

Interview with Catherine Miller (CM) – Part I

Conducted by Betty (BM) & Chris Maier (CM)

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Linton, North Dakota

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- BM:** Today is October 11, 1995. I am Betty Meier, a volunteer interviewer for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at North Dakota State University Libraries in Fargo. It is a pleasure to visit with Catherine Miller. She is from Linton, North Dakota. We are doing our interview out on our farm, so we are not in her home but she does live in an apartment in Linton. Katie, I'm going to ask you your name.
- CM:** I am Catherine Miller from Linton, North Dakota, like Betty said. The date of my birth is December 10, 1921; and I was born on a farm in McIntosh County which is in North Dakota; and my father's name was Gabriel Miller; and he was born in Selz, South Russia.
- BM:** Do you know where he was born in South Russia?
- CM:** Not other than in Selz, South Russia and I suppose in the home because ...
- BM:** That was the trend then. Where did he die and where is he buried?
- CM:** He died in his home in the town of Linton, North Dakota and is buried in St. Josephs Catholic Cemetery east of Linton, in Emmons County.
- BM:** What was your mother's name?
- CM:** Magdalene Lacher, and she died at St. Alexius Hospital in Bismarck. She is also buried in St. Joseph's Cemetery in rural Linton, North Dakota, in Emmons County.
- BM:** Do you know I'm not familiar with St. Joseph's Cemetery. Do you remember what township that was in?
- CM:** It was in Dakem Township.
- BM:** How many brothers and sisters did you have in your family?
- CM:** There were fourteen of them, ten of them living. The third one of my brothers passed away when he was fourteen years old; and the three youngest children my mother had, one was stillborn, and one died within a few hours, and one was fourteen days old.
- BM:** Can you name them in chronological order, I know that's quite an order, but start with the oldest to the youngest.
- CM:** Mary was the oldest, then was Philip, Thomas, Peter, myself, Catherine, Magdalene, Francis, Gabriel, Theresa, Eva, Veronica, Monica, Clementine and Joseph.
- BM:** Good, I don't know if I could do that with my own kids. Do you have any recollections of your mother or your father telling you stories from the old country?

- CM:** My dad did. My mother was born in America, so she had no way of telling us about it. But dad did tell us that they lived in a house, and the barn was right next to it. Everybody lived in a village, and the land was around the outside. He told us how they would go out and harvest their grain with scythes, and then gather the wheat or whatever hay together. He and his sisters would go out and work on that part.
- BM:** Do you remember any stories from other families that lived there? Did they get together and tell stories?
- CM:** Yes, they got together to visit and play cards. There were always parties. There were name parties, birthday parties, especially during the winter months, not so much in the summer months. They did talk about the old country many times.
- BM:** Did they ever wish that they could go back to the old country?
- CM:** My dad never talked about wishing to go back, but he talked about the fruit they had over there. He wished he could have it over here in America, but he said we just can't grow it here in America.
- BM:** Did they receive letters from the old country?
- CM:** No, not to my knowledge.
- BM:** Did you have other relatives that came over from Russia then?
- CM:** Yes, my dad's whole family came over; and my Grandmother Miller's sister Clara and Anton Mosset came over first. Then about a year after that, my grandmother and grandfather and their whole family came over.
- BM:** What language did you speak as a child?
- CM:** German. When I went to grade school, I did not know anything but German.
- BM:** Do you know what dialect it is?
- CM:** No, I don't. Platt Deutsch I think.
- BM:** I know that your family were farmers, so I know there was always chores and with that many children in the family, it was sort of doled out. Do you recall some of the chores that you enjoyed doing?
- CM:** Not really.
- BM:** Tell me some that you had to do.
- CM:** There was milking, carrying in water, carrying out manure, and carrying out ashes. That's one thing I always disliked was always cleaning up the ashes. You pulled out the ash bin, and it would drop on the floor, and you'd have to clean it up. The manure, I did not like that either, but that was the only means of fuel for our cook stove. We did not have any wood around there. I will tell this story on here though. I was about seven years old and was supposed to bake bread while my mother was in the field. She made the dough in the morning; and I kneaded it down. When she came home at noon, she would put it in the bread pans; and she said at such and such a time you build a fire, and put the bread in, and bake the bread. That I did, but then I went outside to play with my sisters and forgot about that. When I came in

the fire was out; and there was no manure in the house, so I had to go out and pick up the manure, and bring it in, and start the fire. I do not remember what the bread turned out like.

BM: Did you get any help from your sisters?

