

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

Germany during the War

O. H. 808

FRIEDA SCHWEDERSKI

Interviewed

by

Elizabeth Cole Clark

on

October 22, 1986

FRIEDA SCHWEDERSKI

Frieda Schwederski was born March 15, 1924, in Medischkehnen, Germany, a part of eastern Germany known as Lithuania. Her maiden name was Gintant. She was born on a farm and went to school until she completed the eighth grade. She then worked on a farm like all German youth were expected to do. Because of her beautiful voice, she sang in several choirs in Germany and continues to do so in her new country.

Mrs. Schwederski's interview told of her early childhood and her escape from the Russians as they were conquering Lithuania. She describes her escape and eventual life in a camp in Denmark.

Today Frieda lives in Boardman, Ohio, has a fine family of four children, and continues to sing in choirs in her church, the Honterus Lutheran.

Mrs. Schwederski was extremely nervous and found it quite painful recalling some of the events in her life during the rise of Hitler and the ensuing war.

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INTERVIEWEE: FRIEDA SCHWEDERSKI

INTERVIEWER: Elizabeth Cole Clark

SUBJECT: education, escape, camps, rise of Hitler, farm
life, holidays

DATE: October 22, 1986

C: This is an interview with Frieda Schwederski for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Elizabeth Cole Clark, on October 22, 1986, at Youngstown, Ohio, dealing with Germany during World War II.

Where were you born?

S: March 15, 1924 in Medischkehnen.

C: Is it a small town?

S: It is just a village. It is just a farm village.

C: What section of Germany?

S: East Germany. It is now East Germany.

C: What large town is near it?

S: Loadjuthen. It is not a large town; it is just like a village. A church was there. We went there for confirmation classes. That was the little village.

C: What did you raise on your farm?

S: Everything: Grain, potatoes, chickens, cows, sheep, and geese.

C: Did you work on the farm?

S: Yes.

C: What all did you do? What were some of the things you did?

- S: Later on when I got older I had to do things. At ten or twelve years old I had to help.
- C: Did you milk the cows?
- S: Yes, I loved that. I don't know at what age but early enough I know.
- C: What kind of tools did you have on the farm?
- S: Just like the stuff we have today.
- C: The same things?
- S: Yes. Machinery, but a lot of stuff we did by hand.
- C: How many acres did you have on your farm?
- S: Forty morgen . An acre is a little different I think. A morgen is an acre in German, but I think the size is a little different.
- C: But it's close?
- S: Yes.
- C: When you were growing up in the early 1930's, were you aware that there was a serious depression in Germany?
- S: In the 1930's we went to school, but sure we noticed there was some friction, especially us because at that time we were under Lithuania. Right on the border we were Lithuanian and we spoke German. In school we had to have a Lithuanian class everyday. You had to learn Lithuanian. The German kids who had German parents spoke German at home. We did better in the Lithuanian class than the kids that had parents who spoke Lithuanian at home. All of my family is of German descent.
- C: They are of German descent?
- S: Yes. Then we were again under Germany, but that was around Hitler's regime. It was around Hitler's time, 1933 or later, 1936 or 1938 I think. I'm not sure when we went back to Germany.
- C: Were you real close to Poland?
- S: Lithuania is not so far from Poland. There was a river that was the border and Germany and Lithuania. There was a little riverbed 150 miles wide. That was the country in which we lived; it was German, really.
- C: What were your schools like? What was it like going to school? What did you learn?

- S: We had smaller schools than what we have now. You learned everything in school. You started out in first grade. One teacher had up to the middle school grades all in one room. That was the section that had the first graders, the second graders and so on.
- C: That was like a one room schoolhouse?
- S: Yes. Even the high school there were other grades. I think we went to the twelfth grade to the same school but a different room and a different teacher.
- C: What is the thing you remember most about school? Can you think of any stories?
- S: We learned pretty well. The students that wanted to learn, learned. The students that didn't want to learn hardly learned how to read and write in those years. I liked to go to school and I learned and I got all good grades. I cried when I had to stay home and help my father and mother some days. I would rather go to school.
- C: You loved school.
- S: We had to walk about a mile to our school.
- C: What were your holidays like with your family? Like we have Christmas and Easter, what did you do?
- S: We had them too. I know we had relatives and we got together around that time. We had a horse and buggy and sled and we used them at Christmastime; we visited each other in the sled. I know we had aunts and uncles. We kids had to sing. The school kids had to perform at Christmas.
- C: It must have been fun having the horse and sleigh?
- S: Oh yes. We didn't have telephones at that time. When some kind of message had to be brought to an aunt or uncle we had to ride a bike or when the weather didn't permit, we had to walk. Our relatives were two or three miles away. It was really a little far to walk. We had to ride our bikes a lot of times.
- C: Did you have a hard time during the Depression, the early 1930's, when money was so difficult and the government was having a tough time? Or did your parents keep it quiet?
- S: We kids didn't feel much. As kids we didn't worry about that stuff. But we heard later on they had it rough. Some had to sell off their property or a couple of horses or something just in order to survive and pay taxes. They had it rough. Today we don't think we have it rough, but we still have it rough. Isn't it awful that life is rough?

