

MM: Then, what kind of transportation?

MH: Well, we had a horse and buggy. We started out for the station, then we loaded everything at the station, so we didn't go to (Geterma?). First, they took the older people and the real little children, they took away. We had to come afterwards because if something happened we can always walk but they can't walk. That's what they told us. So my parents, they came to Poland much earlier than we did.

MM: I see. You mentioned a station. Where was the station at? Railroad station, what city? Odessa?

MH: No, no, there was a substation over there, or whatever it's called.

MM: But it's not too far from the village?

MH: No, not too far.

MM: So you went in there and of course the Nazi forces helped you and you were prepared. So there were lots of people. Many people left.

MH: Oh yes.

MM: Everybody. You left everything behind then, I bet.

MH: Everything. No furniture. We couldn't take anything like this along.

MM: So this was the second time this happened. First in Siberia.

MH: Ya.

MM: And a second time. And then you really had good memories of this because you were really 20 years old at the time, leaving.

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: So, it was quick haste. You left and went to the train.

MH: Yes.

MM: And everybody left. Where did you go to once you arrived on the train?

MH: We went toward Germany, you know. That was all our goal, to go to Germany. We went through Bessarabia, Romania, Hungary, and well in Bessarabia we got too close. The Russians came too close so we had to leave everything there. There, we couldn't take anything along. What can you carry.

MM: Oh, you mean you were on foot there?

- MH:** Yes.
- MM:** No train.
- MH:** Yes, we were on foot there for awhile, yes.
- MM:** How long was this?
- MH:** We had to leave because the Russians was bombing already and shooting on our train so we had to leave which was along the railroad.
- MM:** You abandoned the train and just walked.
- MH:** Yes, uh-huh.
- MM:** Were there a lot of people?
- MH:** Oh yes.
- MM:** Thousands of people?
- MH:** Gosh yes.
- MM:** So, many of the other neighboring villages to you, they all came together.
- MH:** Yes, uh-huh. A lot of (Achensunz ?). There were a lot from Achensunz.
- MM:** Achensunz.
- MH:** Karlsruhe, Landau, ya.
- MM:** Yes, remind me again, what were the neighboring colonies to your village?
- MH:** Karlsruhe was the closest, and then was Landau. It was a bigger village.
- MM:** Any other villages? Suntz was near?
- MH:** No, that was quite a ways.
- MM:** So you got to, this happened in Bezzarabia, Bezzarabia when you went to leave the train and walked.
- MH:** Ya, we walked.
- MM:** Was this many days?
- MH:** I think it was a day, two days and one night. We had to walk all night there.
- MM:** You heard a lot of shooting of course.
- MH:** Oh yes, we had really.
- MM:** Fearful?
- MH:** Oh yes.

MM: Were you with your parents at that time?

MH: No, no. The parents were gone already. The parents and my sister, she had two little kids. They were together.

MM: They went earlier.

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: But you had no idea where they were.

MH: No, they went right to (?). They were lucky.

MM: And the rest of the children were together then, the rest of your family? Some of you were together.

MH: Well, they were all married already so there was only me and my sister, the one who lives in the United States.

MM: So, you two were the only ones with this other group. So, you got out of Bessarabia, then where did you go to?

MH: Well, we got on a, for awhile we were on a German truck with the soldiers. There were a few soldiers in there and it was just the two of us, me and another girl. Her name was Anna. I forgot her, Anna. We were walking and we kind of, we lost the rest of them already who we knew from our village. So the rest were all strangers, so we were holding on to each other. We got on the truck with the Germans, the soldiers, and they drove for awhile then, to Bessarabia in there and there was a camp where we stayed, I think we stayed there. We stayed there for a long time, weeks, and then from then on we went again on a train. We went to Poland.

MM: Where were you at in Poland?

MH: (Wathikow ?). It was a German name at the time. I think it's called different in Polish but that's the German name.

MM: How long were you there?

MH: Oh. I couldn't know that.

MM: A few months anyway.

MH: No, that is a year maybe even.

MM: Did you, were you working there?

MH: Yes, we were working.

MM: What kind of work?

MH: It was just like a mine. It was like a mine there and we were working there, shoveling and things.

MM: Did you do different hard labor?

MH: Yes, oh yes. It was hard labor.