CM: No, I think I picked the manure alone; but I did get help from my grandma like days when it was bake day and my mother said, "Make some dumpf nudla." Then Grandma would come over and shaped out those "dumpf nudla"; and then she would tell me at such and such a time you start the fire and told me how to put them on. But my Grandma died in 1930, so I was about eight years old when she died.

BM: Well, I know on farms there's a lot of activities going; and everybody is responsible for different things. If you didn't do the work that was expected of you, was there any discipline?

CM: Yes, there was. Each one was assigned to something; and if there was a fight about whatever we were supposed to do and didn't do it, mother would give us a slap once in awhile. But my dad never had to give us a slap. He would say in a rough voice, "Weren't you told to do that?" and we knew we'd better do it. I cannot recall that I got a slap or a spanking from my dad. My mother did once in awhile, but not hard. When my dad spoke, I knew he meant it, so did the rest of the family.

BM: So you considered him the strong one in the family?

CM: Yes.

BM: What was it like to go school in those days?

CM: We lived a half a mile from the country school, and we had to walk all the time. Recess was our most enjoyable time, because we got to go out and play and talk in German the first two years. But the second year we had a teacher; she did not understand any German. If she caught anyone of us speaking in German, we had to come and stay in for the recess and write "I will not talk German" maybe a hundred times or more whatever. We carried our own lunch pail in gallon syrup pails, those were our lunch pails.

BM: How many grades did you go to school?

CM: Eight. All eight grades were in one room.

BM: Did the school operate nine months or just a certain length of time?

CM: Seven months, we were always done in late March. They needed the boys at home for farming.

BM: Do you remember any specific things, when you were in school? Do you remember a certain book?

CM: Arithmetic, spelling and reading were my most important. History and geography were not my type.

BM: Do you remember any kind of games that you played, when you were outside?

CM: "Ring around the rosie", "drop the hankie", "tag" and in the wintertime it was "fox and goose". There was a creek not far from the school, so during the noon hour we'd run down and skate; and we would hear the bell on clear days. When it was windy, we would have to guess about what time to come back. If it was a calm day, we could hear the school bell and then come back.

- BM:** One thing that stands out in so many of those old school houses, when I see them, is the heating systems. Do you recall what kind of heating stove you had in that school?
- CM:** The first two years, it was just those round pot bellied stoves; and then we got a new heater. It was a broad bellied type, but there was a square frame around the outside. This one teacher that we had...we could bring along some potatoes, and we would put them in the ash box, and they were done by noon. So we had warm potatoes for dinner.
- BM:** Your hotdish for the day. Was there a difference, were you aware of town schools? Did you realize there was a difference between farm and town schools?
- CM:** Well, we knew there was a difference; but we didn't know what the difference was, because we never had the opportunity to go to town school.
- BM:** In what way did religion and church play in your bringing up?
- CM:** Very much. Our family was very religious, and everybody got to go to church each Sunday. Prayer was a must. In the morning we never had breakfast, until all the chores were done; and every family member had to be present. Then we would have prayers, like morning prayers and a lot of prayers. I always call it a litany. Then after that, we got to sit down for breakfast. There was always before and after meal prayers every day. Bedtime prayers too. Sundays in the summertime, we would go to church every Sunday; but in the wintertime, we would just have a mass every two weeks. The one week when the priest couldn't come over and then we had our organist, he would pray, recite the litany, and sing songs; and we had the rosary and that. Also, Christmas Eve, that was one of the times we gathered together like that over there. On Sundays afternoons, when the dishes were done after lunch, mother would always sit down and read what we call nowadays the Scriptures. At that time, it was the epistles and gospels; but now we call it the Scriptures. She would read that in German to us; and we'd all have to listen, even though we had heard it in church. When we came home, mother did it again. But so many of those words were so big, we didn't understand them anyway.
- BM:** In what language was all this done?
- CM:** This was all in German. I only started to say my English prayers, when I was sixteen years old. I went to Hankinson, North Dakota, to become a candidate for the Franciscan order. I didn't know the sign of the cross in English or any other prayer. So that was a very hard year for me. I only went one year. The next year I went six weeks; and then I was sent home, because I had any injury to my back. But it was doubly hard for me. Those children were so far advanced in school compared to me; and as far as going to church, I didn't know any English prayers. In our church, the services were always in German until World War II; and Father Lauinger said, "Our boys are going off to war, they can't even go to confession any place." He had tried it before, but the congregation never approved it. They wanted it in German. But in World War II he said, "We have to start teaching our children English."
- BM:** How did your parents feel about this change?
- CM:** They disapproved; but they like father said, "The boys have to go off to war, and don't talk English. They don't know a prayer in English, and they can't go to confession in English." They knew things had to be changed, because they had sons too. None of them had to go to war. My youngest brother was

supposed to go but, then dad said he needed him to farm. So the first time they gave him an excuse, but the second time he was ready to leave; and then the war ended.