- C: Did you have brothers and sisters?
- S: Yes. I have a sister not far from here. She married an American. She came here for a visit and she met him and she stayed here.
- C: Well, in your growing up years when Hitler was coming to power in the 1940's, were you aware of this? Was your family aware of it?
- S: Oh yes.
- C: How did it affect you and how did you know about it?
- S: Well, we were happy that he was coming. We didn't know anything bad about him. He gave us more work. We could sell our stuff. We couldn't even sell our grain and our pigs or whatever we raised at that time; we couldn't eat them either. We needed money, that I remember from my parents. We couldn't sell the products that we had. But as soon as we got back to Germany things got better. Things were better; we could sell everything we planted. We were free; we could talk. We were afraid to talk German anywhere in Lithuania at that time. That didn't bother us either, we came along with all the neighbors.
- C: Were you involved in any of the youth camps? What were they like and what did you have to do?
- S: Like what they have here, the Brownies, the Boy Scouts. That is what we had. All the kids liked to do that. I liked it too. You participated. You would sing or do some sport. Really everything was alright for the kids to do. I like to sing anyway, so I was where the singing was.
- C: How far in school did you go, I mean how many grades?
- S: Up to the eighth grade.
- C: Then did you go to a vocational school or did you take training or what did you do?
- S: No, after school, that was it. I learned sewing and home economics
- C: What did you do for a job then after you finished the eighth grade?
- S: I was home. I stayed home. You have to on a farm.
- C: When did the war begin to affect you when Hitler started the war? When did you become aware of it?
- S: When did that war start?
- C: It was 1938, 1939, going into Poland.

S: Yes.

C: At one time he went into Austria.

S: Well, yes, later on we heard all kinds of stuff.

C: Did you hear about it?

S: Yes, we did. We didn't have radios. We heard from one neighbor to another. One neighbor heard something and came and told you that.

C: How did your neighbors feel about this?

S: Different. We had different neighbors, but all of them knew.

C: Did they feel that Hitler was doing anything wrong? Or were they just glad he was there to help the economy?

S: Yes, that's it. Not until later in the war did the opinion change. The guys had to go to the Army.

C: Did your dad have to go to war?

S: No.

C: Because he was a farmer?

S: Yes, and he was sick and couldn't go anyway.

C: How about your brothers?

S: Our neighbors and my brother went. I had one brother. I have one sister here and one brother in England. Yes, he went; he had to go.

C: Whereabouts did he fight, on the Polish border? Where was he? Did he go into Poland?

S: He was too young. Later they took him, toward the end of the war, once they went into Russia. We got involved there. You had to leave home and all that stuff and you never came back. They pushed the Germans back and we had to leave our farms and everything.

C: What did you do then?

S: We had just a wagon and we put food, blankets and stuff like that in it and took off. You were afraid of the Russians. If they captured you they took you to Siberia. I had a cousin who was in the Army there. He warned us not to stay. The Russians were coming. He said, "If we are losing the war you better take off if you have a chance to take off." My sister

and my mother and I ended up going to Denmark. We were there for almost two years or so. We lost all of our relatives during the war. Then we found each other later on. We had an address in West Germany and if we got through it and were alright we were to write to that address and somebody might find us. We did find my brother. He got captured in England. He stayed in England. He married an English lady there. He didn't know of anybody or anything so he had to start there.

C: When you went to Denmark where did you stay and what did you do while you were there?

S: We were just in some camps there.

C: Was it called . . .

S: They were like Army camps. They were empty barracks there and they made room for us.

C: Did you go to school or did you have any classes?

S: Well, we had some kind of little jobs such as cleaning up or working in the kitchen.

C: Did you do anything to help the war effort like plant gardens or work in the factories or anything like that?

S: Right in the camp up in Denmark they asked for younger people to work. I have to think what I did. I was working there for a week or two, then my mother didn't like it. It had something to do with cleaning some stuff; it was like a little factory. I can't remember what that was. It was not bullets or stuff like that.

C: What did you do when you lost contact? What happened to your father? Did he go with you and your mother and your sister?

S: My father died before the war.

C: Oh, he did.

S: He died during the war, before we had to leave. Well, my sister was small then. She is eleven years younger than I am. Then we had our grandparents, my mother's parents with us. It was hard.

C: As the war was drawing to an end and you realized that Germany was going to lose the war, how did you feel about that? What were you concerned with? You were older now; what were you concerned with?

