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Narrative and everyday experience: Performance process in the storytelling of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites. (Volumes I and II)

McCabe-Juhnke, John Elmer, Ph.D.

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NARRATIVE AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE: PERFORMANCE PROCESS IN THE STORYTELLING OF THE SWISS VOLHYNIAN MENNONITES

Volume I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech Communication, Theater, and Communication Disorders

by

John McCabe-Juhnke
B.A., Bethel College, 1978
M.A., University of Illinois, 1981
August, 1990
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ABSTRACT

This study examines oral narrative performance within the cultural context of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in Moundridge, Kansas, whose forbears were members of a congregational group that migrated from the Russian Province of Volhynia in 1874. These inmigrants strove to maintain Gemeinde—a mutually supportive community of believers separated from the world. A Swiss Volhynian Mennonite himself, the author tape-recorded interviews with second and third generation descendants of the Russian immigrants. Using the interview transcriptions and personal observation in the Moundridge community as primary data, the author demonstrates how the formative elements of everyday narrative performance both sustain and are shaped by the social and cultural norms of Swiss Mennonite Gemeinde. An analysis of the personal and social roles of Swiss Volhynian storytellers reflects a fundamental tension between individuality and conformity. An examination of the written transcriptions of these oral narratives reveals noticeable contextual overtones. The use of dialect, insiders’ code, community-oriented genres, and the structural technique of linking (connecting the story with people and places familiar to both storyteller and listener)
demonstrates oral narrators' evocation of an in-group context for storytelling.

Integrating narrator and narrative into a discussion of performance process, this study presents a synchronic view of narrative performance, which sees the audience, the performance setting, and community norms and expectations as constitutive elements of performance. Swiss Volhynians most frequently perform at the level of natural or unself-conscious narration rather than intentional or public narration, allowing storytellers to maintain the community norm of self-effacement despite their obvious competence as performers.

An analysis of performance setting describes it as comprised of social norms, physical environment, and the psychological makeup of teller and listener. Settings vary in terms of thematic and behavioral expectations that determine the level of a storyteller's acceptance.

Finally, in addition to examining the author's special stance as a researcher, audience member, and performer of Swiss Volhynian oral narration, this study shows that understanding personal experience storytelling provides insight into the aesthetics and criticism of performances at any level: those in everyday experience, in the public arena, and in the classroom.
INTRODUCTION

Narrative performance is a pervasive act in everyday experience. As we tell others about events in our lives and listen to what others say about us, we cast and recast our experience in ways that affirm our individual and relational identities. As Kristin Langellier observes, performance scholars have become increasingly interested in stories from personal experience, or personal narratives, although theoretical approaches to this "boundary phenomenon" are diverse and underdeveloped.¹ Langellier categorizes current research on personal narrative into five analytical perspectives. She identifies in each perspective a varying degree of emphasis on personal narrative as formal structure, performance act, interactive discourse, social process, and political action. As Langellier's research suggests, personal narration is a primary form of communicative activity. Thus, any analysis of personal narration must consider the multifarious elements that comprise the communicative situation. In other words, an informed interpretation of personal narratives

necessarily attends to not only the story "text" but also the storyteller, the story listener, and the socio-cultural context of the storytelling community.

Attention to the contextual elements of personal narratives has led performance scholars to focus on particular "speech communities" in an attempt to determine the relationship between social experience and personal narrative.\(^2\) By examining the narrative behaviors of members of cultural and ethnic subgroups of American society, folklorists, ethnographers and performance scholars have been able to demonstrate the influence of collective experience on individual identity. A community's distinctive set of beliefs, values, and expectations find expression in the personal narratives of its members.

Although a collectively understood value system is typical of many rural communities in the United States, the socio-moral standard of each community is unique. A community negotiates its values based upon the distinctive historical and sociological contexts that have shaped its identity. This study focuses on the narrative behaviors of the descendants of Mennonites who emigrated from the province of Volhynia in Russia in the 1870's and settled in central Kansas. The rural community of Moundridge, Kansas, is populated with a large proportion of Swiss Volhynian Mennonites.

Because they migrated primarily as church congregations and made their living as farmers in isolated rural areas, the Swiss Mennonites

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have generally remained separate from the various societies in which they lived. Sustained by their Anabaptist Christian beliefs, these Mennonites worked to establish a community of mutually accountable believers, or Gemeinde, that was independent of the social and political structures of mainstream society. As a result, a distinctive cultural identity has endured among the Swiss Volhynians as evidenced by their ethnic foodways, Swiss-German dialect, and religious orientation. Although each of these features of Swiss Volhynian society presents an opportunity for cultural analysis, this study focuses on the oral narrative practice of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites.

Attention to oral narrative among Mennonites in the Moundridge community is an appropriate locus for this study for several reasons. Swiss Mennonites have a reputation for their distinctive style of speaking. People in surrounding communities frequently identify natives of Moundridge simply by listening to them speak. Since references to oral discourse are prominent in local descriptions of what makes Swiss Volhynian Mennonites unique, the ways of speaking among this group of Mennonites warrant special focus.

In addition to a characteristic rhythm, energy, and pattern of emphasis in their oral style, Swiss Volhnians are known for their boisterous manner of interaction. As R. C. Kauffman observed, speaking at the Seventy-fifth Anniversary celebration of the Swiss Volhynian migration, "You can always tell what a Schweitzer [Swiss
German] thinks or feels, for he will tell you."

Clearly, people within the community, as well as outsiders, have openly acknowledged for years the Schweitzers' reputation for spirited, candid talk.

Though Swiss Volhynians demonstrate their verbal ingenuity in a variety of ways, oral narrative is a mode of discourse that dominates the everyday experience of Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge. Nearly all traditional Schweitzer expressions, Swiss-German rhymes and sayings, and patterns of family nicknaming are either framed within or accompanied by narratives—stories that establish the significance of the events, people, and/or places that gave rise to the expressions or encouraged their dissemination. Thus, narrative emerges as a way of speaking that encompasses a broad range of experiences shared by the folk in this traditional Swiss Mennonite community.

Among the Swiss Volhynians in the Moundridge community, oral narrative functions to establish community ethos and to locate individual identity within the context of that ethos. Richard Bauman asserts that oral narrative is the primary means by which members of small agrarian communities establish their personal and social identities. According to Bauman, members of a community are "defined in part by their actions and experiences, elements of their local social biography...[and] stories are the major means by which such actions and experiences are memorialized and given

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expression. 4

The enduring influence of Gemeinde has shaped the development of "local social biographies" in the Moundridge community. Stories about people and events in the community express Gemeinde by affirming community "connectedness." For many Swiss Volhynians, oral narrative has become the primary expressive medium for reinforcing and sometimes questioning the norms and expectations of the community.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this investigation is to examine and describe the oral narrative performances of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in the Moundridge community in order to discover ways in which the creative process of storytelling in everyday experience constitutes a context for the negotiation of Gemeinde among participants in narrative interactions. Demonstrating the way in which the formative elements of narrative performance both sustain and are shaped by social and cultural norms will enhance the understanding of the personal narrative process and will enable an informed approach to the performance of oral ethnic materials.

Contributory Studies

Studies in a variety of disciplines have contributed to this investigation, including language and literary theory, folklore, performance anthropology, conversation analysis, and performance studies. Current research in all these areas focuses on the issue

of the relationship between verbal performance and emergent context. Because contemporary research in performance has obfuscated boundaries between disciplines, the categorization of fields of study in this review is more perfunctory than definitive.

Though recent studies in human performance rightfully eschew the application of literary theory to oral performance, current understandings of the expressive nature of language as it evokes lived experience build upon central concerns in language and literary theory. Frederick Turner's analysis of the relationship of literature to oral culture suggests that oral and literary discourse have common roots in the ritual tradition. Turner probes the inter-relationship of text, actor, and audience within the performance context in order to determine a universal framework for his "ontological criticism."5 Whereas Turner's attention to context points beyond specific circumstances to universal qualities in literary performance, other literary theorists suggest that contextual considerations are important precisely because of what they reveal about the particulars of the immediate situation.

Discourse theorist Mikhail Bakhtin affirms the common cultural heritage of oral and written discourse. For Bakhtin all language, both oral and written, is context dependent. He asserts that the social contexts and ideological stance of the writer cannot be separated from the words he or she employs in a literary text. Bakhtin likens novelistic discourse to everyday utterance, which is

determined by "its immediate social situation." He suggests that in any utterance "the word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant." Bakhtin's notion that situation enters into utterance and contributes to its meaning demonstrates the shared concerns with current trends in folklore.

Another important concept from Bakhtin's work is "heteroglossia"—the idea that literary language, indeed all language, is comprised of a variety of speech types. These speech types, or dialects, range from liturgical discourse to the informal slang of common laborers. Because "each word tastes of the context ... in which it has lived its socially charged life," one can identify certain language types with certain contexts. The dialogical relationships among these language types as they inter-animate one another are central to discovering the social and ideological context of the novel. Bakhtin's attention to the dialogic relationships among various language types pervades much of his theory of literary discourse.

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The concept of heteroglossia relates directly to the study of cultural subgroups. The tension between ethnic and religious subcultures and the dominant society engenders a host of different language types, arising from ethnic, religious, national, and/or occupational differences. In Swiss Mennonite oral culture, for example, the rich cultural heritage of the Swiss Volhynian dialect, with its mix of Polish, German, Russian, and English, demonstrates the lived experience of a community that has been continually uprooted, moving from country to country in search of religious freedom. The Swiss Volhynian dialect reflects what Bakhtin terms "polyglossia," that is, the tense interrelationship among many different national languages. The oral discourse of Swiss Mennonites demonstrates additional tensions between the values, practices, and habits of the more traditional, conservative farm culture and the pressures of assimilation to contemporary American society. By attending to heteroglossia in oral discourse, a person can explore how language types that arise out of these varied contexts influence an individual storyteller's style.

Current perspectives on literary discourse that view it as a dialogue between the author and the reader are consistent with recent concerns in the study of natural narrative that regard the audience as a primary participant in shaping the meaning as well as the outcome of oral performance. Hans Robert Jauss and Hans-Georg Gadamer center their theories of literary interpretation around the
reading public's understanding of a literary work. Both Susan Sniader Lanser and Mary Louise Pratt build upon J. L. Austin's speech act theory. They conceive of literary discourse as a relational act that is shaped by social and cultural context. These recent trends in literary criticism treat social, cultural and historical contexts as integral components in the interpretation of literature.

Linguistic studies have also examined the shaping influence of contextual factors on language use. The shared perspectives of linguistics and literature are evident in Pratt's use of William Labov's oral narrative components in her work. Similarities between formal elements in oral and written language show that both forms of discourse are linked in terms of structure and function. Although Labov and Joshua Waletzky focus almost exclusively on linguistic properties of personal narratives, they acknowledge that the relationship between teller and listener influences the use of language structures in narrative.

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11 Pratt, pp. 51-67.

perspective focuses more directly on contextual issues. Lakoff observes that extralinguistic factors significantly influence the interpretation of language structures.

Current research in language theory informs the structural analysis of Swiss Mennonite oral narratives in this study. Thus, the analysis of language and style attends to both linguistic and extralinguistic factors. Attention to both kinds of factors illuminates the relationship between the everyday experience of Gemeinde among Swiss Volhynians and the language they use to talk about their experience.

The trend in language and literary theory to locate meaning as outside of rather than within the language structures themselves reflects current concerns in the study of folklore. Folklore research has moved away from an emphasis on studying artifacts as a link to the past. The historic-geographic method for tracing and comparing variant folk tales in order to discover their original forms has been superseded by current scholarly interests in folklore that focus instead on the folk tale "in context." Such researchers as Roger Abrahams, Richard Bauman, Dan Ben-Amos, Alan Dundee, Robert Hemenway, Mary Ellen Brown Lewis, Barre Toelken and Barbara Herrnstein Smith all have argued for a more synchronic view of


Rather than looking at the folklore product in isolation, these writers are interested in the process of folkloric communication. They assert that text is inextricably bound to context and is thus determined by the individual who creates it, the setting in which it is performed, the community tastes that govern its production, and the audience who attends it. Thus, understanding folklore requires knowledge of the entire cultural context in which it is created.

The notion that oral performance is intricately interwoven into the everyday experience of the community is supported both in general theoretical studies and in research into specific speech communities. In the area of general theory, Dell Hymes suggests that various speech communities use language in ways that are distinctive to the

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"defining context" of community interaction. Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer support Hymes' view of the significant influence of the community on verbal performance. They suggest that language and socio-cultural context are radically linked. Walter Ong discusses the influence of audience and occasion on narrative composition and acknowledges the significance of contextual factors in the oral poet's creation. In terms of specific field research in various ethnic communities, Roger Abrahams' work with inner-city Blacks, Linda Degh's studies among the Szekler peasants in Kakasd, Hungary, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's investigation of narrative performance among East European Jews, and Rosan Jordan's work with Mexican-American immigrants, have all demonstrated the vital link between performance and community context.

Both theoretical discussions and specific field research in the various communities have contributed to our understanding of how language and culture interact. The works of Hymes, Bauman, Sherzer, Ong, Abrahams, Degh, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and Jordan have each provided valuable insights into the relationship between community and performance.


folklore have demonstrated the importance of viewing a community's distinctive ways of speaking as emergent within the social interaction of its members. In Swiss Mennonite culture, interaction among community members both develops within and functions to define the context of Gemeinde. While narrative themes generally affirm community-connectedness, industriousness, and cooperation, narrative behaviors reflect the importance of humility, deference, and self-control. Thus, the distinctive social expectations of the Swiss Volhynian community are both named and enacted in the oral narrative performances of its members.

The shift in folklore studies to a synchronic view of performance, a view that regards performance as emergent in the obtaining circumstances of its creation, has encouraged a new interest in less traditional forms of folkloric communication. Steven Stern suggests that although much research has tended to value folklore from the past more than hybrid forms of the present, newer forms of expression, such as personal experience narratives, are becoming more prominent in folklore scholarship.19 Victor Turner analyzes narratives from informal conversations as they reveal social processes in community life. According to Turner, a breach of social norms initiates a process of social drama that forms the basis for both literary and oral narratives.20 Turner’s attention to

19Steven Stern, "Ethnic Folklore and the Folklore of Ethnicity," Western Folklore, 36 (1977), pp. 26-29.


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conversational narrative demonstrates a new interest in informal modes of narrative discourse. In a similar fashion, Sandra Stahl focuses specifically on the form and function of personal narratives in her research, suggesting that such narratives are means for sharing and testing personal values and traditional attitudes.21 Both Erving Goffman and Dell Hymes focus on less traditional forms of verbal expression, Hymes attending to modes of performance and Goffman to narrative roles as they emerge in various patterns of everyday speech.22

Current scholarly works that analyze everyday modes of speaking in terms of a community's traditional attitudes and beliefs have provided for new approaches to cultural investigation. Indeed, this study of Swiss Mennonite culture would have suffered had the scope of analysis been limited to traditional folktales. The opportunity to examine everyday narrative performances provides a wealth of insight into the lives and experiences of the Swiss Volhynians in the Moundridge community, for whom the expectations for traditional forms of storytelling performance are relatively low.

Current research in performance anthropology shares with folklore studies an interest in the way culture is expressed in the course of everyday experience. Roger Abrahams asserts that an


"anthropology of experience" should attend to "the most common and ordinary activities in the flow of life in the group under observation." Abrahams suggests that planned events—those to which people look forward with some level of expectation—represent only a small segment of cultural experience. Therefore, these special events should be interpreted in relation to the normal flow of everyday activities. Because ordinary and extraordinary experiences "share a scenic wholeness," both deserve attention in the analysis of cultural experience.

Recent anthropological studies have attempted to recreate the "scenic wholeness" that Abrahams describes. In her study of the Jewish elderly at the Aliyah Senior Citizens Center in Venice, California, Barbara Myerhoff addresses a broad range of communicative activities at the center. Her analysis of the ceremonial observances at the center is informed by her experience leading classroom discussions in Living History classes at the center and by her many informal conversations with regular patrons. Myerhoff also nurtured a deep friendship with Shemuel, a self-proclaimed skeptic in the elderly community. Her observation and participation in so many different aspects of life in the community enabled her to develop a sophisticated composite picture of the experiences of the elderly in

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24 Abrahams, p. 46.

the Aliyah community.

Henry Glassie's study of the rural community of Balleymenone in Northern Ireland is another notable attempt to analyze featured performance as situated within the flow of everyday experience. Glassie's desire to study this Ulster community "from the inside out," led him to develop trusted relationships with several individuals from Balleymenone. His portrayal of Ulster society is based on intimate conversations with the "community's wise speakers," as well as participation in the work and social life of the community. His description of the local tradition of the ceili—a storytelling session among neighbors gathered in a home—reveals a thorough understanding of the way in which traditional verbal expressions emerge within the current of everyday activities in the Balleymenone community.

One of the most rigorous attempts to develop a composite picture of folk experience is Gary Gossen's book on the oral tradition of Chamula Indians of Southern Mexico. Gossen analyzes the relationship of cosmology and the oral tradition of a Tzotzil-speaking community of Chamulas. In an effort to present a holistic analysis of the Chamula community, Gossen develops a meticulous

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27 Glassie, p. 86.


taxonomy based on the classifications articulated by the Chamula people. Spanning from conversational language to ritualized formulas of religious practice, Gossen's taxonomy demonstrates the need to interpret individual types of expressive behavior within a broad range of community experience.

These studies by Myerhoff, Glassie, and Gossen plainly affirm that extraordinary events are a part of the ongoing processes of cultural communication. Coming to terms with the processual nature of cultural expressions, both verbal and nonverbal, has been a primary concern for performance anthropologists. According to Edward Bruner, researchers should conceive of expressions as "processual activit[ies]" rather than seeing them as "static text[s]."30 Bruner asserts that in the "doing"—in the moment of performance—the text becomes "transformative," and we are able to "re-experience our culture's heritage."31 Thus, in order to formulate legitimate interpretations of cultural experience, one must examine the constitutive elements of the performance situation.

A process-oriented analysis of performance necessarily attends to ways in which people begin, sustain, and end performances within the flow of everyday experience. In the case of Swiss Volhynian Mennonite culture, storytelling performance is seldom featured as a special event but is situated within other forms of social interaction such as working together, eating together, or just


31Bruner, p. 7.
visiting. Thus, current studies of less formal, more spontaneous modes of expression such as conversation and natural narration provide an appropriate backdrop for the analysis of Swiss Volhynian oral performance. These studies demonstrate the importance of developing an enduring relationship with a particular group of people in order for a researcher to be able to distinguish the mundane from the exceptional experiences in a community. Indeed, my life-long association with the Swiss Volhynians has encouraged a depth of insight into the flow of experience in the Moundridge community that enables a more immediate, if more subjective, encounter with the Swiss Mennonite culture.

In the study of conversation, John Gumperz has developed a theory of discourse strategies that clarifies the way in which various types of speech emerge in the process of conversational interaction. Reminiscent of Mary Louise Pratt's development of speech act theory, John Gumperz conceives of discourse as comprised of a variety of speech activities that are negotiated by speakers and listeners. Whether telling a story, discussing politics, or chatting about the weather, participants in conversations attempt to establish "an agreed upon set of rules for their interactions." Of course, discourse activities continually shift, and new expectations emerge within the course of the interaction. As changes occur, the interactants' ability to adapt depends on a level of interpersonal

32 See John J. Gumperz, Discourse Strategies (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982).

33 Gumperz, pp. 166-167.
skill as well as shared cultural knowledge. Gumperz' analysis of misunderstandings that occur between members of different cultures demonstrates that "each culture has its own constraints not only on content, but also on the ways in which particular activities are carried out and signalled."\textsuperscript{34}

Gumperz' research encourages scholars to attend to culturally derived patterns for speech activities as well as for speech content. Here again, both thematic and behavioral aspects of Swiss Mennonite oral narrative performance emerge as central considerations for analysis. A pervasive sensitivity to Gemeinde fosters a sense of mutual accountability that shapes both the style of performance and the range of acceptable topics in Swiss Volhynian oral narrative. For example, the content of Swiss Mennonite stories tends to affirm traditional Mennonite values like cooperation, industriousness, humility, and nonviolence. At the same time, storytellers generally engage in narrative activities in which the expectation for featured performance is relatively low. Conversational narratives and personal experience stories provide Swiss Volhynian storytellers with opportunities to perform without obligating them to "show off" their oral skills.

Whereas Gumperz' research develops a general framework for analyzing a wide range of discourse activities, other conversation theorists have focused more specifically on conversational storytelling. Wayne Beach investigates the way in which conversational participants depend on shared knowledge to achieve

\textsuperscript{34} Gumperz, p. 166.

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understanding in conversational storytelling. Numerous other conversation theorists illustrate the significant influence of the immediate situation on conversational storytelling. Livia Polanyi asserts that conversational storytellers are constrained by the obtaining circumstances of a conversational interaction. Polanyi argues that stories must be "relevant to the talk underway" and "tailored to the specific people who are the story recipients." Deborah Tannen identifies ways in which tellers and listeners co-participate in conversational storytelling. Tannen submits that in determining whether to share and how long to sustain conversational stories, storytellers respond to the perceived level of listener affirmation. Jenny Mandelbaum also demonstrates the participatory nature of conversational storytelling, in which listeners effect a change in direction or a revision of the outcome of conversational stories. Mandelbaum submits that tellers and listeners actually "co-author" conversational stories. With more focused attention to


37 Polanyi, p. 33.


40 Mandelbaum, p. 124.
nonverbal behaviors, Charles Goodwin demonstrates ways in which, based on the situational contingencies, storytellers and listeners orient themselves to each other in conversational tellings. 41

Studies in conversational narrative share an overriding concern for ways in which tellers and listeners co-create both the context and the content of conversational stories. An understanding of the active role of the listener in the performance setting requires researchers to problematize the teller-listener relationship as it shapes the storytelling context. For Swiss Mennonites, relational history is generally connected with the local social biography of the community as a whole. Oral narratives function to locate the teller-listener relationship within the arena of community experience. Often a primary task of tellers and listeners is to establish a shared set of community associations within which the events of the narrative can be understood.

Current research in performance studies reflects recent trends in folklore, anthropology, and conversation analysis, which attend to situational factors that influence the structure and development of discourse. Traditional approaches to the oral interpretation of literature have given way to new perspectives on performance, which include forms of artistic oral performance—both literary and nonliterary—within the scope of our analysis. Indeed, research in performance among American subcultures has been and continues to be a

primary interest in performance scholarship.

Jean Haskell Speer identifies a symbiotic relationship between folklore and interpretation.⁴² Whereas folklore offers valuable literary resources to performers of literature, performance studies offer folklore the possibility of sustaining a tradition of oral performance. Speer and Elizabeth Fine contend that folklore studies allow us to develop new approaches to critical theory that join with "other humanists and behavioral scientists in an exploration of performance in human life."⁴³ Their focus on folklore studies, literary criticism, and sociological research clears the way for performance theory to become more synchronic in its approach. A synchronic approach to performance enables researchers to explore various cultural codes that influence the performer, the audience, and the expectations for the performance event.

The relationship between folklore and performance studies has been a fruitful alliance. Performance studies has enthusiastically probed the new world of "texts" that folklore offers, and folklore studies has adopted the concept of performance as fundamental to the analysis of folkloric communication. Richard Bauman describes recent performance-centered analyses of folklore, which examine the role of folklore as it affirms or resists social transformation in modern


Bauman’s article anticipates Langellier’s recent attention to the social and political functions of personal narration.

Elizabeth Fine clarifies the issue of text in performance as it relates to folklore and performance studies. Her methodology for composing a written record of folklore performance addresses concerns raised by Dennis Tedlock in folklore research. Fine augments Tedlock’s research by developing a system of notation that carefully records the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of oral narrators. She cautions against confusing the written record of performance behaviors with a performance “text,” since oral “texts” are truly present only at the moment of the telling. Dell Hymes’ perspective on the ethnography of speaking shapes Fine’s approach to oral performance. According to Fine, the ethnography of speaking “aims to discover the patterns and functions of speaking within specific cultural contexts.” Her research equips performance scholars with valuable tools for studying storytelling and oral performance among culturally distinct ethnic groups.

Ethnography is a central concept in Dwight Conquergood’s studies in oral culture among the Laotian immigrants in the Chicago area.


47 Fine, pp. 36-37.
Anthropological and folkloristic concepts are prominent in Conquergood’s discussion of the performance of texts derived from fieldwork in oral culture. Conquergood contends that performers of literature and ethnographers are involved in similar activities. Both seek “the liberalizing benefits and emancipating knowledge that come from imaginatively entering another world.” For the performer that world is the world of a literary text; for the ethnographer it is the world of a contemporary subculture.

Conquergood views performance as a paradigm for human action. Utilizing Wallace Bacon’s concept of performance as embodiment and dialogue, Conquergood suggests that performance pervades human activity. The performer of literature, like the everyday storyteller, participates in an ephemeral process, gives substance and form to a variety of experiences, and engages in a dialogue between self and other.

Conquergood’s performance paradigm is germane to a discussion of Swiss Volhynian natural narrative performance. As this study will demonstrate, Mennonites in the Moundridge community rarely tell a “good story” as if it is an isolated product that stands on its own


merit. Rather, oral narratives gain significance as narrators situate their stories within the ebb and flow of everyday experience. The individual identity and experience of the storyteller along with the shared experiences, value orientation, and social expectations of the community are inseparable from the process of Swiss Mennonite storytelling. For Swiss Volhynians, oral narrative is a means for expressing the relationship of the individual to the community.

Conquergood also addresses the moral dimensions involved in performing texts derived from fieldwork in American subcultures. He encourages the performer to maintain a dialectic balance between empathy and difference when texts reflect experiences extrinsic to one's personal history. Here again, the notion of dialogue is fundamental to the performer's experience. Performance becomes a dialogical act in which the world view of the performer interacts with that of the storyteller.

The concept of dialogical performance has significant implications for any study involving materials derived from distinctive ethnic traditions. This study proposes to analyze the dialogue between Swiss Volhynian Mennonites and mainstream American culture and to extend the interaction between these two cultures. At the same time, my own heritage as a Swiss Volhynian Mennonite offers yet another perspective on the performance of ethnic materials. Working within the culture of my origin, I have an inside view of the

link between personal experience and performed text. As a Swiss Volhynian Mennonite writing for an academic audience in the American mainstream, I am constantly mediating dialogical tensions between two distinct cultures. This unique position enables the analysis of the perspective of an ethnic group insider who performs oral ethnic materials both within and outside of the traditional ethnic community.

Current research in all fields that study human performance affirms that performance is above all a process. Our understanding of the process of performance depends upon our willingness to examine the constitutive functions of speaker, audience, community, and culture within the performance setting. This study of Swiss Mennonite oral culture examines the inter-animation among these variables as they function to establish a relevant context for the interaction of the participants in the storytelling process.

The foregoing summary of research literature demonstrates the importance of considering elements of “context” in an analysis of performance process. Though scholars in all performance disciplines identify contextual factors as important shaping influences on performance, specific understandings of “context” and its functions are varied and numerous. Michael Moerman criticizes theorists who have done little to define the function of context in social science research. Moerman observes, “To the social sciences, ‘context’ usually means something like vague surrounding features that cannot
be stated except, perhaps, in retrospect.52 These "surrounding features" can range from historical background to the immediate physical setting of an interaction. Admittedly, these features shape the communication event in important ways, but conceiving of "context" as an established package of contiguous components that remains constant in the course of the interaction limits our understanding of the way context functions in performance and in communication in general.

Moerman offers an alternative view of conversational context that is more functional for the analysis of human interaction. He sees context as emergent in the sequential interaction of conversational participants. In effect, conversational context is created by the persons in the communicative situation as they "place conversations in the history of interactions that compose a relationship and a biography."53 Moerman's attention to the participants' role in creating a context for interaction has been affirmed by conversation theorists as well as scholars in other disciplines.

Robert Nofsinger asserts that "context is a subset of participants' general background understandings: the specific item(s) of shared knowledge that the participants collaboratively

53Moerman, p. 29.
locate, access, or invoke as momentarily relevant. "54 Nofsinger argues that participants work together to establish a context for understanding their immediate interaction.

The ways in which [conversational participants] help each other to access those particular items as relevant to a specific moment of the conversation are ways of achieving context. That is, context works because it involves subtle processes of participants communicating to each other (or indexing for each other) which particulars have momentary interpretive value.55

For Nofsinger, context is "an achievement of the participants."56

According to Ronald Wardhaugh, one primary achievement of conversational participants is that of agenda-setting.

What you can say (or must conceal) on any particular occasion is controlled by the agenda you have set for yourself on that occasion, that is, your overall purpose, which, of course, you must partially work out [sic] during the conversation itself.57

As conversational participants work out the agenda for their interaction, they create a context that focuses the talk on accomplishing the agenda at hand. Though individuals may come with pre-conceived notions about the purpose of the interaction, the emergent context is always mutually constructed within the conversation itself.

The structure of informal conversation by its very nature


55 Nofsinger, p. 238.

56 Nofsinger, p. 238.

encourages all participants to share in creating the context for their interaction. Though performance assumes a more formalized relationship between speakers and listeners, the notion of a mutually constructed context is applicable to the performance situation as well. Roger Abrahams submits that performance participants share in the "situating" of folklore in the "process of living in groups." 58

In his analysis of the performance event, Richard Bauman affirms Abrahams' perspective. Bauman suggests that people knowingly locate speech behaviors within the course of social interaction in order to create a context within which behaviors can be mutually recognized as performance.

Oral performance, like all human activity, is situated, its form, meaning, and functions rooted in culturally defined scenes or events—bounded segments of the flow of behavior and experience that constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation, and evaluation. 59

Of course, the history of community interactions and the background understandings of the participants contribute to the participants' ability to achieve a relevant context for performance. Thus, one must distinguish between constitutive and constituted contexts. Henry Glassie observes that

... some context is drawn from the immediate situation, but more is drawn from memory. It is present, but invisible, inaudible. Contexts are mental associations woven around texts during a performance to shape and complete them, to give them meaning. 60


59 Richard Bauman, Story, Performance, and Event, p. 3.

60 Henry Glassie, Passing the Time in Ballymenone, p. 33.
Glassie's observation suggests that constitutive and constituted contexts are inter-related. In order to understand the latter, a researcher must have some notion of the former. Indeed, those intangible historical and cultural influences affect the way in which context is created in the immediate situation.

A survey of research literature in the fields of language and literary theory, folklore, performance anthropology, conversation analysis, and performance studies reveals the need for a more focused analysis of the relationship between constitutive and constituted contexts as they function in the process of oral performance. The oral narrative practice of Swiss Volhynian Mennonites provides an opportunity for such an analysis. Just as context both shapes and is shaped by participants in a performance situation, the sense of Gemeinde both influences and is negotiated by Swiss Mennonites in narrative interactions.

Central to the radical doctrine of the Anabaptists was the concept of Gemeinde—a congregation that was comprised of "a community of believers, totally committed to obey the rules of Christ's kingdom, joyfully submitting to its discipline."\(^{61}\) Within the Gemeinde, men and women subchued individual interests in an effort to better the community. Although more than a century in the United States has diminished the sense of Gemeinde for the Swiss Volhynians, prevalent traces of this idea remain in the oral culture of the Mennonites in the Moundridge community. As first and second


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generation descendants of the Russian immigrants, these people maintain a strong sense of accountability to community expectations. This examination of Swiss Volhynian oral narration will demonstrate that a primary function of narrative performance is to express the evolving sense of Gemeinde among Swiss Mennonites by affirming community "connectedness," reinforcing community values, and sometimes questioning the norms and expectations of the community.

**Methodology**

The diversity of approaches to research in the area of oral narration in ethnic subgroups attests to the value of examining this subject from a variety of perspectives. Concurrently, the present investigation employs a combination of research methods including descriptive analysis, field research in oral narration, and interpretive inquiry.

The combination of these approaches results in a hybrid form of ethnomethodology. According to Harold Garfinkel, ethnomethodology assumes that people express themselves in concurrence with common sense understandings of the social situations in which they interact. Garfinkel resists an approach to understanding actions in context that depends on pre-ordained rules for interaction. Instead, he views rules for social behavior as emergent in the interaction itself. This study examines oral performance behaviors as they emerge in the everyday experiences of the Swiss Volhynian

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Mennonites.

In order to discover the common sense understandings of narrative performance for this group, I have described traditional modes of social behavior as they have developed in the history of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites. To this end, this study incorporates sources that recount the course of the Mennonites' migration and the events leading to their arrival in central Kansas. It describes the experience of the Swiss Volhynian immigrants as they adjusted to a new way of life in American society. This study also examines the Swiss Mennonites' current lifestyles and social behaviors, including religious and church experiences, occupational roles, family relationships, and educational background, in order to establish their contemporary social context. Since few published materials on Swiss Volhynian society are available, much of this data has been obtained through personal observation of, and conversation with, Mennonites in the Moundridge community.

Folklore field research has been a fundamental method of data collection in this investigation. However, because of my personal experience as a Swiss Mennonite who has grown up in the Moundridge community, I adapted my approach to participant-observation in this study to accommodate a more informal method of data collection.

New trends in performance scholarship have increasingly adapted, even transformed, standard practices of participant-observation. James Clifford argues that even the most scientific approaches to ethnographic study cannot escape the subjectivity of the researcher's personal perspective.
It becomes necessary to conceive of ethnography not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed "other" reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least two and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects.64

Numerous theorists have proposed new models for conceptualizing ethnography. George Marcus asserts that "modernist" ethnographies are "essays" that focus on the "incompleteness and indeterminateness" in the world of the ethnographic subject.65 Edward Bruner argues that all ethnographers "begin with a narrative in our heads which structures our initial observations in the field."66 Similarly, James Clifford suggests that contemporary ethnographies are "fictions" that "select and impose meaning as they translate it."67 These perspectives on ethnography compel contemporary researchers to problematize more self-consciously their personal frame of reference for cultural interpretation.

In order to broaden his personal frame of reference on the community of Ballymenone in Northern Ireland, Henry Glassie committed himself to establish extended personal relationships with his informants. He observes:


Ethnography is interaction. Collaboration. What it demands is not hypotheses, which may ultimately close study down, obscuring the integration of the other, but the ability to converse intimately.  

Much of Glassie's sensitive portrayal of culture in Ballymenone is based on intimate conversations with members of the Ulster community. His approach to cultural inquiry—though less formalized—is infinitely more thorough than more traditional approaches to ethnography. Glassie's method emerges within the intricate fabric of Ulster society.

In this study, I have attempted to take advantage of, rather than to deny, my personal perspective on Swiss Volhynian culture. I interviewed fourteen informants between the spring of 1986 and the summer of 1989 and found that my position as a community insider enabled a natural entrance into the daily lives of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites. These informants recognized me as one who "belonged." Some knew me as a nephew, or great-nephew; others as a former student or family friend. In the rare instances that interviews were first time encounters, I was at least recognized as John and Ethel Juhnke's youngest boy. I was known, welcomed, and nearly always was offered something to eat or drink.

Though the primary "textual" data for this study were obtained through tape-recorded interviews, the responses elicited and the interpretations offered are derived as much from my intimate association with the Swiss Mennonites as they are from a careful analysis of the interview transcripts. In order to develop a

legitimate analysis of oral narrative in everyday experience, my primary data necessarily come from my personal involvement in the everyday experience of Swiss Mennonite culture. The interviews, then, provided a means for following up on personal insights about the performances I have observed in natural environments and for soliciting the help of my informants in describing such performances.

Despite the often disconcerting presence of a mechanical recording device, many of these interviews exhibit a familiar, spontaneous quality that is typical of interactions between community insiders who are acquaintances, friends, and relatives. Thus, a majority of the narrative performances that arose during the interviews closely approximate performances in natural environments. As Glassie observes, local communities "include people who can turn interviews into conversations, [and] who can present its significant texts." In these cases, I have incorporated the narratives into the discussion of natural performance, which as this study demonstrates, is not bounded to any specific social activity but occurs in virtually all interactive settings.

As a researcher who has been raised in the Swiss Volhynian Mennonite tradition, I was aware that traditional folk tales were almost never performed in the community. At the same time, vague recollections of references to members of the older generation who had reputations for being good storytellers, prompted me to begin my field research by trying to locate storytellers with established reputations. However, my initial inquiries in the Moundridge

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community were met with a general lack of information. Sociologist Rolf Brednich's suggestion that Mennonites have no distinctive tradition of storytelling seemed to hold true for the Swiss Volhynians. In rare instances, individual community members identified others as good storytellers, providing a few leads for the initial interviews. However, when the formal interviewing began, informants often identified other community members who might have a better perspective, more accurate version, or more interesting telling of certain events. Thus the pool of informants gradually increased. After each of the fourteen tape-recorded interviews, a written transcription was prepared.

For the analysis of the materials collected through field research, this study uses both descriptive and interpretive methods. The descriptive approach identifies the narrative style of Swiss Mennonite storytellers, focusing on the types of language, selection of words, and arrangement of ideas in oral narratives. The interpretive approach examines language as it reveals and shapes both individual identity and the larger cultural context of the oral narrator. By probing the individual traits as well as cultural background of personal narration, this study identifies ways in which Swiss Mennonite storytellers create a context that enables the expression of individual identity, while affirming the interconnectedness of the cultural group.


71 See appendices A through N, pp. 215-479.
Organization

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapters one, two, and three examine different components of Swiss Volhynian personal narration: the narrative context, the narrator, and the narrative. In chapter four, these components are integrated into a discussion of the process of narrative performance, and chapter five examines other performance contexts from a personal narrative perspective. Chapter six offers a brief summary and conclusions of this study.

The first chapter describes both the historical background and the contemporary social context of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in the Moundridge community. It traces the Mennonites’ migration from Canton Bern in Switzerland, through the palatinate in South Germany, to the Russian province of Volhynia, and finally to central Kansas. This attention to the historical background enables an analysis of how understandings of Gemeinde have evolved in the Swiss Volhynian community. The first chapter also examines the shaping influence of historical context on the identity of these Mennonites today and identifies various aspects of contemporary society that comprise the social setting for Swiss Volhynian storytelling.

The second chapter focuses on the position of the oral narrator in Swiss Volhynian society. Utilizing the materials gathered in field research as well as current writings on Mennonite culture, chapter two describes the personal and social qualities of individual narrators in the Swiss Mennonite community. It examines the informants’ personal understandings of their roles as oral
narrators. The chapter identifies characteristics that oral narrators have in common as well as characteristics unique to individuals. It probes the relationship of the individual narrator to the Swiss Volhynian community as a whole.

In the third chapter, the verbal component of Swiss Mennonite oral narration is examined. Swiss Mennonite narratives are analyzed from the perspective of current theoretical writings in folklore, linguistics, and literary theory. This chapter demonstrates how the formal properties of these personal narratives—such as word choice, genre, and narrative technique—function to situate narratives in the context of the Gemeinde. It specifically focuses on the functions of dialect, insider code words, intercultural language play, genre differences, and structural devices in Swiss Volhynian oral narratives.

Chapter four integrates the components of personal narrative performance, analyzing the entire process of Swiss Mennonite oral narration from a synchronic perspective. Here, the narratives are discussed as elements integrated within a larger performance context, which includes the storyteller, his/her audience, the performance setting, and the community norms and expectations. This chapter probes the relationship between constitutive and constituted contexts, attending to functions of the physical environment, the social norms, and the psychological makeup of teller and listener in the immediate performance setting. An analysis of similar narratives performed in distinct settings clarifies the interpretive differences that inevitably result when a narrative performance is
The fifth chapter explores the relationship between personal narration and other modes of verbal performance. The process-centered perspective of the fourth chapter is applied to the performance of oral ethnic materials by community outsiders and to the performance of literary texts. Chapter five also analyzes the special case of my personal stance as a researcher, audience member, and performer, who performs these narratives for both insider and outsider audiences. Finally, this chapter demonstrates how educational approaches to aesthetics and performance can benefit from a perspective that recognizes the shaping influences of community aesthetic on performance behaviors.

A sixth chapter summarizes the significant findings of the study and addresses the enduring impact of the concept of Gemeinde on this group of Swiss Volhynian Mennonites. This chapter discusses the contemporary significance of the socially constraining nature of Gemeinde as it is revealed in the storytelling practices of the Swiss Mennonites in the Moundridge community.

**Significance of this Study**

The discoveries made in this study contribute to the growing body of research in folklore and performance studies. As a folklore study, this investigation functions to preserve a dwindling tradition. With the increased urbanization and assimilation of Mennonites in the mainstream of American Society, the distinctive quality of Swiss Mennonite oral narration is gradually diminishing. By recording and documenting these narratives, this research
preserves some of the oral culture of the Swiss Volhynian community. It also provides an entry into Swiss Mennonite culture for students and researchers who are unfamiliar with it.

Illuminating the inter-relationship of personal narration and cultural context benefits the discipline of performance studies. Both individual experience and cultural affiliation contribute to the process of context-creating that is integral to personal experience storytelling. In its attempt to offer a synchronic view of personal narration, this study identifies the complexity and richness of the performance process, which evolves out of the continually shifting personal, relational, social, and cultural dynamics of everyday experience. An approach to performance that recognizes the relationship between created context and the diverse contextual factors that shape oral narration opens the possibility for an experience-based performance criticism. An experience-based criticism resists the narrow definition of objective standards for performance. Instead it recognizes that participants in performance situations negotiate the relevant contexts for performance and in so doing constitute a performance aesthetic that is uniquely suited to the particular personal, relational, social and cultural experiences that obtain in the performance interaction.
CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CONTEXT

OF THE SWISS VOLHYNIAN MENNONITES IN MOUNDRIIDE, KANSAS

Access to a meaningful past is mediated via story. . . . The cluster of stories by which a living tradition is carried leads individuals to a sense of who they are and where they have appeared in the life of the community. They place the individual in a context, they confront him with an identity which he must either do something about or shunt aside and allow to atrophy.¹

With the above comment, John L. Ruth, Mennonite writer and aesthetcian, affirms the vital role of narrative in establishing individual and community identity. Indeed, we come to understand ourselves through the stories we tell about our past. Our sense of "personal continuity" depends on our ability to "link an indefinite number of remembered episodes" into a coherent life's story.² That life's story may be challenged, negotiated, argued, and revised based upon the interaction with a community of listeners that has had


some share in the making of one's personal history. The more sustained a person's relationship with the community has been, the more impact the community history and identity has on the individual's self concept.

In the lives of individuals from close-knit ethnic communities like the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in Moundridge, Kansas, the community history has a decided impact on individual identity. A careful examination of the personal narrations of these people reveals a rich interplay between individual and community identity in the oral culture of the Swiss Volhynians. Although a variety of perspectives emerge from stories told by different narrators, a sometimes elusive and yet ever-present common thread runs through these narratives.

On the surface, the stories display a few obvious commonalities. The stories have a personal tone, a folksy feel that assumes a warm and inclusive attitude towards the listener. They concern the lives of rural people, families and friends who seem remote from the driving pulse of urban life. The narrators are articulate, intelligent, and aware of social norms that influence the evaluation of behaviors. But deeper than these surface characteristics is a unifying sense of community: an understanding that success or failure in this rural society depends upon the mutual accountability of its members for behaviors that promote a collective good.

This notion of mutual accountability is a central assumption that shapes the experiences of the Swiss Mennonites living in the Moundridge community. Because the small town of Moundridge (present
population approximately 1,200) was incorporated largely to serve the needs of the Swiss German Mennonites who settled the land in the 1870's and the 1880's, the central core of the community was, and continues to be, made up of Mennonites.

The influence of the beliefs and practices of the Mennonite church on the Moundridge community is pervasive. Harley J. Stucky, a Mennonite historian, observes:

The Russian Mennonites of 1874-1884 tried to establish their own unique communities based on common faith, dialect, occupation, family ties, dress, and similarities in farm, architectural design, and economic standards. They tried to perpetuate communities similar to those in the old world primarily on the basis of congregational affinity. . . . Sometimes entire Russian congregations or villages were transplanted to America such as . . . Kotosuflka at Moundridge. These were congregations and the community was built around the congregation.\(^3\)

Because the communities they formed remained separate from the mainstream of American Society, Mennonites were able to continue the lifestyle and customs of the old country.

Although more than a century of assimilation to American society has diminished the Swiss Mennonites' identification with old world customs, the Moundridge community retains a definite cultural and ethnic ambience. Traces of the Swiss Volhynians' ethnic identity include their decided Germanic accent, their use of the Swiss German dialect, and their preference for traditional foods. An analysis of their oral narratives reveals their adherence to a system of shared values as well. In virtually every case, Swiss Mennonite storytellers assume a value system that is mutually understood by the

listening audience. These narratives are told for members of the community by members of the community.

Although a collectively understood value system is typical of many rural communities in the United States, the socio-moral standard of each community is unique. A community negotiates its values based upon the distinctive historical and sociological contexts that have shaped its identity. The Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge are profoundly influenced by their identification with an ethnic and religious subgroup of American culture.

This study examines the way in which storytelling creates a context for the negotiation of community identity. Though such contexts emerge in the moment of narrative interaction, they are shaped by distinctive cultural and ethnic experiences. Because Swiss Mennonite stories are based largely on personal incidents and family history, they provide a valuable resource for studying the relationship between the creative process of storytelling in everyday experience and the ethnic and cultural context within which these stories are told. This analysis of the oral culture of the Swiss Mennonites will focus on the oral narrator, the narrative, and the community within the context of the performance process.

Since their sense of identity is bound up with the Swiss Mennonites' roots as an immigrant population, a brief discussion of the historical context that has contributed to Swiss Volhynian Mennonite identity is appropriate here. After summarizing the history of the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge, this chapter will describe the present day social context of these people as it relates
to their past.

Summary of Swiss Mennonite History in Europe

Any history of the Swiss Mennonites necessarily begins with the history of the Mennonites in general. When Martin Luther in Germany and Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland ushered in the reformation, many evangelical Christians felt the reform did not go far enough. In order to effect a pro-reformation majority within the Zurich city council, Zwingli conceded to his conservative supporters two points that the dissenters could not tolerate. He supported the idea that the church was the "source of authority for the governing of society" and that "baptism was the initiatory rite whereby the individual . . . became a member of society" (HS, p. 19). Since the reformed church still sanctioned child baptism and the concept of a state religion, the dissenters broke even further from the new religious order, which earned them the name "radical reformers."

The radical reformers viewed baptism as a believer's "conscious act of obedience," and they saw the church as an intentional community—"a fellowship . . . composed of people committed to the discipleship of Jesus and a value system in total opposition to that of society at large" (HS, p. 19). In 1525, a group who strongly opposed the baptism of infants broke away from the reformed church

I have compiled the information for the historical background section of this paper from the following sources: Martin H. Schrag, The European History of the Swiss Mennonites in Volhynia (North Newton: Swiss Mennonite Historical Association, 1974); Harley Stucky, A Century of Russian Mennonite History; Solomon Stucky, The Heritage of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1981); and P. P. Wedel, A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites (n.p., 1960). Hereafter, direct quotations from these works are cited in the text as EH, CR, HS, and SH respectively.
and began the practice of baptizing adults upon confession of faith. This group became known as the Anabaptists—the rebaptizers.

Felix Manz was among these first Anabaptists, who left Zurich to spread their views across Europe. The movement spread from Zurich, to Bern, and ultimately to the countries surrounding Switzerland and the Netherlands. Manz was the first of 10,000 or more Anabaptists in this area of Europe who were martyred or died in prison. Anabaptists continued to be persecuted until 1661 when they migrated to South Germany. This migration was just one of a whole series that fostered the sense of the Mennonites' separateness from the societies in which they lived.

Mennonites got their name from Menno Simons, a well-educated priest who broke from the Catholic Church and joined the Anabaptists in Holland. Simons' distinguished scholarship enabled him articulately to defend Anabaptist doctrines in his published writings. The name "Mennonite" was originally a pejorative term used by Simons' enemies to label his followers. But by 1550, Mennonites were generally known by the name and had accepted it themselves.

Central to the radical doctrine of the Anabaptists was the concept of Gemeinde—a congregation that was comprised of "a community of believers, totally committed to obey the rules of Christ's kingdom, joyfully submitting to its discipline" (HS, p. 21). Within this community of believers, other principal doctrines emerged: 1) The church should consist of only those members who choose to follow Christ voluntarily; 2) Only those who have confessed their faith in Jesus Christ should be baptized; 3) Faith
and good works are inseparable (an emphasis on serving God through meeting the needs of fellow human beings); 4) Christians should love peace and be nonviolent (CR, p. 2). According to Solomon Stucky, "... the command to love ... was unconditional. No condition of religion or society, church or state, could in any way qualify these demands" (HS, p. 21-22). Mennonites believed that war and killing were against the doctrine of love. This belief placed them in tension with the mainstream militaristic society and became a motivating factor for their ultimate migration.

The greatest majority of Swiss Mennonites came from Canton Bern in Switzerland, where they were persecuted for their Anabaptist beliefs. The ancestors of the Swiss Volhynians lived in an Anabaptist region called the Oberland. "This was the ancestral home of the people named Stucki, Gerig (Gering), Schrack (Schrag), Kaufmann, Krehbiel," and others (HS, p. 30). In 1671, approximately one hundred Mennonite families who were seeking to escape the persecution in Switzerland accepted the invitation from Count Karl August to come and settle in the Palatinate province in South Germany, which needed rebuilding after the Thirty Years War. The German Prince promised them religious freedom, among other privileges. Some of the Swiss Mennonites also fled to France.

The Swiss Mennonite immigrants in Germany and France came together again in Russia, beginning in 1773, after Catherine II invited the Mennonites to come and settle the new territory Russia had won in the war with Turkey. Catherine was aware of the Mennonites' reputation as thrifty farmers, and she also promised them
special privileges such as military freedom and military exemption. Swiss Mennonites flocked to Russia, settling first in the western Ukraine and slowly migrating eastward.

When the Swiss Mennonites settled in the province of Volhynia in Polish Russia, they began to establish themselves as a community. As Solomon Stucky observes:

> It was at this time that our people became a distinct ethnic group—the Swiss Volhynians. Having lived for generations outside the boundaries of Switzerland, they had long since lost their Swiss dialect. They spoke a South German dialect which, through the years in Eastern Europe, had undergone considerable modification until a distinct "Swiss Volhynian" dialect began to emerge. Separated from the Swiss Mennonites in Western Europe, they developed their own cultural identity. (HS, p. 100)

Their distinct cultural identity fostered a sense of community. Within the Gemeinde members were encouraged to be accountable to each other in their religion, work, and social life. Because almost all the work in Russian villages was done cooperatively, social interaction was a part of nearly every activity. Even leisure time on Sundays was spent visiting in homes.

The church was the center of the community in Volhynia, and its members were responsible for encouraging and disciplining one another. A person who continued in wrong doing after being confronted by a fellow member appeared before the church board. If the transgressor persisted, he or she was banned from the fellowship. Church members were expected to avoid the errant member completely until he or she repented and was again received into the fellowship. "Very seldom did an excluded member remain in the Bann, because no one wanted to be outside the fellowship" (SH, p. 29). Thus, church
discipline was the responsibility of the community rather than the pastor. The excommunication process was initiated and enforced by lay members of the church.

The Swiss Mennonites in Russia were almost exclusively farmers, and as the community grew, the demand for land became greater. In 1861, when the Czar released Eastern Volhynia in Russian Poland for agricultural development, many families moved to a tract of land north of Zhitomir, the district capital. The Swiss Mennonites purchased the villages of Kotosufka and Neumannfka and a tract of wooded land that they cleared and cultivated. They built a meeting house between the two villages. The leader of the congregation was Elder Jacob Stucky (Jakob Stucki) and his church was often called the "Stucky Church." As the villages grew and became one large village, they settled on the name Kotosufka.

After several generations of peace and stability, during which the Mennonites prospered in Volhynia, they encountered difficulties once again. According to Martin H. Schrag, Czar Alexander II became caught up in the "growing spirit of nationalism" in Russia.

In 1870, the Czar took action. He introduced a program of Russianization, militarization and restoration of Russian Orthodox Christianity. He informed the people that the day of special privileges for certain groups was over. . . . He introduced a policy of conscription and abolished military exemption. (EH, p. 78)

Essentially, all the special privileges that were promised the Swiss Mennonites by Catherine II were revoked during Alexander’s reign.

According to Cornelius Krahn, the Mennonites were especially hard hit by the passing of the military conscription law.

Since their origin in the sixteenth century, it had always
been one of their principal characteristics to serve suffering fellow men in the name of Christ, especially during times of catastrophe and war but not to participate in military service.⁵

The central tenets of the Mennonites' faith were again in direct conflict with national ideology.

A delegation of Mennonites from several Russian provinces went to St. Petersburg, the Russian capital, to plead for exemption from the Czar's policies. The delegation included Jacob Stucky, who was a representative from the Swiss congregations. No authorities in St. Petersburg gave audience to the Mennonite delegation. Instead, they were informed by a high official in Ostrog that their status of exemption was being revoked and that military conscription would soon be re-instituted. If the Mennonites were not willing to adhere to the new policies, they would be given a few years to emigrate. For the Swiss Volhynians, emigration was the only answer.

On August 6, 1874, seventy-eight Swiss Mennonite families—virtually everyone in the village—left Kotosufka. Elder Jacob Stucky led this group of 441 persons, which was the last and the largest group to leave Volhynia in 1874. They crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the ship City of Richmond and arrived in New York on August 31. Nineteen families of the Kotosufka group joined Russian Mennonites from other communities who had settled in South Dakota, while the remaining fifty-nine settled on the prairies of central Kansas on the land that the railroad had for sale there. A few from the South Dakota group came to Kansas later and settled approximately

seventy-five miles southwest of Moundridge in Pretty Prairie.

Swiss Volhynians in Kansas: The Early Years

The Swiss families who went to Kansas had temporary accommodations first in Peabody, then in Halstead, Kansas.

As the leader of the group, Elder Stucki was given a deed to the Southwest one-fourth of section nineteen in Mound township, to be used for church purposes and a community center. (HS, p. 143)

Here the railroad built an immigrant house for the "Stucki Gemeinde". When it was completed, the Kotosufkans moved from Halstead to the immigrant house in Mound township. They maintained the congregational structure they had in Russia and named their congregation Hoffnungsfeld—Hopefield.

When the Eldorado-McPherson branch of the Missouri Pacific Railroad was built, it ran through the Swiss Mennonite community. In 1886, the railroad company constructed the Mound Ridge station, which was named for "its location on a ridge in Mound township" (HS, p. 172). The Swiss Mennonites were among some of the most prominent founding members of the town of Moundridge, which was incorporated the following year in 1887.

As the Swiss Mennonites established themselves in central Kansas, they became gradually more comfortable in American society. The sense of isolation from the outside world diminished with their increasing dependence on American commerce for the success of the family farm. Community members became less interdependent and began to rely more on the individual family for support. Thus, "the family, rather than Gemeinde, became the primary social unit" (HS, p. 183). The integration of church and community became much less
pronounced as the financial success of the family farm enabled economic growth and independence. Although Swiss Mennonites remained ardent in their commitment to church doctrine, they began to see their economic and social development as personal and family issues rather than church concerns.

As Swiss Mennonites achieved economic success in America, opportunities arose for their young people to pursue professional occupations. Whereas the first and second generation immigrants made their livings primarily through farming, subsequent generations have increasingly entered into the professional work force. As more young people became trained teachers, doctors, and business associates, their opportunities for employment in the rural community were decidedly limited. Those who had received professional training often left the community to seek opportunities for employment. Thus, those young people who stayed in the community were primarily those who continued in agricultural occupations.

America's involvement in the First World War placed the Swiss Mennonites at odds with the national spirit once again, as the nation called young men into military service. Because of their stance on nonviolence, many Mennonite youths opted for conscientious objector status and enlisted in alternative service. "In World War I, Mennonite boys largely from the prairie provinces, were ridiculed, jailed, and often suffered severely for their pacifist non-resistance position" (CR, p. 17). Mennonite conscientious objectors were repeatedly derided by the American public for their stance. James Juhnke's analysis of "triumph tales" among Mennonite pacifists in
World War I reveals the struggle Mennonites faced as they tried to maintain "their Christian self-respect and identity in their time of public humiliation."\(^6\) The level of mistrust that the American patriots felt towards the Mennonites was exacerbated by the Swiss Mennonites' use of the German language—the language of the enemy. During World War I, other Americans no longer identified the Swiss Mennonites as "Russians" as they had in the early years after the immigration. Instead, the Mennonites were called "Germans" as if to intensify their "foreign" status and further alienate them from the American mainstream.

After World War I, Mennonites felt the need to counter the prevalent stereotype that cast them as a backward group of foreigners. The German language was increasingly phased out of worship services as the Mennonites began to identify more with mainstream protestantism. Although their movement towards progressive religion succeeded in many areas, one tenet of their faith kept them from total assimilation: their belief in pacifism. This belief caused another schism between the Mennonites and American society with the onslaught of World War II.

The widespread refusal among Mennonite men to enlist in military service during the Second World War again called attention to the distinct religious identity of the Swiss Mennonites in the Moundridge community. As a result of their experiences during the war, the Mennonites were induced to evaluate their commitment to their

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traditional Anabaptist roots.

During and after the Second World War there was a widespread re-examination of the Mennonite experience, resulting in a rediscovery of the unique contribution of the Radical Reformation with its perception of Christianity as radical discipleship, and its concept of the Gemeinde as a foreshadow of the Kingdom of God. (HS, p. 185)

Although their social and economic success in the United States encouraged the total submersion of Swiss Mennonites into the American mainstream, their commitment to the central doctrines of the religion of their ancestors has inhibited complete assimilation.

Their heritage of faith has enabled Swiss Mennonites to maintain a distinct religious identity in the arena of American protestantism. Since their European experience, Swiss Mennonites have understood that commitment to discipleship means a total separation from the values of society.

In the perspective of the four centuries since their beginnings in Switzerland and Holland, the Anabaptist-Mennonites have often appeared to be a people having no abiding city, but always seeking a city whose builder and maker is God. (CR, p. 2)

Although their religious identity has contributed to the Swiss Mennonites' view of themselves as a closed group, their ethnic identity derives from sources other than their Anabaptist doctrine. After all, Swiss Volhynians are just a small fraction of Mennonites, and they share their commitment to the central tenets of Anabaptism with Mennonites the world over. Certainly, their ethnic identity has been shaped by their religious commitment, but for Swiss Volhynians, a sense of "peoplehood" emerges from social and cultural factors as well.
Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in Contemporary Society

Many of the influential social and cultural factors in the contemporary experience of the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge are rooted in the history of their experiences. Although more than a century in the United States has diminished the sense of Gemeinde for the Swiss Volhynians, prevalent traces of this idea remain in the oral culture of the Mennonites in the Moundridge community. Richard Schrag, a retired Mennonite farmer, remembers it this way:

"[W]e were conscious of the fact that to misbehave—there may be punishment, and to fall out of favor with the community—the church family—was a real disgrace. And you'd really feel isolated... We were considered, at that time—when I was growing up—we were considered a closed group."

Although practice of the "Bann" had been abandoned years before, the social exclusion of those who offended the community was still prevalent in Richard's childhood experience. The formal structures of church discipline in Russia had been transformed into an informal system of social isolation and chastisement.

As a second generation descendant of the Russian immigrants, Richard still maintains a strong sense of accountability to community expectations. Richard is one of the fourteen informants from the Moundridge community that were interviewed for this study, all of whom were either first or second generation descendants of the immigrants from Volhynia. As a result, their perspective reflects a

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7Personal interview with Richard Schrag, 27 March 1986. Transcriptions of the field research interviews are included in Appendices A through N. Subsequent references will be bracketed within the text. Citations will include the appendix letter and the page number. For example, the citation [F:279] indicates that Richard's comment above is transcribed in Appendix F on page 262.
distinct sense of community identity that has no doubt diminished in subsequent generations. Although third and fourth generation descendants may have a passing interest in their Swiss Volhynian heritage, their emotional involvement is less intense than that of those who interacted closely with parents and grandparents who came from Russia. As a result, the perceptions of "community" as they emerge in this study are those of a specific group of older Swiss Mennonites, who range from 60 to 98 years of age.

This particular group of Swiss Mennonites is a transitional group. They learned English as a second language. While these people spoke German to their parents and siblings in their childhood homes, they speak English to their own children. They have seen remarkable changes in farming practices, from the primitive methods of the horse-drawn plow to the modern technology of motorized tractor. Whereas their childhood experience was limited to activities in an isolated rural community, they now have the freedom and mobility that modern forms of transportation provide. Although their experiences with religion, social life, work, education, and family relationships have altered significantly in the course of their lifetimes, they recognize the link between each of these aspects of contemporary life and their past experiences.

Of the fourteen informants interviewed, only four were still located on the farm at the time of the interviews. Of the remaining ten, only three had occupations other than farming that had prompted them to live in town. The other seven had either retired or semi-retired from farming and moved to town (six moved to Moundridge and
one to Newton). Thus, a core of the informants have grown up and
remained in the Moundridge community.

On the surface, the town of Moundridge today looks much like
many other rural communities in the Midwest. The large Co-op grain
elevators that tower far above the other buildings in town attest to
the importance of farming to the community. Among other small
businesses in town are one grocery store, a cheese factory, a medical
clinic with two doctors, two hardware stores, one automobile dealer,
and a farm implement store. These appear to be ordinary small town
businesses in every way except that distinctively German names—like
Goering, Graber, Kaufman, Schrag, and Stucky—identify the
proprietorship of a majority of them. Out of the twenty family
names represented among the Swiss Volhynians who migrated to America,
over half shared these five family names. The predominance of these
names in the Moundridge telephone directory as opposed to common
English names like Smith and Jones attests to the pervasiveness of
Swiss Mennonite influence in the Moundridge community.

The number of churches in this small community indicate the
strong religious orientation of the people in and around Moundridge.
There are eleven churches in the Moundridge community (six in town,
five in the country). Of the eleven, seven are Mennonite churches,
four of which have strong Swiss contingencies in their membership:
First Mennonite, Eden, Hopefield, and West Zion.

Although the heritage of the Swiss Mennonites has had
significant impact on the Moundridge community, the centralizing
force of Gemeinde has dissipated to some extent since the Swiss
Volhynians are no longer unified as the congregation of a single church. The diversity of church congregations reflects the various needs of different factions within the community in terms of location, convenience, biblical interpretation, and styles of worship. The Swiss Mennonites have tempered their previous emphasis on conformity with a new sense of respect for individuality and personal preference. Thus, "there is a greater exercise of the freedom of will in one's commitment to the Gemeinde and discipleship" (HS, p. 187). Yet, these changes in the relationship of the individual to the church community have not effaced altogether the notions of the unity of church and community standards and the expectation of the individual's conformity to those standards. The informants in this study demonstrate an awareness that individual choices, though less rigidly monitored, are seldom divorced from considerations of family and community expectations. While church services are geared more towards worshiping God and less towards admonishing the fellowship to lead holy lives than were those of their Russian ancestors, these Swiss Mennonites still sense the importance of Christian discipleship in their everyday lives. As an outgrowth of their religious experience, Swiss Mennonites typically practice neighborliness, generosity, and service to one another, which continue to build a sense of community supportiveness and concern.

Whereas social activities were generally centered around church life in the early years of the Swiss Volhynians' experience in America, the social scene today is much more diversified. Of course,
home visitation is still a popular way to socialize informally for the second generation Swiss Volhynian descendants just as it was for earlier generations. However, families and friends today are more likely to gather in homes and converse over a meal or a game of cards than to engage in a rousing discussion of biblical interpretation as did their forebear. At the same time, modern mobility allows the Swiss to relate to groups of people from outside the community, and the development of business and industry in Moundridge has brought people from diverse backgrounds into the community. As a result, Swiss Volhynians have multiple opportunities to interact with people from other origins.

As in small towns everywhere, recreation and leisure activities reflect the diversity of interests of people in the community. The city recreation program offers a variety of social opportunities, including team sports, a park, tennis courts and a swimming pool. In addition, the local high school offers other occasions to gather, such as athletic events, musical programs, and theater presentations. Of course, church activities such as women's sewing circle, choir practice, carry-in dinners, traditional church holiday celebrations, and Sunday School parties still provide opportunities for socialization, but they often compete with other activities in the community.

Mennonites of different origins used to remain separate from each other. In recent years, however, Swiss Mennonites have

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developed bonds with Kansas Mennonites from various backgrounds, affirming the commonality of their anabaptist origins. Although Moundridge is still perceived as a predominantly Swiss community, the churches, businesses, and schools are peopled with Mennonites from a variety of backgrounds such as low German, Dutch, and Prussian. Their interaction with Mennonites and others with various origins has significantly broadened the social horizons of the Swiss Volhynians since their early years in America, and yet they still have a reputation of being a clannish group.

Even though Swiss Mennonites today have automobiles and television sets to connect them with the broader American community, many continue to feel most comfortable with members of their own group. The historical precedents for their in-group orientation are clear. Because the Swiss Volhynians migrated primarily as a church congregation and made their living as farmers in isolated rural areas, they have seen themselves a "closed group," a people separated from the mainstream of the various societies in which they have lived. The most ostensible contemporary evidence of the Swiss Mennonites' traditional stance of separateness is their use of the Swiss Volhynian dialect. Their dialect sets these people apart even from other strains of German speaking Mennonite immigrants and attests to the Swiss Germans' participation in a specific congregational group.

Mennonite historian David Haury suggests that the clannishness of the Swiss Volhynians may have resulted from a sense of "cultural
inferiority" in comparison to other Mennonite immigrant groups.⁹ According to R. C. Kauffman, the Swiss Volhynians were among the poorest of the immigrant groups, while "the Low Germans came from well-established cultural settlements in Russia and Germany."¹⁰ Kauffman suggests that in order to compensate for a generalized inferiority, the Swiss have been inclined to prove themselves to other Mennonite groups both in terms of financial success and material gains. In time, these "strongly motivated, highly active, and intensely persevering" Swiss Volhynians surpassed their low German neighbors in terms of agricultural success.¹¹ No doubt, this need to distinguish themselves among other immigrant groups encouraged a sense of isolation and independence.

Although the distinction between various groups of German immigrants has diminished over time, the second generation descendants of the Swiss Volhynian immigrants are still cognizant of the differences. Victor Goering's perspective on the distinction between the Swiss and the Low German reflects an attitudinal transformation from the early years of perceived inferiority.

... for some reason, we felt that we were—we were—I don't know how to say it—superior. But, at least we didn't—our dialect surely wasn't as bad as theirs. [He laughs.] Or our accent, you know, wasn't as bad as theirs.


¹¹Kauffman, pp. 57-58.
Kind of a low blow to me when I came to college and Miss Becker said that the Swiss dialect is—Swiss accent is just as pronounced as the Low German accent. [H:390]

The Swiss Volhynians' ambition to achieve material superiority nurtured a sense of rivalry between the two groups. This rivalry undoubtedly encouraged the groups to remain separate from each other, and to bond members of the same clan.

The Swiss accent that Victor Goering mentioned endures today as a distinctive identifying factor of the Swiss Volhynians from Moundridge. People from surrounding communities often identify Moundridge residents' place of origin by listening to them talk. Community outsiders label the unique rhythm and pacing of Swiss Volhynian speech as the "Moundridge accent." In Moundridge, however, the accent is often referred to as the "Eden accent," since Eden Mennonite Church has the largest representation of Swiss Volhynians in their congregation.

In addition to the "Eden accent" and the Swiss Volhynian dialect, the mutual appreciation of traditional Swiss foods attests to the enduring in-group socialization of the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge. Makkuchen (poppy seed rolls), Gorwe, (sweet dough coffee cake), Käs Berogi, (cottage cheese dumplings), and Bone Berogi (sweetened bean dumplings) are some of the most popular traditional foods. When Swiss Mennonites gather for family, church, and community gatherings, one or more of these specialty dishes are

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12 Although community outsiders often suggest that a taste for these foods is genetically inbred, numerous exceptions have proven that even people from other cultural backgrounds can acquire a taste for these Swiss specialties.
frequently included in the food fare.

