

Interview with Alex Kloster
Marquette, Michigan
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START OF INTERVIEW

TAPE 1 SIDE A

Russel Magnaghi (RM): Okay, Alex what we'd like to do this morning is to discuss a little bit about your family background and a little about the role of the Germans that settled in the eastern Upper Peninsula. Let's start with your family a little bit of background in terms of where they came from and then we'll get to the Upper Peninsula.

Alex Kloster (AK): Well, originally the Germans went to Russia, they were taken there by the tsar's wife, and I think it was Catherine. Who married the tsar and went to Russia and took several hundred, as I recall, several hundred German families to Russia. The purpose was to infuse the German culture into the barbarous Russians. That's how it's always been explained to me. But they were very provincial people and never mingled with the Russians. They created to my knowledge, two large settlements. One up on the Volga River and one down in the Kuban River Valley, near the Black Sea which was a smaller group I think. But still hundreds of families. And they stayed there for roughly a hundred years in those two settlements. Now my mother came from the settlement on the Volga River Valley, along with several of her other families that I'll mention a little bit later.

RM: Could you give your mother's name?

AK: Anna. Anna, and her last name, maiden name, was Abelhans.

RM: Could you spell that?

AK: I don't know how to spell it. I believe it's A-B-E-L-H-A-N-S. Abelhans, I think that's how it's spelled. My mother never went to school, so she never wrote her name. I've never seen it in writing, but I've heard people mention it. Then my father he came from the settlement down in the Kuban River Valley which seems to me to have been a much more prosperous group, more highly educated. All the other families that came and settled in the UP about, I'm sure it was around 1915 because I'm sort of gaging it around my brother's birthdate, my oldest brother's birthdate. The other people, the other families that came all came from the Volga River area. My father was the only one that came from the Kuban River area to the Upper Peninsula. There were many others that came to America but he was the only one up here. He met my mother in Milwaukee, they weren't married when they came over here, he met my mother in Milwaukee and that's where that group I guess originally went. That's how they met, so all the other families that came to the UP were from the Volga River area.

RM: Now didn't a lot of the, or weren't there quite a few Volga Germans that went out to the Dakotas?

AK: Oh, a lot of them yeah. There are huge settlements out there yet. In fact I'm supposed to have some kind of a relative out there someplace. Either in Iowa or North Dakota. But my father, he only had one relative that came to this country and he went to Clinton, Iowa a young cousin of my fathers. He was killed in a hunting accident, as far as I know those are the only relatives that he ever mentioned.

RM: I think one time didn't you tell me, getting back to the European end of it, didn't you have some kind of horror story about the people that were maimed? In the old country, like your father's family? You might also mention your father's name?

AK: My father's name was Anthony, Anthony John Kloster. And I remember a brother named Ed too, he has the same name as my father. Yeah my father made a lot of efforts to local his relatives after World War 1. After World War 1 and, there was no evidence of any of them ever having survived anything, they were completely and totally gone. The Russian people, you see there were two villages where my father lived. One on the one side of the Kuban River, and on on the other side of the river. One was all Germans and one was all Russians. They seldom ever intermarried, but they weren't hostile towards each other. They celebrated Christmas together and weddings and things like that. But when it came to marriage very very seldom did they intermarry. But he contacted people in the Russian village and they said they had no idea what happened to the people, they were all gone. He hear a rumor that a trainload of them had been taken back to Germany sometime during the World War 2, or 1. But he could never verify that, he tried.

RM: Now he had relatives in that village. How many did he have?

AK: He had 12 brothers and 1 sister.

RM: And he was the only one that came to the United States?

AK: He was the only one that came to this country because he had spent 4 years in the army and he was a translator because the officers in the Russian army spoke various languages. And when you have these high level meetings, they would speak in Russian but some of the officers who were Armenian and so forth, couldn't speak Russian or understand it. So my father would translate. He sit alongside of them and give them kind of a simultaneous translation of what the people were saying then would they would want to say something or make some kind of a comment they would tell him and then he would repeat it in Russian. Of course he heard the content of all these meanings, and in fact he was in an army, the Russian army, when the revolution started in St. Petersburg and he was sent from Turkey up to St. Petersburg. Of course by the time they got there on the train, the thing was over. All the sailors and the factory workers were arrested I suppose, so he went back with his company back to Turkey again.

RM: Now was this in, they had that, there was kind of an uprising in 1905? Was this?

AK: That was, that was it. And then the sailors from the cruiser *Aurora* joined the factory workers and started an uprising.

RM: That was later though.

AK: No that was 1905.

RM: But he was involved in what happened in 1905. He went there in 1905.

AK: Yeah. But then after he got out of the army he went home and he talked with his brothers and his father and mother and told them that things were going to get really bad before they got better. But where they lived that was kind of a paradise. Beautiful, Georgia Lorne [spelled phonetically] knows the area. I talked to her the other night in the library. It's a beautiful fertile area, you can grow anything. And the owned land there. They said "we're not gonna go and leave this." So he said "well if you're not then I'm going by myself." He never saw them again. That was the end of that. But the families that came up to the Upper Peninsula they came here, well they were tricked I guess into coming to the Upper Peninsula. Because somebody had told them that if they would come to the Upper Peninsula, they could get 40 acres of land and a cow and 50 chickens and sort of described it as being a complete farm, they'd just move in and take it over. Well when they got up there they discovered that there was some land but it was just cut over timber land, all the slashing and the stumps, no chickens, no cows. They got conned into coming up there and I think the reason was that they would bring these families in and once they got them there they couldn't leave because they didn't have anything of their own, so they had to go work in the woods and work in the lumber camps. Now Dennis Byashefkis' [spelled phonetically] uncle got conned that way. He was taken to Seney and he had to work a year in a logging camp in Seney before he earned enough money to get out and go to Detroit. But that's what happened to them anyway, and they wound up with farms, all of them were farmers.

RM: Going back to when they came, they came around?

AK: About 1915, something like that.

RM: How many were in this group?

AK: Let's see if I can remember, there wasn't very many. There was my mother and my father, then there was the Leachman family, I think that was spelled L-E-A-C-H-M-A-N, Leachman. There was a Snyder family, the Snyders were, and Mrs. Snyder was Mrs. Leachman's daughter. Then there was the Rupp family, R-U-P-P, that was a pretty good sized family. Then there was the Hartman family, well there were two Hartman families. Well not exactly two families, it was Joe Hartman who was married never had any children. Then there was Oscar Hartman who was a bachelor, I think he had been married and left his wife or she died or something. But Oscar was kind of a drifter, he'd just drift from place to place. He'd stay with Rupp and then he'd stayed with his brother, Joe. Let's see now, who else was there? Leachmans...there was one or two that I can't remember right now but that's about all there was. They lived up there in the woods the first year. When they got there because they had to stay, and then the Hartmans and the Rupp, Leachmans, Snyders, they all somehow out there got a piece of land, 40 or 80 acres something like that and they farmed very very marginally until finally they all, the old folks all died and the kids went to the city. The children, I can't remember all their names, but they're all big families. The only one that wasn't was Joe Hartman, he never had any kids. But the Rupp and the

Leachmans and the Snyders, they all had big families 8 or 10 kids. And there are some left over in, some of the kids have come back from Flint. They spend their years working in the factory in Flint and now they've come back up here to retire.

RM: Now you mentioned the Rupp family. Is that, there's a Catholic priest named Rupp?

AK: He's no relation. I asked him one day if he was related to them but he wasn't.

RM: They even spelled the name, all the same.

AK: Yeah.

RM: Where did these older Germans come from before they settled in the UP, were they all living together or something?

AK: They all went to Milwaukee, from what I was told that's what they were told to do in the old country when they left, go to Milwaukee. Well they went to Milwaukee but like was just sort of like a stop-over. When they got to Milwaukee then they were conned into coming up to the UP. They were only in Milwaukee probably a month or so, and typically they stayed with relatives until they sort of got some idea to what they were gonna do and then off they would go. Many of them went, why this group came to the Upper Peninsula I don't know somebody must have been real persuasive because most of them went west. Iowa, Nebraska, out in the grain country. In fact my dad spent I think two years out there in Iowa and Nebraska. Another thing too, yeah I forgot this part! After they got to the UP and found out this wasn't any paradise and that there weren't any free lunches, they migrated around kind of like a band all these families. And they went to Bark River, they went to Harris, they went to Hermansville, they went to Carol, Michigan, they went to Pueblo, Colorado, they went to Montrose, Colorado and a couple of other places that all, working sugar beets, they share cropped sugar beets. And each one, they would go out and they would take on like 40, 50 acres of sugar beets.

RM: Oh so they didn't just go out to pick them but they actually grew them?

AK: They sharecropped them.

RM: They sharecropped them!

AK: Somebody else owned the land and bought the seed.

RM: But they did all the work.