MM: And what kind of place did you live at? Where were you living?

MH: First, well, we had first just a one room house. It was just one room where we could live because it was like a camp, or whatever you call it, and it was this big room side by side, and we lived in there and then later on we moved closer to town and we had a nice little apartment.

MM: Who were you living with?

MH: With my Dad, Mom, sister.

MM: You found them there?

MH: Oh yes. You'd be surprised. You know, they scolded over Hitler, but he was organized. He was really organized. Everything was written down, everything registered. We found them right away. The registration, then we knew the address and we found them right away.

MM: You found them right away.

MH: Yes, uh-huh.

MM: So, I bet it was a happy day when you found them. You'll never forget that.

MH: No.

MM: Of course, and then you were there for about a year in Poland.

MH: Yes.

MM: That was about 1945, you were still there.

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: What happened then?

MH: Well, we had to move again when the Russians came closer so we moved again. We moved to West Berlin. (Neurebien ?) It was called at that station and that's where we stayed. We stayed over night and then we went over to (West Fallin ?).

MM: And that was about 1945 and you were in, of course, Western Germany at the time.

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: And the war ended?

MH: When?

MM: In 1946. About 1945 the war ended. But you then were with your parents still at the time.

MH: Oh yes.

MM: Did you know where the rest of your family was?

MH: Yes, yes. We knew where they were, but I can't tell you the names anymore where they were.

MM: No, but I mean, at that time, you had some idea that you'd rejoin somewhere.

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: Along the line.

MH: Oh yes.

MM: So, when you went to Western Germany, and the war was over, then what happened with your life?

MH: Well, we worked at the farms with the people that own different, everybody owns their land there, so we worked for them.

MM: So you were hired by someone?

MH: Oh-huh, yes.

MM: Someone took you in. Someone took your family in and then you started working for awhile and so forth.

MH: Yes, uh-huh.

MM: And have you ever had contact with those families that took you in?

MH: No, huh-uh.

MM: This was for how long that you worked on the farm in Germany?

MH: I think it was two years.

MM: This was in the late forties then?

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: Now, you came to America in 1951, but before 1951, you know, after the war, until 1951, what were you doing all that time?

MH: Well, two years I worked in (Seler ?), in town Seler. No, one year, only one year I worked there, just before I came over here. It was my last job, ya.

MM: In 1951. Then how did you have a chance to come to America? How did that happen?

MH: Well, my mother's brother lived here in New Salem.

MM: And what was his name?

MH: Mat Hauf.

MM: Mat Hauf. He had been over here for some time.

MH: Ya, he was, he was over here. He came over before me. He was over here along time before that.

- MM:** Right. And you made contact with him?
- MH:** Oh yes. We had contact before the war started, before World War II started. We always had contact with him. And then towards last, you know, Ma, she didn't have anything, but Ma, she remembered the address. Ya, New Salem.
- MM:** Uh-huh, so she wrote him from Germany?
- MH:** She wrote and found him again. So we got in contact.
- MM:** And he wrote back.
- MH:** Uh-huh, ya.
- MM:** What proceeded after that?
- MH:** Well, we wanted to come over and he was willing to ah....
- MM:** To sponsor you?
- MH:** To sponsor, ya.
- MM:** So, who all came over to America?
- MH:** Well, just the four of us. My parents, and my sister and myself. But we came over separately again. I don't know we all ended up separately. I came over first, then my sister came a month later, then my folks came a month later.
- MM:** But you all came to New Salem.
- MH:** Yes, uh-huh.
- MM:** Oh course, speaking only German at that time then.
- MH:** Yes. It was just like coming to a different world.
- MM:** It certainly was.
- MH:** In New York, oh Gosh, that was something. You couldn't understand nothing.
- MM:** So, you came all alone as a young girl.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** Of course, you were really in your twenties at the time.
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** But did you know others that came with you?
- MH:** No, not at the time. They were all strangers. All strangers.
- MM:** And you came on a ship.