The Swiss Volhynian patterns of socialization have clearly changed in terms of work habits. The American Swiss spend much less time working together than did their Russian ancestors. Because of the communal work force in Volhynia, the Swiss Mennonites had ample opportunity to socialize as they worked together. Their American descendants, however, are more diversified in terms of their occupations and less likely to work in community with one another. Thus, they have experienced changes in patterns of socialization concurrent with changes in work habits. Even though most of the "first and second generation pioneers were farmers or worked in vocations directly related to agriculture" (CR, p. 35), they no longer engaged in the communal practices of farmers in Russia such as herding livestock to the community pasture. Today, Swiss Mennonite farmers operate independently, separated by "tall, impenetrable hedges" that delineate their family farms (HS, p. 183). Other than the chance meetings at farm supply store or at the grain elevator during harvest, socialization and work are predominantly separate activities.

The contemporary realities of the decreasing economic stability of farming and diminishing available land for the multiple heirs of the family farm have had significant impact on the vocational diversification of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites. The occupational trends of third and fourth generation descendants are typical of other American young people. Harley Stucky sums up the contemporary vocational activities of the Russian Mennonites as follows:
...although there is a heavy emphasis on service vocations, the tendency of young people is... to disperse themselves throughout society in accordance with the social, cultural, and economic patterns. Young people tend to be influenced in making their vocational decisions by their educational experience, economic rewards, marriage, climate, and other factors. (CR, p. 35)

Since the core of the informants in this study are second generation descendants of the Swiss Volhynian immigrants, they have witnessed this occupational diversity in their children more than they have participated in it themselves.

In order to broaden their career opportunities Swiss Mennonites have necessarily had to rely more directly on formal education. Historically, education had been important to the Mennonites in Russia as a means for promoting their cultural identity. C. Henry Smith submits that instruction in Bible and German were essential to the curriculum, whereas the Russian language was scarcely addressed.13 According to Smith, establishing their own primary schools in America was a natural outcome of their migration, since one of the primary reasons for leaving Russia was so that they could maintain "their religious and cultural life as they had inherited it."14 John Hartzler observes, "They were firm believers in handing down to their children the rich heritage of the past and this heritage involved language, morals and religion. . . ."15

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schools in which they had control over the curriculum was one of the best ways for the new immigrants to insure the passing on of their valued heritage. As did other Mennonite immigrants from Russia, the Swiss Volhynians saw education as the "handmaid" of religion.\textsuperscript{16} Even when the public education laws became more stringent, Swiss Volhynians supplemented the public school curriculum during vacation with their own instruction in German and religion.

The relationship of church and school has been an important factor in the educational development of Mennonites in Kansas like the Swiss Volhynians. The organization of the Western District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church was decidedly influenced by concerns over the education of Mennonite youth in Kansas. In 1877, preachers were invited to meet with teachers to provide leadership in the discussion of curricular issues. "Out of this teachers meeting grew the Kansas Conference of Preachers which later merged into the Western District Conference."\textsuperscript{17} The training of teachers for the instruction of Mennonite youth was a primary concern of the Kansas Conference. Thus the need for higher education grew out of the desire to provide quality primary education. As a result the Halstead Fortbildung-Schule was formed.\textsuperscript{18} This preparatory school was ultimately expanded and moved to Newton, Kansas, where it became Bethel College, the first Mennonite institution of higher learning in Kansas.

\textsuperscript{16}Smith, \textit{The Coming of the Russian Mennonites}, p. 213.

\textsuperscript{17}Smith, \textit{The Coming of the Russian Mennonites}, p. 215.

\textsuperscript{18}Smith, \textit{The Coming of the Russian Mennonites}, p. 221.
In recent years, the need for career preparation has overtaken the need to maintain a cultural and religious identity. Whereas the first Swiss Mennonites to achieve college educations were primarily interested in service vocations like teaching, preaching, and medical practice, the educational goals of Swiss Volhynian youths today reflect the diversity of the broader culture in America as students receive training in such fields as business, law, and technology.

With the expanding educational goals and career options for Mennonite young people today, Swiss Mennonites are increasingly moving away from the rural Moundridge community to urban areas that offer better opportunities for employment in their chosen professions. Besides broadening the Swiss Volhynians' exposure to the diversity of attitudes and beliefs in American society, this dispersion of young Mennonites has altered the sense of family closeness and interdependence. Among third and fourth generation descendants of the Swiss Volhynian immigrants, siblings are much less likely to remain in the same community than were their parents. The practical outcome of the physical distance between family members who live in different cities or states is that they learn to function more independently. They are no longer able to cooperate and support each other on major work projects like painting the house, caring for a new baby, or building a shed or workshop. Whereas their parents were accustomed to calling together their brothers and sisters for a family work day in order to accomplish major tasks, Mennonite young people today either find the resources among friends and acquaintances in their community of residence or, more likely, hire
laborers to do the job. Although getting together as an extended family is still important, the distance between family members necessitates more formal planning. Thus, family gatherings rarely occur more than once or twice a year during traditional holidays or summer vacations.

Though the significance of the extended family has diminished in recent years, Mennonites have maintained fairly traditional views on marriage and family. The value of the nuclear family has endured, though ways of perceiving relationships within the nuclear family have changed. Mennonites today are more sensitive to issues involving the development of individual identity. At an Inter-Mennonite family conference in 1987, Clare Schumm, the secretary for family life ministry for the Commission on Education of the General Conference Mennonite Church, stressed that one task of the family is to "not only allow for but [to] help the individual flourish." The fact that church leadership is calling for sensitivity to the individual needs and desires demonstrates a significant change from the view of family a century ago. Whereas conformity was the standard for the families of Mennonite immigrants in the 1800's, individualism recently has achieved more status.

In spite of the increasing modernization, dispersion, and independence of many of the young Swiss Volhynians from Moundridge,

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20Clare Schumm, May 1987, as quoted in Carla Reimer, "'The family' gets top billing at inter-Mennonite meeting," The Mennonite, 103 (1988), 253.
the strength of family bonds endures. Many of those who have left the community make family visitation a priority in their vacationing and travel. Family reunions continue to be important events of the holiday season. Often over a hundred people are in attendance when extended families have reunions. Solomon Stucky suggests that historically Swiss Volhynians’ strong family relationships grew out of their enduring experience in “isolated, small groups” that practiced “nonconformity to the world” (HS, p 107). Although contemporary Swiss Mennonites have more experience in “the world”, they still find comfort and enjoyment in returning to their roots—their heritage—which Robert Kreider affirms as an Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage that is “expressed in the language of family, smallness, [and] neighborliness.”

A distinctive characteristic of the extended family in Mennonite circles is the frequency of marriage among relatives. Solomon Stucky states, "This is a widespread phenomenon in Mennonite history, and is still a common practice in . . . Mennonite communities today" (HS, p. 107). Among the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge, a husband and wife often can trace their family lineage back to shared great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents. Such intra-family marriages reinforce the closed group orientation of the Swiss Volhynians. Furthermore, they tend to blur the distinctions between the family and community domains. Because of the complex interrelationship among families, a crisis in one family may well impact a

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substantial segment of the community.

Although the foregoing description of the present day social and cultural context is only a brief summary, it suggests that religious, social, occupational, educational, and family issues among the Swiss Volhynians are intricately interwoven. Even though Swiss Mennonite young people are thoroughly immersed in present day American culture, the residual influences of their ancestors' patterns of living in congregational community prevail in virtually every aspect of Swiss Volhynian life. Naturally, the older persons in the community especially cherish their religious and ethnic identity. These people express their cultural heritage in a variety of ways: their food, their dialect, and their ways of speaking about themselves.

A basic understanding of the historical and present day social contexts of the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge is an important prerequisite to the forthcoming discussion of Swiss Mennonite oral narration. By attending to the ways Swiss Volhynians talk about themselves, one can explore the relationship between natural narration and the cultural context. Steven Stern observes that "expressions of modern ethnic folklore make a distinct contribution to the generation, transmission, and maintenance of a sense of ethnicity." Because the Swiss Mennonites are a group in transition, one would expect their personal experience stories, family reminiscences and community tales not only to affirm but also to question their identity as an ethnic group. As individualism

22Steven Stern, "Ethnic Folklore and the Folklore of Ethnicity," Western Folklore, 36 (1977), 29.
continues to replace conformity among the Swiss Volhynians, their ethnic identity becomes increasingly nebulous. Thus, one must address the tension between the individual perspective and group identity in order to comprehend fully the relationship between personal narration and the social-cultural context of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in Moundridge.
CHAPTER TWO
THE ORAL NARRATOR: THE STANCE OF THE STORYTELLER
IN SWISS MENNONITE CULTURE

For the sake of organization, the discussion of the narrator is separated from the analysis of the narratives. I recognize the artificial nature of this separation, since teller and tale are intricately interwoven. Naturally, my understanding of the stance of the oral narrator in Swiss Mennonite culture is drawn primarily from Swiss Mennonite narratives. Nevertheless, beyond the realm of the stories he or she tells each narrator relates to family and community members in a social role that is seldom ostensibly connected with storytelling. Therefore, an appraisal of an oral narrator's social behaviors can provide valuable insights for the analysis of narrative behaviors that may not be readily available from a purely "textual" analysis.

The search for individuals with established reputations as storytellers in the Moundridge community is fraught with false leads, disorientation, and a general lack of information. An initial inquiry into the storytelling traditions of the Swiss Mennonites (or "Schweitzers," as local residents call them) can leave one feeling
that no storytellers exist in the community. In the rare instance that individuals are identified by others as good storytellers, the "storytellers" themselves deny the distinction.

The pervasive denial of the existence of a storytelling tradition among the Swiss Mennonites prompts an inquiry into the reasons for the expressed void. Since the Swiss Volhynians are a religious as well as an ethnic group, two apparent lines of inquiry emerge. The first asks whether religious standards in some way inhibit participation in activities that are perceived as purely entertaining or frivolous. The second probes any cultural traits that may prevent the dissemination of traditional folk tales.

An oral narrator who has been reared in a religious tradition that, according to Solomon Stucky, values the "practical life, stressing the dangers of pride and admonition to lead holy lives" (HS, p. 101), has plausible reasons for a bias against storytelling, which is associated with frivolity, self-presentation, and secularism.

Stucky's observations regarding the religious values of the Swiss Mennonites conform with a more general perspective on Mennonite beliefs observed by John L. Ruth. Ruth identifies seven aspects of traditional Mennonite doctrine that presumably discourage members of the church community from engaging in artistic endeavors. Ruth's list includes 1) the "shunning of idolatry," 2) "mistrust of worldly sophistication," 3) animosity towards "individualism or personal egoism," 4) "withdrawal from the fleshly pursuits of 'this present evil world,'" 5) a view of "art as artifice," 6) emphasis on
practicality, and 7) "concern for edification." ¹

In light of the asceticism suggested by the values listed above, the absence of storytelling—in the sense of fictional narration—among the Swiss Mennonites is no great surprise. Oral narrators prefer modes of narration that are perceived as truthful such as stories of personal experience or family histories. According to Ervin Beck, Mennonites are predisposed to tell "true" stories because of the "value they have persistently given to integrity of speech ever since their Anabaptist origins in sixteenth-century western Europe." ² Furthermore, the Mennonites' emphasis on separation from the evils of the world has engendered severe limitations on exposure to traditional folk tales of other European societies.

Mennonite separateness is a notion germane to a significant cultural trait of the Swiss Volhynians: clannishness. The Swiss Mennonites' sojourn through South Germany, France, Russia, and the United States fostered a feeling of estrangement from the society in which they lived. For over two centuries, they remained a closed group. The Kotosufka congregation's migration en masse to America perpetuated the custom of the closed community by enabling the Swiss Volhynians to maintain the congregational self-sufficiency they had practiced in Russia.

Although their interdependence as a congregation has dissipated with acculturation to American society, a measure of clannishness of


the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge has endured. Speaking in 1949 at
the seventy-fifth year celebration of the Swiss Volhynian migration,
R. C. Kauffman identified the Swiss Mennonites' "most obvious . . .
trait—that, namely, of a strong in-group feeling—the
denominational loyalty and separateness that characterizes us."\(^3\)
Even today, after a century of acculturation to American Society, the
Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge are often perceived as a clannish
people.

With such a strong cultural bias towards separateness, the Swiss
Mennonites have maintained a community in which the concern for
activities and experiences of those within the group dominates the
oral culture of the group. J. O. Schrag identifies the narrow scope
of Swiss Mennonite oral narration. He observes, "[W]e developed a
lot of little stories [when we were together with our cousins], but
no one—they didn't amount to anything outside of your group"
[E:258]. Thus, the storyteller in the Moundridge community cannot be
distinguished by his or her vast repertoire of traditional folk
tales. Rather, the oral narrator tells personal experience stories,
family reminiscences, stories about unusual community events or
personalities, and oral histories. It is not surprising then that
Swiss Mennonites consider storytelling—in the traditional sense—as
an activity foreign to the Moundridge community.

J. O. Schrag's comment above is a prime example of how

\(^3\)R. C. Kauffman, "A Critical Evaluation of Ourselves (The Swiss
Mennonites)," in Addresses and other items of interest connected with
the Seventy-fifth Anniversary Services of the Swiss Mennonites
(Schweitzer Mennoniten), ed. Harley J. Stucky (North Newton: n.p.,
1950), p. 54.
informants themselves theorize about the role of the oral narrator in the Swiss Mennonite community. Scholars such as Barbara Babcock, Richard Bauman, and Alan Dundes have encouraged researchers to examine the critical perspectives of the "folk" regarding their expressive behaviors. Attention to the folk criticism of Swiss Mennonite informants reveals that despite their reticence to claim a storytelling tradition, Schweitzers do recognize informal modes of storytelling that emerge in the process of socialization. For example, Selma Stucky suggests that when she was in high school stories were told at church youth parties "when things were talked about" [L:384]. Most informants also identify family visitation as a primary setting for storytelling. William Juhnke observes that "much visitation" during family gatherings often encourages storytelling [C:232]. Victor Goering suggests that family members frequently tell stories in order to tease each other about humorous or embarrassing incidents [M:409].

J. O. Schrag offers the most in-depth local perspective on the storytelling practices of Swiss Mennonites. A self-acknowledged authority on Swiss Volhynian dialect, Schrag observes, "the South Dakota people," unlike the Moundridge Schweitzers, "have more stories—real stories. You know, like the white woman—Die Weisse

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Frau—and several others" [E:256]. By identifying folk legends like Die Weisse Frau as "real stories," Schrag implies that Schweitzers are likely to associate the term "storytelling" with "fictional narration." This association helps to explain the general lack of recognition of a storytelling tradition in the Schweitzer community. When Schrag observes that "telling stories is not [the Swiss Mennonites'] long suit," he is apparently referring to traditional folk tales [E:257].

After dismissing the notion of a folk tale tradition in the Moundridge community, Schrag goes on to address what he sees at the heart of Swiss Mennonite oral narration.

But, there are stories. Sometimes you have to dig a while till you get them out. But there are some stories that have been—especially in their own experiences, you know... So, they created their own stories. [E:257]

Indeed, "creating one's own story" is a primary function of Swiss Volhynian oral narration. Drawing from personal experience, narrators not only can affirm their personal identities in oral narration, they can also adhere to expectations of truthfulness thereby upholding the integrity of narrative discourse.

Erwin Goering affirms the idea that maintaining integrity may have limited the scope of Swiss Mennonite oral narration. He observes, "[Storytelling] was there. But it was never polished or shall we say, pronounced. There was always this problem of gossip—of a thing becoming gossip" [N:440]. Goering's comment suggests that oral narrators who tell stories on other people must be extremely careful not to be perceived as gossips. Clearly, the oral narrators' safest alternative is to tell about incidents that they observed or
participated in themselves.

Erwin Goering's observation implies another reason for the lack of recognition of storytelling among the Schweitzers. If indeed storytelling is never "polished" or "pronounced," then it is seldom featured as a main event. Instead it is embedded in activities that have more prominence in the community psyche. Most often, narratives emerge as a result of the tellers' participation in the occasion at hand such as a family reunion, quilting bee, or harvest luncheon. The way in which the Swiss Mennonites conceive of storytelling coincides with what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes about narration in Eastern-European Jewish communities.

Narration is conceptualized as an act rather than as an event . . . and as subordinate to various kinds of nonnarrative discourse even when it dominates an encounter.5 The reluctance of the Swiss Volhynian oral narrator to acknowledge forthrightly his or her storytelling is inherent in this perspective.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies several attributes of European Jewish oral narration that directly correspond to characteristics of Swiss Volhynian storytellers. Although Jewish narrators specialize in parables and jokes, these traditional forms of storytelling occur in the informal context of everyday interaction. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes that these Jewish oral narrators have no set time or place for storytelling. "Everyone can tell stories. . . . There are no professional storytellers. . . ." Nor are there "'public

performances' for the sake of storytelling alone." As in the case of the Jewish community, the absence of a generally acknowledged forum for sharing stories among the Swiss Volhynians does not necessarily signify the lack of a storytelling tradition. In fact, storytelling is pervasive in both cultures. For Swiss Mennonites, the "traditional" corpus of narratives includes personal experience stories and community anecdotes rather than standard folk tales, legends, or ballads.

The prevalence of oral narration among the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge in everyday activities no doubt contributes to its perceived lack of significance in the eyes of community members. How can Swiss Mennonite informants reasonably be expected to provide examples of reputable storytellers, when oral narration is a commonplace mode of discourse for virtually everyone in the community? Although "good" storytellers are inclined to deny the distinction because of their modesty, this lack of recognition also may be due to the profusion of able oral narrators, which renders the valuation of such a common behavior inconsequential.

A researcher hoping to discover the most "practiced" oral narrator in the Schweitzer community will clearly miss the mark if he or she pursues the storytellers with the largest repertoire of traditional folk tales. Rather, one should look for those persons who have been consistently engaged in the commonplace activities of community life. Oral narrators generally acknowledge that they have attained their repertoire through informal interaction in everyday

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6Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, p. 283.
I think I got some of my information about situations and the background just at random. When we—when they had their butchering days or their—and the former generation—my uncles got together. Just listening in I got more—more of that stuff came out than really we inquiring [about specific stories]. [F:257]

Richard Schrag's comment above underscores the importance of social involvement for attaining the necessary information for telling stories. Phil Goering further acknowledged the constraints of living on a farm with restricted means of transportation. His limited social involvement made it difficult for him to hear stories about what had happened in the community. Because of their isolation on the farm, some people failed to hear about incidents that happened in the community [G:285].

Social involvement for the Swiss Mennonite breeds the stuff of storytelling: everyday experience. Storytellers in the Moundridge vicinity are farmers, doctors, housewives, teachers, anyone in contact with others in the community who has an inclination to share himself or herself with others. Though a few individuals who are especially engaging speakers may be called "clowns" or "real characters" and may be known for their ability to "mach Spass" (or "make fun") [L:390], the role of "storyteller" is an primarily an informal one that can be assumed by virtually anyone in the community.

Although the religious and ethnic heritage of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites establishes an experiential nexus for the oral narrators in the Moundridge community, individual traits and personal experiences precipitate a diversity of perspectives among
storytellers. One simply cannot assume a conventional pattern of attitudes and beliefs for all Schweitzer narrators. Rosan Jordan stresses the need for researchers to consider individual traits that affect an informant's relationship to his or her ethnic culture.

Any study of the folklore and culture of an individual member of an ethnic group . . . must assess the extent to which ethnicity dominates (or fails to dominate) that individual's psychological, sociological, and cultural orientations, and, since other matters than ethnicity may influence that orientation, it must assess the degree to which such factors . . . impinge upon the particular traditions under scrutiny.7

Therefore, attention must be given to the unique characteristics of individual Schweitzer storytellers in order to determine how each perspective reveals a distinct view of the Swiss Mennonite experience.

One legitimate method for probing features that are unique to individual Swiss Mennonite storytellers is to identify the demographic factors that influence personal perspectives. Jordan identifies social class, gender, rural or urban background, and "personal-accidental factors" as elements that merit consideration.8 In this study, age (or generational positioning) and occupation have significant influence as well.

Of course, not every demographic factor is of equal consequence for each oral narrator, and many personality traits have more to do with the psychological patterning of an individual than with demographic considerations. Nevertheless, factors such as age,

8Jordan, p. 382.
gender, and occupation have enduring impact on individual narrative perspectives and are more readily accessible than is knowledge regarding individual psychological functioning. Therefore, I have chosen to identify the most notable demographic influences for each informant interviewed and to discuss the effects of these influences on individual storytellers.

Adina Zerger Krehbiel and Jacob J. Goering are the oldest of the informants who contributed to this study. Jacob was 90 years old and Adina was 98 at the time of the interviews. For both, age is a significant individual trait that colors their narrative perspectives. Their lives in the Moundridge community are characterized by nearly a century of experience. As first generation descendants of Swiss Volhynian immigrants, each is acutely aware of the many adjustments the Mennonites made as they learned to survive in a new culture.

Adina has a kind of quiet authority in her speech as she discusses the differences between her experiences as a youth and contemporary community life. She frequently refers to insecurities and fears that troubled her family in their strange new surroundings.

[T]hey lived different than they do now. You know that. But they were just as happy as they are now, I'm sure. . . . But they were a little more—always in fear for something can happen, or people here they didn't know, you know. . . . [T]hey were kind of scared something could happen. More than we are. [Ar222]

Adina's perspective on contemporary experience is rooted firmly in an understanding of the past that has deepened with age.

Jacob J. Goering speaks with a similar attitude of understanding
as he narrates events from his family's past, although he seems much less concerned with pointing up the difference between past and present experience. Rather, he establishes his authority as a storyteller by his candid style. His account of his mother's experiences is lucid, yet unadorned.

She mentioned about her home life. She married young. She was fifteen years old when she married. . . . She said her father was a tyrant. . . . [He was] terrifically strict. Things were taboo. They were not to have any ornamentation in their hair, for instance. She had a little ribbon in her hair. That ribbon was torn out and into the stove.

Jacob's terse disclosure, which is noticeably lacking in qualifiers, indicates the kind of confidence that old age enables. He seems to be saying, "I was there when these things were spoken; therefore, I know they are true."

Jacob and Mina have in common the authority of old age. Yet, other personal traits nurture in each a perspective that is obviously distinguishable from the other. A comparison of the two narrators reveals that fear is a more prevalent theme in Mina's than in Jacob's narration. The difference can be attributed to occupational and gender distinctions.

In the traditional roles of daughter and housewife, Mina has been reared as a dependant, someone who relied on her father to protect her until her husband became her provider. Her vulnerability to her surroundings has been intensified by the dependency fostered by her traditional role. As a woman, she is also able to share emotions more freely than Jacob.

Jacob, on the other hand, has been the head of a family farm,
conscientiously providing for his family's needs. Accomplishing the task at hand within the limitations of unpredictable weather and often unreliable farm equipment has been a life-long pattern for him. In his role as farmer and father, Jacob has learned to value physical labor and emotional restraint—both of which influence his status as an oral narrator.

Although all of the informants grew up on the family farm, only a few made their livings exclusively through farming. Others had occupations that either supplemented or completely replaced the farming enterprise. Richard Schrag (age 70 at the time of the interview) is one informant who made farming (with ancillary income from work as a farm mechanic and carpenter) his primary occupation. As a second generation descendant of the Swiss Volhynian immigrants, Richard has seen more of his peers adopt other vocations than would have been the case in his parents' generation. With his natural intelligence and educational background, he could have attained a professional career. However, as the oldest son in a farm family, he was naturally predisposed to pursue an agricultural career.

His life-long occupation as a farmer has had a significant impact on Richard's narrative perspective. His earliest memories of childhood experiences have to do with playing farm.

I had one brother who was less than two years younger than I. As children, we used to take some spoons, some old discarded tablespoons, and we'd rig them up in tandem sometime and we had a tandem plow. We went along the dust and we were playing plowing and then we were playing raking. We were playing farming in our own imagination as children. [F:265]

The prominence of this reminiscence, which was Richard's first
response to a question about his childhood activities, betokens the enduring effect of his agricultural background on the narrative reconstruction of his past. This effect is also evident in his recollection of stories his father told, most of which have to do with outmoded farming practices.

Delbert Goering, William Juhnke, and Phil Goering (ages 60, 74, and 83 respectively at the time of their interviews) all combined the farming occupation with teaching. Of course, rural background has substantially influenced the storytelling of each. However, Phil’s storytelling is focused almost completely on his personal experiences as a youth on the farm, while the other two are more objective and analytical about the stories they share. Perhaps Phil’s age arouses his sensitivity to the remarkable changes that have taken place over the course of his life. His narration is characterized by an overriding awareness of how difficult farming was for his family in earlier years. When viewed from the vantage point of the modern conveniences he has come to know, Phil’s experiences working with horses, mules, and primitive farm implements increase in significance. He observes that “those days were quite rugged” [G:283] and verifies this claim with his narration. As with Adina and Jacob, we see that age lends a kind of authority to Phil’s reconstruction of the past.

The teaching profession has influenced more directly the narrative perspective of both Delbert and Bill. Each has developed patterns of learning that have enabled him to become a scholar of oral history in his own right. An awareness of the value of
storytelling in preserving a people's culture has encouraged an objective inquiry into oral narration that goes beyond a novel interest in personal reminiscences.

Delbert teaches third grade in the Moundridge grade school and has been a teacher and school administrator for years. As a member of the committee that wrote the history of Moundridge for the centennial celebration in 1987, Delbert was responsible for tracing reminiscences in the community. He also has encouraged his grade school class to collect family stories in a family folklore assignment. Thus, his perspective on storytelling reflects a decided bias towards objective evaluation.

Just as Phil Goering epitomizes the personally involved oral narrator, Delbert exemplifies a detached perspective. Very few of the stories he shares have to do with personal experience. Instead, Delbert is most interested in events from the lives of others (his grandfather and other Russian immigrants) that can be in some way recorded and verified. He acknowledges gathering some of his stories from printed materials and others from personal interviews. As a local historian, Delbert approaches Swiss Volhynian storytelling in a detached manner. He seems more comfortable adopting the role of a student-observer, rather than that of a performer-participant.

Delbert's age very likely contributes to his objective narrative stance. As a younger member of the second generation descendants of Mennonite immigrants, he is approximately twenty years removed from the "rugged days" of Phil Goering's childhood experiences. He is not of the generation that gains authority by
having lived in the "primitive" age of the Swiss Volhynians in Kansas. Rather, he relies on the stories of those who are indeed able to speak first hand about experiences in the "olden days."

The perspectives of Phil and Delbert Goering seem to merge in William Juhnke's manner of oral narration. William is an oral narrator who directly participates in the tradition he studies. The fact that his age positions him about ten years younger than Phil and ten years older than Delbert may be coincidentally related to the progression of narrative perspectives in these three men, but it suggests a correlation between age and one's level of participation in personal history narration. William's enthusiasm for discovering significant events of community and family history parallels his fervor for telling them. He willingly shares stories from his own life as well as those from the experiences of others.

As a teacher and historian, William has learned to value storytelling as an important aspect of historical research. His repertoire of stories is drawn from both oral and print media. The prominent influence of literary sources is evident in his use of stories from books by P. R. Kaufman, Mahon Breese, Christian Krehbiel, and Henry Fields. He also mentions hearing a story at a teacher's conference told by "Alfalfa" Bill Murray, a former governor of Oklahoma. William's educational experience obviously has shaped his storytelling manner.

William's stories of personal experience reveal the abiding influence of his rural upbringing on his oral narration. The incidents he narrates include an account of saving his brothers from
falling in the water while playing by the creek, a story about a hired hand's serious injury while pitching hay, and a lengthy narrative about a life-threatening experience with runaway horses. These stories demonstrate the narrator's keen awareness of the challenges and hazards of farm life. William's narrative perspective derives an indelible mark of distinction from the agricultural side of his life's work. His storytelling combines his experience as a farmer with his skills as an educator as he vividly recreates repeated childhood encounters with peril.

Along with the heightened sensitivity to the antiquated equipment and behaviors of years gone by, faltering health is an unwelcome trait that accompanies old age. In William's case, ill health is a personal-accidental factor that merits consideration. He had just recently recovered from a stroke at the time of the interview and was suffering from a loss of language facility as a result.

At the end of the formal interview he commented, "... well, I don't know. I'm sorry I'm so disorganized" [C:241]. His apology acknowledges his awareness of the mental handicap with which he is burdened. Although William is generally quite lucid and fluent, his frequent fumbling and struggling to remember names and details bears witness to the debilitating effects of the stroke. Perhaps an awareness of his limited mental functioning prompted him to refer to printed materials, which he saw as more authoritative sources.

Though the farming occupation still is dominant among the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge, a good number of Schweitzers have
established professional careers. J. O. Schrag left farming behind to pursue a career in dentistry. His professional life distanced him from the farm culture. J. O.'s years of separation from his agricultural roots have formed a storytelling perspective much less dominated by rural concerns than that of the other informants.

Instead of dwelling on memories of outmoded farm equipment or maladies of agrarian experience, J. O.'s oral narration reflects more concern with the theme of progress. He demonstrates an awareness of the effects of technological and intellectual advancement on the Mennonite community. One story involves comparing the condition of his family's touring car to an inferior one owned by another member of the community [E:259-260]. This narrative reveals an underlying sense of competition for material gain that accompanies technological progress. Another story relates the homecoming of his Uncle Andrew who "went off to school [and] . . . brought culture back home" [E:261]. His pressed pants, folded handkerchiefs, and ultimately, his refusal to lead the family in morning devotions are manifestations of Uncle Andrew's new enlightenment. This story indicates the oral narrator's acute understanding of the repercussions of academic advancement in a rural community that is generally removed from the intellectual mainstream. Due in part to J. O.'s professional experience, his narrative perspective is distinguished by a sensitivity to the effects of progress on the Swiss Mennonite people.

One cannot assume a conventional mold for oral narrators in Swiss Mennonite culture. To do so would be to deny the distinct
differences in perspectives engendered by the individual traits of each storyteller. An examination of different versions of a common experience among Swiss Volhynians reveals noticeable variations that illustrate a distinctive perspective for each storyteller. The Bücher Bähr stories are prime examples of variable perspectives on a common experience.

Almost every informant recalled a bookseller in the community who was nicknamed the Bücher (Books) Bähr. He travelled around the community in a horse drawn buggy selling books and devotional materials. Since Bücher Bähr's home was some distance from Moundridge, he had to depend on the hospitality of his customers for his food and shelter. When he made a sales call at mealtime, he expected to be fed. He spent the night and stabled his horses wherever he made his last call of the evening. All the informants agree on these few basic facts, and yet recollections of specific details surrounding Bücher Bähr's character are often quite different.

Delbert Goering recalls an incident involving a challenge to Mr. Bähr's intrusive behavior.

He made a run of the community from house to house. And wherever he landed for dinner, that's what he had. And wherever he landed in the evening, that's where he slept. His horse was taken care of in the barn. I remember him. . . . Somebody asked him once about going where you're not invited. And he said, in German, "They didn't ask me not to come." [B:228]

In Delbert's version, the storyteller withholding personal judgement on the actions of the bookseller. Instead, he offers a brief catalogue of the salesman's typical behaviors. The only indication of the
narrator's personal involvement in the story is the acknowledgement of his remembrance of Mr. Bähr. Although a negative evaluation of Mr. Bähr's behaviors is implied by the report of the challenge, the storyteller attributes the confrontation to "somebody" else.

Delbert's account of Bücher Bähr's behaviors reflects the characteristic objectivity of the storyteller's narrative perspective. The lack of specific personal remembrances results in a sparse description, almost totally lacking in specific details. As a teacher and local historian, he is most interested in reporting the facts and is careful to leave out any obvious personal evaluation. When compared with other storytellers, Delbert is singular in his guarded, detached manner of narration.

In contrast to Delbert's minimal description, Richard Schrag's recollection of the Bücher Bähr is abundant with specific details. He describes his discomfort with the lack of hospitality his parents showed to Mr. Bähr.

There's another place I was just a bit embarrassed. Maybe I was too sensitive. But some of my uncles in the area—he was there time and time again for the night. They fed his ponies and kept him for the night. And I don't know whether he ever stayed at our place or not. I always thought the folks had a good reason because the rooms were filled with children. They didn't have an extra spare bedroom. Another reason I think they weren't too anxious to have them in the home was because he insisted on playing rook. And he'd play solitaire! . . . No, we were not very hospitable to that man. That sort of bothered me that other people took him in and we just hardly ever at our place. [F:278]

In Richard's version the point of view is very personally involved. He indicates much less concern for statements of objective fact and invests more feeling in his narration than Delbert. This segment of
his recollection reveals as much about Richard as it does about Mr. Bähr. His embarrassment about his family’s appearing inhospitable in comparison to his uncles and his desire to provide sound reasons for his parent’s behaviors indicate the narrator’s firm sense of obligation. He notices others’ willingness to share the responsibility for housing the Bücher Bähr and is uncomfortable with his family’s lack of participation.

From his experience on the family farm Richard has learned the importance of shared responsibility in the face of unpleasant tasks. If one person refuses to take responsibility for his or her share of the farm work, the success of the whole operation may be in jeopardy. Richard recognizes that no matter how personally inconvenienced a person feels, one has to do his or her part to accomplish the greater good. These resonances of Richard’s life-long experience on the farm lend a distinctive color to his narrative perspective.

Richard’s description of the Bücher Bähr’s horses provides another example of the decided influence of his agricultural background on his personal outlook. Although several informants mentioned that Mr. Bähr travelled with horse and buggy, Richard was the only one who attempted to depict them.

... when he came into the yard, he had a very loud "Whoa!" so that people would hear that. That was his honk. But he had some beautiful road ponies. They were just as

9 The obvious parallel with the Mennonite concept of Gemeinde (a mutually supportive community of believers), may suggest that Richard’s perspective is more culturally than individually derived. However, I believe his individual experience as the oldest son in a farm family has reinforced this cultural attitude, thus distinguishing his perspective from that of the other oral narrators.
slick and—. To me, it was intriguing because he had many
different kinds of books. [F:278]
The reference to the horses is brief—mentioned in passing. The
narrator never finishes his second descriptive sentence.
Nevertheless, the storyteller indicates the deep impression the
horses made on him in his arrested attempt to describe them. His
inability to come up with an adjective to accompany "slick" indicates
what was for the storyteller the truly indescribable beauty of the
horses.

Phil Goering remembers the Bücher Bähr spending the night with
his family and acknowledges that the salesman was welcomed in his
parents’ home. At the same time, Phil’s description of Mr. Bähr
indicates an understanding of the reasons others in the community may
have been reluctant to welcome the man.

He’d come over here—they called him the Bücher Bähr—and
try to sell books. But I don’t remember that he was ever
here for a meal or anything. . . . This Bücher Bähr, he’d
make it a point to stop in about meal time. He’d unhitch
his horse and stay over night. Feed his horse. Then he’d
have a little sack and take a little oats along for his
horse on the way out. . . . It wasn’t that he wasn’t
welcome. But, you know, I guess at some places he
wouldn’t have been. [G:284-285]

This account has a bit more of the detached quality of Delbert
Goering’s narration than does Richard Schrag’s remembrance. Phil,
however, does seem to own the experience a bit more than Delbert by
acknowledging that Mr. Bähr had, in fact, spent time in their home.
Although, this storyteller never directly evaluates the bookseller’s
behavior, a personal judgement is implied in the extended description
of the provisions that the visiting salesman requires: he not only
"makes it a point" to be fed by his customers, he feeds his horse and
takes a little extra oats for the road! This catalog of Mr. Bähr’s presumptuous behaviors reveals the narrator’s concern about limited resources on the family farm.

The memories of those "rugged" days when his parents had to "scrounge for an existence" [G:283] reinforce Phil’s conservative sense, and his account of the Bücher Bähr’s behaviors has been shaped by that sense. A man who comes and takes that which he has not worked for may be welcomed overtly, but an underlying annoyance is certain to accompany the reception.

Erma Goering, Phil’s wife, seems more willing to acknowledge the annoyance people felt toward the Bücher Bähr. Phil requested that she tell a story of a family whose daughters wearied of washing Mr. Bähr’s dirty laundry.

[The Bücher Bähr] used to spend all night at different people’s houses. Well, these Herman Wedel’s had a whole bunch of kids and they lived in a four room house. And he’d go there and stay all night. Then he’d bring his dirty clothes along with him. ‘Course, they had a lot of washing to do with all [those kids]. So the girls got kind of tired of it. And they took his underwear [laughs] and starched them real heavy. [laughs] And that was the last time he brought them over. [laughs] That’s the end of the story. [G:284]

Resonances of Emma’s traditional role as nurturer and sustainer of the home are evident in her description of the Bücher Bähr. Whereas most of the men recall the necessity of providing a stable and oats for the travelling salesman’s horses, she focuses on the added burden of the laundry. Naturally her experience in the social role of a traditional farm wife has influenced her perspective on Mr. Bähr. Although she withholding personal judgement as she describes the salesman’s typical behaviors, her delight in the ingenuity of the
Wedel girls' plan suggests that she believes that in some way, the Bücher Bähr received his just due with the over-starched underwear. Even though the teller did not experience the events of the story first hand, she seems to identify strongly with the role of the women in the story. Out of necessity the Wedel girls had to handle Mr. Bähr's imposition creatively, since a direct complaint or confrontation was not within the expected role of the traditional farm women of the time.

Jacob Goering's recollection of the book salesman is rendered in the terse, matter-of-fact style that characterizes his narration. Vested with the authority and wisdom that accompanies old age, Jacob is much more concerned with providing truthful information than with analyzing social decorum. He states, simply, that "if people invited him, he stayed overnight" [D:254], and he withholds any comment on the appropriateness of Bücher Bähr's behavior.

Oh, yes. Yes. I knew the man. ... He was never married. He was a victim of arthritis badly, or rheumatism. He was a bookseller ... for Mennonite Book Concern, Berne, Indiana. [D:253-254]

Jacob avoids the murky waters of opinion. Instead, this narrator focuses on certainties: the salesman's marital status, physical condition, and place of employment. One can easily understand why each of these considerations is important to someone speaking from the perspective of old age. The loss of companionship, physical health, and gainful employment are often primary concerns for senior citizens.

Unlike the other informants, J. O. Schrag candidly acknowledges his family's refusal to welcome the Bücher Bähr in their home.
There were a lot of incidents. He was an unwelcomed guest in a lot of places, for one thing. . . . The story is that he would pretty well time himself so he would get there at dinner time—that type of thing. . . . He came with a horse and buggy. So he had to have feed for his horses. . . . Now, we didn't welcome him. He still came, but he never stayed at our place. We didn't have a spare bedroom for him. [E:262]

Contrary to Richard Schrag, J. O. assumes that his own family’s treatment of the salesman was representative of a community norm. From this narrator's perspective, Mr. Bähr was generally unwelcome, so J. O. expresses no regret at refusing to entertain the man. Furthermore, the Bächer Bähr had every reason to recognize that he was unwelcome and yet he continued to call. J. O. implies that the salesman was responsible, not community members, for his widespread rejection among them.

Although J. O. expresses some concern for adherence to community norms, his recollection of the Bächer Bähr indicates the storyteller's emphasis on the importance of an individual's taking responsibility for his or her own actions. This emphasis directly relates to his individual perspective regarding progress. At a time when most of his peers were seeking their livelihoods by taking over their portions of the family farm, J. O. separated himself from the farm community and pursued a career in dentistry. His stepping out of the mainstream in order to achieve professional advancement reveals the relevance for him of taking responsibility for individual actions. His strong sense of self-sufficiency indelibly impacts J. O.'s perspective as an oral narrator.

J. O. describes the visual appearance of the Bächer Bähr more vividly than any other narrator.
... the thing that I remember more than anything else—I remember his face, his beard. But I remember the plague on his teeth. It was just thick. Oh, you know, soft stuff.

Ooh! [E:262]

Of course, one can easily attribute this focus on the distinctive appearance of the bookseller to J. O.'s perspective on the significance of the individual. However, I am tempted to interpret his careful depiction of Mr. Bähr's unhealthy teeth, as an avid argument for the utter indispensability of the profession of dentistry. Whatever the case, the trained dentist's powers of observation certainly enhance the description.

Though storytellers in the Schweitzer community clearly represent a sufficient range of psychological and social perspectives, an apparent strain of community ethic encompasses them all. The narrators' preference for personal stories that demonstrate the consequences of actions that uphold and/or defy group norms reveals a pervasive concern for negotiating the oral narrator's level of commitment to the Gemeinde.

A narrator's predilection to tell personal experience stories frequently suggests a discernible value orientation. Sandra K. D. Stahl asserts that oral narrators may favor personal narratives over other forms of storytelling because "through personal experience stories we articulate and then test the values that identify ourselves."¹⁰ According to Stahl, the memorate, which generally is defined as a narrative account of personal experiences with the

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supernatural, often is viewed as a teller's attempt to affirm traditional beliefs. Stahl, however, expands the definition of the term "memorate" to include "extraordinary experiences of a realistic or 'secular' nature."\textsuperscript{11} She suggests that although these stories reveal no direct affirmation of belief in the supernatural, they distinctly reflect a storyteller's system of beliefs.

The secular personal narrative . . . represents a segment of the teller's personal system of ethics. The storyteller's own values influence the perception of the experience, encourage the casting of the incident in story form, and prompt the repetition of the story in various contexts.\textsuperscript{12}

The personal narratives of Swiss Mennonites exhibit a strong value orientation of the teller that expressly acknowledges and generally affirms the collective value system of the Swiss Mennonite community. Storytellers have a keen awareness of the individual's relationship to the larger community of Mennonites. The common bond of their agricultural experiences has nurtured among Swiss Mennonite storytellers a regard for hard work and commitment to a task.

William Juhnke, Jacob Goering, and Phil Goering all have stories that involve runaway horses or mules [C:243-246, D:254, G:286-287]. In all these stories, the unfortunate victim of the runaways manages somehow to "hang on"—whether to the seat or the lines—and to brave the dangers of colliding or being drug on the ground in order to see the task through.

A similar commitment is reflected in Phil Goering's story about

\textsuperscript{11}Stahl, p. 270.

\textsuperscript{12}Stahl, p. 270.
breaking his leg while harrowing [G:287-288]. In spite of the fact that his leg had been "snapped ... in two between the knee and the foot" and "folded ... over," Phil managed to raise himself "out from under and lay down on the plank, and [to keep] the horses from turning away from the fence." The basic assumptions of hard work and responsibility preclude the option of abandoning a task, even in the face of danger or injury. In his account of a life-threatening experience with runaway horses, William Juhnke demonstrates a similar sense of obligation. He says, simply, "I tried to hold the horses and slow them down. I didn’t even think of jumping off" [C:242-243].

Telling yet another story about runaway mules, Phil Goering demonstrates the importance of personal responsibility in tasks beyond those required in one's own family. The incident he describes occurred while he was thrashing at a neighbor's farm.

So, I got the mules out and hitched them together and started walking them towards the rack wagon which was quite some distance away. But the mules started running, and here I couldn’t run as fast as they could. I was hanging on to the lines. And then, they drug me quite a ways. I certainly didn’t want these mules to do any damage for this man. I’d have felt guilty if they did. So, I still hung on to the lines. [G:287]

This remarkable sense of obligation to the neighbor is rooted in the concept of Gemeinde; all men and women are called to uphold and support each other as brothers and sisters in Christian community.

Besides the shared value of dedication to work, Swiss Mennonite storytellers have a common understanding of the tension between individual interest and community and/or church expectations. I have already acknowledged this tension in J. O. Schrag's story about his Uncle Andrew [E:261]. Andrew violated the family and community
expectations by bringing "culture" back home. The ultimate challenge was his refusal to lead the morning devotions. This move toward individuation brought about ridicule and caused disappointment in the family. The narrator identifies the pain of transition as members of the Swiss Mennonite community break from the closed group and refuse to conform to its standards.

Jacob Goering's story about his mother's father also acknowledges the tension between individual interests and community expectations [D:253]. The church of Jacob's grandfather's generation believed that ornamentation was sinful. Individuals were expected to conform to the church's standards and to accept them without question. Because a small ribbon in a young girl's hair challenged the authority of the church, she was dealt with harshly.

In addition to their sense of generally accepted religious standards, Swiss Mennonite narrators have a mutual understanding of the social and political expectations of the community. A common thread among all storytellers is a concern for the maintenance of the status quo. Narrators frequently tell of encounters between the community (or individuals in the community) and some sort of foreign element (person or practice).

William Juhnke told about Indians at Alta Mill who tied their pony to the scale.

And then they went west of the mill, across the river. . . . When they came back, the pony tied to the scale ran off and, uh, pulled the scale along with it and smashed it all to pieces. And one fellow, who was the mill owner, was a Schrag, Joseph Schrag. He wanted to sue the Indians and make them pay for fixing this and all. But the other partner, Jacob H. Goering, . . . said, "Oh no. We can't—that would cause more trouble." And so the one was
peaceful, and the other guy would have, you know....
[C:234-235]

The Indians are portrayed as hostile outsiders who pose a threat to the status quo of Swiss Volhynian society. The disorientation that results from such a disruption is evident in William's description of the mill owners' response. Standards for confrontation and discipline that may be understood and adhered to within the community may not necessarily apply when dealing with outsiders. William neither commends nor criticizes the responses of the mill owners, revealing some ambivalence about which action would have been most appropriate. The conflict between the desire for retaliation and the appeal to make peace represents a central tension in Swiss Mennonite experience, the tension between the individual will and community expectations.

William's story about his Uncle Otto and the Ku Klux Klan [C:242-243] affirms more directly the community standard of peaceful living. When members of the Klan appeared in Uncle Otto's yard threatening to hang him for "being disloyal to the United States," his neighbor, a member of the Baptist church, came to the rescue. The neighbor recognized the shoes of one of his fellow church members, "and he says, 'I recognize you. You served communion and here you are doing this to my neighbor. That won't go.' He saved his life" [C:243].

The symbol of communion is powerful in William's story. Mr. Fields and his fellow church member had acknowledged a bond between them in the act of communion. Mr. Fields appealed to that bond, asking his church brother to reconsider his violent intentions. By
subverting Uncle Otto's oppressors, Mr. Fields becomes the hero of this story despite his affiliation with the Baptist church. Mr. Fields' strong appeal to the values of kinship, peace, and reconciliation coincide with the deeply felt Mennonite values of the narrator. As a result, William can comfortably bestow him with heroic status.

Richard Schrag's story about the black field crew reveals apprehensions about outsiders who looked different although they posed no immediate threat.

And, of course, I think people were a little bit apprehensive—that there was a little bit of prejudice. But they were good workers. . . . Then they got to a certain place and one of the [field] pitchers became seriously ill. . . . Well, in fact, he should have been in the hospital. But this mother of the home kept him there for days and days and nursed him back to health. [F:273]

Richard says that the person who told him this story lauded the farm mother's act of mercy as "a very courageous undertaking" [F:273-274]. The implication is that the community saw this field crew as potentially dangerous. The workers' outsider status was intensified by the color of their skin. The woman's commitment to help the field hand in spite of the dangers—perceived or real—reflects a fundamental attitude about the importance of helping the needy. Richard's interest in the narrative demonstrates his sensitivity to at least two fundamental strains of Swiss Volhynians community ethic—the proclivity to regard outsiders with caution and the responsibility to help those in need.

Perhaps the most compelling examples of narrators expressing their adherence to community norms are found in stories about the
actions of community insiders whose behaviors present a challenge to the status quo. Stories that recall a community member’s defiance of the expected patterns of behavior often involve persons who have left the rural community and been exposed to different ways of thinking and behaving. One example discussed earlier in the chapter is J. O. Schrag’s story about his Uncle Andrew’s refusal to lead family devotions.

Richard Schrag told a story about the Reverend C. J. Goering’s daughter getting the first bobbed haircut. As did J. O., Richard focused on the community’s reticence to accept the culture of the outside world. Reverend Goering’s daughter went to visit one of her aunts from another community. Being abreast of the newest fashions, the aunt convinced her niece to cut her hair short—in a “bobbed” cut. Because of the Apostle Paul’s admonition that long hair is the woman’s glory, Reverend Goering was horrified when he discovered his daughter’s new haircut. He felt compelled to resign the pastorate, since the New Testament teaches that a church leader should be in control of his own household. Although the church did not accept his resignation, the community was duly shaken.

Richard acknowledged that this story represents an earlier time when the community adhered to stricter standards of conduct. Although expectations today are less rigidly defined, many Swiss

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13 This story does not appear in the appendix, since Richard mentioned it following the tape-recorded interview. I recorded it in my Field Journal, 27 March 1986.

14 Art Goering corroborates Richard’s assertion that the girl’s haircut shook the community. Art recalls that the issue was discussed in the local newspaper, The Moundridge Journal [K:19].
Mennonites still feel deeply obligated to uphold a community code of conduct. For divergent insiders, this mutual accountability among community members can be stifling. Ellen Kling, who left the community in 1945 and returned after her divorce nearly forty years later, contends that in Moundridge "everyone knows what everyone else is doing" [J:335]. For Ellen and others who have deviated from the status quo, the close-knit nature of the community has been more burdensome than comfortable. Whether individuals adhere to it or challenge it, virtually everyone forthrightly acknowledges the powerful influence of the community standard.

Any description of the Swiss Volhynian community ethos must acknowledge the complex intermingling of ethnic identity and religious practice, since both ethnicity and religion are at the heart of Swiss Mennonite identity. As a result, community standards and expectations reflect Russian-German peoplehood as well as Mennonite doctrine. No doubt both strains of experience have shaped general qualities such as industriousness, humility, rigor, and neighborliness. The convergence of Swiss Volhynian identity and Mennonite identity creates a distinct cultural heritage that permeates the experience of individual community members.

The tension between identification with the group and individual expression is fundamental to Swiss Mennonite oral narrators. Despite their common cultural heritage, Swiss Volhynian storytellers express their individuality in a variety of ways. Age, gender, occupation, and other personal-accidental factors influence the level of identification each has with the community standard. The variety
of responses to the Bücher Bähr, for example, demonstrates that despite the community expectation to help the needy, individual storytellers interpret legitimate need and appropriate response differently. At the same time, virtually every narrator—irrespective of age, gender, or occupational role—implies a sense of reservation about Mr. Bähr’s immoderate expectations for community assistance. Thus, the storytellers exhibit a measure of conformity despite their individual differences. In storytelling, they evoke a context that enables them to test their position as individuals within the Gemeinde.

This investigation of the personal and social stance of Swiss Mennonite oral narrators has demonstrated the complexity of narrative perspectives represented in the Moundridge community. Obviously, no common mold exists for the narrators who contributed to this study; one cannot conclusively identify a typical narrative stance among Swiss Volhynians. Each storyteller exhibits a distinctiveness that is shaped by individual traits as well as collective experience. Thus, the most apparent fundamental attribute of Swiss Volhynian oral narrators is the special tension between individuality and conformity that emerges in their storytelling. This tension attests to the distinctive position of the storyteller in the Swiss Mennonite community somewhere between tradition and progress, between community norms and individual uniqueness, between the ordinary and the extraordinary.
CHAPTER THREE

THE NARRATIVE: LANGUAGE, STYLE, AND GENRE

IN THE STORIES OF THE SWISS VOLHYNIAN MENNONITES

The examination of individual perspectives in the third chapter has already suggested the profound influence of personal experience on the narrative style of Swiss Mennonite storytellers. Probing the relationship of language to experience involves a slight shift in the focus of the discussion from the person of the oral narrator to the narrator's "text." In this chapter, the word "text" refers to the written transcriptions of the language of spoken discourse recorded in the interview process. I recognize that text is inextricably bound to context and do not intend to excise in some way the "artifact" from the environment in which it is produced. Rather, I will focus on the oral narrator's text in this chapter as a point of departure for the analysis of the relationship of language to experience. This chapter will concentrate on the style, word choice, narrative technique and genre distinctions of Swiss Mennonite oral narrations as they function to situate narratives in the context of the Gemeinde.

Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of discourse in the novel supports
the notion that language—both written and oral—reflects the lived experience of the individual who uses it.

For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. . . . Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word.1 Bakhtin recognizes a pervasive tension in spoken and written discourse between language that is "half someone else's" and half "'one's own.'" Because we are constantly using words that have been appropriated from the experience of others, our speech reveals a complex multiplicity of contexts that reflect our own experience as well as the experience of others. As we bring words together in new combinations, we create new contexts for the interpretation of meaning.

One can logically apply Bakhtin's theory of narrative discourse to spoken discourse, since Bakhtin himself derives much of his criticism from an analysis of speech. Thus, by examining the linguistic features of an oral narrative one can discover how an individual narrator creates a particular "conception of the world." Word choice, style, and narrative technique constitute "contextual overtones" that suggest particular interpretations of a narrator's experience.

On the most fundamental level, the speech patterns of the descendants of Swiss Mennonite immigrants from Volhynia exhibit the

tension that Bakhtin identifies in the interplay between several national languages, or polyglossia. As Adina Krehbiel pointed out the Swiss German dialect "isn't like the [German text]book. . . . We had Polish and Russian and German in our language which is so easy for us" [A:220-221]. The Mennonites' sojourn through South Germany and Polish Russia has obviously contributed to the multilingual nature of their dialect. Victor Goering gave an obvious example of the Polish influence on the Schweitzer dialect. He talked about the traditional after harvest celebration that his family called objinky. For years, he assumed that objinky was just a family word for the post-harvest event. However, when he and his wife sponsored some Polish trainees recently, they discovered that the Polish word for harvest festival is dovzhinky [M:403]. No doubt, the Swiss Mennonite's experience in Polish Russia fostered an assimilation of Polish nuances in their dialect. In the same manner, after more than a century of experiences in the United States, Swiss Mennonites have incorporated American English into their dialect as well. One often hears "germanized" pronunciations of English words when listening to the Schweitzer dialect.

Polyglossia abounds in Swiss Mennonite oral narrative. The Swiss German dialect occurs most often in passages of reported speech. However, narrators generally translate the Swiss Dialect into American English in order to accommodate the unfortunate ignorance of the interviewer, a third generation descendant of the Volhynian immigrants who understands very little of the Schweitzer vernacular. As if to underscore the accuracy of the rendering—in
effect to demonstrate the "truthfulness" of the narrative—
storytellers maintain the Swiss dialect when they recount bits of
speech that originated as Schweitzer phrases.

Often when storytellers render reported speech in dialect, the
quoted passage has a special intensity or significance to the event
being described. Notice, for instance, William Juhnke's fervent plea
to his neighbor for help with the runaway horses.

[Val Krehbiel] saw that my horses were running. And . . .
I yelled, "Stop mei Geil! Stop mei Geil!" ["Stop my
horses! Stop my horses!"] . . . He couldn't stop them.
[C:245]

In the face of an apparently life-threatening situation, the young
William called out in desperation. At this point in the story, a
measure of intensity appropriate to the impending danger accompanies
the verbal command and the shift into dialect highlights the urgency
of the moment for the narrator.

While his use of the dialect shows the indelible imprint of a
traumatic childhood experience, it also indicates the regularity with
which the narrator spoke in dialect as a child. The occurrence of
the Schweitzer dialect in a phrase quoted from his childhood
experience indicates a progression in the storyteller's mode of
communication as he has grown older. As a child, William spoke
mostly Swiss German in the home. As an adult, his primary mode of
oral communication is American English. One can readily ascertain
the impact on the narrator of years of assimilation to American
culture. In fact, the early stages of acculturation are implied even
in the childhood command, which begins with the English word "stop"
in the "germanized" pronunciation, "shtop") rather than the Swiss
word "halt."

The occurrence of the Schweitzer dialect in Swiss Mennonite oral narrations often highlights the punch line of a story. Richard Bauman suggests that although some stories have a primary focus on events, in anecdotes that make use of quoted speech, the primary focus is the dialogue—"the conversational encounter that culminates in a punch line."\(^2\) Especially for the older Swiss Volhynian storytellers, memorable conversational encounters are those in which the dialect is used to poke fun at someone. J. O. Schrag laughed about Fred Grundman, who finally managed to start his dilapidated car after repeated efforts and then triumphantly exclaimed "Entlich uf hoch!" ["Finally I'm on high!"] [E:260243]. Ellen Schrag and Erwin Goering told stories about Andy Unruh, the stuttering Low German farm hand. Their stories also achieve their humor by quoting Andy's lines in German [N:457-459; I:323].

The humor of a punch line spoken in dialect is sometimes elusive when the phrase or sentence is translated into English. J. O. Schrag told a story about a member of the Hopefield Church choir, John Strauss, who was "the butt of a lot of stories. . . ."

He couldn't sing very well but then, he would try it. Well, we had a cantata. And at the dress rehearsal . . . John Strauss wasn't there. So at the time for the rendition he was there. Now, then he walked up and he said, "Where do I sit?" And at that time Ed P. Goering was still alive. . . . And Ed P. said, "Das Wees nurre der Gott und der Neuenschwander." Now, Neuenschwander was our preacher. "Only God and Neuenschwander knows where you're going to sit!" [E:259]

Although the literal translation of Mr. Goering's comment seems devoid of humor, the oral narrator chuckled when he finished the telling. Of course, some of the humor arises from knowing the people involved in the incident, but the oral narrator's direct quote indicates an interest as well in the specific phraseology of the comment. A part of what makes the punch line funny is the fact that it is stated in dialect. Schweitzers enjoy the special finesse that the Swiss dialect lends to the spoken word and often acknowledge that funny statements lose their humor when translated into English.

The Swiss Mennonites' appreciation of the distinct character of the German language is demonstrated in a reluctance among storytellers to offer English translations of reported speech without acknowledging that the quotations were originally spoken in German. Notice Delbert Goering's account of the challenge to Bücher Bähr's manner of salesmanship.

Somebody asked him once about going where you're not invited. And he said in German, "They didn't ask me not to come." [B:228]

The narrator identified the language of the original statement even though the quotation was in English. Richard Schrag made a similar acknowledgement in his story about trying to refuse wine gracefully from his wife's grandfather.

So I thought, "... maybe I can wiggle out of it because of my stomach trouble." So I said, "Well, I don't want to [drink wine] on account of my stomach." He said, "The Apostle Paul"—he said it in German—"The Apostle Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake." And I was stuck. [F:270]

In this case the narrator made a false start, interrupting himself to
acknowledge the original language of the quotation, almost as if he
failed to recognize the inadequacy of the translation until he
uttered it aloud. Both narrators reveal a reticence to delete
completely the influences of the German language on the oral culture
of their people.

In Richard’s example there is a further indication that for
previous generations of Swiss Mennonites the German language was
vested with religious authority. Prior to World War I, the
Mennonite churches in Moundridge used German for Sunday morning
worship services. Although their education in American schools had
fostered the general adoption of English for communication in the
home and at the work site, Swiss Volhynians continued to worship,
pray, and read the Bible in German. Therefore, the grandfather’s
quotation from the Bible would naturally have been spoken in German
rather than English. Richard’s need to acknowledge the German
original no doubt arises from a keen awareness of the significance in
earlier years of using German in all forms of religious discourse.

Swiss Mennonites frequently shift into dialect at points of high
seriousness in their discussion of religious issues. Notice Ellen
Schrag’s recollection of her father’s deep concern that young people
in the church had forsaken the practice of Bible study.

But I know he had one complaint. See, he was Sunday School
teacher for a long time. And he said, "Sie studieren aber
net das Wort!" ["They do not study the Word!"] That was

Ellen’s use of the emotionally charged word "burden" and the
repetition of the quoted line indicate the depth of her father’s
feelings. Here the shift into dialect really highlights the
earnestness of the quotation. A similar effect occurs in Richard Schrag's reflection on the church's punishment for the halloween pranksters. Richard suggested that people his age, who are ten to fifteen years older than the pranksters, were much less likely to be involved in such destructive behaviors. For Richard, it was important to be regarded as "spiritually-minded. And all that other was worldly—weltlich. That was weltlich" [F:280]. Again, the repetition reveals the intensity of the statement and the dialect accentuates it.

Recently, Mennonites have become much more indifferent towards the German language. The spiritual aura that once surrounded German has all but vanished. Ellen Kling recalled a conversation between her brother, Donald, and a friend that provides a good example of the Schweitzer's shift in attitudes toward the German language.

... Joe said that those older people were convinced that in heaven German would be the only language spoken. And then they started to laugh and Donald said, "Yes, but do you remember, Sis... that Dad agreed for a while. But then he said, 'No, that can't be. Because there aren't enough cuss words in German.'" [J:339]

Certainly the remark by Ellen's father, Dan Waltner, typifies his feisty nature. At the same time, the comment debunks the idea that the German language is sanctified in some way. It also reveals the absurdity of ascribing morality to particular words in any language. After all, if the language in heaven includes a healthy proportion of cuss words, then we ought not to be offended by a little swearing here on earth.

A joke that has circulated in Mennonite circles reflects the diminishing influence of the German language among contemporary Swiss
Mennonites. The joke tells of an old Mennonite minister who argued
vehemently that God spoke in German. In order to prove the fact, the
minister pointed to the passage in his German Bible where God says to
Adam, "Adam, wo bist du?" While the joke attests to the reverence
with which the German language has been viewed, it affirms a new
attitude of enlightenment by showing the obvious absurdity of the
minister's argument. His veneration of the German language inhibited
the minister's intellectual progress, just as adherence to old world
customs stood in the way of material progress for the descendants of
Swiss Volhynian immigrants. Stephen Stern's research into the
function of ethnic folklore suggests that American born ethnics often
use dialect jokes to distinguish themselves from their "backward"
predecessors. In the same manner, the joke about the Mennonite
minister helps the progressive Mennonite to ease the embarrassment
about his or her backward ancestors and disparages the exalted
position of the German language. For the "new" generation of Swiss
Mennonites, knowledge of German is more novelty than necessity.

In addition to instances of Swiss German dialect, typically
Germanic grammatical structures bear witness to the impact of the
Swiss culture on Schweitzer oral narration. Even when no German is
spoken, narrators often use characteristic sentence structures of the
Swiss German grammar in crafting their oral narrations. For
instance, the adverb "already" generally indicates a time expectation
within which an event occurs or fails to occur. When a person says,

3Steven Stern, "Ethnic Folklore and the Folklore of Ethnicity," Western Folklore, 36 (1977), p. 23.
"I thought you had already finished that," she is saying that she had expected the task to be finished "by this time." However, Swiss Germans frequently use the word for more than its 'adverbial' function.

Used as its German translation "schon," "already" can give emphasis or indicate urgency. In describing the style of humor of Dan Waltner, a community jokester, Adina Krehbiel commented, "He'd say things . . . [that were] so dumb that it was for sure that it's not true already" [A:225]. To the ear of a native speaker of American English, the use of "already" seems strange in the previous sentence. The comparative time expectation that the adverb suggests cannot be applied in the sentence. Adina's awareness of Dan's humorous intent really has very little to do with the time when he made the 'dumb' comment. In this case, the adverb emphasizes the level of absurdity in Mr. Waltner's comment.

Even when "already" can be properly construed as a verb modifier, it often indicates a special urgency. Children who are reluctant to end their play at the end of an evening's visit in someone else's home often hear the command from impatient parents, "Let's go already!" William Juhnke used the adverb in a similar manner as he commented, "I was wondering whether I'd run off the world already someplace" [C:245]. Here the adverb emphasizes the excessive distance travelled in the seemingly endless jaunt with the runaway horses.

Although the play between the two languages is most frequently illustrated by the juxtaposition of German and English phrases, some
instances of language play involving double meanings do occur. Dan W. Goering remembered that he was teased as a child for wishing it would be more hell [bright] outside on dreary days. He and Erwin C. Goering tell differing versions of a story about a Mennonite farmer who asks a neighboring "English" woman for a Kisse [pillow] for his sore buttocks [H:304, N:435–436].

The play between English and the Swiss dialect typifies the way bilingualism contributes to language play in immigrant cultures. Rosan Jordan, who has studied Mexican-American immigrants in the Southwestern United States, observes that "the power to play with both languages suggests the power to control both cultures and hence to deal effectively with one's biculturalism." Although Jordan's study involves groups that have migrated more recently than the Swiss Mennonites, her premise that bilingual language play demonstrates a tension between cultures has significant applications in the study of Swiss Mennonite oral culture.

A fundamental tension arises in Swiss Mennonite stories in the play between languages. The prevalence of the dialect and of "Germanized" English expressions in their stories, demonstrates the Swiss Volhynians' enduring awareness of their status as an immigrant culture. Their dialect affirms the Schweitzers' identification with their Russian ancestors and reveals an abiding level of separation.

4This he told me in a conversation after the formal interview with his wife, Erma.

from American society. At the same time, their facility in American English attests to the Swiss Mennonites' unapologetic participation in the current of contemporary American society. Like Jordan's Mexican-American immigrants, Swiss Volhynians in Moundridge demonstrate their command of both languages in their word play, and thus bring about a "subliminal merging" of two cultures. However, the interplay of languages in Swiss Mennonite oral discourse reflects a different tension than that of the Mexican-Americans in Jordan's study.

The need for a "psychological reconciliation of opposites" is less intense among Swiss Mennonites. Of course, this need has diminished in part because of the reduced tension between the Swiss Volhynian and American cultures after more than a century of assimilation. However, Swiss Mennonites differ from other immigrant cultures on a more fundamental level. After their immigration in 1874, a primary goal for Swiss Mennonites was to remain separate from American culture rather than to assimilate it. They established their own congregational community in the hopes of maintaining the lifestyle they had established in Kotosufka. In a sense Swiss Mennonites have assimilated in spite of themselves. Indeed, their oral discourse reflects an abiding preference for separateness over integration.

The polyglot in the Swiss Mennonites' oral culture indicates the

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variety of cultural influences that have shaped Swiss Volhynian experience. Though predominantly German, the Swiss dialect also utilizes words from Poland, Russia, and the United States. Because of this unique mingling of national languages, the dialect is difficult to decipher for any group other than the Swiss Volhynians. Thus, unlike numerous other immigrant groups, the term "bicultural" is really inadequate to characterize the heritage of the Swiss Volhynians. Indeed, their oral discourse reflects a multi-cultural experience. Ironically, the multi-cultural nature of their dialect functions to limit, rather than to broaden the base of their communication. When Swiss Volhynians speak in the "mother tongue," they can be understood fully only by other Swiss Volhynians. The dialect affirms their distinctive cultural identity and enables Swiss Mennonites to perpetuate a sense of separateness from the American mainstream.

Another distinguishing feature of Swiss Mennonite oral discourse is the noticeable minimalism that pervades these narratives. Stories are seldom embellished with careful descriptive phrases. With a few exceptions, storytellers recount incidents in brief statements, sometimes using only two or three short sentences to tell a story. Perhaps this practice is in keeping with the values of truthfulness and modesty: better to err on the side of sparseness than to embellish and run the risk of wavering from the absolute truth.

Often the storyteller uses specific names, especially in discussing family members, without explaining the relationship of the narrator to the person named. Adina Krehbiel remembers Dan Waltner’s
storytelling antics, suggesting that he spoke "like Carl does a little bit, too" [A:225]. She does not mention that Carl Waltner is a nephew of hers who is at best a distant relative of Dan Waltner's. William Juhnke refers to the owners of the Alta Mill, saying simply that it was run by "Ransom Stucky's father and uncles" [C:234]. Jacob Goering talks about Gilbert and Victor working in the field without mentioning that they are his sons [D:254]. Swiss Mennonite stories are full of these unexplained references that reveal an insider's code in the use of language—a kind of "Schweitzer Shorthand," if you will. These storytellers assume that their listener knows the family relationships, since he is a member of the community. Again, the notion of Gemeinde surfaces in the assumption of a shared knowledge of family and community members.