AK: Yeah. And they did that for quite a number of years because one of my, one or two of my sisters was born in Colorado. When they were working sugar beets out there. But after a few years, see their theory was that they would work the sugar beets and then get a share of the profit, they'd take the money and buy themselves some land. Well the way it turned out, they finally wised up. The way it turned out, they made just enough during the season to pay their bills and get them through the winter and the next spring they were broke. So they had to go back

to the sugar beets again. During the summertime when they were working the sugar beets, the land owner would finance it, he'd pay for their groceries and that kind of stuff. But in the fall when the crops were sold he got his money back. They got just enough to get through the winter. Well my dad, well all of them decided that that wasn't the thing to do so they finally got back up to Brimley and how in the world they bought land I don't know how they got the money, unless they bought it with no down payment and paid the rest of their life. But they did some land, Joe Hartman had a farm, Rupp had a farm, Snyders had a farm. Snyders lost their farm in the Depression, the bank took it. In our view the bank took Rupp's farm too, they were marginal. By the way they settled in a place, this is so strange, it's a road that runs north and south two miles west of Brimley off of M28 and it runs north off M28 probably a mile and a half, and then turned east and runs into Brimley. That was called the "Irish Line," why they called it the "Irish Line" I'll never know but that's where all those German people settled, right on that road. In fact I was born there on the corner, that's where I was born.

RM: Now does your family have a farm along with these other people?

AK: Eventually. Yeah my father quit the sugar beets and when to work for the railroad and he became very successful. He was a tremendous mechanic and he went all over the United States repairing steam engines that nobody else could repair, they couldn't tune them up you know? He'd go up out there to Santa Fe from Battle Creek where we lived at the time when he worked for the railroad, he worked for the Grand Trunk. But he'd go clear out to Santa Fe to tune up an engine or two, then he'd come back again. They paid good money, he saved so that in 1929 he bought a farm, his first farm he bought in Brimley, 80 acres with cattle, horses, machinery, the whole works. Paid cash for it, which was very very fortunate because he went into the Depression with no debts, so he got by very well compared to everybody else he didn't owe anybody anything.

RM: Now your father went and settled, got married in Milwaukee then went up and settled in Brimley, or they were up in Brimley. Then this group migrated, did the families migrate?

AK: Oh yes.

RM: From Brimley, they went to all these other places to sugar beet farm?

AK: The families got together to go.

RM: But they'd always go back to Brimley, so there's something there that?

AK: Well yes, eventually something brought them back there, I don't know what. I have no idea what.

RM: I wonder if somebody owned some land and they went back because that person owned some land? It's interesting, curious.

AK: I don't think so. I don't think so. Now it might have been, it could have been that the old Mr. Leachman. See he never went on those sugar beet safaris.

RM: Oh.

AK: Old Man Leachman and his wife stayed there.

RM: What was his first name?

AK: I don't remember, I don't remember her first name either. I don't know her name, but they were very very old. She was a midwife, Mrs. Leachman was a midwife for our whole group. In fact she tended to my mother when I was born. And just lived down the road, we all lived on the Irish Line.

RM: Maybe was he like the kind of like the patriarch or something and the people went back because he was there?

AK: I think he was kind of like the group leader and everybody sort of, you know surrounded him. He never went out for the sugar beets, he stayed there. There was another _____ hall too, I don't remember where it was. I can't remember now. But they all had relatives back in the old country because they used to get together. They'd sit around Sunday afternoon and talk. I used to like to sneak up to the door and sit up there and listen to them, kids weren't allowed in the room. We had to get out and go to the barn and play, you know get out of way but I used to sneak in there and listen to them, listen to them talk about people in the old country that they left. Brothers and sisters, and mothers and fathers, the whole bunch. But after this group came, none of the relatives came after that. You would think there would have been another wave or two of them, but no there wasn't.

RM: But then that, they did get about that time they settled in 1915 so you got caught up in the war. I know there was kind of a similar situation down by Perkins where you had some Belgians settled about that time. But then the settlement really never expanded, it was founded by Belgians and then World War 2 intervened and that ended any further development. So the people that are there are not the colony that was anticipated. Now what did they...

AK: See these people too, these Germans, that was their intent. They were told in the old country, that the streets were paved with gold and there was no limit to the amount of money you could earn in America. So their intent was to come here, make a bunch of money, and then get all the relatives over here. Well they didn't make the money, and then the war started.

RM: Now you're saying that your father went up there and settled with the group, moved around with them when they were doing the sugar beet experience. But then you said he didn't get into developing a farm, but you were born up there? He was working on the railroads, so how did that progress?

AK: They were still working sugar beets when I was born.

RM: Okay.

AK: And I think they were working sugar beets in the UP then, because one of my sisters was born in Hermansville, and one was born in Bark River. See there were 11 kids in my family. There was 2 girls that are younger than me that were born in Bark River and one in Hermansville. So they were working sugar beets at that time. They my dad went on the railroad. He worked on the railroad until 1929, that would be probably 3 or 4 years at least, something like that. Anyways he'd buy up when he come home. And then he just kept buying for himself until the Depression. He kept buying land and buying land, and the banks were foreclosing farms. And he was not real popular with a lot of people around Brimley because the bank would take their farms and then he'd buy 'em see. They kind of threw it at him for taking the farm. Well the bank had it, the bank would sell it to my dad, for it was foreclosed on, and then he'd take it over and make the payments. That snowballed into a pretty big operation there. Then his real goal in life was to raise fruit, because where he came from they raised every kind of fruit. Apples, and cherries, and plums everything you could imagine. So 1936 he left and went down to Benzie County and he bought one farm. They farmed in Benzie County and up in the UP.

RM: Oh so they had the UP property as well?

AK: Yeah. And then...

RM: Well you also had all these brothers and sisters.

AK: Yes.

RM: So he had farm hands!

AK: He had a crew yeah! We were the original migrant workers, I spent more time on the road between Benzie County and the Upper Peninsula, hauling horses and machinery back and forth. We worked with horses in those days, you didn't have to buy gasoline and we made all our own hay. And we had these big Belgian horses, huge buggers, they could do it all in a day. So we farmed down there, and he did the same thing down there. Whenever a farm would become available that looked like it had some potential he would buy it. So eventually he got into the cherry growing business so heavily that he had to give up the farming in the UP. But the last piece of land in the UP was sold in 1948, which was it. Then he just raised cherries.

RM: Down there?

AK: Yep.

RM: Now what happened to the rest of the people?

AK: Well, Oscar he just drifted around. He worked in the woods a little bit here and there and then he'd go and live with somebody.

RM: Now this was Oscar?

AK: Oscar Hartman.

RM: Hartman.

AK: He just eventually died. Joe Hartman, to tell you the truth I don't know how in the hell he lived. He was a very very nice person, really of the whole gang he was one of them that I really liked. He had small pox when he was a youngster and one eye was covered with just a white or opaque membrane over his eye. He was a strange looking guy. He had 40 acres of land, and of course it was just him and his wife. I don't know who he willed, I guess he worked odd jobs here and there and got by, that's all. I don't remember if he ever even owned a car. But Joe, he finally died. John Rupp was the last of them. Joe Snyder he died I guess in 19... I don't remember what he died from, he wasn't old when he died. He went to dad about 1942 something like that, right around World War 2. John Rupp, he outlived them all except for my mother and father. He was the last one of them to die. He lived right in Brimley for years and years, and I guess he lived off of social security or something, he was ally by himself. His wife and Mrs. Hartman, Joe Hartman's wife, were sisters. They were sisters but very different from each other. But the strange thing about it is that all of the women, including more than half of the first generation, which would be my generation, all of the immigrant women and practically all of the first generation women, have now died and every single one died of cancer. Every single one except my mother, my mother was the only exception. Two forms of cancer, breast cancer and cancer of the throat.

RM: My oh my.

AK: Isn't that strange?

RM: Yes. That goes against any statistical average.

AK: That's right.

RM: So you're talking how many women that was.

AK: Oh god, 20 or more. Every single one died of cancer. Marie Snyder who married, _____ from Goetzville, a Polish fella now a policeman in the Sault. She did just a couple years ago, same thing. Cancer of the throat. Her mother died of the same thing.

RM: Were they smokers?

AK: No. The only one that smoked was Joe Hartman, and Oscar did too. Oscar died of cancer too. My dad smoked, but he didn't have any cancer and lived to be 85. My brother, he died of a, his heart just failed. But they were smokers, every single one of them died of cancer.

RM: Now talking about the women, what would they do? Were they involved in just keeping up, well they had these large families. Were they mainly keeping house? Did they doing farm work?

AK: Oh hell yes, oh yeah. They worked just as hard as the men. The sugar beets, when they worked in sugar beets, they did just as much work in a day as a man did, and so did the kids. My

older sister, the oldest sister who is living in British Columbia now, she recalls when she was just maybe 6 or 7 years old...

RM: What year?

AK: Probably about in the early 20s.

RM: Okay.