- MH:** But they all spoke the same language as I am.
- MM:** What was the name of the ship you came on?
- MH:** General Han.
- MM:** General Han. And it was a trek over to New York.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** And then you were in New York for a couple of days?
- MH:** No, it was just I think, just a day or so there. Then we got out and they lead us around to buy things. We got, I don't know, some money. I don't remember any more how much. We got some money from the government right away to buy some, so we bought some bread and got meat and made sandwiches. It was good.
- MM:** Then you went on the train?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** Towards North Dakota.
- MH:** Yes. In Chicago, we had to get out and we were there for a long time. And we was going to go out and see the outside people and I didn't know how to say, to ask anyone if I can go. And I say, "Can", how did I say, can, "Go", I say. I just said "Go". And the man knew what I wanted to say. "Ya, you can go."
- MM:** So you can see a little part of the city.
- MH:** Ya. We went out and looked around otu there.
- MM:** So you came to New Salem.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** Were you living on a farm?
- MH:** No, we lived in town.
- MM:** Lived in town. And there you were the first to come.
- MH:** First to come. And my uncle was right there by the depo.
- MM:** Waiting for you.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** And so then you started to work in New Salem?
- MH:** Yes. We were (Metropolitan Hotel ?)
- MM:** Did some work there?
- MH:** Uh-huh.

MM: You met your husband there?

MH: Yes, uh-huh.

MM: What was his name?

MH: Edward Huck.

MM: Edward Huck. You were married in what year then?

MH: In '52.

MM: Oh, so it wasn't too long?

MH: No, it was just a year later.

MM: So, you didn't waste any time and you found a husband.

MH: Ya.

MM: And then did you have trouble learning English?

MH: Well, ya, I had uh, of course I heard it everyday then to talk. My relatives, they all, and they when they talk to me, they talk half and half, you know.

MM: Right.

MH: So I kind of caught on a little bit.

MM: Did you understand their English quite well?

MH: Oh yes, uh-huh. English and German is quite the same. Like if you would be just Russian and wanted to learn English, it would be much harder.

MM: So, then your parents, of course, came over later and so forth, but who didn't come over to America in your family? Who stayed in Germany or who stayed in Russia?

MH: Well, Christ stayed in Germany.

MM: And until today?

MH: Yes, uh-huh. And Elizabeth, she stayed in Russia and then the rest of them, well they all died. They were all in Russia.

MM: You, oh you lost some of your brothers and sisters?

MH: Oh yes. Two of them died in World War II.

MM: Did they join the military?

MH: Yes, they had to.

MM: The Russian military?

- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** They were part of the Russian forces?
- MH:** No, wait a minute. Just Christ joined. He had to go to the Russian, and then like Joe and Tom, Big John, well they were drafted to the German army.
- MM:** Oh, they came back with the Nazi forces?
- MH:** Uh-huh. And when we were in Germany, they got drafted.
- MM:** They got drafted. And then did they go back into Russia again?
- MH:** No, no.
- MM:** No, I mean with the Nazi forces?
- MH:** Well, ya. They went east, ya. That's for sure.
- MM:** So you lost two brothers?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** Did you lose any contact with anyone that you're wondering about? You never heard anything more?
- MH:** No.
- MM:** So you knew, identified all of them and what happened.
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** Your sister, in Russia, Siberia, how old is she today?
- MH:** She is, she's in the eighties already.
- MM:** She's in the eighties?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** In your last letter from Elizabeth....
- MH:** Was for Christmas. She always sends a card.
- MM:** And she lived in her own home yet?
- MH:** No, she lives in an apartment.
- MM:** Alone?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** She had how large a family?
- MH:** She had only one son.

MM: One son?

MH: Uh-huh, and he died. She's all alone.

MM: She's all alone. What does she write to you about? Does she write to you about the new life there, the changes?

MH: Ah, well she writes, ya she writes that to eat they have plenty, and they get money and they got plenty to eat but clothes, they can't buy no clothes. There is no clothes to buy. And it was always kind of hard in Russia. No clothes.

MM: No clothes, to buy. Not enough clothes and so forth. Shoes and so forth.

MH: Ya.

MM: So, she stayed all these years. Did you keep in touch with her all these years?

MH: With Elizabeth? Uh-huh.

MM: So you had her address?

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: So how did you have her address or did you always have it even when you were living in the Ukraine, you knew her address in Siberia.

MH: No, no, I didn't know it. Not even in Germany, I didn't know it. It was after I was here. I think it was in the '80's, the first part of the '80's she started to write.