Storytellers typically use "Schweitzer Shorthand" to orient the listener to the people or places that the story involves. At times, making sure that the listener knows exactly to whom an incident happened or exactly where it occurred nearly supersedes the storyteller's account of the event itself. For example, William Juhnke interrupted the first line of "Uncle Wesley's Hay Story" to ask his wife about the man with whom his Uncle was working [C:248]. William was not satisfied with simply identifying the man as "a Wedel." Instead he wanted to know, "Now, which Wedel was that?" Only after his wife identified the man as "John Wedel's older brother," could William proceed with his story. When he finished the story, William added that his Uncle Wesley was the brother of the interviewer's Grandfather.
For some storytellers, this process of making connections errs on the side of obsessive and the "shorthand" turns to "longhand." In a story about a Mennonite farmer who was tarred and feathered for refusing to buy war bonds, Art Goering tried to relate the man's name to his contemporary descendants.

Of course, you take this John Schrag, better known as Krike Hannes [Creek John]. You know who I'm talking about. John Schrag, he was Dan and Herman's father, and Pete and Jake, the Schrag boys, you know. There's only three living now, I guess. Pete and Herman and Adam. Yah, the three out of nine boys. Yah, their father—who, incidentally, was direct uncle to my mother. Mrs. Schrag and my mother's mother were sisters. So, my mother and the Schrag's were first cousins. But, uh, John Schrag, he was . . . [K:349]

After establishing what he evidently perceived to be a necessary link, he resumed the story, which took only two sentences to tell.

In this case the storyteller not only makes an association for the listener, he also demonstrates his own relationship to the protagonist of the story. In so doing, he virtually eclipses the story itself. Swiss Mennonites easily become preoccupied with such digressions. In fact, the "Mennonite Game" (as this activity of making associations has been affectionately labelled) is a commonly acknowledged form of verbal play for Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge as well as for ethnic Mennonites across the country.

When Swiss Mennonites shift into the association game, their verbal activity regularly delays or even replaces narration in their oral interactions. Notice how Erwin Goering nearly loses track of the story about his father's desire to go to school in the following example.

E: He didn't want to be a farmer. He wanted to go into
business. Well, when they grew up, the oldest two were daughters. And then there were five boys. Something like that. Mrs. P. S. Krehbiel, Peter D.'s folks. Pete lives with Frieda—Frieda Epp.

J: He was my uncle. [His first wife, now deceased, was my mother's sister.]

E: Yah. Okay. Sure, sure. Okay. Uh, um—what was my point, now? You shook me when you said he was your uncle. I should have known that. [N:442]

Erwin very much wants to provide a connection for his listener with the P. S. Krehbiel family. When the interviewer provides an obvious association, Erwin chides himself for his failure to do so. His dismay at having missed the connection is evident as he struggles to regain the narrative line. As Erwin's story and many others demonstrate, the association game is a typical pattern in Swiss Mennonite oral style.

Code words other than specific names of people or family relationships also indicate an in-group relationship. Mennonites in Moundridge often speak a few words or phrases to refer to stories that "everyone" knows. A person may recite a catch phrase as a substitute for telling the story thus demonstrating the story's relevance to a similar situation. J. O. Schrag recalls the origin of the phrase "grüm Strück Vereiss" ["grim broken rope"].

... what would that mean to anyone else? Well, it happened that Victor Goering was visiting Uncle Dan's and somehow we fooled around with a rope in the barn. He was involved where he was irritated, he was grim. He was angry about it. [Laughs] And the rope broke, see? Well, so we would just say, "grüm Strück vereiss," and that was our story. We knew what was going on. [E:259]

Often families share a broad repertoire of such phrases. An actual telling of the story surrounding the phrase's origin seldom occurs
within the closed context of the family. Instead, Swiss Mennonites tell these stories to people outside the family who may hear family members use the phrase with each other but are unfamiliar with the context surrounding it.

J. O. Schrag refers to several "in-stories" that his family shared [E:259-260]. Each one ends with a phrase quoted in the Swiss dialect.

So those kind of stories we just used when something didn't happen the way it should. We would bring in one of those stories. Everybody knew what we meant. [E:260]

Schrag's reference to "those kind of stories" reveals an understanding of a system, albeit informal, of genre distinction for Swiss Mennonite oral narrations. His comment indicates a general awareness in the community regarding the situations in which this "type" of story is most appropriate.

In Chapter Two, I demonstrated that Swiss Volhynians generally discuss storytelling in terms of its relationship to the social situation in which it arises. Clearly, Swiss Mennonites are more concerned with the occasion of the telling than with classifying the tale. Henry Glassie's assertion that communities "will not have culture reduced to a formula, ready to hand over," holds true in the Swiss Mennonite community. The naming of the acts of speaking among Schweitzer's is largely flexible and informal. Storytelling is most often referred to in very general terms such as "recalling experiences," [N:427] "telling incidents," [M:413] "getting information," [F:276] and "rehashing things" [H:293].

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Swiss Mennonite oral narratives frequently combine elements of family life, community happenings, and historical events in ways that often defy clear-cut categorizations. In one story, Richard Schrag talks about listening to his father discuss the practice of drinking wine at weddings. Richard's parents were the first in the community who did not have wine served at their wedding. Richard's account is obviously a personal remembrance, a family reminiscence, a community tale, and historically significant, since Swiss Mennonites virtually never serve wine during present day wedding celebrations. I do not intend to ponder over which genre most appropriately categorizes Richard's story, since genre distinction is a secondary consideration in this study. I include the example here to demonstrate that distinctions between story types can be obscure.

In spite of the difficulty of categorizing them clearly, Swiss Mennonite oral narrations can be loosely separated into four basic kinds based on the type of information, incidents, or experiences they recount. The four kinds of stories are local histories, community anecdotes, family reminiscences, and personal experience stories. Each type is clearly tied to the people and events that make up the Moundridge community and to the immediate situation in which it is told. Narrators tell other kinds of stories (like traditional folk tales) only on rare occasions. In these cases the storyteller has learned the tale from outside sources such as printed literature or speeches by outside professionals. Otherwise, storytellers draw the characters and events in their oral narration specifically from the real life experiences, historical or recent, of
the Swiss Volhynian people.

I define local history as a narrative that describes past events that have influenced the course of community development or that recalls local response to national or international events. Examples of local history include Art Goering’s stories about the Mennonites who refused to buy war bonds [K:348-349], William Juhnke’s stories about Indians at the Alta Mill [C:234-235] and about finding a successor for Elder Jacob Stucky [C:238-239], and Victor Goering’s story about the children who died and were buried by the pioneer women while the men were off looking for land [M:406].

Of the four genres, Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge tell local histories the least frequently. Most of the local history is either in the form of general observations ("... they were always driven from one country to the next on account of the war" [A:222]), or else tied to specific family reminiscences ("Dad said they tried different kinds of crops" [P:272]). Other than occasional stories about Elder Jacob Stucky, very few historical accounts deal with specific characters and situations. Perhaps Schweitzer narrators assume that the self-acknowledged historians in the community collect and preserve historical information thus reducing the importance of the oral transmission of such data. William Juhnke [C:237,243,249], Jacob Goering [D:255], Delbert Goering [B:226], Richard Schrag [P:271], and Ellen Kling [J:333,337,338] all referred to printed materials that contain historical information regarding the Swiss Volhynians. Apparently, an increase in the educational level of the Swiss Mennonites has been accompanied by a decrease in the oral
transmission of local history. One would expect an immigrant group to have a wide repertoire of stories about immigration, but informants related only a handful of stories about immigration and the difficulty of adjusting to life in the United States.

Community anecdotes are stories that are known by a wider audience than the members of an individual family. These are stories about people or events about which the community is more generally aware. For Swiss Volhynians, the meaning of community anecdotes is invariably tied to social context of the community. Richard Bauman states that community anecdotes are "densely indexical in a concrete social sense." In other words, they gain meaning through the associations with other people, places, and events in the community setting. Thus, to comprehend fully the sense of a Swiss Volhynian community anecdote, a performance scholar must understand the relationships of the people involved, the attitudes of the community towards them, and the expectations for the situation in which the incident occurred.

In some cases, a community anecdote is commonly known because the event was serious enough to have community-wide impact. Some examples of serious anecdotes are Richard Schrag’s story about the Swiss woman who nursed a black farm hand back to health [F:273], Dan W. Goering’s story about the Lutherans who withdrew their children from Mennonite Bible School [H:297], and Art Goering’s stories about John Schrag’s persecution [K:349] and about Waldo Wedel’s hunting accident [K:375]. Art Goering appropriately describes these

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9Richard Bauman, Story, Performance, and Event, p. 76.
narratives as "stories that they've told of, you know, incidents that were shocking to the whole community" [K:375]. Each of these stories confronts a central concern of the community psyche such as religious freedom or nonviolence.

In many cases, community members are familiar with anecdotes because the incidents involved were humorous enough to be circulated for entertainment value. Examples of humorous anecdotes are Emma Goering's story about the disgruntled Wedel girls who starched the Bücker Bähr's underwear [G:284], Harold Schrag's story about exposing Andy Unruh in his underwear [I:306], and William Juhnke's story about the drunken Mennonite farmer who brought the wrong buggy home from Zhitomir in Russia [C:235-236]. With these stories, humor is derived from the unexpected deviation from community norms such as respect for the sabbath, modesty, and sobriety.

Narrators of community anecdotes speak in the third person and are surprisingly unapologetic for telling a story that they did not personally observe. Notice Delbert Goering's version of "The Reluctant Pastoral Candidate." Although other informants acknowledged the incident, Delbert's account is the most complete.

That afternoon [a Sunday when the church was meeting to make its decision] in sight of the church—I assume he lived that close—he hitched up horses to a plow and started plowing the fields where the people could see him and was smoking a cigarette. I would draw from that that he didn't want the job. But he was chosen and he accepted . . . and served, I'm sure, an awful lot of people. [B:228]

Delbert's style is straightforward; he recounts only what he understands are the basic facts of the story. Any individual interpretation of the events he clearly identifies as his own with an
do obvious shift into first person narration ("I assume," "I would draw from that"). Although he did not directly witness the incident, Delbert is unapologetic about accepting responsibility for the narrative. With community anecdotes, the narrator's authority to tell them comes more from the sense of community ownership than from his or her first hand knowledge of the events. After all, "everyone knows" these stories.

Family reminiscences are stories that are most often told within the context of family sharing. They are stories about humorous or dramatic events in the life of the family, and are frequently told by the former generation to the succeeding one. The family expresses a collective ownership in these stories rather than vesting one person with the responsibility for it. Swiss Mennonites have a broad range of family reminiscences in their repertoire. Some examples are Art Goering's story about his mother saving a single kernel of corn before burning the cob [K:353], Selma Stucky's story about her Uncle Dan who thought that ugly babies should be thrown to the pigs [I:381], Erwin Goering's story about his feud with the buck [N:427-428], and J. O. Schrag's story about his Uncle Andrew's refusal to lead in family devotions [E:261].

Family reminiscences are often preceded by a verbal cue—a phrase or sentence that identifies with whom the story originated. Phrases like "I got this from . . . Grandpa Goering" [F:271] and "Dad told me once" [I:297] do more than identify the original teller. They also validate the truthfulness of the story by associating it with real life experiences from a family member's past. In some
stories this verbal cue may function as "title" of the story. For example, during the interview with William Juhnke, his wife scrawled the word's "Uncle Wesley's hay story" on a scrap of paper and handed it to me. When I mentioned the story in those terms, he immediately recalled the incident and told the story [C:248]. The verbal cue both identified the story and evoked its telling.

Certainly the most prevalent narrative genre in Swiss Mennonite oral culture is the personal experience story. Personal experience stories are, of course, first-person narratives that recount the narrator's participation in and response to events in his or her life. Unlike community anecdotes or family reminiscences, personal experience stories are owned by the individual teller. The topics and themes of these stories are as multifarious as the experiences of the narrators who tell them.

Sandra Stahl has advanced folklore research by her inclusion of the personal narrative in the "canon" of traditional folklore.

... we could not say that the performance of a personal narrative involves a traditional resource of the class "tale type" or "traditional plot." However, the performance will involve a number of the other traditional aspects such as traditional structure, use, attitudes or idioms. ... The newness or oldness of the story is a relative matter then, dependent upon the degree of traditionality exhibited by the totality of the performance.10

Stahl suggests that "the personal narrative is more traditional than innovative," since it relies on the first person narrative tradition

and on traditional attitudes. Because conventional folk tales are almost completely absent in Swiss Volhynian oral culture, a focus on personal narratives is essential to an analysis of storytelling in the Moundridge community.

Undoubtedly, personal experience stories provide a bulk of the materials for the analysis of language and style in Swiss Mennonite oral culture. Thus, the remainder of the chapter will focus on specific stories from a variety of tellers as they represent traditional aspects of structure and style. The stories I chose for analysis here are in many ways representative of the entire collection of personal experience stories in this study. I selected these particular stories on the basis of three criteria: 1) they all have a sense of completeness, 2) they are all told by different tellers, and 3) they are all varied in thematic content, in other words, not all the stories address the same general topic (i.e. farming accidents or family tragedies).

Art Goering's story about the hard-working farm hand, Andy Unruh [K:371], is an example of what Sandra Stahl calls an "other-oriented" personal experience story in which "the narrator serves mainly as witness and recorder of incidents in which other people are primary participants." Art prefaced the story with a statement,

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or an "abstract" to use William Labov's terms, that indicated the overall theme: Andy's exemplary industriousness. Art said, "He didn't even want to quit of an evening when it was quitting time. That's a fact." After this preface, Art began the story with an orientation to story time and place: "I know one time when we were thrashing bundles, I don't recall where it was at. . . ." At this point, Art identified the other major character in the story, the owner of the thrashing machine, Marv Boyce. Art utilized the commonplace "Schweitzer Shorthand" by saying that Boyce "had married one of John Wedel's daughters." In so doing, Art demonstrated for the listener how a non-Swiss name like Boyce was connected with the Mennonite community. Art orients the listener further with information about the length of the thrashing day and the working pattern of the hauling crew.

The central tension of the story involves Andy's refusal to stop working when the usual time to quit had arrived. Shortly after initiating the complicating action of the story, Art shifted into a direct quotation of the conversation between Unruh and Boyce.

. . . Andy had a team of horses and was heading for the field to load again. And Marv run away from the machine a little and hollered to him. He says, "Andy!" He hollered real loud. He says, "It's quitting time." And Andy just

13I have borrowed William Labov's terms for the six structural components of oral narrative: 1) abstract (a short summary of the story), 2) orientation (the necessary background information), 3) complicating action (the story events), 4) evaluation (a comment on the story's relative importance), 5) result or resolution (a conclusion), and 6) coda (a shift out of the story frame). See William Labov and Joshua Waletsky, Essays in the Verbal and Visual Arts: Proceedings on the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society, ed. June Helm (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1967).
looked to the west and just hollered back, he says, "The sun ain't down yet." And he drove on. [K:371]

This segment of reported speech is the climax of Art's story. The dialogue highlights Andy's blatant deviation from the normal work patterns of the hauling crew. In the resolution, Art reported how much Andy had loaded by the time the rest of the crew quit.

The final sentence of this story functions as a clincher, or what Labov calls the "coda." Art's closing words were, "He was just—that's what I mean—he was honest as the day was long." The line echoes an earlier observation that Art made when I first introduced Andy Unruh into the conversation. His repetition increased the impact of the statement and deftly drew the action to a close. This final line is, at the same time, an evaluation of the incident, indicating Art's approbation of Andy's industrious nature.

A number of the other-oriented personal experience stories told by informants cast Andy Unruh as the central figure of the story. Victor Goering [M:413], Erwin Goering [N:457-460], and Ellen Schrag [I:305] all have their own personal experiences with Andy to report. However, in order to probe a slightly different perspective, I have chosen a story with a different main character as a second example of other-oriented personal experience stories. William Juhnke shared a story about a hired hand from the Boys Industrial School who was "a real tough character" [C:249-250].

Here again, the narrator begins with a story abstract. By preceding the story with a statement about the hired hand's ruggedness, William has primed the listener for the action that ensues. Again, a standard orientation segment followed the abstract:
"One time we were thrashing stacks. One stack was just about done and they were just cleaning up on the stack." Unlike Art's story, however, the central tension in William's story utilizes vivid description rather than reported dialogue.

This fellow was a little careless with his pitchfork. And he lifted it up and the belt from the engine came and hit the tines of the pitchfork. And the handle hit him here [William gestures to his chin], right on his chin and gave him a heck of a blow. I couldn't see any blood or anything, but I was close by. As a little boy, I stepped up closer to look at him to see what happened. And he stuck his tongue through the hole at me. [C:249-250]

In this case, the juxtaposition of the shocking sight of the serious wound and the nonchalant response of the hired man creates a visual image that is the emotional high point of the story.

The resolution and coda of William's story were brief. He observed that the hired hand kept working until evening, in spite of the wound. William concluded with the statement, "The next day he was back at work." Although this final line is less directly evaluative than the clincher in Art's story, it does function to underscore the hardiness of the main character. The line suggests a level of regard for the central character, who suffered such a serious injury and still had the strength to return to work the following day.

Sandra Stahl's observation about other-oriented personal experience stories is entirely applicable to these two tales. According to Stahl, narrator's of other-oriented stories "underplay their personal role in the story to emphasize the extraordinary
nature of things that happen in the tale.\textsuperscript{14} Although Art's narrative technique is more effusive than William's restrained style, both utilize basic formal structures to evoke a primary image of an unusual event in which they were only minimally involved.

By contrast to these other-oriented tales, the self-oriented personal experience stories cast the narrator as the primary actor in the incidents they describe. According to Sandra Stahl, self-oriented tales are based on the narrators' "own self images and emphasize their own actions as either humorous or exemplary."\textsuperscript{15} Of the stories that demonstrate the "exemplary" actions of the narrator, many have to do with enduring hardships on the farm. Several of these stories cast the narrator as the lone individual who is faced with opposing forces in the natural world, such as William Juhnke's story about the runaway horses [C:234-235], Erwin Goering's story about his feud with the buck [N:427-428], and Phil Goering's stories about the runaway mules and horses [G:286-288]. However, for a closer examination of a story on this general theme, I have chosen a story in which the narrator's actions are more humorous than exemplary: Ellen Schrag's story about her revenge upon the obnoxious tom turkey [I:291].

Ellen's abstract was less specific than Art's or William's. She stated simply, "I remember something distinctly." Thus, the listener is left in suspense about what the "something" means. However, by placing "I" in the initial position of the prefatory sentence, Ellen

\textsuperscript{14}Stahl, "Personal Experience Stories," p. 270.

\textsuperscript{15}Stahl, "Personal Experience Stories," p. 270.
already implied that she, and not some other, would be the central figure in this story. Ellen's orientation segment did little to introduce the time and place of the event. Instead she began by identifying the other "main character" in the story, the turkey gobbler. The narrator, no doubt, assumed the listener realized that the events took place at her childhood home.

In the complicating action segment, Ellen portrays her confrontation with the turkey by combining quoted internal monologue with a description of the action.

And I went out there and there he was. And I was disgusted with him. So I took a rock. I thought, "I'm just going to throw a rock." And I hit him right on the head. And that head and the long neck went—come down on that ground. [She laughs.] And then it got terrible hot for me [she fans her face with her hand] because I was afraid maybe he couldn't even lift that thing up any more. [I:291]

Here, the reported internal thought highlights the intensity of the main character's feelings. However, once she achieves her aim and hits the turkey, an interesting twist occurs. Rather than glorying in her triumph, she immediately regrets her actions and begins to worry about the welfare of the turkey. Thus, the central tension of the story shifts from her encounter with the turkey to her inner conflict about destroying one of the resources of the family farm. Ellen has developed a second plot line that leads the listener to contemplate the repercussions of her actions when they become known to other members of the family.

The resolution of Ellen's story addresses the tension between the individual and the family rather than the conflict between the individual and nature. After a sentence that summarized her
confession to her father, Ellen provided this resolution: "But by the time we got back that head was almost all the way up already." The recovery of the turkey dissipates the fear about wasted resources and signals the returning to balance of the family relationships.

Ellen's conclusion did not include an evaluative component. Rather than reflecting on the consequences of the action in some way, the coda statement seemed to dismiss the incident. She said, "Now if I would have to do it again, I'd probably miss it." The statement offers no appraisal of the significance of the event. Rather, the conclusion is as quirkish as the events in the story. What began as an odd twist of fate, ended in the same fashion, and though the intermediary experiences were troublesome, the results were virtually inconsequential.

In the context of the recorded interview, informants may shift into personal experience narration as the result of a variety of stimuli. The informant may tell a story in response to a general question, such as, "Do you have any special memories of childhood experiences?" Or the interviewer might ask for a specific story, for example, "Tell me about your experience with the runaway horses." Sometimes telling one story reminds an informant of another one. Occasionally, personal experience narration is embedded within a more general personal reminiscence.

Erwin Goering is one storyteller whose personal narrations are most frequently embedded in more general reminiscences. His story about the stillborn infant is a good example [N:434]. His recollection of his grandmother's storytelling led him to discuss her
influence on his uncle's family, with whom she lived [N:432]. Then he recalled her career as a midwife and confided that pregnancy and birth were never discussed in the home. This led him to a general reminiscence about how as a child, he knew that a new baby was about to be born in the home [N:433]. In the midst of his discussion about the usual events surrounding childbirth, he shifted into a personal narration about the unusual incident—the stillborn baby.

In this case, the abstract was preceded by a transitional sentence that related the general reminiscence to the specific story that was about to ensue. He said, "And that was usually the case," and then added, "The only unhappy time that time was when a stillborn came." In so doing, Erwin directed the listener's attention away from the general reminiscence and previewed the central theme of the story. The second sentence also functioned as an orientation to the specific time the event occurred.

In the extended orientation segment of his story, Erwin talked at length about the usual happenings on the day the baby was delivered such as going to get Grandma and calling in the doctor. This led him back to a general reminiscence mode as he talked about what would normally happen in case of bad weather and about how capable his grandmother was at delivering children without a doctor's help. Erwin's phrase, "But that time," then reoriented the listener to the specific incident he had begun to narrate earlier.

After this second orientation, Erwin moved directly to the central feature of the story. He used vivid visual description followed by commentary about his emotional response to the event.
The youngster, I remember they had put a dress on it, and lay it—didn't embalm it—laid it on a table in the parlour. And a veil over it or a see-through thing. And we went in there. We'd look at it. And it was strange. But no life in it. You didn't know whether to be—whether to be, uh, sorry or what because you had no attachments to it. [N:434]

Here, the central tension of the story comes from the main character's inner conflict, from his uncertainty about how to respond to the lifeless infant.

Erwin provided a semblance of closure with the added comments, "But the event was not a happy one. We knew that" [N:434]. These statements seem to function appropriately as the coda indicating a transition out of the story frame. In one sense, they do signal the end of the description of the wake. However, since narration about the burial directly follows this narrative shift, I view the two events as different "chapters" of the same story. Later on, a look at the overall resolution and coda will demonstrate how, from the narrator's perspective, the two events are interrelated.

Erwin moved into the second "chapter" of his story with the transitional phrase, "Then at burial time." In the complicating action of this second event, he described the casket and the digging of the grave. Then, Erwin carefully described the sound of the burial and brought about the emotional climax of the second segment of the story.

Then when you covered it up—the sound! The first sound of those clods hitting that box [he slaps his hand] that'd sound terrible. Like a terrible thing for this baby. Just think of how—. [N:434]

The eeriness of the first segment of the story is superseded by the horror of the second segment.
Of course, the resolution of the story is necessarily tragic. Again, a final evaluative comment signals the story’s coda. As Erwin reflected on his experience with the stillborn baby, he addressed the relationship between his first encounter with the dead child and the burial. He said, "That [the sound of the clods] was more dramatic, actually, than the fact of its coming and going" [N:434]. The coda ties together the entire experience, evaluates its emotional impact, and gives closure to this solemn narrative.

The final self-oriented personal experience story that I have chosen for analysis differs from the preceding two in that reported dialogue is the central feature of the story. Richard Schrag told a story about being served wine by his wife’s grandfather [F:270]. He was reminded of this story as a result of our discussion about his parents’ wedding [F:269], which was the first wedding in the community where wine was not served.

Richard prefaced the story with the following abstract: "I’ll tell you a little of a story. Now this may be offbeat, but since we’re talking about wine." Before Richard specifically introduced the time and place of the happening, he offered a bit of general orientation about the wine that his wife’s grandfather had stored in the basement. Then Richard said, "When we [he and his wife, Lizzie] were dating, in fact, we were engaged, we went over there to visit them once and he was a very hospitable person." This statement very specifically orients the listener to the time and the place of the event as well as to the main characters of the story.

Richard continued the story, providing important background
information about Grandfather's practice of serving wine "if he really wanted to show his appreciation." Richard also talked about his own distaste for wine and his problem with stomach ulcers and effectively set the scene for the central conflict.

Richard told the climax of the story by shifting first into quoted internal monologue and then into dialogue.

So I thought, "Here's where I'm—maybe I can wiggle out of it because of my stomach trouble." So I said, "Well, I don't want to on account of my stomach." He said, "The Apostle Paul"—he said it in German—"The Apostle Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake." And I was stuck. [P:270]

Here, the conflict is embellished by the narrator's revelation of his internal thoughts. He lets the audience in on his private motivations, which heightens the anticipation of the grandfather's response. As a result, the listener delights in the cleverness of the grandfather's response. Richard's greatest attempts to get out of the situation gracefully are no match for the verbal wit of the grandfather. Since the grandfather's ability to speak persuasively is central to Richard's recollection of the incident, direct quotation is the most legitimate technique for a narrative recreation of the experience.

The coda of Richard's story sums up the impact of the incident. Richard said, "I couldn't get out of that one." Again, the evaluation of the statement is implied. The listener understands that Richard was bound because of the grandfather's excellent verbal skill.

The structural similarities of these personal experience stories are obvious. Whether self-oriented or other-oriented, they make use
of such common narrative techniques as quoted dialogue, vivid
description, ironic twists and contradictions, and internal
monologue. Although they are starkly minimized at times, traditional
techniques of plot development such as exposition, rising action,
climax, resolution and conclusion are present in the stories as
well. Swiss Mennonite stories bear out what Walter Ong observes
about oral remembering. Ong states that although real life
experiences do not happen in the form of "climactic linear plots,"
people's lives do "provide material out of which such a plot may be
constructed."16

In order to identify community norms that influence the
structuring of personal experience into narrative form, one must
consider a variety of contextual factors. Access to social and
relational components of performance context is limited when one
works solely with written transcriptions of oral narratives. And
yet, an analysis of the formal components of these narrative texts
reveals several customary approaches to structure and genre in Swiss
Volhynian narrative discourse.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the inclination to tell
stories about events that one has either witnessed or participated in
has been nurtured by an enduring concern for truthfulness among Swiss
Mennonites. With the personal experience genre, Swiss Volhynians
can legitimately tell about their own experiences without appearing

16Walter J. Ong, "Oral Remembering and Narrative Structures," in
University Round Table on Language and Linguistics 1981 (Washington,
to "make things up." Speaking honestly is of primary importance for Swiss Mennonite storytellers, so they are more comfortable talking about themselves than attempting to characterize someone else's experience.

The preference for talking about oneself seems out of character for members of a community that prizes self-effacement. However, the thematic content in these stories frequently affirms the value of humility and individual submissiveness. Stahl's definition of the self-oriented tale seems out of character for Swiss Volhynian narratives, which may emphasize the narrator's actions as "humorous" but seldom as "exemplary." Ellen Schrag's story about the turkey and Erwin Goering's story about the stillborn infant represent a general trend for Schweitzers who tell self-oriented stories. The novelty or seriousness of a personal experience is usually what motivates a Swiss Mennonite narrator to tell someone else about it.

Although one might expect the descendants of an immigrant group to have a wide repertoire of oral histories relating to immigration themes, Swiss Mennonites relate only a handful of stories in this genre. Very few stories address the difficulty of adjusting to life in the United States. As I have already suggested, access to printed materials on Swiss Volhynian history may diminish the need to sustain a tradition of oral history. Yet, with the indelible impact that cultural transplantation has had on the Swiss Mennonites, the conspicuous lack of oral narratives on the subject seems somehow incongruous. Here again, an inquiry into the social and historical context surrounding their migration offers significant insights into
this apparent incongruity.

The Swiss Mennonites migrated to the prairies of central Kansas from Volhynia in Polish Russia, where they were established in a relatively self-sufficient farm community. In Volhynia, they maintained their German identity, remaining separate from Russian society and depending on each other for their social, religious, and educational welfare. Because they migrated as an entire church community, rather than as individual families or small groups, they were able to maintain this sense of congregational affinity. Since they were used to farming and were good at it, they were well-suited to their new agricultural environment. Of course, they struggled, experiencing frustration and disorientation as they adapted to a new place. Despite these adversities, they maintained the most fundamental component of their experience in the old country. If these immigrants had nothing else, they had Gemeinde.

Having established a mutually supportive community of insiders, Swiss Mennonites were naturally less concerned with their interactions with Americans and more intent on maintaining Gemeinde. Thus, a historical precedent was set for talking about community affairs, rather than about how to deal with the Americans. The narrative discourse of the Swiss Volhynians today reflects this historical precedent in the storytellers' preference for community tales and family reminiscences as opposed to oral histories. For Swiss Mennonites, affirming the "presentness" of Gemeinde, rather than remembering its "pastness," is a primary function of narrative discourse.
In terms of the structural elements of Swiss Mennonite oral narratives, the facility with which Labov’s story components can be isolated and identified in these personal narratives gives credence again to the general applicability Labov’s structural scheme. However, the Labovian model, which was developed from a study of "large numbers of unsophisticated speakers," is not designed to chart microstructural components that distinguish the narrative style of Swiss Mennonite storytelling.17

The microstructure of "Schweitzer Shorthand" is perhaps the most prevalent example of Swiss Mennonite narrative distinctiveness. Usually occurring in what Labov calls the "orientation" segment of the narrative, this narrative component, which I call "linking," functions to orient the listener to the time, place, and characters in the story in a special way; it links the listener with the characters in the story and with the narrative community. For example, Art Goering told about seeing a Swiss German play that explored the theme of agricultural progress. After the abstract ("I recall that the Swiss gave a play to that effect"), Art began linking.

A: I don’t know whether you heard [the play] or not.

J: No.

A: Phil Waltner was in on—. Of course, Phil died young, you know. Waldo Waltner’s oldest brother. And in the play . . . [K:355]

17 Labov and Waletsky, p. 12. I respect the value of Labov’s significant work. His structural scheme does what it is designed to do. His model cannot be expected to account for the microstructural components of Swiss Mennonite oral narratives, which represent a specific case in an isolated speech community.
In one sense, linking clauses set the scene for the story, but they do so in a special way. Linking attempts to connect the teller and listener by demonstrating shared knowledge of community relational structure. The narrator asserts a community relationship in his assumption that the listener either knows the characters in the story personally or knows someone from the characters' families. Thus, linking affirms peoplehood, by highlighting the inter-relationship of speaker and listener within the context of shared experience.

Linking is not genre bound. Any story that deals with community experience can be linked with the listener. Even non-narrative discourse makes use of linking. However, its frequent incorporation within oral narrative attests to the deeply indexical nature of much natural narration. Because it functions to connect the listener with the story characters, linking frequently coincides with the orientation segment in narrative discourse. However, linking can occur at any juncture in the narrative, since its function is independent of narrative structure.

The frequency with which linking occurs in Swiss Volhynian narrative discourse indicates the fundamental nature of this structural component in Swiss Mennonite narrative form. In many Schweitzer stories the linking and evaluation are equally significant. For Swiss Volhynian narrators, connecting the listener with the characters and relationships in the story is as vitally important as demonstrating the significance of the story. In fact, sometimes linking becomes the primary goal as it did in Art Goering's
Krike Hannes story [K:349]. Though others may view these structures as digressions, Swiss Mennonites deem them as central.

The fact that linking often delays or even replaces narrative activity in Swiss Mennonite oral discourse reveals the abundant appeal of this formal structure among Swiss Mennonites. It is one of the most apparent distinguishing components of Swiss Volhynian narrative texts. One can easily identify the similarities between the micro-structure of linking and the macro-structure of Swiss Mennonite socio-cultural experience. In fact, Swiss Mennonite community is founded on a system of linkages. Community members inter-connect in ways that establish a collective system of interaction, which is at the same time mutually understood and individually meaningful.

Indeed Swiss Volhynian oral narration reflects the inevitability of contextual overtones within story texts. The storyteller’s participation in community life is apparent in the preponderance of dialect, which promotes an in-group identity. The minimalist style of narration, which frequently utilizes Schweitzer shorthand and insiders’ code words, demonstrates a concern for the economy and integrity of speech. The predominance of local histories, community anecdotes, family reminiscences, and personal experience stories demonstrates an overriding interest in life within the fairly limited scope of community experience.

As it has in the development of genres, community experience also has shaped the linguistic structure of Swiss Mennonite oral narratives. In addition to reflecting a broad spectrum of community
concerns, structural elements function to locate story action within a mutually understood context of people and places. Thus, even an analysis that focuses specifically on "textual" considerations of Swiss Mennonite oral narrative reveals that narrative structures function both to recall and to evoke the fundamental assumptions of the Swiss Volhynian Gemeinde.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE PERFORMANCE PROCESS: EVERYDAY NARRATION IN ACTION

Although the preceding chapter focuses specifically on oral narrative "texts," the discussion of language and style within the chapter repeatedly alludes to elements outside the language structures themselves. References to the storyteller, the listener, and the community appear frequently in the analysis and indicate the necessity of examining the oral "text" within the immediate situation of the performance event. Richard Bauman submits that scholars of performance must attend to more than the limited domain of verbal structures. Indeed, the elements that comprise the communicative situation must be examined if we are to understand the constitutive and constituted contexts of storytelling performance.

Richard Bauman defines performance as follows:

Fundamentally, performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. . . . Performance is a mode of

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language use, a way of speaking.\textsuperscript{2}

Bauman's notion of "verbal art," which acknowledges the role of performer and audience in the communicative event, is widely supported by contemporary scholars of folklore performance. Robert Hemenway identifies a paradigm shift in the study of folklore. Hemenway states that modern folklorists "reject the notion that the folklore text constitutes a literary form." Rather, they base their definition of folklore "on communication models that emphasize the 'context' of oral tradition as much as the 'text' being communicated."\textsuperscript{3}

A perspective that views verbal art as act rather than artifact must examine language concurrently with the interaction of the participants in the performance situation. Therefore, in order to fully comprehend Swiss Mennonite storytelling, one must understand that any oral narrative exists because it was communicated in a "folkloric 'event' . . . and the event manifested a network of interrelationships between tale, teller, and audience that must be analyzed holistically."\textsuperscript{4} In this chapter, I hope to achieve a more holistic view of Swiss Mennonite oral narration by examining oral narratives in the broader context of performance, which includes the storyteller, his/her audience, the performance setting. An


\textsuperscript{4}Hemenway, p. 127.
examination of the fundamental elements of the storytelling process reveals that Swiss Volhynian narrative performance both sustains and is shaped by community norms and expectations.

The discussion in chapter two describes the Swiss Mennonite storyteller as essentially uninvolved in the performance of traditional narrative modes such as folk tales and legends. Thus, Swiss Volhynians seldom view oral narrative performance as the central feature of social activities. Rather, community members assume narrative roles informally, as narration spontaneously enters in to other more commonly acknowledged social activities. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett offers a helpful distinction between the conceptual understanding of and a practical reality of storytelling performance. Her research among East European Jewish immigrants suggests that storytelling may be "conceptually . . . subordinated to . . . other activities even though in practice narration is known to dominate encounters. . . ." This conceptual-practical distinction applies to Swiss Mennonite storytellers as well. In practice, Swiss Mennonites do tell stories, but they are generally reticent to acknowledge storytelling as a formal activity.

Of course, all personal narration is, on one level, a performance. Anyone who frames personal experience into a story alters his or her linguistic stance in order to sustain the narrative structure. In this sense, we all perform. We shift roles from

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conversational participants to story performers. At this level, story performance is not self-conscious; rather, it is "natural" narration. Story performers are virtually incognizant of the behavioral shift. They have little notion of assuming special responsibility to an audience for demonstrating storytelling competence.

Bauman's definition of performance suggests a second level of performance. At this level speakers consciously assume the role of storyteller. They accept special responsibility to an audience for storytelling competence. Story performance at this level is "intentional." The oral narrator intends to achieve a certain effect, highlight a specific action, and/or portray a particular attitude for the attending audience. Thus, an intentional performance is always a public performance to some extent.

Because of its public nature, intentional performance relies on more formalized means of invoking the performance frame. Erving Goffman asserts that "full-scale" story performance is signalled by "change of footing" that indicates the beginning of an extended telling.\(^6\) John Gumperz explains that such "contextualization cues," indicate "the contextual presuppositions" for the listener.\(^7\) Barbara Babcock supports Gumperz' view, asserting that narrators self-consciously employ metanarrational techniques that function as "framing devices" for performance.


By focusing our attention on the act or process of communicating, such devices lead us away from and then back to the message by supplying a "frame" ... within which the content of the story is to be judged.  

Speakers who set up their stories "to be judged" by listeners are explicitly aware of the public nature of their performances. 

Despite differences in the way they are initiated, natural and intentional performance resemble each other in many ways. They utilize similar formal structures and behavioral modes, which can obscure attempts to distinguish between the two levels of performance. Dell Hymes illustrates the difficulty of locating and assessing performances, observing that a person may report an event without actually performing a story. The idea that one can tell a story without performing it is further supported by Richard Bauman's suggestion that in some cultures the expectation for the performance of certain genres is very low. According to Bauman, performance is optional in the case of personal narratives in American society. Both Hymes and Bauman use the term "performance" in its intentional sense, suggesting that performance occurs only when a person "assumes responsibility for presentation." 

In order to ascertain the extent to which Swiss Mennonite oral narrators are intentional performers, one must determine what verbal  

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11 Hymes, p. 18.
and paralinguistic behaviors are recognized within the community as techniques for framing performance. According to Richard Bauman, devices that "key the performance frame" vary from community to community.12 These devices can range from special codes and formulae to an appeal to tradition. Bauman identifies Labov's evaluative component as one indicator of personal narrative performance.13 Admittedly, calling attention to the significance of a story asks the audience to regard the narrative in a special sense, and it may, in some cases, signal intentional performance. However, within the Swiss Volhynian community, the evaluative component serves a different purpose.

In the case of Swiss Mennonite everyday narration, the evaluative component consistently functions to identify the impact of narrated event on the storyteller's perspective. As was demonstrated in chapter three, the evaluative component is often combined with the coda in Swiss Mennonite narratives. For example, at the conclusion of Erwin Goering's story about the stillborn infant, he said, "That [burial] was more dramatic, actually, than the fact of [the baby's] coming and going" [N:434]. As in many Swiss Mennonite narratives, this evaluation was offered after the fact. Though it "keyed" the structural conclusion of the oral narrative, the evaluation did not function to invite attention to performance at the beginning of the story. Thus, it failed to initiate the necessary "frame" for intentional performance.

12Richard Bauman, Verbal Art as Performance, p. 16.
The common use of the stylistic features identified in the previous chapter indicates that Swiss Mennonites achieve at least a structural consistency within their oral narratives. One cannot argue, however, that this consistency indicates a mutually acknowledged system for keying intentional performance. Rather, these structural devices demonstrate the facility of these storytellers as natural narrators. For example, when I asked Ellen Kling if her father, Dan Waltner, entertained them with stories in the home she responded, "Well, yes. But then it was just growing up with him. It was not anything—I think we were so used to it that it never occurred to us that this was special" [J:342]. Despite her father's reputation as an able entertainer, Kling eschews the notion that he expected his behaviors to be regarded in any "special" sense. Only in rare instances are Schweitzers concerned with demonstrating their competence as oral performers. Any self-conscious attempts by Swiss Volhynians to attract an audience function to develop interest in the story rather than to draw attention to the performer. As a result, natural narrative performances are initiated with such lines as "Now here's a story . . ." [C:237] or "One story about this mill owner . . ." [C:235] or "The best one about Andy . . ." [I:323].

Though most Swiss Mennonite oral narrators perform almost exclusively at the level of natural performance, their performance at this level does not preclude the utilization of a variety of performance behaviors. Indeed, both intentional and natural performances reveal a continuum from sparse to richly textured performance behaviors. Swiss Mennonite oral narrators exhibit a high
level of performance competence despite their reticence to assume responsibility for demonstrating that competence to a critical audience.

Swiss Mennonites demonstrate their verbal competence in a variety of ways. The oral narrative texts analyzed in chapter three reflect the Schweitzer storyteller's ability to craft cohesive stories with sufficient action and character interest. Swiss Mennonites also frequently incorporate dialect to lend humor or special intensity to their oral narratives. Dell Hymes suggests that code-switching from one language to another is a "sign of 'breakthrough' into full performance." Although Hymes focuses on intentional narration, his continuum between "minimally and maximally realized" performances applies to natural narrative as well.

Swiss Mennonites reveal storytelling competence in their nonverbal behaviors as well. Storytellers use impersonation, mimicry, and hand gestures, though sparingly, to aid in the presentation of characters and action. Erma Goering shared a family reminiscence about a time when as a little girl she forgot what had made her cry. As she presented the featured lines of the story, "Was will ich? Was krein ich?" ['What do I want? Why am I crying?'], she mimicked a child's voice [H:295]. Erwin Goering impersonated the stuttering farm hand as he told the story about Andy Unruh's disgust at Uncle Jonas's cigar smoke [N:459]. When Ellen Schrag told about her father pretending to be asleep in order to fool her grandfather, she held her eyes partially closed, adopted a drowsy demeanor, and

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14Hymes, p. 24.
slowed the rate of her speech [I:315]. These are just a few examples of ways in which Schweitzer storytellers use nonverbal behaviors to evoke a character or scene.

One cannot identify a prototypical performance style for Swiss Mennonite natural narration. However, all oral narrators use at least one or two performance techniques. This range of behaviors supports Dell Hymes' notion of a performance continuum. According to Hymes, the maximum level of performance involvement is called "authentic or authoritative performance" and often occurs in only a small portion of the performance event which may be predominated by illustrative or reportive aspects of performance. The performance behaviors among Swiss Mennonite natural narrators range from the terse, guarded reports of informants like Jacob Goering and Ellen Waltner Kling to the effusive, entertaining presentations of people like Ellen Schrag, William Juhnke and Erwin Goering.

As Swiss Mennonite natural narration moves toward maximal performance, the distinction between intentional and natural narrative is less apparent. The narrative performances of Swiss Mennonite natural narrators demonstrate at least a practical familiarity with a moderate range of intentional performance techniques. Community members have come to expect a certain range of performance behaviors from specific individuals. They admire, for example, Phil Waltner's sense of humor or Bill Juhnke's flair for the dramatic, suggesting a public sphere for oral performance.

Although they acknowledge certain individuals for their

performance abilities, Swiss Mennonites consistently deny the existence of a performance tradition. Often when Schweitzers acknowledge a person's talent for oral performance, they suggest that competent performance is a natural ability as opposed to a practiced skill. For example, Emme Goering affirmed that "everyone appreciated when [Phil Waltner or A. C. Stucky] said something" [H:302-303]. However, when I asked her if she thought these storytellers intended for their behaviors to be entertaining, she dismissed the idea.

It just came natural for them, it seems to me. It just—I don't know whether they even tried to be funny. But they had a knack. [H:303]

Emme's comment reflects a general assumption among Swiss Mennonites that performers do not work at performance. Rather, their abilities reflect natural, God-given talents. Dan W. Goering summed up the issue characteristically when he said, "In our community, seemingly, we never had any Rich Littles yet" [H:303].

Despite their recognition of "good stories" and "good storytellers," Swiss Mennonites are reticent to identify "good storytelling" as an established community practice. Since storytelling emerges spontaneously out of the fabric of everyday experience, Swiss Mennonites tend to view storytellers in the community as "accidental performers"—those who "had a knack" [H:303] or had "a gift of gab" [J:342]. Indeed, as accidental performers, Swiss Mennonite oral narrators have little inclination to address specifically their performance behaviors. Oral narrators are seemingly more concerned with offering a credible story than with
mastering a credible performance. However, in terms of a demonstrated functional ability to perform, Swiss Volhynians are clearly capable performers.

Since natural narrators are not bound by the established rules of a performance tradition, they relate to their listening audience more spontaneously and informally. They are accountable to their audience for relational authenticity rather than for demonstrated performance ability. Thus, the performer-audience relationship becomes a vital issue in the discussion of the performance process. Oral narrations are created by tellers who perform them for a specific audience. Apart from the teller-listener relationship oral narrations do not exist. Social psychologists Kenneth and Mary Gergen argue that all narratives assume an audience. According to Gergen and Gergen, a narrator's sense of accountability to his or her audience shapes narrative construction significantly. Whether for communicative competence or relational maintenance, accountability to the other—to the audience—is fundamental to all performance of oral narration.

The informal nature of Swiss Volhynian natural narrative performance enables participants mutual access to the role of storyteller and that of story listener. Thus, the teller-audience relationship reflects the sense of Gemeinde among those who participate in storytelling occasions. With tellers and recipients

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on relatively equal footing, storytelling becomes a process of mutual construction, in which listeners directly influence outcomes of narrative performance. Livia Polanyi asserts that in conversational storytelling oral narrators are constrained to "recipient design" their stories. In other words, "What is said must be tailored to the specific people who are the story recipients."\(^{17}\) In Swiss Mennonite storytelling, tellers and listeners work together to establish an "insider-to-insider" relationship.

Because story listeners have a decided impact on the development of oral narration, an analysis of the teller-audience relationship must focus on the specific relationships that exist in the immediate performance environment. Here the distinction between conversational tellings in the interview situation and those in other social settings becomes important. One simply cannot ignore the role of the interviewer in shaping the outcomes of storytelling performance. Michael Moerman asserts that an interviewer's questions "require [the informant] to orient himself to [the interviewer's] relevancies and meanings, and so alter the world [the researcher] had set out to investigate."\(^{18}\)

Clearly, one cannot formulate conclusions about tellings in natural environments based on the interview setting alone. Rather, the specific influence of the interviewer on performance outcomes


must be addressed. Having observed oral narrative performance in other settings, I am sensitive to the ways in which the exigencies of the interview situation shape the verbal interaction between researcher and informant. By comparing the interview narratives to tellings I have observed in natural environments, I hope to demonstrate how these tellings represent and how they deviate from oral narration in other social situations.

On many levels of experience, the "relevancies and meanings" of the interviewer and the respondents in this study were mutually understood. As a native of the Moundridge community and a third generation descendant of Swiss Volhynian immigrants, I share with those whom I interviewed many assumptions about social life and religious experience in the community. As a researcher however, I had the added burden of "developing a significant study"—a burden which imposed a "research agenda" on the conversational interaction, often diminishing the sense of spontaneous talk. The difference in age between me and my informants also influenced our conversation during the interviews. As contemporaries of my parents and, in some cases, my grandparents, the informants frequently had to adjust their

19 Some autobiographical information may be appropriate here. For the first twenty-three of my thirty-three years I was continually involved in the Moundridge community. I was born in Moundridge and was raised on a farm just a few miles outside of town. As a child, I attended the historic first church of the Swiss Mennonites, the Hopefield church. When I was a freshman in high school, I was baptized and joined the Eden Church, the largest Mennonite church in the community. After high school graduation, I went to college at a Mennonite college located just fourteen miles from Moundridge. Thus, even as a college student, I kept in close contact with the community. The only extended period of time I spent away from the Moundridge community was during my four years of graduate school.
talk to accommodate a member of the "younger" generation.

One apparent difference between the listener in the interview setting and the listeners in natural environments is the size of the audience. Whereas butchering days, harvest luncheons, or family gatherings are occasions that ensure a collection of listeners to narrative performances, the interview setting limits the number or participants in conversational storytelling. I was the lone audience member in all of the interviews except for the interviews with Art Goering, Ellen Schrag, Erma Goering, William Juhnke, and Phil Goering, during which their spouses were present.

Despite age differences and the limitations of the interview setting, an informal, spontaneous quality of interaction frequently emerged in the interviews. The informants demonstrated that the Schweitzer community—like the Ulster community that Henry Glassie describes—has its "wise speakers . . . who can turn interviews into conversations, and present its significant texts."\(^{20}\) Although some informants initially expressed anxiety about the interview, generally they welcomed me into their homes and responded to me with warmth and openness.

A number of elements in the oral narrations that were told during the interviews indicate that the storytellers clearly had geared their stories toward the community insider audience. The most ostensible evidence of in-group communication is the frequent incorporation of the Swiss dialect. During the interviews, William Juhnke \([C:245-246]\), Erma Goering \([H:295]\), Dan W. Goering \([H:297]\),

Ellen Schrag [I:309-310,315,323,325], and Erwin Goering [N:436,457,458] all used the Swiss dialect at times without offering English translations. By using straight dialect they communicate an inclusiveness—an assumption that the listener is a part of the group because he understands the in-group dialect. Since the Schweitzer dialect is predominantly an oral language, it can be acquired only in the context of spoken communication with other Schweitzers. Thus, when Swiss Mennonites speak in dialect to someone, they are using one of the most significant means available to them for affirming community with their listener. Clearly, the dialect is intended for an insider audience.

The informants' occasional efforts to translate Schweitzer phrases into English indicate their legitimate doubt about the interviewer's ability to understand the dialect. Art Goering's precautionary question, "Can you follow the Schweitzer Deutsch?" [K:356] would be obviously superfluous to audience members from his own age group. Storytellers can naturally assume facility in the Swiss German dialect among their peers, but with an interviewer from a younger generation they respond appropriately to their listener's insecurity. After all, as third generation descendants of the Swiss Volhynian immigrants, members of my generation were the first to grow up speaking English in the home. Our parents were more likely to use dialect to exclude us from conversations than to include us. The little dialect we understand was learned much later as adults. More

21 One cannot learn Schweitzer dialect by studying a textbook. In fact, Swiss Mennonites exhibit considerable disagreement when asked how to spell dialect words.
recently, however, second generation Swiss Volhynian descendants have become concerned about the survival of the dialect in the face of waning usage. Thus, storytellers proffer translations not only to avert miscommunication with the listener, but also to encourage familiarity with the dialect in order to ensure its continued use.

The sporadic fashion in which dialect translations are offered in the interview setting indicates some ambivalence among storytellers about the status of the dialect in Swiss Mennonite culture. As I have suggested, third and fourth generation descendants have so assimilated to American culture that they speak American English almost exclusively. For some, their only knowledge of the dialect may be from comparing their parents' and grandparents' German to the standard German language they learned in school, rather than in the home. Storytellers from the second generation of Swiss Mennonites in Kansas are continually faced with the tension between immigrant status and assimilation. Naturally, this tension is more apparent in interactions between second generation descendants and third generation descendants than would be the case in situations that involved the older generation exclusively. Although in many cases the informants spoke in dialect during the interviews, they held in check their confidence that they would be completely understood.

In addition to the Schweitzer dialect, Swiss Mennonite storytellers often use code words and phrases that instantly recall experiences that they have in common with their audience. The use of insiders' codes during the interviews represents a typical pattern of
interaction that emerges in natural environments as well. Sometimes these code words are used as "Schweitzer Shorthand" to take a short cut in identifying what family someone is from or where someone lives. For example, Art Goering talks about the Krike Hannes [creek John] family [K:349]. Since there are several John Schrag's in the community, this particular one is identified by the fact that several creeks run through his property. In the same manner Erna Goering identifies which Pete Stucky she is referring to by calling him Pete Kruzel [curl], the curly-haired one [H:294].

Although many of these code words are in dialect, there are similar cases in English. For example, members of the Peter P. Kaufman family are known as the Pat's [N:442]. Although the reasons for the changing the name Pete to Pat are unclear, nevertheless, the nickname endures. Another instance of code words in English is Harold Schrag's reference to the phrase "freezer child." The saying is an "in-family" phrase that originated from an incident in Harold's childhood, when one of his cousins got in trouble with his Aunt Kate for playing with the ice cream freezer. Aunt Kate is supposed to have said, "Margie, quit playing with the ice cream freezer. You've always been such a poor child and don't know how to play." Now the phrase refers to anyone who is slightly awkward, odd, or out of place.

Code words and phrases like those mentioned above are intended solely for an in-group audience. They assume a commonality, a background of knowledge that is virtually impossible for an outsider.

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22 This version was told to me by my mother, who is Harold's sister.
to comprehend. The shared experiences of speaker and audience enable their mutual understanding and appreciation of the insider’s code, which affirms a sense of belonging—a sense of connection to community. Thus, the storyteller’s use of insiders’ code secures a place for the listener within the Gemeinde.

Whereas dialect and code words are obvious indications of the inclusive nature of the teller-audience relationship in Swiss Volhynian storytelling, the assumption of shared values is a more subtle way in which Swiss Mennonite oral narrators constitute a context of Gemeinde in relating to their listeners. Oral narrators assume that the impact of a story is self-evident when it relates to a value that teller and the listener share. Storytellers need not explain the value structures that support their narratives because they sense that their listener understands them implicitly. A closer look at some specific examples from the interviews will help to clarify some general patterns in the kinds of assumptions narrators make about their audience.

J. O. Schrag told a story about his Uncle Andrew that implies the intensity with which Swiss Volhynians regard their religious commitment. He described the difficulty his Uncle Andrew had trying to fit in when he returned home after having gone away to college [E:261]. J. O. highlighted one incident in particular—a time when Andrew’s mother had asked him to lead in the morning devotions and he refused. The story ends with J. O.’s comment, "You know what that could do to a family."

Schrag’s final statement is rich with value assumption. He
fully expected the listener to understand implications of Andrew's refusal. The line would likely have very little impact on an audience of community outsiders who are unfamiliar with the community norms. Community insiders, however, realize the sacrifices their ancestors made so that their descendants would have the freedom to practice religion as they pleased. Insiders know that commitment to the church and its mission is to be taken seriously. They would further understand the importance of maintaining family harmony by doing one's share and respecting parental authority. The absence of this vital background information in Schrag's story indicates the insider status of his listener, who understands without explanation the significance of Andrew's refusal.

The undercurrent of values such as nonviolence, industriousness, and the mutual supportiveness of family and community can also be traced through the interview narratives. In every case, the relationship of the narrator to the audience is an important determining factor in the extent to which these themes are developed. As the example above demonstrates, the interpretation of these stories is clearly dependent on extralinguistic factors. As Robin Lakoff observes, "the way in which individuals relate to one another . . . directly affects the use of language" in their encounter.23 Certainly, the teller-audience relationship is uppermost for consideration in the interpretation of Swiss Volhynian stories.

Though important, the relationship of the teller to his or her audience is just one of several extralinguistic factors that

influence the performance process. Lakoff states that "the type of social situation in which [the speaker and addressee] find themselves" influences the meaning of their interaction.\textsuperscript{24} Lakoff’s reference to social situation relates to what I have loosely termed the "performance setting." I conceive the performance setting to be comprised of the physical setting as well as the social-psychological context of the performance. As Richard Bauman suggests, performance is the product of several "contributing factors" which include the performer’s "view of the other participants in the situation, and his actual or potential relationship with them—what persons may constitute an audience for his performance. . . ."\textsuperscript{25} Bauman’s observation suggests that a performer negotiates the form and extent of his or her performance on the basis of the variables in the performance setting.

The notion that the performer caters to the expectations of the audience was addressed in the preceding discussion of the teller-audience relationship. However, an analysis of performance setting broadens the perspective on the teller-audience relationship by probing such issues as the effect of the physical environment on the interaction, the extent to which participants trust each other, the history of their relationship, the level of each participant’s involvement in community life, and the depth of their commitment to

\textsuperscript{24}Lakoff, p. 926.

the community ethic. Obviously, the composition of every performance setting is extremely complex; it shifts and changes continually as the participants negotiate their relationships to each other and to their environment.

Since performance setting is a complex and ever-changing entity, it can be a very complicated matter to analyze. Making general observations is difficult because each setting develops a character of its own based on the intricate interrelationships of the variables involved. As a result, I have decided to focus on four specific performance settings—three interview settings and a family reunion—in order to describe the developing composition of each setting and to show differences among them.

Because Erwin Goering is one of the most enthusiastic and animated storytellers that I have interviewed, my conversation with him affords a prime opportunity for analyzing performance setting. I first heard about Erwin from Victor Goering's wife, Elizabeth, who suggested that I arrange an interview with him. She commented on his engaging storytelling style and his tremendous ability to recall details.

Although I may have met Erwin prior to contacting him about an interview, I did not remember him. He made it very clear in our initial phone conversation that he knew me. When I identified myself, he responded with a warm, "Well, hello, John!" Then he responded to my question, "How are you?" with a standard Swiss response, "ziemlich gut" ["pretty good"], acknowledging our mutual heritage within the first few seconds of our conversation. Already a
bond was established that put me at ease about requesting an
interview. Unlike many of my informants, Erwin welcomed the
opportunity to visit with me. He said, jokingly, "I can’t think of a
better way to spend an hour than to visit with you." Already in
this initial conversation, we were developing a relationship that
would contribute to the level of trust between participants in the
performance setting.

The physical environment of the interview was the living room of
Erwin Goering’s home in North Newton. The Goering home is located
just a few blocks from my home, so we share a sense of home town
familiarity; we know some of the same people, travel the same
streets, patronize the same businesses. Although seemingly
insignificant, these shared experiences help create a sense of
belonging. Our mutual displacement from the community of our
childhood homes helps to establish a subtle bond between us.
Although it has been more than twenty years since his last position
at Bethel college, we are both living in North Newton because of our
connection with the college. Clearly, the physical environment of
the interview inspires a number of shared associations that influence
our perceptions of each other and our feelings about the interaction.

The living room was comfortably furnished. Erwin sat at a right
angle from me on the sofa. The tape recorder microphone was on the
end table next to him, leaning on the arm of the sofa so as to focus

26 By comparing Erwin’s willingness to Selma Stucky’s reticence
(she responded to my initial telephone contact with, "Why in the
world are you calling me?"), one can easily see how the climate of
the performance setting would differ in these two cases.
upward towards his voice. He generally seemed quite comfortable, although the location of the microphone distracted him at times because he was concerned that he might bump it with his arm. This may have limited his gestures on occasion, but most of the time he ignored the microphone and addressed me directly.

In my analysis of the teller-audience relationship I addressed some preliminary concerns about the effect of the tape-recorded interview on an interviewee's responsiveness. That analysis pertains directly to the discussion about performance setting as well. Using a recorder tends to impair the sense of "informal conversation." In the role of "informant," interviewees may feel compelled to give "information" rather than to participate freely in a conversation. The introduction of a mechanical device into the conversation seems to counteract the normal sense of spontaneous and free-flowing discussion, since interviewees feel accountable to what "goes in" to the machine. As a result, it behooves the interviewer to reduce the attention to the mechanical device, and establish a climate of interpersonal trust and intimacy.

I found the task of establishing a positive climate with Erwin to be a relatively simple one. His warmth and receptiveness during our initial telephone conversation eased my anxieties about arriving at his doorstep as a virtual stranger. He warmly welcomed me into his home and encouraged me to set up wherever I felt most comfortable. He was very relaxed with the use of the recorder and the interview began without the least sign of anxiety.

In virtually any context, when a researcher turns on a tape
recorder a shift—sometimes subtle, sometimes drastic—occurs in the conversational flow. I return to Erving Goffman's notion of a "change in footing" to help me discuss the way this shift influences the development of the performance setting. According to Goffman, any time a person abandons the "ordinary conversational give and take" and takes on a new role or function, he or she has changed footing. Clearly, the moment at which the tape-recorder is turned on a change of footing occurs in the conversation. The participants in the interaction shift from their roles as fairly equal partners in the conversation to roles as researcher and informant. In these roles, the researcher guides the direction of the interaction and the informant responds to his lead.

Very little change in tone, voice quality or body positioning accompanied Erwin's change into the informant role. I initiated my new role by opening my notebook and leaning forward. I began by asking about his family background. He responded in detail, explaining that his mother and father were both Goerings and identifying surviving members on each side of the family to help familiarize me with both Goering clans. After my question about his memories of grade school, Erwin initiated a change in footing. He began to take the initiative for guiding the conversation. He said, "I remember the school teachers. And an interesting experience I had, if I may throw that in." I encouraged him to share the experience, and he described a reunion he had just last year with his

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first grade teacher, Mrs. Horchheimer. Although the shift was subtle, Erwin had managed to redirect the conversation from childhood reminiscences to a recent experience from adulthood.

Though the change of footing was subtle, the implications of the shift were significant. First, by assuming the role of initiator, Erwin demonstrated his willingness to return to conversational give and take. He was showing his preference for moving spontaneously from one topic to another, rather than being directed by a predetermined list of questions. He also demonstrated a sensitivity to the shifting balance of responsibility as he moved out of his role as respondent. He asked permission to "throw in" a story that was unrelated, rather than moving ahead without encouragement from the interviewer. Thus, he managed to assume control of the direction of the conversation while affirming his respect for the traditional roles of researcher and informant.

This change of footing had further implications for the development of the performance setting. By taking charge, Erwin showed his willingness to be regarded with "special intensity." He assumed responsibility for the information that followed as if to say, "Listen to me now, and you'll find what I have to say is interesting." With Erwin's introductory phrase, "Just last year," the interview framework was recast into a narrative event, as the interviewee adopts the status of "narrator" and the interviewer the status of "story listener," to use Goffman's terms.\(^\text{28}\) By taking the initiative to redirect the interaction, Erwin demonstrated a

\(^{28}\text{Goffman, p. 151.} \)
readiness for performance, which I encouraged by willingly assuming the passive role. By negotiating our roles in the interaction, we developed a sense of openness and flexibility that diminished the limiting influence of the tape-recorder on our communication and provided for a breakthrough into performance. In this particular performance setting, the level of trust between participants offset the attention to or anxiety about the mechanical device.

Although the history of our relationship is limited, Erwin and I found common ground in the perspectives we bring to community life. The earlier discussion about physical environment showed the relevance of our mutual relocation in North Newton. As natives of the Moundridge community who subsequently moved away, we share a perspective of distance that both enables some objectivity and allows for nostalgia. Yet, Erwin's involvement in the community is much more grounded than my own. His memory of community events and his knowledge of family lineages is acute. He almost never relates an event without linking first, establishing some kind of connection with my relatives or acquaintances in the Moundridge community. Some of his ability to remember names and relationships may be simply an individual personality trait. He may have cultivated this personal attribute in his work at Bethel College in admissions and alumni relations, which required that he remain in touch with his home community in order to build good college relations.

Because of Erwin's depth of involvement in the Schweitzer community, he lends an air of authority to the performance setting. His insights into the Swiss community ethic and his ability to
communicate those insights with narrative functioned to transform the framework of the interview from a question-response pattern to a forum for spontaneous reflection and response. In so doing, he gained momentum and control throughout the interview, which allowed him numerous opportunities for the authentic performance of natural narration.

Erwin's initial introduction of the narrative frame consisted of only a minimal level of performance. He basically reported the events of his recent reunion with his first grade teacher [N:423-424]. He used no impersonation on the limited instances of quoted speech. In fact, he was careful to identify the origin of the phrase, "you were such a cute little fellow," with the follow up, "that's her words, not mine." Of course, Erwin's disavowing personal responsibility for the compliment demonstrated an appropriate attitude of modesty on his part. Further, since there was almost no distinction between Erwin's narrative voice and the quoted line, the follow up line was necessary for the listener to understand that the compliment was actually character speech rather than narration. Erwin's reportive style, however, gradually became richer and more animated throughout the course of our conversation.

The decreasing formality of the interview that facilitated Erwin's spontaneous performance did not result purely from his initiative. We both participated in the redefinition of the interview context. As Erwin became more comfortable in the role of "narrator," I affirmed him as the "story listener." I demonstrated the value of his performance by allowing myself "to be caught up in
I remained silently attentive, in order to encourage him in his storytelling. Often, Erwin moved from one story to another without a word of interruption or transition on my part.

In the latter part of the nearly one and a half hour interview, Erwin's level of natural performance reached its highest intensity. Erwin brought up the Low German farm hand, Andy Unruh, taking the lead in the conversation to introduce a subject about which he had several stories in his repertoire. He told five stories about Andy Unruh with a range of behaviors that signalled a breakthrough into full performance [N:457-460]. In three of the stories, Erwin quoted Andy in German. In one, he mimicked Andy's stuttering voice. All were performed with animated physical gestures that indicated character action. Erwin achieved a level of energy and richness, revealing a fullness of performance that was remarkable considering the limitations of the tape-recorded interview.

Because of the complexity of interpersonal experience, a myriad of personal idiosyncrasies and incidental factors that influence performance setting are simply too elusive for a researcher to isolate and analyze. Nevertheless, one can safely assume that the environmental, interpersonal, and social influences identified earlier account at least in part for the obvious distinctions between performance settings. These constitutive factors influence the emergent context of Gemeinde in the interview setting. In the interview with Erwin Goering, the comfortable room, warmth of the relationship, and mutual regard of Swiss Mennonite culture enabled

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Bauman, Verbal Art, p. 43.
Erwin to claim familiarity and to develop a sense connection with me.

As the constitutive contexts—the shaping factors—of the interaction change so does constituted context—the level of connection developed by tellers and listeners. In order to explore some of these changes, I will discuss a performance setting in which several of the apparent influencing variables were quite different from those in my interview with Erwin Goering.

Ellen Kling is a decidedly more reserved person than Erwin Goering. When I initially contacted Ellen by telephone, she was reticent to agree to an interview. She was concerned that she would have nothing of substance to offer, since she spent nearly forty years of her adult life completely removed from the Moundridge community. After I suggested that I was interested in how her experiences elsewhere influenced her perspective on the community, she seemed more at ease and agreed to meet with me.

The physical environment of the interview was Ellen’s residence in Moundridge. Although I am familiar with many of the houses in Moundridge, I had never noticed this house before. So the house was "new territory" for me in Moundridge. She identified the house as her mother’s home, which indicated a sense of displacement, of not really feeling "at home." The reticence Ellen felt in inviting me and the anxiety I felt about having persisted seemed to be fostered in this environment in which we were both "guests."

Ellen and I sat across from each other at the dining room table,

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30Ellen’s mother, who requires full nursing care, lives in the Memorial Home, a retirement home in Moundridge.
with the tape-recorder between us. The physical barrier of the table was reinforced by the presence of the recorder, which was constantly in our sight, reminding us that the purpose of our interaction was formal research. This arrangement tended to inhibit spontaneous conversation, reinforcing the expected roles of researcher and respondent.

To suggest that the physical environment dictated the pattern of communication for the ensuing interview would be naive. Rather, the arrangement was indicative of the overall structure of our interpersonal encounter. After the tape recorder was turned on, we seldom broke out of the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Ellen responded to my queries graciously, but briefly. She seldom elaborated unless directly requested to do so. Unlike Erwin, Ellen never initiated a new direction in the conversation. The interview was structured and orderly with few opportunities for spontaneous interaction.

Because our interaction during the interview so consistently followed the question-response pattern, Ellen and I never established a level of familiarity that allowed for a deepened sense of trust between us. In spite of our respect for each other and mutual interest in the sociology and history of the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge, we never achieved the level of flexibility needed for a breakthrough into full performance. The performance setting was limited by our unwavering reliance on the interview format.

Although this was my first face-to-face encounter with Ellen Kling, I hesitate to say that the limited history of our relationship
stood in the way of spontaneous interaction. Rather, our level of involvement in community life seems at issue here. Ellen's feelings of attachment to the Moundridge community are minimal, at best. She admitted that she was uncomfortable coming back to the community in 1983.