AK: She remembers having to get up at daylight and work till dark cleaning beets. Because the men, and the adults, like two or three adults would go ahead and they had what they called blocking holes. The hole was just wide, the same width as a distance you would want to trim the beets. When the beets were rolled into the ground in a steady stream. So the adults would go ahead with the blocking hole and they'd chop out a block of beets. Then they'd chop another block but they would leave a few between the spaces. The kids then came around behind on our hands and knees and picked up the ones that fell, that was their job. I've heard her tell lots of time about how she was on her hands and knees going down those rows when she was just a little weakling, pulling beets daylight to dark. She wasn't the only one, all the kids had a part of it.

RM: Did they grow sugar beets over in Brimley or that was just im?

AK: Well none over there.

RM: None over there?

AK: No, no sugar beets around there. The land was clay-y over there, not good for sugar beets. It's got to be sandy like around here. Down around Hermansville and Harris and Bark River. Of course the reason they get into the sugar beets is because in the world of _____, they need a lot of sugar beets. That was what they knew. It was quite a lot like that, one segment of that movie *Centennial*? That Russian guy went out to Colorado, got into the sugar beet business and became a big success? Unfortunately my dad never got that.

RM: Now what did they, in terms of their culture and so on, what happened with the language? Was that spoken?

AK: Oh yes. We all, when we were kids, we all understood German. My older brothers and sisters spoke German and still do, very well. The younger kids didn't master it too well. As far as understanding it, all of us understood German just as well as we understood English. In fact, you _____ yourself, my parents speaking German to us, or English whatever it happened to be. They didn't want anyone to know what they were talking about, of course they would always talk to us in German. Then whoever else was around didn't understand it.

RM: So then the whole community maintained the language?

AK: Oh yes, oh yeah. And the older kids were very fluent in German. And I was to some extent for a while, but in fact I can still understand. Now they also spoke Russian.

RM: I was gonna ask about that.

AK: When they didn't want us kids to know what they were talking about they would revert to Russian. And my father was the scholar of the bunch, he was pretty well educated in the old country because his father was pretty wealthy. He was pretty well educated, he could read, write, and speak fluently several different languages. When he came to this country they wanted him to go to work in the post office in New York City where they held him on the boat.

RM: Oh I see.

AK: But he wouldn't have any of that, he got the hell out of there.

RM: Now where there, oh we're getting kind of to the end of this one.

TAPE 1 SIDE B

RM: Okay, in terms of this little colony there, how many families were living there and how many people in kind of general terms?

AK: Of just the Germans?

RM: Of the Germans, yeah.

AK: I think there was probably about 8. About 8 original families, and then as the older kids got married of course that could have added to the population. But the strange thing about it is, none of those children of those families married each other.

RM: Oh! So in the old country they maintain this close German connection but then here they didn't? Wow.

AK: There wasn't any of the kids from those families that got married, like a Snyder and a Rupp you know.

RM: That's interesting.

AK: They all went somewhere else and found a husband or a wife.

RM: Now did most of the kids, the young kids, stay there? Or a few didn't to work the farm?

AK: Well, they stayed until they were probably into like high school age, very few of them finished school. Let's see, of the whole bunch I don't think any of them finished high school or went beyond high school besides my one brother and that's it. The rest of them all left school as soon as they possibly could, or got kicked out. They'd hang around on the farm until they were

old enough to get a job in Flint or Pontiac, most of them went to Flint and Pontiac, those were the two places they went.

RM: Working?

AK: To work in the factories. And I can remember them going down to Flint or to Pontiac and getting a job and they would work until they had enough money to buy a really nice suit and a used car that was kind of shiny, and then home they would come. And they'd flash a few ten dollar bills around you know, they were living.

RM: Now did these families, were there any culture things that they brought with them? Cultural baggage? Thing that they did, say holidays they celebrated?

AK: Oh yes, yeah.

RM: But they were done in a special fashion?

AK: Oh yes. New Year's was a big holiday, we celebrate New Year's like it was really something. Christmas was celebrated differently.

RM: How would they go about celebrating these?

AK: Well it was different in the sense that it was a real religious celebration. It was centered around midnight mass, you know. I can remember get up in the middle of the night and going out and jumping on the sleigh with 2 or 3 feet of straw on it and some quilts, and lay down in that hay with a quilt over me and go into town for church on Christmas Eve, because you had to go to midnight mass, that's how we always do it. Then coming home freezing to death! But you had to do it. There were all sorts of strange things too that they believed in like, if you took bread for example and put it outside on New Year's Eve, then the lord would bless that bread during the night and that's what we ate for breakfast on New Year's Day. The whole family would sit down and eat a big piece of that bread. I remember my mother every New Year's Eve wrapped up a loaf of homemade bread in a towel and put it outside, come in the next morning hard as a rock, frozen solid! We'd sit down there and very solemnly eat that piece of bread you know.

RM: Now were there any other activities like that, _____ for New Year's courses? Were there special meals?

AK: Yeah, the food was always kind of different. My mother made, and I guess the other women did too, they made kind of a dried fruit soup for Christmas. And a big kettle would last about 2 or 3 days. Made out of prunes, raisins, currants, I don't know what else but whatever kinds of dried fruit she had. She's put it on the stove and it would cook for about 3 or 4 days. And then she made this special pastry that was cut like a trapezoid. Then were three slits made in it that connect in a T. That's more folklore see. Everything that they did had a religious orientation. You couldn't put 4 slits in that cookie, and you couldn't put 2, only 3. You know what the symbolism is there, it's the blessed trinity. Three is a sacred number. And we would eat those cookies and eat that soup that was a special meal for Christmas.

RM: For Christmas?

AK: Yep. I hated it, it gave me heart burn something terrible! But you had to eat it.

RM: Now that would be on Christmas Day?

AK: Yep. And then for 2 or 3 days after, as long as it lasted. When it was gone that was it until the next Christmas.

RM: So only made at Christmas. Did they do anything on Christmas Eve? Anything special, besides the midnight mass?

AK: No, we just got ready you know? We always sing a song, always sing songs. We would sing some songs, Christmas songs, religious Christmas songs.

RM: At home?

AK: At home.

RM: Did you do Christmas trees? Was that a part of it?

AK: Yeah a tree.

RM: Did you get into getting presents?

AK: Oh, very limited! Very, very limited. Like 1 thing per person and that would be it.

RM: You said they also celebrated New Year's as kind of a special day. Were there anything else besides the bread, the eating?

AK: Yeah! There was, see I know how to make all this stuff. I've resurrected those recipes, I can make most of the stuff my mother taught me. We used to have, I don't know what the hell you'd call it in English. In German it's called *galunga* (?), gal means gel or jelly and *galunga* means jellied meat. It's kind of like that head cheese, it's got gelatin in it but there're more gelatin in it. Originally made out of pigs head, by boiling the pigs head. But we never boiled a pigs head because that's kind of gruesome. We used hocks, we had hocks. Boil that all up and we'd boil it and boil it and pick all the bones out then put it all in a pan, put it where it's cool and it sets up real firm. Then we ate that with the bread.

RM: Oh I see.

AK: It was quite an unusual breakfast.

RM: I bet you were glad that they only did it once a year.

AK: Although today I crave that thing, I make it.

RM: So it's just the ham hocks that have been boiled down into a gelatin and then you heat up the gelatin and that's it?

AK: And the meat that's in it. All of it sort of disintegrates. Then you pick the bones all out and put in lots of salt and pepper. All kinds of salt and pepper, then let it set. When it sets up like Jello, then you just cut it into squares and eat it, it's really delicious.

RM: And you still make that today?

AK: Oh yeah, I still make that.

RM: Were there any other times of year, like Easter or something or some other time, where they had special foods or things that they did?

AK: No, not that I can recall for Easter. Easter was just about like it is today, not as commercial of course. Then again, it was a day that centered around going to church, that was the big thing at Easter time. Oh and then around Christmas time too, or New Year's. On New Year's we used to have to recite a little poem to my mother and father and if we did it practiced in German, we would get a nickel. We used to practice for two weeks to make sure that we didn't make a mistake, make sure we would get that nickel.

RM: What kind of a, was it something that you made up? Or something that was ?

AK: No, it was something that somebody else made up.

RM: You just had to give this presentation to your parents?

AK: Yeah, right. First thing in the morning before you even said "good morning" you had to do that little recitation.

RM: And each of the kids would have to do this?

AK: Everybody had to do it. All by themselves, not together but each one separately. Now I think I could remember that, if I wrote that a little bit I think I could sort of remember it. You know what I'll do, I'll try to remember it and write it out in English for you.

RM: That would be good. Now, what religion, you indicated I think...

AK: All Catholic.

RM: You were all Catholic.

AK: All, yes.

RM: And they didn't, was there a German priest or anything?

AK: Oh yes.

RM: He kept the church then?

AK: No Austrian, he's Austrian which is about the same thing. That's another thing too if you look at the old country, we don't want to talk about the old country too much, but in the old country in most German settlements their priest and their teachers all came from Germany.

RM: Oh, that's interesting.

AK: And my dad said when he went to school, my mother never went to school because she had a very, very deprived childhood, her father was killed by horse thieves and her and her mother just survived, that's all. But when my dad went to school they had to study in Latin, German, and Russian, all three languages. With these imported teachers.