BM: So the transition for your parents was rather difficult.

CM: It was very difficult. My mother knew how to read both German and English. But she only had a third grade education. But my dad could not read or write. The only thing he could write was his name.

BM: I am going to switch now over to Baptism and Confirmation. What church were you baptized in and what church were you confirmed in?

CM: I was baptized into the Catholic church and was also confirmed in the Catholic church at St. Joseph's rural Linton, where the cemetery is located; and where my parents are now buried.

BM: You must have other family members buried there too?

CM: My grandparents are buried there: mother and dad, and my brother, like I said previously, and the three babies. I have two brothers; the youngest one was buried there too.

BM: Were there any festivities with baptisms and confirmations?

CM: No there wasn't.

BM: Do you have a certificate?

CM: A baptism certificate I have; confirmation I do not. I made my first communion one day and was confirmed the next day, at the age of eight.

BM: Were your parents involved in the formation of a church or the building of the church at St. Joseph's?

CM: No they were not. They went to St. Anthony's in rural Napoleon. We lived in MacIntosh County which was in the diocese of Fargo; and St. Joseph was in the diocese of Bismarck. But we only lived two and a half miles from there, so they had to get permission from the Bishop to join the Bismarck diocese.

BM: How did your family deal with death? We just paused for a few moments and talked about some things, because sometimes deaths are hard to cope with and express; but I am going to ask Katie again about death in the family and about grieving.

CM: We lived in the same yard as my grandmother and grandfather did. They lived in a sod house while we had a wood house. Grandma died first December 29, 1930. She died in our house. About a week before, they brought her to our house, so mother wouldn't have to walk back and forth. It was cold already in November. She died in our house; and the wake services were all night long, from the time they died until they were buried. I do not remember going to my grandmother's funeral. Then on January 29, 1932 my brother Thomas died. He was four years older than I. He was eleven years and eleven months, when he died. That was very hard for me. I could not go in when he died. Then my grandmother said, "You come in and hold his large toe, and say the sign of the cross, and then you will get over this." I did not. Every time we had to say a prayer, I sat and cried. My brothers and sisters said, "Well, if she wouldn't always cry, we wouldn't have to cry either." It was hard to give up my brother. My dad and my cousin went to town with the horses and the sled and got wood, and my dad made the coffin for my brother. I did not get to go the funeral, but I know it was hard.

And then Grandfather Miller lived with us in our house. He lived in our living room. All he had was a three quarter bed, and a chest of drawers, and a rocking chair; and there was no privacy. There was not even a curtain around his bed. He also died in our home. He was in bed for three weeks; they sat with him constantly, day and night. During the night, the neighbors would come and relieve mom and dad so they could rest. At other times, mom and dad would take care of him. All the washing my mother had to do; there no attends at that time or anything like that, so the washing had to be done by the mother. I remember them taking Grandpa to the church for burial.

Betty had asked me previously if there were any funerals that I remember. I remember the "Schickal" was always the last song they sang, before they put him down in the grave.

BM: What does that mean?

CM: It is a German song, and I cannot translate it though.

BM: Okay, that's fine.

CM: It was a funeral song; it meant something like it's evident that we all will die; and the song meant that we should not grieve for them, because someday we will be called to come and join them.

BM: That's fine. Did they have the wrought iron crosses at the cemetery?

CM: Not in our cemetery. Those are all tombstones in our cemetery.

BM: Does your family have any heirlooms or any objects of sentimental value that has been handed down?

CM: No, there is not.

BM: If you were to pick a person in the family that were the "keepers" of knowledge in your family, who would you say has that?

CM: My mother did. I think we all pretty much remember some things. When we get together, which we do once a year on Father's Day, our family still gets together and has a picnic. Brothers and sisters are always there, and nieces and nephews as many as can come. Then we discuss, one has forgotten that, and next one will remember it; and they will bring it up like how we grew up, what we remember about our ancestors and that.

BM: What a neat way to have memories. I imagine that Christmas was also celebrated in your family, being a religious holiday.

CM: Yes, it was a religious holiday; and as a church holiday, it was special. But we did not receive very many gifts when I was growing up. Because, like I said earlier, in the beginning of the thirties, there were always a few hospital bills and the burial, My dad had to take care of the expenses of grandmother, grandfather and brother. There was very little money. Then there was the "dirty thirties". Sometimes there was very little food to put on the table and clothes to wear. I cannot ever remember having a doll.