MM: How did she find you?

MH: Through Christ, my brother.

MM: Oh, through your brother. So she had some way of finding you.

MH: She had contact with him. And I suppose it was easier to write to Germany at that time from Russia than to the United States.

MM: Has Christ or Elizabeth ever gone, especially Christ, to visit the former village in the Ukraine?

MH: No, that's something I would like to do.

MM: To do in your life?

MH: Ya.

MM: I think you're healthy enough. Hopefully, if the university ever sponsors a trip, then you'd certainly have to join us because you'd be a good guide for it. Let's go back and visit a little bit about some other points. What memories do you have, Monika, I think it's important for our listeners with this strong German-Russian heritage in North Dakota. What are some of the fondest memories you had, the good times, you know. There was some rough times in your village there, but what are some of the fond

memories you had together as a family? Do you remember some times when you would sit together in the home or your father talk about different things?

MH: Ya, but the earlier things, when we remember still when the Czar was in. That was a better time then was when, during the Bolsheviks.

MM: What did your father say about the time of the Czar, the rulership there?

MH: Oh, he liked it there. He liked it, you know. If you worked hard, you'd have something at that time and he did. He went out to Siberia and he started out there from scratch and he had land, I remember. I don't remember how much, but I know we had land. We had cows and we had horses and everything we need there.

MM: Where was your father born? Do you remember what village he was born? Your father was born in the Ukraine.

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: And then he moved to Siberia. Do you remember by chance what village your father was born?

MH: I think it would be, (Naputski ?). He always talked so much of that village there, that's why we moved there. We felt so much of...

MM: Oh, when you moved back to the Ukraine?

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: What about your mother? Where was she born?

MH: In (Felzenbusch ?).

MM: In the Ukraine?

MH: Uh-huh. It's not far apart there.

MM: From where?

MH: From Naputski and Felzenbusch.

MM: And Katarinintal was how far?

MH: That was across the river there. Nip, I guess it's called.

MM: Oh, the Niper River.

MH: Ya.

MM: So your parents, were they married in the Ukraine?

MH: Uh-huh.

MM: They had some of the family members, already were born in the Ukraine when they went to Siberia, your brothers and sisters. They already had a family in the Ukraine.

- MH:** Yes.
- MM:** Before they went up to Siberia.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** But why did they leave the Ukraine to go up to Siberia?
- MH:** Well, let me see once. It was kind of hard to buy land. When Dad got married, he had to buy land. It was all taken already.
- MM:** In the Ukraine?
- MH:** Uh-huh. So we went out there and he sort of....
- MM:** This new settlement, they heard about in Siberia, and they went up there.
- MH:** So that's how they got there.
- MM:** And of course, you were one of the last in the family, so you were born up in Siberia.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** So, you made lots of moves in your life.
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** When you look back, Monika, of course you've had a good life. You have a wonderful family of six children here in Bismark, ten grandchildren. But when you look back, I know you try to forget those memories.
- MH:** Very much.
- MM:** Oh your childhood and your teenage years and young adolescent years, you know, coming to America and so forth. But when you look back and think of that, what would you like to leave for the next generation to learn as a lesson of what you went through or what are some of the rich things you learned that may have helped you persevere through all these tough times?
- MH:** Well, mostly, it's faith. Faith helped a lot. At least it did for me. A lot.
- MM:** So even those rough times, even in the home.
- MH:** Oh yes.
- MM:** When the church closed in your village, your parents made sure you were going to pray the Rosary maybe.
- MH:** Oh yes.
- MM:** Or you said some prayers.
- MH:** All the time.