RM: Now, over in Brimley did the Germans request or bring in a German priest or it just happen that there was a German?

AK: Well I think, I think he was sent there I believe he came from northern Wisconsin and I believe that he was sent there because of those people. He was there for years and years until, it must have been about probably 1944, '45 maybe before he left.

RM: Did, do you remember his name?

AK: Ollier [spelled phonetically], Father Ollier.

RM: What was his first name?

AK: I don't know his first name, in those days we never even though priests had first names. He was a great, big, fat, Austrian. Mean as could be, oh he was terrible. He would raise hell with people if they didn't come to church, he'd make announcements the next Sunday when they showed up. He'd give them hell right before a sermon you know, he'd spot them "where were you last week! Where have you been?"

RM: Right in the middle of church?

AK: Oh yeah! Yeah that was the preface to the sermon! He'd chastise everybody. He got on me one day when I didn't get to mass on Saturday. Sunday morning I show up at church "where were you yesterday?" I sat there and I said "well I had to stay home and work," I was just a little kid, I was 6 years old. He looks at me and he said "what in the world could you do!" Well he was a tough, tough, old guy.

RM: Was there, over in the community there, was there any prejudice against these immigrants?

AK: Oh yeah.

RM: How did it manifest itself?

AK: They were never assimilated into a society until probably, well into the first generation when the older folks kind of died off. But there was just kind of a resentment, I don't know what in the world it was.

RM: Did you see it in school?

AK: Oh yes.

RM: Could that also be a reason why the kids maybe didn't, or wanted to get out of school? You know you were saying that not a lot of them graduated and sorta bolted from school as soon as they got the chance.

AK: Yeah. You know how it is in school, there is certain levels of existence. They were never, they were never included in athletics. They were never included in any of the social activities. Just sort of ignored. Just yeah, there was a resentment. It was never really open, but you could sense it all the time. You could tell that they weren't really accepted. The attitude was if you stayed out on the Irish Line then that's alright. Nobody will bother you out there. Say on the Irish Line and we won't bother you. And you could sense it in school too. I could. Only had been taught by our own fault, because when you go to school you know, you'd be speaking and well lots of time you would throw in a lot of German words that made more sense to us than English. Then they'd laugh at us and then we'd get into a hollering fight, back into school with bloody nose. For example, one day I got into a fight with a kid because I was whittling something during the, either the noon hour or recess. Some kid asked me what I was doing and I said I was *schnitzenling*, well whittling in German *schnitzen*, so I was *schnitzenling*. Well he started making fun of me and we got into a hell of a fight. It wasn't until I got to be like in the 2nd or 3rd grade that I began to realize it, you know I was using all the German words instead of English words. They didn't understand what they were, so to them that was funny.

RM: Was there any indication that the teachers were prejudicial to the students?

AK: No, not that I can recall. I think, as far as the teachers were concerned, they were more upset over the Indians than they were us, because there were a lot more Indians than there were of us. See there was about 60% Indians in that school. All reservation kids that came into Brimley to school, and there were a lot of them. I think the teachers were sort of preoccupied with the Indians that didn't behave too well either some of them. So they sort of left us alone. Although I had two teachers that were really, really helpful to me. Not necessarily friendly but very very concerned. One of them would go all the way to the Sault, to the library, to get books for me because I liked to read. When she was in the Sault she'd go to the library and check out books, and bring them to me. She's still alive if you can believe that. She's still alive living in St. Ignace. There was another one, you probably know him, Jim Allen that used to be the principle up at the _____ school in the Houghton District? The little school right in the country, he had arthritis and was bent over real bad?

RM: Yeah I think I know him.

AK: Very intelligent guy, very outgoing. He was very good too, he really motivated me as much as he could. But I quit school too, I never went to high school. I went to school a few months in the 9th grade and never went back. Because my dad at that time was so busy trying to get all that work done, my oldest brother was a machinist in Milwaukee by that time. My brother just older than me he had just joined the navy, he was 4 years older than me. He had just joined the navy, I was the oldest boy left at home with one younger brother. So the troops were finally fading out. So I worked like hell and when I was in the 9th grade I didn't start school until probably around the first of November, when all the work got done and all the grain was harvested and the hay was in the barn. All the apples were all picked and my dad bought fruit too see, he was also a merchant. He bought hundred, thousands of bushel of fruit.

RM: This is while he's still in Brimley?

AK: Well there and in Benzie County both.

RM: By this time he still had?

AK: He was still working both places.

RM: This is about what year now that you're talking about?

AK: Just before World War 2. Remember the German navy landed in '39, in 1940 or '41.

RM: You're talking about the fleet?

AK: Yeah. And going to school, the reason kids dropped out of school. I guess most out of them dropped out because they couldn't see anything in it for them. I quit school because I didn't start until November and then in the spring by the end of March I had to stay home and get busy putting the crops in. So I only went to school for a few months, and my report card didn't look so hot, so in the next year I never went back. I never went to high school.

RM: Then how did you get to where you're at?

AK: That's a hell of a long story. I _____ times in the state of Michigan, and got rejected. The last one was U of M, I thought I might as well make it 100%. So I went to U of M, met this lady there, an older lady with gray hair. She was retirement age and I told her what my story was and I said at my age I had just committed 4 years in the navy. I said I don't feel like I shouldn't go back to high school or I feel like I have to go back. At my age, I'm 21 years old now. She said "I'll tell you what, you come in and I'll give you a bunch of tests. If you can pass those tests we'll accept you as a student." I said okay, I wasn't afraid of tests because in those days I was really quite smart. When I went into the navy for example, they batched up the kids in boot camp and gave them these tests to see how they placed. There were 2300 of us that took the test at the time I did and I scored the 3rd highest in the batch. The only two that scored higher than me,

there was a guy named Hughes from Ohio who has been to college for 2 years and then a second guy, I don't know who he was. But I scored the third highest in the group. But I wasn't afraid of taking tests, so I went to U of M and she gave me one test after another for the whole day. A couple of weeks later I got a letter from them saying come on in. Well I was scared to death. I walk around the campus a number of times and looked around and went "jeez, I don't belong around all these scholars." So I went to Eastern, I went to the registrar and I said "why can't you take me?" I said "Look at the letter! They're willing to take me at U of M." He said "aw hell if it's good enough for them it's good enough for me." So I went to Eastern for one year, and then I went back in the navy. And then-

TAPE CUTS OUT ABRUPTLY

AK: So anyway that's how I got into WW2.

RM: So you went to Eastern, you said you went to Eastern for a year?

AK: Then back into the Navy for 2 and half years, then I came out and I transferred to Michigan State. Because they had told me earlier at Michigan State if you get into another college then you can establish a record and you can transfer in here, we wouldn't even ask you about high school. So I went out to Michigan State from then on. What's interesting, I went back to a reunion, school reunion not a class reunion in Brimley because classes were so small that you couldn't have a reunion just with one class. So we went to this reunion and there were people there from 1911 up to what was about 1980 I guess. Of all those people, there were only 2 people who had doctorates was my brother and me. Out of all of those people at that school. So at the time that we were in that school, nobody talked to us. We were not terribly gifted, they'd tolerate you and that's about all.

RM: Where you went later on, in terms of your career before you went to Northern, weren't you involved in the Department of Education?

AK: Yep.

RM: In what capacity were you?

AK: Well I worked there as a finance consultant in the finance division. Then I got promoted to Deputy Superintendent. In the meantime I had gone to Detroit as a budget drafter for Detroit Schools. Jack Roundbox [spelled phonetically] was the Deputy Superintendent of the department at the time. He wanted to come back to the UP, so he recommended me to the Superintendent, to be his replacement as Deputy. So I went back to the department as Deputy Superintendent. Then the other deputy died so I took his responsibilities as well. Then the Superintendent left to Washington so the state board then appointed me Superintendent. At that point I had been there 8 years, and my theory had always been don't stay anywhere longer than 7 years. I had been there a little over 8 years already and I thought wow that's enough time here. So I put in my, year and a half I guess, and then I left. I wound up at Michigan State, taught there and then came up here in '76.

RM: Then you retired, how many years has it been since you retired?

AK: About 2 and a half years. I still _____ when I look around here, find a few of the remnants of those people.

RM: Are there any people, any of the descendants still there?

AK: Mhm. Bobby Snyder's still there, Pete Rupp is still there, Marcus Snyder is still there. The older Snyders they just died off in the last few years, Andrew and John, they both died just recently. Cancer again, every damn one dies of cancer.

RM: Did they, when they lived there, did they smoke meats or anything? As you know part of their preservation of foods and so on?

AK: Not so much. There was a difference between my family and the others because my father, he was different. He was a much more cultured and better educated, they all resented him because they could read, they couldn't write. He could read and write every kind of language you could imagine. Then he walked with _____, him being from the Kuban group he was never totally accepted by the others. Then he became rather successful, wound up with a lot of property and they resented that like mad. I know we've got one family, not gonna mention their name but, we've got one family living in one of our houses and in less than a year they just tore it all to shreds. Just wrecked it, and we'd maintained that house for years that was our original home.

