

Audio transcription of Eva Frances Karges, life stories recorded

Eva Frances Karges Kresha: "Birth to Marriage," 1892 - 1919, Parts 1 and 2

Part 1

I'm Eva Kresha, and this is the month of August 1980. I'm staying with my daughter in California, and I took this time to talk about my life story as I remember it.

I was born on my father's homestead in the northeast part of Merrick County, about five miles north of Silver Creek, Nebraska. My folks lived there, it was typical of sandhills, it was a relinquishment that someone else had as a homestead. The buildings were already there. They already looked old because they hadn't been painted. The house was three rooms, and the barn had a straw roof and the cattle shed likewise and the chicken house. And there was a little granary. That's all the buildings there were on the place. We lived there until after my mother died. Then my grandmother took me and I stayed with her until my father remarried. Then he took me back to live in the home again.

I was born on December 12, 1892. My father's name was Martin Karges and my mother's maiden name was Amelia Scholz. They were married on January 27, 1891, at the Catholic church in Duncan, Nebraska. They first made their home on a small farm at the edge of the sandhills north and east of Silver Creek. Later they moved onto this homestead that my dad took up. Shortly after my birth, my mother took sick and her sickness lasted nearly three years, when she finally gave up with the fight with cancer.

After my mother's death, which occurred on January 18, 1896, I went to live with my grandmother Mason. My dad became a bachelor, living alone like a hermit on the prairie. He spent his days doing whatever he could to earn an honest dollar. He became a cattle herder; he took in cattle to pasture and herded them on the unfenced prairies that were abundant at that time. There were hardly any fences. Everything was prairie and you could just go wherever you wanted to. You didn't have to follow any road, for there wasn't any.

On July 20, 1897, my father married again. He married a Polish lady and she had a son about the same age as I. She spoke some English, but the little boy didn't. You can imagine how we got along. I spoke English and he spoke Polish and neither one understood the other. If he couldn't get what he wanted, he took it away from me. (laughs)

By that time, we were both school age. I was five years old that year, I was eligible to go to school. And Frank, the stepbrother, was also. So, we went to school, which begun always, in the sandhills, where we lived--the school begun the first Monday in December and lasted until the end of April. And we walked to school, except when it was stormy, then our dad took us in the wagon. There weren't very many children in the school because there weren't very many people living in the district. There was only two other families beside ours that had schoolchildren, so most of the time, there was three or four pupils. And the teacher came from Chapman, Nebraska, and she lived with the Karges family--my family. The teacher's name was Grace Bunker. She taught our school for three terms. She became like one of the family, we got to know her so well.

My father was born in Germany. He came to the United States when he was a small child, ten months old. And the family stopped off in Wisconsin, and they lived there for three years. My dad often said the climate there was so poor and the milk he drank was so thin that he didn't grow hardly any during the whole while he lived there, he wore the same clothes when he left there that he'd had when he came, so you can imagine how small he was. If he was ten months old and wore the same clothes for three years, it's funny those clothes lasted that long.

But they migrated to Nebraska--they heard about homestead privileges in Nebraska, so they came directly to Duncan, Nebraska, which was then known as the Village of Cherry Hill. It was named Cherry Hill because of sand cherries growing on the hills north of the village. By the time they come there, my dad's uncle and aunts were teenagers. They were children when they came from Germany, but the two of 'em, the two eldest, married and remained in Wisconsin, where they lived in Milwaukee. The rest came with the grandparents, they all came and they lived on a farm for a while until they went on their own. There was one uncle that married and went to live on a farm west of Silver Creek, Nebraska. And my grandmother, she worked as a maid in a farm home and the other two girls both went to town, to Columbus, where they got jobs. Later they found husbands and they established their homes in Columbus, Nebraska. And their names--the grandfather's name was John Karges, that's what I think, that's what I've been told. I don't know--I think his wife's name was Ann. Their children, one was John, and Ann and Martin. My grandmother was Eva; and the other two aunts were Elizabeth and Katie. And Katie married a man named Phillip Dietz and Elizabeth married a man William Scholz. And my grandmother married a man named William Mason. The other uncle, Martin, married a lady--her name was Ann, her last name was Solm; but she lived only a few years and she had a daughter by a former marriage. After her death, Uncle Martin married again and he married a younger lady, a girl named Ann Kresha [?]. She survived him, she lived for many years, she lived to be 87 years old. Uncle Martin, as we knew him, we always knew him by Uncle Martin because that's the way our dad knew him, our dad knew him as Uncle Martin, so everybody called him Uncle Martin. He died at the age of 77.