- MM:** The Lord would help you through all of this.
- MH:** Especially during Lent and during Advent, we always prayed the Rosary.
- MM:** Very strict during that time.
- MH:** Yes, uh-huh.
- MM:** And what about the clergy? Did they come into the home or did all of a sudden the priest disappear?
- MH:** They all got taken away. Our priest, he was really old. He was in his seventies already. He got to stay but he had to stay in his house. He couldn't mess around. And the other ones, they were all younger. The other villages' priests, they got all....
- MM:** Disappeared?
- MH:** Ya, disappeared. Never heard from. Lots of time I was wondering what happened to them.
- MM:** Of course, you know today, there's a great new freedom for all these people that stayed in the former Soviet Union, like your sister and others now. They have a chance to find their relatives or they're able to speak more freely. They can go back to the church, but its going to take some time for them to have a better life, you know. And when you read about this and think of this and there's of course some resettlement programs to Siberia and back to the Ukraine because they know our German people are hard working people and many are coming from (Upekistan and Cosakstan ?) Back to Ukraine and back to Siberia, what are your thoughts on all of that? So you think they, these Germans should try to make a better life for themselves in Russia, or should they come back to Germany?
- MH:** I think they are better off staying there because Germany is overloaded. There is too many people in there. They won't have no, I don't know. I don't think they have any....
- MM:** Not enough room for all these people?
- MH:** Ya, and they usually, the Germans kind of, especially the ones who are born and raised in Germany, they kind of look down on, I think. Oh, yes. They all look second or third rate to them.
- MM:** Second-class citizens somewhat?
- MH:** Ya, uh-huh. So it would be better if they would stay there.
- MM:** You came to North Dakota in 1951, so you have vivid memories of this and there are not too many people in North Dakota who can tell us what you just told us in this interview. But what is your feeling on, like our efforts at the university and the Germans from Russia Heritage Society and all of this to bring this history of the Germans from Russia, of the early pioneers that came to North Dakota? Of course, you came much later, but do you think it's important for the next generation so your children know about this?
- MH:** Oh ya. I think it's very important, you know, where you come from, and what your parents are.
- MM:** Do your children speak German?

- MH:** No, they understand but.....
- MM:** Have your children asked you, or has it been difficult to talk about those early years?
- MH:** They never ask much but if I start to talk and I don't know. I got a difficult time to talk. Of course, they can ask questions like you do.
- MM:** Right. Well, I appreciate that. That you're taking the time here because it's very important for the next generation and of course we'll make a copy of our conversation available to them someday, which will be good. But those times again, which are important for us to know, and that is....anything else you want to mention about your life in the Ukraine? What did your mother cook? Monika, what kind of things did she make during the week, some of the different kind of meals she had?
- MH:** Well, usually Sundays we had something and then it was potatoes and sauerkraut a lot, especially in the wintertime. Sauerbraten, then pork. We had pork. For dessert, there was no dessert. Sometimes cookies or something, that's all.
- MM:** What kind of soups did you have?
- MH:** We had (koregal ?) Soup and (kumberschitzennet ?). That's a (neffla ?) soup, they call it now, the United States and noodle soup. And the borsch. That is more Russian. It is all vegetable. You can put all kinds of vegetables in there and cook it.
- MM:** Some beets too?
- MH:** Uh-huh. Everything. Every vegetable that can be thrown in there. And it sometimes, even though you don't have no meat, it still tastes good.
- MM:** Now, was it like the borsch they make here in Bismarck?
- MH:** Yes, oh yes.
- MM:** Do you still make your borsch?
- MH:** Sometimes, ya.
- MM:** What foods do you make in your home or when your children were growing up that you remember making in Ukraine?
- MH:** Oh, I made the (kumerschnitzennet ?) a lot, the neffla soup, they like it. And I made schiffnoodla, too. That's noodles and potatoes and sometimes if I have some leftover sauerkraut I put this in and that taste good.
- MM:** Oh, I've never had that.
- MH:** Ya. And that taste good.
- MM:** What about dumplings?
- MH:** Ah, I very seldom make that.

- MM:** Cheesebuttons?
- MH:** Ya, I make them. That are good.
- MM:** Kaseniffla?
- MH:** Ya, kaseniffla.
- MM:** Uh-huh.
- MH:** Or a, what do they call it, fleischkiegla.
- MM:** Those are all things, but your mother made those in Ukraine also?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** Now, you came over later of course, and living in Bismarck, you've met other German-Russian families who their parents came over a lot earlier. Were they similar foods to what you had, or were they a little bit different?
- MH:** Well, it's a, they got, some of it was similar, ya. But there's a lot added already from the United States.
- MM:** What about kuchen?
- MH:** Kuchen, ya. We made lots of kuchen.
- MM:** In the Ukraine, too?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** What kind of kuchen did you make?
- MH:** Well, we'd ah, all kinds if we have some fruit, we'd put some fruit on there, on top, and whip cream, a little on there. Sugar, often some kind of fruit. Apple or we didn't have much or peaches or pears. Pears we had some, but peaches, I never tasted a peach over in Russia. Never.
- MM:** Did your parents make any wine?
- MH:** Yes, towards last. Not when, not when the time when the communists were in. After the Germans came in they then, after the Germans came in there, the land got divided and every family got land then. Ya, we made some wine then.
- MM:** When the German forces came in and you lived in your village, how long do you remember about how many months it was? Was it quite some time? Or a year at least?
- MH:** That was a couple years.
- MM:** A couple years? So you have a good life then?
- MH:** Oh, yes.
- MM:** You felt safe again.