RM: Was it just out of maliciousness or they didn't know how to deal with something nice?

AK: You could see that they did things deliberately. Like 20 wooden spikes for example, they would drive them into the trim around the doors you know to hang their coats, they knew how it worked. Now they could have used a 10 _____ nail. They kind of resented him because he was much more successful than the rest of them. But there still are some left over there yeah. The girls, to my knowledge, Marie Snyder she's died, Molly's still there. The oldest Snyder girl Molly is still there. I think there's another one named Agnes, she's still around she's a nurse, and she's still around someplace. Marcus came back from Flint and retired from the factory. Bobby Snyder, he never left he's always been around there. Whatever the hell he does for a living I don't know, but he's always been around there. Quite a few of them left yeah.

RM: Okay, some other things I'm just thinking of now. Did they get into hunting, fishing, you know sort of living off the...well not completely living off the land, but augmenting what they brought in?

AK: They violated some. Joe Hartman violated I know that, he shot deer whenever he saw one. Yeah, they did as much of that as they could.

RM: To survive?

AK: Right. In a rather crude way, but my dad was a tremendous fisherman. It was the only time that he would stop working was if you invited him to go fishing. He wouldn't stop for a funeral

or a wedding! But if you tell him the fish are biting down at the bay, and hour later he's getting his gear together. That was a big thing in his life.

RM: Fishing?

AK: Yeah.

RM: Now you said he passed away when he was 85, when did he pass away?

AK: 1960? About '68 or '69, something like that.

RM: Now this is, and by that time he was completely down in Benzie? I mean his operations in Benzie were successfully down there as well.

AK: Yep, he never liked the Upper Peninsula, he hated it up here. The only reason he came back here to buy a farm when he left the railroad, you see he wanted to buy a place in Hart, a cherry orchard. But my mom had to come back here where her friends were, and she had friends and relatives in the area. They were her friends from the old country.

RM: Friends from the old country?

AK Yeah, these other families all came from the same village my mother came from. My dad was an outsider.

RM: Do you remember the name of the village?

AK: Rotehummel [spelled phonetically].

RM: What was that?

AK: Rotehummel, now that's the German word. I don't know what the hell it's called in Russia.

RM: Now how would you spell that?

AK: How would you spell red in German? R-O-T-E I think, and hummel...hummel means like _____ to an Englishman, Red Village.

RM: Oh, Red Village.

AK: Another thing that's strange about those people, is that they hated new things. I don't think it was, especially Lutherans, it was any Protestant or anybody that wasn't Catholic. They just disliked them, and that was just sort a general rule because I can remember some of them referring to people as a *Lutheraner Sohn des Teufels*. That's really a terrible way to describe someone, "Lutherans, son of the devil," that's terrible. In fact they had special names to use sometimes, I mean daily _____. So I don't know where that came from, either there was a conflict between the Russian church and the Catholic Church in the old country or what.

RM: We're talking about Lutherans specifically?

AK: I think the term "Lutheran," they used that to describe anybody who wasn't Catholic.

RM: Oh, oh okay yes. That was kind of a common thing, back to the Reformation, common to, I believe the Spanish would call all Protestants Lutherans especially at the beginning of probably some this, has maintained itself.

AK: Yeah. Well you know there were Lutheran colonies too in Russia of Germans, German Lutherans and they were separate from the Catholics. The Catholic Germans and the Lutheran Germans would never live in the same village, they were totally separate. Never associated with each other.

RM: Now, were there any German-like communities in the eastern UP for instance that these people could have interacted with?

AK: Polish, but of course they always looked down at the Polish people. They were always a grade or two below them. But there were plenty of settlements over there, Goetzville in Raber, down in that area. But they ignored them completely. Well, okay. We're at about the end then?

RM: I'll let you get back to work eh! Well thank you this has been very interesting.

TAPE CUTS OUT

AK: I always helped my mother because I always had to sign her name for her. She did handle the negotiating for money. When my dad wanted to buy a piece of property, my mother went to the bank and dealt with the bank because he never did. I don't think he talked to a banker in his life. My mother did all the negotiating. We went to the bank in the Sault one day, and she had some kind of deal worked out to buy another piece of land and mortgage another piece of land for the down payment, and anyway she worked it out so she'd gonna get the land and not invest any money in it. The old guy, the banker's name was Clark, he was the bank president. Kept a very big nickel plated revolver on his desk. I used to like to go with my mother just to see that gun! Anyway, she got all through explaining to him how this out to work see. He says "god damn it lady, if you could read and write you'd be sitting here and I'd be sitting there!" She was clever as hell. Yep it reminds me of an old story that they'd tell about the Scandinavian maid that worked for these very wealthy people and...

TAPE CUTS OUT ABRUPTLY

TAPE 2 SIDE A

RM: Okay, we'll continue now. We kind of left off in the last tape in midstream. Alex, could you tell the story about the Scandinavian maid?

AK: Yeah, yeah. The reason that the story comes to mind is because it has to do with a maid who can't read or write and my mother couldn't read or write either, I'm sort of comparing the two. The Scandinavian maid worked for these wealthy people, and the father bought one of the children a real complicated toy for Christmas. It had to be assembled, well after the kids went to bed he started putting it together. It got to be into the morning and he couldn't get it put together so he just got disgusted and shoved it in the corner and left it. Got up later on, came downstairs and the thing was all assembled sitting in the middle of the floor. He couldn't figure out who did it! He started inquiring and one of the maids said "well I did it." And he said "well, how could you do that? You can't even read the instructions." She said "well mister, when you can't read, you gotta think."

RM: Then I think you were saying, or you were telling me off the tape, that your mother did mostly financial affairs?

AK: She did all the financial organizing and planning, and all that stuff. All the investing, she did that all herself.

RM: So the purchase of all these farms that you allude to earlier, was really handled?

AK: She handled all those kinds of factions. My dad would find the land, but once he found it and decided that that was what he was gonna get then she would make the arrangements with the banks. Always came out ahead. I was gonna tell you too she was psychic you know, and so were some of these other people. I don't know whether, I told the story to Richard Dorson [spelled phonetically] in fact I gave him several stories that are included in that blood stoppers and _____. But Mrs. Leachman the old lady, she was a blood stopper and I used to have a ruptured blood vessel in my head. And if I got bumped on the head or bent over quickly my nose would just start to bleed out of this hemorrhage and blood would shoot out of my nose and I almost bled to death three times when I was a little kid. But on one occasion Mrs. Leachman was sitting on the porch with my mother, and I had done something and my nose started to bleed. That was always a big crisis whenever I got a nose bleed because nobody knew when it was going to stop, or if it would ever stop. My mother couldn't get any help and so Mrs. Leachman told my mother to go in the house and don't look out, stay in the house. She came and got me yeah, I must have been about probably 5 or 6 I guess. We had a poplar tree growing in the front yard of the house in Brimley. She went over to the tree, and she broke off two twigs and put them on the ground in the form of a cross. Then she picked me up, upside down, and let the blood from my nose run on that cross. Then she put me back down on the ground, and my nose bleed was gone.

RM: Huh.

AK: She was all holy, and she warned me she said "don't you tell a soul about this! If you tell anybody what happened, your nose is going to start to bleed again and it'll never stop." Well naturally I told somebody! Well I think she was kind of a psychic. My mother was definitely, there's no question about that.

RM: What were some of the things?

AK: Oh god dozens! For one thing, she knew every single time that I was going to come home. No matter where I was or how long I'd been away, she knew the day I was coming home. It used to exasperate my brother because she would be up early in the morning baking things that I liked and making things that I liked, those old country dishes. My brother would ask her how come she's so happy, and she said "well Alex is coming home, he's coming home today." "How do you know?" "Well I know!" And sure enough, I'd show up. Over and over, not just once or twice. Once I was going home, I was married had 2 kids and my wife, we were going home just for like a weekend, and we lived in Lansing then. She told my brother that morning I was coming home. She's hustling around making pies and stuff, it got to be around 6 o'clock, I never showed up. 7 o'clock never showed up. 8 o'clock, never showed up. He started laughing at her he said "you think you're so smart! He's not here!" She said "he'll be here, something happened." She said "something happened but he'll be here." Well about 9:30 we rolled in, and we got stopped on the road over near Cadillac, there was a head on collision with 6 nuns in the car, head on collision, caught fire, everything burned down. The black top road caught on fire, firetrucks were there. We were held up for, it must have been 2 and a half or three hours before they opened up the road and let us through. Which she told him "something happened." She knew the day her mother died. Her mother died in the old country about 1935 I guess, something like that. She got up in the morning, crying and carrying on something terrible. My dad asked her "what the hell is wrong?" "my mother died." "How in the hell do you know that?" "I know, my mother died." About two months later we get a letter from the priest in the mail telling her that her mother had died. My dad sold some hay one time to a guy who was supposed to be a hay barn, we sold a lot of hay up in Brimley that was that shipped to Kentucky for race horses, that was one of our big crops. We got the hay all loaded out on the rafters in the box car, and my dad was talking to this guy on the porch and finally they parted and the guy left and he walked around the corner of the house down the driveway. My mother caught a glimpse of him as he went past the window by the kitchen. My dad came in the kitchen door, she turned to him and she said "mister," that's what she called him all the time "mister." "Mister, you're never going to see your money." He bought it telling my dad that when the hay was delivered and he got paid, he'd pay my dad for the hay. My dad was one of those people that trusted everybody. He trusted everybody, nothing in writing. Sure enough, he never saw the guy again!