My mother came to America with her family, the John Scholz family. They were five or six children with the parents and more were born later, after they were living in Platte County, where they located. They located north of Duncan, Nebraska, on a small acreage near the Loup River. The members of their family were John, Anna, Amelia, Frances, Frank, Joe, Charles, and Laura. Charles was the youngest. John and Anna were the oldest. They all came from Austria [Austro-Hungarian Empire]. That was their native country and the town was called Hockovitz.

When they located on the farm, they didn't have, well it was just like everybody else. They were pioneers, they only had what they could earn, what they could raise. They engaged in farming and of course, they had to make do with what they could. They didn't have a whole lot, they had to get along. They were just like all the other pioneers.

When Charles, the youngest, was three years old, the mother died and then the father had to finish raising the family. Charles was three years old and Laura was a little older than he and some of the girls--the oldest girl was married. John wasn't married and the other boys weren't married yet either, they were all teenagers. But Grandfather kept them all together. He wasn't very strong, he wasn't very well, he was a cancer victim also. But the boys stayed with him and helped him to get along, to raise the family and to educate them as was proper in those years. Nobody sent their children to high school.

They went to country school--that's what they got along with, the education that they could get in the country school.

John became a farmer, Frank became a carpenter, Joe became a barber, and Charlie became a farmer also. And the girls, well, Melie became my mother and Ann married a farmer and Laura married a farmer and thus it was. They all married people according to who they associated with, and they all became honest citizens of the country where they lived. Most of them all lived in Nebraska, with the exception of Frances, when she married she moved to Canada to make her home.

I suppose you'd like to know what my parents looked like, their coloring, their temperament and so on. My mother was an inch taller than my dad. She was five foot nine. She had real dark brown hair, dark brown eyes. She was a strongly built person. Being so tall, why, she'd naturally be well built. Farm girls were well built, you know. She was a thoroughly domesticated person, I guess you would say. She loved fancy work. She did fancy knitting, crocheting, and she made some of my clothes, had the most perfect button holes. When they told me that my mother made them, well, every stitch was in place. I didn't know my mother personally because I was so little.

My aunt Frances wasn't married then yet, and she stayed with us a lot when my mother was sick. Later on, when I got to be older to realize those things, we had a hand-made quilt that was made of square pieces about an inch and a half square and they circled the quilt round and round and round. The name of the quilt was "Trip Around the World." And from that time on, I always kept thinking, I wonder if I'll ever get to make a quilt like that one. We had it on our bed, we had it until it wore out, of course. But I always kept thinking about that quilt. And once I saw the pattern was advertised in a magazine, I sent for it. And from that time on, I always kept thinking about hand-made quilts. Of course I made some in my time, but then, you know, when you're raising a family, you don't have time to sew quilts, you have to see to it that they have clothes to wear and that the washing is done, and the cooking is done, and whatever.

I suppose you want to know about my dad. Well, the first that I can remember of my dad, his hair was half gray, but I could tell that his hair was brown, kind of a sandy brown. He had real bright blue eyes and he always wore whiskers in the wintertime. He said that he had to do that to keep his face from chapping. So when wintertime came, he wore whiskers. Ma used to tease him that she wanted him to shave like other men did, but he said, "Other men don't have faces like mine. I wear whiskers for the comfort of my face." And that's what he did.

