

In Touch with Prairie Living

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By Michael M. Miller

Germans from Russia Heritage Collection
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I want to share with you the wonderful life story of Helen (Feist) Krumm, who was interviewed for Prairie Public's award-winning 2012 documentary, "At Home in Russia, At Home on the Prairie." I have fond memories in October 2001, when we interviewed Helen at her home in Hague, ND. Helen was a "shining star" in the documentary.

Helen was born on October 3, 1920 in Strassburg, Kutschurgan District, near Odessa, Ukraine, and passed away on November 18, 2009, at the age of 89. In 1944, Helen and her family were displaced from South Russia (Ukraine). Left with only the possessions they could carry, the women walked across Romania and Hungary into Poland where they worked in a factory making clothes for the German Army. After several months, they were displaced again, this time to Germany. Tragically, in 1945, Helen's husband was killed shortly before the birth of their daughter, Marie. For the next six years, Helen worked on a small orchard in Germany and raised their daughter with the help of her mother.

After Germany fell to the Americans at the end of WWII, Helen began receiving care packages from Joseph and Katherine Krumm of Hague, ND, via the Catholic Charities Program. Following the exchange of a series of letters, Joseph and Katherine offered a fresh start by paying for the passage of Helen and her daughter to the U.S. Helen faced an agonizing decision about whether to stay in war-torn Europe with her family or venture to America alone. She decided to go. When asked why, Helen said, "Columbus took a chance, too. Why shouldn't I?" Helen and her daughter set sail from Bremerhaven, Germany on October 10, 1951, and caught their first glimpse of the Statue of Liberty on November 1, 1951. From there they traveled by train to Hague on November 5 in cold and snowy weather.

Bob Dambach and Michael Miller interviewed Helen in October 2001 at her home in Hague, ND. Helen shared, "The 1st of November we came to New York, the 2nd, we got unloaded, and each one got his tag on where we were to go. They gave us \$5. We didn't even know what to do with it. But in the train, we could get food to eat. On the 5th of November, I came to Bismarck and

that night came right to Hague. Traveling with me was my daughter, six years old."

When Helen arrived on the Krumm farm near Hague, she mentioned, "At that time they [the German settlers] hardly knew any English here. The church was German, and then later on it switched in the '60s. They switched everything to English. There were a lot of farm kids out there who came in the Hague school, they didn't know English. They had to learn."

For three years, Helen enjoyed a peaceful existence working on the farm. Unfortunately, Joseph's wife, Katherine, passed away in 1954. Helen helped him through this difficult time and slowly love blossomed. In 1955, Joe and Helen were married at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Hague. They had seven beautiful children. After Joe passed away in 1969, Helen continued to farm. Among her greatest pleasures were cooking and telling stories of her early years in Russia and Germany. She also loved gardening and cultivated an array of vegetables and marigolds which greeted passerby as they entered Hague.

She learned English by listening to the radio and reading as many books as she could get her hands on. "I learned [English] on my own. I had a radio going, and I knew how to write and read. I was what you call a bookworm. I loved to read, and I learned myself. Joe had the radio and you could get Yankton in South Dakota, Lawrence Welk, and that's how I learned my English.

A lot of people say, "Did you went to school?" I said, "Yah, I went to school, but a Russian school not the English school. But one I regret, I should have learned spelling. The German spelling and the English spelling is different. Joe had the 'Dakota Herold' (from Dickinson, ND) and the 'Josephs Blaetter,' they used to call that, was the Catholic newspaper."

In March 2017, Emmanuelle (Emme) Hulm, did something special to honor her grandmother Helen. For a final project in her Broadcast Journalism class at the University of Mary, Emme made video honoring her Grandma Helen. The documentary won Emme the first-place award in the Emerging Filmmakers' Competition at the Dakota Digital Film Festival in Bismarck. The video captures Grandma Helen Krumm's courage,

and Emme's search for a gift that she can keep in memory of her grandma. "When I watch and listen to the video, and I again see photos and hear her voice, it just hits me." Emme said. "There is just something about her voice."

"And she baked the world's best chocolate chip cookies, hands down." Emme said. "And the freezer was always full of Schwan's ice cream." Emme shared that was probably why all her grandchildren went to Grandma Helen's home.

Lisa (Krumm) Hulm, Hague, ND, daughter of Helen, shared, "Mom's faith came first in her life. She was a 'prayer giant'. She would pray countless rosaries for her family. She loved attending Mass at St. Mary's in Hague. She had a beautiful singing voice. I can still hear her singing with her wonderful German accent that she never lost."

Interviews of Helen (Feist) Krumm were conducted by Kathryn Glatt Wald, in February 1987, Father Leonard Eckroth, Peter Eberle in January 2003, and Bob Dambach and Michael Miller for Prairie Public in October 2001. The audio and transcriptions of the interviews are at <https://library.ndsu.edu/ir/handle/10365/14342>.

For more information about the 24th Journey to the Homeland Tour to Germany and Ukraine (May 2022), donating a family history and/or photographs, or how to financially support the GRHC, contact Michael M. Miller, NDSU Libraries, Dept. 2080, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050, (Tel: 701-231-8416); michael.miller@ndsu.edu; or go to library.ndsu.edu/grhc.

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