S: You can do nothing about it or change it; you just hope that it

will work out somehow. You just feared for your own life, that's all. That is how we thought. We were sort of glad we came out. We got to Denmark; we knew there were human beings there. They did take care of us alright in Denmark. We got to eat there.

- C: As the Russians came in, did you know any people that were unable to get out in time? How were they treated, do you know?
- S: We had heard that. Especially the older people in their seventies and eighties, they said, "What do they want us to do? We are not going to go. Why should we go?" We have heard that some-- I don't know because I didn't see it--were taken away. We had a friend, a neighbor. He married a girl later on and they took her to Siberia. She was there for six or seven years I think. She told us things: How hard it was to make a living out there. They didn't have enough to eat. They had to work out there. They had some farm work to do or factory work. That is what I heard from that lady that was in Siberia. Our fear was that we better go before we have to go there.
- C: What were some of the things you took with you when you went?
- S: Not very many things really. We had to leave our wagon on a seaport in the city there. The boat took us so we just had a suitcase with a couple of clothes and some papers that we had that were special, such as pictures or something, not really much.
- C: Did you know of any of the Jews that were persecuted? Or did you have any friends who were . . .
- S: We didn't. But we have heard that. I didn't see it so I didn't know what to believe. Was it really that way? I always thought that. But I think there was some the bothered the Jewish people.
- C: Well, it is usually just a few who would do something like that. How did you happen to come to the United States?
- S: We had an aunt here. She was here since 1922 or 1924. We were in contact with her after the war ended. We wrote to her. She hugged us; she hugged both of us. I was married over there. She wanted some of us to come over. She wanted to help us. She did help us, a lot. She sent us packages when we were over in Denmark. She sent us clothes and stuff from here. We were glad about that.
- C: I should say. Did you have food? I have talked to some people who had practically starved to death. Did you at least have food in Denmark?
- S: Yes, and Denmark was not so bad. My aunt sent us packages. We

even got some money. She sent us food too, clothes and food. I can't say that we were hungry or starving. We always had something to eat, not like some cities. The people of the cities, we heard, didn't have enough to eat.

C: Since Germany occupied Denmark, did they do much other than the occupation there? Did you feel that you could come and go as you wanted? Did you have freedom there or were you restricted?

S: We were restricted.

C: How about the Danish people at that time, do you remember?

S: The Danish people, some were very nice and some were not so nice. When I was out in that one camp, they came and asked us to help them. We went out helping them pick potatoes and stuff like that. They came and got us with the little bus or little truck or something and we hopped on it and we went there and we had lunch up there. We could drink as much milk as we wanted when we were done up there. They gave us potatoes or something. It helped when we brought something home. Some were very nice. The farmers, the ones that we went out to help, they treated us alright.

C: In this camp, did you have your own little place to live or did a whole group live in one, big room?

S: Well, we had barracks there. There were about fifteen to twenty people in a room. You just had a bed, a double bed and a bunk bed. You had your little suitcase and you didn't need much more.

C: How did you cook? Did you cook in a group or did every family cook for themselves?

S: No, there was a big kitchen, like our big kitchen, with big pots. We just had a dish to go and get our food. Sometimes we could eat right in the same room, in the kitchen, or sometimes we brought it to our room.

C: What did you do to pass the time while you were in that camp?

S: We did play cards. We got to go and see movies. They showed movies. I went to every one. We did sewing.

C: Knitting?

S: Knitting. They brought over from the office, from the factory, some little pieces of sweaters, skirts, or blouses. We unraveled that and knotted them together and made sweaters and pullovers. We did a lot of handwork.

C: Did you do anything that would help the boys in the service or anything like make bandages or Red Cross?

S: No, we didn't.

C: What are some of the experiences that some of your friends had? Did you ever get back in contact with them?

S: We did some weaving and some braiding. We braided the pieces together and we made handbags and stuff like that. I know we were very busy at one time. We did a lot of them. I was even in charge of it for a while. They brought us in the material to make them. We made big ones and small ones and really nice ones. I haven't done one since. That was a job, to do something there. We didn't get anything for it. We just did it. Then there was some kind of church group. Some ladies or somebody there held some kind of meeting and we sang some songs. We wrote them down. We had books and books written down from that time.

C: Did you get the news of what was going on with the war?

S: Oh yes. When did the war end, 1945? We got back fairly soon after that. They let us go back to Germany.

C: Where did you go when you went back?

S: We came back to around Hamburg. Hamburg is a big city. We found there that my uncle and my aunt were there. While we were in Denmark we just had to come down there on a train. They let us go. I was about twenty-one years old then. I was nineteen when we went up there.

C: Did you ever go back to your farm?

S: No.

C: That would be in East Germany, right?