BM: I didn't either, so there is two of us. Do you remember Christkindel or Belzenickel?

CM: Yes, I remember Christkindel. I think I was about eight years old; and when the Christkindel come, we always had to go to the living room and wait for the Christkindel to come; and the door was closed. So this one time, one Christmas Eve, I got up earlier and walked out; and here I saw my dad's cousin

undressing herself as a Christkindel. So that let the cat out of the bag and then from then on, I was the Christkindel for a few years. I don't remember how many years. But we never did have a Belzenickel.

BM: Do you remember any of your other gifts? Was it food or....

CM: Yes, it was peanuts, candy, oranges and apples. Because we did not always get oranges and apples. Apples and oranges were during the wintertime. But a handkerchief or a brooch or something of that kind.

BM: What about Easter activities?

CM: Oh yes, there were Easter eggs to be dyed. Mother had that special Easter bread that she baked with raisins in it and flavored it with anise. When the eggs were done, the younger ones were always sent to dig little nests, pick some grass, and line the nests with grass, till the eggs were dyed inside. One of the older ones had to go out and keep the younger ones busy, while the mother and the others were dyeing eggs inside. Then they were hid until Easter Sunday morning. We were disgusted many times, and here we had dug those Easter nests and lined with the green grass; and the Easter rabbit would never lay his eggs in there nor the candy that we got. It was always in some kind of a plate, a soup plate or a little box or something and we would find it under the table in the morning. We questioned why; and then mother would always have an excuse, maybe the Easter rabbit was worried the dogs would get it. She always found an excuse of some kind.

BM: Then of course you went to church?

CM: Oh definitely, but we only had mass on Easter Sunday, we did not have what they call the "TeDeum" at the mission, that was always held at the Parish of St. Michael's. Then what we call Easter Monday, that was another holiday, then we had another big celebration. Like Easter Sunday, we had low mass; and then on Monday we had high mass. Now some people wonder what's the difference between low mass and high mass. For the low mass, there was no singing; and for high mass, the choir would sing, and the priest would sing some of the songs.

BM: That's quite different from today.

CM: Its much different. At that time everything was in Latin. We did not understand what they were praying up there anyway. The priest did give his sermon or "homily" we call it now, in German and used those big words that we didn't understand anyway.

BM: There's a lot we don't understand, isn't there? Now with the ten children, there must have been marriages going on in your house, when you got to that marriageable age with brothers and sisters. I know you didn't get married, but you must have been involved in marriages. Maybe you remember more than those who were participating in the marriage. Can you tell me anything?

CM: There was no wedding in the house. My oldest brother was married in the house of his bride. My oldest sister was married out of the church, and then their marriage was blessed later on. Then there was my second brother: that was in his wife's house too. Then the others, by that time they were always in the halls like at Strasburg or in Bismarck. Yes, I was involved. We had to do the table waiting and preparing the food before and after. When my oldest brother got married, food was prepared the day before; and it was taken over to the bride's place. Then the day of the wedding, well, they started early in the

morning, like about ten o'clock; and then we'd have a meal at noon, which was always soup. That was a dish that had to be, and then there were some others.

Well, when my brother was married, the cooking was done downstairs; and the eating and the dancing was done upstairs. So we had to carry all the food from the basement to the upstairs, put up the tables, and eat, and take down the tables, and dance. Then in the evening was supper again: tables were put up, and ate, tables were taken down, and we had to go down and do the dishes. So the day after the wedding, we were supposed to go over and clean the house of the bride's parents. Well, I think, we had as big a celebration as the day before. There was dancing, there was singing, and we went home; and the house wasn't any cleaner than when we got there.

BM: So this was day three then?

CM: Yes, one day of preparing, one day of wedding, and the next day of having real fun.

BM: The bride and groom probably missed out on day three.

CM: No, they were there. No, that wasn't that they went on a honeymoon or anything.

BM: Which brother was this, and what was his name and his bride's name?

CM: My brother's name was Philip and his bride's name was Anna Mary Baumstarck.

BM: She was from Strasburg?

CM: No, she was from St. Joseph's area. She was just six miles from our home, where she grew up.

BM: Now you mentioned music again. Was there any special music, accordion or anything?

CM: Accordion and clarinet; and then the second day, the bride's dad just played on his organ.[harmonium] He had one of those pump organs, and then he played on there, and we'd dance. Some old lady got dressed up for fun, you know: she went and took some of the meat that was left over and kind of tried to hide it. She was a very comical woman; and then she came in and said, "Yea, I almost froze to death out there; and they didn't come and look for that meat that was missing." But nobody was aware that any meat was missing. They did drive over to the neighbors and get that one lady with a "mischts reutsch" (stone boat). This is boards for runners and boards across the top and a horse: kind of sleigh-like where they haul the manure on with one horse.