I think the Moundridge community people are, um, a very—this is a very close-knit community. Everyone knows what everyone else is doing. And, uh, someone who has not lived here, like I haven't, is an outsider. And no matter what you do, you are always going to be an outsider. [J:335]

Her sense of detachment from the community has colored her perceptions of the community ethic. To Ellen, "close-knit" becomes a pejorative term, meaning exclusive and narrow. She has little affinity for the everyday experiences of the people in Moundridge and cannot be expected to engage in free-style conversation about community activities and events. Her limited involvement in the community affords her a minimal repertoire of community anecdotes, and her feelings of estrangement preclude any inclination to perform them.

In cases like the interview with Ellen, one needs to be careful not to attribute the absence of a certain style of natural performance to deficiencies in the performer or the performance setting. Clearly, every person has his or her own personal performance norms that determine the level of vocal and physical animation as well as the kinds of stories an individual tells. If I focus on performance too narrowly either in terms of style or genre, I run the risk of ignoring perfectly valid instances of natural performance that fall outside the range of my focus. In some
instances, the performance setting may not provide for a certain style of performance because of the individual performance norms of the participants or the environmental, interpersonal, and social factors involved.

Because of Ellen's physical and emotional detachment from the Moundridge community, she has a limited repertoire of community anecdotes. If she had been asked about her life in Buffalo or Denver, she would very likely have had a wealth of personal experience stories to share. In this situation, the researcher's pre-established agenda limited the informant's opportunities to volunteer information spontaneously. Questions that assumed a social connection and depth of involvement in community life simply were not geared towards Ellen's experience. Virtually the only link Ellen has with the Moundridge community is her attachment to family. Thus, her personal narratives were limited almost exclusively to her family. She reminisced about her parents and grandparents and talked about experiences with her only brother, Donald. Her style was quiet and controlled, with a level of conviction that betokened a personal integrity in her speech. Other than an occasional wave of her eyeglasses, she used very few gestures. The performance setting, though it offered little opportunity for spontaneous storytelling, did allow for some reportive and illustrative personal narration.

The discussion of performance setting thus far has examined the influence of relational factors in the interview context. A key factor in determining the level of trust between participants is often tied to the history of their relationship. Because of my
limited history with Erwin Goering and Ellen Kling, the issue of trust was new in both relationships. Since we had very few preconceptions of each other, we had a short span of time in which to build trust. By contrast, the performance settings in my interviews with extended family members such as aunts and uncles were influenced by an extensive relational history that has enabled us to learn to trust each other over time.

Trust develops among extended family members as our experiences together enable us to know what to expect from each other. We understand each other's personal quirks and are familiar with some of the same family code words and phrases. We have a history of helping each other out, of sharing each other's burdens and blessings. We understand the family behavioral code and know how critical we can be of each other when that code is violated. Because of our history together, family members generally do not need to second guess each other about the ground rules for communication.

William Juhnke, my father's oldest brother, has a reputation as the Juhnke family historian. I knew that I could expect a favorable response from him, when I asked for help in my research. William has done some interview research of his own; so he is familiar with the process. When I contacted him about helping me, he invited me to come over immediately. No doubt, his enthusiasm was sparked by the fact that I am his nephew, someone of his own flesh and blood who can carry on the family history.

The context of my interview with William was influenced by a decided quality of warmth and "homesyness." This was not strictly
business as usual. I was expected to stay for more time than the
duration of the interview; I had been invited to stay for lunch. So
even as we sat down in William’s study and set up the recorder for
the interview, the style of interaction was affected by the overall
communication event, which was perceived predominantly as a social
event. The interview had little of the reticence and formality of a
first encounter. Thus, the potential for the spontaneous performance
of oral narration was high.

The effect of the physical environment on our interaction was
less significant than the social context. Since I am their nephew
and was visiting them in their home, the ambience of the home
environment highlighted the social aspects of the interaction. For
the interview we moved into William’s study, which gave the
interaction a slightly more formal feel. At the same time, his study
is William’s private space for research and reflection. In light of
the sense of comfort he must feel and the kind of activity that
generally happens in the room, perhaps the study is the most
accommodating space for a discussion about family life and community
history.

I began the interview with a question about the stories that my
Grandfather Juhnke may have shared with Uncle Bill. Thus, the very
opening of the interview frame began with an affirmation of our
family connection. William recalled very few specific stories.
Instead, he explained the Juhnke family history at length as if to
reaffirm our common family heritage. Having begun with family
themes, we established a performance setting that fostered the
telling of family reminiscences. The setting also provided for the "metamorphosis" of personal experience stories, which can become family reminiscences as they are told in this context of family sharing. In other words, although certain stories may have originated with William, the extended family may begin to express a collective ownership when they have passed on to other members of the family outside of the context of this interview.

In spite of the overall context of family sharing surrounding the interview, it took some time before William and I stepped out of the formal roles of researcher and respondent. William's background as a researcher of family history may have prompted him to limit his responses to the information requested in the questions. His experience in research has likely been more focused on product than process. Spontaneity and informality prevailed as we repeatedly discussed family members and common family experiences. Several times I made requests for specific stories that other members of the family had identified as a part of William's repertoire. I mentioned that his son, Jim, had suggested that I ask him for a specific story [C:236]. Twice I mentioned that William's brother, Walt, had alerted me to stories [C:242,243]. Within the ambience of informal family sharing, William became more comfortable with introducing new subjects into the conversation.

The specific request, in the context of a family conversation, is a standard technique for invoking the performance of a personal experience story. It is a way of assuring the oral narrator that the

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31Hymes, p. 20.
story requested has proven its value to other audiences and is worthy of retelling. Thus, when I followed up my request for William’s story about the runaway horses with the comment, "Walt said to ask you about the runaway horses," the request became a form of compliment. If William’s brother had not thought the story a "good" one, the request would not have been made. The acknowledgement of the value of a past telling was a way to prime the narrator for a repeat performance and to enhance the potential for breakthrough into natural narrative performance.

William’s story of the runaway horses was the most authentic natural performance during the course of the interview [C:243-246]. With no further coaxing from me, William spoke for a solid three to four minutes, narrating the various twists and turns of his lengthy journey with the horses with a commanding energy and animation. William combined dialect, internal monologue, and vivid description to evoke a scene and to transform the interaction completely. As storyteller, William took complete charge of the interaction. As story listener, I withheld comments and follow-up questions and became a willing audience to William’s performance.

With his rich performance of the runaway horses story, William demonstrated once again the potential for the full performance of natural narration within the setting of the tape recorded interview. In William’s case, several variables helped open up the possibility for performance during the interview. The informant’s family relationship with the interviewer, the overall ambience of the social visit, and the specific request for storytelling performance combined
to provide an amenable setting for performance.

The tape recorded interview has been the central focus thus far in the discussion of performance setting. Obviously, I am obliged to address the interview context because of my thorough use of the tape recorder in the collection of data. Yet, numerous other contexts facilitate storytelling much more readily than the tape recorded interview. According to Richard Bauman, an important "organizing principle in the ethnography of performance is the event (or scene) within which performance occurs." Bauman defines "event" as "a culturally defined bounded segment of the flow of behavior and experience constituting a meaningful context for action." Bauman's concept of event relates directly to the issue of performance setting. Because the tape recorded interview is in many ways an artificial means for defining the flow of behavior, a further examination of performance events in natural settings is pertinent to this discussion.

As the foregoing analysis suggests, the types of oral narration that occur in certain events depend on a composite of environmental, relational, and social factors. Some events may foster certain types of narrative activity and discourage others. Of course, social interaction is a fundamental requisite for narrative performance. However, the style of performance (minimally or maximally realized) and type of narration (natural or intentional) often depends on the nature of social interaction in the performance event.

Informants identified a variety of storytelling contexts,

32Bauman, Verbal Art, p. 27.
lending support to the idea that oral narration can happen just about any time at just about any place. Delbert Goering observes that stories emerge in a happenstance fashion in the community [B:227]. Swiss Volhynians generally acknowledge that though storytelling is seldom required in social events, it arises most frequently in situations in which visitation is a key function. William Juhnke observes that farmers tell stories while taking a break at the co-op filling station or grain elevator [C:250]. Richard Schrag asserts that sometimes stories emerge "at random" or perhaps during "butchering days" or other times when extended family members get together [F:276]. According to Enna Goering, family gatherings are prime events for storytelling [H:293]. Selma Stucky remembers that in her youth stories were told during wintertime at parties when the young people were closer together in the house or while she was helping her grandmother with chores [L:384]. Erwin Goering also remembers his grandmother telling stories when she came over to baby-sit [N:429]. And the list could go on. Any occasion for social interaction can provide an opportunity for storytelling.

A closer look at the different events mentioned above reveals that some settings naturally provide for the telling of certain kinds of narratives. Although one cannot posit a one-to-one relationship between the type of event and the type of stories told, attention to the kind of interaction that occurs in each context prompts some general observations. Family gatherings such as butchering or thrashing days or family reunions are prime events for participants to share family reminiscences. When farmers gather at the co-op or
young people attend parties, the broader community participates and community anecdotes are a natural outcome. Talking and working with grandmother provides an opportunity for the telling of local history as well as family reminiscences.

Of course, no genre is limited to a certain type of event. Yet, storytelling context has significant influence on the content and stylistic structures of Swiss Volhynian oral narration. As Dell Hymes suggests, structure cannot be seen as "equivalent to conscious rule or as necessarily unconscious" but as "sometimes emergent in action." As demonstrated by the examples above, one would be obviously misguided to assume that genre differences are the function of an external set of predetermined structures. Rather, genre differences grow out of the varied performance settings in which stories are told.

With personal experience stories the contextual norms are less clearly identifiable. Although informal conversation generally provides an opportune setting for the telling of personal experience stories, they can be appropriately told in the context of virtually any event. Of course, the level of expediency for telling a personal experience story depends on the relationship of the participants and the prevailing social norms of the setting in which it is told.

In order to examine the telling of personal experience stories in diverse contexts, a researcher needs to observe various events in which such stories are told. Since it approximates interpersonal conversation to some extent, the tape recorded interview provides

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33Hymes, p. 71.
adequate opportunity for the analysis of personal experience storytelling in the context of conversational interaction. Regrettably, the use of the tape recorded interview as the primary source of observation limits the examination of personal experience stories in the context of other events.

In light of the limitations of the tape recorded interview, a researcher's observation techniques need to be broadened in order to examine events that cannot be so readily documented in the form of interview transcripts. Here the advantages of being a researcher from within the community become evident. Because I have continued to be involved in the Moundridge community especially in the area of family activities, I am able to observe Swiss Volhynian storytelling in a variety of settings outside the research interview. Although I do not have the benefit of written transcriptions to reinforce the accuracy of my recollections, I at least have the advantage of repeated experience in a variety of contexts. For the purpose of this analysis, however, I will focus on Ellen Schrag's telling of a personal experience story at a family reunion that I attended recently. The opportunity for the analysis of this particular telling is enhanced by the fact that Ellen subsequently narrated the same experience during our tape recorded interview.

On December 26, 1988, nearly a hundred descendants and in-laws of Daniel D. Schrag and Anna Zerger Schrag family met for their annual Christmas reunion at the Moundridge Middle School.\textsuperscript{34} The

\textsuperscript{34}Dan and Anna, who had ten children, were my grandparents on my mother's side. The past few years have seen the birth of the fifth generation of the Schrag family.
reunion organizers, the Richard Schrag family, had requested that every family come prepared to share a reminiscence during a brief program after the carry-in dinner. Thus, storytelling was to be formal part of the program. The sharing time was minimally structured; a representative from the oldest child’s family began and each family shared in turn down to the family of the youngest child. Interspersed with the stories were spontaneous responses of others that sometimes playfully challenged the storytellers or added their own observations to a reminiscence. All the stories were personal experience narrations that ranged in content from humorous to sad. Nearly all of the stories were remembrances of incidents involving the Dan Schrag children or grandchildren.

Harold Schrag is the eighth child of Dan and Anna Schrag. When he was asked if he had a reminiscence to share, he declined. Others were invited to share stories involving Harold’s family and several people responded. Then Ellen, Harold’s wife told a personal experience story about “Stoning the Turkey Gobbler” [1:308]. She gained the attention of the audience with a comment like, "I have something to tell," and she got to her feet. By standing in her place, as others before her had, she was positioning herself as a story narrator. The extraneous chatter subsided and she began with her story.

The general plot line was similar to that of the subsequent telling during our tape-recorded interview with a few subtle differences in word choice. She used her arm to demonstrate the action of throwing the rock and that of the turkey’s head falling
over. Her voice was loud enough to compensate for the large audience. When she told about the turkey's recovery, there were some appreciative titters throughout the audience. After the final line of the story, she sat down.

Since I did not record the earlier telling, making a comparison of the specifics of language usage of two tellings is difficult. However, the performance setting for the telling in each event presented some obvious differences. Unlike the interview, the reunion was a decidedly structured, public event. The participants had been primed to expect that one of the outcomes of the event would be storytelling, in a formal sense. Since the stories were requested prior to the event, the storytellers had opportunity to prepare themselves for performance. Indeed, the family reunion, with its preconceived structure, public ambience, and formal attention to storytelling, encouraged narrative performance at the intentional level. Although the reunion did not preclude natural narrative performance, the formal organization of the event seemed less accommodating for spontaneous, unself-conscious performance. An examination of the various components of performance setting reveals significant differences in the composition of each setting.

At the reunion, the physical environment imposed more structure on the interaction. The middle school cafeteria is a large room with tables set in rows, which obliged the storytellers to stand so they could be seen and heard by everyone seated at the tables. As a result, the performance frame was invoked by each storyteller standing in turn to share a story and sitting when the performance
was completed. Although some spontaneous sharing occurred, the "authentic" intentional performers in this environment were those who stood for their performances.

In the interview setting, the physical environment allowed for informality. The living room is a common setting for casual conversation. Ellen was seated in a lounging chair and I on the sofa at a right angle to her. With no barriers to seeing and hearing the story, little physical action was necessary for the keying of performance. Rather than standing to "take the stage" as she did when she performed at the reunion, Ellen initiated the performance frame with a prefatory statement, "But one time—I remember something distinctly" [I:308]. The downward inflection at the end of the statement and pause that followed communicated to the listener that a story would follow. Her performance style was adapted to the informal setting as well. With only a single audience member in the familiar setting of her living room, Ellen required very little physical effort to secure attention.

The extent to which participants trust each other is more difficult to determine in an analysis of the family reunion setting. Within the collected body there was a pervasive sense of good will and a spirit of openness, although one certainly would be less likely to assume a blanket acceptance in such a large group. Because reminiscing was an established pattern in this setting and because her listeners were people with similar rural experiences, Ellen could safely assume a sufficient level of trust in light of the lighthearted nature of her story.
The level of trust in the interview setting is decidedly easier to determine, since one needs only to account for two participants. In the case of my interview with Ellen, the level of trust was high. Since Harold is third and my mother is second youngest in the Schrag family, our families have always been close. As nephew and aunt, Ellen and I have a sufficient history of positive experiences to assume an attitude of caring and openness between us.

As is true in most cases of family interaction, for Ellen and me the level of trust in our relationship is tied to our relational history. In the context of the family reunion, the same principle applies. Based on a history of acceptance and security within a family, family members feel free to open themselves to each other. In both settings, the potential for performance is enhanced by a prevailing aura of acceptance.

The extent of community involvement and level of commitment to the community ethic is similar in both performance events. After all, the mutual involvement of participants in the same community facilitated the interaction in both settings. At the same time, the shared value of respect for family relationships drew the participants in each event together. The Schrag Christmas reunion continues as a yearly tradition because so many of the Schrag descendants are still located in or near the Moundridge community and have a mutual desire to participate. In the same manner, Ellen is an accessible informant because she and I live in the same area and have family connections.

A more important issue in the distinction between the two
performance settings is the way in which Gemeinde is negotiated differently in each event based on varying perceptions of community norms and expectations. Since Swiss Volhynians seldom articulate the community code specifically, their understandings of acceptable patterns of behavior emerge as a result of perceived positive and negative nonverbal responses during performance and occasional evaluative verbal comments subsequent to performance. The two tellings of Ellen Schrag's "Turkey Gobbler" story demonstrate that immediate performance contexts are constituted differently based on the emergent perceptions of community expectations.

Before the analysis of these two specific cases, some general observations are in order regarding community norms and expectations for oral narration among the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge. In spite of the specific expectations of various settings, all Swiss Mennonite storytelling is influenced to some extent by a more general set of community norms. These norms fall into two basic categories: those that encourage traditional performance behaviors and those that engender traditional narrative themes.

A list of behavioral expectations for both natural and intentional Swiss Volhynian narrators would likely include the following items: 1) speak the truth, 2) abstain from gossip, 3) draw attention to the story, not to yourself, 4) honor those who uphold community norms, 4) criticize only those who violate community norms, 5) do not build yourself up in your story, and 6) honor your ancestors. Just as these behavioral considerations are grounded in traditional attitudes and values so are thematic considerations.
Sandra Stahl suggests that "any 'complete' personal narrative will have as its core a traditional attitude." She suggests further that identifying attitudes in oral performance is like identifying themes in literature. A list of themes for Swiss Volhynian personal narratives would be likely to include those that explore one or more of the following traditional values: 1) religious commitment, 2) frugality, 3) commitment to hard work, 4) the mutual supportiveness of family, 5) nonviolence, 6) humility, 7) personal responsibility. Clearly, behavioral and thematic considerations are inter-related. The distinction between them is important, however, since oral narrators may adhere to one set of expectations while violating another.

As I have suggested in the discussion of genre, the community expectations for Swiss Mennonite storytellers vary depending on the performance setting. Emergent performance contexts also influence the expected level of adherence to both behavioral and thematic expectations. These varying expectations become clear when one compares the two tellings of Ellen Schrag's "Turkey Gobbler" story. In the interview setting, Ellen sufficiently adhered to both sets of expectations. Thematically, her story supported the values of frugality and personal responsibility. In terms of behavioral expectations, her narration was truthful, to my knowledge. She talked about a personal experience in which she was the single actor, so the potential for gossip was limited. Her voice and gestures

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helped to evoke the scene without seeming obtrusive in the context of a "living room discussion." Since I specifically requested stories from her personal experience—probing incidents related to school, home, church, and job—I could not fault her for talking about herself so much. She was free to discuss anything within a broad range of experiences. Thus, the expectations in terms of story theme and content were in some respects less restrictive than those in the reunion, which narrowed the performance range to stories dealing with Schrag family reminiscences.

At the Schrag reunion, uncles, aunts, and cousins told stories in turn about their experiences with Grandpa and Grandma Schrag, or with Schrag cousins, and as they did so a behavioral norm began to establish itself. Storytellers were to tell stories with themes that directly related to Schrag family experiences. Oral narrators who told personal experience stories that related specifically to a member of the Schrag family were behaving according to the expectations for the event. Ellen, however, told a personal experience in which she was the sole participant and which was essentially unrelated to the Schrag family experience. In so doing, she redirected the attention from the family experiences to herself. As a result, she suffered the subsequent private chastisement of Schrag family insiders, who thought the story "odd," "out of place," "unnecessary," or "uncalled for." Although her story may have been appropriate in terms of its implied traditional values of frugality and personal responsibility, in the emergent context of the Schrag family reunion it violated the traditional behavioral norm of self-
Clearly, the storyteller's level of vulnerability increases when the telling of a personal experience story moves from an interpersonal setting that fosters natural performance to a public setting that promotes intentional performance. The negative reaction to Ellen's story at the Schrag reunion attests to the difficulty of gauging the level of acceptance of performance intended for a public context. The irony of the negative evaluation of Ellen's story is that the judgement was based on a single thematic element. The personal experience genre was a natural outgrowth of the group sharing at the reunion, but it was deemed appropriate only if it dealt specifically with in-family themes.

The complexity of the performance setting intensifies as storytellers perform intentionally in events with larger audiences. As performer and audience negotiate the immediate context of the public performance, general assumptions about Gemeinde must be appraised in light of the specific expectations for public performance—expectations that sometimes defy easy categorization. As Ellen's experience at the Schrag reunion demonstrates, even a deepened sense of community involvement and strong sense of identification with community ethic cannot guarantee a sensitivity to the expectations of certain subgroups in the community. In other words, the constitutive contexts for performance such as religious background and ethnic identity may shape the performance process in important ways, but they never fully determine the immediate performance context. Rather, the constituted context is negotiated
according to the expectations of tellers and listeners in the immediate situation. Whereas the in-group orientation of the Swiss community fosters criticism of outsiders generally, the specific "in-family" setting of the Schrag reunion engendered criticisms, though covert, that grew out of the immediate performance context. As an in-law, Ellen was perceived as having a minimal claim to the Dan Schrag family legacy, and so her performance was deemed inappropriate in the context of the Schrag family reunion.

Although the personal experience story can be told in a variety of settings, natural narration in the context of interpersonal sharing provides a more consistent set of norms for its performance. As Sandra Stahl states, "nothing creates intimacy so well as some confession or exposure of the self: the storyteller offers a welcome gift to a cold world, a moment by the fire of self."³⁶ In this setting, the performer and audience can negotiate their relationship freely as they dip in and out of the easy flow of everyday conversation.

As teller and listener explore their relationship through personal experience narration, the oral narrator comes to terms with her position within the larger cultural context. The performance process enables the oral narrator to posit for his audience a narrative self that expresses values and probes connections that can be validated or revised by the listener. In this sense, narratives become "communal projects . . . not the possession of single

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individuals, but . . . byproducts of social interchange."

This social interchange is governed by the shared norms and expectations of the community in which the speaker and listener participate.

For the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in Moundridge, oral narration is a way to test and to reaffirm an individual's identification with community. The storytelling process constitutes a context for the negotiation of Gemeinde among participants in narrative interactions. As community members acknowledge the use of insiders' code, affirm narrative behaviors, and accept the thematic and structural development of narrative texts, they create a sense of belonging—of connection—among tellers and listeners. The extent to which storytellers maintain community acceptance depends on their degree of adaptation to a set of mutually accepted behavioral and thematic expectations. The enduring ethos of humility, service, and self-denial in the Swiss Volhynian community shapes significantly the storytellers' oral performance.

Within this generally self-effacing culture, the development of a tradition of public performance has been somewhat limited. As we have seen, the largest proportion of Swiss Mennonite oral narration occurs at the level of natural narration. At this level of performance, Swiss Mennonite storytellers conceptually subordinate their role as performer. They disavow a sense of spot-lighted performance, that is, performance in which the storyteller intends to demonstrate competence to a discriminating public.

Despite their preference for the natural narrative mode, Swiss

Mennonite oral narrators demonstrate a wide range of performance behaviors, displaying at times a high level of performance competence. Although they seldom consciously assume the responsibility for entertaining, moving, or inspiring a public audience, their performance behaviors often entertain, move and inspire despite the storytellers' intentions. Audience satisfaction may be the outcome of performance, although it is seldom the intended aim. Within the natural narrative mode, Swiss Mennonites have the opportunity to demonstrate a high level of performance competence without having to accept the responsibility for public praise or criticism. In their reticence to identify individual members of the community as public performers and their tendency to guarantee equal access to performance for all members of the community, Swiss Mennonites evoke a sense of Gemeinde, which assumes that individual talents are natural gifts. Swiss Volhynian narrative performances affirm that God-given talents ought not to be used to promote oneself, but rather to foster one's relationship to the community.
Attention to the performance process reveals the highly indexical nature of personal experience narration among the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge. The interplay between the oral narrator and the insider audience produces narratives that assume a shared knowledge of people, events, attitudes, and values endemic to the experience of the Swiss Volhynian community. Insight into the influence of performance setting and community values reveals the vital connection between narrative "text" and "context." With the knowledge of how completely the emergent contexts of Swiss Mennonite oral narratives are shaped by the communicative interaction between members of the same community, one can scarcely conceive of these same stories being told outside the community context.

The method of oral transmission secures to some extent the continued life of storytelling within the context of community social interaction. Yet, any time a study records, transcribes, and publishes the verbal facets of oral performances, it opens the possibility for extracting the verbal texts from their natural
environment and introducing them into a new performance setting. Indeed, the recent interest in the performance of oral ethnic materials in the performance studies discipline demonstrates our fascination with nontraditional text materials. It is a worthy fascination, in that an understanding of oral transmission yields tremendous insight to the performance process in general. If we view personal experience storytelling as a fundamental level of performance upon which oral performances of any kind are based, then attention to the multiple variables that contribute to performance at this primary level should enlighten our understanding of performances at any level. From natural narration in its native context to theatrical performance on the Broadway stage, all performance draws us unto new worlds of experience that enrich our lives and sharpen our understandings of our individual world views.

In this chapter, I will examine the relationship between the performance variables in everyday narration and "re-performances" of oral narrative and literary texts. Using Swiss Mennonite oral narrations as test cases, I will discuss the performance of folkloric texts by individuals inside and outside of the community context. Then, I will explore the relationship between community aesthetic, which governs the performance of personal narration, and aesthetics and performance technique in the oral interpretation classroom.

If folkloric performance is a communicative process that is "true to its own nature when it takes place within the group
itself,"¹ then a community outsider who removes the verbal record from the group and performs it in another context utterly transforms the communicative process. How can a person hope to achieve "authentic" performance with a completely different set of performance variables? Suddenly, the speaker has no sense of the history that contributed to the events he or she describes; the audience is unfamiliar with the people and events in the story; and the value assumptions are altered. The ability to sense the experience of the other who initially spoke these words and to communicate it to an outside audience is impeded significantly.

Students of performance, however, are always in the process of "appropriating" unfamiliar texts in the oral interpretation classroom. Like ethnographers, students who engage in "re-performance" hope for "truthful" interpretations in spite of the fact that "truth" is bound to the contextual considerations surrounding the original utterance. Of course, the conscious artistic creations of fiction writers provide more substance for textual analysis, since they are conceived as predominantly printed modes of communication. At the same time printed texts, like oral narration, are situated in a context of values that is negotiated between sender and receiver. Bakhtin's notion of the socially charged nature of words provides an insight to performing the texts—whether oral or printed—of an "other." According to Bakhtin, an individual continually appropriates the language of others into his or her own speech. In

fact, we are unable to claim any word as truly our own. Rather,

the life of the word is contained in its transfer from one
mouth to another from one context to another. . . . In
this process the word does not forget its own path and
cannot completely free itself from the power of the
concrete contexts in which it has entered.\(^2\)

While the immediate context of a word's usage may determine its
meaning, words can also evoke contexts in their usage.

Bakhtin's perspective should encourage the student of folkloric
texts to look both within the recorded account and without for clues
to the social contexts in which language has functioned. Lacking the
benefit of community experience, one quickly realizes that assumed
norms are evasive without a supporting context. As a result,
students of performance need to pay special attention to the
implicit values in the verbal account, in order to flesh out the
context of values within which the "text" originated. Looking for
clues outside the text may involve research into the community
environment of the text or into analogous environments that form
values and attitudes on the basis of a collective identity.

Looking for context clues within the text requires at base an
understanding that words do not occur in a vacuum. Apparent or not,
every utterance is the result of a relationship between a speaker and
listener who negotiate the immediate context for their interaction
based on mutual social and cultural experiences. As Wayne Beach

\(^2\)Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Theory and
History of Literature, Vol. 8, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson
observes, we "regularly use language in contexts to build contexts."³ Ronald Wardhaugh's analysis of conversational context demonstrates the intricate relationship between the shaping past and the emerging present in conversational discourse. He asserts,

Every conversation has a location in both time and space. Often, too, the participants have a history, sometimes long sometimes short, of previous conversations with each other to draw on: they know what it is like to deal with each other. Every new move in a conversation becomes part of that history and continues the total historical relationship.⁴

The challenge of fleshing out the interactive contexts from verbal records of performance is that relational histories seldom are expressed directly.

Erma Goering's story about her mother driving them to school is a good test case of a minimally rendered personal experience story.

Then I also remember . . . Mother taking us to school. But she wasn't an expert driver and didn't want to back. So she drove around the corner—uh, Vernons live where we lived. Vernon is living there now. So she drove around the section. Took us to school and then back again. [H:292]

Faced with only the verbal record, a performance researcher has very little overt evidence of the social context of this narration. However, if one carefully examines the words in order to postulate a teller-audience relationship, he or she can discover some of the implicit contextual norms.


Bakhtin suggests that as listeners we are keenly aware of nuances of speech even though our terminology for discussing varieties of discourse is limited. He argues that we naturally attend to "verbal sideward glances, reservations, loopholes, hints, [and] thrusts," in everyday conversation. If we "listen" to the words of the text above with our "mind's ear," we begin to sense some of the varying registers that Bakhtin addresses.

The speaker's first line sounds like a response to a question, implying an audience—one that has requested that the speaker "remember." Thus, one can assume that the act of remembering is an important issue in the speaker-listener relationship. Another indication of the relationship between the speaker and the listener is the reference to Vernon. The speaker shifts from the narrative frame to provide the listener with a bit of background information. The shift indicates the significance of place for the narrator. Establishing connection with locality is a priority for the speaker.

The shift also enables a person to draw some conclusions about the history of the narrator's relationship with the listener. The speaker-listener relational history is sufficient to enable the speaker to mention Vernon and Vernon's home without further explanation. At the same time, their relational history is not extensive enough to assume the listener's knowledge of the original home place of the speaker. Thus, the interpreter may conclude that the speaker has a more extensive past in this locale than does the listener. Perhaps the speaker's position of authority in terms of

5Bakhtin, Postoevsky's Poetics, p. 201.
local history prompted in some way the listener's request for remembering. Although details are lacking, the speaker-audience relationship begins to emerge as a result of careful attention to the verbal record.

Although the story contains very few specifics about the speaker's locale, attention to types of speech (or dialects, as Bakhtin calls them) that can be identified with specific social contexts provides at least one clue. The narrator mentions that her mother drove "around the section." The word "section" hints at a rural environment, in which land is divided by square mile sections. Viewing the story in the context of a rural location, enables the interpreter to understand the effort required to transport children to a school that was most likely not conveniently located just down the street, but rather several miles away on country roads.

As one begins to recreate the context of the story from the clues in the verbal record, he or she begins to sense a few implicit values as well. The effort required to get the children to school, especially in light of their mother's limited driving experience, implies the value of education and personal responsibility in the context of the speaker's world. The attention to the relationship of locale and experience reveals an attachment to place and a sense of the significance of the land. Thus, a careful examination of the verbal record enables the student of performance to begin filling in the surrounding context of the utterance.

The five short sentences of the above narration provide only a sketchy outline of the social-cultural context of the utterance.
Indeed, if the words of the oral performance are our only access to the performance context, we are left with many unanswered questions. What is the relationship between the teller and the listener? Where do they live? How do they feel about where they live? Why is the listener so interested in remembering? What makes the speaker an authority? Answers to these questions elude us when the verbal record is our only access to performance.

Assuming that the aim of an interpretive encounter with any text is to experience the world from the perspective of an other, then it behooves those who study and perform folkloric texts to probe the extratextual factors that contributed to the creation of the narrative. If we limit ourselves to textual analysis alone, we restrict our participation in the world of the folkloric text by neglecting the pervasive influence of the social and cultural environment on the experience of the text.

Students of performance need to explore beyond the verbal record of the folkloric performance if at all possible. Discovering the formative influence of environmental, relational, and social factors on the performance process enhances a person's ability to enter into the world of the folkloric text. Of course, not all cultural contexts are equally accessible. If a performer cannot directly observe the community within which the folkloric text was created, he or she may be limited to what ethnographic researchers and performance scholars have published about a particular contemporary subculture. Access to other texts from the same community, contact with unpublished "experts" on community life, or whatever other means
the performer may have available for filling in the cultural context of the folkloric text will facilitate his or her understanding of and entrance into the world of the text.

The responsibilities of performers of oral ethnic materials do not end with the examination of the verbal record and the societal context of the folkloric text. They must also consider the performer-audience relationship in the new performance setting. How does one go about orienting an audience to the cultural context of a folkloric text? In other words, how does one take responsibility for creating an immediate context for performance? Often when classroom performers of traditional narrative fiction assume an implied audience of general readership, they trust that the audience needs little explanation other than the performance to illuminate the context of the work. In the case of oral ethnic materials, the implied audience is clearly not a general one, but rather a specific community for whom the "text" has meaning because of the shared values and assumptions of the group.

Because of the complex interrelationships of performance variables in any context, interpreters should be aware that performances can never be exactly duplicated. Dwight Conquergood cautions against attempts to appropriate thoroughly the experience of the other without recognizing the perspective of difference that a performer brings to a folkloric text.6 Conquergood's view of performance as a dialogue between self and other is a helpful concept for developing a reasonable approach to the performance of oral

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6See Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act."
ethnic materials. Interpreters should understand that, as Richard Bauman suggests, folkloric texts emerge from "the interplay between communicative resources, individual competence, and the goals of the participants, within the context of particular situations." The particularity of one situation precludes an accurate transference of context when texts are re-performed in another situation. Thus, to hope for an "authentic" performance of oral ethnic materials outside of their originating context is an unrealistic ideal. The most interpreters can hope for is that their performance will help to enhance the dialogue between the culture of the folkloric text and the culture of their own situation.

Using the performance of oral ethnic materials to encourage dialogue between cultures allows performers to re-conceive the elements that constitute a communicative performance. A view of performance as an emergent in the larger communication event enables performers to broaden their perspective to include attention to the environment, to the attitudes of the audience members and their reasons for assembling, and to their background of knowledge and experience in the culture of the folkloric text. Examining these variables helps performers to determine the most appropriate footing for facilitating the dialogic interaction within the event. Whether performers begin as lecturers, interviewers, discussants, story bearers, or cultural critics and in what sequence and combination they take on these roles will ultimately depend on their understanding of the communicative event.

7 Bauman, Verbal Art, p. 38.
Viewing performance of literature from a personal narrative perspective enables interpreters to abandon the outmoded notion that the text is the central locus for performance and to become more attuned to the interaction of performer, text, and context. Thus, interpreters are free to move outside the text as they prepare themselves and their audiences for performance. Within this perspective, performers are free to use introductory remarks in order to provide background information that orients an outside audience to what happens within the performance frame. Audience orientation may be an essential component of a performance event that features oral ethnic materials. Providing a frame within which audience members can view a performance not only allows them to be more critical, it enables the performer to establish an appropriate distance from the text he performs. Richard Bauman submits that artistic performance "sets up, or represents an interpretive frame within which the messages being communicated are to be understood. . . ." Although Bauman is referring to folkloric performance, the concept applies to artistic performance of oral ethnic "literature" as well.

The value of dialogic performance lies in the opportunity it provides for performers to come to terms with cultural influences on their own identity as they explore the identity of the other. Mennonite writer John Ruth submits that "authentic identity" must be informed by memory and "cannot be manufactured by 'aesthetics'. . . ."

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8Richard Bauman, "Verbal Art," 292.
To have identity, we must have some access to our past." Oral narration provides a means for organizing past experiences into a coherent narrative that supports the speaker's present identity. The social and cultural norms of the narrator's environment serve as the organizing principle for his or her personal narratives. Interpreters who discover the function of personal narrative in organizing the experience of the other are no doubt better able to reflect on the organizing principles of their own narratives. In so doing, they achieve a better understanding of the fundamental components of their own identity.

Performers who realize the difficulty of authentically reconstructing the past of the oral ethnic narrator should be acutely aware of the difference between the perspectives of self and other. At the same time, their sensitivity to the process of forming and expressing a personal identity enables an empathy and a respect for an alternative experience. As performers realize the differences and identify with the similarities they have with speakers of oral ethnic materials, they sharpen their own perspectives on self. Bakhtin's reflection on the function of dialogue in Dostoevsky's fiction is apropos to the dialogic process of performing folkloric texts. He says that a person in dialogue becomes "that which he is . . . not only for others but for himself as well."  

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10 Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's Poetics, p. 252.
The performance of oral ethnic materials provides performers with an opportunity to explore themselves through the experience of an other and to enlighten audiences through an encounter with other subcultures. However, when performers approach folkloric texts from their own cultural experience, the nature of the performance process changes. As a researcher who has grown up within the cultural context of the Swiss Volhynians in Moundridge, I approach Swiss Mennonite storytelling from an insider’s perspective. I am naturally less concerned with exploring a sense of "otherness" in Swiss Mennonite narratives than with achieving an objective perspective on the socio-cultural context in which I have been immersed. While the outside performer might gain perspective on his or her own identity by exploring folkloric texts from my community, the effect of my own performance of these texts is quite different, depending on the settings in which they are performed. In my analysis of the insider’s perspective on performance, I will focus on the difference between performing oral ethnic texts as an insider to insiders and performing them as an insider to outsiders. To avoid repeating the analysis in the preceding chapter, I do not intend to analyze the performance process for the telling of my own personal narratives. Instead, I will address the implications of performance when I perform the stories of others from the community.

Because my fieldwork has increased my knowledge of Swiss Mennonite stories, I have many opportunities to perform stories for community insiders as I discuss my research with family members and friends in the Moundridge community. Unlike the outside performer,
who may pour over the verbal record and examine supplementary research, I seldom refer to the transcripts or consciously evaluate the performance setting. Typical of oral performance within my home community, these performances are spontaneous—words are spoken as they come to mind without any sense of obligation to a printed text. From performance to performance the "text" is newly created on the basis of the setting.

Neither I nor the outside performer are the original "owners" of the stories we perform. As I suggested in the discussion of genre, however, the issue of story "ownership" is a cloudy one in Swiss Mennonite oral culture. As personal experience stories pass from one family to another and are repeated by family and community members, they are transformed from personal to community lore. Although personal experience stories may be the primary narrative genre among Swiss Mennonites, the prevalence of community anecdotes indicates that telling stories about the experiences of others is a common practice in the community. Thus by telling the personal experience stories of other Swiss Volhynians to an audience of insiders, I contribute to the metamorphosis of these stories into community tales and participate in the collective "ownership" of Schweitzer lore.

In order to illustrate the way in which transforming a personal experience story into a community anecdote affects the performance of the story, I will examine two different tellings of the same incident—one a personal experience story and the other a community tale. The incident involves a prank played on Andy Unruh, the Low
German farm hand. Erwin Goering told an eye witness account [N:459-460] and Harold Schrag told a second hand version [I:323]. Although the basic result of the prank—exposing Andy in his underwear—was the same in both narrator’s accounts, the two tellings were very different.

Erwin Goering’s story was much more specific in terms of the participants in the prank. The event happened at his Uncle Pete Kaufman’s farm and his Uncle Jonas Goering was the perpetrator. Erwin and his cousin, Emil Kaufman, were witnesses. Erwin incorporates quoted speech in his telling, presenting his Uncle Jonas’s explanation of the set up of the joke in some detail. Since Erwin was privy to the prank beforehand, he was primed to witness the incident with more careful attention than a passing observer. In the climax of the story Erwin described the vision of Andy in his underwear:

... but don’t you know, all of a sudden the pump goes and the light goes on. We sit up and there is this figure, Andy as old as he was, streaking across [he laughs] in his B.V.D.’s embarrassed as all get out. [N:460]

The successful outcome of the prank fulfilled the expectations of the participants and ensured the humor and interest of subsequent narrative accounts. The storyteller’s first-hand experience enables a clarity and detail in his telling of the incident.

Harold Schrag’s version of the incident was much less detailed. He gave no information about the perpetrators or participants other than that “they” were at Pete Kaufman’s farm. Harold’s story lacked the incidents of quoted speech in Erwin’s telling. He offered no orientation to the prank other than to identify Andy’s nightly habit
of "washing off" (as opposed to "getting a drink" in Erwin's telling). Like Erwin's narrative the successful outcome of the prank was the highlight of Harold's story, but his description was a bit different:

And those crazy guys—[he laughs] everything was dark and they switched on the yard light. And the guy, all he had on was his shirt. They said that shirt was sticking straight out; he was running around the tank. . . . [I:323]

Unlike Erwin, Harold never says directly that embarrassment was Andy's reason for running. His understanding that Andy lacked even his B.V.D.'s, diminishes the need to mention specifically the issue of embarrassment, since it is so strongly implied.

Any number of factors could account for the differences between these tellings: dissimilar performance settings, individual narrative styles, or other incidental personal factors. However, a closer look at the narrative point of view of each telling helps to clarify the process of transforming personal experience stories into community anecdotes.

Naturally, Erwin's personal experience narrative is more specific in its description of the incident. The autobiographical overtones establish a sense of intimacy in his telling. Although the story is an other-oriented account, the narrator's participation, though minimal, enables him to speak with authority about the details of the event. Since his Uncle Jonas was the main perpetrator of the prank, Erwin has a vested personal interest in the story. His attitude towards this experience is colored by the history of his relationship with his prank-playing uncle. Erwin's closeness to the event allows him to recreate the scene vividly in a way that engages
the listener's vicarious participation in the prank. The ultimate success of the prank in Erwin's telling is intensified by his first-hand participation in the event.

Harold Schrag's point of view in his telling of the incident clearly reflects his complete nonparticipation in the action. His lack of personal involvement in the incident precludes any sense of autobiographical intimacy. Rather than identifying a specific perpetrator, Harold attributes the prank to "those crazy guys." His only claim to narrative authority is that he knows the people who were involved. Yet, in spite of his lack of personal involvement in the incident, Harold willingly assumes the responsibility for telling the story.

On the surface, Harold's "right to narratorship" appears a bit tenuous. If we trust the eyewitness account, we may be tempted to accuse Harold of distorting the facts. However, an analysis of Harold's telling in light of community expectations demonstrates the viability of his claim to the role of storyteller. No doubt, many people in the community had personal encounters with Andy's eccentric behavior. As an outsider who violated the behavioral norms of the community, he was a target for criticism. Thus, the outcome of the prank exposes (more directly in Harold's than in Erwin's telling) Andy's peculiarity, chastises his behavior, and affirms the status quo. Harold assumes authority as a storyteller because of his role as a community insider who has prior knowledge of Andy's strange personality and who adheres to the behavioral codes of the community.

A number of factors influence the transformation of personal
experience stories into community anecdotes: the number of people who witnessed the original incident, their level of involvement in the event, the narrative facility of those who tell about it, and the relevance of the incident to community interests. The issue of relevance is perhaps the most difficult factor to characterize specifically, since the guidelines for determining relevancy are hazy. Almost any unusual, funny, frightening, or awkward experience has some relevance to community interests and can be turned into a worthy community anecdote depending on the personalities involved. Andy Unruh's reputation as a oddball in the community heightens community interest in his day-to-day experiences. Knowledge that A. C. Stucky [H:302] and Dan W. Goering [M:416] always have a way of expressing themselves in a dryly humorous fashion piques community interest as well. Familiarity with the history of a person's relationship to the community in terms of status, social role, or family background enhances the community's interest in his or her experiences. Perhaps the abiding influence of Gemeinde contributes to the keen interest of the community in the daily experiences of its membership, so that what interests one person is likely to interest all members of the community.

As community members recast personal experience stories into community anecdotes, they engage in a traditional process, identifying and affirming community norms. Their narrations are a formal means for expressing community identity, saying either "this is who we are" or "this is who we are not." As Richard Bauman suggests, narrative provides a means for traditional communities to
express "their local social biography."

It is here that narrative comes into play: stories are the major means by which . . . actions and experiences are memorialized and given expression. . . . There is always a sense of locality and familiarity about the dramatis personae of these stories—they are all known personally or in terms of their connection within the community: kinfolk, neighbors, friends.  

The sense of familiarity with the people and events, the ability to say "because I know you I can tell your story," and the opportunity to build a community repertoire engender a feeling of belonging that is important for the sense of personal and community identity.

As I tell the personal experience stories of the people I interviewed to other members of the community, I participate in a community practice that demonstrates my connection with the local social biography of the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge. As perpetrator of the transformational process, I am bound by several general rules that govern the recasting of a personal experience story into a community anecdote: if the story is clearly focused on the perspective of a single individual, the subsequent narrator should identify the original storyteller ("Eli Schrag is the one that told me this about his uncle" [C:235]); if the story originated in the context of a family or small group, the narrator should identify the group ("Eddie Pat and those guys . . . they said . . ." [I:323]); and, of course, the I-narration should be absent from the subsequent telling, since telling someone else's story as your own would jeopardize the norm of the truthfulness in the telling. Thus, the narrator clarifies that his or her claim to the story is not a

11Bauman, Story, Performance, and Event, p. 76.
personal one. Rather, the claim to the subsequent telling is a community claim—one that the narrator shares with other members of the in-group.

Within the context of the in-group, narrators have no occasion to perform these stories in the character of the narrator. Only when stories move from oral to print culture do performers consider the possibility of enacting the narrator rather than telling the narrative. Although the verbal record is only a portion of the overall performance event, once it appears on the typed page the concrete reality of the printed text defies alteration and adaptation of the words to a new performance setting. In some factions of the performance studies community, norms induce a performer to embody a new persona in performance, submerging oneself in the world of the printed text. By contrast, within the Swiss Mennonite community I am able to narrate someone else’s story by shifting into third person narration, even to impersonate the original teller for several phrases or sentences, but never to completely embody the persona as if I were the original teller. The total embodiment of another character would call attention to the act of performance in my home community, thus shifting my performance from the generally accepted mode of natural narration to the more precarious mode of intentional narration.

As a storyteller within the Swiss Mennonite community, I find the notion of submerging myself into the “world of the text” uncomfortably self-conscious and academic. As a scholar, I understand that the printed text may evoke the world of the telling;
as Swiss Mennonite I am acutely aware that the printed text can never fully embody that world. My own sense of "the world of the text" is inseparable from my experiences in the Swiss Mennonite community, and my performances among my own people are necessarily bound by the community norms and expectations. Thus, the printed text is never a formal presence in my everyday performance among the Swiss Mennonites. It is, however, a much more significant presence in my performance for the academic community.

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, I am constantly aware of the tensive relationship between my role as a researcher and my role as a tradition bearer. I have to consider to what extent I am prepared to open myself and my home community for scrutiny in the academic world and to what extent I am willing to share my academic research with my home community. Although the process of revealing elements of each community to the other is fraught with risks, it also helps me achieve perspective on both. While formal opportunities to talk about academic research are somewhat limited in the rural community of Moundridge, the academic world is amenable to discussing new research in ethnicity and performance. Thus, the academic environment provides at least one obvious setting outside the Swiss Volhynian community in which I am likely to perform these stories.

As an insider performing for an outside audience, I encounter a new set of norms and expectations for performance. As I suggested

12 My first experience performing for an outside community was in a panel on ethnographic research at the Southern States Communication Association Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, April 1989.
earlier, scholars in the performance studies community often have implied that the text should be primary focus of the performer. We are interested in how our emotional and intellectual understanding of a printed text can be enhanced by performing it orally. Most performance scholars view textual analysis as an essential prerequisite to—or at least an important outcome of—oral performance. Since the verbal record of a folkloric performance is the most obvious counterpart to the printed text in performance studies, the verbal record tends to have more primacy when oral ethnic materials are performed in the academic community. Within this setting, enacting the narrator (the speaker in the "text") as opposed to telling the narrative, is an accepted community practice.

As a storyteller from the Swiss Mennonite community performing under a different set of norms, I am much less self-conscious or uncomfortable with the notion of submerging myself into the "world of the text." Because the performance setting encourages an enactment of narrative personae, I can more readily attempt to embody the narrative personae of other Swiss Mennonite narrators, without feeling that the "truthfulness" or "naturalness" of my performance is in question. This new performance setting provides a tremendous opportunity for a dialogue between cultures, a dialogue in which both sides have the benefit of personal experience within and research about their respective communities.

Within the context of academic interaction, the tradition bearer no longer functions at the level of affirming his or her individual and community identity. Rather the storyteller utilizes his or her
performance as a medium for intergroup communication. According to Richard Bauman, folklore as communication occurs within members of the same group "on the basis of a shared social identity" and between members of different groups "on the basis of a differential identity." This differential identity is the foundation of dialogical performance, in which the performers say "because you do not know me I will tell you my story." Stories about familiar people and events speak the difference of performer's world to the other and the open opportunity for the other to express his or her difference. Thus the performance process can provide for the development of intergroup relationships, which cultivates an appreciation for difference and feeling of acceptance between parties.

Opportunities abound outside the academic research community for intergroup dialogue based on the performance of oral ethnic materials. One area that stands to benefit from an understanding of the social implications of folklore is the oral interpretation classroom. As Dwight Conquergood suggests, "interpretive performance" now can move beyond the exploration of "otherness" in the printed text and take us "even further towards gaining access into that 'rich ensemble of texts' living beyond the confines of printed books." Students of performance who understand the


expression of differential identity in narratives from everyday experience can gain a new appreciation for the identity-claiming nature of literature as well. An awareness of the way in which community aesthetic governs performance behaviors within and outside of cultural subgroups should encourage students to probe the concept of aesthetics and performance technique in the classroom as well.

In the final section of this stuffy I will focus more specifically on how knowledge of the constitutive and emergent contexts of the oral narrative performance process can enhance the study of literature in the performance studies classroom. First, I will briefly examine the shared concerns of recent literary and oral performance theories in order to demonstrate the viability of attention to both in the instruction and practice of oral interpretation. Then I will discuss the significance of values and norms in the "community" for the performance classroom. And finally, I will show how approaching literary texts from a personal narrative perspective can enhance students' understanding of the process of performing literature.

The relationship between narrative and oral performance theory demonstrates shared concern for a context-centered view of performance. Current views of literary language enable the inclusion of social, cultural and historical context in the interpretation of literature. Just as the speaker-audience relationship determines meaning in oral discourse, so meaning in literature is determined by the relationship of author and audience within the social-cultural context of the utterance. Thus, any
attempt to interpret language outside the context of its use ignores a vital factor in the process of artistic communication.

The relationship of the printed word to spoken discourse suggests a link between the interpretation of oral and literary texts. Mikhail Bakhtin submits that in all forms of discourse the word is determined by "its immediate social situation." He suggests that "the word is a two-sided" act in any utterance: "It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant."15 Considering the marked influence of the social situation on the interpretation of Swiss Mennonite oral narration, Bakhtin's notion clearly applies to forms of oral narrative as well as literary discourse. Similarly, Mary Louise Pratt's perspective on the interpretation of literary discourse relates directly to the elements of performance setting discussed in chapter four. Pratt suggests that in addition to interpreting literary works on the basis of their "surface grammatical properties," we need to consider:

- the context in which they are made,
- the intentions, attitudes, and expectations of the participants,
- the relationships existing between participants, and generally,
- the unspoken rules and conventions that are understood to be in play when an utterance is made and received.16

Pratt's comments reveal a theory of literature that is grounded in an understanding of the way speakers and listeners interact in social situations.

Pratt's notion that natural narrative and literary narrative are

15V. N. Volosinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, p. 85.

"utterances of the same type" suggests that scholars can gain insight into the oral performance of literary narratives by examining the process of oral performance in everyday narratives. Thus, gaining an understanding of the relationship between oral narration and social context in the performance of everyday narration within a cultural subgroup like the Swiss Mennonites reveals important applications of this relationship to the performance of literature in the educational environment. If we view oral performance and literary performance as vitally linked, then we should approach the oral performance of literary works with an intentional focus on the influences of the constitutive context of the performance classroom as well as that of the literature that students perform. Teachers and students need to address directly the emergent contexts in the classroom setting in order to achieve a more holistic perspective on the "utterances" of student performers.

Students of performance need to understand the complex interface of contexts within the classroom performance setting. The social and cultural contexts of the literary work—including those of the author, the persona, the characters, and their audiences—meet the contexts of the performers and the classroom audience. This setting opens the possibility for a multi-layered dialogical interaction that can be richly resonant with the voices, stances, looks, attitudes, and values of the contexts represented. Although performers are not likely to achieve a conscious awareness of all the intricate interplay of social and cultural resonances within the classroom.

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17Pratt, p. 69,
performance setting, their attempts to probe multiple contexts to the best of their ability increases the richness of their interpretations as well as their comprehension of the complexity of the performance process.

Teachers can facilitate students' understanding of performance context by discussing openly the emergent norms and expectations of the performance setting in the classroom. Since students in performance classes come from a variety of backgrounds, they are likely to have diverse perspectives on "what range of speech activity is regarded as susceptible to performance and what range is conventionally performed." Students of performance need to examine the differences among their various perspectives on performance. By encouraging students to identify their individual performance norms and to compare them to the expectations for classroom performances, the oral interpretation instructor can prepare students for the emergent context of classroom performance.

An awareness of the diversity of expectations in various performance communities often broadens an instructor's perspective on what constitutes an acceptable performance in the context of the oral interpretation classroom. Performance educators have often tended to limit the range of "acceptable" student performances by defining performance too narrowly. Beverly Whitaker Long suggests that "our limited prefiguring, may prevent our 'seeing' a wide range of

possibly valuable performances." Long suggests that the evaluative process can be sharpened by expanding what we mean by performance. We can expand our perspective by carefully assessing the range of performance behaviors in the various speech communities that our students represent. We can also examine our own context of values as it influences our perceptions of performance. Frederick Turner's suggestion about the study of literature in the classroom is especially appropriate for the performance classroom. He says, "the reading of literature in the classroom ought to be explicitly related to the values of the individuals present, and of the community as a whole." Teachers of performance need to be aware of the way in which the norms and values of the performance setting are continually negotiated by performer and audience—students and teachers.

One way to initiate the discussion of different norms of performance is to ask students to tell the class a personal experience of their own. Students inevitably demonstrate a variety of speech styles, performance behaviors, and narrative techniques, which the instructor can utilize to demonstrate both individual and community performance norms. Students may be asked to

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21 My own experience with this technique has been in the basic Performance Communication class that I teach at Bethel College. I use the technique as an introduction to the narrative unit.
identify other contexts in which they have told their stories and to
discuss the differences in verbal and behavioral style in these
diverse contexts. This enables the instructor to demonstrate the
impact of various social and cultural contexts on performance
practice. Once students are aware of the influence of community
aesthetic on performance behaviors, the instructor is prepared to
discuss aesthetics and performance technique in the classroom. As
students come to realize the diverse expectations of their peers as
well as the educational objectives of their instructor, they begin to
formulate perceptions of the unique context of the classroom setting.
This perception should aid students in finding an appropriate balance
between their own performance techniques and those that are expected
of them in performance class.

The benefits of using personal experience storytelling as an
introduction to oral performance extend beyond the discussion of
performance technique. It offers tremendous insight into the
creative process. All the raw materials for narrative literature are
present in oral narration. Students come to see that experience is
essentially nonsensical, unless it can be given coherent structure in
the form of narrative.22 Our need to order our experiences leads us
to create the narrative elements of plot, character motivation, and
time consciousness. By listening to others and performing their own
personal narratives, students are exposed to a variety of ways to

22Gergen and Gergen, "The Social Construction of Narrative
Accounts," in Historical Social Psychology, ed. Kenneth J. Gergen and
Mary M. Gergen (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates,
combine narrative elements.

One manifestation of the variety of personal narrative styles is the way one person attends to detail while another narrates only in broad strokes. Yet another student may combine these techniques. A comparison of students' narrative styles facilitates a discussion about the significant influence of point of view on the relationship of text to "objective reality." Students can easily distinguish other-oriented from self-oriented personal experience stories. An instructor can use their ability to make this distinction as the basis for further discussion of the implications of differences in point of view. If students can begin to identify possible reasons for an oral narrator's inclusion of certain details and exclusion of others, they can begin to see the impact of point of view on narrative choices and to understand the selective processes at work in narrative creation.

Although personal experience stories necessarily reflect a first person point of view, the other-oriented stories provide the raw materials for discussing the third person perspective as well. Students can readily identify the distinctions between the point of view of a self-oriented story, in which the oral narrator participated in the event, and that of an other-oriented story in which the storyteller simply observed the incident. The level of subjectivity, the intensity of emotional and physical involvement in the action, and the degree of identification with the main character are generally lessened in the other-oriented accounts much as they are in third-person literary narratives. Of course, a whole range of
levels of involvement can surface in classroom tellings of personal experience stories, which an instructor can then relate to the range of points of view in narrative fiction.

Becoming aware of the influence of one's own point of view on the narrative process offers students valuable insights into the choices literary personae make in structuring their narratives. At the same time, students should understand that a literary persona's point of view emerges as a result of a social-cultural framework that has been artistically structured by an author. In other words, the world of the text, though created from the raw materials of real world experiences, has been structured by an artistic consciousness that is generally quite distinct from the narrative persona. Thus, to further enrich their understanding of the created world of the text, performers can probe the social and cultural context of the literary artist as it relates to that of narrative persona.

Authors write for readers. Like oral performances, their literary performances occur within a particular performance setting. The more fully performers can "reconstruct the literary-historical context within which a [text] was received," the better they will understand how the relationship of the author to his or her readers influenced the creation of the world of the literary text. To ignore this context, to assume that the text alone is sufficient to communicate the social context of the author, is much like assuming the verbal record of a folkloric performance can communicate the

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cultural context of the ethnic narrator. Although the author's apparent management of artistic techniques may provide substantive clues to the socio-cultural context within which the literary text was created, performers still further enrich their interpretations by looking outside the text. Elliot Mishler's observation about the analysis of oral narrative is applicable to literary narrative as well. He states that an interpretation of stories as they "express and reflect broader cultural frameworks of meaning, requires introduction of a more general knowledge of the culture than is contained in the text itself." 24

Extending the comparison between personal experience narration and narrative literature may help students and scholars of performance to understand the relationship between the context of the narrator and the context of the persona in the literary text. Erving Goffman suggests that in personal narratives the "I" who narrates and the "I" in the story, although related, are two different "animators":

...the one who is physically animating the sounds that are heard, and an embedded animator, a figure in a statement who is present only in a world that is being told about, not in the world in which the current telling takes place. 25

Expanding Goffman's analysis to include a third level of animation helps to clarify the literary concepts author, persona, and character as they enter into personal narration.

Since we know that the physical animation of performance is

24 Elliot Mishler, "The Analysis of Interview Narratives," p. 244.
25 Goffman, p. 147.
adapted to the relational context of the setting, we can assume that some aspects of the "whole person" of the oral narrator, though emergent in other contexts, are concealed in the narrative interaction. This "whole person"—the complex and multi-faceted "I" whose personality is much broader than can be contained within the limited scope of the narrative setting—is what I will call the "primary animator" of the narrative. The "primary animator" is the oral counterpart to the author in narrative literature. His or her history of experiences has nurtured a personal and social identity that has influence on, but is never fully embodied by, the "physical animator"—the "I" who directs the narrative within the context of a particular telling. This "physical animator" is the oral counterpart to the persona in narrative fiction. The "embedded animator"—the "me" that is a "narrative recollection of what no longer physically exists"—is the oral counterpart to the character in literary narration.

Like the author of a literary work, the primary animator determines the tone and attitude of the physical animator based on his or her personal and social identity and the history of his or her relationship with the audience. So the physical animator is, in a sense, created by the primary animator for the specific narrative situation. Thus, the physical animator is "a kind of aesthetic

construct," created by the primary animator for presentation within the norms and expectations of the performance setting. Indeed, personal narrative is "a form of self presentation, that is, a particular personal-social identity is being claimed," and "everything said functions to express, confirm, and validate this claimed identity." When a student of performance understands the roles of the primary, physical, and embedded animators as they contribute to the identity-claiming function of oral narration, he or she has a framework for analyzing personal narration according to personal identity and cultural values. This framework provides a most natural starting point for the student's analysis and performance of narrative literature.

The student's natural facility in narrative creation affirms Frederick Turner's notion that literary art and oral tradition are both descendants of human ritual and that "word art" is indeed a "human inheritance." Because narrative is a fundamental process for ordering experience and claiming identity, students sense innately ways to incorporate the literary techniques of plot development, character motivation, and time manipulation in their personal narratives. Indeed, all humanity has a fundamental capacity for narrative performance. According to Conquergood, the view of

27Crites, p. 162.

28Mishler, p. 243.

29Mishler, p. 243.

human beings as "performing creatures" is generally supported by contemporary research in communication studies, which describes humans as "performing creatures who constitute and sustain their identities and collectively enact their worlds through roles and rituals." If instructors can utilize the telling of personal narratives in the classroom to help students understand themselves as heirs to the tradition of narrative creativity, we can alleviate some of the students' anxieties about their ability to analyze and perform narrative literature.

As students begin to recognize the links between natural and artistic narration, they realize that "literature is a context, too," a context that they can analyze almost as if they were analyzing a performance event: in terms of the structure of the event (novelistic discourse, short fiction, epic poetry) relationships of the participants (the author and the reading audience), and the traditional norms and expectations of the event (standard literary form and technique). Using their own experience with narrative creation as a foundation, students are prepared to view narrative texts as vital components in the fundamental process of giving order and coherence to human experience.

The similarities between oral and literary narrative traditions, should encourage further dialogue between literary and performance theorists and social scientists. Social psychology provides a valuable humanist perspective on the narrative process. Social

31Conquergood, "Communication as Performance," p. 27.
32Pratt, p. 99.
psychologists Mary and Kenneth Gergen postulate that individuals possess several life stories and select events "so as to justify the selected narrative." Other social psychologists such as Robinson and Hawpe, Sarbin, and Crites assert that individuals necessarily speak those narratives that gain them the most acceptance in the "listening" community. As we have seen in the case of the Swiss Volhynians, content is influenced by both the performer's relationship to his or her audience and by community aesthetic and values. This is not to say that organization of narrative is consciously manipulative. Rather it is more subtle and adaptive on the basis of audience expectations.

If we view narrative literature as a record of the persona's process of choosing events to create a sensible life story, we can encourage performers to be sensitive to this selective process. An understanding of the importance of the exclusion as well as the inclusion of events should help the performer to achieve a more authentic realization of text in performance.

Gergen and Gergen also suggest that "one's view of self in a given moment is fundamentally nonsensical unless it can be linked in some fashion with his or her past.... In developing narratives one attempts to establish coherent connections among life's


events.\textsuperscript{35} That process of making sense out of an ongoing complex of random experiences is essential to the process of self-narration. With each constructed plot, chaos is held at bay. Perhaps we can benefit from an approach to the performance of literature that encourages students to reconstruct experience through the appropriation of someone else's story. As the performer begins to establish connections among narrated events, he or she can recover the coherent experience that is the persona's life story.

At the same time, researchers and practitioners of performance need to recognize that recovering the experience of the persona's life story seldom results in a final authoritative interpretation of the literary narrative. The complex interrelationship of personal, relational, environmental, social, and cultural variables in the performance setting precludes the possibility of probing completely the text in context. Even the most thorough analysis reveals an abundance of possibilities for interpretation, but very few, if any, absolutes. We need to expand our critical perspective to accommodate the interfacing worlds of the performer, the text, and the critic as they contribute to the complex set of standards and expectations of each new performance setting.

An expanded view of performance criticism should enable critics and performers to negotiate the aesthetic norms of particular performance settings based upon the diverse experiences of the constituents represented. Such an experience-based criticism eschews a narrow definition of objective standards for performance

\textsuperscript{35}Gergen and Gergen, p. 173.
and recognizes that performance aesthetic is emergent in the diverse contextual factors that contribute to a particular performance setting. An experience-based critical perspective realizes that a performance of literature may be authentic without being authoritative. If we adhere to the conception of "right" interpretations, our prefiguring may limit our ability to recognize "rich" interpretations—those that reflect the performer's thorough exploration of the interfacing contexts of the world of the text and the world of the performance.

Although "rightness" versus "richness" is no doubt a concept that has surfaced elsewhere, my colleague, Professor John K. Sheriff, reminded me of it again. I am indebted to him for his willingness to share his insights into literary theory with me in informal conversations.
CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Because Swiss Volhynians in Moundridge have maintained a sense of in-group identity, the scope of their oral narrations is confined to the experiences of a relatively secluded community. The sense of containment in the Swiss Volhynian community has enabled a focused analysis on the relationship between oral narrative performance and its shaping and emergent contexts. Narrative performance in any context is a complex process, which continually varies as relationships change among the diverse elements of the performance setting. The examination of the oral narrative process among Swiss Mennonites has shown that narrative in the Moundridge community both creates and is shaped by a unique understanding of the function of Gemeinde.

The first chapter showed that many of the influential social and cultural factors in the contemporary experience of the Swiss Mennonites in Moundridge are rooted in the history of their experiences. Because Swiss Volhynians migrated as a congregational group that valued separation from the world, they remained detached from the mainstream American society, making their living as farmers.
in an isolated rural area. Although this sense of isolation has diminished in recent years, a sense of clannishness is still readily apparent among these Swiss Mennonites. Despite more than a century in the United States, contemporary Swiss Volhynians express in a variety of ways the endurance of Gemeinde—a community of believers that mutually supports and disciplines its members.

The personal and social roles of the Swiss Volhynian oral narrator were the focus of the second chapter, which examined the relationship between individual and community identity. The community values of truthfulness and humility as well as the cultural precedent of separation from the societal mainstream have nurtured in Swiss Volhynian oral narrators a tendency to disclaim participation in a storytelling tradition. Though conventional folk tales are scarce, personal experience storytelling is abundant among Swiss Mennonites. Thus, telling personal experience stories endures as the most "traditional" practice of the Swiss Mennonite oral narrator. The predominance of informal, conversational modes of storytelling diminishes the likelihood of assigning special status to the role of the oral narrator in the community. Indeed, all members of the Gemeinde are potential oral narrators.

The focus on the oral narrator in the second chapter revealed that characteristics unique to individual narrators such as age, gender, occupation, and personal-accidental factors foster distinct narrative perspectives for each individual. The various responses to the Bücher Bähr, a book salesman from outside the community, indicated that individual perspectives are uniquely shaped by
personal experience. At the same time, Schweitzer oral narrators reflect an obvious sense of shared values and behavioral norms.

Since both ethnicity and religion are at the heart of Swiss Mennonite identity, community standards and expectations demonstrate Russian-German peoplehood as well as Mennonite doctrine. The convergence of Swiss Volhynian identity and Mennonite identity creates a distinct cultural heritage, which promotes industriousness, humility, rigor, and neighborliness among community members. These values are consistently reflected in the narrative perspective of Swiss Volhynians. Thus, fundamental tension between individuality and conformity pervades the experience of Swiss Mennonite oral narrators. This tension attests to a primary function of the oral narrator's role, which is to negotiate the perimeters of Gemeinde among Swiss Mennonites.

The focus in the third chapter shifted from the narrator to the narrative, as I examined more specifically verbal aspects of Swiss Mennonite oral narration. The analysis of narrative "texts"—the narrative transcriptions—revealed noticeable contextual overtones within Swiss Mennonite narratives. The storyteller's participation in community life is apparent in the preponderance of dialect, which promotes an in-group identity. The minimalist style of narration, which frequently utilizes insiders' code words, demonstrates a concern for the economy and integrity of speech. The predominance of family reminiscences, and personal experience stories demonstrate a pervasive interest in events that occurred within the bounds of community experience.
The common techniques of linking and Schweitzer shorthand reflect an overriding concern for locating story action within a mutually understood context of people and places. Linking not only functions to orient listeners to the story; it also connects them to the telling as well. Linking enables the narrator to create a context for the narrative interaction as well as to establish his or her narrative authority. With linking the narrator implies, "I can tell this tale because I know the people, or I've heard reputable others tell it, or I understand the 'community' of its telling." As the most distinctive structural feature of Swiss Mennonite oral narrative, linking reflects a prevalent concern among Schweitzers for claiming a connection with the Gemeinde. Thus, both small and large scale narrative structures enable Swiss Mennonite oral narrators to claim narrative authority by establishing themselves as active participants in or truthful witnesses to events in the life of the community.

Chapter four integrated the components of narrator and narrative into a discussion of the entire process of personal narrative performance. Viewing narrative performance from a synchronic perspective, I analyzed the storyteller, his or her audience, the performance setting, and the community norms and expectations as formative elements of the performance process.