S: Yes, that was in East Germany.

C: Have you ever kept in contact with anybody there?

S: We almost went back once. Wait a minute, we did go back. The fighting was further out and they said we could go. We were on some farm for a while before we went over to Denmark. Then we tried to go back and it wasn't long. I couldn't tell you how long, maybe it was just two or three weeks, not even that. We had to leave again. That was sad. Everything was gone; nothing was there. The house stood there yet but there were no animals there anymore. Everything was taken, the grain and stuff. You hardly could survive anyway.

C: After the war was over were you able to get clothing and food? Did they bring in things for you? What happened? Who did you first see, the Americans, the French, or the British?

- S: Well, after the war we came back to Germany. There I met my husband and there we started all over again. It was hard. We got some kind of papers like food stamps, almost like that. That is the way we started out until it got better. Well, it took a couple of years. You had so many stamps for butter or milk or eggs or bread to buy. That went for a while, the food stamps. We still had to pay, but we at least got them. A lot of people had the money and you just paid for it and you got it when you needed some.
- C: From the black market?
- S: The black market was there.
- C: What kind of money did you use? Was the mark [deutsche mark] still around? Were you able to use the mark?
- S: No, the mark changed on our wedding day. Whatever marks we had the day before weren't good the next day. We got new money then. Each person got just fifty marks. That is the way we started out.
- C: Regardless of what you had, everybody got fifty marks?
- S: Fifty marks. Our old mark was not good, so they made a new mark. It worked out alright.
- C: At least you had something. How about housing? Where did you live because Hamburg was so badly bombed and you were coming into Hamburg?
- S: Well, we never stayed there. We were out of town a little, plenty out of Hamburg. We bought a little bit of land and built a house. My husband and his brothers and my father-in-law, we all worked hard. We started building a house, one house and then another house. We had a house later on there.
- C: That is how you got your start then?
- S: Oh yes. That is the way we started. Then we left the house later on and we came over here.
- C: Are you glad you came?
- S: Oh yes. We thought we had to save something to pay off the house. My husband would probably know better about the house and how much it cost to build it. Then we came here. We thought we would come over here. We had an aunt over here. Her husband passed away, but she had two children; she was not alone. We took a big step and came over here. We thought we would work for five years and then we would go back and we would pay our house off over there. We would save and then go back. Well, we never went back.
- C: Do you still have your house?

- S: No. We sold the house a couple of years earlier. We had the house as long as my mother lived in it.
- C: How often have you been back to visit?
- S: Oh, we did go back. As long as we had mom there we went back quite often, with our children and everything. Quite a few years went by . . .
- C: As you look back and you see the different things that you see on the television and newspapers and radio, is it amazing to you what all went on that you were not aware of?
- S: A little bit, yes. I don't think I can believe everything I hear or see, especially the Holocaust. I couldn't watch it or couldn't believe it.
- C: It's very devastating, isn't it?
- S: Yes. But nobody bothered us and we bothered nobody else.
- C: It is a period of history that is very interesting.
- S: Yes, we kids took it the way it came. If you can't change it, you have to live with it.
- C: Was your mother ever fearful that anything would happen to you if you associated with Jews or said politically that you disagreed with Hitler? Did you worry about it?
- S: No.
- C: You didn't get involved?
- S: No, it never got that far. We never got involved.
- C: You were just happy that things were going better than they were?
- S: Yes, we were happy with the way it went.
- C: Do you recall your parents saying anything to you about what it was like after World War I, the struggle they had before you were born?
- S: Yes, I do.
- C: What was it like? What did they say about it?
- S: The war was not good. There is always a struggle after a war. They struggled too. We were small kids and we had it very hard from what I hear too. Then my dad had something after the war; he was affected from the war.

C: Was he in World War I?

S: Yes, and he didn't get what he should have gotten. They wiggled out of it. He didn't get the right papers they way he should have. He should have gotten money. Some . . . What do you call it?

C: Disability?

S: Not quite disability, but that is why it was hard. My mom had to work hard. He got more and more disabled and she had it hard.

C: Was he injured?

S: Oh, later on he had Parkinson's disease. That is what I remember my daddy having. I heard it had something to do with the war. He had some operation on his head and I believe it was something that had to do with that. But he got that and he couldn't work. We kids had to work later on.

C: When you were little kids what kinds of games did you play and fun did you have?

S: Oh, we played outside. Just school kids, we had all kinds of fun games. I don't know which ones . . . You know, just all the kids grabbed their hands together and had some kind of singing; a couple would do this and that; they would slap each other; all kinds of little games.

C: Did you ever get involved in gymnastics or anything like that? Germany has always been known for great physical strength.

S: No, I didn't.

C: Do you think it was because you went to a country school that was far out?