In spite of all the troubles he had, all the bills and everything, the way he hauled my mother from one doctor to the other during the years when she was sick . . . She had surgery three times, they went from one doctor to another, hoping to find somebody that could do something to . . . Those days, you know, people mistakenly thought cancer could be cured. While nobody found a cure for it, but everybody kept hoping. Of course, when her time come to die, well, she died. She was 28 years old and a little older. If she'd lived to the following July, she'd have been 29, but she died in January. She was 28 years and some months old. When my dad paid the hospitals and everything, he didn't [have the money], he had to borrow the money. His uncle Martin Karges, his namesake, signed his paper. Then he paid 'em off, one after the other, as much as he was able, a little at a time. I was 14 years old when he paid the last doctor bill to a Columbus doctor. The doctor had died and they were settling his estate and the administrator called on my dad, couldn't he pay something on it? "Well," he says, "you know," he

says, "I'm married, I'm raising a family," and he says, "you know it costs money to raise a family and I have doctor bills too, but," he says, "I've got some young horses. If you can take those horses on the doctor bill, you're welcome to." So they came out, two men on horseback came out, and they took three young horses that hadn't been trained to the harness. They were halter-broken, but they weren't trained to the harness. They drove those horses to Columbus. Those horses went in payment--the last payment of my mother's doctor bill. The doctor's name was William S. Evans, he was in Columbus, a doctor there for many years until his death.

Maybe I should tell something about my dad's occupation. I mentioned something in my previous talk that he had the occupation of taking in cattle to pasture. When he got his patent on his homestead, before he married my stepmother, she had filed on 160 acres that was nearby and so we decided we had to live on Ma's homestead for five years, so Dad continued his cattle herding occupation, but this time, he rented different tracts of land and he put fences around them and put up windmills. He always had, every summer, he'd have a school kid from town, who'd make his home with us, who would ride those fences. They'd ride a different fence. He and--my stepbrother Frank was older by then, and he and Frank would ride the fences with staples in their pockets and a hammer, and whenever there'd be staples missing on a post, they'd get off their horse and nail it up so the cattle didn't get out. The surrounding areas around there, nobody else had this occupation. So any of this land was owned by people that were in town or wherever, that owned the land, Dad would rent it, and of course, he'd take in cattle, as many as the land he had could pasture. He wanted to make sure that the pasture wouldn't be over-grazed because he wanted it to be serviceable for next year. So that's what he did.

My dad was a hard worker. Beside the cattle occupation, he also had what they called a "cream route." Three days a week, he drove around the surrounding countryside gathering up cream because people didn't have any cream separators. They had skimmed cream and there wasn't any cream station in town to buy the cream, so my dad gathered up this cream. He had large cream cans on a big wagon with a wet tarpaulin over the top and he hauled this cream to a creamery at Genoa, Nebraska. He usually traveled around 25 miles a day. He went a different route every day. Once he'd go south, another time he'd go east, another time he'd go north. He'd always manage to gather that cream and get it up to the creamery before 4 o'clock in the afternoon, because riding a cream wagon drawn with horses . . . if you's out on the road that cream would get pretty warm even if the farmer's wife kept it in a tank and kept it cool. It got pretty warm before he got to Genoa if he didn't travel. So he had some fleet-footed horses--broncos, no less. He'd usually take his lunch along and take feed for the horses. When noon came, he'd unhitch and feed his horses so they'd travel better. He'd eat his own lunch and then he'd go again.

Now you probably want to know what sort of person my father was. My father was the most wonderful person, in my book. Honestly. Nobody was any more than my father. He was the number one person in my book. He was a hard worker. He worked day and night, seemed to me. When he come home, many times he'd come home, he'd eat supper, he'd hitch up the horses again and take two hay wagons and drive down to where he had some hay bought--because we lived in sandhills, we didn't have any meadow to make hay. He had to haul hay, he had to buy hay to feed the cows over winter, to feed the horses over winter. If we needed grain, that had to be bought. We didn't do any farming