- MH:** Well, ya, ya.
- MM:** Well, then did you go back into the church again?
- MH:** Yes, uh-huh.
- MM:** So the church opened again.
- MH:** The church came, the priest came from other states. Other countries, not other states.
- MM:** They came maybe from Germany over.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** You had church services again?
- MH:** It was all German priests that came there, from Hungary mostly, I guess they came.
- MM:** Were you glad when the church doors opened?
- MH:** Yes.
- MM:** I bet that was a fond day, especially for your parents because they were such good Catholic people.
- MH:** You know, I remember first Holy Communion. I was 16 years old. And I was first communion.
- MM:** When you were 16 years old?
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** Confirmation, too?
- MH:** I went to confirmation in Germany only. There was none. At that time, only the Bishop only could give confirmation and in Germany.
- MM:** So your first Holy Communion, were there many at that age or were you one of the older ones?
- MH:** Oh, there were lots of older ones. I was not the older one. There were lots of older. The first year, there were lots.
- MM:** So you had German catacism and had to learn all that.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** Because for a number of years, you couldn't have much of that.
- MH:** Well, usually at home, Pa usually taught us a lot from the Bible. And when we were reading the Bible and all the books that, you know, like the Mass or....
- MM:** Did your parents receive any kind of German newspaper?
- MH:** Not is Russia.
- MM:** Not in the Ukraine then? What about here in North Dakota? Was there any kind of newspaper you had?

- MH:** Yes, there was one, but....
- MM:** Was it called North Dakota Herald?
- MH:** Ya, the Herald, uh-huh.
- MM:** From Dickinson?
- MH:** Uh-huh, ya.
- MM:** So you read that?
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** Did they read that quite intently.
- MH:** Ya, oh yes. Even my uncle who sent it, (transcribed ?) over in Germany.
- MM:** Oh, so you were already getting it in Germany?
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** These documents, I see, are quite interesting that we're looking at here. First of all, why don't you read this in German and just tell us what this is, Monika. This document we're looking at so that our listeners will know. Just tell me what this is right up here.
- MH:** Deutsches Reich. It means German Reich. Is the country and (???). It means you become citizens.
- MM:** So this paper is proof of citizenship?
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** That you were German?
- MH:** Uh-huh. And I was still a little under age. No too much, but that's why I was included with the parents, all by myself.
- MM:** And of course it means you were born in 1924.
- MH:** Uh-hum.
- MM:** And you were born in what village?
- MH:** (Neilobinskoi ?)
- MM:** And that was a Siberia.
- MH:** Ya. U.S.S.R.
- MM:** Uh-huh, and here now, it mentions....
- MH:** (Hunsert ?). That's where the papers were made, in Hunsert.
- MM:** Uh-huh.

- MH:** (??)
- MM:** Yes, very interesting. And this is 1944.
- MH:** Uh-huh. (Lieberitz ?)
- MM:** And then we have this document. This was your (riskoff ?). And tell me a little about that.
- MH:** Well, I got this (??) Just before.....
- MM:** 1957.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** This was of course in Germany and....
- MH:** This is a one here. 1951. September, 1951. That's how the Germans make it. That's a one.
- MM:** But here, it mentions....
- MH:** Katarinintal, Ukraine.
- MM:** Ukraine. So this is a real precious document for you, these two documents you've kept these all these years. When you look at...
- MH:** That's where I was living in (Beten ?).
- MM:** Monika, when you looked at these documents, and they are priceless to you, and precious, but sometimes do you reminisce?
- MH:** I don't....this is a sad one here. This....
- MM:** Uh-huh. It certainly is...
- MH:** When we became German citizens.
- MM:** Uh-huh, because you were a Russian citizen, of course.
- MH:** Ya.
- MM:** So you had different citizenships at that time. Monika, you became a citizen in what year? Became a citizen in Bismarck, North Dakota on July, 1956, and I'm sure that was a precious moment in your life.
- MH:** Uh-huh.
- MM:** And were there others who became citizens with you, other German people?
- MH:** Well, ya. There were lots of German people there. One of them from Hazen, Maria. I don't know what her name was. And one of them lives here in Bismarck yet. A lady that became citizen at the same time. Her name is....what is it now?
- MM:** I'm reading this item from the Bismarck Tribune in 1956. The headline is "66 Get Citizenship in Ceremonies Here: and of course you're listed. I'm amazed at the number of people that are names from