RM: But you shipped the hay?

AK: They hay was gone, we had it in box cars and rafters and it was on its way. Never saw the guy never got the money. On another occasion they had bought a piece of land, another farm down in Benzie County and bought it on a contract, a land contract. That was an especially good year. That was _____, the crops were good, and the prices were pretty good. My mother wound up with more money than they had anticipated. They're sitting there pondering on if they should keep paying this interest or not to this guy. Finally they decided no, they're gonna pay him off, they're gonna pay the land contractor off because there's no sense in paying interest. My dad never beat him paying interest. So they sent the money down to a bank in Frankfort and told the banker to deposit it in their account and then call this guys, Oinebeck [spelled phonetically], and give him the money for the farm, pay him off and let the banker handle the transaction. He said sure he'd do it. Well they put the money in the mail, the next morning my mother got up all agitated, all agitated. Gosh she was all, carrying on something terrible. She said "we made a terrible mistake." My dad says "how do you know?" she said "I just know we did. We should

never had sent that money.” My dad said “well if you think it’s that bad, call the bank and tell them when they get the money just put it in our account and don’t do anything, just leave it there.” So, we didn’t have a telephone, had to go someplace for a phone. Call the bank, and told the banker that the checks coming.

RM: Oh it was a check? It wasn’t cash?

AK: No, it was a check. She said “don’t give the money to Oinebeck, put it in our account and leave it there.” He said “fine, okay.” The next day they get a letter Oinebeck who said that he would discount that mortgage 10% if they paid off in cash!

RM: Oh my word! [Laughs].

AK: That was the mistake see! They sent the money too soon! She figured it out, and she saved 10%. She did those kinds of things all the time. We just thought it was normal, it occurred after to us now how unusual it is, like witchcraft.

RM: Now did she do any other things? Was she into any like, you said this woman could stop nose bleeds and what not. Were any of the women into that kind of folk medicine or?

AK: Just Mrs. Leachman, she was the only one.

RM: Did she do any other things?

AK: Oh yeah, she kept me alive when I was first born. She was the midwife, and from the time I was born I just started to die. I couldn’t eat, and so she came up and my mother was talking to her, it must have been like two weeks after I was born and she told my mother she said “you’ve got to stop feeding him milk.” She says “boil oatmeal and squeeze the juice out of it and give him oatmeal juice.” No milk, and that’s what I grew up on, oatmeal juice.

RM: Oh my word.

AK: And I know today, and you do too, some people cannot digest milk. My oldest daughters have it, we had to give her soybean juice instead of milk when she was first born because she couldn’t digest the milk. Very common with African people, Leroy Reynolds. She was the, kind of the witch.

RM: Okay. [Laughs].

AK: She could do lots of strange things.

RM: What were some, were some other ones that you find interesting?

AK: I don’t remember anymore exactly. But I remember that everybody was kind of scared of her. Everybody was sort of an arm’s-length because boy she’d put a hex on you if you crossed her. Then she became a house keeper for the priest for a long time.

RM: So this Austrian priest?

AK: Yeah.

RM: Here are some of the things, now that you continue talking kind of little refinements. What were some of the crops? You mentioned the hay going to Kentucky, what were some of the crops that they...the biggest crop?

AK: The biggest crop in terms of value that we grew in the UP was flax. We grew hundreds, thousands of bushels of flax. That was a big crop that was the most I could remember is \$6.10 a bushel. My god in those days that was a terrible amount of money. We raised, in fact my dad set a production record that I don't think has ever been broken, in growing flax the productive grade. And barely, we raised a lot of barley in those days because it was prohibition time and people were buying all kinds of mulch to make their own beer. So we raised all kinds of barely. And then of course oats. Oats, hay, barely, flax. And peas! Peas, we raised a lot of peas. The hard kind you know, dried peas, because there was a big demand in the Depression for beans and peas. People lived on beans and peas.

RM: So you're talking about raising these for sale?

AK: Oh yeah.

RM: All this was for sale. You said your father raised all of these, what about the other farmers? Were they raising?

AK: Pretty much the same, pretty much the same.

RM: But not as thorough as?

AK: Not as extensive. There were some bigger farms away from us. Like the Moogle [spelled phonetically] family, I think they had, they had just as much land as we had. But there weren't many farmers in that area that were the same caliber as my dad. He was a tremendous expert. He always for example, he always demanded that the plowing be done in the fall. Had to be done in the fall. "Plowing in the spring is a waste of time, you're crops will only be 50%." Well I always thought "hell that's just folklore you know, he just wants us to get it done that's all." Afraid we wouldn't do it in the spring! Years later I picked up the bulletin from Michigan State University College of Agriculture telling why fall plowing is so much better than the spring plowing because there's a certain bacteria that grows on the top of the soil. If you turn that under then it has an opportunity to work and break down the organic matter all winter long. So you're getting a lot more nourishment there through that bacterial action in the soil. Now he didn't know that, but he knew damn well fall plowing was better than the spring time. Nobody ever asked why, "why is Tony's crops so nice?" Look across the road, the guys got a field of flax. It's all kind of yellow and it's gimpy and skinny looking. My dad's was tall and grew and thick. Well, it's the fall plowing, who knew! We ____ our manure _____. We put every damn forkful back on the ground, in fact my dad would buy manure. Sometimes you would get it for nothing, people were

too damn lazy to spread it. So he'd go get your manure and put it on the field. He was a hell of an expert.

RM: Now was this something that he learned from the old country?

AK: Must have.

RM: You said his father had a big farm over there.

AK: Yeah.

RM: How many acres did he eventually, was he eventually farming in the UP, you know serving the UP.

AK: I don't remember what it was. It was a lot though.

RM: Several hundred?

AK: Yeah. See we leased a lot of land too. We raised sheep, they had bald eyes, tremendous number of sheep. We raised them on leased land over on the Bound Road which was east of our place, by the Waiska River. We had sheep in there until the damn hustlers put us out of business. They'd go in and steal truckloads at night.

RM: Oh. About what year was this?

AK: That would be, between 1930 and 1936. We would lose truckloads, and it was somebody local that was involved in it because we would go over there at night and sit all night with shot guns waiting for them to show up. No one would show up. Soon as we stayed home one night, they were there. So somebody who could see us was involved in it. Finally my dad gave up because he was losing so bad. He blew them off and took them to Rudyard and sold 'em. That was another good cash crop. We shaved those buggers and sold that wool, there was big money in that. _____.

RM: Sounds like your dad got into every possible farming activity.

AK: At the same time he's doing this he's hauling 5 or 6 truckloads of fruit up to the UP every week.

RM: Oh from down? Now this is when he had the farm in Benzie County? So he's doing that as well?

AK: Yeah, and farming up here too. I don't how the hell he got all of it done, I just don't know how he did it. In fact I was left up here one summer all by myself. I ran this whole operation up here by myself. Took off 200 and some tons of hay all alone, with horses. Worked the horses practically to death, I had two teams. I'd work one of them till noon, as hard as I could go then put them away in the barn where they could cool off, take the other two and whip them till dark.

Had to keep alternating them. 200 tons of hay all alone, never saw a soul from March until September I never saw a human being.

RM: Oh my word.

AK: In fact I know what it's like to be a hermit because when you're alone like that and you don't see anybody for a long period of time, it doesn't take very long that you don't want to see anybody. I milked some cows and we sold cream. I separated the milk, drew the milk to the crates. Had 40 some big crates and sold the cream to the cream man, that's why he's called the cream man. He came out and took the cream in the truck, cream cans. It didn't take very long before the days when I knew he was going to show up I'd make sure I was some distant from the house so I didn't have to talk to him. By fall, by September, I had worked out a routine all by myself. I was perfectly happy all by myself. That's why you mention the damn hermits, it's like a disease! It takes over!

RM: What was the I don't think we, I asked your...I got your mother's village name. What was the name of your dad's village?

AK: I've got that written down at home. Synlvka, that's a Russian word. So that was Russian. Synlvka. K-A on the end, S-Y-N... no. Yeah S-Y-N, must be L-V... L-V-K-A. It's just a short distance from the Black Sea, his father was also a fisherman, caught sturgeons. Big huge sturgeons, 4 or 5 hundred pounds.

RM: The other thing is foods. You mentioned some of the foods for holidays. What kind of food did you eat on a regular basis? Did you eat any German type foods?