S: Oh, they had all kinds of stuff there for gymnastics. The guys participated more than the girls. We would play games or stuff like that with the ball, some kind of game with the ball. I can't think of the word in English. I like that game.

C: What was the greatest adjustment you had to make coming to this country? What was the thing that was most difficult to do?

S: Well, the most difficult was the language I think.

C: Did you have any English in Germany?

S: We tried in Germany once we knew we were going to come over here. We got all kinds of little booklets that we could find. You have to be here to learn it. We learned enough. It came along.

- C: Well, I was in Germany and I forgot all the German I knew and it was very difficult. I love Germany. I really enjoyed it. It reminds me so much of Ohio. I went in 1970. I think it's a beautiful country. It reminds me so much of Ohio. I got homesick. I went to England and Wales and Denmark.
- S: England is nice too.
- C: Beautiful, absolutely gorgeous. But I got homesick when I got to Germany because it seemed like it was Ohio.
- S: It's nice, yes, especially when you live a little more in the country. It's different when you visit the city. Each city has its own look and its own style and history. It's nice to see all of those buildings and castles. I haven't seen them.
- C: Growing up, did you go to church on Sunday? What did the church do for you?
- S: I know we had to walk about a kilometer, around two miles; the horses were tired from working the whole week. We had to walk to church then. Mom came along; daddy, most of the time, couldn't. Mother wanted us to and we got there. I had to walk to confirmation class like every other kid. We had to walk there once a week. It was a nice church.
- C: Which church did you associate with, the Lutheran?
- S: Yes. We had a Lutheran church. It was all we had, the whole surrounding had just one church. We heard that someplace there was a Catholic hall where they met but we didn't have very many Catholics, just a few. I believe there were just a few. The farmers all were Protestant. Here and there there were some factory workers that were Catholic and they didn't have a church. They met someplace.
- C: Being in the part of Lithuania you were, you were moved back and forth before World War I and then after World War I and then . . .
- S: No, the parents didn't . . .
- C: The government moved back and forth?
- S: Yes, the government did. The parents stayed there.
- C: The country was switched around, but you just stayed put on your farm.
- S: Yes, we did. That is what I hear. We didn't have to leave the farm. When the Second World War came . . .
- C: That was when?

S: Yes.

C: Did you take any of your animals or did you just leave the animals and get out?

S: We left the animals, even the horses. When we went on the boat we had to leave the horse and wagon. You get attached to those animals; it was hard to leave them. It was frightening.

At first we wanted to go with the wagon over to some island. It was wintertime then and we couldn't get over to the island. There wasn't a road. If you wanted to go then you went over the ice, over the water; it was frozen. The people were in haste. They drove up too close. They just fell in the water, wagon, horse and everything. We went over that water for maybe a half a mile, over the ice and then we turned back. There were all people there that we knew. Everybody was on the same boat, in the same shape. Everybody wanted to come over that ice and get to the other side. It was a disaster. We got away. A lot of people didn't. A lot of people fell in the water.

C: Were they trying to cross the end of the Baltic Sea and then getting over to a shortcut?

S: Yes.

C: Oh my. What time of year was this?

S: January.

C: January!

S: Once we got cut off, we had to wait. We were singled in, that meant surrounded. Around us were the Russians already. They bombed; they shot; everything went on. We were almost captured. Then the tractor and the train could go. They let us out. We came out of there and we got to Pillau later on and we took a boat and that was where we left our horse and wagon. That is the way we got to Denmark.

C: Did they lose a lot of people on the ice?

S: They did. I'm sure they did, yes.

C: They were anxious to get away.

S: Even on the boat they had those mines in the water. We heard that those boats that went from there to Denmark to Copenhagen . .

C: They were all those little islands?

S: We got there alright. We got lice and we got everything on that trip. All the people, hundreds on that boat and that room, got

over alright. That was a good thing. That took us on the train and we drove all the way up to the north of Denmark. Then we got into some kind of Army barracks.

C: Were you able to see the ocean or the water from where you were stationed?

S: No, no we couldn't. When we looked on the map where we were, we were not far.

C: But you never got out of that camp?

S: No, we stayed there. They took us in one camp and later on they started sorting us. We were not even real Germans. They thought we were Lithuanians more than Germans. So we should have some kind of privilege. They took us to some kind of international camp. We came out of there; we made good friends there in that German camp. The people cried when we left there. We went to some international camp later on. The food was maybe a little better there. The people were not as nice as they were in that other camp. They were somehow . . . I don't know. We were somehow too German for them; we were not Lithuanian; we were not Polish; we were not this or that. I felt that sometimes that there were some guys that looked at you as if they would do something to you. I know I said, "Polnische Wirtschaft;" that is German.

C: Did the Red Cross help at all?