South Central North Dakota, Central North Dakota, Buhla, Hazen, Napoleon, and then of course, Wishek, and people I even recognize today some of those names. But I didn't realize they became citizens so late but this is quite a valuable piece of literature and of course, we see your name listed. And this of course was a new life for you and your were officially a citizen of the United States so you had three citizenships.

MH: Three citizenships, ya.

MM: You were Russian, and then the German, and now you're American. Not too many can have that but have you gone back to Germany to visit?

MH: No, not yet.

MM: You'll have to plan that.

MH: Ya. I should before it's too late.

MM: Ah, can you think of anything else you'd like to mention that we, as a remembrance of those memories? I think we've talked about quite a bit. I gather again that had it not been for the strong perseverance and faith of your parents with such a large family, and not knowing where some of the members were, and then you and your sister alone at times and your parents were really over in Poland, and then you were picked up by the German forces and fear of walking alone like that. So, and the people having such a good life in North Dakota and then what's happened today, you know, with these people. Again they are on the move.

MH: Ya.

MM: In the former Soviet Union. People are moving here and moving there and wondering what's going to happen.

MH: I've got lots of grand neices and they moved from the Ukraine into Germany now.

MM: Oh you do have neices?

MH: I've got some letters already from one of them.

MM: What we need to do is when we're finished with our conversation, we need to get some of those addresses down because at NDSU, many of the articles that we have had published in the newspapers or presentations, we translate those to German and to Russian because we know many of the younger people that are, you know, of German-Russian descent in the former Soviet Union can't read German anymore, so they know only Russian but it's important that they know of what it was like and what's happened in America with all these people and what we're doing over here because it's important for their history because they couldn't study much about it and so that's kind of a gap. They don't know unless they had correspondence or renewed correspondence like you have. They don't realize the history of so many changes in North America.

MH: That's right.

- MM:** And not that we're trying to tell them we have a much better life than they do but just to give them a little history and hope. And then some families of course are helping them somewhat out economically. Sending them a dollar or two or sending them items. We have good examples of that. So we'll need to visit about that later and give me some of those addresses because maybe we can pursue some interviews someday of some of those people that have come back, some of your relatives, to Germany. When I'm there in August of 1993, which will be in just a few months. I'll have to pursue that.
- MH:** That isn't too far away.
- MM:** I know. But I think we'll close our conversation. Any final words you want to leave with us?
- MH:** Well.
- MM:** Just anything you'd like to say on this. I know this is a new experience for both of us. It's the first experience for me speaking with someone in North Dakota that came over, you know, came to America in '51 and actually lived in a village in the Black Sea, you know, and of course remembers the time when the church was closed and then opened again. So you have those memories of seeing the church closed.
- MH:** Yes.
- MM:** And then opening again, and a strong Catholic family. It must have been quite a day for your parents when the church opened again.
- MH:** It was tear shedding too. Well, I'm just happy that I'm here in the United States. But they took me in and gave me a citizen and I have a nice family here. I'm really happy about that.
- MM:** Yes.
- MH:** And grandchildren.
- MM:** Right, and you can help us in preserving this heritage by informing us about people who we may want to interview or if you have any photographs and things like that to add to our collection at the university. So I think we're going to end our conversation. This is Michael M. Miller, Germans from Russia bibliographer for North Dakota State University and it was a pleasure to be in the Huck home and visit with Monika and her life in Siberia and Ukraine and then back to Germany and now in America. Thank you.