AK: Always, yeah. We ate something called *glace*. In fact I made some the other day, I think I'm the world's expert now. But it's a real, its peasant food. Boiled potatoes, and just before the potatoes are finished, you take some dough made like bread dough but with no yeast in it. You just tear it up into pieces about the size of a half a dollar, a little bigger maybe. You throw them in the water and by the time that pillows that's done. You drain that off, take some lard and chopped up onion and brown the onions in the lard, pour that over the whole mixture. Then you take sour cream, put sour cream all over the top. Then you put the whole thing in the oven for an hour or so and let that all kind of season. It sounds awful but god is it good! It looks terrible too.

RM: Because you keep the potatoes whole then or is it mashed at all?

AK: Just the potatoes, like penny dumpling that's they're described you know they're chewy. But god I've made that for dinner and have people look at it "the hell is that? It looks like something you would feed the pigs!" As soon as they eat it they come back for seconds. And then pasties, my mother must have made 15 different kinds. I don't know even what we called them. But she'd put sauerkraut and pork in some of them, potatoes and pork in some of them, cherries in season you know, strawberries. Aw hell just about anything! She's make up about a dozen of them, put them on a great big cookie sheet and shove 'em in the oven and bake 'em and that's what we'd eat.

RM: Sort of like turnover or meat pies?

AK: Just like a pasty.

RM: Thin dough?

AK: Yeah. You'd take them out to the fields to work.

RM: Now this was something that she'd learned when she came up to the UP?

AK: No.

RM: This was something she brought with her?

AK: Yeah. Then pierogi you know with the potato filling, oh she made lots of that. Then my dad made about 30 different kinds of sausage. We butchered in the fall, god he'd make sausage to eat and I'd have to clean all the damn cases. The pig casings you know? The sheep casings? Scrap them with the back of the knife. They had to be totally transparent, hold them up to the sun and look at them. If there's any membrane there throw them back in the bucket and do them over. My hands would freeze, because it's in the fall yeah its cold. Yeah, oh god he made good sausage.

RM: Did he smoke it or?

AK: Now we never smoked it, just salted. Just seasoned it and we always made it late enough in the year so it would stay cold.

RM: Oh I see, the cold would freeze it.

AK: We hung it up in the what we called the pump house. Another thing at Christmas time too, talking about food. He used to make some kind of sausage and it was stuffed into a cow's stomach. I always had to clean the stomach, turn it inside out you know, and scrap it. Then turn it right side out and scrap it till it looked just like a liner out of a football. Then he'd have his sausage all ground up and mixed and ready to go and he'd tie up one end of that stomach with twine and then stuff all that sausage in there. And then just keep packing it and packing it until it's as hard as a rock, then tie the other end up and hang it up. Hung it right till Christmas, then that what the day that you ate that sausage. Took a knife and slit that casing and unfold it and then slice that sausage into big slices, like bigger than a slice of bread. It was good.

RM: So it was like, and that was salt in there? So it was cured? Salt cured?

AK: Yeah and it had all kinds of seasoning and I think it had barley in it, it had barley mixed in it. It wasn't just pure meat. I think there was barley, I know it wasn't rice it had to be barley. Yeah, it was a mixture of stuff.

RM: Well it must have been cooked.

AK: It was cooked yeah.

RM: Okay so it wasn't just salted?

AK: No, just salted for seasoning with pepper, and then cooked and hung. We stuck in that...no no no. He stuffed it, and then it was cook

RM: And then cooked?

AK: Right, that's why we tied the ends up so tight. Put it in a big kettle and let it simmer for hours and hours. Then we took it out and hung it up.

RM: Was there sauerkraut? Did you make sauerkraut?

AK: Oh god yes. Sauerkraut by the barrels yeah. And my dad always put apples in the sauerkraut. You'd never ate anything so good in your life as an apple that's cured in a barrel of sauerkraut. Isn't that strange? We used to take a big barrel, big wooden barrel, put about 4 inches of cabbage in the bottom, pound it down good, put a layer of apples in, put about 4 or more inches of cabbage in, pound that down, and just keep building that up to the top.

RM: Oh, so whole apples or sliced?

AK: Whole apples, full apples. Nice big red apples. And they cured in that sauerkraut and my god are they ever good. I'd give anything to have some now. And watermelons, he used to pickle whole watermelons. Our basement in the fall by deer season was so full you could just barely walk through. We had bins of potatoes, bins of carrots. Thousands of jars of canned berries, fruit, meat, and every damn thing you could think of. Bushels and bushels of apples and pears. That was our provisions down there for the winter. The meat hung out in the pump house. In those days see, in fact my dad to my extent sort of lost interest and near the end he did lose interest because there was no more challenge left. Every year was the same, no more orchards to plan and stuff, and he lost interest. But originally see we spent 50% of our time in survival activities. Preparing food and getting ready for the winter. But near the end, just before he retired a couple years before he died he just quit and sold everything. They moved into Frankfort in town and that's where my brother lives now. See he stayed home, but he inherited everything. When they sold out, my father died and my mother died. He just stays up there in the summer time and he goes back to Texas in the winter time. He goes over to Florida for a while, he's got a place in Texas, place in Frankfort. But he wound up with all the property. Which is alright too because he took care of them until they died. That was alright. But near the end, farming became so different because you spent 100% of your time just working on cash crops. The sausage making was gone, all the animals were gone, no more homemade bread. Everything was just gone. You lived just like people lived in the city. That really didn't feel good for him. The things he enjoyed, making sausage and butchering the hogs, it was done. Raising some cattle, _____.

RM: One other thing was the Depression, I mean the Depression was bad for everybody. But you kind of indicated that your dad?

AK: He thrived.

RM: Yeah did well.

AK: He thrived during the Depression. That's when he got all that land.

RM: Then he had all these crops, you said he was producing peas and whatnot that were in demand?

AK: You see, I don't know whether it was luck or skill or what but let's say for example we raised oats and barley. Well in the fall we thrashed that grain and we put in the granary. Then all winter long we'd run it through the fanning mill, we had our own fanning mill. To build the _____, clean the grain real nice, put it in bags and kept it till spring. In the springtime, we sold it for seed grain. The other farmers would have to go to the bank to borrow money to buy seed and gasoline or whatever you needed to get your crops in. Soon as fall came, that note came due, you had to sell the grain. Well grain in the fall is a hell of a lot cheaper than grain in the spring. They couldn't hold it over because they had that note to pay off see. My dad never had to borrow to buy seed and so forth. So we store our grain in a granary and it stay there till spring. Springtime we sold it for seed grain. So instead of getting oh 25 cents a bushel, 27 cents a bushel maybe, we got like a buck and a half.

RM: Oh!

AK: It makes a hell of a difference.

RM: So he sort of started without any debt?

AK: Right.

RM: And everything he did he was making money

AK: Right, like I said earlier see he paid cash for that farm in 1929 and he owed nobody a penny. In fact he lost a few hundred dollars to the banks in Battle Creek when the bank failed, but not very much. But since he didn't have any debt you see, that's what, he had a lot of luck during the Depression.

RM: Okay, now we'll kind of leave the Volga Germans and the farms and so on in Brimley. I remember in the past you had mentioned that, you talked a little bit about the history of prostitution in the Upper Peninsula, you had some interesting stories. I was wondering if you recount some of those now about prostitution in Sault St. Marie.

AK: Yeah, in the Sault? It was very common there, and very open. Everybody was aware and everybody tolerated it because, I guess, it was what they called the West End. And that was the place that you never wanted to go, that was the bad part of town, the West End stay away from there. That's where Fort Brady was and I guess the people in town, the police department and

everybody else that tolerated it did so because they figure that would keep the sailors from you know invading rest of the town. And so they allowed those houses there in the West End to operate freely. They'd every now and then in order to make it look kind of legitimate, they'd raid them. They'd go down and arrest them all, take them down to the police station, load the girls up on the train, ship them back to Chicago. But within an hour there'd be another batch coming, or they'd pass each other along the way. And off they'd go for another 90 days or 6 months and the police would go down and arrest them again, it went on for years and years and years. There's one left yet that I know of. In fact this lady that runs it was on the TV a while back and she sued somebody for interfering with her business, restraint of trade or something? Remember that? Pictures of her sitting on the porch, it was on television on the porch?

RM: I think just recently, in the past month or two, there was a thing in paper where they had raided, it was still around. They had raided the place and I think finally shut it down, or at least for a while. It was still, I guess up until 1988 at least there was still prostitution actively being engaged.

AK: That's right. One thing happened over there at one time. This was back I think about, probably about 1948 something like that. It was getting time for another raid, you know to make it look like they're really trying to put this thing out of business. Well, there was one or two young policemen on the police force and they got things screwed up. They went and pulled the raid a night early, before they were supposed to be there.

TAPE CUTS OUT ABRUPTLY.