S: The Red Cross had something to do with the international camp. All the foreigners more or less were in that camp. The Germans had to stay in another camp. In one camp around the beginning of 1944, we had singing there. A church formed; they had a choir. On Sunday morning we went and sang out of the camp in a church. The church was really close by. It was 200 or 300 yards away maybe. All the people could go to the church. We had a choir and a director and everything. We also had a piano player. We had nice music; we learned a lot of nice stuff there. We enjoyed that while we were there. That is what we did in that camp

C: Were you aware of the American and British planes coming over and bombing? Did you ever see it?

S: In Denmark?

C: No, did you ever see it from where you were?

S: Before we got to Denmark we saw it, yes.

C: Because you went through Hamburg, because there was so much in Hamburg . . .

S: No, Hamburg we went through after the war. Before we left home we heard planes, Russian planes, flying over at night so we had

to close up the windows and have no light showing. They bombed areas, even farms. When they got closer with their planes . . . We heard planes. Somedays we would drive up to look and sometimes a bomb was in the field. Sometimes even a barn or a house was bombed. That gave us something to think about when we saw that. When we were sitting in the house we could hear different motors, different sounds. We knew that those were Russian planes up there. Those cities must have gone through something. We were just farmers; they didn't bother with the farmers as much. The cities were leveled off.

- C: Your brother, you say, was captured? Do you know where he was captured and sent to England as a prisoner? Apparently the English must have captured him.
- S: No, I think he was captured in Holland, and then they took him to England. It could have been the English soldiers or even the Americans; I couldn't tell you. They captured him in Holland. He was a paratrooper.
- C: Do you stay in contact with him?
- S: Yes. He is supposed to come here, but it looks like he doesn't. .
- C: Well, things are pretty tough over there right now.
- S: Yes. Well, he hurt his back; he can only do certain things. I heard he had to retire early. He retired early and he is younger than I am.
- C: Did he get injured when he was in the Army?
- S: No. He was a farmer. Some farmer took him and he had to take care of their cows and the pasture. It was a big farm.
- C: Did he get any special training? What is he doing now?
- S: Well, he went and did some kind of work. What he is doing now they trained him to do. He could just sit and later on do some kind of work; he had to test some bad parts. He had to look for defective parts and he had to take them out. He checked something. I'm not even sure if he still does it. I heard he has retired.
- C: Did he get any kind of compensation from the German government for being in the war?
- S: No, not that I know of. I wonder if he will get it once he . . .
- C: Retires?
- S: Retires, yes. We will talk about it one of these days.

- C: Do you have any friends right now or family that you are in contact with in East Germany or East Berlin, the part that the Russians are in control of now?
- S: No. My neighbor's cousin is in East State right there at home where we all left; he was even in West Germany and he decided that he was going to go back home. He did go back home. He thought he would be able to run his farm. No sir, he didn't.
- C: He didn't get his farm back.
- S: No. He had to work for some kind of . . . He works on a tractor, he runs the tractors.
- C: A community farm?
- S: Yes.
- C: Called co-op farms?
- S: He never got his farm back. That is the little bit I hear. He is in contact with him. But I hear he is not doing too bad. He is married and has a family and when the kids grow up like that, they think nothing of it.
- C: They think it is okay.
- S: Yes. I guess it is a little better there too. At least they don't hunger and stuff like that.
- C: At least they are not hungry.
- S: Yes. Not much more I don't think. Some here, even in the club we are in they have relatives, a sister or a brother still there. We hear that some do pretty well in East Germany. I hear from some if you do what they tell you to do, if you do everything and go along with what they want you to do, that they don't bother you. You have everything. Some even have cars up there, drive cars and all of that. How could you if you just work for a living? You couldn't have a car, but there are exceptions.
- C: Did they ever contact you to see how you are? Are they anxious to find out what the rest of their friends have done?
- S: Our farmer neighbor wasn't here but he came up to Canada. His sister was there. While he came to Toronto, we drove up there just to see him. He is more in contact with old friends and old neighbors and he told us all kind of things. He is a guy that can remember everything and he can think of everything. He can talk for days. He never quits; he has so much to talk about. It's a joy to meet him. We didn't meet too often, but when we met we went out of our way to meet him.

C: You talk about old times?

S: Yes.

C: It's nice to talk over old times, remembering your friends.

S: Yes, and work. We worked together. We came together. We had our fun. We had a record player. He was the one that operated the record player we had. It was just an old-fashioned record player with the RCA tube. That is the kind we had. We danced once we had our farm jobs done. It was a big job always, dresching the corn and the wheat and the stuff. You brought it in the barn and then some kind of machine came to you . . . I don't know how to say it in English. Nowadays on the field they separate right away the corn from the cob.

C: Combines?

S: Yes. At that time it wasn't quite . . .

C: When the thrashers came in you really had to cook lots of food for them.