whatsoever. About the only planting we did, we had a little garden about as big as our house. And Ma planted a few carrots, a little lettuce and radishes and anything that had a long growing season. We could never raise any tomatoes because along in July they'd dry up because it got too hot and dry. So we got along best we could. We always bought the potatoes from Grandma and we bought cabbage from a lady near Genoa that raised it. We'd make sauerkraut and Dad would always grain feed a beef and butcher it so we'd have meat and the same way with hogs. About the only time that Dad bought meat is when he was in town he'd come home with a soup bone. Believe it or not, you could get a soup bone for a quarter. It was what they call a shank. You could get it for a quarter and Ma would cook it and we'd have soup and meat one day and the next day we'd have meat, there'd be meat left for the next day. Well, you know, our family was small. There was just Dad and Ma, Frank and me and the hired boy. That's all there was at the table in the summertime, unless one of the uncles came over. Dad had uncles living at home. They'd come up to help make fence, and they would-- of course they'd eat at our table then, too. Those days, nobody went home for meals. If they come to your place to work, well, you invited them to have dinner with you. That was the rule. My dad was--that was his rule. I don't care who came. There was many a time we kind of lost patience with him. Some agent would come there trying to sell him something and he'd be talking his sales talk, of course, and Dad'd invite him to stay for dinner. Ma says, "My goodness! Dad invited him for dinner and we've just got leftovers." (laughs) But they didn't care, they sat at the table, and they thanked us for the meal, and they was real happy. Sometimes they were people that were used to eating at restaurants. They'd say, "Well, when I eat at a restaurant I know just what I'm gonna get and I know just how it's going to taste," he says. "When I eat out in the country, it's something new and I enjoy it a whole lot," he said.

My dad was a loyal family man. His family came first. He looked out for the family and he always emphasized, whatever you told anybody that honesty was the best policy. You got what you paid for and you couldn't get something for free unless it was something no one else wanted.

When the children were little, he told them stories, he sang them songs. Often he'd sit in the rocking chair holding the baby. He'd tell stories to the older ones and he'd sing until the baby fell asleep. Things like that. He enjoyed himself when he could visit with a neighbor. Ma says, "We're not waiting for Pa, he's probably talking to somebody up there on the fence corner." (laughs) So Ma would put his supper in the warming oven and we'd go ahead with our supper. Of course, Dad was always there on time at noon, but when he went to town, we didn't wait for him then either because he'd meet a friend in town and of course they'd pass the time of day and they'd talk politics or whatever men talk about, you know. My dad had many friends. Anybody that he knew was his friend. He really had a host of friends. Of course, he lived in the same area all his lifetime, in Merrick and in Platte County. So that's why Ma said, "Oh, he met somebody he knows and of course they have to talk about everything what happened and so on since they saw each other last."

When the children grew up, they got to be teenagers, they were just the same as they are nowadays. They had dates, they had to go to a dance, to a show or whatever and who knows where they went. The car couldn't talk and the kids weren't talking either because when Dad was scolding, why, they told as little as possible. Dad would wake up, he'd say, "Well, gosh, I didn't hear the kids come home yet." He'd lay there a while and the clock in the kitchen would go "ding" for the half-hour. He'd lay there a little while longer and the clock would strike the hour. Pretty soon the clock would ding again

and still no kids. Believe me, those kids got Hail Columbia the next morning at breakfast! Only some of them didn't come down to breakfast. They got home so late that they slept in. Ma made breakfast, and Dad and the hired man ate breakfast and went their way, and Dad let the kids sleep, because you know, he couldn't trust those half-awake kids on a tractor. They might come into an accident.

So he always kept a hired man, sometimes he had two hired men. When I went there to visit, Ma would say, "You know, it's a good thing my health is better." She says, "If my health was--be like it was when you were home, I couldn't keep up the way I am." She says, "I have to cook for these hired men, and the girls, well, when they get up, they help. But then, when they get home and it's pretty near morning, why, you can't expect very much of them," she'd say. (laughs)

At this time, I think I better tell something about my family. My stepbrother, Frank, was 21 years old when World War I broke out, and of course he was drafted. It just about broke Mother's heart. He was her son by her first marriage. In fact, he was the only survivor. She had three daughters, but he was the only son, and the daughters all died in infancy. Frank was a real nice, upstanding young man. He was tall and handsome like his father, and Ma thought the world of him. She really--she just thought, "Well, now, if he goes to war, he'll never come home alive," but he did. He went to camp in Kansas. From there he went to Germany, with the ammunition train, he hauled ammunition. He says many a time he'd just get past the place and the road would be blown up behind them. After the Armistice was signed, he was with the Army of Occupation in Germany, and he told how nice the Germans were. He said the German people were nice to the American boys. Fact is, a lot of these American boys were of German descent. Some could even speak German. They made friends among the Germans, too, and they were well treated.