BM: What did they do with that then? Did they take anybody for a ride?

CM: No they did not. They just got this one lady, the neighbor lady, you know.

BM: Do you remember any of the food that you prepared for the weddings?

CM: Yes, we had to pluck chickens, bake cake, bread and kuchen. There was always pickles, mashed potatoes and, like you said, chicken noodle soup. I do not remember though if they made their own noodles. I think they did, and the chicken soup was cooked in the wash boilers.

BM: I'm glad we don't have to cook like that nowadays.

CM: I am too, it's much easier.

- BM:** Do you remember any bridal clothes?
- CM:** She bought her dress; it was a street length my sister-in-law got at the thrift store in Linton. It was \$9.99.
- BM:** And this was in what year?
- CM:** It was on November 24, 1936.
- BM:** What color was the dress?
- CM:** Light blue, and the veil was in white, with a short veil. And of course, my brother got a new suit.
- BM:** That was the first wedding, and they went on after that.
- CM:** For two of my sisters, I baked their wedding cakes and decorated them.
- BM:** Were there flowers?
- CM:** Yes, there were flowers, homemade.
- BM:** Homemade?
- CM:** Yes, with crepe paper, my mother would make some homemade flowers for the first ones.
- BM:** Did any of them get married during the summer months, and use wild flowers?
- CM:** No they did not. It was always after harvesting and thrashing. Weddings had to be in the fall.
- BM:** That's right, I had forgotten about that. Were the weddings pretty much at their choosing or were any of them arranged.
- CM:** In my family they were all chosen, but my parents' wedding was arranged. My brothers and sisters chose their spouses.
- BM:** I am going to switch now to the position of the woman, I guess. Did they have work to do outside?
- CM:** My oldest brother didn't live on the farm very long, because his wife didn't like farm work. They moved to town. My second brother, I think they farmed for about three or four years, then they also moved to town. Some of my sisters married and did outside work on the farm.
- BM:** There was a question I wanted to go back to. Did you have music in the house with all your brothers and sisters?
- CM:** No, we did not. My dad was supposed to have had a [pump] organ, in the beginning when they were married. But my dad liked to sing, and he taught us some songs, mostly some church songs: but he liked other songs too. He sang other songs too, like for their birthday parties or their name-stay parties. He would sing.
- BM:** Did the children all join in and sing with him?
- CM:** In his earlier years; yes but later on his voice turned bad too, then he didn't sing so much anymore.
- BM:** Do you remember when you learned to dance?

- CM:** Oh, I was very young, about eight or nine years old. I remember I was only about six years old, when my mother's brother was married; and it was just about a quarter of a mile from where we lived. So we got to go and dance a few dances, but I don't know how well we did.
- BM:** Well, it was fun anyway, wasn't it?
- CM:** It was one of those old sod houses; and they had support in the middle to support the center and we would dance around that angle iron. We learned to dance at an early age.
- BM:** What kind of dances were these?
- CM:** Waltzes and polkas. My dad did the Cardas very well, (this was a special dance), but I never learned to dance. My three younger sisters do it well, too. I asked my youngest sister to teach me one time at a wedding dance. I had two left feet; and I said, "I'm ashamed, let's get off the floor."
- BM:** Well, I know you all had fun, whether you did it right or wrong or in between.
- CM:** Dancing and singing was in our family. There was only mother and one of my sisters that did not sing in the church choir at one time or another.
- BM:** Were the children kept pretty much with their parents, or with the adults? Were they allowed to stay pretty much of the time?
- CM:** No, they were not. The children were up front: the first grade and back, first graders were up front, second graders and then on back. Until they started school, they were with the parents; and then in church, the women were on one side and the men were on the other side.
- BM:** That's a tradition, right.
- CM:** Yes.
- BM:** Do you remember any of the songs that you sang as a child or as you grew up?
- CM:** Yes, I do, like a German one, "Maria Zu Liebe." And in the public school we sang like "Old Black Joe," and I can't think of the others right now. There were several I liked very well. "Home on the Range," was another one. There was always in the beginning of the day, the first fifty minutes we'd sing, when we had a teacher that we had four years. They wouldn't let us speak German. But that was the opening of the school day, about fifty minutes of songs.
- BM:** Did you sing patriotic songs?
- CM:** Yes, "The Star Spangled Banner," "America the Beautiful."
- BM:** You mentioned awhile ago that your family didn't go to the public dance halls. Were there certain attitudes towards the public dance halls?
- CM:** I think there is a misunderstanding. Yes, we did go to the public dance hall, but we were not allowed to go until we were fourteen years old; and then we went with the older brothers and sisters. My older brother and my oldest sister did not; see, there were barn dances yes; they got to go to those in the neighborhood.
- BM:** The barn dances were upstairs in the hay loft?