TAPE 2 SIDE B

AK: You know what, the kid that was always the dimwit, the dumbbell, was always a Russian kid. They were hoeing corn one day, and every kid had a hoe and was supposed to go out around the grass where there was the corn you see. But they sat down to rest. Well the ground was hot see, so these kids would sit there and dig their feet down below the surface where the ground, the soil was cool to cool their feet off. The Russian kid, he put his feet down in the dirt and got them down there and he was sitting there, and pretty soon he looked and the dirt was moving. And he looked at that, his toes were wiggling so it was moving dirt. He grab his hoe and took a slice across and bang! He cut his toe off with the hoe, he thought it was as toad. A kröte in German was a toad. The way he used to tell that story was so god damn funny. And every time he'd rest the horses he'd have something to say.

RM: You were saying, before we turned it on, you had the story, would you tell the story about the grass?

AK: Oh the grass yeah! We were resting one day and he pulled out the, we had crab grass I guess it was. He'd show it to me and he'd say "do you see that? That mark across there see? Across that blade of grass?" I said "yeah," pull up another one and look at that there's that same mark across the grass. He pulled up several of them and said "see they're all that way." He said "look at them!" So I pulled up a bunch and I looked at them, sure enough everyone had that scar on them. He said "do you know what causes that? I said "no." I didn't have any idea. And then he

said, well he said “when Christ was carrying his cross, he left from _____ he stumbled and fell and when he fell his face hit the ground and he clenched his teeth and crushed that grass. And ever since that that grass has had that scar on it.” Whether it’s true or not I don’t know.

RM: Then he would go and tell stories about the, about the old country?

AK: Yeah, mostly about the old country, just what it was like over there you know? Where he learned, he said the soil was so fertile you could grow anything you planted.

RM: Did he ever tell about his trip to the United States?

AK: Oh yes, about that, in great detail.

RM: Where did he leave from?

AK: He left from Bremen, Germany. He went across the country to Germany and left there. Went down on the _____, and he didn’t want to buy a ticket you know? He came by himself, when my mother came it was a group of people. He came by himself, _____, he got acquainted with these sailors from the passenger liner in Bremen and visited with them and told them that he wanted to go to America but he didn’t have any money. Finally, he asked them if there was any way he could go with them. So finally they said “if you can come on board, we’ll smuggle you on the ship if you agree to wash the pots and pans in the galley while you’re on the ship.” And he said “well yes!” [Laughs]. So he said he went on board and he only worked for 4 hours a day washing pots and pans in the galley. He said he got the rest of the food, everyone eats right there. Didn’t cost him a penny! He got to America, jumped off the ship and that was it!

RM: That’s an interesting...

AK: He went back to the old country the same way, same ship.

RM: What did he do? Did he return soon after he was here or? Sometime past?

AK: Yeah, it wasn’t too long. He came here, he came before my mother came 1910 I guess. He was in the army in 1909. He rode on a train with the tsar too, with Tsar Nicholas, he was going someplace and the tsar was on the same train. During the night the tsar, in his own car you know just a very beautiful car all just for him. But during the night he got up and he walked through the train and talked to the soldiers and that sort of thing “are you okay?” You know, “anything that you need?” Twice, there were two trips on the train that the tsar was in. I don’t know if there were guards guarding the tsar, anyways I don’t know. But they were on the same train. They say the tsar was an extremely handsome general, it was probably his pride, to general. I’m sure the man was a bastard the way he lived.

RM: How did he view the revolution and so on? He never really talked about it?

AK: No, he never really talked about anything in the sense of taking any sides you know. Whether it should have happened or shouldn't have happened or what. He just, it happened yeah. It's one of those things that happened, he knew it was coming. Yeah.

RM: What did he do when he came to the United States? You know, as a job?

AK: Well I don't know if I can remember everything, in the right order either. But I know he went to Akron, Ohio and he worked in a rubber factory in Akron, Ohio. Where they made rubber boots, you know those big buckle boots with the buckles on it? Well they vulcanized that whole patch on there in one piece. Just before they go to the boxes somebody take a knife and slits it down the front, so it would open up. And that was his job, cutting those pieces. While he was in Akron he lived in a boarding house and that's where he learned to read and write English. He'd get the newspaper every day and he'd study in his bedroom and sit on the porch and he'd ask these old guys what certain words were. I said before, this was in the fall before spring came like a period of about 6 months, he said he earned nothing just so he could sit and read the newspaper. He taught me to read when I was, I don't know about 3 years old. I used to sit on his lap at night and everyday he read the newspaper. He read it like a book, the front page, then the second page, then the third page. Put it all on the kitchen table, laid it open flat. Well I used to crawl up and sit on his lap and hang on the table and I'd point at words and ask him what those words were. He never ever got, it never bothered him. Some parents would tolerate that for a few minutes then tell them to get the hell out of here! It never bothered him, no irritation every time I asked him what a word was. I'd see a picture of it, with words underneath it. "What does that mean?" He'd tell me. So by the time I started school I was reading and reading well, and I couldn't understand why, how these kids couldn't read! The teacher put those things on the board for them like "did" and "was" for god sakes teacher get going!

RM: Sort of like Sesame Street is today! You end up doing that for about three or four years before you start school, that's what happened to me.

AK: That's right, yeah. I couldn't figure out why she was doing all that. Everybody knows that! So that was the teacher that used to get me the books from the library. She'd get me books from the Sault to read. I still remember her, she's still alive too. She must be damn near 100 years old.

RM: Sure.

AK: Mrs. Mogle [spelled phonetically]... or Miss! Not Mrs. Miss. Mogle.

RM: Okay, well this has been very interesting. Do you want to stop?

AK: No! I ever tell you about the logging camp days, but that's kind of vulgar. Some of the things that those guys used to do and used to say...

RM: It's all part of the...

AK: It's funnier than hell. Of course Dorson told me the same thing. He said you know he said "a lot of the folklore is vulgar but it's still folklore."

RM: Yeah.

AK: And he said “you gotta document it somehow.” It has meaning. You know in the logging camp...I don't want to get into that now. But there was a social structure just like anywhere else. There was one guy that was the top of the pecking order, then there was bums, all these for the show. He never has a place put his boots, never has a place to hang up his socks to dry. It's hilarious.

RM: It's always the same guys, somebody falls into that. But there was a guy in that spot there.

AK: That's right. There's always that guy at every camp. Then there was always the philosopher. Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, I'll tell you. I used to laugh. I had a top bunk in the corner, and I could lay in my bunk and I could kind of watch everybody and see, watch their antics at night. And contrary to popular opinion, lumberjacks are not big strong burley guys that just drink and cut down trees and fight. They were the most wimpish bunch of bastards I knew. Bitch and moan and complain all the time. Always picking on the cook too, never when the cook was there, always when they were off in the woods, that damn cook. If the cook doesn't have sweet rolls for them in the morning or something that they expect, holy Christ for 3 days that was the topic of conversation. “That damn cook has got to go! No damn good!” And on and on and on. Their life is so limited, you lose interest, you earn nothing, just living in the woods. Now I used to read, because the truck drivers would bring stuff in for me. I seldom got out of the camp, I was the young one I had to stay there and take care of the damn horses while everybody else went to town. I had to stay there and carried water for the horse and fed them and clean the barn and so forth. So the truck drivers would bring me reading material. Newspapers and magazines and so on. They were a bunch of real bitches I'll tell ya, one guy scared the hell out of me. He had anger I don't know what the hell that was about. He was in the Swedish navy or Danish navy or something in World War 2. His ship had sunk and he was shell shocked. He'd tell me some nights he's go nuts. He came back from town in the middle of the night once, how he got there I don't know. I was all alone, I was in my bunk I made it look like I was sleeping in my bed and I watched to see what he was going to do. He was drunk, he was staring at me. He picked up his ax and _____ he walked up to my bunk. His face was about one foot from mine looking at me, and I gotta do something. So I said “Andrew go to bed you need some sleep!” And he looked at me, he could have said yeah. He put his axe down on his bunk and went to sleep. I didn't sleep another second that night. [Laughs]. But he was a hell of a good guy, good worker too and a very very kind person. He was very clean too, most of them weren't. In fact, twice in the wintertime we got lice from guys coming into camp and they had lice in their head. Damn, within a few says everybody's got them. In great big gray vats, and you could feel them running down your back and down your sleeves. They congregate under your arms where it's warm. Then you gotta boil all your clothes with P&G soap and Lysol. But I was not kidding about Andrew, he was exceptionally clean for a lumberjack. He would take his clothes, and he only had one set of clothes, and he would wash them and hand them up to dry. Of course he had nothing on him, the first time I ever saw it, he took his shirt off, and he took off his underwear. He was a real husky guy you know, strong. He had a big tattoo of Christ on his chest, it covered up his whole chest. Christs hand is up like this and holding a length of a chain, and the chain goes over his shoulder, and you look on the back and there's the devil on the other side.

[Laughs]. Each one had a hold of that chain. And I mean they were big, they covered up his whole chest and his whole back. He should have been skinned when he died to keep that! They were a funny bunch though I'll tell ya. They were something else. We should be done.

RM: Yes. Well thank you!

END OF INTERVIEW