When Frank came home--the Armistice had been signed in November and Frank came home the following June. And he come home, was everybody happy to see him. My dad, he couldn't have been happier if it was a child of his own. But he loved Frank just as though he was his own child. Fact is, he reared him from a child of five. The other ones, of course, they were all younger. My brothers and sisters . . . my sister next to me wasn't a teenager, but the others were--they were all teenagers. There was nine of us altogether. Frances was twenty, and the rest of them were all teenagers. My youngest sister, Mary, was six. They was all in steps that way, one next to the other, about two years apart. There was Frances and Adam, Lucy, Celia, Martha, Martin, Mary. Mary was the youngest. Mary was quite a gal, I tell ya. She ruled the roost among the kids. Of course, she was a pet and she knew it. Whenever Ma went to town, "Ma, bring me some candy," she'd say, and she'd always tell the girls, her older sisters, "Now, you better do what I ask you to, or I won't give you any candy when Mama brings some." We always called our parents Papa and Mama until everybody was grown up. Then they became Pa and Ma. But while the children were little, they were Papa and Mama to everybody. Sure enough, whenever Ma came home, she'd always bring a bag of candy for Mary. Mary would pass the candy around, and she'd remember the ones that she wasn't going to give any to. Oh, she was quite a gal.

But you can't make people the way you want them. They'll be what they are. They'll have their own individuality, and same way, when the kids grew older, of course they had to adapt their selves to their duties. The girls, after I married, after Frank got home from the Army, Dad told me, "Now Eva, don't set your wedding day until after Frank gets home," he says, "I want Frank to be home at your

wedding." So sure enough, I was engaged to be married at Easter that time, and I made my intended wait until Frank got home before we had our wedding.

I want to tell you about my earliest childhood memory. We didn't have a funeral at a funeral home, as we do now. The funeral proceeded from the home of the deceased. Of course, my mother lay in state in her casket in the living room. Grandma led me by the hand and she said to me in German, "Come give your mother a kiss." She lifted me up and I bent over and kissed my mother, my dead mother's face. That's the only recollection I have of my mother, how she looked. I don't remember what she wore, I only remember the deathly pallor of her face and I carried that memory with me through the years. After that, when we went to church, when we went to the cemetery, my dad carried me on his arm. I remember seeing the tears run down his face, and I remember how the people gathered around the graveside. The sisters were singing in Latin something that I knew nothing about. I remember how the casket was lowered by the means of straps into the grave, and that's all I remember from the funeral itself. After that, I went home to Grandmother Mason and made my home with her. They had to watch me constantly, I always wanted to go to Mama. And I'd run out to the road as if I was gonna go, go home. They had to watch me. Later on, they still had to watch me. Grandfather and uncles had to watch me because I'd run away. I'd see somebody going down the road and I'd follow them. I'd see Uncle John going somewhere and I'd follow him. Pretty soon, he got onto me, he made himself scarce. He went to the barn and went out the back door and went to wherever he was gonna go.

But it didn't take long and I knew my way around. I'd follow Grandpa Holden to the Sunday school. I'd go to Holdens' . . . if I figured that Grandma Holden was making cookies. Or I'd go to Tolmans', or to Cueleys' [sp?]. I'd even go across the track to people that I lived there--if I thought that Uncle John'd be there, then I went there too. And I didn't go home either. Come evening, "Die kleine Eva, bist du heim?" Grandma would say, and then she'd make the uncles go, one to each house and Grandpa to one house, each one would go to a house to see which one would bring Eva home. When they brought Eva home, she got a spanking for running away. Poor little thing. She didn't know what she was being spanked for. Of course, it hurt just the same. But next time, she'd do the same thing again. And when my dad would come to visit, Grandma would tell him, "Fix [?] eine Mutter für deinest kind"--"Get a mother for your child." Well, that was easier said than done. "Who was I going to get to be a mother to my little girl?"