- CM:** Yes, they were. They were cleaned especially in the summer. The barn dances were cleared for the square dances and everything out there. I think that was one of my first public dances was in an upstairs of a barn. They had a square dance up there.
- BM:** Now, you considered that a public dance, so who came to those?
- CM:** The neighbors, and then we had a man out there just "calling" by the name of Clem Malone. You remember him don't you? He was our square dance caller. My dad did not allow it in his barn.
- BM:** Do you know the reason for that?
- CM:** He just didn't approve of it.
- BM:** In other words, the barn dance was part of their social life.
- CM:** Yes.
- BM:** Whose barn did you go to, in your community?
- CM:** Tuchschers or Tuchscherer were our neighbors. That's the first one I attended. Then there was the old house later on, I attended there. Those were about the only ones around there I recall. You know the older people danced in the houses; when they had their namestay parties or birthday parties. Then everything was cleaned out, like the kitchen, everything was cleaned out of there, and they would dance in there until about two or three o'clock in the morning.
- BM:** I wish floors could tell stories, because they did the same thing here too. I want to go back to your grandparents and parents. Did they have any superstition?
- CM:** Very much so. My dad did not start field work on a Wednesday or a Friday. My dad was superstitious about that. I cannot say the reason why; I do not know why, but he would never.
- BM:** Did they go by the stages of the moon, or anything like that?
- CM:** In planting some of the time, they did, yes. As far as the moon, my dad would kind of predict the weather by the shape of the moon or whatever.
- BM:** Anything about a boogy man, hooting owls?
- CM:** No, nothing like that.
- BM:** Your mother didn't tell you any fairy tales or anything like that?
- CM:** No, she did not believe in that. The boogy man would scare us, and she would never tells stories like that.
- BM:** Can you identify any special healing techniques that were used in your health?
- CM:** Brauche, my Grandma Miller did a lot of that, not only for our family but for neighbors all around. My mother did some too, and she did write some of it down in a book, but I myself did not believe in Brauche. I remember one time, I was supposed to be (55)

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- BM:** Do you think there is any difference in sicknesses today as compared to the past? Do you recall any home remedies?
- CM:** Yes, my mother used linament for aches and pains; and green drops were used for everything. From a toothache, to a headache, to a stomach ache, whatever ailed you. Greendrops were supposed to have done it. One home remedy I know of that my mother did not use, but one other lady did when I was working for somebody else. I had a bad chest cold; and she said she'd take some lard, mix it with mustard; the lard had to be unsalted. She put it on a cloth and laid it on your chest, until it become red. I laid down and put that on; the lady I worked for came into the bedroom and she says, "Is it red yet?" I said, "No." I had looked at the mustard plaster. She took a little bit longer, and she came in and says, "Is it red yet?" and I said, "No." I kept looking at the mustard plaster; and she looked at it and she says, "Oh, you are almost getting blisters on there; your chest is all red." (laughs) Had they told me that my chest was suppose to get red, not the mustard, I'd had known the difference. But mother used linament for everything, and rubbing alcohol was a good one too that she used.
- BM:** Do you think that there are different sicknesses now days compared to then?
- CM:** Well, for one thing, cancer. I think more strokes, I don't think people had that many strokes at that time. Yes, worldwide AIDS, and all these things. There are many more than what we had years ago.
- BM:** Did you have any midwives in the family?
- CM:** Always, all my mother's children were born by a midwife, with the exception of the two younger ones. One of them was stillborn and the youngest one was stillborn in Bismarck in the hospital. He was what they called a "blue baby." He had a heart condition; and within fourteen days, he died. But the rest of us were all born at home by a midwife.
- BM:** Did you know who the midwife was in the community?
- CM:** Yes, we had two of them. Mrs. John Schmidt, and Mrs. John Werner.
- BM:** Were they paid?
- CM:** That I do not know. I have no idea whether they were paid or not.
- BM:** Did your parents or your grandparents use certain expressions in Russian or German?
- CM:** I cannot remember them using expressions; but our dad taught us like the one, two, three, numbers. I knew them up to ten, but I had forgotten it. My grandfather was out harnessing his horses one time; and my brothers, Peter and Thomas were out in the barn watching Grandpa harnessing the horses; and he was using Russian language. Then Peter said to Thomas, "Oh, Grandpa is teaching us how to cuss in Russian." Grandfather Miller said, "You'd better get out of here." (laughs)
- BM:** He wasn't going to be known to teach his grandsons bad language.
- CM:** They would not have understood it anyway, they did not understand what it was. He did get the idea that it must be, because he was using the Russian words.
- BM:** Do you remember the name of the German newspapers? Did you receive any of them in your home?
- CM:** Yes, the "Staats-Anzeiger" and the "Nord Dakota Herold."