Swiss Mennonite storytellers generally perform at the level of natural or unself-conscious narration as opposed to intentional or public narration. Performance at this level allows oral narrators to maintain a measure of self-effacement despite their obvious
competence as oral performers. If Swiss Volhynian oral narrators make any self-conscious attempts to attract an audience, they do so in the interest of the story rather than to draw attention to their competence as storytellers.

Chapter four described the teller-audience relationship in the Swiss Volhynian community as heavily indicative of an in-group ethos. Although the bulk of the materials for this study were collected via tape-recorded interview, the interviewer's stance as a community insider enabled a sense of interpersonal sharing and provided opportunities for observing social interaction in other natural environments. The use of dialect, code words and phrases, as well as the obvious assumption of shared values attests to the esoteric nature of the teller-audience interaction.

The examination of the distinctive nature of several different performance settings in chapter four demonstrated the influence of the psychological makeup of teller and listener, the social norms, and the physical environment on each setting. It also enabled a comparative analysis of a personal narrative told by the same person in two different settings: the interpersonal interview, in which the performance was at the level of natural narration, and the family reunion, in which the performance was at the intentional level. The level of vulnerability increases for intentional performers in the Swiss Volhynian community, who may have difficulty determining the expectations of certain family subgroups within the community. This comparison also clarified the relationship between two sets of expectations, thematic and behavioral, that determine the extent to
which Schweitzer storytellers are able to maintain community acceptance. Both sets of expectations reveal an enduring ethos of humility, service, and self-denial which shapes significantly the Swiss Volhynian storyteller's oral performance.

Though community expectations may influence the thematic and behavioral development of Swiss Mennonite oral narratives, the emergent context for narrative performance is determined by immediate "agendas" of the participants. In order to avoid criticism, storytellers must be sensitive to the way in which the exigencies of each performance setting constitute a unique understanding of Gemeinde. In other words, status as a community insider does not ensure the oral narrator's acceptance in every performance setting. Those who misunderstand the emergent expectations for performance are subject to criticism.

In the fifth chapter, I argued that understanding personal experience storytelling provides insight into the aesthetic and criticism of performances at any level. When students of performance view it as an emergent within the larger communication event, they realize that the environment, the background of the audience, and the participants' depth of experience in the culture must be considered in the analysis of any "text" in performance. In order to probe the performance process in a variety of contexts, I discussed the special case of my own stance as a researcher, audience member, and performer, who performs Swiss Mennonite narratives for both insider and outsider audiences.

As I tell the personal experience stories of the people I
interviewed to other members of the community, I engage in a transformational process, changing their self-oriented personal experience stories into my other-oriented community tales. Such narrative transformations in the Swiss Mennonite community generally adhere to the following guidelines: 1) If the story is clearly focused on the perspective of a single individual, the subsequent narrator should identify the original storyteller; 2) If the story originated in the context of a family or small group, the narrator should identify the group; 3) I-narration should be absent from the subsequent telling, since telling someone else's story as your own jeopardizes the norm of the truthfulness in the telling. Thus, the narrator clarifies that his or her claim to the story is not a personal one. Rather, the claim to the subsequent telling is a community claim—one that the narrator shares with other members of the in-group.

As community members recast personal experience stories into community anecdotes, they engage in a traditional process, identifying and affirming community norms. Their narrations are a formal means for expressing community identity. As Richard Bauman suggests, narrative provides a means for traditional communities to express "their local social biography."1 The sense of familiarity with the people and events, the ability to say "because I know you I can tell your story," and the opportunity to build a community repertoire engender a feeling of belonging that is important for the sense of personal and community identity among the Swiss Mennonites.

1Bauman, Story, Performance, and Event, p. 76.
Performance expectations are completely transformed when I perform Swiss Mennonite stories in the academic community. Since the verbal record of a folkloric performance is the most obvious counterpart to the printed text in performance studies, the verbal record tends to have more primacy. Within this setting, enacting the narrator (the speaker in the "text") as opposed to telling the narrative, is an accepted community practice. Thus, narrative performance no longer functions to affirm the narrator's connection to the local community. Rather the storyteller utilizes his or her performance as a medium for intergroup communication. According to Richard Bauman, members of different groups communicate "on the basis of a differential identity" when they share folklore with each other. This differential identity is the foundation of dialogical performance, in which the performers say "because you do not know me I will tell you my story." Stories about familiar people and events speak the difference of performer's world to the other and open opportunity for the other to express his or her difference.

Finally, the fifth chapter argued that attention to the shaping influences of community aesthetic on performance behaviors enhances the approach to aesthetics and performance in the educational setting. An awareness of the diversity of expectations in various performance communities broadens the perspective of both instructors and students regarding what constitutes an acceptable performance in

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the oral interpretation classroom. Performance educators have often tended to limit the range of "acceptable" student performances by defining performance too narrowly. Beverly Whitaker Long argues that we can expand what we mean by performance and thus sharpen the evaluative process. Teachers of performance need to assess carefully the range of performance behaviors in the various speech communities that our students represent. We need also to examine our own context of values as it influences our perceptions of performance.

Frederick Turner submits that "the reading of literature in the classroom ought to be explicitly related to the values of the individuals present, and of the community as a whole." Performance educators need to be aware of how the norms and values of the performance setting are continually negotiated by performer and audience—students and teachers. We need to expand our critical perspective to accommodate the interfacing worlds of the performer, the text, and the critic as they contribute to the complex set of standards and expectations of each new performance setting. With an experience-based criticism, one that eschews a narrow definition of objective standards for performance and understands that performance aesthetic is emergent in the diverse contextual factors of a particular performance setting, we come to recognize that

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performances of literature may be authentic without being authoritative. Indeed, our preconceived standards for what makes a "good" performance are ineffective measures for evaluation that tend to stifle student creativity. An experienced-based critical perspective, on the other hand, encourages performers to explore thoroughly the interfacing contexts of the world of the text and the world of the performance.

Using personal experience storytelling in the performance classroom can be a constructive technique for introducing students to the complex issues of oral performance. With this technique, instructors can help students understand their natural ability to employ performance techniques. This method also offers tremendous insight into the creative process. Students come to see that all the raw materials for narrative literature are present in oral narration. As human creatures our need to order our experiences leads us to create the narrative elements of plot, character motivation, and time consciousness. By listening to others and performing their own personal narratives, students are exposed to a variety of ways to combine narrative elements. If instructors can utilize the telling of personal narratives in the classroom to help students understand themselves as heirs to the tradition of narrative creativity, we can alleviate some of the students' anxieties about their ability to analyze and perform narrative literature.

As students begin to recognize the links between natural and literary narration, they realize that literary analysis is much like the analysis of an oral performance event. They are able to look at
literature in terms of the structure of the event (novelistic discourse, short fiction, epic poetry), the relationships of the participants (the author and the reading audience), and the traditional norms and expectations of the event (standard literary form and technique). Using their own experience with narrative creation as a foundation, students are prepared to view narrative texts as vital components in the fundamental process of giving order and coherence to human experience.

In sum, this investigation has analyzed the formative elements of narrative performance as they sustain and are shaped by Swiss Mennonite understandings of the Gemeinde. For this group of Swiss Mennonite immigrants, the historically significant concept of the Gemeinde—the community of Christian believers who rely on each other for support and discipline—has pervasive influence on oral narrative performance. The formal structures of church discipline in Russia, which banned offending members from participation in the fellowship, have been transformed into an informal system of social isolation and chastisement. While Swiss Mennonite storytelling is shaped by this system of social control, at the same time it offers a means for negotiating the assumptions of this system.

William Juhnke observes that oral narrative often functions to exclude and criticize—"to build yourself up or to tear somebody else down—to gossip. Stories are told just to belittle the black sheep of the community or the families that are not popular" [C:233]. As members of the Gemeinde, Swiss Mennonites have license to identify and criticize those who are out of place. The Gemeinde empowers its
members, "to say who is deviant . . . and just what behaviors are to be rewarded, punished, tolerated and so on." At the same time, the Gemeinde can be stifling in its pervasive insistence that individuals adhere to community expectations and its narrow definition of who can be a part of the "in-group." Richard Schrag acknowledges the negative effects of the closed community.

When our children were growing up in a different school system, we thought the Moundridgers were the most cliquish people in the world. Some of our kids really had a struggle. [F:280]

The "struggle" to come to terms with the inclusive-exclusive dimensions of the Gemeinde has engendered distinctive norms for narrative performance among Swiss Volhynian Mennonites. Narrative behaviors are subject to the same social control as other aspects of Swiss Mennonite experience. Thus, oral narrators are reticent to accept the role of public performers. Rather, they perform at the level of natural narration, which assumes less responsibility to a critical audience. By performing at this level, Swiss Mennonites reduce the risk of seeming proud or self-possessed, and they are less vulnerable to criticism. In addition to the influence of the Gemeinde on performance behaviors, aspects of Gemeinde emerge in the thematic development of Swiss Mennonite oral narrations as well. By affirming community "connectedness," reinforcing and sometimes questioning the norms and expectations of the community, narrative performance constitutes a context for the negotiation of Gemeinde among Swiss Volhynians.

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Despite obvious consistencies in behavioral and thematic elements of Schweitzer oral narration, the specific circumstances of a particular setting can alter performance norms considerably. Of course, the indeterminate nature of narrative performance is not unique to Swiss Volhynian personal experiences stories. Rather the discoveries about the narrative process in this specific speech community can be applied to narrative performances in other communities as well. Indeed, performance on any level—whether natural or intentional, folkloric or literary, at a family reunion or in the classroom—is shaped by the personal, relational, and cultural norms in the community of its creation.
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NARRATIVE AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE:
PERFORMANCE PROCESS IN THE STORYTELLING
OF THE SWISS VOLHYNIAN MENNONITES

Volume II

A Dissertation

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in

The Department of Speech Communication, Theater,
and Communication Disorders

by

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May, 1990
(She identifies the location of the farm where she grew up: one mile east of the Eden church. She gives the following background information. She is the only surviving daughter of a family of six daughters and four sons. She went to English and German school.)

J: Did you speak only German at the time you went to German school?

A: Well, we spoke our German, yah. The teachers, of course, had in their books—different—a little different. You know that. That our talk isn’t like the book.

J: Yes. That Schweitzer is kind of hard to understand when you’ve studied high German.

A: We had Polish and Russian and German in our language which is
so easy for us. [Laughs] Whenever our sisters were all together we used to talk a lot.

J: Did your parents speak only Schweitzer?
A: Yah.

J: So you learned English in school?
A: Yah.

[She talks about being required to speak English in school and the difficulty of knowing the right words for things.]

[She remembers family devotions, learning verses in German, and singing German hymns.]

[She talks about playing table games for fun, especially miel zu, played with colored corn on a homemade board. In winter, they played Fox and Geese.]

J: Did most of your social times involve church activities or did you have other kinds of social time?
A: I remember people got together. They talked about the Bible, mostly. And whether they agreed or not. It took longer if they didn’t agree. [Laughs] In church we had Wednesday Gebets Stunde, prayer time. One leader read the Bible and then they prayed and they sang. The little children didn’t go. The children didn’t get as much as they do now in church. They always stayed at home until they were about school age.

[Other childhood activities included playing Drop the Handkerchief, Ring Around the Rosy, and getting together at Christmas time to make decorations for the tree. Quiltings were also social times. She talks about going to school with her}
future husband and not being interested in him. Dates were usually double dates until a couple would become engaged. Engagements usually lasted about a year. Women got engagement rings, but not diamonds. Adina regrets that she lost her ring.

J: Did your parents ever tell you stories about coming over from Russia?

A: Well, our folks were twelve and fourteen. They were young. It seems like they didn’t talk very much. I only remember that they talked about the Jews. Those were their seamstresses. They made their clothes, you know. In Russia. There some separate. Oh, they told how sad it was to leave because there were a few—very few—who stayed. And it was sad going across the ocean. It was really something and I don’t blame them. But when they came over, the people were so nice and friendly.

J: They didn’t have any problems adjusting being in America?

A: No, no. And my folks, the Zergers, were very poor. They didn’t even have enough money to pay the few dollars that they had to pay to engage the land. So Dad’s uncle did that for them. And they stayed in Illinois and earned money to pay for what they had to have. And then they lived different than they do now. You know that. But we were just as happy as they are now. I’m sure.

J: You mentioned your parents telling you about the Jews in Russia. Were there any other standard stories that you parents shared with you—say, when you were sitting around as a family, would you ask for specific stories?
A: It seems to me we didn't. And I often wondered why. We didn't ask for stories and—maybe just when mama's sisters came. They laughed about things that they did there. Or what they saw there or what they said. Otherwise, they didn't—. Well, there was one funeral before they left. They were ready to go and she got sick and died. And they had to wait--hold the ship—I understood.

J: Oh, really? They had to hold it for the funeral?

A: Uh huh. Till they were through with the burial. And about the ship they never told us much. I wondered already how it was. I forgot how long they were on the ship.

J: So, in your family your parents didn't generally tell you a lot of stories?

A: Well, no. But they were a little more--always in fear for something can happen or people here they didn't know, you know. When they moved out of wherever they got, at first. And I remember we were kind of afraid when we saw a covered wagon from the north we were those were Zigeiner—those that always wanted something. They were so poor and they had to have to eat. So, sometimes we gave them some bread. We always had baked homemade bread and stuff—chickens. But, uh, I think they tried to show their Christianity very much. But they were always driven from one country to the next on account of the war. And so they were sort of not settled down too—. They wanted to live here because they like it. But they were kind of scared something could happen. More that we are.
[She talks about the one English family in school that was kind of separated. She was afraid of them. They were bigger than most of the immigrant students.]

[There were no special stories used for teaching Sunday School. Only stories specifically from the Bible were used. Children stayed home from Church until they could read. Then they were involved in Bible classes.]

A: At home we had an organ. I played the organ and sang my song and I cried all the time.

J: You cried all the time?

A: If it was a nice Christian song. I cried all the time. Sang and played—[laughs]

J: Why were you crying?

A: Well, I don’t know. Now I think I felt that I needed something, you know? To be a Christian, I think. Because we heard about Jesus and those that followed Him and those that didn’t. We got that early. We always got the Bible out. We had a big Bible. And there were pictures. They showed us the pictures and told us the story about it. And maybe that was it. I don’t know for sure.

J: When they told you the stories about the pictures would they read from the Bible or would they just tell you?

A: Well, they just told us. They didn’t read it. We were young, of course. Just told us what this means and what those people did.

J: Do you remember which pictures stand out for you?
A: Oh yes. Some were terrible!
J: Scary?
A: Scary! [Laughs] Let's see, which one was the worst? Oh. I almost cried when they had that Moses couldn't get into the land. He wanted so bad and he had so much trouble. And then he could not get in. I thought that was terrible. And when they sold Joseph was so bad, too because I didn't want to go away from home. I was one that liked to stay at home.
J: So it made you feel afraid that you might have to leave sometime?
A: Oh, yes. That would be so terrible if we'd have to do that.
[She recalls that her parents never emphasized the importance of making a decision to follow Christ. Rather they emphasized how bad it would be not to follow Him. Baptism was the time when they acknowledged publicly that they had made a decision. Adina felt that young people today feel more freedom to talk openly about spiritual decisions.]
[She recalls the spirit of helpfulness in the community. Her father was a brick mason who often did work free to help people who had a need in the community. People in the community helped an aunt of hers who had moved from western Kansas to settle by bringing her goods for her new home.]
[She recalls being scared of horses. She remembers playing house with Anna, my grandmother. The milk barn was their house and the kittens were their babies. Their dolls were homemade out of rags. Anna and Adina married young—at seventeen and nineteen. Adina]
still believes strongly that the man should be the head of the household.

[In Adina’s family, among her children, storytelling was equally scarce, although she and her husband were not as tight-lipped as her parents. Her parents felt that it was not important for the children to know what was going on—especially concerning problems in the church. They hoped that problems would be fixed without the children knowing that they existed.]

[She remembers Dan Waltner as a particularly humorous character in the community.]

A: He could talk so crazy and so dumb and we had to laugh.

J: What kind of things would he say?

A: Well, he’d say things like—like Carl [another Waltner in the community] does a little bit, too. One day it was so terrible cold all of a sudden. I think it was way below zero, and I said, "It’s a cold morning." And he said, "I think it would be too cold to go barefoot." And things like that. So dumb that it was for sure that it’s not true already.

J: Did he exaggerate or tell tall tales?

A: Yes he did.

J: Do you remember any specifics?

A: Well, I don’t remember. [Laughs] [She names a daughter] tells me very often, "Mamma, You’ve forgot. It was this way—it was a little bit different. [laughs] So I’d better not say too much.

[She reiterates the absurdity of Dan Waltner’s style. The interview ends with a discussion of what my grandmother used to say about me.]
[I summarized for Delbert the different types of stories I was looking for: family memories, immigration stories, church-related events, etc. He began by reading a story from his research for the Moundridge Centennial. The story tells of a German-speaking farmer who tries to get an American merchant to sell a whetstone for half price. The merchant misunderstands and breaks the stone in half.]

D: I'm not sure if my grandpa told me that or my dad. I'm sure it was supposed to have happened in Moundridge.

J: So this was supposed to have involved a Mennonite immigrant?

D: Yes. And the communication problems.

[He reviewed another story from a book entitled Short Stories of Swiss Mennonites Who Migrated from Volhynian Russia. The story
involves the problems of travelling at a time when there were no bridges. One family attempted to cross a flooded river and the box of their carriage ended up in one place and the horses another.]
[I asked about a story that Jim Juhnke (son of informant, William Juhnke) had told me about a farmer and his team of horses that beat a hailstorm home. He had no recollection of the story.]
[He told a story about an unusually large steer owned by a man named Wing. This story, however, doesn’t involve Mennonites.]
[We talked about his methods of collection. He mentioned interviewing residents at the Memorial Home for the Aged in Moundridge. Jacob J. Goering told him about the "black" college, a private school for instruction in the German language and Bible that was always out of money. Since they couldn’t afford to paint the exterior, it got the name the "black" college.]
[He talked about the informality of the organization of the private Mennonite schools which were loosely structured around the needs of the farmers.]
[Discussing storytelling contexts, Delbert suggested that stories usually arose in a happenstance fashion. In his family tradition, Delbert recalled almost no specific contexts in which stories could be expected to be told. His grandfather did have a reputation for telling the grandchildren stories about coming over from Russia. There was no telling of traditional folk tales per se. All his grandfather’s stories had to do with his life. Delbert recalled that his grandfather used impersonation of characters as a storytelling technique. He mentioned an interesting character in the
community, Bücher Bähr.]

D: He was a door to door salesman who drove around in his buggy. One of the things he did was peddle his books but he also had devotional type things. He just made—he made a run of the community from house to house. And wherever he landed for dinner, that’s what he had. And wherever he landed in the evening, that’s where he slept. His horse was taken care of in the barn. I remember him. [The poor quality of the recording here makes the next few lines difficult to decipher.]

Somebody asked him once about going where you’re not invited. And he said in German, "They didn’t ask me not to come."

[He didn’t know specifics about Bücher Bähr’s background. Delbert thought that the salesman also made sales in the Pretty Prairie community, another predominantly Swiss Mennonite community.]

[Delbert was not aware of any stories used for religious instruction. He recalled a story about a Mennonite church in Moundridge that drew lots to elect church leaders. One individual, who was up for the position of minister, wanted to ensure his rejection.]

D: That afternoon [a Sunday when the church was meeting to make its decision] in sight of the church—I assume he lived that close—he hitched up horses to a plow and started plowing the fields where the people could see him and was smoking a cigarette. I would draw from that that he didn’t want the job. But he was chosen and he accepted [difficult to decipher] and had a long tenure at that congregation. And served, I’m sure,
an awful lot of people.

[He asked if I'd heard a story about a woman with unusually large hands who could milk a cow taking two of the quarters of the udder in each hand. In Russia, the Bolsheviks would watch her and toss her coins as tips. She migrated to the U.S. and continued milking cows until she was eighty years old. He also told a story about the influential church leader, Elder Jacob Stucky.]

D: He was aware of some factions in his church. One of his grandsons—well, this is no secret—Peter J. P. Schrag, has written up like a term paper on Elder Jacob Stucky's vision. Now, Elder Stucky died before Peter J.P. was born. So this was handed down from somewhere. But in this vision, he predicted a number of things that did come to pass. He predicted the split [the Eden Church broke away from the original Hopefield Church]. He predicted that the church would move to where Eden is now. And that they were going to have a minister with a long name—I mean Hopefield would. And that was Neuenschwander [garbled phrase].

[Elder Jacob also predicted that a monument would be erected on a site near the Hopefield Church. In 1976, a commemorative monument was raised for the centennial celebration of the Swiss Mennonites' migration. Evidently, Elder Jacob asked that the details of his vision not be released until after the monument was erected. Delbert discussed the sketchy origins of Elder Jacob's vision and the difficulty of determining what actually was a part of the original document.]
Good morning. The information that I covered with most of the folks I've interviewed earlier involved family background. But since I know pretty much about our family background, what I'd like to focus on specifically is stories Grandpa Juhnke may have shared with you about coming over to the United States from Germany, being immigrants in America, and so forth. Did Grandpa relate any stories like that to you?

No—no. I was younger and I remember a few things. You see, he was an orphan. He had a sister that came. He never told us anything about his parents in Germany or Pomerania. But he had a sister who came and her son, Augustus. Of course, they were
of German and evangelical background.

[I have deleted some background information. William talked about his large family. He is the oldest surviving son of ten children.]

J: Okay. What kind of things did you all do for fun when you were growing up?

W: Oh!—We had the creek going through our place. So we fished, and went swimming, and even when the water was rough— I remember one incident. We were north of the barn and the creek ran right close by and Carl and Walt and John, they were dancing on the ledge of the creek. And the high water was almost full. And I said, "Be careful," I said, "because it's uneven there you might slip—" and all the sudden Carl was slipping down. And John and Walt, they were younger. They were closer to him and he was pulling on grass to save himself—pulling himself back up, you know. And by then I was afraid that the boys might go. So I pulled on him—I got him out.

J: So you were the hero in that situation.

W: Yes. He remembers that and we kids we talk about that, you know.

J: So you had a lot of fun by the creek.

[I have deleted a discussion of childhood activities which included farm chores, playing marbles, and playing ball with cousins who lived nearby.]

J: Most of the mixing you did with students, then, was at school or at, maybe, church related activities.

W: Yes. Yes, I think the church was very important in our lives—
Christian Endeavor and that sort of thing. I met my wife! The
first date I ever had with her I took her home from Christian
Endeavor.

J: I see. Okay.

[Here I asked about special family traditions, and William talked
about the family devotional before bedtime which included singing
and a German prayer led by his father.]

J: Okay. Did the family ever sit around and reminisce or tell
stories during times together? Was that a part of your home
life? Do you remember telling stories as a family?

W: Well—not, not a great deal. Uh, the unfortunate thing was that
Grandmother Juhnke died at age forty. That was before I was
born, you know. I never did see her. But, uh, I learned about
her through tracing the family record of landowners here and
tracing her origin to the Jank— the married Janken. But my
father didn't tell very much about his particular family
because he lost his mother. And Sundays, we never went to the
Juhnke family. But we did go to my mother's family. And I
played much more with my mother's— which was the Kaufman
family. They were good friends of ours. So I remember playing
especially with Uncle Lee's kids. Who was born in— like I
mentioned a little bit ago— he was born when Moundridge was
organized. And he lived close to us. And his father, my
mother's father, was the elder— the second elder— of the
Hopefield Church. And so I remember much visitation going on in
our family visits, between our parents about church affairs—
church problems and church difficulties. Especially after Grandpa passed away in 1929, then there were some problems about changes in the church. They got the first non-Mennonite person —came in to preach after he did. And then there was great trouble and tribulation.

J: So most of the stories that were told when you got together as the larger, extended family had to do with church issues?

W: It seems like church issues, yes.

J: Because it's been said that Mennonites have no distinctive tradition of telling stories. Do you think that's a fairly accurate statement?

W: Well, uh, you know there are some stories—one of the greatest storytellers in our tradition was P. R. Kaufman. His nickname was Petie. And he was a storyteller. He told about coming from—you know, he was only nine years old when he came from Russia. And his recounting, in a book that we had, had stories about his experiences in coming, and how he played, you know. He got to America, the land of the free—how he ran up and down the aisle when they got into the immigrant house. But he was called down for his wildness. And, of course, he was a storyteller. He told about experiences in Russia—school in Russia—what it was like. You know, we had our own teachers and all that kind of thing. And he, uh, he told that. I interviewed, uh, another person, who was my father's cousin, about early days in the community. And he, he—I asked him about Indians he remembers that ever came by Moundridge in the
early days. "Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" he said, "there were some at Halstead and some at Wichita." But he closed up his telling about his experiences then, you know. But they were the peaceful kind.

J: I see.

W: I remember Adolph Goering was a wonderful storyteller, but he was a single man. He was a philanthropist; he gave some money to Bethel College to build Goering Hall. And when he was old, he would tell me, for instance, about Indians. He said one story that was told him by his family was about Indians coming to the Alta Mill one Sunday.

J: To the Alta Mill?

W: To the Alta Mill.

J: Where is that?

W: That was on the Little Arkansas River. And that's where our people took their wheat to be ground into flour.

J: Oh, okay.

W: Ransom Stucky's father and uncles ran the mill. I remember when he told me that one time they were about 200 Indians. This, uh, they stopped at the Alta Mill. And an old scale to weigh sacks of wheat was outside, and one tied his pony to the scale. And then they went west of the mill, across the river. And eventually they came back. When they came back, the pony tied to the scale ran off and, uh, pulled the scale along with it and smashed it to pieces. And one fellow, who was a mill owner, was a Schrag, Joseph Schrag. He wanted to sue the
Indians and make them pay for fixing this and all. But the other partner, Jacob H. Goering, which was, uh, Andrew's, uh— [William's wife, Meta, who is passing the hallway outside the study, corrects him: "Adolph!"] Adolph. Adolph Goering's grandfather, he said, "Oh no. We can't—that would cause more trouble." And so one was peaceful, and the other guy he would have, you know, wanted, uh, uh—

J: Would these people, the mill owners been people of your father's generation?

W: My grandfather's.

J: Your grandfather's generation?

W: And older. They would have been in Russia. One story about this mill owner, for example, who wanted to sue this Indian or bring him to justice, that I heard—that was told me about an experience he had in Russia. The Mennonites weren't all perfect, of course. And one time he went with, when he lived in Russia, uh. He, he—

J: Okay, this is a story of Adolph Goering's?

W: Adolph? That, that, uh—no not Adolph Goering. Eli Schrag is the one that told me this about his uncle. This was—


W: Yah. But he later was one the fellows who ran this mill. Well, he left Kotosufka one day with a horse and buggy to the county seat town, Zhitomir. And over there he drank. He bought some liquor—whatever the Russian liquor was—that he came home with two horse buggies, a different buggy altogether—
left his own horse there.

J: [Laughs] That's pretty good. When I ran into Jim at Bethel College yesterday [Jim is William's son, a professor of History at the Mennonite college in North Newton, Kansas.], he said, "Be sure to ask dad about the story of the fellow who was trying to beat the hailstorm home."

W: Oh. Oh, oh, oh, oh.

J: Do you remember that one?

W: Well, that—that's the kind of story—story—Yah. Sure. The uh—a fellow with a—is telling how good a horse he had on his particular buggy. Now this buggy had a little box in the back. And I remember my father taking us to school, and there were several of us children, when it was muddy. And I would stand in this, uh, back of the seat in this box they had—the buggy—the seat. And anyway, this fellow was caught in a hailstorm. He was coming home—back into his home. But he kept the horse and the buggy going fast enough that the hailstones filled up the back—behind the seat already, you know. And when he got home, as luck would have it, the barn door was open. So that as he drove into the barn, one hailstone hit a post that was beside—the olden—the gate was attached to—or, uh, the closed—and one hailstone hit that post and drove it clear into the ground. [John laughs.] But his horse kept in front of the storm and kept him going home.

J: Now, who told you that story?

W: Well, that is a story that was an old Kansas farmer, Mahon
Breese. There was a continuing record. And I read all those stories. When I would visit my younger nieces, I would tell these stories to them.

J: Okay. It was a story you had read.

W: That I read and, uh, tell.

J: Was it supposedly a true story about someone who lived around here?

W: Not necessarily.

J: Just a tall tale.

W: Just wild tales, you know.

J: Did you traditionally tell those kind of stories for your family? For instance, you said you told them to your nieces and so forth.

W: Yah, at times. Somewhat.

J: I'm sure there were also stories around family themes like those you told about Carl falling into the creek. I would imagine that being second generation descendants from the immigrant families, there are still some stories about the difficulties adjusting here in America, being a German speaking people.

[Here, I asked about a story told by Delbert Goering, another informant. William remembered it but had difficulty reconstructing it.]

W: Now here's one story that tells something about the people and their attitude toward the leader, you know, when they came from Russia to America. Elder Jacob Stucky was the leader. And
Meta's mother told me this story about Elder Jacob. When they came to Hamburg and got on to the boat the first time—these people lived on more or less flat land and never were familiar with water. And some of the women were afraid to go on the boat. The boat was bobbing just a little bit. And one other lady was comforting one of these who was very frightened. They said, "Ach, don't worry. If Elder Stucky is going to be on the boat, it won't sink."

J: So, they had a lot of confidence in him!

W: They had a lot of confidence in their leader. This continued for the early years in America, but then eventually some of the problems and some of the jealousies that were present in Russia, you know, evolved here, too, and caused frictions and differences.

J: My Great Aunt, Adina, said that her parents said something about a funeral holding up the boat when their family came over. Have you ever heard that story?

W: No, I'm not familiar with that.

J: As you said before, a lot of the stories we know are somehow related to church themes or religious themes. For instance, the high esteem, that Elder Jacob Stucky was held in. Evidently, there is a story about a vision of his involving some predictions that he made that came true. Are you familiar with that?

W: Well, a little bit, yes. Pete Schrag has written a little about this. See, when he was retirement age, it was a little hard
holding the community together. One of his sons had some difficulty. One married his cousin. The youngest son married his cousin and had to go out of state to get married. And so, his credibility was reduced and finally, he—I don’t know. But some have said in choosing a minister, one thing Elder did not—he didn’t choose anybody. He didn’t have a son to follow him, you know, that he could choose at all. That created some problems. Some has been written about the Elder’s vision—what he saw, foresaw, you know. He kind of foresaw that there would be no minister to hold the community together. And, you should—it was common among the Amish—the rule was that if you don’t have a minister that emerges to choose, then you should get an elder from the nearby communities. Not necessarily a Schweitzer [Swiss German], even. And this caused quite some friction. Some thought, "No, we’re not getting an outsider!" And there were certain criticisms of him. I know there’s a story that a Pretty Prairie elder should be used—some of them thought. And then there was some correspondence. He didn’t—they didn’t get along, it seemed like, the elder and the Pretty Prairie elder whose name was Flickinger. And then there were some letters exchanged. And in the pulpit there was some talk about rivalry and jealousy or whatever. And finally the church elders moved that there shall be no more talk of this problem between them! And that was enough to lead to his permanent retirement, and, finally, his death, too—once he was told by the church, "Let’s have no more talk of this." There is something there that
needs some more research and I don’t know if there are actual records.

J: How were the church leaders chosen? Would it have been up to Elder Jacob to say, "Here’s our next leader?"

W: I don’t know what the elders—what the process of choosing was in Russia or elsewhere. But it seems often it was the son or somebody in the family that followed. And there was, of course, the lot also. My mother’s father was chosen by lot to be elder of Hopefield.

J: So they did—

W: Later, after him—it was his son-in-law that became the elder at Hopefield.

[For a moment, William and I were talking at the same time which makes it difficulty to distinguish the words. I believe he was trying to point out to me that Elder Jacob Stucky is my great grandfather.]

J: So, that process of drawing lots involved what? Did they put a piece of paper in the Bible?

W: Yes, well, there were three people in the community already chosen as ministers—that were serving as ministers. I suppose that was not by lot. And it was these three that—I understand that there were four Bibles. And it was possible that nobody would be chosen. But one of them, they had something that—you’re the one that I want, you know. And Napoleon Kaufman, my mother’s father, he drew the one that had the lot. And so he was chosen leader. But there was, uh—I suppose it varied
somewhat. I don’t know.

J: Delbert Goering was telling me a story about one of the churches in the community where they were about to make a decision about a pastor for their church. Evidently, there was one fellow who tried to scare them off by working his field and smoking a cigarette on Sunday while they were having their church meeting. Are you familiar with that story?

W: Yes, I’m very familiar—that person was from the First Mennonite Church, P. P. Wedel.

J: First Mennonite Church in Moundridge?

W: Yah, yah. He was a Bible—he taught Bible in high school. I know he was a long term minister. He was one that preached for a long time.

J: So they ultimately did choose him?

W: Yah, they did choose him, anyway. I heard that kind of story, too. That he was being considered and so that he’d not choose, I understand, he went into the field and did some work on Sunday, even!

[We discussed the practice that some Mennonite groups have of forbidding musical instruments in church. Although this was not true of William’s experience, the discussion ultimately led him to relate the following story.]

W: There was a band organized. And I know one time one of the people from the Hopefield Church—a Strauss, Grandpa Strauss—happened to be in town when the band had set up on Main Street and was practicing playing. They had occasional band days. I
think every year there was a band day. And bands from different towns would come in. So there was a lot of blaring. He noticed his team was afraid of the music. And he noticed there was some Eden and Hopefield members in there, too. So at the next church meeting he moved to expel anybody from the church who plays in the band.

J: Oh, really? Why was that considered such a taboo?

W: Well, his horses were scared, you know. They were playing the band and they almost ran away from him.

[He digressed for a moment, talking about church members’ participation in band and choir. He then discussed the Mennonites’ break with the Amish and mentioned that Elder Jacob Stucky was more considered with the heart than with legalistic details.]

J: Let me trace some other stories from the family and find out what you know about them. Walt [William’s brother and my stepfather] said today that just recently a story came out about Otto Juhnke and the Ku Klux Klan. Have you heard this story?

W: Yes. [He stammers a bit trying to explain that Uncle Otto was my grandfather’s brother.] He lived west of Elyria on the McPherson road. And one night the Baptist Church, uh—Fields, a neighbor, noticed that there was some excitement going on apparently there. And he didn’t know what it was. And he went out—he was going to bed and he quick put on his clothes and went out there. They were going to hang him for being disloyal to the United States. This was during the war.
J: World War I?

W: World War I, I suppose. It was almost like the Creek John, so called because he had numerous creeks running through his property] story where a mob from Burrton came and almost executed him for not buying war bonds. But this, I didn't know about this. I had no inkling that Uncle Otto was ever in trouble until I read this book by Fields, the young man who told about him.

J: So Fields was Uncle Otto's neighbor?

W: Was a neighbor. And his son has written a book in which he told how his father came. And he saw that it was people that had led communion in the Baptist Church in the morning! [Here, Meta leans in from the hallway and inserts, "He recognized their shoes."] And how, "What are you doing here?" He looked at his shoes and says, "I recognize you. You served communion and here you are doing this to my neighbor. That won't go." He saved his life.

J: Fields was not a Mennonite, then?

W: No. He was Baptist.

J: Someone who recognized people from his own congregation.

W: Yah, from his own congregation, right.

J: I see. Do you have a story about runaway horses? Walt said to ask you about the runaway horses.

W: Yah, well. Kind of, you know my father was road boss. That is, he had several miles that he'd drag. And he would get paid for keeping the road in shape. He would drag the road with
several horses pulling a drag. He'd stand on the drag and he'd
go up and down one side and back on the other.

J: Kind of like what a grader would do.

W: Yah, right, right. But more than this, the roots—the cause of
the story—. A mile south of here they had graded the road.
And it was a little bit wet and it was bumpy. And so on this
particular— was it a Saturday morning?— I don't know what.
Anyway, I wasn't in school. I was pretty young, but I had a
chance to go along with Dad. And three horses hitched to a
spring wagon had one unit of harrow. And dragging behind the—
and we crossed the two bridges over there. And just when we got
to the first bridge, Dad got off and gave me the lines to the
horses. And he was going to raise up the harrow that was
dragging behind. What he was going to do is drag the road—try
to get the road more even so people could drive with their
vehicles. And just as we crossed the first bridge, he lifted it
up because there were wooden planks across and the harrow would
hold on. Well, anyway, we got across the second bridge going
west, and a rabbit jumped out of some tin cans piled in the
debris that was on the west side—the southwest side of the
bridge. And that scared the horse on that side and they all
started jumping. And the harrow broke off and Dad stayed behind
and they started running. And it was so bouncy and all, after a
little bit, that I pulled the line and drove off to the west
where in the ditch it was smoother. It was kind of cleaned out.
And I tried to hold the horses and slow them down. I didn't
even think of jumping off. But, anyway, a little bit farther ahead, I noticed there was a telephone pole and the tongue of the wagon, the middle of it, was—the horses were headed right toward the telephone pole. And that would blow our wagon and knock me off of the buggy and all. But I managed to pull the lines to the right just enough so the third horse on this side came on this side of the telephone pole. And when they hit the pole, it jerked his head. And, a strap broke through, but it missed the left side wheels of the buggy. And I kept going on. So I was kind of lucky. It saved my life there. But, later on I got back on the road again—it wasn't quite so bad. I came up to Val Krehbiel's. You talked to Mrs. Val Krehbiel?

J: Yes, I talked to Great Aunt Adina.

W: And her husband saw that my horses were running. And I said—I yelled, "Stop mei Geil! Stop mei Geil!" ["Stop my horses! Stop my horses!"] And the kids were out there kind of—coming out to the drive. And so he got in front of the horses and they started up again. He backed off. He couldn't stop them. My dad was way behind already by now. I know I had an Uncle—Uncle Simon lived further that way—Sam Stucky's father. But I thought—I was just a young kid—I thought I passed their place a long time ago. I was wondering whether I'd run off the world already someplace. I was so scared. But, sure enough, we came a little bit later to a place. "No, this is Uncle Simon's place here!" So I turned the horses in there and drove against the barn. I got them stopped, I guess. I got off and I thought,
"I'm going to tie a link and back up again." And I did. I looked and, sure enough, it seemed like he was hooked back on again. Now, what kind of miracle had happened? It seemed like I didn't have anything to tie. Anyway, I thought I'd back up and go back and meet my dad. And I backed up a ways. And, no, the horses, when I turned them that way and drove up ahead instead of going back to the road, they went out—they turned to the north and went out on the field. And they started picking up again. And out in the middle of the field—way out there—I saw a fellow plowing with a gang plow and five horses. And so I headed in his direction. And sure enough, that was my Uncle Simon. And when I came close to him, they slowed down again. He stopped. He put his lines around something on the plow. And I told him, "Ich bin der Wille Juhnke. Am Ernst—sei buh." ["I am Willie Juhnke. Ernest's boy."] "Jo, Ich kenn dich." "I know who you are. I recognize you." By this time, Val's car—Dad picked up Val—turned on to the field. [He mutters something that is unintelligible and then laughs.]

J: Is that when they got them stopped finally?

W: Yah, then finally we went back and I don't remember hooking up the harrow and harrowing finally. But then we got back home. I still remember to this day when we got home, that my mother served for the meal—Maak Blotski. Little dumplings in Maak and stuffing. Oh, that was good.

[He recalled telling his cousins about the runaway horses, and I moved on to ask about jokers in the community. William told of a
report he heard that his father and father's cousin, Dan Waltner, used to entertain at the Pleasant Ridge old literaries by jigging, singing, and saying poems.]

[Side one of the tape ended with my question about stories involving outsiders to the community, and William mentioned George Endke. Side two follows.]

J: So, continue with the George Endke story.

W: One of the things that some people remember is that there was a whisky—a cold drink—during harvest time that they would put down into the well to cool. He took this cooling thing up and spilled the water and urinated into it. He would play a trick. He watched somebody else come and drink that cold water and take a swig of it. I don't remember—I heard Alfalfa Bill Murray, governor of Oklahoma, tell the story about the fellow that was so tight—the farmer—and he had a man drive his horse-drawn mower around the field and he would watch. The farmer that owned this rig went home and came back. He went to a shock where the water jug was, too. He looked down automatically and it was oil instead of water. So he filled up his mouth with water [he means oil]. He kept the oil in there until the binder came clear around. Then at the end, he crawled under the binder and oiled whole dang machine.

J: [Laughs] Now, who told this story?

W: This was at a teacher's meeting in Wichita. A speaker who was then governor of Oklahoma, Alfalfa Bill Murray. He was running—he came to talk to the teachers because he was a candidate for
[Here, Meta leaned in from the hallway and handed me a note on which was scrawled, "Uncle Wesley's hay story."]

J: Meta suggested that you tell the Uncle Wesley's hay story.

[Meta encouraged him, saying, "You remember? You remember that one."]

W: He put up hay with a Wedel—now, which Wedel was that?

[Meta answered, "John Wedel's older brother."]

W: Yah, well, there's a Wedel family. They put up some hay together. Half of it was to be Uncle Wesley's half and half of it was to be—. It was a very hot day and the guy said to Uncle Wesley, "Why, shucks, it would be a lot more fun to go fishing." And Uncle Wesley was up on the stack. The stack was just about closed in so if rain would come, it would be one good stack, and about half the hay was still—. Uncle Wesley—he told this neighbor of his with whom he was working together, he said, "I'll tell you. All right. Fine. But this stack is going to be mine! What's out there is going to be yours." "Okay, okay, okay. I'll take what's left." And so they went fishing. That night a big rain storm came and his hay got wet. Uncle Wesley got a good laugh out of that.

[We established that Wesley was my grandfather's brother and looked at an old portrait of my grandfather's family. I then asked for stories about the travelling salesman, Bücher (Books) Bähr.

William remembered him but recalled very few specific stories.]

[My next question addressed the style of particularly good
storytellers in the community. William digressed somewhat as he discussed one good storyteller, Christian Krehbiel. He recalled some incidents from Krehbiel’s autobiography involving his advocacy of education in various Mennonite communities. When I asked William specifically about gestures and the use of impersonation, he assented that generally good storytellers used these elements of style.

[William then was reminded of a story that Adolph Goering told him about Napoleon Kaufman, William’s grandfather, and Peter C. Stucky. Both Kaufman and Stucky were ministers, but they weren’t on speaking terms. Evidently, when the elders were chosen by lots, Kaufman was selected and Stucky was not. Jealousy caused the tension in their relationship. In fact, one Sunday morning, Stucky was seen spying in the windows of the church while Napoleon was making preparations for the morning service.]

[I questioned William about the different situations in which stories have been told, but he never answered the question directly. He did, however, recall an interesting story about a hired hand from the Boy’s Industrial School who was “a real tough character.”]

W: One time we were thrashing stacks. One stack was just about done and they were just cleaning up on the stack. This fellow was a little careless with his pitchfork. And the handle hit him here [he gestures to his chin], right on his chin and gave him a heck of a blow. I couldn’t see any blood or anything, but I was close by. As a little boy, I stepped up closer to look at him to see what happened. And he stuck his tongue
through the hole at me. He didn’t get it fixed until in the evening. The next day he was back at work.

J: Did he have stitches?

W: Yes, I think so.

[I made one more attempt to probe storytelling contexts. With Mata’s help, William finally acknowledged that farmers would gather at the elevator or the Co-op filling station in Elyria to take a break from their day’s work, and there they would tell stories. He didn’t elaborate on any other contexts. During this line of inquiry, William offered an observation on the function of storytelling.]

J: What sort of function does storytelling serve for a group of people like ours? There is certainly a lot of identity established by the kind of stories we tell.

W: I think another thing is, to build yourself up or to tear somebody else down—to gossip. Stories are told just to belittle the black sheep of the community or the families that are not popular, you know.

[I asked about stories other than Bible stories that were told in Sunday School as a part of religious instruction, but William responded instead by telling about the unusual strength and influence of his grandmother, Frehnie Juhnke. He also repeated a saying that he often heard his grandfather, Carl, use at bedtime.]

W: In’s Bett, in’s Bett, [To bed, to bed]

Wer eny hett—Who has one,

Wer keny hett—Who has none,
Must auch in’s Bett—Must also have a bed.

So, there’s a little bit of generosity in that kind of thing.

J: Well, you’ve given me a lot of good information. Thank you for your time.

W: Yah, well, I don’t know. I’m sorry I’m so disorganized.

[End of taped interview.]
[Goering remembered that the single outlet for socialization was the church. Visitation after the services was the usual social fare.]
[Goering agreed with the statement that the Mennonites have no distinctive tradition of telling stories. He said that storytelling consisted mainly of family reminiscences and stories of the past. He was not aware of storytelling having been used as an instructional tool in church education.]

J: You mentioned that your mother often told you stories about her past. Did you prompt her to tell them or did she volunteer them? In what kind of a situation would she tell these stories?
G: Well, I think maybe we prompted her, too. But she willingly said about—she mentioned about her home life. She married young. She was fifteen years old when she married.

J: She was married when she came over from Russia?

G: Yes. Had two children—well, the second one was born on board ship. And then of course, another son was born here in the states. She said that her father was a tyrant.

J: How so? Was he very strict?

G: Terrifically strict. Things were taboo. They were not to have any ornamentation in their hair, for instance. She had a little ribbon in her hair. That ribbon was torn out and into the stove.

J: Because that was considered sinful to have that kind of ornamentation.

G: Yes, right.

J: Was that pretty standard? Did she think that her father was more of a tyrant than other fathers she knew?

G: Well, how could she say? I don’t know. She told me also that she was happy to get married at least to get away from home.

[He wasn’t aware of any stories told about the difficulty the immigrants had adjusting to life in America. He didn’t remember his parents discussing dissension in the church. Nor was he aware of any stories about drawing lots for church leadership.]

J: Delbert Goering mentioned something to me about a character named Bücher Bähr. Does that ring a bell?

G: Oh, yes. Yes. I knew the man.
J: What was he like and what did he do?

G: He was never married. He was a victim of arthritis badly, or rheumatism. He was a book seller [garbled phrase] for Mennonite Book Concern, Berne, Indiana. And he drove a team of horses and a buggy. And he drove from house to house selling books or periodicals, whatever. And if people invited him, he stayed overnight.

J: Was he pretty well accepted in the community?

G: Yes, yes.

J: People didn’t mind to see him coming around?

G: Didn’t mind, no.

[I asked if he recalled any stories about difficulties on the farm.]

G: In my own family, we were putting up hay. Gilbert was driving the hay rake. The horses ran away for him. He fell down. And I don’t know how he happened to get out, but he did.

J: How did he fall?

G: Not backwards, but ahead.

J: So he fell in front of the rake?

G: Yah.

J: And it went over him?

G: That—I don’t know how that happened! 'Course, there was hay in there. Another incident when the horses started running. Victor was—I sent him out to plow. And they went on the road and started running. They turned on to the field but they just kept on going. My neighbor, Waltner, just was at the yard. He says, "Get in here!"—you know, the car. He took off and got to
those horses and stopped them.

J: Was there someone holding on to the horses as they were running?

G: Victor was hanging on to the seat. He didn't get off. And then I got on that—I shouldn't say it, but then—I got on to that plow and I put that plow down and I gave them the works.

"Now, run if you want to run!" Now, that was pretty dangerous.

[Jacob had no recollection of the story about the farmer who beat the hailstorm home with his team of horses. He did comment that hailstorms were a significant fear of that farmers of his time.]

[His parents didn't talk to him about the Elder Jacob Stucky. He recommended that I read Solomon Stucky's book on the history of the Swiss Mennonites.]

[He didn't recall any particular good storytellers in the community. Final remembrances had to do with schooling. The public school term was five months and the Bible school term was three months. All instruction in Bible school was in German. He discussed the differences between Swiss German and High German. All students could speak both languages. They used High German in Bible school and spoke the Swiss dialect at home.]
[We discussed Schrag's research for an album he made (Unsere Leit) that deals with the unique style of the Swiss German dialect. Swiss German, or Schweitzer as it is called, is a completely oral language. Schrag's interest is in preserving the dialect. His album records various rhymes, idioms, and folk sayings of the Swiss Mennonites in Kansas. He said that storytelling is not really prevalent among the Kansas Mennonites.]

S: Now, the South Dakota people [Swiss Mennonites who settled there] have more stories—real stories. You know, like the white woman—Die weisse Frau—and several others. I was really surprised how many stories they had. [He explained the kinds of people he used for informants.] Most of the material I got
around here were from—well, there were two sources. From people who did not go on to school—they were people who stayed on the farm basically, and they used the language and they didn’t try to get away from it. The same thing happened in Pretty Prairie. And then I went to the older people and I got a few rhymes that I hadn’t heard before. Much of that I knew. I just hadn’t retained it.

J: It’s been said that the Mennonites have no distinctive tradition of telling stories. Would you say that is true for our people?

S: Well, I don’t know. I don’t think that telling stories is their long suit. But, there are stories. Sometimes you have to dig a while till you get them out. But there are some stories that have been—especially in their own experiences, you know. I know my mother told a lot of good stories about the move from Russia and some of the hardships. So, they created their own stories.

J: Who was your mother?

S: Adina Kaufman. She was—well, [he mentions a brother of hers]. Her parents were immigrants. And that’s another thing. Her parents and their siblings split when they got to New York. Her parents went to South Dakota. And the others came to Moundridge. My grandparents, then, the Kaufman grandparents, lived in South Dakota for about ten years. Then they had letters from Kansas telling how good Kansas was. So they came to Kansas. South Dakota at that time had drinking water difficulties. They didn’t go down deep enough and so they had
very hard water with all those rocks. And, of course, the winter—they couldn't—they weren't prepared for the severe winters. So it's the rocks and the water and the family down here. So ten years later they moved down here.

J: What were the most engaging stories that your mother told you about the process of immigration?

S: Well, there were a lot of stories about Elder Stucky. It's not a very long story, but they made the point that when they got on the ship, for instance—and, of course, they were scared, obviously, to make that trip over the ocean. They said as long as Elder Stucky's on there, why, there's no problem. I mean, that ship isn't going to sink as long as Elder Stucky is on there. There were some stories, of course, that developed through the church because there was a lot of division there. But those stories, of course, weren't really stories that you would tell for entertainment. There was a lot of discussion about that.

J: A lot of the stories that I've collected have to do with maladies on the farm. Do you know any stories about problems with farming or that have something to do with life on the farm?

S: Well, there was a lot of that going on. And, of course, sort of an in-story you'd have—. We were together with our cousins, especially the Dan Schrag boys. And we developed a lot of little stories, you know. But no one—they didn't amount to anything outside of your group. But they just happened—things that happened. And we also would have sort of our own
made idioms. For instance, if I would say, "grimm Strück vereiss" what would that mean to anyone else? Well, it happened that Victor Goering was visiting Uncle Dan's and somehow we fooled around with a rope in the barn. He was involved where he was irritated, he was grim [grimm]. He was angry about it. [Laughs]. And the rope broke, see? Well, so then we would just say, "Grümm Strück vereiss," and that was our story. And we knew what was going on. And another one, for instance, that we used an awful lot—. In the Hopefield Church—it was a small church—and most everybody who could carry a tune would join the choir. Well, there was a John Strauss there who was somewhat the butt of a lot of stories because he wasn't the homeliest person nature ever created. [His inflection indicates he means Strauss was the homeliest.] And he couldn't sing very well but then, he would try it. Well, we had a cantata. And at the dress rehearsal—obviously it was a time when you'd have seating arrangements made. Well, John Strauss wasn't there. So, at the time for rendition he was there. Now, then he walked up and said, "Where do I sit?" And at that time, Ed P. Goering was still alive. And he asked Ed P., "Now, where do I sit?" And Ed P. said, "Das wees nurre der Gott und der Neuenschwander." Now Neuenschwander was our preacher. "Only God and Neuenschwander knows where you're going to sit!" [Laughs] That kind of stories, you know. And then one time, for instance, we were going home from church. And that was the time when we still had touring cars and you
know—. And we were going east, turning to the north that where—that was our road. And there was Fred Grundman. He had a worse car than we did. And his car just wasn’t working at all. And just as we passed him, why he said, "Ich kann der Karborator nicht kriegen! Ich kann der Karborator nicht kriegen!" The carburetor doesn’t work, you know. And then, finally when he got going, he said, "Entlich uf hoch!" Finally, I’m on high! [Laughs] So, those kind of stories we just used when something didn’t happen the way it should. We would bring in one of those stories. Everybody knew what we meant. And it was sort of an "in" story. That type of thing.

J: It seems like our people have a stronger tradition of having that kind of an in-story as an identifying factor. In my family, for example, if Mom has made a bauble of some sort, subsequently, we will bring up a word or a phrase that will recall that. I’ve seen that happening a lot among our people. Family stories seem to predominate our tradition. I know the Canadian Mennonites have a tradition of telling stories for religious instruction that are not specifically Bible stories. That seems totally foreign to our people.

S: It would have been the unusual. It just doesn’t seem to me like we were terribly vocal. We were pretty good on one-on-one or one-on-small group. But, anyone that talked much more than that got elected to be preacher, I guess. I don’t know. [Laughs]

J: Do you recall your mom telling stories about the difficulty of adjusting in American society?
S: Oh, yes, yes. One of the things that she brought out an awful lot was—. In my dad's family—she married into the Schrags. And that was a bunch of boys. But there was one—that was Andrew—that went off to school. Then he came home and brought culture back home. Like pressing your pants and folding handkerchiefs—something like that. That was unheard of, you know—that type of thing. And the ridicule that he had to take because he didn't wear overalls after he had been teaching a while or at the university or something. And Grandma Schrag—because at that time, Grandpa was dead—asked him to lead the morning devotions. And he refused. You know what that could do to a family!

J: That was probably extremely traumatic.

S: It really was, yah.

J: You mentioned earlier that people didn't talk too much for fear of being elected as minister. I'm wondering if you recall any stories about drawing lots for church leadership?

S: Well, my mother told this on Uncle Andrew Schrag who—. I guess they had a sort of run-off election. At least, he had gotten the most votes. And then he was put into the lot with several others. And, of course, he didn't get it. And then, I think it was Uncle Voran got it that time. I'm not sure who else. But anyhow, he was left out. That was another one of those things that really hurt the family. Or hurt him, you know.

J: Do you know what was involved in the process of drawing lots?

S: They had nominations for various—. And I don't know would it—
sometimes three or sometimes five of the highest were—. And a slip of paper was put into each Bible and that's how they were selected. If you selected the right Bible—or the wrong Bible—whatever way you look at it.

J: You mentioned Bücher Bähr in your album, Unsere Leit. Were there stories associated with him and his dealings in the community?

S: Oh, yah. There were a lot of stories. There were a lot of incidents. He was an unwelcomed guest in a lot of places, for one thing. He always came—well, he didn't—but I mean, the story is that he would pretty well time himself so he would get there at dinner time—that type of thing. He would—of course, he came with a horse and buggy. So he had to have feed for his horse. And that—those would create a few stories. And then he was a very sharp—very avid card player. He wanted to play cards all the time. Now, we didn't welcome him. He still came, but he never stayed at our place. We didn't have a spare bedroom for him. But the thing I remember more than anything else—I remember his face, his beard. But I remember the plaque on his teeth. It was just that thick. [Gestures to his teeth as if scraping] Oh, you know, just soft stuff. Ooh!

[Laughs]

[Schrag wasn't certain of Bähr's origin, but he assumed he was an immigrant.]

[I asked about jokers in the community and about stories that poked fun at eccentrics in the community.]
S: Well, I don’t recall right now. A lot of them were X-rated. A lot of them were X-rated, really. I know you don’t want this or it isn’t what you’re getting at, but what little research I’ve done—it just seems to me like our funny stories are X-rated. A little different than the Low Germans. The Low Germans have a lot of stories that aren’t X-rated. I don’t recall right now any stories.

J: But they all deal with topics that are a little risqué?

S: Uh huh.

[He mentioned that a lot of the nicknames used were also risqué and are no longer in use.]

J: Do you recall people talking about particularly exceptional storytellers in the community? Were there folks like that that were admired for their ability to entertain?

S: Yes, for entertaining. I don’t know whether for—. Yes, yes, there were. There were some people like that. Whether you can come up with just exact ones—. Yes. I often recognized that when we went visiting because my dad was just the opposite. He was just not a storyteller, you know. So that when we went some place that was a lot of storytelling. Especially when we went to Pretty Prairie. We were just filled with stories. But, um—oh, let’s see, who were some of them? We had people that were but I can’t recall right now any particular ones.

[I asked Schrag about the Weisse Frau (White Woman) story that is a part of the folklore of the South Dakota Mennonites. He didn’t feel as though he were the right person to tell the story since it is not}
a part of our tradition. He did summarize it briefly.)

J: Do you recall any similar kinds of stories that we tell around here, or is my assumption correct that storytelling, in the strict sense, is not our "strong suit" as you put it?

S: I don't think it is.

[The interview ended with a brief summary of the kinds of stories my research had uncovered. Schrag affirmed that William Juhnke was an appropriate informant because of his reputation as a good storyteller.]
Interview by: John McCabe-Juhnke
With: Richard Schrag
Place: The Schrag Residence, Moundridge, Kansas
Date: Thursday, March 27, 1986

J=John     R=Richard

J: First of all, I would like to trace what kind of special memories you have of your childhood. What kind of things did you do for fun in the home? What were special family activities like?

R: We made our own entertainment. We were a family of ten. I had one brother who was less that two years younger than I. As children, we used to take some spoons, some old discarded tablespoons, and we'd rig them up in tandem sometime and we had a tandem plow. We went along in the dust and we were playing plowing and then we were playing raking. We were playing farming in our own imagination as children. That was one of the simplest things we did. As a family, we were not allowed to
have regular cards. We were not allowed to have a rook deck in the house. We did not play rook. I think later the younger ones finally even made some rook cards. They colored them different colors just so they weren't rook cards because card playing, according to the folks, was considered an evil because gambling was always seemingly associated with it. Then we had another game called Miel Zu. I don’t believe I could play it anymore. But it was also a homemade game played with buttons. We played some checker, but very little. Then of course, we had these party games. I don’t know how much information was given with the unorganized weekly parties we had after—I suppose you got that from someone.

J: No, I wasn’t aware of that.

R: Sunday nights after church, the parents who had teenagers in the community would invite the young people over there. There were no organized games. Occasionally, some of the ones who weren’t quite so awkward as I and some others were square danced. They had some callers. Somebody maybe played the—. But otherwise we played just party games. That’s the way we actually got acquainted—the boys got acquainted with the girls and the girls with the boys. The older folks were thinking there was just a little bit of foolishness going on at those parties but by and large there was no drinking going on. I think in my experience it was a good experience. Some people got by with not having the party at their place because they didn’t quite approve of it. And yet their children went to other people’s places. It
was a bit hard on the house. If there was any, you know—if the
weather wasn't good maybe they'd mess up the house. Sometimes
there was some furniture destroyed but as a general rule, they
respected the property.

J: So the responsibility for hosting would move from home to home?

R: Oh, yes. It was hardly ever two Sundays in a row at the same
place. I know there are some places where they had it ten times
to the other people just having it once. My parents—for one
thing, they had a large family—small children and in my time
we had it our house so seldom. I remember at my sister's
wedding party—of course, these parties, they were organized a
little bit more in that they served treats. After a wedding,
they went to the girl's place and had a party there. All the
young people were supposed to come and then they gave them—I
don't remember what it was anymore—candy, or something. We
had an oak table that just had the middle post. It didn't have four
legs on it. Somebody sat on the table and broke that table. Of
course, that made it much more difficult to have the party over
there after that [Laughs] because there was some destruction of
property. But I think in general, the young people behaved
quite well. That was a regular—. Sometimes we knew a week
ahead of time. Often somebody just came and said, "Come to our
place tonight." It couldn't have been organized poorer, really.

J: Who spearheaded the organizing of these parties? Did they have
the sanction of the church?

R: Evidently it was pretty much left in the hands of the children.
But they usually had the parent's consent before they even came to the meeting and said, "Come to our place tonight." But some parents were much more generous towards this than—. I always felt a little bit guilty that we didn't have it more often at our place, but we didn't.

J: You said sometimes they had square dancing. Was that acceptable to the church?

R: Well, it would not have been, but little by little we found out that our parents also knew what the calls were—swing your partner round and round. And I never even learned it. But—in other words—I think they had it when they came over from Russia. There was some square dancing going on.

J: So it was a tradition they were familiar with?

R: Yah, it was sort of a tradition. But—and yet some people frowned on it. There were not very many in my generation at these parties that participated because they just didn't—so many of us just didn't know the steps and we didn't know the calls. There weren't very many callers, either. Not very many people that played the instrument for that.

J: Were most of your social activities related somehow to church functions?

R: Yes. Church was a—was really where social gatherings (and I say this advisedly, I hope)—if you did not attend even church evening—because this was connected to church functions—because people came to church to find out where the party was. Now this is—I'm not trying to make light of the reason they came. But
it had something to do with it. I would say, yes.

[He remembers October 20 as a special family holiday when they celebrated the double wedding of his parents and his mother’s sister and husband. The closeness of the two families really taught him the meaning of true fellowship.]

J: Traditionally, would storytelling, in some fashion, be a part of that get-together either in the form of reminiscences or talking about important things that happened in the community?

R: Well, there was one thing that the parents—my parents at least—my dad was very proud of. And he told us that many times. Well, the folks also told us. And I know that they talked about that. I heard the former generations speak quite a bit about that. The weddings were two meals—dinner and supper. They butchered a steer and a hog specifically to feed the visitors—the invited guests at the wedding—were so proud that theirs was the first wedding at which no wine was served. And that made a deep impression on us children and I’m sure upon Uncle Val’s children, too. For the simple fact that it was a suspicious practice and they thought it’s unnecessary and it doesn’t—it gives a good example to the children that wine should be taken at least in—not in excess. And I think it affected the children that it’s a questionable practice to drink wine.

J: Would most of the weddings prior to theirs—

R: All of them. All of them.

J: --have had wine served?

R: Yes, had wine served at the weddings.
J: I thought that wine was always a taboo.

R: No. In fact I know that many of these people made their own wine—of Dad's generation, yah. In fact, one of my aunt's had the reputation that her wine was really good—she knew how to make wine. Not mentioning any names, now. But Dad even said that she made some really good wine. Now, I personally—my experience with wine has been very negative. I'll tell you a little of a story. Now this may be offbeat, but since we're talking about wine. Lizzie [his wife] grandmother—grandfather had wine for years and years and years, I know, in his basement. Never drank it in excess or anything like that. When we were dating, in fact, we were engaged, we went over there to visit them once and he was a very hospitable person. He always had to serve food. Whenever anybody came over, that was a must. And if he wanted to really show his appreciation, he'd serve a little bit of wine. Well, I knew I had a battle on my hands when he offered us some wine—Lizzie and me. At the time, I had a bout with stomach ulcers. Of course, alcoholic beverages were a no-no for the stomach's sake. So I thought I had a real out. Because I didn't like wine. Wine always was bitter to me. So I thought, "Here's where I'm—maybe I can wiggle out of it because of my stomach trouble." So I said, "Well, I don't want to on account of my stomach." He said, "The Apostle Paul"—he said in German—"The Apostle Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake." And I was stuck. I don't know to this day whether I took some. But I guess I took some just to be polite.
[Laughs] I couldn't get out of that one! But actually, I don't think he was the only one. I think if you wanted to really be hospitable, you would serve a little glass of wine to your guests. At least, I got that impression from him.

[He said that it was during Prohibition that the Mennonites became opposed to drinking.]

J: Do you remember any stories told in your home about things your grandparents told your parents about moving to America? Do you remember any stories about difficulties that the immigrants had coming to a new society?

R: I have—I got this from her [his wife's] grandfather also. [To Lizzie] How old was Grandpa Goering when he came? Was he fourteen? Or was your Grandpa Krehbiel fourteen? Anyway, he was a teenager when they came across. He described the journey they had from Peabody to the immigrant house here. To me, that was kind of intriguing. He said they had oxen hitched to the wagon with the supplies. And they got thirsty and went to the creek. You couldn't stop them. They were thirsty so they went to drink water—the oxen did. And the wagon tipped over. To him, that was very traumatic. Now somehow they got—. But otherwise, I haven't heard too much except what they—pioneer life—the folks talked about that somewhat. They used cow chips for fuel. Now I don't know whether there were any buffalo around here anymore or not. Here, I may be a bit confused because I read the book, Pioneer Women and that was in western Kansas where there were many more buffalo. But I know they
also went to the pasture to pick up cow chips. They got some straw from the straw sack, I guess, after they had thrashed. And they made their mattresses with it. They slept on straw mattresses. I mean, of course, they had ticking around them. They made their quilts—they had feathers in their quilts that they plucked from their own geese and ducks—feather comforters. My dad told me that in the early years, they even used horse power—where there were horses went around in a circle and, uh, provided the power to run the threshing machine. I think Dad remembered that faintly. So that was a real slow process. Dad said they tried different kinds of crops. They came over—of course, they brought the winter wheat from Russia. And then they—for a couple of years they tried broom corn. I never knew that, that they raised broom corn here right where our place, or at least a mile east of us where Grandfather’s place was. So they experimented. And he said that they did feed some cattle on a big scale. Grandfather—they raised their own corn. And then they’d fatten their steers. They raised a carload of steers every year. They had their own herd cows. That, to me, was a real surprise—that they operated that big that soon. I don’t know whether they did any of that in Russia or not. See, my grandparents were married when they came over here and they established a—and um, so um. Now, I just heard this of late—not too many years ago—I don’t get this from my parents. My grandmother, my mother’s mother, and her sister-in-law made all
the clothes. They even designed and sewed overcoats for their husbands, for the children. And then they did some custom work for some of the other men folks in our community. To me, that was extremely interesting because I didn’t know that they were adept at sewing. I think they must have had sewing machines at the time. I got that from—I didn’t get from my fa—. I was surprised and I’ve been so sorry that I couldn’t verify that. There’s one story that just came to my mind that I thought was very unusual. Now, I’m just rambling on. You’re not getting anything—.

J: No, that’s fine. I’m getting what I want.

R: They usually hired the custom threshers. They brought their own crew along—the field pitchers. And, of course, the farmers had to furnish their own pitchers on the rack to carry the bundles to the machine. One year, somebody said he can come and thresh when they wanted him. He had an all black field pitching crew. And that was the first ever. And, of course, I think the people were a little bit apprehensive—that there was a little bit of a prejudice. But they were good workers, he said. Then they got to a certain place and one of the pitchers became seriously ill. He did—the person that told me this—did not know what the illness was, but he said he had to be bedridden for—. Well, in fact he should have been in the hospital. But this—the mother of the home kept him there for days and days and nursed him to health. In that day, when there were questions about different races and things like that, to me that was so extremely
interesting. The person that told me that thought it was a very courageous undertaking for that mother to do that. She kept him there, I think, for weeks to nurse him back to health.

J: The mother of that home would have been your parent's generation?

R: Yes, yes. Yah, yah.

J: Do you have recollections of this black crew coming in?

R: No, they didn't thresh at our place. But my course—same age as I am—well, in fact, it's Paul Zerger is who it was. It was in that area by the Zergers. When they washed and came in to eat, he said, "They really can't wash their hands clean, can they?" [Laughs] It's just a child's innocence, you know, because the palms just didn't look quite right. But this is one thing—I think Aunt Adina told me that—that Paul was to have said that. I am—personally, I am surprised that I didn't get more of these stories from my mother. Of course, I didn't ask. I should have when I had her with me.

J: In what context were these stories shared in your family? For instance, when you were sitting around the table, would you ask for a story?

R: I think I got some of my information about situations and the background just at random. When we—when they had their butchering days or their—and the former generation—my uncles got together—just listening in I got more—more of that stuff came out than really we inquiring.