One day, the answer came. He knew Mr. Vlecik. They went to the same church. Mr. Vlecik came from the old country and he spoke German real well. I never knew him, but then I was told that he was versed in German and he could write it too. When my dad got to know him, when he saw Mr. Vlecik driving into Columbus, he was driving a hog wagon--he had squealing hogs in the wagon. And behind him was his widowed daughter, and she was driving a hog wagon too, and they were taking the hogs to market. And Dad never knew much about Mr. Vlecik's daughter before, but he figured, "Say, she might be a possibility in order to be a mother for my little girl." Some time later he heard that Mr. Vlecik was sick, so he went to call on him and he found out that he had a terminal illness, that he'd lay in bed until the day came. As often as he could, as reasonably often as he had time for, he'd go to visit him. He stopped there on the way from church, or some other time when he'd have time, and one day, Mr. Vlecik said to his daughter, "That Martin that comes to see me is a good man. He'd make you a good husband." That's all he said. He never told her what she should do about it. But come a day when he

asked her the question, and they went to see the priest and the priest made the announcements in church the way it was customary, the way it was prescribed in those days, that a forthcoming marriage had to be announced three times in church. The third announcement came out and Grandpa Vlecik kept getting worse. Finally after the calls all were out, my dad and his intended went to the priest to ask his advice. "Well," he says, "it would be better to wait and see. If your father gets better, all right. Be quietly married. And if not, why, then come and see me again and we'll talk about it more."

So it didn't take long after that, her father died. Her father died on July 8, and so they went to see the priest. He said, "Well, in this case, you better wait a couple of weeks until everything is straightened around, till the funeral is over and everything is more or less on an even routine again. Then come back and we'll talk again." So they did. They went back and he said, "It's all right. Have a very quiet wedding. No music."

So on July 20, they had a quiet wedding and they didn't have any music. After they got home, they had a meal with only a few friends present. Grandma stood me up on a plank seat, made me sing a German song that she had taught me. My grandmother was a teacher in the old country, and she knew how to do those things.

After that, we went to our new home then. My stepmother, when she was still Mrs. Torczon, she filed on a homestead, not far from where Dad's homestead was. And after all the papers and everything were in order, we still continued to live on Dad's homestead the last of that year, and then when spring came, they started building a new house on Ma's homestead. After the house was finished, we moved. We lived there and we went to school, Frank and I. When the school started in December,

Part 2

we was already located in our new home and we could just step out the door and five minutes later we were at school. It was right there--the school house was in the corner and our house was in the corner of our homestead also, so we could run home to get a drink of water and we always went home to lunch. And the teacher lived with us and she did the same thing, we all three of us went home to lunch.

There was only one other family that had children coming to school. There was only three families in the district left, and the one family had all their children grown up. They had one young man who would come to school in the wintertime, and he only came because the neighbor's boy came also. So they only came to school a few weeks in the wintertime, and then when springtime came and they had work to do at home, they didn't come to school anymore.

Then the teacher only had just us three. All three of us were "of an age" and we all were in the same grade. So we had all our lessons every day and along about February, we were through the book and then we started from the beginning again. We stayed in the same grade and the next time it was lots easier for us, especially grammar. Grammar was a tough subject and the first time through, the teacher had to do a lot of explaining and the next time we just breezed through. When April came we was all through our books and we was ready for vacation.

When we were school age, Frank was a great fella for pie. When we lived on Dad's homestead, we carried lunch pails. Frank expected to have pie in his lunch every day. And once, he looked in his pail and there was no pie, he went home and he wouldn't go to school and Ma couldn't do a thing about it, so we both stayed home. But when we lived on Ma's homestead and we came home for lunch, Frank was satisfied, he ate whatever was served.