- BM:** What kind of information did your family get from these newspapers?
- CM:** A lot of it, I think that mother and father were interested in people from different areas like South Dakota, North Dakota and Canada, that wrote into those papers. They got to know the news from there, like we do nowadays from the radio or television. Some of the people that wrote to that paper they knew and some of the obituaries were in there. Not the "Staats-Anzeiger," I think, they got more of the political information from that one.
- BM:** You know there is a question I wanted to ask, I knew you grew up learning German and speaking German. Did you learn to write and read it as well?
- CM:** Yes, I did. When I left home, I was about twenty-one; and, until I was thirty-one, I was gone. I would write to my Grandmother Lacher in Zeeland. I would write German letters to her in the regular German letters, and she would write them to me too. We learned it; there was six weeks in the summer. The public school let out in March, so we had six weeks of summer school which they called CCD or vacation. Then we learned to read in German, and our catechism, and our bible history was also in German, so we did learn to read in German.
- BM:** Can you translate from German to English for people now?
- CM:** Some of it, not everything, but quite a few things I can.
- BM:** Were there funnies or the comics with those newspapers?
- CM:** No, there were not. Serious German newspapers.
- BM:** Do you remember when your family got it's first modern conveniences?
- CM:** Electricity; the first car I do not remember. I was too young, when my dad got his first car. Electricity we got in June of 1949; and a radio probably in 1934. That was battery operated. Television about 1954 or 1955.
- BM:** Now that we're talking about television, did you watch the Lawrence Welk shows?
- CM:** Very definitely, Saturday evenings, we made sure we got the dishes and everything out of the way by the time the Lawrence Welk show came on. Every once in awhile, I still watch the re-runs on Prairie Public.
- BM:** It brought back all the memories of the dancing and the rhythm of the music. What family member do you remember best, and what family member did you look up to?
- CM:** My mother, Magdalena Miller, and my Grandmother Katherine Lacher. Grandmother Miller and Grandfather Miller, I was too young to really remember too much of them when they died. I never got to know my Grandfather Lacher, because he had passed away before my mother was married. My mother was only 14 years old, when he died.
- BM:** I am going to ask some questions now about what primarily women do, was there anyone in the family who had a talent for sewing, textiles, basket weaving, or bobbin lace or paper cutouts. If I could pronounce the word, I'd say it.

- CM:** "Scherrensnitten." Yes, my Grandmother Katherine Lacher crocheted; and she knit. My mother sewed our clothes. She could crochet and knit; and I think I inherited my crafts from both of them.
- BM:** What do you do?
- CM:** I do crocheting, knitting, work with plastic canvas, and counted cross stitch.
- BM:** Did you sew with the sewing machine?
- CM:** I sewed all my clothes, until the last two or three years. I am getting tired of it. Yes, I had to sew all my clothes, because it was hard to buy clothes that fit me. The waist was too short, and I was smaller across the top than I was across the hips. So yes, I sewed. I did tell you earlier that I was 4-H Leader for six years, and some of the ladies would come and borrow my dresses. They fit you much better than if you had bought them. I sewed suits and sewed for other people. I sewed bridesmaids dresses and sewed my own suits.
- BM:** You were a professional. Where did the fabrics come from? Did you get new or did you reuse old things?
- CM:** For new clothes, mother would always get new from the Sears Roebuck catalog. She used to get those. Then there was a mercantile store at Wishek, where she would buy some. When I first started on my own, I got some out of Montgomery and Sears Roebuck catalog. I would order in. But the later years, I'd buy it from the fabric stores, like Penney's used [to be] at Linton. I still have some material at home that should be sewed up, but I don't care to sew anymore.
- BM:** When you were growing up and clothing for that many children, do you remember your mother sewing for you girls?
- CM:** Yes, mother sewed all the clothes. She even sewed overalls and jackets for the boys.
- BM:** Was that all new material or did she reuse some of the older garments?
- CM:** No, it was new material. One thing she did use was flour sacks. Our petticoats for every day were from flour sacks. She'd remove the print on those cotton sacks with homemade soap and lye in it. It would come off easy; and then she would dye it and sew it up for petticoats, and even for our panties.
- BM:** I grew up with bloomers.
- CM:** Yes, that's what it was, bloomers.
- BM:** Was she a quilter? Did she make quilts?
- CM:** My mother did not. My Grandmother Katherine Lacher, yes, many of them, because she was widowed. They were married fifteen years; and after she had raised her family, she was alone. Then she would make quilts, and appliqued bedspreads, and crocheted tablecloths and bedspreads for other people. I don't think she was paid for it. I think they just gave her the material, and she did it.
- BM:** Probably gave her something else that she could use again.
- CM:** That I don't remember. I can't recall that.
- BM:** What are your memories about women's activities and recipes from the Dakota Farmer in Aberdeen, South Dakota? Do you remember that?