J: So, butchering days or, like Bill said, farmers meeting at the
mill would have been the kind of situations in which these
stories would have been told?

R: That’s right. I think I would concur with that. I think that’s
correct.

J: I assume that in that context stories about jokers or folks who
were kind of made fun of would have come out?

R: That’s right. That’s right.

J: Do you recall any stories that were passed around the community?

For instance, someone might say, "Hey, here’s a good one that
happened to so-and-so."

R: [Laughs] I don’t know. [Laughs] Of course, this was when a—

[Laughs] young people’s—they had parties, you know, that
generation when they were teenagers—my dad and his pals. And I
know that there quite a few young people at the time that knew
this story. I don’t know how many of my generation got the
story. But Dad got such a bang out of it because it happened to
one of his pals—one of his guys he ran around with. [Laughs]
They were on the porch—it was at a party. It was Sunday
evening and they were on the porch and there was a window
between the porch and the living room. The young people were
having fun in the living room. [Laughs] This buddy of Dad’s
said, "I’m gonna jump into this window and scare them"
[Laughs] So he jumped in and hung on to the window and broke it.

[Laughs] And Dad just laughed and laughed and laughed. And
every time he told that story, why, he laughed. Now, let’s
see—. Oh, another story that came down as far as that
generation was concerned, was about your grandpa and—I think he was a cousin—Dan Waltner. Did Bill tell you anything about him?

J: No.

R: They had their literaries or their programs—that is, this wasn’t in school. I guess maybe it was—maybe they just got together and had literaries like we did later on—community programs. And those two were the comedians of the community. When they were single, he said, they just had the crowd roaring. Now, I knew your grandpa. I thought he was a somber, sober—I couldn’t believe it at first. But I’ve heard this verified often, that Dan Waltner and Ernest Juhnke were the—that’s where you got your orneriness, I guess, to entertain. Really. They say they were some real entertainers.

[We talked briefly about Adina’s mentioning Dan Waltner as an entertaining person.]

J: Did your folks talk at all about the church problems of the early generations of immigrants?

R: They were reluctant to. You see, that was very near and dear to Dad’s heart and life because his grandfather brought over—. See, it was so much of a family affair. His mother was a daughter of Jacob Stucky who brought us here. My dad said that his dad was a very quiet man. He did not talk much. Yes, that was a very unfortunate thing. that I have made quite a study of on my own since then.

J: But your folks didn’t talk that much about it?
R: That's when I got a lot of the information—at these gatherings—butchering time or hay-making time—just during that time.

See, the split happened long before my time. It was about in—starting in the 1880's, I think. Then there was this matter of trying to again merge, you know, and reunite and have one—.

That happened in '23—'22, '21, '22, '23 and then nothing came of it. But of that I heard a little bit more because then, see, I was born in '11. So that made me 10—11,12,13 years old.

J: Do you remember hearing anything about the Elder Jacob Stucky vision?

R: I had never heard about it until four or five years ago. I think I read a copy of it. Did Delbert talk about it? [His parents never talked about it.]

[I ran a few story themes by him that I had heard from other informants to get his responses. He had not heard about the family who hid their organ upstairs. He had heard stories about drawing lots for church leadership.]

R: You know, I'm not too sure but I thought that there were drawn by—they picked on two. Now I don't know how they arrived—whether this was by lot or not. But I know that one of them turned it down and the other one took it. It happened to be a relative. My dad mentioned this more than once. He was wondering whether this ever bothered my uncle that he turned it down. But I never got any reaction from him. I never discussed it with my uncle, or anything. But, otherwise, electing by lot was just a little bit ahead of my time.
J: What about Bucher Bähr?

R: Oh, him I remember well! Real well.

Was he welcome in your parent’s house?

R: No. [Laughs] You said, say yes or no. [Laughs] I’ll tell you why. There’s another place where I was just a bit embarrassed. Maybe I was too sensitive. But, there were some of my uncles and some in the area—he was there time and time again for the night. They fed his ponies and they kept him for the night. And I don’t know whether he ever stayed at our place or not. I always thought the folks had a good reason because the rooms were filled with children. They didn’t have an extra spare bedroom. Another reason I think they weren’t too anxious to have them in the home because he insisted on playing rook. [Laughs] And he’d play solitaire! Maybe you heard this already. He’d play solitaire. And, of course, when he came to the yard, he had a very loud “whoa!” so that the people would hear that. That was his honk. But he had some beautiful road ponies. They were just a slick and—. To me, it was intriguing because he had many different kinds of books. No, we were not very hospitable to that man. That sort of bothered me that other people took him and we just hardly ever at our place.

J: Do you recall any stories about Halloween pranks being played?

R: Well, there were, um—. That turned out to be very unfortunate. The only one I remember that we found out the next day in school. It was some of my cousins and our neighbors that came over. They put a chicken coop on a wagon. That’s all I can
remember that happened at our place. But in the community, that turned out to be a really sad story. Maybe you heard what happened. Finally, the people—they did kind of mean things. They picked on certain people. Went every year. Dragged the harness out. Pulled a buggy clear on top of a roof of a barn. And somebody—and they went to somebody’s place once too often, and they came out with a shotgun and shot into the air to scare them away. I think a few of them got a few pellets, too. But they weren’t hurt. That got taken up by the church board. He reported them and that was quite a smear in the church. [He was not sure of the specific sanctions of the church against the pranksters, but he was certain that they were approached.]

Those were people that were from ten to fifteen years younger than I. I personally didn’t participate in it. But we were just a little bit more conscious of the fact that to misbehave—there may be punishment and to fall out of favor with the community—with the church family—was a real disgrace. And you’d really feel isolated. And that sort of vanished. The children—the young people—after a while—didn’t let that bother them. I think that’s why we didn’t do many things that we might have done if we wouldn’t have been afraid. We were considered, at that time—when I was growing up—we were considered a closed group. The people in town—even the town kids in high school—made us feel a little—us country ginks, you know, these people from the country. Part of it was our own fault, but we thought—they thought that’s the way they can
keep—we can keep our identity as a people. The parents thought this will keep them from many of the evil practices that they would indulge in if we wouldn't sort of be a separate people. The parents stressed very much—the former generation—that we're supposed to come out from among them and be a separate people. And they should know that we are Christians—that we are spiritually minded. And all that other was worldly—weltlich. That was weltlich. It was very interesting how some of these things finally turned out. Slowly, slowly, they came in.

[I made the observation that when I was growing up, the concentration of Swiss Germans in the Moundridge community was so strong that we perceived those who were not a part of that heritage to be the outsiders. Essentially, insiders and outsiders changed place.]

R: Yah, yah. This is very interesting. When our children were growing up in a different school system, we thought the Moundridgers were the most cliquish people in the world. Some of our kids had a really struggle.

[We established the fact that family identity was important in determining who was on the inside. Certain families in the community seemed to gain power positions on the basis of family name only.]

[I inquired about the style of those people he remembered as particularly good storytellers.]

R: One person that impressed me very much—of course, he wasn't one
of the older ones—was Preacher Sam Goering. He was a good storyteller. He could say things—deliver things in such a homely way that was so common and yet so impressive.

[He ended finally by observing that although the Moundridge community had very few people with the reputation of being good storytellers, he was certain that some communities had many.]
[Phil was born in 1903. There were six boys and four girls in his family.]

J: It's been said that the Mennonites don't have a distinctive tradition of telling stories. Would you say that's been true in your experience?

P: Well, I remember my folks did not talk too much about those early days. I don't know why. They both came over as children from Russia. It seems that either my memory is at fault or they did not speak too much about some of those early days. However, I do remember my father speaking about plowing sod with oxen in the Pretty Prairie area and it was a little rugged going. They lived off the land or whatever game was available such as
prairie chicken eggs or rabbits—they sort of scrounged for an existence.

J: So they did share some with you about what the difficulties of pioneer days were like.

P: Yes. Those days were quite rugged. And it took a lot of hard work to get started.

[He recalled no stories about the difficulties of communicating as German speaking people in America.]

[His parents came first to Peabody, Kansas. Then, they moved to South Dakota which was too cold, so they moved back to Kansas and settled in Pretty Prairie. He mentioned the Weisse Frau story from South Dakota, that his father told him. Phil remembered the details only vaguely.]

[He didn't remember any incidents of storytelling used as religious instruction.]

[He didn't recall stories about jokers in the community or people making fun of foolish characters in the community.]

J: Do you have any recollection of a fellow called Bücher Bähr?

P: Yes. Yes. He came to our house quite regularly.

J: Was he welcome in your house?

P: Yes, he stayed over night. And uh, I'm sure Mrs. has got a good story on that. Would you take—put her on?

J: Sure!

[He called out to the kitchen, where his wife, Emma was working.]

P: Emma!

[I turned off the tape for a minute while she made her way to the]
living room and Phil explained to her that I was asking about Bücher Bähr.

E: Well, let’s see. Now. I’d better get my thoughts before you put it on there.

J: Okay.

E: He used to spend all night at different people’s houses. Well, these Herman Wedel’s had a whole bunch of kids and they lived in a four room house. And he’d go there and stay all night. Then he’d bring his dirty clothes along with him. ‘Course, they had a lot of washing to do with all—. So, the girls got kind of tired of it. And they took his underwear [Laughs] and starched them real heavy. [Laughs] And that was the last time he brought them over. [Laughs] That’s the end of the story.

J: Do you have any recollections of other people who played pranks on him?

E: No I don’t. He’d come over here— they called the Bücher Bähr— and try to sell books. But I don’t remember that he was ever here for a meal or anything.

J: Were the books he sold mostly on religious themes?

E: I think so.

[I asked if they knew where Bücher Bähr was from. They speculated that he may have been Swiss German, but weren’t really certain.]

P: This Bücher Bähr, he’d make it a point to stop in about meal time. He’d unhitch his horse and stay over night. Feed his horse. Then he’d have a little sack and take a little oats along for his horse on the way out.
J: And he would be on his way to the next place, right?

P: Yah, yah. [Laughs] It wasn’t that he wasn’t welcome. But, you know, I guess at some places he wouldn’t have been.

[Phil said that living on the farm with limited means of transportation made it difficult to hear stories about what had happened in the community. Incidents may have happened that many people wouldn’t hear about because of their isolation on the farm.]

J: When you would hear stories about folks, where was most of the talking and socializing done?

P: Well, we had sort of a medium sized layout on the farm. We had enough acres so that we had to hire some help during harvest. And this was the time when harvest hands came flocking in from you know where. And, uh, in the evening after work hours were over they would sit around on the ground outside there in a big circle and some of those hands had sort of been around, so to speak. And they would sometimes come up with some pretty weird stories about snakes twenty feet long and such as that. And some of the rest of us that hadn’t been out too far from home were a little doubtful about whether there really were twenty foot snakes. And so, we’d look a little skeptical and I remember one Irishman in particular. He was pretty sharp with his eyes. He could see when we were doubting his word. And it made him a little angry! [Laughs]

J: What did he do when he got angry?

P: He just got a little louder and a little more specific as to where twenty foot snakes could be found and so on. Of course,
we had never been to Africa or Asia so we couldn’t prove that there weren’t any twenty foot snakes to him. But the doubt was still there, nevertheless.

[Phil could think of no outstanding examples of good storytellers in the community.]

J: Do you have some interesting stories about farming or problems on the farm? You were just beginning to tell me one about the runaway horses.

P: The runaway horses? We’re thrashing. We had our own thrash outfit. And I usually had a choice of hauling bundles at the horses to the thrash machine or scooping the wheat into the grain bin. I usually liked scooping better than I did hauling bundles for some reason. I guess it was closer to the water all the time. One time I did choose hauling bundles with two horses on a rack wagon. For some reason, they got scared and started running. They had to go through a certain gate. And when they got started running, I couldn’t control them very good. And they headed for that gate. The gate wasn’t quite wide enough that time. It hit the side of the barn and tore out one-quarter wall of the barn. It flattened it and almost ruined the rack wagon, also.

J: Did you get in trouble with your folks at that time?

P: No. No, they were quite sympathetic about those things happening.

[He said his parents were glad nothing more serious had happened to him.]
P: There was one other incident I recall, when I was working for a neighbor, and he had mules. And we were thrashing. And I was supposed to drive his mules on the rack wagon. And it was dinnertime and we unhitched those mules and after dinner at 1:00, it was time to go. So, I got the mules out and hitched them together and started walking them towards the rack wagon which was quite some distance away. But the mules started running and, here I couldn't run as fast as they could. I was hanging onto the lines. And, then, they drug me quite a ways. I certainly didn't want these mules to do any damage for this man. I'd have felt guilty if they did. So, I still hung on to the lines. And it—they were dragging me at quite a speed. And, finally, I decided, well, I'm not going to be able to drag like this much longer. So, I just let go of those lines, and right then the mules stopped. And I never did understand the mules for doing that.

J: Are there other things you remember about farming difficulties?

P: Oh, I remember one time when I was harrowing. And we had these old harrows with the two by twelve across the top. And you'd ride across that flank. And this was a summer when the flies were just terribly bad on the horses. And they switched and switched their tails. And finally, they switched the lines out of my hands so I was puzzled about what next. If I don't get a-hold of one of those lines, they'll run off. So, I reached—stooped over and tried to reach those lines. I lost my balance and my leg was in front of the harrow and the harrow hit it and
snapped the leg in two between the knee and foot, broke it, folded it over and drug it to the end of the field. And I lay there and finally raised myself out from under and lay down on that plank, and kept the horses from turning away from the fence. Their heads were towards the fence—and kept them there.

And, luckily, one of my brothers had just finished another field with his harrow and came out there and rescued me.

J: That must have been painful.

P: It was! [He discusses the three months he had to take off from his teaching job.]

P: They tried to haul me to a bone doctor in Inman by the name of Wiens. And they took my only a quarter of a mile. And the pain was terrible. And I told them you’ve just got to take me back. So they took me back and stretched me out on that divan in the room, there. And they went and got the doctor.

J: So he came to the home?

P: He came and put me on the couch on my back. And they put sandbags—put my leg between sandbags. And at first, they had to try to set that bone. And then they’d get two men on one end of me and two on the other to pull that bone back in place. And that was an excruciating painful. And they set it. And then my leg started swelling up and it turned plum green from the hip clear down to the toes. I was afraid of—we were going to lose the whole leg. But, Doctor Wedel from Hesston kept coming out and finally things turned out better.
[He remarked later on the miraculous recovery of his leg. Though a half inch shorter, it has never bothered him since.]

[End of recorded interview.]
The first thing I'd like to do is to get a little background information on you and your family. You were born in this community?

E: Yes. In Harvey county. Right across [the line] . . .

J: Do you mind telling me what year you were born?

E: 1914.

J: How large is your family, or was your family.

E: Well, [she chuckles] really—there were really fourteen children. But one died—was stillborn, and another one lived seven months. And so there were twelve of us that grew up. But then, we've lost Harley since. [She addresses her husband, Dan.] How long ago was it that Harley died?
D: He was born in 1929 and he live forty-three years.
E: So that's as old as he was.
J: Okay. Alright. And you had how many brothers, how many sisters?
E: We were seven girls and five boys. Of course, that doesn't include the two that are gone.

[We established that she went to school in Pleasant Ridge in McPherson County.]

J: What was school like? Do you have any special memories of going to school.
E: Well, the memories that I have of going to school is that we were two and a quarter miles from school. And it meant [she taps her hands on the table to mimic walking] walking most of the time. Unless it was really bad. But in the latter years, maybe when I was seventh and eighth grade—Roland was already, you know, out so—well he was after me, only that stillborn was in between. So there we drove a Budda to school.
J: A Budda? What's that?
E: Sort of a covered—a covered [she looks to Dan for help in her description]—

D: An enclosed buggy.
E: Enclosed buggy is much better, yes.
J: That was horse drawn?
E: Yes, horse drawn.
J: So did your brothers take you to school or did you just take yourselves?
R: Yes. We took ourselves. I was the oldest in the family. And then Roland was the next, that's living anyway. And—I don't know— [she looks to Dan for help here] did we use only one horse two? We took a little hay along. We had a little barn there. And the horse was in the barn during the day.

J: And it stayed there during the school day and then you'd just ride it home?

E: Yes, yes. I remember one time when the weather was so bad—it rained so hard that Dad came with the Model T to check on us when we drove to school. And we were about as far along as where Leland Goering lives now when he caught up with us. We were okay, so he turned around and went back home. [She laughs] Then I also remember, well maybe earlier, Mother taking us to school. But she wasn't an expert driver and she didn't want to back. So she drove around the corner—uh, Vernons live where we lived. Vernon is living there now. So she drove around the section. Took us to school and then back again.

J: So she wouldn't have to back up.

E: Yes. [She laughs.]

[We discussed the makeup of her grade school peers. She remembered that most, if not all, of the students were Swiss Mennonites, so she never felt isolated because of her background.]

E: Another thing which I remember about going to school which I didn't like [She's very emphatic here]—and I don't like snow up to this day—because it just seemed that the forecast only needed to be for snow and we were already snowbound. And then
we lived so far and then daddy didn’t let us go to school
because we might not be able to come home. And I remember when
the snow was deep and he took us with the horse and sled, I
think, across fields so he could get across. Very often we were
absent when there was school. And the rest were in school. And
we hated that.

J: Because you liked school? Or because you didn’t want to catch
up from absent?

E: [Indicating her agreement with the latter assertion] That was
it. Yes.

J: Do you remember, as children at home, what kind of things you
did for fun—for your entertainment?

E: [She looks at her husband and smiles.] Dan, did we have fun?
[She laughs.]

D: Well, they had quite a bit of interest in table games, like
checker and Miel Zu.

E: [She responds to Dan] I thought you would say that whenever we
have a family gathering now—then we four older ones would get
together in the corner and rehash things that we did when we
were younger. And he [meaning Dan] could never see much fun in
that. Seems like we were sort of two families because there was
quite a difference in age between—it was from me on down to
Toby. And then Violet was in between, which is the one that
died when she was seven months old. And then the next were the
twins. There was quite an age group. So we were sort of two
sets.
[We review who each of her older siblings are and I acknowledge that I know all of them except for her sister Florence.]

E: She lives in—they live in Burns. She lost her first husband—was Sam Stucky, Pete Kruzel’s [Curly-hair]. And now she’s married to a Swede. Florence Swanson.

J: You say that when the four older siblings get together at reunions you rehash old times. What sorts of memories come up as you reminisce? Do you talk about family traditions? Do you talk about special activities that were a part of your home life? Or do you just remember silly things that happened? Or is it a combination of those?

[Here Dan breaks in.]

D: I think it’s just the latter.

E: [She laughs] A combination of both, I guess. One thing I remember about Roland was whenever we had ice cream, he always liked it soft. So he—he’d set it on the stove for a while and [with emphasis and a gesture as if stirring] stir so it would get softer. Then he’d eat it.

J: So his ice cream was heated up before he ate it.

E: [She laughs] Yah. His ice cream was not ice, I guess.

J: Are there other things you remember about growing up—about your brothers and sisters—or even something that happened to you that people still either make fun of or ask you to tell about?

E: Well, one thing I don’t remember, it’s what my folks and my aunts remind me of every once in a while—was that I sat in the back steps of the house, and cried and cried and cried. Then,
all of a sudden I stopped, and said [she mimics a child's voice], "Was will ich? Was krein ich?" ["What do I want? What am I crying for?"] I forgot what I wanted, and what I was crying for. And then I started to cry because I had forgotten what I was crying for. Am that a good story.

E: And then also, going to Sunday School. I don't know how old I was when I started going to Sunday school, but I was always shy, and I didn't want to go. And then one time, I decided, "Well, tomorrow I'm going." It was on a Saturday. "Tomorrow I'm going." And then I said, "[Unclear word that sounds like an expression of dismay] Morgen geh ich ins Kämmerchen." You know, Sunday School was a Kämmerchen because it was in a little closet there in church. And then they handed out little pictures for the picture roll that was a picture roll class. But anyway when morning came, I didn't go. [She laughs.]

J: You do remember that incident?

E: No. No. That is also what they tell me.

J: Well, evidently then, storytelling, in the sense of family reminiscences a part of growing up for you. I mean telling stories on other people. But probably not storytelling in the sense of made up stories. Are you aware of any kind of creative storytelling in that sense?

E: Well, I know that we girls had a Welma. We just imagined that we had a friend and her name was Welma. And we'd always talk to Welma. And then Roland got a little jealous. And he was not
going to have a girl for a friend. So he had a Philip. [She laughs.] And so he talked to Philip while we talked to Welma. And then sure enough, later on when the twins were born we really had a Welma.

J: Oh, so she was named for Welma.

E: Yah. One interesting thing, I don’t know whether it’s that important, but I was still smaller and made playhouse—played in a playhouse. And one evening, I think we had hired men. I don’t know. Were they thrashers or what? And while the men were eating I went outside to make supposed walls for my house. And I stooped over to pick up a stick which I thought would make a good wall. And the stick started to—[she laughs and makes a wavy hand gesture] to get away from me. So I knew it was a snake and I wasn’t out there very much longer after that.

[Dan interjects a comment here.]

D: The same thing happened to Moses in the book of Exodus.

[Emma laughs.]

J: Now let’s see. Would it have been your grandparents that were the original Russian immigrants?

E: Yes.

J: Did your parents or grandparents ever tell you stories about that experience?

E: I cannot remember that they did. I think the little I know is what I picked up since from others, or hearsay, or during the celebration. [She means of the centennial of the Swiss Volhynian migration to Kansas.]
I probed the issue of stories involving problems in communicating in a new language relating the whetstone story, but Erma didn’t seem familiar with it.

E: Well, no. The only thing I know is that we, I mean Dan and I, couldn’t speak a word of English when we started school which was not good. Because then when we started school it was awfully difficult to first learn the language before we could even communicate with the books or understand what we read.

J: So you had specific courses in the English language in the schools?

E: Yes, yes. But then there was about two months or so of German school after. Maybe the English school lasted only about seven months, I believe, at first—when we started. And then we had German school and the German school then graduated into Bible school—then later on it was Bible school.

J: Was the Bible school teaching in German or was it in English?

E: [She asks Dan] Do you remember?

D: At first we had only German school. And it was really a German Bible school. I had a sister which taught that. And we had a Lutheran in our district. And they sent their kids for a while, and later they quit sending them. They said, "Das war nicht Bibel Geschichte. Das war mennonitische Geschichte."

J: "That wasn’t Bible teaching. That was Mennonite teaching."

[Actually, Geschichte means history.] That little of German I can get. [Erma laughs] Now, can you think of any experiences in your family that now, maybe, your children ask for you to
tell—that they request of you. For example, "Can you tell again about when thus and so happened?" Are there stories that you "own" as a family?

E: I wouldn’t know.

J: What kind of stories were told, as you remember in your Sunday School classes? Were they always Bible stories or did you have other kinds of instructional stories that were told to supplement Bible teaching?

E: It seems to me that they were all Bible stories. It was a little bit different than what it is now. It was strictly Bible teaching. And then the German was kept on much longer. When I was baptized, our catechism was in German. And then when we were bap—. That was going to catechism. And then when we were baptized we were given the option whether we wanted and English Bible or a German Bible, you know, that they gave then for Baptism. And I chose the German because I thought the English is more prevalent now. And I didn’t have as many German Bibles as English Bibles. And I still like the German.

[We talked about the special attachment some people feel to the German language. Dan observed that the "translation" of German Bibles to English took place from 1929 to the early thirties.]

E: I remember also the transition. Sometimes the sermons were in English and sometimes in German, but mostly in German. And uh, times when they were in English, I didn’t exactly realize until I went home. Or on our way home when it dawned on me, "There! It was in English today! That’s why it was so interesting."
And I didn’t—I understood both. But then they always seemed a little bit more interesting when it was in English. Because by that time, I had been in school and knew the English better than the German.

J: So you were able to think in both languages.

E: Yes.

J: Was there any kind of language play? I mean, when you know two languages, you have the ability to make fun of one language in the other. Do you recall any language play like that?

E: [To her husband] Well, Dan, you always were complaining that when we were in high school we were the "so-and-so dutchmen." It was during—well it wasn't during—. Yes, it was during the war wasn’t it?

D: When we were in high school it was in the thirties.

E: Yah. Oh, that way. But then we were a certain kind of Dutchman because——

J: And in high school, then, you mixed more with people who weren't Mennonite?

E: Oh yes, yes.

J: And you felt a real division.

E: Yah. But the funny thing is that some that were—had German names and everything, but were more English and also made fun of the German people.

D: Well, during World War I the Janzens became Johnsons and the Dycks became Dicksons. And they changed their names to avoid the stigma of being German. That was around World War I.
Maybe around 1914 or someplace in there.
[We clarified that they attended high school between the world wars.
Both Erma and Dan graduated in 1937.]

J: So did you two meet in high school or in church?

E: Well, I can't remember when I met him—well, when I learned to know him. But I remember being in high school with him. But he remembers before that, remembers me from before high school. And we both were at home several years after graduating from grade school, before we went to high school.

J: Now I'd like to look at more general community themes. We talked about family stories. But sometimes when people get together, they tell stories about someone in the community who was sort of clownish or looked at as being a little foolish. Do you remember anything like that? Someone who was the brunt of everyone's jokes or was known for being particularly funny? Or maybe even outsiders to the community that were talked about. Are you aware of anything like that. [Short pause. She seemed to be drawing a blank.] The one that everyone mentions is the Bücher Bähr.

E: Oh, yah. The Bücher Bähr. And Dolph Boese.

J: Dolf base?

E: Adolph Boese.

J: I haven't heard about him.

E: Well, he had, I think he had only one—the little finger on each hand. And then he'd go about like this, you know [she gestures with the two little fingers extended]. And, well, the kids
[Emma remembers about Adolph only the deformity of his hands. I asked her about specific recollections of the Bücher Bühr.]

E: Well, only that he—I even had a ride with him—home from school. He came along with his buggy and stopped and asked whether I wanted a ride. And I imagine I rode with him until he came to Uncle Solomon's drive because he always—he was there so often. But I can't remember when I got off, or what.

J: Would he stop more often at your Uncle Sol's than at your place?

E: Oh, yes. Yes. I don't know whether he ever was at our place for the night. And there he was. See that's Esther Vogt's parents.

J: Did you get the sense that they welcomed him? That it was fine for him to stay there?

E: Well, I guess they took it with a grain of salt, I would say. They didn't mind and they didn't relish it. And I think that was the case with many people. He sort of had his places where he stayed often. And played solitaire. [She laughs]

J: He knew where he would get a meal and a bed for the night?

E: And oats for his horse.

J: Are there any particular individuals that you remember, or you know even now that you would say can really tell a good story?

E: [She pauses for a few seconds and then looks at Dan.] Can you think of anybody?

D: No.

J: The old timers always remember Dan Waltner as a good
storyteller.

E: [She pauses a few seconds to think.] Of course there were those people that—well, like A. C. Stucky—he was always, well Sylvanus was even more so—that he would always make some kind of remark that everybody enjoyed. [To Dan] Now you tell him the story about [she says this more slowly] "That's good for people who like to rub it in."

D: [Laughs] Oh, yah. We were working on remodelling the church and for days and days we worked on that oak floor. And we put this kind of filler on it and that kind of filler. And then we take burlap bags and keep rubbing [he makes a rubbing motion with both hands] until—kept rubbing until we were sore all over. And N. P. Stucky said in his quiet way said, "This is a good job for people who like to rub it in."

E: Then there was A. C. Stucky, too. We were there at one time for an evening. And the Mrs. brought us some refreshments. And then she was talking about dishes that she had bought. And got, uh, "And now some are broken and we can't replace the broken ones, because I don't want to break the set."

D: They were quiet people. But when they said something, it generally counted.

E: But of course, then, another fellow who always was sort of
joking around, and everybody appreciated when he said something was Philip Waltner. But he’s already gone too. And uh, he said, "When I was young, it was always I that had to go down and open the gate. But now when I drive with my son, I still have to go down and open the gate." [She laughs] And then also, he—his carpenter’s bag. He said, "I don’t know. They just don’t make the carpenter’s sack as good anymore. I used to be able to go around them twice [she gestures as if strapping the bag around her waist]. And now I can hardly tie it in the back."

[We discussed the relationship of Phil Waltner to Dan Waltner, who weren’t members of the same immediate family. Erma suggested that J. O. Schrag was a good storyteller as well.]

J: So you remember about these people like Phil Waltner and A. C. Stucky that when they were telling their stories they intended for their behaviors to be entertaining? In other words, they understood that they were the center of attention when they were telling these stories. Would they, for example, impersonate voices or use hand gestures as you remember them?

E: It just came natural for them, it seems to me. It just—I don’t know whether they even tried to be funny. But they had a knack.

J: They were just funny people.

E: Well, I—. They just had a knack. The way they brought it out was amusing. Very nice people.

D: In our community, seemingly, we never had any Rich Littles yet.

[We discussed the nature of my research and what I intend to do with the finished product. They seemed genuinely curious rather than
concerned. I thanked them for their time and turned off the recorder. Dan then volunteered another story about confusing the German dialect with English. I asked if he would be willing to tell it again for the tape. He wanted Erma to do it because he "would be too nervous." After some deliberation, he finally consented to tell it again for the tape.

D: Andy J. Goering was telling this about one of his relatives in South Dakota. This relative had a field of stones—of stony land in South Dakota. And he wanted to clear it. He cleared it with a stone sled. And as the day wore on his seat got awfully sore from riding the stone sled. So he decided if he'd go to this here lady, which was close by, and ask her for a pillow, it would ease the situation. But he forgot the English word for pillow—for Kisse [sounds like kiss-ah]. And he asked this English lady for a Kisse. And he saw what was going on in her mind [in other words that the request disturbed her, as he told it in the unrecorded version]. He tried to correct the situation by saying—pointing to his [lips] and saying, "I don't mean Kisse here." [He points to his buttocks.] "I mean Kisse there."

[End of recorded interview]

[After I turned off the recorder, Dan apologized for how nervous he got about telling the story for the tape. He said that hearing a good story is like taking a good photograph. The best photographs aren't posed. He seemed to suggest that stories must be spontaneously shared in order to be told most effectively.]
J: So you were born in this community. Is that right?
E: I was born a little west of Elyria.
J: Do you mind telling me what year you were born?
E: 1925.
J: And how big was your family?
E: I was the eleventh child born but the tenth living.
J: And you were the last?
E: Oh, yes, the last! [She laughs.] It was time for the last.
J: So you have how many brothers and how many sisters?
E: Well, I had six brothers and three sisters. One sister, the first child, died at six months of pneumonia.
J: Are the rest still living?
E: No. Two brothers have passed on.

J: Where did you go to school?

E: I went to Elyria—King City Grade School. And I did a lot of walking. I read someplace that if you walk about uh—oh, like an eighth or quarter of a mile you get nice legs—if you walk. So I walked! [She laughs.]

J: How far were you from school?

E: Oh just a—I think it’s about a quarter mile.

J: Did you find that most of the other students were Swiss Mennonite children like yourself?

E: It was mixed by the time I went to school. When I was in the first grade it was mostly Swiss. But as years rolled on, like in the fourth grade already, from then on up their were some others.

J: Did that cause any problems? Was it uncomfortable to be Swiss German when there were English kids there?

E: No. I think we were still in the majority. [She chuckles.]

J: So being in the majority allowed you to feel pretty comfortable.

E: I really didn’t think much of it, I guess. You know.

J: Do you have any special memories of school days? Things that stick out in your mind? Incidents, experiences from when you were a gradeschooler?

E: I don’t know exactly what type of—of reminiscing you want.

J: Oh, just anything.

E: Uh, the only time I got reprimanded in my first four years of school was, uh—Bill Juhnke was teaching a class. He was my
third and fourth grade teacher—a very good teacher. I really liked him. But one time I had trouble with an arithmetic problem. It had to do with quarts and pecks. And I went up there and I asked him—I sat in the front seat where there was no desk, you know. And he asked, "Well, which is bigger? A peck or a quart?" Well, I didn't know the difference right then, so I said a quart, 'cause I knew what a quart was. And oh [emphatic and stern] "Go back to your seat, and study!" [She laughs.] I felt so bad. But otherwise I had no problems.

J: Were there any kids that were known as bullies?

E: In the upper grades I thought there were some that acted like that. It was one of our people and one who was not.

J: And they cause some problems for the rest of you?

E: Not for everybody, but they did for me.

J: Do you have special memories of your childhood in terms of what you played special activities you did for fun?

E: I was kind of a tagger—six years difference between my youngest brother. And being a brother, he would tag along with Dad and the boys. Where I was kind of alone. I mean I used to wonder if I was adopted or something; I had nobody to play with. And finally when I got my brains together I realized the money problems my dad had—that under no condition would they have taken on another child when they had that many of their own, you know. So I realized that I was not adopted. But I learned to play with myself, you know, alone. I—I was out, especially in the summer months or spring and even fall, I was outside—a lot.
And I had a doll buggy one time, and that was my car. So I had roads, and I had towns and I had [she chuckles] home, you know. And I [she gestures as if pointing out the winding roads] drove around with that car. And, oh, I had to do some things, though. I carried in wood.

J: Yes.

E: But one time—I remember something distinctly. We had one turkey gobbler that—he was alone. And boy, was he boss! He would show that continuously—that he was the boss. He sometimes stood on top of the cave—the cave was like a little hill, you know. He stood up there and was pretty close to the back gate. And I went out there and there he was. And just really acting—[she throws her head back and scowls] acting up. And I was disgusted with him. So I took a rock. I thought, "I'm just going to throw a rock. And I hit him right on the head. And that head and the long neck went—come down on that ground. [She laughs.] And then it got terrible hot for me [she fans her face with her hand] because I was afraid maybe he couldn't even lift that thing up any more. Well, I did have to go and tell dad that I wondered if he shouldn't butcher the gobbler," because I—I think he's hurt." But by the time we got back that head was almost all the way up already. So—[She laughs.] Now, if I would have to do it again, I'd probably miss it.

J: Right. You could have never had that good a shot two times in a row.
E: No. No.

J: What were the main social activities that you did as a family?

E: Well, the church was the center of the social activity. I mean, everything stemmed from the church and the church people. Uh, we had—Dad knew a lot of people in South Dakota so whenever they came out, they were over there. And families would come over, and then they talked—always talked about scripture—discussed scripture. And of course, there was always one or two that didn’t agree with the rest and so it got pretty loud sometimes. But they enjoyed it tremendously. And what I remember the most of all of my home life was my dad—every evening—if we had company, then he did this later—no matter what the time was. If nobody was there, he spent the whole evening in his rocker—he had a designated rocker and so did my mother. And his legs went up on another chair or whatever, and he was down real low in that rocker, reading the Bible. That was before he went to bed every evening. And he spent hours, sometimes 'til midnight. Now once in a while we noticed he would sleep a little bit in between. And sometimes his own snoring would wake him up. So then he’d read—studied more. But I wish that I could know what he knew. About the old testament he knew all the judges in order—the judges. And then he knew all the kings in order of Israel and Judah, you know, southern and northern kingdoms. And it was—. And others studied too, I know. But I know he had one complaint. See he was Sunday School teacher for a long time. And he said, "Sie
"Sie studieren aber net das Wort!" That was his burden. "Sie studieren net das Wort—nicht das Wort." They do not study the word and that is still a problem today if you try and have a Sunday School class. It still is. Even though you love them dearly and want, you know—

J: And that made a real impression on you as a child.

E: Oh it did. Of course, we had devotions every day.

J: That was a family tradition of yours to have morning devotions?

E: Morning. Always morning. Yah, that was morning. Yes.

J: Were there other traditions or special activities that were a part of your home life? Either daily rituals or some special thing you did every week or periodically?

E: Oh, I think, we had company every single Sunday.

J: You always had someone over. Family usually?

E: Family. Company. There was somebody actually came from North Dakota. Boy, they were over there. And uh—actually, Dad was cousins to some of them, too. And so they needed to come, I guess. Uh, there was, uh, was something else that I thought of that I wanted to say. Well, I can’t think of it now. Go on.

J: Okay. Do you remember people who were particularly entertaining? You know, someone who was always able to tell a good story or who you always had fun being around?

E: You mean in my younger days or in my—

J: Well—

E: Any old day?

J: Yes. Any old day. Young days or even now. Who are some people
in the community who—?

E: Well, uh, my brother Art can tell a story.

J: I'm going to talk to him this afternoon.

E: Are you?

J: Yes.

E: I don't know if he will or not, but he has a sense of memory that many don't have. Actually, reading was his education. Reading. That's where he learned a lot. I mean, memory, and also facts. And during our Schweitzer ensemble days [this was an instrumental music group in which Ellen played piano and her brother the banjo], I was very much inspired by him. [An unclear word] And then he learned poems, some were comical, of course, and so on. Little stories sometimes. But uh, I thought he did pretty good at that. And he knows his German beautifully. He always claims that the German language is actually more descriptive than English.

J: I find that a lot of the people I talk to feel the same way. It's as if you can't say it quite right in English. The jokes that people tell aren't nearly as funny if they're told in English.

E: [Laughs] Oh that's true. Yah, that's right. And, you know, another thing. I think a lot of our parents smoked in their young days. But as soon as a child came along, that was the end of that.

J: They made sure that—

E: I never—never saw him smoke—at all. I—I'm not sure of that
but I know many did. I know Harold's dad did. And uh—they simply—that was the stopping point. [She chuckles.]

J: Do you have any special remembrances or reminiscences that sort of "belong" to your family? For example, were you involved in some events or activities that when you get together with the extended family, they say, "Oh, tell about when this happened or tell about when that happened"?

E: I was the youngest of the family. Therefore, they all thought I was spoiled and I didn't have too much of a hold on the ropes, you know. Uh, [she gestures to the recorder] turn it off for a bit, I can't think.

J: Okay.

[I turn off the recorder for a few moments while Ellen gathers her thoughts.]

E: I don't believe—I had no chance to learn a lot of those because I was the youngest. And mother died when I was only twelve. And so, I didn't realize then, how much I wanted to talk to her later on, when I was getting married and later—how to do this—how to make the Schmelz for the Knepp, you know and this and that. Or Bone Beroji or—. I had wonderful sisters that I called and some sisters-in-law that I called about things. But mostly, the biggest percentage was trial and error, of my cooking. But I desperately wanted to go to college. Just terribly much. Not that I would have had all my college paid. It wasn't that. I had some kind of a scholarship, yes, but— [she says this with emphasis] but I wanted to go. And I'll tell
you why I didn’t. I would have been willing to work my way through. How could I ask Dad to go to college when he and the youngest son, Martin, were living there and the one who wasn’t married, my sis Lilly, was either in college or teaching, one of the two. Now, how could I have that nerve to ask him if I could go to college? When they were already alone a lot, you know, with meals and— [She laughs.]

J: Right. Right.

E: And things like that. Wash the wash and keep things on a regular basis. I just—I just felt I couldn’t. So I didn’t.

J: Was there something about growing up in this community that made you want to get an education, that made you revere education? Because it seems like a lot of the Swiss people did go to college.

E: Of our family there was only one. And that was John W. He was right in the middle. And he wanted to go to college, and there were enough older fellows to do the work and younger ones to take care of things. So he could go. He could get away. And he went on. He got his masters, and then for years—he was my first grade teacher and my twelfth grade teacher. And then he was also principal of the senior high. And then he retired.

J: But did you feel like your parents or people in the community really respected people who went on to college?

E: Oh, it depends on the people. See, some people come from college and don’t know very much. Well, I shouldn’t say that.
But they can't read well, and their grammar is terrible. That—it just—that kind of got my ire up. When I heard some guys read the way they read. And then being rather—well, I shouldn't call them ignorant—but unknowing [here is a garbled phrase]. I guess I thought when you go to college, you really learn. But somehow they get through, and then you wonder how.

J: Yes.

E: So, I say, it depends on the fellow, on the woman, or on the person as to how he uses his knowledge, whatever he has. There were—my dad was not against it, my folks were not against it, but they did not have the money to send me on to college. They just didn't!

J: So it was a financial consideration as much as anything.

E: Yah. Now, Lilly and Martin both have some college. Lilly had enough college to teach and I think Martin went two years. But there too, he had it terribly hard. He had to chore in the morning and got—milked terribly late. And then, he thought he would farm anyway. He was the youngest. So, he then quit. So, I—I wish that I could have gone, but that's how life was.

J: Did you ever ask your parents to tell stories from their growing up years?

E: Dad told me once. After that—. He said that one time he had a date. 'Course that was here, yet. See he was not born in Russia. Uh, Uncle Andrew was born in Russia. Maybe one of the A. C. Goering family could tell you something. But my dad was born here. And he said one time he went out on a date. He was
supposed to be in at a certain time. I'm not sure when it was, if it was eleven or if it was twelve, but he was supposed to be in and Dad would lock the door at that time. And uh, he usually got there but he said that night, he didn't get home in time. See, the door was already locked. [She laughs, then resumes in a hushed voice.] So he got a ladder and put it up to his upstairs window. He crawled up and got through the window and went to bed. It wasn't too long after that the ladder, I guess, fell down—made a noise. Anyway, his dad heard something. He said, "John!" And he answered as if he were—would wake him up. And he called again, "John!" And [she leans back and squints her eyes] "Yah." [She laughs.] And uh—oh—[she calls] "Was hak ich gehört?" ["What did I hear?" ] And Dad said, [she acts sleepy] "Was? Was? Was war?" ["What? What? What was it?"] You know, as if he just—I think he had him convinced he was asleep. You know, he got by with that. [She laughs.]

J: He got by with that one.

E: He got by with it. Yah. But I thought that one was interesting.

J: So it would have been your grandparents that migrated from Russia. Is that right?

E: Yes, Yes. And uh—Uncle Jake. That was Uncle Jake—was the oldest. Jacob Gehring—G E H. And he—he had his name G E H. He's the only one of the whole Goering family—excuse me—of Dad's parents who—who kept that G E H. The others are all G O E.
J: Do you remember your grandparents?

E: No. They were all gone. And I thought that was something, too, that I missed. I would love to have had communication with them.

J: Other than the story that you just told me, would your Dad have told you anything about things he had heard from his parents about migration? Or about the difficulties of adjusting to American society?

E: Well, see, they came as a group. And they clung together like— .

J: So it was a little easier since they migrated as a congregation?

E: Oh, yes. If it would have been one alone, it would have been too difficult. But coming as a group, that helped so much. They could live together; they could share. And of course, babies were born on the boat, and some died. And they had to be thrown in the water. That wasn’t easy either.

[I asked about any stories regarding the difficulty of adjusting to life in America.]

E: Oh, in America. Well— . Oh, I often heard how little they had, you know. How little they got along with. Yet they had plenty to eat, you know. And we think we need to have so much more. And even at home, we had plenty room and all. And we always had plenty to eat. And I am so amazed, I’ve said this more than once—I’m so surprised how balanced the meals were. When I know that my mother did not have the "Basic Seven" in school. I know that! Yet, we had—in the summer, we had greens from the garden. In the winter, we had sauerkraut and green beans. You
see, it was absolutely amazing.

J: So they knew by instinct, or something, what good eating was?

E: Well, always a vegetable, you know. The vegetable was green beans. I'm not saying that every, every meal. But I'm saying the balance through the day and the week always. It was really something. Sauerkraut's a very good food, you know. You know, the cabbage family—oh, we had cabbage too, of course. In the summer lettuce. The cabbage family is very good. There are kinds of—parts of the family, at least, that will fight against some types of cancer. That has been established. So, I think they ate good food without really knowing how good it was.

J: Some people tell stories about the difficulties of communicating in two languages. Do you recall any stories that were told about that? Either difficulty communicating in English or sometimes confusing the two?

E: Well, they say if you want to teach your child—want your child to learn two languages, you will teach them both at the same time. That's how a child learns. But I didn't hear any English. When I started school, I knew nothing. And if my brother, John, hadn't been the teacher, I wouldn't have gone yet. But they sent me. I was only five. So, one thing concerned me that I didn't know how would I ask to go to the bathroom. So he told me that one word. Then I knew.

[There's a few moments of silence while I check my list of questions. Then I ask about stories regarding church expectations and community behaviors.]
J: How did the church respond to people who were sort of on the edge--testing the new thing that hadn’t been done before?

E: Oh well, they frowned on it. That was definitely a no-no. The way they were living, they thought was good. And something new, well— [She mutters some German phrase under her breath that is hard to understand.] You know, something sort of like that. Or, "Hast du schon gehört?" and things. Then it went around and they talked about it. But slowly the bending started. And, you know, we’ve bent a long ways.

J: Yes. It was always probably the hardest for the first people to try something new. For women to cut their hair, or--

E: Oh my. I have a sister-in-law who was the first one in our family to have her hair cut. Oh Dad didn’t like it. And it was that general idea of the church. Don’t cut your hair. And biblically—it’s interesting, I’ve read that so often about hair and cutting hair. And you wonder what’s long and what’s short. Actually, I think Jesus and the men of that day had longer hair than the men now. And for the woman to have hair to the waist, I suppose, was beautiful. But then it ends up, the apostle Paul ends up saying that the hair is a covering. [She chuckles.] Oh yah. And you know—. Go on to something else.

J: Okay. What about stories that were told about people in the community? For example, stories about someone who was known for doing particularly funny things—a community clown of sorts. Are there stories like that?

E: Well Danny Waltner, Dan Waltner, was a clown. I don’t like to
say this, but, you know, he could talk and he could talk and he could tell stories at our PTA—our little meetings, you know, in school—we didn’t call them PTA then they were just literary meetings. And uh, whoever wanted to got up and gave a speech. And I tell you, Dan could do it every time without planning or anything. And uh, yet, in Sunday School, he didn’t say a word. Now that’s difficult to explain—or to understand, rather. It’s not so hard to explain, but it’s difficult to understand.

[We discuss my upcoming interview with Ellen Waltner Kling, Dan Waltner’s daughter. Then I move on to the issue of outsiders to the community.]

J: How did people respond, react, or talk about outsiders?

E: At one time or another—at one time, I know the other side of the Turkey Creek was supposed to stay there. And this side of the Turkey Creek, lived among themselves. At one time, that was a serious matter. If somebody came across the Turkey Creek—they came across the ocean—but if somebody came across the Turkey Creek that was serious business.

J: That was predominantly a Low German community?

E: Yah.

J: Do you know what fuelled that conflict?

E: No, I don’t. I think they had acquired certain ideas about us that maybe they—like the generation before us acquired from their parents, I would guess. Because this was just not a personal thing, you know.

J: When people started to interact more with those people, like
even dating the Low Germans, did that cause a real stir right at
first?

E: I don't know who the first one was really, to marry outside the
community but I remember that they—the Sunday when they talked
about turning around completely. There were more people coming
in—marrying from the outside—than those that hadn't. Well,
now of course, it doesn't matter.

J: But that was a real concern, years back.

E: It was a real concern.

J: If you didn't marry a Swiss Mennonite—

E: Sure! Well, Mennonite, of course, Mennonite. But then the Low
Germans were Mennonites, too. But there was this feeling, you
know. I never knew just why. Not that they were enemies with
each other, you see. But I guess they had—were a little
different, I don't know. They thought they were at least.

J: That's interesting.

E: There was also terrible—there were two factors—uh, factions is
what I want to say—in the old church. You know, those people
were like warriors.

J: That was what led up to the split?

E: My dad told me about it once. I don't remember everything, but
it was terrible, just terrible, what they did to each other.
How they took their wheat—one of them hauled some at night so
the other one wouldn't know. It was—childish is what it was.

J: So they were really competitive?

E: Well, they were at odds with each other. See, there were two
factions, as I say, in the church. And these two men were the heads. And they were just—they were fighting, literally fighting. When one died, the other one was overjoyed. Well, who would ever feel that way? I—you know, human nature doesn't really change.

J: Probably you heard a lot about that conflict at the time. Although children maybe weren't as much a part of that conversation as were the parents.

E: No, children at that time stood behind the door. [She laughs.]

J: So, you tried to get in on what they said.

E: And there were—if we couldn't all get to one table, I tell you, the children ate later.

[Her husband, Harold, who has been on the telephone and in conversation with Dennis, a prison parolee whom they are supervising, comes into the living room to make a comment.]

H: I'd say we were a "freezer child" at that time.

[We all laugh at this "in-family" phrase that refers to an awkward, odd, or peculiar person.]

J: And could play with the freezer and that was about it. What about the Bücher Bühr?

E: Ach, yes!

J: Do you remember that fellow?

E: Well, sure. I can still hear him. Because he wasn't even quite at the driveway, maybe the first horse was turning a little bit, and he said, [she bellows] "Hello-o-o-o-o-o-o," you know. You could hear him from—could have heard him from—well you
know from—back from Elyria already. But, uh—yah, that was—.

J: So he stopped at your place, and tried to sell things.

E: He had books, I guess. Yah. I don't know if he—. Did he have—? I'm not sure all of the things he sold. But he sold other things too, I thought. I don't remember.

J: Did he ever stay at your house?

E: Ach, yes.

H: Yah, he fed his horses real good, I'll tell you. [Ellen laughs.] Gave them much oats.

E: He and Andy Unruh, were two figures in our history.


E: He worked for people. He was a hand. He was a slow worker, but steady. And he stems from the family—. Well, I could name some, but maybe I shouldn’t. But his family just sort of forsook him.

H: Ellen was ugly [meaning mean] to Andy.

E: [She ignores Harold’s comment.] And, uh, he stuttered an awful lot. And ate like a—like a bear. Oh, one time, it just happened to be that the jam dish was in front of his plate. Well, then he ate it as dessert; he thought it was dessert. And uh, one time we ate fish, and Lilly and I—we both stood amazed and looked at each other—how he ate the fish! As if they had no bones! He just ate ’em [she gestures to her mouth] and then the bones were hanging—all around his mouth he had bones hanging. Oh, it was unreal!

J: So he was a hired hand that worked for your dad?
H: Yah, yah. He shucked and he was a steady worker. He wasn't very fast but he was good.

E: Yes. He worked cheap. But he overate his work I think.

[Harold laughs.]

E: But then, he had no home. And I think he's buried—I wonder if he isn't buried in Oklahoma somewhere. But it was sad how his own flesh and blood did not take care of him or want him around. Instead they used his money.

H: The best one about Andy—He was over at Pete Kaufman's, you know, Eddie Pat and those guys. He worked for them quite a bit. And at night when he was—he'd always go to the stock tank and kind of wash off. And those crazy guys—he laughs] everything was dark and they switched on the yard light. And the guy, all he had on was his shirt. They said that shirt was sticking straight out; he was running around the tank! [He laughs.]

E: He was terribly—

H: Oh those crazy nuts—they about died!

E: [Laughing] He ran around the well! One time, that people know, he had a—he swore. And then he said, "Das tut mir leid."

["I'm sorry about that."] He was sorry right away that he had said it, you know.

J: Getting back to the Blicher Bühr did you feel like he was welcome at your home?

E: Yes.

J: Or was he just a burden you had to bear?

E: It wasn't exactly a burden, I didn't think but—
H: Well, I think your dad got his money's worth as far as that goes. [Ellen gives him questioning look.] Well, you know.

E: [To Harold] He got his money's worth? How?

H: Didn't he?

E: By feeding his horses?

H: Oh, you're talking about Bähr?

J: Yes. I went back to the Bärcher Bähr.

H: Oh! I don't know about that bird!

E: Yah, I don't know.

H: He'd come to the yard and holler, "Ho!" just terrible loud so the people would know he was there.

E: Oh, he wasn't—he wasn't even in the driveway, I think, had started turning and he was already calling, "Hello-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o."

H: He wasn't at our place too—

E: You know, my dad and Uncle Joe D. C.—that's—they were brothers—next in line in the family.

H: Milt W.'s dad.

J: Okay.

E: They agreed on everything about scripture except one thing. My Dad thought that at Jesus's temptation, Jesus could have yielded, see. But He was strong enough not to because He was also God. But uncle Joe thought he couldn't, because he was God. Those were—that was the only—only biblical fact that they disagreed upon. I thought it was interesting.

J: Did they spend a good deal of time arguing that one out?

E: Oh, sure! They talked about it a lot. But often, when they
visited, somebody else was there—another either friend or in-
law or somebody—boy, then it got loud in the parlour! So it was funny.

[I ask for examples, other than Dan Waltner, of entertaining storytellers in the community and Harold affirms that Dan was about the best. As I attempt to conclude the interview, Harold offers me a soft drink and Helen asks him to bring me a snack as well. Then she returns to issue of arguing about Bible interpretation.]

E: Whenever it got so loud in the parlour—the men were talking you know and one of the wives would go, [she leans over as if calling into the parlour] "No. Doch net so laut!" ["Now, not so loud!" [She laughs.] I remember, the women were there talking, of course, and the men were so loud arguing—arguing but in a friendly way.

J: Right.

E: And that is a gift, too. To argue in a friendly way. Because people, if they don’t learn to disagree, then it’s bad. I, uh— can I say one more thing?

J: Sure!

E: About our ministers, we had, uh, was it P. P. Tschetter? Or P. A. Tschetter? It was Tschetter. His son was a minister in the Pretty Prairie Mennonite Church. Maybe he’s still there. I think he is. Anyhow, when he came to Eden one time, he told the church, he said he came—in German, he was German—he said he came to preach the gospel. That was it. The others will take care of the—the lay people take care of the, that is, the
church organization as a church. And my dad thought that was absolutely wonderful! That's what a minister should do. Not to become too involved, and then to take sides yet, you know. That is just wrong. You can't do that and be—be God's man, you know. But nowadays, you don't find that very much. Not around here. And sometimes people have the tendency to include the minister in every meeting there is. That's wrong! It's not fair to the minister either, 'cause it's hard for him to say, "no." But this one thing Tschetter—brother Tschetter said when he came: "I came to preach the gospel."

J: Was he here after or before some of the in-fighting?

E: Oh long—early, in the early days. Oh yah. He just didn't want to be a part of that.

J: Right.

E: Deciding and voting and this sort of thing. And I thought that's a good way—

J: Your dad admired that.

E: He sure did. 'Cause he did not like when the minister became involved with people.

J: Okay. Well, thanks a lot.

E: It's alright to help. Don't misunderstand me. But I think you know what I mean. Certain things come up in the church. Well, what to do now? And, I mean, he did not want to take sides; he just didn't want to be a part of it.

J: Sure. I think that's healthy sometimes.

E: I think that was very healthy, yes. I think he—he was
appreciated.

J: Well, I think that’s—

E: I have a question: why are our people so afraid of revival meetings? I want to know.

J: I don’t know. I don’t have an answer.

E: Now, where my folks came from and my generation’s folks, you know, they were not afraid. And I’m not afraid of them because my dad, my mom, when we went they always took me along. And uh—I just want to know. Is it because of, uh, die Stille in dem Lande got too still [the quiet in the land got too quiet]? We’re too afraid to speak out? Even now, witnessing becomes a problem because the people are scared they won’t know what to say. Well, the only way you’ll know is to go ahead and do it. I really have a question. I have a burden. I’m glad that evangelism was the topic of seminars and that you read about it among the Old Mennonites.

J: Don’t you think a part of the reason that has been so uncomfortable for our people is because for so long we just assumed you knew what everyone’s spiritual life was about because, well, we’re a part of a Mennonite family. This is a part of our heritage. People associate that with—

E: But, you know, we have to—even our spiritual life has to be renewed.

J: Uh huh.

E: I don’t know. They’re—I don’t why they’re scared of it. Believe me they are.
[At this point, Harold brings me a soft drink and inquires about my son and the formal interview ends.]
APPENDIX J

Interview by: John McCabe-Juhnke

With: Ellen Waltner Kling

Place: The Kling Residence, Moundridge, Kansas

Date: Wednesday, May 24, 1989

J=John E=Ellen

J: You were born in this community. Is that right?
E: Yes.

J: Do you mind telling me what year you were born?
E: 1924.

J: How large was your family?
E: Just my brother and I.

J: Just you and Don?
E: Yes.

J: And both still living. Where did you go to school?
E: To Prairie View, the country school. And then to Moundridge High School—McPherson High School first and then Moundridge High School. And then Bethel.
J: Was Prairie View predominantly a Swiss Mennonite school?
E: Yes. Pretty much. And Holdemans.
J: So there wasn't a real sense then that you were somehow strange or an outsider?
E: No. Except we didn't talk English when we started to school. We all talked Schweitzer when we started to school.
J: And the school was taught in English? And you had to learn English once you got to school?
E: Uh huh.
J: Okay. Do you have any special memories of school? What was it like for you? Did you enjoy your grade school experience?
E: Oh yah. I think I did. I remember the stove in the middle of the school. I was a—I don't remember very much about it. It must have been pleasant. I remember the blizzards. And that Dad had to come after Donald and me with the horse and the buggy because we were unable to walk home in the blizzards.
J: In good weather you always walked?
E: Yes.
J: How far was it?
E: It was, oh let's see, quarter—half a mile maybe.
J: So it was fairly standard for most of the students in the community to—
E: Walk. Uh huh.
J: —walk to school unless you had bad weather. Do you have any special memories of your childhood that recall fun times or things you did as a family—special family traditions?
E: No. I don't. The family get-togethers. The holidays. And the making of home-made ice cream. That sort of thing. We did that. I remember that we had to stay at home on Christmas Eve when Dad and Mom went to church. And I don't understand why we did, but Donald and I were scared to death! Alone at Christmas Eve. But there was a Christmas Eve when we had to stay at home. For some reason—maybe one of us was ill. Might have been. Uh huh. We waited for them to come home. That was an interesting evening.

J: What were your main social activities in the family? Was it church, family reunions, getting together with cousins?

E: Yes. Uh huh. It was mostly just that. We didn't do too much else. We had—it was an event to be able to go to Hutchinson to shop. And I had to go to an orthodontist and so that was pretty exciting to be able to do that.

J: That seemed like quite a trek at the time to go to Hutchinson?

E: Yes. Uh huh.

J: Do you recall specifically social activities that were related to church functions? Either at a young people's group, or—

E: You know, I really don't. My memories of some of those years are not very clear. I remember driving to church. And being allowed to drive when I was old enough. Um, I remember baptism at Eden Church. But I don't remember what in the world we did when Mom went to the Everlasting Sewing Society Meetings. Whether I went along or whether I stayed home. Maybe I was in school during some of those times. But she was very, very
involved in church activities. And then of course there was hard work—hard work for her at the farm.

J: Sure.

E: The two of us didn’t have to work very hard. But then she did.

J: Yah. Well with only Don as a son that probably left a larger burden on your mother to help out.

E: It did. Yah, she worked very hard.

J: You went first to McPherson High School and then to Moundridge. What was it like moving into a High School in which you didn’t feel like you were a part of the main group?

E: Except that I lived with Phelix Krehbiel’s girls—with two of my friends—in a house in McPherson. And I suppose the three of us just were fairly comfortable with being with each other. I wasn’t entirely alone in McPherson.

J: Yes. So those were your high school friends?

E: Uh huh. And grade school, of course. They had been. We all went to the same grade school. And then Moundridge—for three years in Moundridge—you know, those were the people I knew from church.

J: Right. So you didn’t feel a tension in your growing up years between the English the Swiss German folks?

E: No. I didn’t really. I think some of that—some of that I experienced at Bethel in the early forties. Because those were the war years.

J: There were a lot of tensions between Bethel and the Newton Community at that time.
E: There really were. Uh huh.

J: You went on to get a bachelors degree and then a masters degree.

E: Uh huh. Uh huh.

J: Did you feel as though you had special encouragement from your family—

E: Yes.

J: —from your parents to get your education.

E: From my mother, yes. My granddad was P. R. Kaufman, the man who wrote *Unser Volk und Seine Geschichte* [*Our People and their Story*].

J: Oh. Yah. I've read that.

E: Yeah. And, of course, he didn't get to go to school, but he had nine children. And the ones who grew to maturity all became educated. So they all got to go to school in Oklahoma. And then when they moved to Kansas, to Kingman County, they got degrees here various places. McPherson College, one of my Uncles did. And I think—and my mother got to go to school when she was in Oklahoma—as a young person got to go to Weatherford Normal Teacher's Training School. So I was—

J: So education was revered. Was that sort of a community norm?

E: No. I really don't think so. I really think I was one of very few people, probably, who was fortunate enough to be able to be encouraged to go to school. You know, most of the people here who are my age, lived here sixty years ago and still live here. Most of them do. And have made some trips but have not moved out of the community.
J: Right. At what point did you leave Kansas completely? Was it to get your masters?

E: Uh huh. The Bethel community I left to get my masters.

J: And then did you go into teaching?

E: Well, then—I met my husband at Bethel. He had been afforded free tuition by Bethel because he was in C. P. S. [Civilian Public Service, an alternative to military duty for many Mennonites during the war] and he was from the east. And so we moved to Buffalo, New York, and I began to teach there at the University of Buffalo. And he started to go to school after his C. P. S. years. So—

J: How many years were you in Buffalo?

E: Oh, off and on, um, several years. And then he was drafted again in, let me see that's—. See, I taught at Bethel. After I got my Masters I came back and taught at Bethel for a couple of years in the late forties. And then, we went to Buffalo. And then he was drafted again. And the second time he was drafted we went to Denver to IW Service. And we spent his two years in Denver. Then we went back to Buffalo and he became a teacher in Buffalo for another couple of years. Let me see, 'til toward the end of the fifties. Our son was born and we moved back to Denver for—made that permanent move. Uh, and George became a principal when he came—well, he was a teacher first—and then he became a principal in Jefferson County schools in Denver. So I really did not come back to this community until six years ago when I moved back here.
Okay. So you’re still fairly new back here. Which means you were away for how many years?

Well, since college. 1945 to ’83. About forty years.

Was that separation at all traumatic for you?

To come back?

Well, to go or to come back.

I was not comfortable—especially comfortable coming back. But I don’t think I minded—I didn’t mind leaving.

You mention peers that have remained in this community for sixty years. Most likely those are people who married people from the community and stayed—either farm families or whatever. Did you ever feel any tension—

Yes.

—there, between those who stayed and your choice to marry outside the community and move on?

Yes. I think that there is, you know, a situation like that. With anybody I think there is. Uh huh.

Do you care to talk any more about that? What were some manifestations of that tension?

I think the Moundridge community people are, um, a very—this is a very close-knit community. Everyone knows what everyone else is doing. And, uh, someone who has not lived here, like I haven’t, is an outsider. And no matter what you do, you are always going to be an outsider.

Uh huh. Yes. There’s a real sense of the in-group. And I don’t know how much is culturally derived, but it’s interesting
to hear you say that even coming back, it's still a little uncomfortable to be a "newcomer" to this community. Uh, let's see. When you got together as an extended family—that is with your mother's or father's brothers and sisters—were there any stories told to the larger group that sort of belonged to your family? In other words, do you remember any stories that someone would ask your dad to tell to the larger group?

E: No. I don't. But I'll bet that Selma and Anna [Ellen's older cousins] could tell you some. Because, as I say, there are a lot of things that I don't remember. I remember a wake. My grandmother's wake. I remember that. Out at the farm. And that was a rather emotional experience for all of us cousins to be allowed to stay up and watch.

J: What did they do at the wake? Did they just—

E: Oh, we were up in our loft and we hung down and looked down—ups—you know, the farmhouse had an upstairs. We just kind of lay there and looked down over the banisters and watch the people. [She shudders.] It was—it was weird! [She laughs.]

J: I wonder when that tradition went out.

E: I wonder, too.

J: I've heard a couple of people talk about wakes.


J: Now, your grandparents were immigrants from Russia. Is that right? Or would it have been your great-grandparents?

E: No! The—on both sides—the grandparents were. Uh huh. Uh huh. The Waltners were considerably older than the Kaufmans.
My grandmother Waltner was—oh, goodness—well, it's all in the Kaufman book. But, then she really was quite a bit older than Granddad Kaufman was. And, let's see, I just—she just didn't live very long after—you know, she died soon after when I was a child so I really didn't get to know her. I think she was a rather forbidding—as far as I can remember—a rather forbidding lady. I cherish the memories—my Grandmother Kaufman, who is the lady with P. R. [she points to an oval portrait on the wall] in the middle picture—is my Grandmother Kaufman.

J: Okay.

E: I didn't know her even nearly so well as I did know Grandmother Waltner because she died when I was just a baby. This Grandmother, she died fairly young. She looks old there [on the picture], but she isn't all that old. But Granddad Kaufman, now, I got to know him very well. And really, really loved him.

J: Would he have told you stories about immigration—about difficulties of adjusting to American society?

E: See, we lived so far—we lived—they lived in Kingman, of course. And we lived here. I don't remem—I'm sure that he probably did. I don't remember those so well as I remember some of the things like the peppermint candy in the closet. You know, those kind of—those are the things that people remember about their granddads. But I, I am very excited about the book, and the translation of the book and working on the genealogy because there are many stories about granddad and his—and his family. Not the children, but his brothers and a
sister. There was a sister also.

J: Where do those come from?

E: Where did I find them?

J: Yah, how did you collect those stories?

E: Oh, we—I have the stories from—most of them came from one of my aunts who is deceased now. But who was alive while the book was being written. So, see, we worked about five years on that book.

J: And that’s due to come out—

E: It did.

J: I did come out.

E: Last summer. A year ago. Uh huh. It’s published. But there are stories in that book about people who are older than 1900.

J: Did you collect those through interview situations?

E: No. I didn’t. I wrote to people and asked them to write up the stories. So—and I worked just mainly on my family. I didn’t get stories of—you know, the rest of us on the committee worked on our own families.

J: Right.

E: But I have the stories from my family. And those are things that people remember.

[We discuss the apparent lack of a storytelling tradition among the Swiss Mennonites and the difficulty of locating traditional narratives.]

E: But it was—I think probably it was difficult for those of us who worked with the Jacob branch to get stories of these older
people. Now, your uncle Bill—would be an uncle wouldn’t he?

J: Yes.

E: My goodness. He has stories about everybody. And he was always very willing to write them down or to tell them. But not everybody was. We really had to work with getting stories about the people in the family—having them write them down.

J: It’s interesting to probe where that reticence comes from, a reticence to really tell about ourselves.

E: But still, you know, in family reunions everyone is very willing to share. Among themselves they share stories, but to an interviewer. I think perhaps that’s a little bit uncomfortable.

[We discuss the importance of an element of spontaneity in sharing reminiscences. She concurs that family reunions may provide one of the most natural contexts in which to observe storytelling.]

E: This morning when I went to town, Joe Goering, the banker, and Donald have offices next to each other on main street. And for some reason they were talking about older people—and my Dad’s name even came up—older people who felt that German was the only language—was the only language. And Joe said that those older people were convinced that in heaven German would be the only language spoken. And then they started to laugh and Donald said, "Yes, but do you remember, Sis," and I didn’t remember this, of course, "do you remember, Sis, that Dad agreed for awhile. But then he said, ‘No, that can’t be. Because there aren’t enough cuss words in German.’" [John laughs.] And, you know, probably your granddad would have said about the same
thing.


E: I think they were really a couple of rascals in those years.

J: As I understand it they were.

E: I think they were!

J: Which is always a surprise to people who sort of watched Ernest [my grandfather] from the outside and thought he was a very austere and stern gentleman. They almost can’t believe that sort of—

E: That he did that.

J: —rascal nature. Let’s see. You seem to have a special sensitivity to the notion of community insiders versus outsiders. Do you recall from your growing up years any specific stories about foreigners who came into the community?

E: No. I don’t. But then, that happens even now.

J: Yes. There’s a whole host of remembrances about the Bücher Bahr. Do you remember him?

E: Oh! The book man.

J: Yes.

E: I don’t remember him, but—okay, Selma would be able to tell you stories about him. She tells me stories about him.

J: Oh, does she?

E: And if my mother still were—oh, she would love to tell you stories but she’s in a nursing home now and doesn’t remember. But he did come. And he always invited himself to meals, didn’t he?
J: That’s what they say. Timed it pretty well to get a meal.

E: He did! He did!

J: Or to come at night and get his horse fed and sleep over.