S: Yes. A lot of neighbors came together. We would need more help and then we had to cook to feed them. In the evening we had some music and some dancing.

C: Sounds like fun.

S: That was some time alright.

C: You had a good time.

S: When we see those people now after so many years it's still fun and you appreciate it. It is your old, country person.

C: You're in a new country but you still remember so much that happened.

S: Oh yes, you will hang on to that a little bit. We met a lot of people here and we are really satisfied here too. There are a lot of people here that are immigrants. Maybe their parents came in already but you hear it over and over. They all came somehow.

C: Sometime everybody did.

S: Yes.

C: Can you think of any other good stories you can tell me about your growing up, or anything during the rise of Hitler or while the war was going on or just after?

- S: Now we have calmed down very much. But the first couple of years after the war we were all shook up and we couldn't sleep at night; you had nightmares. The nerves or something or whatever it is that does it . . .
- C: Probably because you were under so much stress. You were just torn up.
- S: Even when you're young and can take more, it still worked on you somehow. I calmed down. I haven't had them. Not a bad nightmare, but you would dream about the war or something, or were scared to death. That is why I don't even want to think about the war. It's done and it's over.
- C: It's history.
- S: We don't talk very often about it, even with my sister. As long as she has been here I think we talked once or twice about it. She was so much younger than I was, but she remembered some things that I don't even remember, that stuck in her mind. She was nine or ten years old and she tells me sometimes that I did this and I did that and mama wanted to give up. "You took the line and the horse and wagon and drove," she said. "If mama wouldn't have had you we wouldn't have gotten there." I guess everybody was scared. Somebody had to do it.
- C: Have you talked to your children and told them all of this?
- S: We have talked, but not too often.
- C: You should.
- S: My husband was in the war, and he has lived through different things I guess.
- C: When you were fleeing your farm with your horses and stuff, did you stop and eat? How did you manage to eat? What did you do?
- S: We just had some sandwiches, some smoked meat or just butter and bread. We took some from the farm. We found some places on the road that had warm meals. My grandma and grandpa got very sick; they got diarrhea that we couldn't cure. There were older people that couldn't take it, couldn't fight it no matter what we did. We didn't have stuff. There wasn't a doctor in the camp.
- C: Like a dysentery?
- S: They even took them to the hospital camp. They couldn't help them. I lost my grandma and grandpa in about two weeks.
- C: While you were in the camp in Denmark?

S: Yes.

C: Do you think it was bad food?

S: It was hard on them, on all of us, you know. We took them along no matter what. We didn't want to leave them for the Russians to take or to shoot them. We thought we would do what we could. They really wanted to stay too.

C: Did they?

S: Yes. They were old and didn't know why they should go. They weren't going to make it long anyway.

C: How old were they at the time?

S: They were in their eighties. They were eighty-two when they died.

C: Well, did they get something like dysentery?

S: Yes, they must have. They couldn't eat; they couldn't drink; it was like a diarrhea.

C: Was it like influenza?

S: Yes. That must have been the word for it. The German word for it was katar. It hit mostly really young children or old people. It looked like it was catchy; people got it very much. It was bad. So that is the way we lost Oma and Opa, real quick there.

C: Were they buried there in Denmark then?

S: Yes. My mom and my aunt from America went to visit them later on. My mom and her brother and sister over there, they all went to Denmark and went to Frederikshavn. Frederikshavn was the city we were in up there. They went up to that cemetery. How they got through, I don't know. They didn't talk any Danish, just German. They got the information where they were. We just had the number or something. I don't remember where mama got that. They just had little sticks with the number on it, I think. We just saw their graves once. We were not allowed to go there later on. That was in the cemetery, maybe not quite in their cemeteries or on the site where they put the foreigners down. That is where my mom and her sisters went to go and see the graves. It was hard for them just like for everybody.

C: It doesn't matter when it happens.

S: The different country, the time that went by and the time that took them there.

C: So many changes.

- S: It didn't affect younger people so much as it did my mom. She was really depressed and down.
- C: She lost her husband and her mother and dad.
- S: Yes, and the farm.
- C: What did she do when the war ended?
- S: We kids were around and she stayed with us. We went to work and she cooked. We built a house there. She got a little monthly rente.
- C: Something like social security?
- S: Yes. She was off her farm; she had to live off something. She got something--they didn't call it social security--monthly. Each child got so much and then the mother or the father or whoever it was got that much. Most of the people found jobs. We did whatever we could, or we learned something. We took up something. I didn't. I always had enough to do. So we came back and we married and then we built a house. We then had kids and there was enough to do.
- C: Were your children born over there?
- S: Two were born over there and two over here. They were very small when we came over here. Karin was two years old when we came over. My other daughter was six months.
- C: Did you come through Ellis Island when you came?
- S: No.
- C: Where did you land?
- S: We came through New York. We had papers, immigration papers.
- C: Did you fly or come by boat?
- S: No, we came by boat. We could not fly. I don't know if we were afraid to fly or something, because we had these two, little kids. They told us we could have flown. We should have done that. We were about eight days on the water. We were sick.
- C: That's for sure. It was an experience, wasn't it?
- S: Yes.
- C: Especially for the children.
- S: The little ones would not survive. We were glad to see New York. That was a journey. Then when we came over here my aunt and my

cousin came to greet us. We had it made.