- CM:** Yes, I remember I still have some in my own cookbook that I cut out and glued into some books. Patterns, yes we ordered some. Dress patterns, and embroidery patterns, and there were some crochet patterns in there too. Now my mother could not crochet from a written pattern. She would have to have a crocheted article to see it. But then again if she saw something, she could go home and make it. One time, they were in Fargo for a few days. It was during that Nonpartisan League. There was a problem there. I don't remember exactly what it was, but they were there a few days. The neighbor lady was with her. So they went to Woolworths and they had a crocheted apron hanging up. She looked at it, and got some thread, and started crocheting while they were there. By that time, she had one done; and each one of us girls had a crocheted apron.
- BM:** Amazing. She most certainly must have been an articulate person.
- CM:** Yes, she was.
- BM:** Are there other stories that you'd like to tell me or something that you would like to share with me? I know I have one question and that's about you. You've done so many things in your life that I don't think we have even touched on. Many of the things you have done for yourself, your family, your church, or our communities. Maybe you can give me a run down of some of the things you especially think are important.
- CM:** Well, as a single lady, I liked to babysit. I did a lot of babysitting and always liked children. As a young girl, I liked to do horseback riding. I did until I left home, when I was twenty-one years old. I still would like to ride horses, but I think they'd need to hoist me up on the horse. But if there is a horse show in the area, I will go and watch it. Or a rodeo, I usually attend those. I love driving. That's one of my favorite pastimes. There for a awhile, I decorated cakes for people for birthdays; and I made two wedding cakes for my sisters. I made a few anniversary cakes. I like to decorate cakes. At the time, I used to cut hair for others and gave home perms.
- BM:** I think one of the things that amazes me is that you have been a leader for a 4-H club. How many years did you do that?
- CM:** About six years. I had no intention of doing it until the neighbor's girl would have liked to start it. And she said, "Mom, why don't you ask Katie if she would be our leader." And I said, "I wouldn't mind being your leader"; but I live in McIntosh County and would have to go to the courthouse that would be forty miles away. And you live in Emmons County. We were just four miles apart, but there was that division of counties. I said if your mother asks if we can go with the Extension Service in Emmons County, I will. They allowed us to do that, so I taught it for six years. I learned more there than from homemakers. I was a member of Homemakers, but then you are supposed to know the basics already. Where a 4-H leader, they give you the basics; and I got quite a few of the techniques that I did not know before. I learned along with the girls.
- BM:** I guess the other thing that really impressed me is that you are constantly learning. Are you still?
- CM:** Yes, I still want to learn. Like for instance about my religion. I like to learn and I like to learn what's new in the world. If there is a new craft out there, I want to know about it and will want to try it. That bobbin lace that we talked about before interests me very much, but I feel I'm just too old; I am involved in too many other things to start that.

- BM:** It is a time consuming thing, but tell me about some of the other things you are involved with?
- CM:** Where do I start? Many things in the church, the community and the hospital. I'm chairperson of the American Cancer Society of the service division. I'm a member of the Senior Citizens. I like to attend basketball games at school, and visit with the neighbors. I've belonged to the same homemakers club for thirty-five years.
- BM:** I have to tell you a story about Katie, because she has probably forgotten it already; but these are the kinds of things she does in the community. We met her at one of these church suppers. I asked her why she was standing in line so early; and she said, "Well, I'm going to pick up a plate and take it to a lady who can't get to the church supper." Those are the kinds of community things that Katie always does spontaneously. And in a few minutes, she was back and was having her own supper. Are there other things that you would like to include in the interview that we might have missed?
- CM:** A good example of the local dialect. (Sounds like Chris Maier is talking to her in German, and she responds in German.)