E: Uh huh. Uh huh. Yah. I think. I just do not remember that, but they tell me about him. And his last name was Bähr, wasn’t it?

J: Yes.

E: And he was the book man.

J: Yes.

E: That’s—he was a travelling library or something? I don’t know. And then of course the lineament guy. You know, the man who sold the what do you—now it’s Amway but it wasn’t then—it was, uh—Watkins! The Watkins man. Don’t you—he’s, uh—I kind of remember that man, who had those—all those medicines on the back of his—. Oh, maybe it wasn’t the Watkins man. Ask somebody else and see.

J: Okay. He sold lineament?

E: Well, yah. Those medicines on the back of his wagon. I kind of remember that. And Mom would buy from him. I bet you that was the Watkins man. I just bet it was.

J: In terms of people having a specific reputation as being good storytellers in the community—someone who can really turn a tale, really entertaining talking about self or others—do you have any—

E: Huh uh. I can’t recall.

J: Almost everyone says Dan Waltner.
E: Really?
J: Yah. But your Dad didn't entertain you kids in the home as you recall.
E: Well, yes. But then it was just growing up with him. It was not anything—I think we were so used to it that it never occurred to us [the phone rings] that this was a special—excuse me.
J: I'll turn the recorder off for a minute.
[I turn off the recorder until she finishes her phone conversation.]
E: It's so interesting about people talking about my dad. He probably very likely had a gift of gab. I'm sure. But as I say, I think my lady cousins would be able to help you with that if you still have time to do interviews.
J: And is Selma fairly spry?
E: Oh yes. Very, very alert. Yah. She would be a good one to remember.
J: Maybe more so than Anna.
E: Yah. Anna—since Anna doesn't hear well, Selma, likely would be the one to go to. Selma is maybe ten years younger than Anna and would be quite willing to talk with you, I'm sure.
J: Well, that helps a lot. Thanks a lot for taking some time.
E: Oh, you're welcome.
[End of recorded interview.]
[I began by mentioning the interview I had earlier, with Art’s youngest sister Ellen.]

J: Let’s start with a little bit of background information on you. Were you born in the Moundridge community?

A: Oh, yah. Yah, three miles west and a mile and a half south of Moundridge.

J: Okay. And do you mind telling me what year you were born?

A: 1910.

J: Your family was pretty large. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: Well, there were eleven children. The oldest child, a daughter, passed away at seven months, but the rest of us grew up. There
was ten—six boys and four girls—that grew to adulthood, Ellen being the youngest.

J: Alright. Where did you go to school?

A: A district called Mound—Mound schoolhouse—two miles west of Moundridge.

J: Those were your grade school years?

A: Yah.

J: And did you—was that predominantly a Swiss group?

A: Yah, pretty much. We had—'course when I started school there were—at the one room school—there were—all nine grades were a-goin' and there were forty students. Twelve beginners. Outside of about, uh, oh I could think of maybe eight or ten of those students, maybe, were not Swiss. There were some—some who are in Wisconsin now—some Behr and some Numburgs. And there was a family by the name of Koehn. I don't know whether they were of the bearded group at one time or not. They may have been. But [an unintelligible word] there was Goering and Schrags and Stuckys.

J: So in grade school you felt like you were pretty much a part of the majority.


J: What was your grade school experience like? When you think back to grade school, do you recall specific incidents that stick out in our mind?

A: Yah. Well, one thing, of course, when you talk about the teachers—E. E. Flickner was my first teacher. Although, I was
lucky. I had good teachers all the way through. But E. E. Flickner, for example, he was kind of teacher and nurse and mother to all of us, you know. If somebody would get hurt, he’d have a roll of tape or something to tape the spot and so on. But, we had a lot of fun. I recall that the noon hour was the most interesting of the whole school. [He chuckles.] Whole school time.

J: What happened at the noon hour.

A: Well, we played ball and all kind of different games, you know. We had different games. We had a game that we called "blackman." You know, you’d catch a fellow and pat him on the back three times. 'Course, during the noon hour when it was cold—we were right at the edge of Sand Creek there—we’d go to the corner there where J. Hobart’s boys live—Jay Goering, you know. Just a little south of that there’s a hill down to—that’s the Sand Creek, there. That’s where we could go skating when it was ice enough to hold us. We had a lot of fun, I tell you.

J: Do you remember other kinds of things that you did with your family or your cousins for fun? What kind of games did you play or social activities were you involved in?

A: Yah, well—of course, we took to playing ball quite early. Although baseball, of course, we were out of school then already—out of grade school—then took a hold of that. But, of an afternoon—my dad’s older brother and his family live just a mile across the section from where we were, west of us. Of
course, we always were after our folks to let us go over there Sunday afternoon, you know, and romp around with Uncle Jacob Goering’s boys. And we did that quite frequently. And there again, if it was in the summertime and not too cool, why we’d like to go swimming, too. Well, at least bathing. We maybe weren’t much swimmers, but we had a lot of fun in the water.

J: Right. Were other social activities generally involved with church activities?

A: Well, of course, we were taught that going to church was, almost to say, a must. And we were in church as a rule. We took part in C. E., you know, Christian Endeavor and Sunday School, obviously, had different teachers as we grew up. And, of course, being on the farm, as far as midweek services were concerned, that was a matter of [he faces me directly] opinion, so to speak—you know, as to whether you could always attend or not. And I think justifiably so. Because if you’re on the farm, you—as the old saying goes—make hay while the sun shines. And uh—but the folks were pretty strong on this matter of going to church. I recall Dad used to say that, "Well, really," he said, "church going is just a habit, but," he said, "it still is a good habit. And people should go." Of course, he didn’t suggest that we go because it was a habit, at all. But he was saying that with many it is a habit, I feel sure.

J: Right.

[At this point, I suggest that we reposition the microphone to pick up his voice better. We turn off the tape and make the necessary
J: Okay. Now I think we're set up where it will work better for us. So in terms of your life in the Moundridge community, how many years did you stay in that community?

A: Well, I was born in 1910. And then we moved to Elyria there, where Martin lives now, a quarter mile west of town in '24. So that was fourteen years there in that immediate community. The eighth grade—I took the eighth grade at King City School in Elyria. Bill was in school at the time and Milt Coering—Milton C. who just passed away. They were in--.

'Course the Elyria school house, I recall—King City—that was, I guess, mostly Schweitzer. But there were some others there then, too.

J: I see. Did you sense a tension there between the Schweitzer's and the--

A: Somewhat. But nothing that couldn't be handled, I should say. There was a little bit. But really they were quite considerate. Some time there was the name of Bonham who was there. And uh, there was one or two others. But it was—the majority was still Swiss.

J: So, in terms of your childhood experience, you don't recall instances when you were made to feel inferior or out of it or somehow not a part of the group--

A: No. No.

J: --because of your heritage.

A: No. No. On the contrary. I was led to believe, in fact, I
felt that, uh—at a very young age—that my heritage was something to be remembered. And I’ll tell you why. When we lived at, uh—well, this happened before we moved in ’24. This happened during the war years. Well, some guys in town there, the over super-patriotic ones, you know, thought that those who went as a conscientious objector didn’t amount to very much. I recall that one guy came from the Moundridge community one time. I was just a lad, but I can remember. He told my dad that he wanted him to buy war bonds. And Dad said, "No. I’m not buying war bonds." The guy didn’t like it. He got angry really. He was not much of a gentleman to say the least. And he said, "Why not?" Dad said, "Well, there’s more than one reason. One reason is, of course, I don’t believe in it. I don’t believe in that principle." He said, "A second reason is I don’t have money to buy it." He said, "I wouldn’t buy it if I had the money." And this guy says, "Well, John, those who--" that was my dad’s first name—he says, "John, those who will not have purchased war bonds, we’re going to have the black list in Moundridge, right on the street. And the names of those who will not have purchased war bonds are going to be on that list." And Dad says, "that’s quite alright. That’s your privilege. I’m still not buying war bonds." And he didn’t. I remember that, John. I don’t know how many people would have stood up to it like that. There are probably others. But I know my dad did. And I’ll be eternally grateful.

J: Do you know if other than that incident there was other ridicule
that he suffered as a result of not buying?

A: That Dad suffered?

J: Yes.

A: No. Not to my knowledge. Of course, you take this John Schrag, better known as Krike Hannes [creek John]. You know who I'm talking about. John Schrag, he was Dan and Herman's father and Pete and Jake, the Schrag boys, you know. There's only three living now, I guess. Pete and Herman and Adam. Yah, the three out of the nine boys. Yah, their father—who, incidentally was a direct uncle to my mother. Mrs. Schrag and my mother's mother were sisters. So, my mother and the Schrag's were first cousins. But, uh, John Schrag, he was actually tarred and feathered during that time. But he stood the test, too.

J: Was it generally known in the community at the time that that had happened?

A: Yah, I think it was. Though I was too young to have grasped the full—uh, whatever word is the correct word to use here. But it was around. They knew that knew that Grandpa Krike Hannes there was, uh—had been gotten a hold of and stood the test. That—I, I think that's the only case of our people there that were actually tarred and feathered.

J: Right. Let's--

A: But he was some, excuse me—. I should say—some would say that he was just stubborn—obstinate, you know. Well, maybe it was—. I kind of think he was. I think we all are to a degree. But let's not forget that he might have been stubborn, too. But he
knew what he was doing, too. He had a faith that he wished to preserve. Let's give him that credit, too.

J: What memories do you have within your family of traditions that you observed as special activities that were a part of your home life?

A: Yah. Well, I think the thing that I—maybe I shouldn't say remember the most. But I remember it as much as I remember anything else. And the thing that to me now means of the most value, that is the way I grew up in the continued practice of family devotions. As I look back on that now, John, to me that's number one. I don't know of a morning when I was at home, that we didn't have family devotions. That had to be. But I mean, it had to be! And Dad used to say, "Well, let's all gather round." And each one on his chair or bench, whatever. He used to say, "Well, if I want just to read it," he says, "I can do that to myself." He wanted attention, see? And I guess there might have been actually times when we maybe got to school a little late. But that had to be. And here's—I'd like to make this comment, John, I wonder, your family included—mine and everybody else's-. If we in our churches would once asked the question—it wouldn't hurt to do it; I'm not suggesting that we do, but it wouldn't hurt to do it—to have the people, the parents raise their hands of the homes where they have—not discarded but carelessly left the practice of having family devotions. I think I'd be surprised—we'd be surprised how many hands might go up. May I take this just one step farther? I
think that's one of the major ills of society. Unless we come back to that, regard—. If you or your wife, John, or Tim and Lela Mae [Art's daughter and husband]—we had the little boy [my 18-month-old son, for whom Lela Mae's daughter was baby sitting] here the other day, you know—

J: Oh, yeah. They said they were going to bring him by.

A: Cute little shaver by the way. May I just say you love him very much while you have him because before you know it he's going to be 17 or 18 and then they're away. But, uh, that's one of the ills of society. And if that's not being practiced—if you're too busy, and I suspect some would say, "We're too busy."

Anyone that's too busy for that, is too busy, John. You know what I'm saying.

J: Right. Well, Ellen had said, too, about your father, that every night—no matter how late it was—he would always read the Bible.

A: Yah, he studied. That was—the reading of, and study in the evening, was I guess, more to himself. Our devotions, of course, was all in the morning.

J: Right.

A: Oh yah. Dad read an enormous amount. I know Mom said she could see him sometimes through the sleeping room—the bedroom door—that he would sit there sometimes. He'd kind of gesture a little bit, you know, as to what this or this might mean. Dad had a terrific memory. It served him well. I guess that maybe rubbed off of his dad because they said the Goering grandpa had
an exceptional memory. Then, of course, outside of that, we played a lot outside. We farmed with horses, you know, for a long time. And we always had a few ponies that we could ride. We never had bicycles. I guess dad figured there was too many of us, because we’d just fight if we just had the one. And he couldn’t afford six. So, we did do quite a bit of riding with the ponies that we had there. And very—very little fishing, I tell you, as far as hook fishing is concerned. There was a habit, it was really against the law. But not as far as decency was concerned. But it was against the law to go hand fishing. We did that in the Sand Creek and in the Turkey Creek someplace, too. That’s one of the best sports in the world, John. [He smiles.]

J: Hand fishing?

A: Yes, sir! They talked about cruelty, you know. You see, on TV they show people catching fish and if they’re a little too small, they [he gestures as if taking hold of a fish hook and pulling it out] tear ‘em out. And I guess that hurts the fish, too. Doesn’t it?

J: Uh huh. Well, I think my brother could attest to hand fishing. I never did it so I don’t know. [Art laughs.] It always seems a little bit scary to me.

A: Well, it is. But you get used to that, too. You get too—if you do it a while, you can—your hands are underwater, of course, and you can tell the difference whether it’s a carp or a catfish just by the feel of it. And they’re all too slick,
but—. [He laughs.]

J: Do you remember if there were special stories in your family that were told at home, or even in the context of the larger extended family, that specifically "belonged" to your family? In other words, an experience that happened to you that others request specifically that you tell about because it's your family's story.

A: Yah, well, the—frugality, I guess would be one word that you can use here. I know that the folks were saying about the grandfolks in Russia, you know, how meager their existence was a time or two. And we were taught to be conservative, John. Very, very much so. You don't waste anything. I remember when, once in a while—it happened very seldom—but, once in a while you would find a little—just a little bitsy grain of corn imbedded rather deep in the cob. You know we would feed ear corn to the hogs—just in the ear. And, I repeat, very seldom did that happen. But it did happen that once in a while there was one little kernel left that the hogs didn't get. Mother would never put that in the oven. She would break it off, and then burn the cob. She just didn't think that corn was meant to burn. We had chickens, you know. And she was saying how that when she was a girl she would go with her older brothers. Uh, her name was Wedel, of course. John Wedel was the oldest. She would—with the two older brothers some times—it was kind of in play, but still it was their task to have a little cart—whether it was a four wheeled wagon or two wheeled—they would follow
along the fence row in the pasture and pick up the bark that had
fallen off, off the posts and put it on that deal. And maybe
some time the cow chips. I wouldn't be surprised. And then,
Grandma would use that maybe to make breakfast or some other
meal. John, they didn't waste anything in those days. They
couldn't afford to. That together with the upbringing as far as
maintenance of the family altar, I think were the two
outstanding ones.

J: I see. Did your folks talk at all about how your grandparents
felt about immigration? Were there any immigration stories or
things like that?

A: Well, I don't know as that they just discussed that too much.
Uh, other than the fact that my folks, of course, were both born
here. But then Dad's two older brothers, Jacob C. Goering—that
was Henry and—called little Chris and little Hank—I don't know
if you remember those terms or not. Your dad would, I'm sure.
Their dads, Jacob C. Goering and Peter C. Goering, they were
born in Russia, see? And they came over, oh, I think Uncle Jake
must've been, oh fourteen, fifteen. Peter C. was thirteen—
something like that. And they, of course, recalled how the
times were there. I heard them both mention that already—as to
what their older brothers—and one sister was born there, too.
But other than that—

J: No stories about any difficulties of adjusting to life in
America or problems with learning the language?

A: No. Not really. Their adjustment, of course, uh—the
conviction, John, that the grandparents had, even in Russia. Some say, "Well, you’re laying it on here." And say, "It wasn’t all their faith. It was the economics, too." It might have played a part. But it was very minor compared to their desire to worship as they pleased. That’s why they came. And so having had that, uh—you know, my dad’s oldest sister and my mother’s older ones—. Why, uh, her folks having been through that in, you know, Russia, why, I guess the adjustment here wasn’t too hard. It took pioneer life work. You might be interested to know my dad told me one time that he plowed with the walking plow for twenty-one days straight, outside of Sunday, of course. The plowing was good. It had rained right, and what not. But I guess the weather was not too terribly hot. But twenty-one days with the walking plow! I guess that gave him some of the muscle. He was stout as an ox. And then the difference—I don’t know how much you want in this, but—we talk about change. Well, one of my pet peeves is that not all change is progress. But look at the change that they had. Dad saying that he plowed with the walking plow. And he did that for his wheat, John. That wasn’t just for his garden, you know. And then came the plow with wheels on. And I recall that the Swiss gave a play to that effect. I don’t know whether you heard about that or not.

J: No.

A: Phil Waltner was in on—. Of course, Phil died young, you know. Waldo Waltner’s oldest brother. And in that play, why one boy
said—. Do you understand—can you follow the Schweitzer Deutsch?

J: Just barely.

A: Well, anyway, let me just say it in English. This one boy said he had heard that Sepvetter (that would be like Grandpa Joe, you know) is going to get him a plow with wheels. Phil Waltner was playing this boy’s father’s part. And Phil says, "What? A plow with wheels? That would be a fine how do you do." I’m putting this in English. "Wird a schöne Geschichte," say, "it’d be a nice story." He said, "Those poor horses have enough of a load to pull the plow through the prairies without a lazy man sitting on it!" [John laughs] Well, just look what that did, John. The walking plow, some were only twelve inch shares. Some were fourteen. But then, what they did they put a sixteen inch share on what they called the solke plow, which was the first plow which we owned. It had three wheels on it and two handles. And whereas the walking plow had two horses the solke plow had three. They added one horse and they plowed at least two widths. I think most walking plows were just twelve inches. But they added four inches. So they plowed a third more. Add one horse more and the operator could sit on the plow. Imagine what an advance that was, John! Just imagine! He could sit on the plow; he could plow a third more. That was something! Then later when John—John W.—Do you know him?

J: John?

A: John W. Goering? He’s older than I am by two years. He’s in McPherson now. His wife was Agnes Wedel. She died here a few
years ago. And when John and I got big enough to—old enough to run the plows, why, I personally had very little experience with the solke plow. But the—what the called the gang plow came along. Those were two fourteen inch bottoms with five horses now. I tell you, when the two of us were in the fields with two fourteen inch plows, which was four bottoms, listen, we were really turning the soil! [He chuckles.] Now they'll hang seven or eight bottom behind one tractor.

J: Right.

A: They go after supper. And they can plow as much after supper than dad plowed with the horses in a week.

J: Sure.

A: And still they don't have time to go and visit.

J: Were there any particular incidents on the farm that you remember? Either some kind of an accident or tragedy or hard time?

A: Yah, we had some tragedies. There would be one [an unintelligible word here] tragedy. I know one time Uncle Chris Krehbiel’s—C. C. Krehbiel—you knew the auctioneer, Ted Krehbiel?

J: Yes.

A: His father I’m talking about. He was a horse buyer. He came through the—came from the south—bought a bunch of horses there in the sand hills, I guess, someplace. He watered his horses there at our place and headed for Elyria where they were living at the time. And they weren’t hauling them. They were pulling
them. Had some horses tied to the tail of the others, you know, in a whole string. And we had some horses—had two or three mares that had colts. John W., the older brother I’m talking about, he was there just playing with one of the colts—one of our colts. And these horses that Uncle Chris had tied up to the corral line—the corral fence they were, of course, just reaching over—you know how they do. And neigh at each other and kind of stop and kick. And the horses kind of made a racket and they turned around and John got run over. Broke his collar bone. But then, he lived through it—lived to pitch ball later. We played ball. I caught for him.

J: How old was he at the time it happened?

A: Well, that was before we moved. Several years before we moved. I was fourteen, John was sixteen when we moved. Oh, he must have been around the ten year mark. Something like that. Eight, ten, twelve, I’m not sure about that. I remember it quite well.

J: Did you make your livelihood by farming?

A: Oh yes. Entirely. Yah. And another thing I should mention here about that experience, it may not amount to anything but, one thing that hurt us as children, in a sense—. You know, the one thing you can do, John, by farming with horses, you can reproduce your own power. You can’t do that with machinery. And we did that, of course. When we were children, why, there were—there was one colt, sometimes two or three, you know, almost every spring. With all the farms around there. And one
time, this was a mule colt, and we would always, you know, stroke the manes and get a little rope on them and lead them around. We had them halter broke before they were weaned, frankly. And we had a swing in the barn. Why Dad ever allowed us to put that swing in the barn, I won’t know. But that little mule colt—. It was a swing that had a board on that was just notched at the end. Not holes in it and the rope through the holes. You follow me.

J: Yes.

A: And that board had fallen off. And that little stinker got to playing around with the rope and turn around and twist it. And it choked itself. We came into the barn; there was a little butt was just barely touching the ground there. He was hanging; he was dead as a door nail. Oh that made—I almost cried that time. Of course, Dad was a little on the—not that he scolded us—but he didn’t like it at all because—. And one thing I tell you, he made us take the swing out of the barn.

J: That was the end of that.

A: That was the end of that. We had swings under the trees outside where the colts wouldn’t get to it.

J: So you made your living on the farm. Then at what point did you move here to Newton?

A: Well, of course, my wife and I, we lived on several different places. But we moved to Newton—to town here, it’ll be seventeen years now in August. Yah. I tell you, time goes so fast it isn’t funny. But we lived in McPherson County for some
—first five years of our married life. It was right there at the edge of Elyria.

J: So all the time you were in the Moundridge-McPherson area you attend the Eden Church?

A: Oh yes. Yah. All the time. And then, of course, when we moved, we moved to the place here where Amanda’s folks lived. You probably are—my wife is a sister to Erwin. You know, Erwin Goering in North Newton there.

J: Uh huh.

A: Yah. And so their folks bought the place there close to Walton. And we moved to that place after the folks moved to town—that was her folks moved to town in '46. And we were there for about twenty-seven years and after that, why, we moved here. But really the greater part of our married life, was lived in Harvey County. See my birthplace was just a half a mile from the south line. The difference—the edge of McPherson and Harvey county was at our south corner at my birthplace there. We were neighbors there to Adolph Goering, who made possible Goering Hall at the college.

J: Right. Right.

A: And they lived right on the Harvey County line. Now there house was in McPherson County and their barn was in Harvey County.

J: In terms of your life’s chosen profession, was it something that just came upon you naturally or did you ever think of doing something other than farming?

A: Well, I think farming, of course. Of course, John went on with
his education. The girls went through high school—some of them did. But, uh, I guess the farming just kind of got into the blood, so to speak. My mother thought that I should be a doctor. I used to, for the younger ones—we’d have kind of growing pains in our shins, you know, and used to put liniment on. We had a deal that they’d call Camphorbalm, which was a good pain reliever. I used to do that. I’d wrap legs tight with clean cloth, you know. Anyway, my mother thought I should be a doctor and Dad used to say that he thought that I should be a salesman.

J: Did you sense that there would have been encouragement for you had you decided to go on to school? In other words, was education, at least in your family, held in fairly high esteem?

A: Well, education was—it was considered. Yah. However, it was not, uh, what word would you use? Not top notch. But the folks didn’t have anything against education. But it was almost impossible for all of us to go, John.

J: Yeah. Your brother, John, went?

A: Yah, John finished. He went through college. And then, of course, he was principle of McPherson High School for a long time. He taught before that, of course. And the two younger sisters, er, Ellen went to high school. And Lilly went—the one that lives in Ohio—she had some college, too. She was in college when mother passed away. But, uh, I had, when I was growing up, I had kind of a desire. I always felt that I’d like to be, oh, really an engineer. Or a railroad or bus driver.
I'd like to—used to think it'd be nice to have a lot of power at your disposal. I'd like to pull the whistle on that steam engine, you know. And things like that. But, really the first year after I graduated from the grades there at Elyria, it was—maybe not impossible—but not very possible for me to have gone to high school. Because Martin, my youngest brother, was just starting to school. The oldest brother and oldest sister were married. An older brother was away on a trip. And John, John was in high school. And the rest were in the grades. Then my brother was in the field with Dad, and I was in the house with Mom. That's what it amounted to. Now, I could have gone the next year, I guess, if I've wanted. But I didn't care to go for some reason. I liked the outdoors. I still take, what I'll choose to call particular interest, in the animal kingdom.

J: Uh huh.


J: Right.

A: I've had some that told me—one was one of my former pastors—thought that I should be in the pulpit. But that never materialized either.

J: When you got together with your parents or had family times together like family reunions, were there special stories that you asked people to tell about their experiences? Some stories that you always liked to hear told again and again—either about an interesting experience or funny happening? Do you remember
some good storytellers in your family?

[Art remembers getting together in the evenings and reminiscing about childhood play with his brothers, but can not recall anything specific. At this point I ask about stories involving events in the community that "cause a stir." From his response, it seems that Art interprets this as referring to the conflict surrounding the Hopefield-Eden split.]

A: Oh, yah. Well, I remember that. That could be a long deal. You'd need another tape for that! Really. But, uh—. Well, that of course had to do when, their was an offshoot, so to speak, of the Hopefield Church. And I think my dad gave that the right name. He made a remark one time. He said, "That deal, that was kind of a disgrace to civilization, not to mention Christendom." And it was. It should've never happened, but it did. It's a long story. Some of the—there's some books written on it. The, uh—oh, who wrote a book on it? You'd find one in the library, I'm sure. A guy who is not a Schweitzer not a Swiss wrote a book and had some comments about it to the editor, too, about some of the things that he thought he knew and didn't know quite as well as he though he did in fact. But then—.

J: So those kinds of stories essentially had to do with the infighting in the church.

A: Yah. That—.

J: And what resulted in the split.

A: Yah.
J: And those kinds of power struggles.

A: And then, of course, there was some things that came later that a fellow wouldn't be allowed to go into detail. It wouldn't do any good to stir up another nest of hornets. But, whereas the Mennonite faith is a nonresistant faith and to me it's still the best. There are some things that happened amongst the Schweitzer people that should never have happened. And wouldn't have happened if the followers of the Lord would have been more followers of the Lord. It's just that simple.

J: Do you feel that now, in retrospect, the community has recovered fairly well from that?

A: I think so. 'Course some—time does a lot of things, John. And it brings a lot of joy and happiness. It creates a lot of wounds but it's also the ultimate healer. And I think it's sort of accepted. I think that on both sides of the ledger—that main deal when the church separated there and became two churches—I think there has been forgiveness on both sides. They live together as neighbors. And things that came about later on, which were also a disgrace—It wasn't good. But maybe, minutely defined, one could say it might have done some good anyway. In that people began to see how, you know, how—what's the word here?—how, ruthless would be one word, how inconsistent with the faith some of these things really were. And so things were taking place that shouldn't have taken place.

J: A lot of remembrances of community events, those that did not have to do with the strife in the church, involve changes as
they made their way into the community. The first one, for
example, to get her hair cut. Those kinds of things that would
always sort of rattle—

A: They did.

J: —the framework as changes came in.

A: Yah, I remember, not wanting to name any names. I won’t. But
then, I remember the first two girls that cut their hair there
in Eden Church. There, too, the term was, "bobbed her hair."
Well, the question that comes: Define when is a lady’s hair
short. See? When are hair bobbed? And when aren’t they?
‘Course, the Apostle Paul says, in essence he says, "Don’t you
fellows know that nature teaches you that man isn’t supposed to
wear long hair?" You know? Things like that. But I recall,
The Moundridge Journal had an article in the paper. One of the
girls that cut her hair, she was one of the first ones. The
article read like this, verbatim, it said, "She had her crowning
glory cut into a windblown." That’s exactly what it was, John.
The Bible calls the long hair for the woman her crowning glory.

Where is our church today? And all the things—you’re talking
to kind of an old fogy. But you can put that name on me if you
want to. I don’t care. Our friendship won’t be marred. And
uh, I don’t know, of course, you go to Shalom [a new Mennonite
Church in Newton] now?

J: Yes.

A: Yah. We were there when Philip [Art’s grandson] was baptized.
And uh, but the format of the bulletin from most of the churches
look pretty much alike to me. I don’t know whether somebody made a kind of a deal that they all follow. Maybe something grew up at Seven Two Two Main [the street address in Newton of the General Conference Mennonite Church offices], I don’t know. But anyway, in our church, too, with all the preliminaries, the minister finally gets the floor. Looks like he can’t even read the text anymore. There is a worship leader beside. [He’s very emphatic here.] That never took place in the past, John. Why does it now? C. J. Goering, our pastor over there at the Eden Church, pastored that church for forty years. Sure, he made mistakes, but who didn’t? And the individuals who might want to go as—young men who might want to go as a minister—if he tries to put in his mind he’s going to be a minister—he’s going to serve a church and please everybody—he’d just as well get a different vocation. 'Cause that individual has not yet appeared. But now you come in there, and I find it—charge it to one of my many weaknesses—I find it extremely difficult, John, to become into—to come into the worshipful mood when I go to church. It’s just not there, for me. There is no better way—you take that to Shalom, John, take this down there—there is no better way to start a service than to sing one of the gospel hymns and bring the people into unity. Here we have an introit, then we have responsive reading, then we have call to worship. [Here he pauses nearly ten seconds.] To me, society bears many of the marks of a God-starved world. I don’t know of no other way to put it. I heard E. G. Kaufman say one time at a
principle address one evening, he said, "I could be wrong, but I think I’m right." [He chuckles.]

J: In terms of stories that were not somehow related to religious themes or church life, much of what people remember about growing up in the Moundridge community is people who either came in from the outside or didn’t quite fit the mold of the community people. For instance, a lot of people talk about the Bücher Bähr. Do you remember him?

A: Oh yah. Yah, I knew the Bücher Bähr. We knew him quite well. He stopped at our house like he stopped at most of the houses around there. And he’d generally know that, in most of those places if it’d be around noon he could stay for the noon meal and feed his horses a little bit, too. And he would sometimes—he’d leave a smaller book by way of appreciation, which was alright.

J: You felt like he was fairly welcome at your house?

A: Oh yah. Oh yah. I doubt whether he was ever turned down a visit there. But then, I know of several places where he stayed and stayed for meals besides our place. I know that for sure.

J: Did you know about the Watkins man—someone who sold medicine?

A: Well, those guys were around. They made their rounds with people with the medicine. I don’t just recall that any particular one that sold medicine. There’s one guy that drove around that we called der Bese Mann. That is, Besen that’s for broom.

[Here the first side of the tape ends. The second side begins with a]
reflection about the Bücher Bühr. Amanda, Art's wife, makes a comment from the other room that is difficult to decipher.

A: Well, you know, he drove through Kansas. He drove through Nebraska and clear into the Dakotas.

[Amanda comments here.]

M: When he'd drive into the yard he'd say, "Whoa, whoa." To get your attention, you know. So everybody knew who--

A: [To Amanda] Holler loud enough, you mean, so that they knew he was here.

M: Yah.

A: Yah.

J: Were there people in the community that you remember as especially entertaining individuals, or people who you really liked to hear tell a story?

A: Yah. There were some such. One I'm thinking of was a little bit ahead of my time. I knew the man. I knew him well. And that's Ellen's father—Ellen Waltner Kling—Danny Waltner. He was a kind of a natural. I remember her dad, Manda's dad used to say how that he would appear on the literary programs, you know. He didn't have to have a topic assigned to him before hand. He'd just get up and say something, and the people had to laugh. It was just that simple for him. He was quite a--

J: But you never saw him perform or heard him?

A: No. Not really. I talked with him a number of times. But I never saw him perform on these literary programs. Talk about entertainment. Literary programs, we had that in different
communities. And sometimes they would change about and have them in different schools, the same group, you know. Oh yah. We had a lot. That’s one thing that we lost then, too. And it is a good that we lost. That was kind of a tie for the community. You know, there was a program committee and they would assign a paper for someone. And then there was a debate on some subject. There were special music events. The chairman would always appoint a critic, and that was the last of the evening. No, we had a lot of—. I recall I sang in a quartet some time and Mose and Eli Stucky and them guys. Well, Eli didn’t sing much, but Mose did. And Milt Goering, the one who just passed away. We had a lot of fun at those old literary programs.

J: Uh huh.

A: But times do change. And I guess some new things will always come in. And we should be willing to accept change. Whereas, not all change is progress.

J: Other than Dan Waltner were there some other especially good storytellers?

A: Not to my knowledge. I recall some that were—. I know Amanda’s Dad used to tell about the spelling and arithmetic matches that the grade schools would have. One of my mother’s sisters, Mrs. J. P. Krehbiel—of course, you’re just a young fellow, but the man that she married that was—she was his second wife. He had the Krehbiel Hardware in Moundridge.

J: Oh. Okay.
And her dad used to say that when it came to arithmetic matches in grade school—. Elizabeth was her name, Aunt Elizabeth. She was the second oldest of the daughters in the Wedel family. And the individual who would read the numbers, you know, sometimes it would be three, sometimes maybe four. Maybe two thousand six hundred and fifty, or something. Maybe three hundred and forty. He said that Aunt Liz, when they would come down—they would have seven, eight, maybe ten or twelve sometimes—she had the right hand line of figures added. And when the teacher would say, "start," she had the answer of that one row—had it down, and the others first then started figuring, see? She beat everyone in the bunch. [He chuckles.] She lived to be ninety-nine. She died at Memorial Home in Moundridge.

J: She was a quick thinker, huh?

A: Yah, she was.

J: Do you remember Andy Unruh?

A: Oh yah. Yah.

J: He was sort of a hired man?

A: Yah, he was a hired man and they kind of had nick-named him Honey Andy. It wasn’t too nice, but Honey Andy’s not a bad name either. And his education, of course, had been very limited. But he was as honest as the day was long. I don’t think I ever met anybody who did more honest work than he. In all due respects to my folks, they didn’t cheat either, and so on. And I think in some cases he was taken advantage of, possibly. We never did, of course. We gave him what the agreement was to
pay. He didn’t even want to quit of an evening when it was quitting time. That’s a fact. I know one time when we were thrashing bundles, I don’t recall where it was at, but Marv Boyce owned a big machine. He had married one of John Wedel’s daughters. And he thrashed for the Schrags and Kaufmans and Goerings and Wedels around there several years. And it was seven o’clock already, but Marv was just going to finish out the wagons that had driven up to the feeder on the thrashing machine. And we would run from seven to twelve and then from two to seven. Those were the ten hour days in bundle thrashing. And it was already seven o’clock, but Marv was just finishing out these. And Andy Unruh had a team of horses and was heading for the field to load again, you know. And Marv run away from the machine a little bit and hollered to him. He says, "Andy!" He hollered real loud. He says, "It’s quitting time." And Andy just looked to the west and just hollered back, he says, "The sun ain’t down yet." And he drove on. And he had most of his loaded yet by the time that they quit. He was just—that’s what I mean. He was honest as the day was long.


A: Yes, sir. He didn’t work fast, but he earned every penny that he got. He never did work fast, but he didn’t give up. He just worked all the time.

J: Were there any other outsiders to the community that made a special mark or that people sort of talked about as being especially interesting or especially strange?
A: Well, I think, of course, you know that I'm interested in music. I'm—to a degree I'm a musician, John. I have a lot of instruments here at home. Most of them I can't master, but then I do play one or two. And I sang in the—Eden Church gave the Messiah a time or two. I always stood in high regard for the individual there who directed the choir. Not the least of which was Jacob Goering who is still living—is a resident at the Home.

J: Yes.

A: Jacob J. Goering.

J: Yes. I interviewed him.

A: Yah. He's an uncle to your mother. And uh, him, and Ben Zerger—Benjamin Zerger as well. Did you know of him?

J: I know the name.

A: Yah. He, uh—well it was a large family, too. Oh who were they? They were so—Kermit Wedel married one of the daughters. Kathleen. Kermit and Kenneth, the twins. Remember them?

J: Yes.

A: That's Kathleen's dad that I'm talking about.

J: Okay.

A: He was quite a musician. He died all too young. He was just seventy one or two when he passed away. He led the choir, the chorus—I mean the Eden Church chorus—in the Messiah when we gave it. I always stood in high regard for those people. They knew music quite well. Again, they, like all of us, had their, you know, their weaknesses and their faults. But all in all,
they were good folks and we learned to respect them. And, of course there were people there who we knew as individuals who, I shouldn’t say always, but nearly always taught Sunday School. You couldn’t help but remember them. There were quite a few of those, too. I know of some there that I could think of. I won’t take time to mention. It would probably take too much time. But when I was superintendent there in ’47 and ’48, I recall how that many, many were not willing to take a class. But some were and did a real good job. I guess you’ll always find those in any church.

J: If you were to characterize the Swiss Mennonite people in an adjective or a phrase that says what makes us distinct from other kinds of Mennonites, what would you say?

A: Well, there may be other Mennonites that’d be just as good. I’m sure there probably were. But the frugality of our people, John. And the minuteness of their conscience is what made the Swiss group that I grew up with distinct for me.

J: What do you mean by "minuteness of their conscience"?

A: Well, they didn’t just—to most of them being a conscientious objector was more than not fighting. See? Most of them were quite minute in their faith that if you were actually a conscientious objector it meant much more than not going to work [he means war]. It meant that you needed to get along with your neighbor, too. And you tried, whereas we always—I think we can say we all fall short—you tried to treat your neighbor as yourself. And I think that came through with the Swiss people.
J: Probably largely because there was a sense of the brotherhood or the family because here was a whole congregation, essentially that migrated from Russia.

A: Sure. Right.

J: And in the first few years, especially, you had to be accountable to your brothers and sisters.

A: They were hard-working people. They knew that you weren't supposed to waste anything. They knew that the Book said that work is honorable. And, well, they just believed in the simple life. And Galatians 6:7, that's one of the passages that we had to study in the German when I went to German school. It says, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever ye sow. That's what you're going to reap." They actually believed that. And it's a good criteria, John. It's a good criteria.

J: Well, I think I've just about covered my list of questions.

A: I hope I didn't bore you.

J: No. Not at all. There is perhaps one other thing I'd like to probe. It's the idea of language play. A lot of people who tell me humorous stories have a real tendency to always recall them in the Swiss dialect. It's almost as if you can't say it quite right in English.

A: Yah. Yah, that's true. You're point is well taken. That's true. And then, of course, of any saying in any language, it means the most in the language that it's coined in. Definitely! But, oh, there have been—I can't think of anything in particular right now—but there have been stories that they've
told of, you know, incidents that were shocking to the whole community. We had cases right there in the Eden Church where we lost young lives, you know. That was terrible. You remember about Waldo Wedel.

J: No.

A: Okay. [He points to the tape recorder.] Is this thing still on?

J: Yes.

A: I— I don’t think they’d mind my saying it, but Waldo Wedel, you know lost his life in a hunting accident.

J: Oh, yeah.

A: Didn’t your mother ever tell you about that?

J: Yes. This would be my Uncle Ben’s brother.

A: Yah. And uh, they were hunting you know from the pickup. And the trigger was just pulled at a rabbit at the wrong time and Waldo just got up. We all cried that time, John. And another time when, actually then on the way from—coming home from Moundridge High School—back to the Ben Zerger family. His oldest daughter, Ella, got killed in that car accident that time, within a quarter of a mile of their home. Again, the whole community was just drawn together by that. I guess that’s one of the meanings that these things have, John, is to make more of a unity, you know, of the people.

J: Yes. Probably in times past more so than today there was a real strong sense of community identity. When you talk to someone like Ellen Kling, who after moving away from the community for a
number of years, came back and had a real strong sense of being a community outsider, you sense that there's a sort of "in-group" who is in control here.

A: Oh yah. Did she tell you how her father passed away?
J: No.
A: He died in Colorado.
J: Oh, did he?
A: Yah. He had gone to see Ellen and her husband there. And of course Ellen was tickled pink to have her folks out there. She said, "Well, I need to go to the store, so you just make yourselves at home." Something to that effect. "I'll be back after a while." Dan says, "Yah, I think I'll go—" the way I got it, I'm quite sure this is right—he says "Yah, I'll go stretch out a little bit." And I don't know how it was, but when she came home, he was gone—she came back.

J: Hm. Heart attack?
A: I suppose it must have been heart. He was in his eighties, though.
J: Yeah.
A: Wonderful way to go, John. Nice way to make the transition.
J: That's right.
A: You bet it is.
J: Just sort of stretch out and go quietly.
A: Like my dad used to say, "The main thing—you don't know when the time comes," but says, "the main thing is to be ready when the summons do come." That's the whole story, so to speak.
J: Well, thanks so much for your time.

A: Well, you're welcome, John. I hope you got something that will help you in making up your paper complete.

J: I think it will.

[End of tape recorded interview.]
[Before we began recording, Selma gave me some background on her husband and children. Her husband is deceased and she has a son and a daughter. Both live outside the Moundridge community.]

J: Okay. You’ve given me some background on the Ben R. Stucky family. Now, I’d like a little more background on the Waltner family. Now who was your father?

S: [She hesitates and points to the microphone] Is this—


S: My father was Joseph Waltner. His father’s name was Joseph. My grandmother was a Kaufman.

J: Okay.

S: And, uh, that’s about all I know.
J: Alright. So it would have been your grandparents that were immigrants from Russia?

S: Yes. Yes.

J: Your Grandpa Joseph.

S: Yes.

J: And then, what year were you born?

S: 1907.

J: How many brothers and sisters were in your family.

S: Well, I have one brother and two sisters. Although one brother died in infancy.

J: The rest survive?

S: Yes.

J: Where did you go to school?

S: Prairie View. Prairie View. That was about three miles east of the Elyria line.

J: Okay. Were there mostly other Swiss Mennonite kids in school with you at that time?

S: Swiss Mennonites and uh, uh—not Holderman but, uh—the other Low German—we called them—kids.

J: Did you sense any tensions in having kids from different backgrounds in the same school?

S: No. Not really. We got along real good, I thought.

J: You were predominantly Mennonite. It’s just that you were different kinds of Mennonite.

S: Yes. Just different kinds of Mennonites. That’s right. And there were families, the kids were cousins, that were American,
which I don’t remember.

J: Okay.

S: But, uh, and then there were—there was this—the Borse and the Schelsky families.

J: The Borse and the Schelskys?

S: Yes. They were immigrants also. But they were Lutheran.

J: Okay. Were they also originally German speaking people?

S: Yes. Yes.

J: School for you was taught in English, however?

S: Yes.

J: Was that the first encounter you had with speaking English?

S: I don’t—I think so, mostly. Uh huh. I’m sure I knew some. But as I can remember—that’s so far back to remember. [She laughs.]

J: So you don’t recall specifically any kinds of difficulties with having to learn another language, or having to communicate in another one?

S: No. I don’t really. No.

J: Okay. What was school like for you? Did you enjoy it? What kind of memories do you have of grade school years?

S: I really have good memories. We had a lot of fun. We did a lot of running games. And, uh, really got our exercise [she laughs] that way, too. And it was nice. I really—I just really can’t complain.

J: You enjoyed going to school?

S: Yes.
J: You felt good about your teachers and your classmates?
S: Yes. Uh huh. And there were around thirty or so kids—children that went and we just had—of course, we had our ups and downs once in a while but not to a great extent at all.

J: You don't have any one really bad experience or one really good experience that sticks out in your mind?
S: Not that I can think of. No.

J: You stayed out of trouble pretty well.
S: Yes. I didn't have much trouble [she laughs] getting along with the kids.

J: Do you have any special memories of childhood, other than school? For instance, what you did at home for fun, how you played with your brothers and sisters, what home life was like, and so forth?
S: Yes. We had a machine shed and behind that was a whole row of trees. And in between we had a little empty space and that was our play house. So we—oh, we just—we even built fence—we built homes, you know. We built fences with sticks and everything. And we just really had a lot of fun. And we made play houses. Of course, my brother came along after I was married, even. So it was just the two sisters and I. And we had a lot of fun.

J: Your sisters were fairly close in age?
S: Yes. Pretty close. Uh huh.

J: Okay. What were your main social activities outside of the home? Where did you go, or how did you mix with other people?
S: Church. And uh, oh, in summers, we used to even get together, you know, Sunday afternoons with some of the neighbor children and some that lived across the section. And so on. We had a lot of fun.

J: Do you have special memories of family traditions? Special activities that were a part of your home life?

S: Oh, we visited quite a bit with family—uncles and aunts and cousins, like that.

J: Was there a set of cousins that you did the most with?

S: The John Wedel family. That was like Della and—Della, Mrs. Elmer Stucky—and Ann Klein and those.

J: Oh, alright.

S: They had older sisters. A little bit older than I, but, uh—. They—the one taught me to crochet and different things like that. She took me along on some of her dates, you know. [She laughs.] Things like that.

J: Took you along on dates? How did that work out?

S: Well, she had a steady boyfriend. And so sometimes she would take me along so I could go to the parties. We always had—they always had Sunday evening parties. And, uh, we were at their house a lot.

J: What kind of things happened at Sunday evening parties?

S: Well, it was a ritual that was observed in the community. There was always a party scheduled someplace. And we played games. In summertime, we played games outside and wintertime we'd—there was some square dancing. And um—
J: And square dancing was all on the up and up? Because generally
dancing has been sort of frowned upon.

S: Yes. I know.

J: But that kind of dancing was acceptable?

S: Yah. It was, uh—sometimes in summertime sometimes we did
outside. And usually then in the house. And we'd play
different games, like "Rook" was started and other table games
that were in the home. Or just sitting around and visiting and
talking and—so—

J: Then there were always parents in the home that sponsored the
party?

S: Yes.

J: And that moved around from week to week?

S: Yes. Then when I started—I never did run a car when I was
younger. But when I was older and started in having dates, too,
we'd get together at different places—different homes or after
wedding parties—something like that. If someone got married,
everybody was invited then for the wedding party. And they even
served refreshments. And I think it was good. You didn't get a
chance to—the kids didn't get a chance to—get out and run
around who knows where—get into trouble and things. We were
just there, all together. And that part of it was good.

J: A fairly controlled environment.

S: Yes. There were always parents around somewhere. Although, you
didn't see them very much, but—but there was always someone
around to take charge if any—. I don't remember ever—anybody
ever—that I knew of ever getting into fights or anything like that, you know. Or scuffles, like that. We just had fun.

J: Yes. You knew how to have a good time.

S: Yah.

J: Do you remember in your family, or in church or social activities, times of sitting around telling stories? That is to say, stories about personal experiences or about something odd or exciting that happened in the community? Where did that kind of talk take place and what kind of stories were told.

S: Uh, [she hesitates a few seconds] they were mostly in wintertime when we'd go to parties and were all in the house. Then we'd be closer together. If we'd be outside, we'd be all over the yard. And usually we played running games and things like that. So—and some just didn't take part and that was the times when things were talked about.

J: Were there one or two people in the community who you always thought, "Wow, if she's got something to say," or "if he's got something to say, it's going to be good"? You knew they were going to have a funny story to tell.

S: There were a few. Yes. Uh huh.

J: Who would've been an example?

S: Oh, Paul Schrag was pretty good for something like that. And, um—oh, dear. I don't remember. [She pauses several seconds.] Most anybody that heard anything during the week. And then we'd discuss it and talk about it. I used to come home and tell my folks, so and so happened. Such and such a thing happened, and
so on. And it was of interest to the community.

J: Do you remember some specifics like that?

S: No. I sure don't. It was just things that were talked about during the evening.

J: There are sometimes within families, special reminiscences that sort of belong to your family. In other words, an experience that happened either in the home, or to your family that people will ask for when you get together with the extended group. Do you remember stories like that from your family experiences?

S: Not just specific stories. But my mother came from Pretty Prairie. And when they got together, there was—we went up there or they came here—there was always, "Oh, and did you hear of so and so that did this or did that, or that happened to them?" Or something on that order. But really, I suppose we did, but I just can't recall anything now.

J: Do you recall any stories, perhaps, that your parents told you about your grandparents coming from Russia? Was that ever talked about in your home?

S: Oh yes. Grandfather—I must have been about four—thirteen, I think, when he died. So, really—and he was ill for a long time, so, really I have not anything—. But Grandmother lived to be a ripe old age and she would tell us all kinds of stories. Like for instance, when they first came from Russia, well, when they landed in New York—or where ever it was they landed. And they were so hungry for something different. They were used to eating a lot of fruit in Russia, and on the ship they didn't get
that. And they—first thing they saw was, "Oh, apples. Look at those apples standing there for sale!" So, boy, they—a couple of those men rushed out and they bought a few apples. And I remember, Grandmother used to imitate how—took a bite, and, boy, this one, and he spit it right out and [she says this with emphasis], "Oh, these apples are terrible! How are we going to live here with food like this?" And finally, it turned out that they were tomatoes.

J: [Laughs] Oh my. Okay. Were there some other things that your grandmother told you about that you can remember? That’s a good one.

S: Yah, that’s a pretty good one, I thought, too. They didn’t have enough money to come here to Kansas, all this way. So, their money just lasted ’til they got to Illinois someplace. And there they got jobs working for people. Grandmother was the cook and house helper and Grandfather worked until they had enough money. And then they came this way, also, which—more of them did that. More people had to do that. And those people, she said they used to come and—couple of times they came out here to visit—those people where they stayed with.

J: Oh, the people from Illinois?

S: Yes. Uh huh.

J: So your grandparents came later than the rest of the people from the Kotosufka group?

S: Well, they came to the States—the United States at the same time.
J: But they wouldn't have come to the Kansas area until—
S: Yes. About three or four years later, I think.
J: They had to work up to get enough money to get here.
S: Yes. Uh huh. To get enough money to get here.
J: You mentioned in your grandmother's story about the tomatoes
that the immigrants were concerned about how they would ever
adjust to life in America.
S: Yes.
J: Are there any other stories about any difficulties they had
adjusting to life here?
S: Well, it's pretty hard on the spur of the moment to think.
J: Maybe even difficulty communicating or learning the new
language. For example, how would they talk to people in America
when they only knew German? [I review the plot of the Dan W.
Goering story about the man who asks for a Kisse when he wants a
pillow.] Are there other stories like that?
S: [She pauses several seconds, then whispers.] Oh dear.
J: Well, maybe you'll think of some a little later on.
S: Right now I just can't. No.
J: Did you get a sense from your grandmother of what life was like
for them when they came to the States?
S: Well, they worked for a few years, as I said. And then when
they came here, they had to find a place to stay. So the first
thing they did was find employment. Then they stayed with
those—lived with the people. They just had—J. R. Waltner.
You know who I mean?
J: I'm not sure.
S: Mrs. Phil Schrag's parents.
J: Okay.
S: Jacob R. He was the oldest son. They lived—they had him. And they just got jobs and worked out at first, until they got enough money accumulated that they could buy a piece of ground. And then they did. And they built—finally slowly built their house.
J: So it was always a priority for them to join community here? Do you know if they ever considered settling there, in Illinois? Or was it always real important for them to get to Kansas?
S: It was always important for them to get here where the other people were. Yes.
J: Were there some other Mennonites with them in Illinois?
S: Yes. Uh huh. There were. But I don't remember at all that they ever said who they were.
J: So you don't recall any problems that your parents or grandparents encountered as Germans in American society? Or that you yourself might have encountered?
S: Well [she pauses several seconds], we, uh—. No, I surely don't right now. I know in grade school we were together with Low German speaking people and—kids. And that made—and later I dated a few of those Low German speaking people and we had a lot of fun with them. Of course, this was later, but, uh—
J: That wasn't—
S: Not when they came. No.
J: Yes. There wasn't real strife, then, between the sides of the Turkey Creek [she laughs] that sometimes you hear about.

S: Yes. I know. No, not in my experience that I know of. Huh uh.

J: What kind of stories were told about religious experiences in the community? Did your parents talk a lot about goings on in the church? Were you made aware of important incidents that were happening in the church or did you have to just glean some of that on your own?

S: I think I heard a lot of it at first, as I said, when we had those Sunday evening parties. And then later, as we got older, they would discuss things more with us. Or if I would come and I'd say, "Well, did you hear. Do you know? They said so and so last night." Well, yes, they knew about it. And they would talk more about it, too. So—

J: You don't remember specifically requesting of your parents, "Say, could you tell us again about this experience?" Did you ever make those kinds of requests?

S: I know I did Grandmother. I used to ask her a lot because when I was growing up they lived just about a half mile from us. And walked through the pasture. And we helped her a lot. As she got older, I'd go over there and help her with different work that she had and things. She would—yah, she would talk a lot. And she'd say how she—how life was in Russia when she was growing up like I was. And she'd talk about that. How hard she had to work there and what they—how life was.

J: As you remember her, she was a good storyteller?
S: Yes, she was.

J: She would even imitate voices?

S: Yes. Yes. Uh huh.

J: And use a level of animation when she was telling a story?

S: Yes, that's right. Uh huh.

J: Were there any people that you knew of in the community that were known for making up stories or creating a good story?

Tall tales.

S: Yah. I know what you mean. I'm sure there were, but I just can't recall any now.

J: What about particular community clowns? You know, people who could always get a laugh by the way they said something or by the way they acted. Do you recall some folks like that?

S: [Quietly considering] That's Dan W.

J: Dan Goering?

S: Yes. [She laughs.] He always was and he still is a clown.

J: People have often mentioned your Uncle Dan—

S: Oh, yes.

J: —as a real entertaining character. Do you remember that about him.

S: Uh, yes. He was always making—trying to make fun, I always thought. He was just trying to create his own fun or something. But, uh, oh yah, he was a character. [15 second pause.]

J: Do you remember specific ways in which he'd make fun or any specific incidents?

S: Well, um, as the kids—brothers and sisters—had their children
[drawing back, very emphatic], "No. No. The babies. No." He wouldn’t look at the babies. No. And Mrs. John Wedel, his sister, Fanny—one time when he came over when she had just a tiny baby. And she wanted him to go look at the baby. "No. No. No. No." He wouldn’t do that. And she took him by the arm and she made him go look at that baby. And we always laughed about that. He did look at it then. He says [again emphatic], "Eefui! [Yuck!] You can’t look at that baby! Throw it to the pigs!" [She laughs.] And I often—we used to talk about it, how when he finally got married at age 44 and his children came along, we always wondered, "Is he going to [she laughs] to do what he told her to do?" [She laughs.]

J: So he was single for a long time?

S: Yes. He was. And he lived at—with Grandmother for a while. And then finally, he built a new house. The house he had was just too old. He built that house that’s there now. And so he lived in the new house and Grandma lived in the other house. And he would just have a ball, you know. He had money and what. So he bought cars and things, you know. He wrecked them a couple of times. But then, the first car that he and my father bought together on shares. We lived just about a half a mile apart. And he said, "Well, I’ve got lots of room to store it, and you don’t have much room to store it. So, we’ll store it at my place." Well, Sunday mornings we’d get ready to go to church, and he was supposed to come after us. So, we’d wait and wait. Finally, he’d call, he can’t get that thing started.
Dad should come help him get the thing started. So, Dad would walk across the field. It was only about a half a mile. Not across the field—pasture. And we would, just in order to save a little time, we'd walk to the driveway, which was about a quarter of a mile. And we'd stand there and wait and wait and wait. And finally they'd—finally here they'd come—finally got it started. Well he just didn't understand. He flooded it too much, you know. Then, of course, it wouldn't go. But he had to have the car at his house. And Dad was so happy when he finally bought—we finally bought our own. And I remember how happy I was. My sister and I came from school, and, oh, they were so excited. And they would come—and they came out. Met us at the door. And they said, "Come! I've got something I want to show you." I remember that just as well as if it were yesterday.

"We have something to show you." And, uh, "Well, where?" "In the shed over there." And so we went out there and there was a brand new shining Model T, you know. And oh man, that was a great thing! I tell you.

[Here the first side of the tape ends. We pause to turn the tape over, and continue with the interview.]

J: It's interesting to get some specifics about Dan Waltner because almost everybody I talk to, especially the old-timers say, "Oh that Dan Waltner, he was an entertainer." But almost nobody could give me any specifics about him.

S: I never heard, but they used to have literary meetings for people. And he would—he ordered books and things that had like
stories, you know, in it. And he would dress the part. If he was a man he would dress up. Most of the time he would take some of Grandma's skirts and he'd play the woman, you know. And Grandma's skirts—and fill out with pillows 'cause he was a thin man, and put some glasses on. And they'd have literary meetings once a month, and he would memorize that stuff. Seems like he could just memorize that so easy. And he would just give—and they call those—it was just like a reading, you know. Acting out. But at that time it was called "stump speech." I don't know why "stump speech," but that's what it was. And they said that he just had the crowd in stitches all the time. Just going on and on with his story that he'd—some way out story, you know that he was telling them and things. He was—that way he was very much in demand. They wanted him.

J: He would—
S: When he got married he quit it anyhow.
J: He did. I was going to say, he and Ernest Juhnke—
J: So, in terms of your larger family reunions, when the Waltners got together, he never—
S: I do not—
J: —entertained?
S: I don't remember. No. He just talked a lot. But not with his entertainment. No.
J: Do you recall some specific "Uncle Dan Stories"? Some things that he would tell?
S: Oh. Oh dear. Um, not right now. I can't remember. Huh uh.

J: There was a sort of craziness, I think.

S: Yes. That was his—that was his thing. Uh huh. And I don't see how he could remember or memorize that easy after that length of time. So—but he was a character.

J: There are a number of stories that people remember about outsiders to the community. People who came in and were a little strange and people talked about them. Some have mentioned the Bücher Bähr.

S: Yes.

J: Some have mentioned Andy Unruh. Your cousin, Ellen, mentioned the Watkins man or someone who sold medicines. Do you remember any incidents involving those characters?

S: Yes. He always had candy that he—. Each one got a piece of candy from him when he came. We always looked forward to him coming.

J: This was the Watkins man? Or the medicine—

S: The medicine man. Yah. And we just didn't go to town shopping like we do now. So we did—we always got our flavorings and our spices and different things like that from them. And it was always a treat when he came because he showed so many things! And, man, we'd just all—all eyes, you know, [she laughs] to see what he had because you just didn't—just didn't see that every day or every other day or so. We didn't go shopping that often.

J: Do you know where he came from?
S: Bücher Bähr?
J: Yes.
S: I think he—
J: Or were you talking about the Bücher Bähr or the Watkins man?
S: Any—any one.
J: Oh, okay.
S: 'Cause they—Well, uh, the Bücher Bähr, yah. He used to come when he wanted to stay for the night, or he needed a meal. Or his horses needed, uh, needed, uh—
J: Oats.
S: —feeding. Yes. I know one story. I think that was at Pretty Prairie. They said that he, uh, he came one time, and he was—oh, yah. He was always talking about his horses. And always in the masculine sense, as though they were, you know, not females. He always, and he called them by names. What was it? Oh, I can’t think now what he called them. Anyway, come to find out, they were females. [She laughs.] People thought that was funny because he always had male names for his horses. And he was so very careful about them. Boy, they really got food when they stopped some place. He never did stay at our place, but I heard—for the night—he himself. But I heard so many people out in this area—see we lived by Elyria—in this area, that they said he had his places where he would come. And they’d always say he’d say—he didn’t have a whistle on his car or, you know, he didn’t have a car—didn’t have any other—. So he’d always say, "Whoa!" And holler out loud, "Whoa!" you know, to
his horses. And he just kept hollering until somebody’d come to the door. So that he knew he was noticed. [She laughs.]

J: So he had sort of standard places where he knew he could get a night’s rest—

S: Yes. Uh huh.

J: —or a meal.

S: Yes. That’s the way he lived. He just got—he was driving around and he just got his night’s rest and got his meals and so on.

J: Did he not stay at your house because he was not out in your area that often?

S: I don’t know. I just—. Dad never asked him to stay. And I just don’t know otherwise why he didn’t.

J: It wasn’t specifically that your folks didn’t want him to stay?

S: No. I don’t think so. But, you know, sometimes you don’t have—we didn’t have much for a meal, you know, or something and he always—he ate good, they said. [She laughs.]

J: That was said also about Andy Unruh. When he was a hired man he used to eat his worth in wages.

S: Oh yes. [She laughs.] That one I don’t know. I don’t know anything about him, but there was another man, even after I was married that was around here. And people said that he did the same thing. You know, he got his food and his horses food and stuff.

J: Any other remembrance of others from outside the community who weren’t familiar with the traditional practices of the Swiss
Mennonites? Or stories about non-mennonites, or people who maybe weren't farmers that had a hard time adjusting to a rural community? Do you have recollections of anything like that?

S: No. I don't remember—don't know anything about that.

J: All right. That's my agenda. I've covered my questions. Are there any other things you've thought of as we talked that you wish you would have said?

S: I had written a few things down about Dan Waltner. [She gets up and goes to get a writing pad from the table.]

J: Okay.

S: Let's see. Oh, how Uncle Dan lived in one house and Grandma lived in her little house. And he—during harvest Grandmother was getting too old to do too much work. And so, my parents and he lived on the same section of land. And at harvest time, they would harvest together. And, uh, let's see [she checks her notes], Mother and I did our chores at home. And then we walked to his place, all the way across, to do his chores. Taking turns carrying a baby sister. It was so hot. And I still remember how tired we were. [Reading from her notes] We got the hogs and the chicken chores done easily, but the milk cows was another story. They were scared to death of women [she turns the page] in dresses. And of course we had not even heard of wearing jeans then. [She scans her notes.] Oh, he was a big tease. One never knew if he was serious. And then about the babies. He always drove nice cars, but he wasn't too good a driver or he drove too fast because he had a wreck every so'
often. Not having a family to provide for he traded cars often. But he settled down when they got married. [She scans her notes.] And then about the going to church and not getting the car started.

J: So we covered most of the things that you had written.

S: Yes. I think so. Uh huh. Yah.

J: Well, great! I'm glad you put some time into thinking about that. [She laughs.] I appreciate that.

S: I just didn't know what you were going to ask.

J: Well, thanks so much.

S: Yah.

J: I appreciate your giving me your time.

[End of tape recorded interview.]
Interview by: John McCabe-Juhnke
With: Victor Goering
Place: The Goering residence, Rural Moundridge, Kansas
Date: Friday, June 2, 1989

J=John   V=Victor

[I begin the interview by reviewing the goals and methods of my research for Victor. I mention an earlier interview with his father, Jacob J. Goering, and launch into questions regarding some background information.]

J: You were born in this community, is that right?
V: Yes.
J: What year was that?
V: 1920.
J: And your family is how large?
V: You mean my Dad’s family?
J: Yes. Your brothers and sisters.
V: There are seven of us, and I’m the oldest.
J: And all survived?

V: Yes. All survived and all survive to this point. Yes.

J: How many brothers and sisters?

V: Three of each. Three brothers. Three sisters.

J: Where did you go to school?

V: In Pioneer School.

J: Where is that located?

V: That's three north and three west of Moundridge.

J: And that was mostly other Swiss Mennonite kids like yourself?

V: Yes. Usually maybe one or two other families is all.

J: Was the distinction between your people and those other families pretty clear, or didn't it make that much difference.

V: Yes. It was fairly clear. Well, there was one Holderman family that came there all the time that lived in the community. But then there were others that would move in, maybe for a year, and then move out.

J: What was school like for you? Do you have special memories of school? Did you like it?

V: Oh, in general, yes, pretty well. We had a regular transportation system because there were—the time I was in eighth grade there were four of us and Uncle Jonas's had five and Uncle Henry's had three. So there were at least twelve that usually went in the same car if it was cold. So we had a pretty crowded car. [He laughs.]

J: I guess so! Are there any special experiences or events that stick out in your mind from your days in grade school?
V: Grade school? Oh, I suppose, we had literary society meetings I think once a month—adults. And then we'd have—I think we called "little literaries" that met as a part of school. I think we met—had programs every Friday, or every other Friday.

J: That was programs that the students put on?

V: Yes. Yes. Yah.

J: What were those like?

V: Oh, if somebody had a little music ability, they'd have that. And then we'd have a—I think we called them "paper"—I don't know, or kind of a news item. Some would try to be humorous and so on. Sometimes a debate, especially the adults. I know that. I don't know if we had them so much in the students. I can't remember that too much. Otherwise, school, I s'pose Christmas programs and the last day of school was really a community event. That was an all day deal that your parents came. And you had a program in the morning, and they called it "the big dinner" at noon. And people would bring stuff, and we'd have ice cream. And in the afternoon everybody played ball. I remember the older, you know, guys over forty, fifty years old playing ball. That was a special event of the year.

J: Yes. What were your main social activities, outside of school? Where did you meet people? What did you do for fun?

V: Basically, it was centered around the church. We had—wedding parties were a big thing. You've probably heard about those. After a wedding they'd have a party. They'd have food there, and the young people would gather for that. And there was a
time when we'd have a party after we had Christian Endeavor. We'd go, "Okay, we'll have the party at your house." So everybody would drive up there and socialize there. That was probably the biggest things. High school—not too much socializing in high school. Very little, I'd say.

J: Because you were far out, or because you were busy on the farm?

V: Well, probably. Probably. I think it's 'cause we weren't in town—transportation and so on. Roads weren't all that great. There was some. We had some things, but not—. Oh, we'd have a class party or something like that, but not too—really, not an awful lot of socializing.

J: So almost everything you did had to do either with your church—

V: That's right.

J: —or with your family.

V: Right. Right. There was much family—. Grandma's birthday was a big thing. And oh, yes. Families working together, especially at harvest time. And then having one evening that you got together and figured up the bills. Paid to balance the books, you know. Who had more hours and so on. And then there was a big celebration. I think whoever had the best wheat crop had to furnish the—had to be the host. Everybody brought something, but it was the host—

J: Right. Was this among your uncles?

V: Yah. Yah. Uncles. The Goering side. There were four brothers who had a thrashing machine together. So they thrashed, and when they finished—. They did some custom thrashing also, but
not a great deal. Oh, some years they had maybe two three weeks of that. That was also considered in this. But our main get-together was shortly after our harvest.

J: Sort of a post-harvest celebration.

V: Yah. Right. And there is a Russian—a Polish word for that called dovzhinky. And we called it objinky. That was Aunt Mary Goering, Uncle Henry's, Ozzie's parents, called it objinky. And when we had Polish trainees we found it's real name is dovzhinky. And it's an after harvest festival.

J: Oh really? But in your family it was the tradition to call it objinky.

V: Call it objinky, yah. [He laughs.]

J: Okay. So it's sort of a change from the polish word.

V: Yah. Right.

J: Well, it isn't surprising since, uh--

V: Yah. Well, you know, a hundred years after they leave, you know, but--

J: Yes.

V: --it was kind of interesting.

J: Are there other kinds of family traditions that you recall or special activities that were a part of your home life?

V: Oh, I don't know if Dad told you, he always sang in a quartet. And they had rehearsals, and that was a pretty big thing—came to our house or somebody else. Sometimes with the family, and most of the time, not with the family—especially in the school year. Most of the time the men just would come. Once in a
while we’d go along. Uncle Ben Zerger sang in it and we’d go up there. But the people that weren’t blood relation, why we wouldn’t go along.

J: Are there any sort of incidents that you remember from times when you got together with cousins when something strange or funny happened?

V: Yes. Yes. Some. I remember when Uncle Dave Zerger had his fiftieth birthday. And of course, they had fifty candles on the cake. And, uh, "Blow out the candles." And he blew out forty-eight. [He laughs.] Why I remember that I don’t know. But I know everybody was there, all the cousins and uncles and aunts. And that’s really the only fiftieth birthday that I remember, but I remember that one.

J: How old would you have been then.

V: Let’s—yah, in the—I—in grade school someplace, I think. Possibly in high school [here is a phrase that is difficult to decipher].

J: Of the cousins you got together with was there a set of folks that you generally spent the most time with?

V: Oh yes. On the Zerger side, oh the boys your age, you know. Like your Uncle Eddie Schrag and Reuben Zerger and Harold, your Uncle, and Harry Krehbiel and Dutch Goering. You know, just from about within a year or two. That’s it. And there were a host of them, so you didn’t have to—everybody had their group, you know, that just clicked. Yah, and of course, that was at celebrations. And we’d get together with cousins, too, Sunday
afternoon and things like that. Since we lived, see, where we lived all my uncles and aunts lived within six miles. And that includes fourteen—fourteen uncles and aunts.

J: Right. That's probably fairly typical of the people of your generation that settled here that so many of your relatives are all in the same area.

V: Yes. 'Til my generation and then they got scattered. But 'til that time—right. That's true. Let's see, what are the other events that stick out. Oh, I don't know, particularly.