C: It felt good then.

S: Yes, oh yes. We learned English really fast. I know my husband went to work. My aunt took him. She worked some places and she introduced him. He learned the language and he worked.

C: One thing I was going to ask you: Why do you think the hate of the Jews came out so much under Hitler? Why do you think so? Be very honest, whatever you think. I have heard different stories. Why did Hitler particularly pick on the Jews as a religion?

S: Well, I think Jews have their own style of doing business. First of all, they are in business. From what you hear a Jew always has some kind of business; he is not a farmer or works on a farm. Either he has a factory or a clothing store. I think Hitler wanted them out. He wanted a clean Germany country, not this mix like America. In America it is called a mix, but that is fine too. It doesn't bother me what my neighbor thinks or does. I think at that time that is the impression we had. He wanted to clean out Germany. The way we saw it and heard then that was done. We, as Germans, didn't think it could be done. We didn't think anyone could do it like that.

C: Do you think it was all Hitler or do you think it was the men working for him?

S: Oh, I think so. There was a whole government force working. It was probably him mostly. He probably had the idea to go through with it. But he must have had enough people that did it with him or for him, otherwise if they would have all been against it they could have gotten rid of him or something. I don't know why it became this way and that nobody did anything about it.

C: Do you have any idea why the Jews didn't fight back? When they knew they were going to be eliminated or executed, why didn't they fight back? Do you have any ideas?

S: Didn't they try to? Some of them tried to get out of Germany. Whatever I read or whatever I get in my hands or do, it's always sad. Those people didn't have any other choice. That is what I see and read in books. I don't know what I should believe.

C: But it can happen. It can happen again too if you are not careful. It could be other people.

S: I hope not. That is for sure some history right there. They better not let that history go to sleep. They push and remind you. I'm sure it hurts and it will always hurt, but I think they should always bring it up.

C: I agree with you. I think it is overdone, that is why I wanted

to do this.

S: It doesn't change.

C: It doesn't change it but it seems like every time you turn around it's back on the television.

S: Yes.

C: And there are other sides to the story that they are not telling too, about the suffering of the German people, how they suffered too. That is why I wanted to do this. Look what happened to you and your family.

S: That was not natural. That came with the war. I guess that was Hitler's fault too; he lost the war. We had to go. It was on account of that the whole world went against him. First of all, he attacked the whole world. So he should have figured he would get beaten. That was not really wise.

C: Germany has always been such a proud nation and high quality in education and engineering and then to have a leader . . . that's too bad.

S: It did happen and had to happen. We all know how it started and how he got there and what he did.

C: It's overwhelming.

S: Yes.

C: In such a short period of time he was able to do that too.

S: Plain and simple, people like us believed in him. We didn't know what went on there.

C: Don't you think the truth was hidden from you?

S: I think so. The newspapers didn't say anything. We didn't read about it there.

C: How can you do anything about it when it's already out of proportion before you find out? You can't do much.

S: Even if you would have tried to do something they would have put you in there too, put you in jail.

C: Did you know any people that objected to Hitler that got taken?

S: Yes.

C: What happened?

- S: You couldn't be too much against Hitler. This man knew maybe more than I did. That is why he was talking. But we heard that they took him away or they had him in for some kind of questioning. He came back, but they watched him then. There were people like that. Maybe he had a big farm, I don't know. He had a couple hundred of acres. He was a big shot there, a big farmer.
- C: Do you think they bothered the farmers as much as they would bother the people in the cities?
- S: I think the cities were worse off than the farms, sure. We went on with our daily business more or less.
- C: You farmers were providing the food too.
- S: Yes. Bigger factories and offices and banks, there were a lot of Jews in banks.
- C: They controlled the money.
- S: Yes. It's alright with me whatever they did, but there were people that didn't like it. It bothered them. No, we didn't hear about it until it was too late. Then we couldn't do anything anyway. But we have felt sometimes even here that it's a nice country; you feel at home. Still we read sometimes about people who want nothing to do with Germans, not very many. They don't bother us anymore, people like that. Most of the people are nice here. My husband especially has done a lot of work for a lot of Jewish people. He will tell you that he has nice customers there. That's the way it should be. That is the way we should get along with each other.

END OF INTERVIEW