J: J. O. Schrag mentioned the phrase grümm Stick vereiss [I pronounce the phrase wrong, leaving the 'r' out of Strick]. Does that ring a bell with you?

V: No.

J: He said it had something to do with when the cousins were getting together playing.

V: No. That one doesn't bring to mind--

J: Was storytelling, in terms of reminiscences or telling about past experiences, a part of your family life?

V: It seems to me, not very much. It seems to me, you know, very little that I can recall. 'Course maybe we weren't interested in the, you know, in the old kind of [garbled phrase]. But we just didn't ask many questions.

J: You didn't ask of your parents or grandparents--

V: Grandparents. Yah, grandparents.
J: --to tell a particular story?

V: Yah, grandparents about what it was like in the old country. That never seemed to enter our minds.

J: So you're not aware of stories from your grandparents' generation about difficulties of adjusting to American life or problems learning the language?

V: Yah. The only thing I can remember, Grandma right off telling when they came to Peabody on the railroad, the men came out here to look for land. And the women stayed there. The men were gone for—I don't know for how long. And there were some deaths of children. And women, see, there was one old man there that helped them bury the child, or children. That's one story I remember. That's about all, really, I can say.

J: What about in terms of your parents? Did you ever ask your parents to tell stories of their early experiences?

V: Not too much, 'til we were grown, you know? Then you start to get interested. But when you're a kid, seems like [he shrugs and laughs], at least I can't recall much, you know. That's the way it seemed to be.

J: How much do you feel that being a Swiss Mennonite was a conscious part of your identity as you were growing up? I mean, were you aware that you had a distinctive ethnic heritage?

V: Yes. Yes. That we were aware of. And sort of in our way of thinking, we were surrounded by the so-called Low German, you know, pretty well. And we were very much—I remember when, in the early thirties, when the first Low Germans joined our
church. See, that was after they'd been here, what fifty, sixty years. That was—there were very few marriages outside the Swiss until about the thirties, I guess, the later thirties.

J: Because it was comfortable?

V: Yes, I think so, probably. And they didn't go away to school much, you know. So the [garbled phrase] was from that home community. And I suppose the Low German were the same way.

J: You don't remember any kind of particular conflict?

V: No. Not too much. Except that, for some reason, we felt that we were—we were—I don't know how to say it—superior. But, at least we didn't—our dialect surely wasn't as bad as theirs. [He laughs.] Or our accent, you know, wasn't as bad as theirs. Kind of a low blow to me when I came to college and Miss Becker said that the Swiss Dialect is—Swiss Accent is just as pronounced as the Low German accent. [He laughs.] But, no, we knew very few. Dad might have known, but otherwise we didn't know very many because Moundridge High School had almost none. You know, they either went to Inman, or Buhler or to Goessel. And so we had almost no Low Germans.

J: So, a part of the reason for the division was simply because their weren't that many opportunities to mingle with the Low Germans.

V: That's probably true. Yes. And everybody was farmers, you know. And therefore the locale. Like we'd go to Inman to a Wiens who was a, quote, rub doctor, you know, if we'd get an arm out of place, something like that, why he'd set for us. He was
cheaper than the medical doctors, I suppose. So he said, "You have a bad twist." [He laughs.]

**J:** Did you learn English first when you went to school?

**V:** Yes. Knew very little before we went to school. Yah, I knew a little but not very much.

**J:** Was that a difficult adjustment for you at all?

**V:** No, not at all. Because a majority of the kids were the same way, you know. Although the ones, I think, that had older brothers and sisters probably had a little edge, already, you know. Since they had spoke that. But it seems like—and then we had sympathetic teachers. First grade teacher was also my cousin. So you could say a word in German if you'd know it and you could get—. That doesn't seem like that—it's not a very traumatic, you know—.

**J:** Do you remember any stories about people who had trouble communicating in English or they confused the languages?

**V:** Oh, I don't know if I can recall any instances like that. There were things, yes.

[I review the whetstone story to prime him a bit.]

**V:** No, I can't recall right off any incidents that the language was a barrier.

[I discuss the notion of certain family "owning" certain stories]

**J:** Can you think of some stories that your family owned?

**V:** Well, my mother, when we had tea would always—. One time we were at Uncle Ben Zergers, and I emptied my glass of tea and somebody filled it beside Aunt Mary. And she said, "Oh," she
said in German, "Ich glaub der Victor gleicht net Tee." "I don’t believe Victor likes tea." I had already had drunk two glasses, I think. [He laughs.] So mother used to tell that story fairly often. And—oh—. Yes, we had a story. My sister sat on a bumper of an old car one time. And she insists she was going to drive along to the house, loading chickens. It was about—backed the car to the chicken house. He drove maybe about—I think a hundred feet. Well, Dad took off for town. She was sitting on the bumper. [He laughs.] And we accused her of trying to get a ride to town. [He laughs.] Then she—when he came to the mail box and slowed down, she jumped off. [He laughs.] That was a story we told many years.

J: She got teased about that?

V: Oh, an awful lot. Yes. Yes, yes. Yah, well, there were different incidents. I don’t know a particular—

J: It seems like stories that you can use to tease someone about something they’ve done are the ones that hang around.

V: Yes. Yes. Yes.

J: Were there any interesting stories that had to do with religious life or issues in church or church leadership? I’m talking about drawing lots for church leadership or making decisions about behavioral norms in the community.

V: Well, I think the divorce issue is one that came out pretty strong, you know. Somebody would get divorced. And somebody would want a church letter after they get divorced. I remember, I think, when Dad was on the deacon board, and a girl wanted a
letter. And they said, "You shouldn't get married again." They
give a letter and so she promised. And inside three years she
was married again. [He laughs.] And, I don't know. It seems
that in Eden, I can't remember as much as my younger days, but I
know we had—Philip Wedel was the minister and he was from our
congregation. He'd already gone to school, but had come back.
That had some friction, I expect. But C. J. Goering, I remember
very little friction there. We just kind of accepted that he
was the leader, and so on. But I sure remember when Hopefield
had their troubles. See, take back about 1930, both Eden and
Hopefield were about the same size. And then we got a big
influx at Eden. And that, because it was over there, I know a
few incidents, but I don't know much about it.

J: Right. Right. How was it made clear to you what kind of
behaviors were expected of you as young people in the church?
Did you feel like church and community expectations went pretty
much hand in hand?

V: Pretty much. Yes. Yes. Pretty much so, I thought. I guess
mostly from Sunday school and parents. That's pretty well it.

J: Did most of your siblings go to school beyond high school?

V: All of them graduated from college.

J: They all did. Did you feel like you had special encouragement
from your parents to go on to school.

V: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes, my mother graduated from Bethel Academy,
and my father from the academy and also had two years of
college. So he encouraged very much. He helped some of my
cousins to go to college and very much encouraged college and education.

J: And you knew that education was valued—

V: Yes.

J: —by the way he made it—

V: Yes. Right.

J: —available for people to go.

V: Yes. Right. Yes. [Garbled phrase.]

[I mention that Swiss Mennonites seem to value education and ask if he has ideas about why they do.]

V: I don’t know. I think my dad saw far enough in advance that not everybody was going to farm. I think he could see that. Especially in this community. That with the coming of the tractor, you know, the switch from horses to tractor— I don’t think he dreamed of farming a section. But, you know, another eighty or something like that was clearly a possibility. That’s my own assessment. I don’t know if that’s true. And as a result—. And I think he valued his education. That made a big difference.

J: People often tell stories about people who were outsiders to the community, people who were of special interest because they weren’t a part of the Swiss group. Do you remember some particular incidents of people who came in that the community had a good laugh over or found interesting or strange?

V: Well, I don’t know how many reports you got about Book Bähr, the Bücker Bähr. Have you got quite a few of those already?
J: Yes. What are your memories of him?

V: Well, my memories—I can tell you from our house, he realized that we—our old—we built a new house in '37. We didn't have much room. So he never stayed over night. Went to Uncle Jonas's where was a bigger family, but he had—they had a room with Grandma. He slept in that room. He slept on the couch in Grandma's room. We thought that was kind of strange. He always went there. To our place for dinner he'd come. Dad would invite him. He knew exactly where he was welcome for a meal. And so he would come, and he'd whistle between his teeth and stop his horses and came on in. From the books I don't remember much. But then he started selling products similar to McNess, you know, and Watkins. You've heard of those?

J: Oh.

V: He had a brand called Zanol. Z-A-N-O-L. And he said that Vanilla was so good. So Mom bought some. And Dad did not like the taste of that vanilla. [He laughs.] He came around the next time. "Buy more vanilla?" "No-o-o," Mom said, "Dad doesn't like it." [He exclaims.] "What? That's the only person that doesn't like that vanilla." You know. [He laughs.] That was one thing about—a story. Oh, and he also stayed at Uncle Jonas's or Joe Kaufman's during Christmas time. He spent three, four days there that time. And his contribution was a sack of peanut brittle. That was his—to the candy sack. [He laughs.] He liked to play checkers. He loved to play checkers. Then, no matter how many games he lost, if he won one
he'd quit and say, "I'm champion because I won the last one."

[He laughs.]

J: So he ate meals with you?

V: Oh, yes.

J: But he didn't ever stay—

V: Not at our house. Not at our house.

J: Did you feel like your mother was willing to have him stay?

V: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

J: It wasn't a—

V: It wasn't—he just stayed. Whatever we had he ate, you know. Appreciated it. Sometimes I think he gave a little token something like that. Fed his horses from your oats, you know. And that was all part of the game.

J: My Uncle Harold also had some stories about a hired man named Andy Unruh. Do you remember that fellow?

V: Yes. Yes. I remember Andy Unruh. Yes.

J: Any specifics about him?

V: Yes. I can tell one incident. I remember he had a pocket watch. You know, putting into bib overalls, you know, [he gestures to his chest] putting in here. And you'd ask him what time it is. "Same time as yesterday at this time." And then he'd pull his watch out, and usually it was not set correctly. I don't think he could tell time, because usually it might be off about an hour or two. So even if you looked at it—he'd pull his watch out and you'd look at it and you didn't know what time it was. [He laughs.] Yes.
J: It was more of a show piece.


J: He was a hired man who just sort of hired himself out for farm work?

V: Yes, yes, yes. I don't know whether he had a permanent home or not. I can't tell you where he stayed. I don't know. Then there was Chris Hingst. Anybody talk about Chris Hingst?

J: Well, I've heard the name.

V: Yah. He was—he lived in Moundridge. I think he lost his wife. And was a day laborer. Was a very, very hard worker. And he spoke—he must have been a recent immigrant because he had a very broken speech. But he knew how to work. And he was—talk about butchering the language. He could do that, you know. And he'd have his regular routine, you know. But, uh—he could communicate well enough. I mean, there wasn't any problem there.

J: He was also originally a German speaker?

V: Yes. Yes. I do not know whether he was Swiss background or not. I can't tell you. Someone like Dad would have to say that.

J: Hengst doesn't sound—


[I ask about funny incidents that people talked about because they seemed out of the norm.]
V: Well, halloween pranks, I guess, were some—maybe not out of the norm—but they were—[he laughs]. Like go to Eli Schrag and harness a cow or something like that. [He laughs.] They'd go, and in the morning there's a harness on the cow. And, I don't know how many buggies were pulled out of sheds and run down the road behind a car 'til the wheels flew off. Was [see?] a common trick and now it seems so sad that these horse drawn buggies which would be real antiques now [he laughs] were just battered up to nothing.

J: They did that just as a prank?

V: Yes. Right. They got them out of the shed. They knew where they were from having been at the place. Then they'd get them out and hook them on behind a car and drive 'til the wheels flew off. [Sarcastic] Great fun.

J: Crazy.

V: Yah. That was that kind of fun. I don't know, but it seemed like kind of cheap fun. Oh, pranks--.

J: Did the people who were involved with that ever get called on the carpet for it?

V: Yes. A little bit. But, see, most of the time they didn't find out who it was, you know.

[Here, I ask about community clowns or particularly good storytellers.]

V: Yes. There were some. But it seems to me—. I really can't pin anything down right off the top of my head. I really can't remember about that. I know Joe Schrag who they called insane.
J: Oh, the one that lived in North Newton?

V: Yah. Yes, he could—I didn't know him that well, but they said he could make stories, you know, and clown. He'd call somebody and call them by their nickname and say, "This is insane speaking." [He laughs.] "Come over." Or something like that. [He reiterates that he didn't know Joe all that well. Then I ask about A. C. Stucky or the Waltner family.]

V: Phil Waltner had a remark. You know, a kind of a catchy remark and so on. I think Dan W. Goering, which is Dictionary Dan as they call him, with his [he chuckles] his knowledge—with his vocabulary and so on—would have stories for you. You know, like for example he'd say that one year he was cutting wheat. It was a poor year and he made a round and stopped. And nothing in the combine bin! Made another round and looked. Stopped. And he looked back and two sparrows were eating the grain as fast as it came in. [He laughs.] You know, stories like that he'd have. And for a while Dan would date girls that were a little bit on the plump side. Said, "Why do you do that?" He says, "Well, when I tell a joke, there's more of them to laugh." [He laughs.] So he was probably our humorist—was Dan.

J: I visited with Dan and Erma last week, and they are both pretty entertaining folks.

V: Yah. Dan always had a, you know, some interesting—some remark, you know, to come up with. He'd say something. Somebody'd kind of brag, you know, or something; he said, "Well, that's not so
great." He says, "Even a clock that's standing still is right
twice a day." [He laughs.] That kind of remark. He'd have
hundreds of those.

J: Is there anyone from your extended family that you really prized
as someone who could tell a good story?

V: Hm. [Nine second pause.] I don't know. I think Uncle Chris
B., Erwin's dad, probably could tell a story as much as anybody.
But I don't remember too many of his stories. They were—he
was, you know, older than Dad quite a bit and I don't remember
that much. But I think probably storytelling, he--. But I
can't really recall too many stories.

[Victor reviews for me that Jacob J. Goering, his father, is the
youngest and the only surviving of member of his father's family.]

J: Okay. As we talked, were their any other things that came to
your mind that you wish you would have said? Are their any
parting shots you have?

V: [10 second pause.] Oh, about grade school. I don't know how
much interest you have. I know we played Elyria one time and
got beat 24 to 1 in baseball. [John laughs.] But then we beat
them in basketball. [A garbled sentence.]

J: Was that the exception to get together with another school and
play?

V: Yes. We did a little of that when I was in—like when I was in
the third and fourth grade. I know we played Farms. And they
had two Galle brothers and an Aurenheimer, who must have been—
he looked in that day when we were small—I thought he was at
least six ten. But he might have been five seven, five eight in
grade school. And there were two Jantz brothers that were tall
and we thought they were giants. And they beat Pioneer in
basketball 40 to 3. [He laughs.] But we did have a few games.
We'd play Mound, and we'd play Farm. And we played Peaceful one
time—not Peaceful, Pleasant—no, Volunteer. Do you know where
that was? Close to Mann Goering's place there—that fallen
down building. We played them the last day of school one time.
It was their last day, our school was already out. We went out
there and played them in baseball. But we didn't—the first
time I can remember playing a night game was: Inman had a grade
school tournament, and we went when your Uncle Eddie was in the
eighth grade. And we took second place, I think. But baseball
or softball—well first we played baseball. Then we went to
softball later. But we played a few games away maybe. [The
next sentences are difficult to distinguish. He says something
about playing basketball outside and having to allow for the
wind when shooting.]

J: It seems like sports was the entertainment for a lot of the men
in the community.

V: Yes. It was. It was pretty much entertainment. I loved to—I
wasn't very good in basketball but I loved to play baseball and
softball. I liked to play that. I figured there your quickness
or your height—well, could sort of develop your skills. It
wasn't like basketball. Either you had it or you didn't have
it. But, uh, yah the sports entered in. At recess we use to go
over to a quarter mile west of school in the barn and play basketball. And we had to be back right at one o'clock, you know. We'd eat our lunch in nothing flat and run up there. And then I think we listened for the bell. I believe we had a clock, but we listened for the bell, and we had five minutes to get back a quarter of a mile. We had a pretty fast quarter of a mile. [He chuckles.] But, we'd do that in the winter time.

J: No feelings, even later in high school, of tension between the Swiss Mennonite kids and the others?

V: A little tension between the town and the rural. Not so much the Swiss Mennonites, necessarily, because there were a few Swiss Mennonites in town. But the town and the rural. The town kids—especially when they were freshmen. They had gone to school already for eight years together. And then here come all these—three, four, five, six from each little school.

J: Right.

V: And so that's where we had tension. But generally, you made friends with some town kids. It didn't take that long and it was over. But we were kind of apprehensive at first. [A few garbled phrases.] The town kids—we always thought that they thought that they were superior. Although when it came to—if you could make it in sports, why, then you'd be accepted. Or if you could make it in music, then you'd be accepted. But I think the common run always felt a little bit, well, not really part of the in-group.

J: Right.
V: But I think it was really more then the town than our Swiss community because we had a few from in town.

We discuss the sense of community that was established by the fact that a whole congregation migrated to the same place and the limited exposure of the Swiss Mennonites to the interface of two cultures.

V: Yes, it was pretty much the group—[boys?] of the group—until you went to college. And then, it's a new world, you know. Then you've got friends that you didn't know existed.

J: Right. Did you find that to be a pretty liberating experience?

V: Yes. Very much so. That's right. And also a humiliating experience. You thought you were fairly intelligent until you met up with some real brains. [He laughs.] In high school, if you didn't want to study too much, you didn't have to. You know, I didn't make very good grades but I could get by. College, you didn't study you didn't get any grades. I stayed home one year between high school and college, and that didn't help anything as far as studies go.

J: Right. Because you lose some of the ability to study. Did you go on four years?

V: No. I went two years. Then stayed home another year. Then I got drafted. And then I didn't go back to school until my children were already in school. Or, no, no, that's not right. Several of them were born, though. See, Terrence was born. And we just didn't farm enough to make it, just financially.

J: So, it was after Terrence was born that you got your degree and started to teach.
V: I already taught one year before at the [garble phrase] district who couldn't find a teacher. I didn't have a certificate. I had to get a provisional certificate. It was a week before school started and they did not have a teacher. So I taught one year. And then after Terrence was born, I went back. Then I started teaching after that. That was in '53. I taught for thirty years.

J: Was most of that teaching? In the end you were in school administration.

V: Yes. Sort of in between. I was in teaching 'til I went to Cloverleaf. And then I was administrat—taught two grades and was also the principal. And then was a junior high principal. [He says that even when he was an administrator, he almost always taught one or two classes.]

J: So, how many years have you been retired?

V: Retired? Six.

J: Six years. Alright. Well, I—

V: I don't know if I helped you much.

J: —think you did. Thanks a lot.

[End of tape recorded interview.]
[The interview begins with a discussion about Erwin's family background. He relates that he was born northwest of Moundridge in 1915. He has two brothers and six sisters. One child was still born. The other nine children survive with the oldest nearing 80 years of age, and the youngest 60. He is the third child of the family, the oldest of the boys. His parents were Christian B. and Adina Goering. His father and mother were both Goerings. Erwin spends some time explaining the family line of the two Goering clans, identifying surviving members of each side to help me establish a connection.]

J: Where did you go to school?

E: Okay. Elementary? Prairie View. Not the Prairie View east of 422
Newton, but the Prairie View east of Elyria.

J: Do you have some salient memories of your grade school experience?

E: Well, it was a one room school. I was a very bashful youngster in school. I went to school not being able to speak much English. It was the ethnic German which properly we call Swiss. But when we lived in Germany in the Palatinate, I found out that the Palatinate German fits our dialect almost perfectly. So there are blends, I’m sure. Well, I remember going to school and not knowing much language. But that blotted out. And the social things came in. I remember the school teachers. And an interesting experience I had, if I may throw that in.

J: Oh yes.

E: Just last year, I had a request to come to—not Junior Loganbills but his brother in Moundridge. What’s his name?

Well, anyhow. He said, "I have a great aunt who is coming to visit. And her maiden name was Helen Horchheimer—Horchheimer. And she said she stayed at your folks’s and boarded and roomed there when she taught school. And that you were a first grader. And you were a cute little fellow." I’ll throw this in, that’s her words, not mine. And she was coming to visit and would like somehow to make contact, ’cause she had been to see my folks but I never was around. And she lived on the west coast somewhere. And so we set up a time and I went to his place on the farm, which had been her home place east of Moundridge. And the Loganbills and Horchheimers were somehow
related. And so he had her there. And I got to the place and waited. They had been out visiting places. So we sat and visited for quite a while, and reminisced. And it was a very interesting kind of reminiscence. There were a lot of things that she remembered that, of course, didn’t mean a lot to me. But, the very fact that those ties stayed—I’m not sure just what that says except that she’s a very socially perceptive person. And she’s in her eighties now. Eighties or—yah, of course she’s in—or nineties or thereabouts. The last thing we —. The second to the last thing she wanted done was a picture taken together. And the last thing was a good smack! Well now that, at age seventy-four [he laughs], was not a bad anticlimax to an earlier experience. But I basically liked school. I liked it for the—maybe more the social aspects. I knew that—I found out that somehow I didn’t get a good start in mathematics, and it never appealed to me very much. But I loved reading and I loved spelling and the social—more the social things. We played baseball. And that was a big—hard baseball. That was before soft baseball.

J: Right.

E: And I remember getting socked in the eye with a struck ball that just practically knocked me out. And I could back up. But, later on the doctor said, "Some time ago you had a broken nose." And I’m sure that that was the event that broke it. [He laughs.] A big nose I knew I had but I didn’t know it was crooked! [He laughs.] Well, it was basically a happy
experience.

J: Do you remember one salient exciting experience, frightening experience, or sad experience?

E: No. No traumatic thing that jumps out at you. I remember that there were in the group there were a lot of boys. And the boys were older because a lot of times fellows would go to school not until they'd graduate but until they were sixteen. Whichever came first, and for some it didn't come first. And you had to put up with the pecking order. And there was always somebody who was—who was running the show, so to speak. And I learned—a very interesting experience—a very interesting observance which just now comes to my mind, among those the strongest and the biggest were Holderman boys that came to school. And they were the Tob Koehn boys. Straightback, they called them. Orin and Harvey and Oscar and Lee and Roy, those are the five boys that I remember. And they, I think because of the rather careful upbringing in the family, they were not as aggressive as some of the others. And so they would seldom take sides. But if someone got pushed around too much, they would come to his defense, and say "Hey, we don't do that here." Which is very interesting. And some of those boys are still alive. I haven't talked to any for quite a while.

J: So aside from the Swiss kids, there were these Holderman boys.

E: Yes.

J: And that was about it, or were there some other English families?
E: Oh, yah. We had—we had some other families which you call the English families that came and went. There were some Caldwells there. But there they were the minority. They were a minority group. And our Swiss group were—. Well, now we had some Lutherans. Borth family. Schelsky family. And they were pretty good size families. So we were the majority but not a predominant majority. Or not a dominating—. Accepting as individuals came up.

J: So there wasn't a sense in your grade school years that you were somehow, uh—

E: Totally separate.

J: Yes, totally separate.

E: Totally separate and either totally different and better—superior, or totally inferior. I remember when World War I came along. And, see, we had six months of regular school and then about a month, or at least some weeks of German school, which was a German reading and Bible school type of thing. And during that time, of course, we were the majority during the regular school season, and the pressure wasn't on us within our group. But there were some within the group who felt that, "Oh, those German speaking people. Those Germans."

J: Right.

E: But in the community, I remember—I remember some feelings. But that wasn't school. But otherwise, I can't say that we were that clique that cliqued together and no new ideas could come in. There was a lot of—a pretty good mix of different
viewpoints, which helped us, I think, as we grew up.

J: Do you have special memories of your childhood you'd like to share? For instance what you did for fun or what your main social activities were.

E: Yah. You know, it's an interesting thing how when you think back—I go back past the place, you know, where we used to live. That's where Dan W. Goering used to live then. Dan and Erma. That same place that I described. It's three miles east of Elyria and about an eighth of a mile south.

J: Okay.

E: And I go by there, and I say, "My golly! Nothing has changed, really, much." The fence along the pasture—[he holds his arms up and slants them slightly] the posts lean just like they leaned when we left them. No one has worked on them, straightened them out. The draw—the slough that came through is still about the same. And then you recall how after a pretty heavy downpour the water would run off. And how you would roll up your— we didn't wear shorts at that time—but you'd roll up your overall pant legs and you would run through it as fast as you can and splash all you could. As a kid, it was a lot of fun. But certain experiences, I recall. I remember, we had sheep. And the main buck of the flock was the ruler of the bunch. And he would try to rule you, too. And when he'd hear that you're—they were usually around the yard—hear that you're coming out of the house or somewhere, or saw you, and no fence between you, he'd come for you. So he would meet—I'd meet him
at the gate. And I'd go grab his [he gestures to his face as if grabbing a beard] wool whiskers and get on him, and then make him run. And if he wouldn't go, I would really pester him to make him go. Wear him out! Get him tired! But he'd always—he'd never forget that. And I remember in the wintertime we would put him—put the sheep in. We had a small barn but we'd put the horses in overnight and the sheep had the main runway. It wasn't a large herd. And I had a strange feeling that—I was in. The sheep were in. The doors—gates were closed. And we had a ladder to climb up to the hay mound. And I was going up to put in the hay so the horses had something to chew at night, and I looked back and here he came, coming for me against the wall. You know, he was ready to [garbled word]. I just slipped up—I, I—[he holds up his index fingers to indicate a six inch distance] missed it by six inches. And he hit that wall and just about took it to—took a joist out. And, of course that, oh that feud went on and on. Then we had geese. And the ganders were always aggressive. And they [he lifts his arm and winces] "A-a-a-a." And the younger sister, Ann—Mrs. Milford Waltner was my younger sister, just younger than I—. She was going somewhere. She was just a little kid. She still remembers it, 'cause she talked about it the other—a few months ago. That gander with his geese, that gander took out after her and was going to really snip her. And so she said, "Boy you were right there and you had a stick and you threw the stick and hit him and he rolled. And then you grabbed him by
the neck and threw him! And he never came again. Never came again." [He laughs.] Just strange little, odd little things that can happen. Oh, I remember when, much later when a bull that took Dad down. But I wasn’t there to witness it. Dad was out in the pasture, and the bull came after him. And he pushed him around, and he got a hold of a little piece of stick and the bull—got him away [at him?] and he took off and went. Then he crawled over the fence and got home. From then on, we had a bull pen. And he would come and he would wham the fence—the wooden fence. And I found a very nice, nicely weighted [he gestures as if holding a pipe] piece of car axle. Steel. And when that bugger would come close enough he would get it shot right over the top of the head [he bows his head and gestures with the side of his hand] between what would have been the horns. And so he respected me, but he didn’t like me. [He laughs.] That was silly. Maybe that’s enough of that.

J: That’s great. Would stories like you just told about your dad being chased by the bull be the kind of things that you would ask your father to tell on occasion? Was storytelling, in that sense, a part of your childhood experience?

E: Grandmother. Dad’s mother would baby sit us. When the folks or couples wanted to go somewhere, here was Grandmother. She’d been widowed twice and she lived much longer in widowhood than in marriage because she lost her husband. But we looked forward to that. Now sometimes you think if you have a crotchety, cranky grandma who was always beating you down, you wouldn’t
want her around. But she was different. We’d ask her, "Hey, Grandma, tell us about the olden days when you first started here." She was a pioneer—was an immigrant from Russia. In fact, if you want the chronology of her family, I could give you a line up sometime. But anyhow, Grandma would say, "Well," said, "when we first came here there were no buildings, no farms. Just tall grass. Tall grass and other grass. And there were actually some buffalo around that they’d see once in a while. Didn’t see them often, but you saw the evidence of them." "Well, Grandma, what was evidence of buffalo?" "Well, buffalo chips." She had to call them buffalo chips. And she said, "And those chips, we would gather and store up in a dry place because that was fuel. And there weren’t many trees around that you can cut down and you had to have somewhere." "Well," I said, "you certainly couldn’t go through a winter. Did you have a stove." "Well, first we had a fire place, and then a stove." "What else did you use for fuel?" "Well, this tall grass. When it grew tall and all, we would cut it low, and then twist it [he gestures] and make grass twists—big blue stem twists. And then we stored those." "Well," I said, "those would burn up fast, too." "Yah. But that’s the kind of winters we had."

J: That was about it.

E: That was about it, at first. And we said, "Well, what scared you most? What were you most scared of?" And she said, "Well, not the buffalo. Nothing like that. The prairie fires. There
was nothing to stop it. If there was a strong wind and the fire got going, and you had," she said, "nothing would stop it." She said, "We never got burned out, but I know of people who did, and that we were always afraid of." Which is very interesting to me.

J: Sure.

B: And, uh—. Well, okay.

J: That's great. Are there some other Grandmother story standards?

E: Yah. She would talk about when someone was sick. I can't name you any particular home remedies, but—. Oh, if you step in a nail—Yah, if you stepped in a nail, well they knew that that sometimes may be fatal. A rusty nail especially. They learned to respect them. So she said, "We did our own—finally, once we were established we did our own butchering. So we'd have the skin of a ham," Schwarte we would call it in German, I don't know if your folks ever did. There the skin on the—h the hog skin on a ham with some lard on it. Peel that off; there's some fat on it. She said, that you would put over the wound and wrap it up, and that fat would draw out the infection. Well, I've since wondered whether it was the fat so much as the salt in the cure, see. But that was the treatment. That was the treatment. The other thing, we had to grease our wagons—our hay wagons our bundle wagons or grain wagons—there was a big shank axle and you had black Wageschmeer. We called it Wageschmeer. Axle grease. And that axle grease would also be a good home cure for an infection or something like that. And so she said they would
use that. But they didn't have medicines like we did. Uh, I remember, even later, once there were doctors, essence of peppermint was a common one. And at home, the home cure if you had an upset stomach, well, Pepermintdropp, peppermint drops. A few drops in a—[he places the index finger of one hand into the palm of the other] in a spoon of sugar. And you swallow that, and—or—yah, swallow it. And that's the relief. So peppermint was a common one. Uh, right now, nothing jumps back at me at the moment.

J: You would say of your grandmother that she was a good storyteller?

E: Oh, she was a good storyteller! And she was a disciplinarian at the same time. She lived with the Jonas Goering family. That was the home place—just east of the Eden church. That was my dad's home place. That's where Jonas, then, was the one who lived there. Jake settled on the place just north of the church. They bought that place. He was the youngest in the family. But Jonas was the second youngest. So the second youngest got to live on the home place, and Grandmother lived with them. She had one room. She had the northeast room. And that was Grandma's room. But she grew up she was in the family life all the way through. She was a midwife. Excellent midwife! And as we went—as we grew up, you know, all of us were born at home. Weren't any of us born in a hospital. And would never talk about any—anything sex or any birth. You were very, very careful not to talk about it. But we weren't dumb.
We would know. We would see, well, there’s something happening. We’d see women walking and, you know, that they were pretty heavily pregnant, you could say. But that was sort of hushed talk.

J: You didn’t talk about it.

E: No. But at home, too, when we were a little bit older and about every two years there was a birth. Don’t know quite what the—what the birth control plan was there. But somehow they had a plan worked out. And it seemed to work for them. Well, we knew. Well, Mama’s slowed up a little bit, and we knew something was going to happen but we’d never talk about it. But a certain morning when the youngest—no not the youngest. No. The youngest would be two years old, they’d stay at home. But the four-year-old went along to school with you. And boy that was a picnic for the four-year-old. It was a new experience for us. Except that we older ones, we knew what was going on. ‘Cause we figured when we came home, there would be a youngster. And that was usually the case. The only unhappy time that time was when a stillborn came. But Dad went after Grandma. He called the doctor, who would come out either from Moundridge, Doc Behr, or doctor, uh, you know, McPherson doctor. I’ve forgotten it all of a sudden. Anyhow they were medical doctors and they would make home calls. And they’d come in for the birth. But, Grandma was there. She knew how to prep and she knew how to take care of it in case a doctor didn’t make it. And in case it was winter or bad weather, and you knew it was
imminent, she might be there a day or two before. Just to have her there.

J: Right.

E: She can handle it if the doctor can't make it. But that time. The youngster, I remember they had put a dress on it, and lay it—didn't embalm it—laid it on a table in the parlour. And a veil over it or a see through thing. And we went in there we'd look at it. And it was strange, but no life in it. You didn't know whether to be—whether to be, uh, sorry or what because you had no attachments to it. But the event was not a happy event. We knew that. Then at burial time. You know you'd bury them in a little wooden box. And someone would—they'd volunteer to dig the hole. Then when you covered it up—the sound! The first sounds of those clods hitting that box [he slaps his hand] that'd sound terrible. Like a terrible thing for this little baby. Just think of how—. That was more dramatic, actually, than the fact of its coming and going.

J: Right. Hearing the clods on the coffin was actually more frightening maybe than even the wake. It sounds like it was a wake. Is that right? I mean, when the baby was laid out on the table.

E: Yah. Sure.

J: Did people come by, or was it just the family?

E: It was just the family. If there were older ones—you know, if someone died that had established a reputation—or our immediate family would come. But, yah, the wakes, that was something
else. That was a—that sometimes turned out to be a party, you
know. A social event!

J: A time to get together.

E: A time to get together. And that’s a separate topic. But these
community parties that we had. We were right in the middle of
those. And those, I think, were socially one of the best things
that happened.

J: That was going to be one of my next questions.

E: Yah.

J: What were your social activities.

E: Yah. When we were growing up, before we got to the dating
stage, it was family visitations mostly. And at home we’d play
rook, dominoes. And we had Bücher Bähr. Did you ever meet
Bücher Bähr? Louie Bähr? [I shake my head.] He was gone
before—. Yah, your grandfolks would have been—Dan Schrags and
those—they would have been the ones that, uh, where he was at
overnight. That’d be a separate topic, wouldn’t it?

J: Well, actually, Uncle Richard said he didn’t stay at their
house.

E: Is that right? He didn’t?

J: He said he always felt a little strange about that because he
knew some of his uncles had kept him.

E: Yah.

J: But at their house, they never kept him.

E: That’s very strange because they’re the same stock. [He
laughs.]
J: What do you mean they're the same stock?

E: Well, your parents, uh, they'd stay with parents of your
Grandpa's side or your Grandma's side. But I know he had his
spaces. My folks-in-law, Joe B. Kaufman—partly it had to do
with—they had a big barn and a lot of room for his ponies. He
had two ponies. And he wanted a nice warm place for those
ponies when the weather was bad. And lots of feed. He wasn't
greedy, but those ponies got the best. And so he would stay.
And if he—if there was—oh you didn't get the kind of weather
forecasts we get now—but if you knew that it was threatening,
he'd head for a place that he might be able to nestle in for a
week. P. J. Kaufman was another one. My grandpa, Peter C.
Goering, oh he'd—Paul P.'s dad. Paul P. is in the home.
Paul's son is Vern and Lowell. Lowell is in Hillsboro.

J: Oh, sure.

E: Yah. Lowell is my cousin. So Bücher Bähr would be there.

Well, when he was visiting over night or staying over night at
our house, why, he'd want to play rook or domino. "Hust du
Domino? Hust du Rook?" [Do you have dominoes? Do you have a
rook game?] And my mom always wanted me to get my homework done
first which was necessary. But we played a round. So we'd—
families would visit with uncles and aunts and neighbors. It
just happened for some reason that my folks and Val Krehbiels
were good friends, but not relatives. So as a family, we got
together lots of times. It didn't develop socially into any
matches or marriages, but Les Goering's Ruth and I are about the
same age, and, man, she was my age and when we were together, why, we were matched up for games—whatever there was. It was an age thing. But then, later, as we grew up and got into high school and so on, the church was, of course, the main center. And the young people's group, Christian Endeavor, we called it—C. E.. And the two churches, Hopefield and Eden, the young people had a lot of wisdom. They stuck together [he laughs], you know. And they got along together. We'd have it at Eden Church one Sunday night and at Hopefield Church the next Sunday night. Neunschwander at Hopefield Church didn't like the parties. He'd preach a sermon after C. E.—after he had a captive audience. And he says [emphatically], "Now you go home and read your Bible and forget about these silly parties." [He laughs.] And here we were, dates and singles and so on. We knew exactly whose place the party would be after the service. And they went from home to home. They didn't go to any public places but into the home. Mothers weren't always so happy. You know, these kids would mess around and a chair might get broken 'cause they pile on a little bit. But it was the best system, I think, of keeping a group of—a community of ethnic people together.

J: Right.

E: Now, beyond that you can still say maybe that was a little bit too exclusive. But this is where they got acquainted. And you jolly well—if you were going steady with a girl—you jolly well better come to the party because they'd start ganging up on you
if you're too exclusive. That was very interesting to me.

J: So if you didn’t go to the party, you would be frowned upon because that was the thing to do.

E: That’s right. It was. And yet a good time. "Now, what’d you do at the party?" Oh, piano—they’d sing and play on the piano. Very seldom that they would get into a waltzing situation because the homes objected to that. And most of the kids hadn’t grown up with it, you know, 'cause dance was O-U-T, out. But rook and dominoes or just plain visiting and fiddling around. No refreshments served. It was just a place where you could, golly, you could sit and talk to anybody. And if you thought that a guy was getting a little bit too sweet on some gal that you might want a chance at, too, why you had a chance there to go visit with her personally, you know. And he stands there [leaning back casting a side-wise glance] with his eyes ga-ga. And all kinds of things. But this was where, really, much of the matching began to happen. Now sociologically, what a wa—. We didn’t go to the movies Sunday nights. In fact we didn’t go. Oh, the folks took us one time. There was "Uncle Tom’s Cabin," a silent movie that was in Moundridge, and the folks took the family. And that was good 'cause we had read the book. Dad had read the book to the family. So, anyhow, those were some things. Summertime we would be out playing folk games. That’s as close as we got to dancing. And then, I remember when at Bethel College, they would officially have formalized folk games and all this kind
of thing. To get the board to approve it, the students had to come up with an evening's entertainment. The board was invited. And the most—perhaps the most critical—the most, uh, shall we say—I want to use only good terms, but he was—the protector of the faith was P. H. Richert, Tabor Church. Open-minded guy in many ways, but, boy in the social activities you—. He was on the board. And here sat the board in the new student union, and here the students came. And they went through their parties and their singing groups and their swinging groups and what all. You know, I'll never forget, when they got through, P. H. Richert said, [he sits up straight and draws his head back] "Is that what they're talking about? We did that at home all the time among our groups." It was in! Well, those were some of the things at the parties. But I think the social event—after every—in every holiday there was a party somewhere. Every marriage there was a wedding party. There better be or else someone would get chivareed, you know. And those were great attracters. And it was, I think, we remarked that I think our generation today of our same group—my girls didn't grow up in that community. They grew up in this community. So they would have had—been heir—fallen heir to that, but we were on the farm and we lived here and we did. So much for that.

Is storytelling a part of your family and/or church and social activities in some way? In other words, did you ever get together and say, "Hey, have you heard the one about this event
that happened?"

E: Yah, it was in there. But it was never polished or shall we say, pronounced. There was always this problem of gossip—of a thing becoming gossip. And gossip has a way of getting in, you know. And yet there were some jokes that came along that had a pretty good point, but you had to be careful about those because they could veer off. And I don't remember any particular setting or event in which there was. Closest to—or something related to that while we were growing up, were—in group activities—were the literaries in the country schools. And there for entertainment you would—someone would go to work and bring them out. And that happened. And then they'd call on—I remember our neighbor Danny Waltner—uh, what's his son that runs the Waltner Electric in Moundridge? And Ellen.

J: Don.

E: Don. Don's dad. Before he was married. He married a school teacher that came to teach there that was twenty years younger than he. [He chuckles.] He had a reputation. Because these literaries were there before I got into the picture, but they kept coming in. And they wanted what they'd call a stump speech. Give 'em a topic and then they talk. And they said that guy would—he would sort of—they sort of ridiculed him, and being alone, he apparently had a little appetite for the bottle. Not that he was vicious or mean or anything like that. But they would say, "Well," after he got through with a speech, "I wonder what part of the bottle that took." But then he'd
come through with a terrific thing. Imagination galore! You know there's some kids who have more imagination than others. And you get them to write the theme or to talk—get them a topic to talk about, you have to reach from all over to get something. Or else find it—it reveals the kind of thinking you do or don't do. But that kind of thing—plays. They went into plays. [He talks about some of the country schools that put on plays. The plays were evidently very popular in the community. He's not sure why the community seemed so much more enthusiastic about plays than the community choir.]

J: So there was in the community a real yearning for that kind of entertainment?

E: There was. There was. And it attracted. It attracted. But sometimes, sure, some things went off color, but you can't control everything. You can't control everything; not even in our college. But mostly. [He laughs.] But, basically because they're people. And not because they're mean people. And so that was there. The roots or the ferment for something beyond that was there.

[He goes on to talk about the church's relationship to Bethel College. He believes that the college has had a positive impact on the surrounding Mennonite communities. Then he comments about his father's desire to go to college.]

E: Now, my dad didn't get to go to college. But I learned, much to my surprise—. I was in my early twenties, I think—later than that—when I first learned that my dad wanted to go to school.
He wanted to go into business. He didn’t want to be a farmer. He wanted to go into business. Well, when they grew up, the oldest two were daughters. And then there were five boys. Something like that. Mrs. P. S. Krehbiel, Peter D.’s folks. Pete lives here with Frieda—Frieda Epp.

J: He was my uncle. [His first wife, now deceased, was my mother’s sister.]

E: Yah. Okay. Sure, sure. Okay. Uh, um—what was my point, now? You shook me when you said he was your uncle. I should have known that.

J: You were talking about your dad really wanting to go to school.

E: Yah. Okay. So Anna, Aunt Anna, was a girl, naturally. She didn’t have to go to school because she was going to get married and be a homemaker. Then was Mary, Mrs. P. P. Kaufman, Marvin and Eddie’s and Jonas Pat’s—the Pat’s, you know. Then was Dave, who was in the bank for years and years and years and almost died in the bank. [He laughs.] You know, that long. Well he was the oldest boy. But there were other boys near his age to farm so Dave could go to school and be a teacher. So Dave got to go to school. C. B. and Henry got about a fifth grade education, but they were the farmers. They were chosen by Mom and Dad to be the farmers. Then came Jonas and Jake. The younger ones again. They got to go to school. They were both at Bethel, either the academy or some college. So Henry and C. B., by voluntary lot—or involuntary lot, I guess, involuntary lot—were designated the farmers. Now, the folks did get them
some farms and set them up. It was easier then. But Dad never liked the farm. He wanted to be a businessman. And he—the happiest years of his active vocational life were spent right here on this campus. After he retired from the farm, he worked in the maintenance department. And when he was my age he was still working here in the maintenance department. They retired him at 77. He loved it. He knew more kids. He’d stop and talk to them. He’d work around the dorms, plant flowers. No one told him to, but he loved flowers and he loved trees. A lot of that are planted around here—. Moraine locust—the moraine locust you can just pretty well say C. B. had a spade and—somewhere. And the Canadian kids—all over they’re liable to say, “Wasn’t C. B. your dad?” I says, “Yah.” “Well, is he gone?” “Oh man, yes. He’s gone.” They said, “I’ll never forget that man. He wanted to know, ‘Who was your dad? Who was your grandpa? Who was your great grandpa? Where are you from? And, how’d you find your way out here?’” Here was a maintenance guy working with this type of thing. And when he retired, Vernon Neufeld was president, and he wrote him a letter of thanks and commendations for the good service he gave the college and congratulations, we wish you well. And Dad had that framed in his room in the Memorial Home. When he got through, he says, “When I’m gone, you can have that.” Well, that showed to me something very important to him had happened. And it wasn’t in the classroom. For him, it couldn’t be. But he got it otherwise.
J: Right. He got to be in that setting.

E: Yah. He got into the setting. And when they moved—they sold the farm in Harvey County—or in McPherson County to get closer to the college. They bought a farm between Newton and—or sold it and bought here. Well, then he was a long way from his Eden.

[The first side of the tape ends here. I put a new cassette into the recorder and the interview continues.]

J: We were on the topic of the—

E: The values.

J: —the values of education in the community.

E: Yah. Yah. Yah. And how it might have affected our Swiss people and how they affected this—the college.

J: Right.

[Erwin says that the Swiss were by far the minority when they migrated. Since the Low German Mennonites were in the majority, they were the most influential in the early years of the college. When the Swiss became more established and could be an economic advantage to the college, the Eden and Hopefield people became valued for their monetary support.]

J: Did you feel like you had encouragement from your parents to attend college?

E: Yah. When I came through high school, the depression hit. I graduated high school in ’31. And Dad said, "Boy, college—I wish you could go to college but we don’t have any money and we’ve got a big family growing up." And I says, "I wouldn’t
expect it." And it was Vic's dad, Uncle Jake, that nurtured me into college. And I owe it to him. I really do. He said, "I'll loan you the money. And you pay it back to when my kids get old enough to go—." And so he hired me when there was work to do. But that's a separate story and a good one. But Dad was always happy to see any of them who wanted, go to school. In fact, to make it possible for the younger generation—. I was still—I was a late graduate, a late bloomer, from the education because I had to drop out—I dropped out between high school and college for two years and couldn't make any headways because there's no jobs. And then two years of college. And then three years of rural school teaching. And then back to college. So I was about five years later than my classmates, or older than my classmates when I came. But during that period of time, the folks said, "Well, if we could live near the campus, then they could commute from home." So Jake and I and Elvin were the only ones that commuted from home some. Jake finished college and I did. Elvin didn't. But the evidence would be that they sold the ethnic home place to move into another community so that they could be closer to higher education. Which to me is some pretty tangible evidence.

J: Sure.

E: And we were never—never had to fight it. Never had to fight it. We had to fight from an economic point. The battle was economic.

J: Right. You said there was a story related to your Uncle Jake
providing work for you.

B: Yah. Yah. Uncle Jake. See, the four brothers—Jake, Jonas, Henry, and Chris—owned a thrashing rig. They were equal partners in it. And I was the oldest of the boys in those four families. Ellis came right after me. And Vic would soon follow there. But I was sort of—worked with them when we redid the rig or the tractor. Get it ready for harvest and so on. And there was a lot of visiting going on. The four brothers—two or three brothers, whichever—and I would be there. And Uncle Jake would always want to know, "Well, what's happening among the young people?" He wanted to know how the young people are doing. What are some of the bad habits they have. [He looks at me directly.] Well, our young people don't have bad habits, you know. There are some stinkers in the bunch but they don't have bad habits. And so, after high school, there was not much prospect of going to college. So I worked around. And he hired me when he needed some work done. He didn't like to clean out his barn. So, he had a team of horses and a John Deere manure spreader and a good hefty fork ready any time I was willing to come and do it. And I did! It was work! And for a time I worked—I hired out to him for fifteen dollars a month and keep. Whatever was to be done. Then the second year, he said "Hey, this isn't going to get you anywhere." I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, you aren't—what are you going to get into some time? You're growing up!" "Yah," I said, "I'm growing up. The depression is here and there's no man, no fun,
your son." And he said, "Why don’t you go to college?" And I said, "Laugh again." I said, "That’s nothing but a laugh. I don’t have any money to go to college." "Would you go if you had a chance?" I said, "I would." "Alright," he says. "I’ll loan you the money." I says, "No, thank you." "Why not?" And I said, "Because if I make debts and something happens to me, then my dad will have to pay them." "Well," he said, "that’s where you’re wrong. I will loan you the money. You pay me back when you can. And at the latest, so that I have it for my kids to go to college. But if something happens to you. That debt’s cancelled." I said, "Are you kidding?" He said, "No." I said, "Then I accept." And he brought me to campus. That’s how I got to campus. He said, "Well, I used to sing in the quartet and all." And he said, "Maybe you can get a music scholarship or something to—. I’ll introduce you to Walter Hohman." And so visit Walter Hohman. Well, that year I sang—we had a men’s octet and I sang as a freshman. Then the second year I came, I had—they started a dairy, and I’ve got a whole different story there about a cow that came to Bethel. I gave that last year at our Fall Festival and some people thought that should be recorded somewhere. [He laughs.] But I don’t think it will. Anyhow, so Uncle Jake would hire me in the summer and if I needed some more money—of course, I counted every penny I could count because didn’t want that chance to go. And I went and taught school in Pleasant Valley, northwest of Goessel. And I had that school for three years. I started with sixty-five a
month and ended with ninety-two fifty. But that was a whopping
good salary. More than that it was an opportunity to go. Then
I came back and finished in 1940. And by the time I was
finished and taught three years I had my debts paid off to Uncle
Jake. But that bond—. Just yesterday, Pete and I were in
Moundridge. We played about eight or nine games of pool with
Uncle Jake.

J: Oh really?

E: 'Cause Pete used to work for him, too. And Pete and I were
those who he would sort of—that he related to well. And pool
was a dirty word in those days, you know. But now it’s a great
recreation. And he’s good at it! He learned it, you know just,
in his life span, very recently, and does a good job of it. And
that’s a good recreational game, but was in the wrong place.

J: How many years did you continue to teach?

E: When I, I taught three years in the elementary school. And
then, when I graduated in '40, President Kaufman wanted me to
stay on. My wife and I got married in '40—August of '40. And
she was on the Bethel faculty when I graduated here. And that’s
another thing. Ed G. Kaufman was her cousin. And he knew us
well. We were dating steadily. And when I came back to school
to finish, she came to teach. She’d gone to Chicago. She’d
gotten her Masters in music and then she came down. So I, uh—
Ed G. Kaufman said [he leans forward and speaks in a clipped
style on Kaufman’s lines] "Ah," he said, "Say," uh, "Remember,
you’re a student." I said, "Yah. So what?" "Well, your
girlfriend's a teacher. None of this regular course stuff that you see all over the college campus here." Couples, you know.

J: Right.

E: "Oh," I says, "don't worry about that." I said, "We're both way too busy for that." Well, anyhow he mentioned it. Two years later when we invited faculty to our wedding, the dean of the school, Dean Goertz—P. S. Goertz was shocked pink! He says, "I didn't know there was anything between you going on! Never saw any evidence of it." Well, [he laughs] this kind of thing. But, see, I guess I went off the track here somewhere.

J: We were just sort of tracing your professional career.

[At this point Erwin summarizes his work life in some detail, providing the following information. After Erwin's marriage, President Kaufman requested that he set up a working project for farm boys that wanted to come to campus for work experience. They renovated railroad cars into apartments. Then he taught social sciences and coached basketball and track at Walton High School for a year and a half. After that he was drafted and went into Civilian Public Service working as a Mennonite camp administrator for four years in Oklahoma, California, Colorado, and in the East. After C. P. S. he returned to the college to work in student recruitment and alumni relations. In 1948 and 1949 he went to seminary in Chicago and finished a Master's in Religious Education. After several more year's work at Bethel he went to Europe from 1957-1959 and organized reconstruction work camps for Mennonite Central Committee. While in Europe he was offered several job positions. He could have become a
full-time insurance salesman, the general secretary of the General Conference Mennonite Church, a pastor at Bethel Church in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, or continued work at Bethel College. He talks about the difficulty of making that choice.

E: Now what do you do between the four choices? That was a bear cat, in my book! You know, why do those things come back over and over? You have to find a satisfactory answer. Why do some doors open more than once, twice, or three times? And when is it a temptation and when is it a call? And I talked to Langenwalter [Bethel's President] and I thought he gave me a gem of a—. I said, "How do you make a decision in a case like this?" "Well," he said, "no one can tell you which one to take, but I have found this to be a good guide. Seeing a need is a call from God to do something sensible about it." Well, now these are all needs. You still have to decide. Well, insurance went out because my wife was opposed to it. And I wasn't all that sure about it, but it was tempting. It was tempting. We'd have financial security now, rather than financial so-so. The college had given me a two-year leave and I didn't want to take that lightly either, after all. General Conference was a real challenge because that's a—you're right there with your people, and it's Canadian and U. S.. And then the pastorate, that had been—that door had been knocking on me for many times. Beatrice [Nebraska], the town church while I was still in C. P. S. says, "We voted to take you." Grace Hill—J. J. Wolfe was pastor and he says, "The board wanted me to check and see
whether you might be a candidate." And, you know, this kind of thing was always there somehow. And Verna says, "Well, why don't you take the conference job?" And says, "that should give you about as much challenge as you need. It won't make you rich either, but it's not our first goal in life anyhow." So I took that for a three year term.

[He talks about Bethel's continued efforts to coax him back while he was at the General Conference offices. After a three-year term with the conference he returned to Bethel as Director of Admissions largely because of his conviction that the college is an important institution for sustaining Mennonite identity. He continued at Bethel until 1966. When he left, he was assistant to the President. He discusses the difficulty of making career choices in a competitive society, and regrets that church leadership positions have also become very competitive. He acknowledges that he had interest in farming but never the opportunity to pursue it. Farming, for him, has been strictly recreational.]

J: You were talking about your grandmother being a good storyteller. Are there other stories that you recall about difficulties of adjusting to American life? What about difficulties in communicating in the English language.

E: Yah. I remember a story that was told which you have to know the German—

J: Well, try me.

E: Yah. Well, they were telling—I don't remember even who was telling the story, but it was Dad's generation of people that
said, you know before the advent of trucks, the Sante Fe Railroad, of course, came through Halstead. So Halstead was the main transportation tie that our Eden Moundridge people had—Eden-Hopefield Mennonites had. And if you had any hogs for sale or some of the mills, of course, weren't any closer, you'd—. But, I remember they had a story about a guy who was hauling some hogs—some fat pigs to Halstead with a lumber wagon. He probably had a triple box. He had to because those buggers would—or else some top on it. Anyhow, he was riding along in the wagon. It was a pretty good stretch. What's it about fourteen, fifteen miles from Moundridge to Halstead?

J: Yes.

E: And before asphalt and bumpy. He was bumping along with his team of horses and he didn't have a cushion on his seat. And it got tiresome and I guess he got bored, and he got the bright idea that he was going to stop at the next farmhouse and try to buy or borrow a pillow to sit on. And so he went—the story has it—he went to the door and a woman answered. And of course, she wasn't German. And he was so German, he didn't know all the English words. Now, what is German for pillow?

J: Kisse.

E: Kisse. Ja, hast recht! [Yes, you're right] Kisse. Alright, now if you didn't have any notion what it would be in English and you wanted a Kisse, now what does—when you say something about Kisse or Kissem or something like that to someone who understands it differently, you might have a problem. But here
he comes and here's this woman and he's got this problem. So he says, "I uh, [he looks down, faltering] I need a, uh, uh, a *Kisse*—a *Kisse*. And she backed off and says, "What kind of a bold guy is this?" And he caught on it wasn't quite the right thing and he says, "No, no, [he points to his lips] not *Kisse* here [he points to his buttocks] a *Kisse* here." Because that was where he was going to use it. But that doesn't help the situation. [He laughs.] And I don't know how he got out of that one, but I thought that was a pretty good story. How the tyranny of words can get you into difficulty. That's one of them. And I think that if a person would make a point of trying to gather stories—I don't. Nothing comes to my mind at the moment about an unusual kind but I think—.

J: Let me ask you if you recognize some of these that I've heard. [He has no recollection of the whetstone story. He suggests that his Uncle Jake may have more recollections of those kinds of incidents. I ask him about good storytellers in the community and he comes up with names of several people who have already died. Then he considers several names of others but doesn't come up with any that have outstanding reputations as storytellers.]

J: In order to probe some elements of style, let's talk about your grandmother again. Did she use a good deal of animation, gestures, and impersonation—those kinds of things—when she told you stories.

E: Not as much as I do.

J: Okay.
B: Not as much as I do. She would more sit with her hands folded and look at you. And she would sit down. But to make it—to animate it a little bit, she would lean forward. And, you know, when Grandma leaned forward you figured something was coming, because you were used to watch a woman being sitting back, very composed and—not complacent but in place and properly quiet. But Grandma, she had—part if it grew out of her being a widow for so many years. [He says his grandmother had a sharp mind until she died. He then discusses her role as a disciplinarian in his uncle’s household.]

J: You said that Bücher Bähr stayed in your home some times. He also stayed your Uncle Jonas’s at times.

E: Yes. Yes. Where they put him, I don’t know.

J: Victor remembered that they put him in Grandma’s room on the couch.

E: No kidding?

J: He said that always struck him as a little strange.

E: Oh, yah! I don’t know. He was at my folks-in-law an awful lot. Joe P. Kaufman’s.

J: How old would you have been when Bücher Bähr was making his main run of the community?

E: I would have been in grade school. I would have been, oh, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen. Something like that.

J: Was it a real treat when he came around.

E: Well, sort of—

J: Did you like to see him come around.
E: --excepting if we were going somewhere that night to visit friends and here Tuesday night the buggy starts coming by and you know for darn good and well either you turn him off—but at 4:30 you don’t turn him away any more. Because, after all, the day is about done. He can’t go and—he’s got to have supper, you know.

J: And that’s just the way it was.

E: That’s the way it was.

J: If he showed up, he got a meal.

E: Yah. He got a meal. He got a meal. Another thing I want to tell you about that guy: I have often wondered—. They used to comment—. It’s amazing to me, I don’t know of anybody who ran him off or ran him down for being a gossip. He never gossiped, that I know of. We never heard a story—a juicy story—about somebody out someplace where he visited that something wasn’t going right. That guy knew how to zip it shut and keep it. And that helped him. ’Cause he’d have been in trouble with lots of them. Now, there wasn’t that much trouble going around early, it’s our generation that brought it in, but —[he laughs]. But no, no. This one thing I must say for him. When he’d, I remember I—. He was at the Goessel home—home for the aged when he had to quit driving his ponies. I don’t know who bought his ponies or buggy or anything like that. That would be a relic that ought to be in the museum. Absolutely. Somebody should have bought that—not the horse, but the buggy—to be in the museum ’cause it was—and he was mostly among the
Swiss people.

J: Was he Swiss himself or do you know what his background was?

E: Yah. He was Swiss. Bahr [pronounced like "bear"]. B-E-E-R.

[Erwin's alternate spelling of Bahr evidences some disagreement among informants about the correct spelling.] Bahr.

J: B-E-E-R.

E: Yah. We'd say "beer" but its Bähr ["bear"]. Louie Bähr. He was Swiss.

J: I'm glad to know the proper spelling. I'll have to go back and change all my transcripts.

E: Yah. He got out to Freemon [South Dakota], too. In the Freemon community because those are our Swiss. But how he made the gap, I don't know. Because it's a long stretch with eight hooves and two tails. [He laughs.]

J: When I ask people about outsiders or interesting personalities in the community, the Bächer Bähr always comes up.

E: Yah. There was another fellow, a Low German. Did you ever hear of Andy—Honey Andy?

J: Andy Unruh.

E: Yah. Andy Unruh. Now he grew up in the Kantener over here—church—six miles north of Moundridge and about a half west.

J: What church?

E: It was the Emanuel Mennonite Church. They call them the Kantener. Why they were Kantener, I don't know. That was a name that was given them. They're sort of, well, a Swiss preacher has sort of taken them away from the Mennonite fold.
They're much more spiritual—whatever it is. Anyhow, Andy never got married. [A garbled sentence.] But he was the—man, no one ever complained that he didn’t work his share. Good hard worker. And particular. And clean. You know, it’s amazing. Some bachelors live like pigs. And I can name you some if you have enough time, I can name you some. They’re gone now. Uh, I—I’ll finish with Bähr—with Unruh. Andy would—you’d send to husk corn, pick corn. He knew how to do it and did it. Stayed with it. Hard work. Cold or whatever. Trim hedge. I trimmed hedge with him, that’s where I had some first hand experience. Side trim it, you know, to—on a field or if you were getting ready to cut it down or pull it or whatever. And he was there. He always had a sharp axe. You don’t try to cut with a dull axe. Now, your shop workers will tell you that. Your teacher, if he’s worth his salt, will start with good tools and sharp! Well, he uh, and I’d start cleaning up and he says, "Neh! Weg raume! Weg raume!" ["No! Clean away! Clean away!"] To get the loose and the little limbs away so he had footing. And he’d get impatient with you if you didn’t do it because it was for your own safety. He would haul bundles or pitch hay or whatever. But he’d love to eat. And to tell one story—that’s a John C. family, that’s Art’s family tell a story about the boys were still—oh, John was still at home. John W. and Art and Martin. You may know Martin. Martin—what’s his—Martin H. Goering? No. He lives just west of Elyria. He’s a brother to Art.
E: Okay.

J: Anyhow, here they were. He was out picking corn. And the other guys were doing something else, but it was dinner time. He had come home. He had unloaded his corn and he was hungry to eat. And so they weren’t all there, but they started, and sort of dribbled in to the process. And that irritated him. When it was time to eat, it was time to eat. [He sounds like he’s grumbling.] You don’t come and go and mess around. But anyhow, —[The tape ends here. The interview continues on the next side.]

J: Since we lost a little bit on the leader of the other side, you might just pick up your story at the point when Andy comes in to eat.

E: Yah. Andy would come from picking corn to eat and only about three fourths of the guys were there to eat and they didn’t know whether to wait for the rest or not. And he got impatient and finally he grumbled. And they said, "Okay. You start. They can eat when they get here." So they passed the serving bowl. It was always a good, generous one because it was a big family. And so he helped himself. A good wad of food, you know. But there was always some left in the serving bowl. And he sat there, his plate was empty and—sullen. And he came through in a German—I’ll say it in German first and then follow up. They said, "Andy, willst noch mehr?" ["Andy, do you want more?"] "Ach, wir weiss net wievell überlasse. Der kommt herin, und kommt der näschte, und kommt der näschte. Und wir weiss net
And then he got up and left the table. "We don't know how much to leave over [for] the rest of the guys." See, he was used to cleaning the plate out—the serving bowl. So you've got to leave something for the others and they don't show. So you can't eat as much as you want to because they have to have some! [He laughs.] That was—that was a good one. Another one—he would, see, Jonas, the oldest of the boys smoked cigars. And Andy—I don't know if he'd never smoked or what. I'm surprised he didn't but he would listen—they were listening to the radio or something, or Jonas was yakking away and smoking his cigar. And Andy sat quiet for a while and the fumes got thicker and thicker. And he says [he stutters], "Ja-Ja-Ja-Ja-Janat, der H-H-Herr wird net mit dir in Schmokhaus sitze."

"Jonas, the Lord will not sit with you in the smokehouse." And he would do it. But the real catcher of pranks—they played pranks on him. And uh, we were thrashing for Uncle Pete. Jonas was still there. I guess he maybe stayed there over night. Anyhow, Emil Kaufman and I were sleeping outdoors. We'd sleep on racks. And Jonas was telling us, he says, "Now, at midnight Andy gets up—Andy goes to bed early. By midnight, he has to have a drink. So he comes to the pump—to the well—and he pumps and he takes a drink and he goes back to where he sleeps." And he says, "Tonight, if you guys want to see something funny," he says, "at twelve o'clock when that pump goes, I'll switch on the yard light that's right over—. And you'll see Andy in his
B. V. D.'s getting a drink." And Jonas thought that was a real funny thing. And we fell asleep, but don't you know, all of a sudden the pump handle goes and the light goes on. We sit up and there is this figure, Andy as old as he was, streaking across [he laughs] in his B. V. D.'s embarrassed as all get out. And the next morning at breakfast Jonas just chewed him out—just razzed him. [He laughs.] Well, you know, things that happened.

[I tell Erwin the "Jam Dish Story" and the "Fish Bones Story" that Ellen Schrag told me about Andy Unruh.]

E: He'd shell them out! Bone by bone. [He laughs.] Well, but he was a good soul. And he was taken advantage of. There was somebody who told me his brother borrowed from him. Well, Andrew didn't have any children. What need did he have? He had room and board and overalls. That's all he needed. Well, so he never got his money back. Now, that's a terrible commentary on people.

J: Did Andy stutter? When you mimicked him you were stuttering.

E: Yah. Ya-Ya-Ya-Yah. Oh yah. He-He-He-He stammered. And the more excited he got the more stammer there was. Yah?

J: Which is probably part of the reason people liked to make fun of him.

E: Oh sure. And he was the butt end of jokes a lot of times. But he kept on doing his thing. If anybody would mistreat horses, oh, he would really get furious. Horses are made to work for you and you treat them with respect.
J: Are there some other characters like that that you remember?
E: Boy! Now that's about as close as anything I can recall, off hand.
J: Chris Hingst? Do you know who he was?
E: I knew who he was. And I remember when that name would come up—all I recall now. I didn’t work with him, ever. But there were sort of some jokes about—well, Hingst, you know, in German a stallion is a Hengst—a Hengst. And so when these guys—one time one of the women, and I'm not sure whose wife it was, was trying to tell a story about him. And she wasn’t going to say the name because of Hengst, you know. And one of the guys picked up on that. And he says, "Wer war das?" "Who was this?" Well, "Seller Mann." "That man." "Yah, but who is he? Who is that man?" "Ach, you know who. It was Hingst." [He laughs.] But that was a sort of play on words more than anything. But there were other people. My granddad, Peter C. Goering, was—he had a soft spot for, shall we say, outsiders or what have you. And he would, when there was a Goering-Krehbiel Mercantile Company in Moundridge where most of the ethnic people would buy there and have shares in stock, he would go to Razook’s. Razook’s Groceries. And the Razooks were Armenians. Well, they had right to be in business, too. But they were different people. They were black haired and they looked like Ausländer, like outsiders. But it may be that he got special favors from them because he was also especially considerate. He would never say that. But if there was a salesman who’d come by in the
country, and he was one of those Ausländer in the country selling whatever he’d sell, Grandpa was sure to buy something. Even though Grandma scolded and said "Wir brauchen das net." ["We don’t need that."] [His grandpa’s answer in Swiss and is difficult to decipher. It makes some excuse for going ahead with the purchase.] But some guys also took advantage of him. This one time I remember, when a guy who was acquainted with him—I don’t know if Grandpa was acquainted with the guy, but the guy knew that’s where the man lived. Here he comes walking down the road with an inner tube that had a big hole in it. And he said he had a flat tire and he needed some money to buy a new one or to get it fixed, and he didn’t have any money. So Grandpa shelled out enough money to buy him a new tube. Didn’t take long—the guy was not smart enough to have turned around and go back—he came driving by. And that didn’t please Grandpa very much. He was almost a soft touch for something like that. And there’s something to be said for being kind to people, especially outsiders, you know. It’s Biblical, too. But it was his way—his way of doing it.

J: Well, you have given me a whole host of things—

E: [He laughs.] A whole lot more than you had planned.

J: —that I can use. That’s very helpful.

E: Well, I hope so.

J: I appreciate it.

E: I don’t mind the exercise a bit.

J: I may have to come back.
E: Yah. Any time. For clarification or if something comes to my mind that I think just might be of help, why I’ll give you a buzz. I don’t think I’ll know that, maybe. But when it’s these—often time when you try to recall, [he points to his head] the computer gets a little block or something. And then you begin to say, "Oh, I can’t remember any more?" or "How come I didn’t know that?" or "How come it didn’t come to me?" Now-a-days we’re quick to say, "Well, it’s your Alzheimers that’s getting in your way." [He laughs.]

J: I think it takes a lot of discipline to remember.

E: It really does.

[He suggests that writing is a similar discipline. It has to be a way of life and not done in bits and snatches.]

J: Well, thanks again.

E: Well, you’re most welcome.

[End of tape recorded interview.]
VITA

John McCabe-Juhnke is a native of Moundridge, Kansas, where he completed his public school education. In 1978 he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Speech/Drama at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas. In 1981 after receiving a Master of Arts degree in Oral Interpretation at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, John was instructor of Speech and Drama at Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas. In 1986 he completed the coursework in the doctoral program in Speech Communication, Theatre, and Communication Disorders at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Since then he has been Assistant Professor of Communication Arts at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: John McCabe-Juhnke

Major Field: Speech

Title of Dissertation: Narrative and Everyday Experience: Performance Process in the Storytelling of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

December 5, 1989