When we lived in the hills, we didn't raise anything in the garden, that is, to have for winter. For winter Dad bought potatoes and he bought cabbage for kraut, and the rest of whatever we had to eat was bought at the store, just like people living in town. Of course, Dad raised a hog to butcher for meat and we had hens to lay eggs for us and we had hens to butcher to have chicken soup now and then. Ma never had fried chicken in winter. The only time we had fried chicken was in the summertime, just when the chickens were frying age. The chickens usually laid enough eggs, so in spring when the cows were fresh, we milked eight, ten cows, Ma always had butter to sell. The butter and egg money bought groceries for us, and that helped us so we didn't feel like we were living in town, although we had to buy a lot of our food.

We didn't have like most folks on the farm because we didn't have any garden, but we had the other--whatever could be provided, we had. And whenever Dad was away, when he was on the cream route, Ma would have a one-dish lunch. We'd either have scrambled eggs on sandwiches or we'd have pearled barley--she'd put the pearled barley on to cook right after breakfast and it was nice and tender by noon. We'd always have to go and stir it every now and then. Ma would allow me to stir it once in a while too and she'd say, "Now, you be sure to scrape the bottom so it don't stick and burn." Sometimes it did. Ma said, "See, you didn't stir it good enough." But it was good to eat anyhow. Frank and I were hungry and Ma was too, and just the three of us sat down to lunch at the table.

In the summertime we didn't have anybody, unless--if we had the herder boy, well then Ma fixed more for lunch. She said, "You have to set a good table when there are strangers to sit down with you," 'cause she said, "we don't want him to say that he didn't get enough to eat." OK.

[If I had a doll with a] broken head, grandma would buy a new head and then the dolly would come back after Christmas with a new head and maybe a new dress if Grandma had time to make it. But usually Grandma didn't have much time to sew because she didn't have any help, she didn't have any girls. And boys, they weren't much help. What she made was usually something that was knitted. She didn't have any sewing machine, so she didn't do much sewing.

When Grandma got through doing things for Christmas, well, you know, she had her hobbies. She always made things. She'd save pictures from a magazine or from a newspaper, and she had all those things stashed away and when she come to make a picture book or something, she trotted them out, and they was all done up nicely and we'd get a book, but the worst of it is--the book was for me, but usually the baby would tear it up. We'd let the babies look at it to keep her quiet, and first thing we knew, it would be torn up. But the way it was, we had fun while it lasted. Of course, I don't think Grandma intended it to last forever, either.

With the rest of us going to school and so on right after Christmas, the teacher would prepare us for Washington's birthday, and we'd learn songs and we'd learn poems, and then we'd invite the mothers and they'd come in the afternoon on Washington's birthday and we'd have a little program.

We'd usually have greeting cards and things like that--merit cards, they used to have. They'd call 'em merit cards, and they'd have a fancy picture on 'em with colored birds and so on. They only did 'em while we was going to school in the hills, and when we went later on to different--other schools where there was more children, they didn't give those merit cards anymore. That was out. So that made our school life interesting. Of course when we prepared for this program, we had to learn special songs and we had to learn poems to recite. That was interesting to have. Later on, when we had an afternoon--when we was all through with our studies and it wasn't time to go home yet, we'd sing songs. Different ones of us had the privilege of choosing the song. We sang "My Country 'Tis of Thee," "Fair Is Our Country," "Columbia, Gem of the Ocean." And then there was another song that I liked real well when I was going to the country school, it was called "Hark, the School Bell Now Is Ringing" and I still remember snatches of it. There was another one I liked real well, it was called "Spring Song." And it told about, it started out, it said, "Trill bird up in the apple tree." Then it went on and it told about all the different things that went on out in the country, out in the wide open spaces. And I remembered those songs for quite a while.

Then for the last day of school we had a song we called "Vacation Is Here, Vacation Is Here." That had three verses. When we had a program the last day of school, of course, all these favorite songs were sung. There had to be something to make a program. After all, there were only three pupils! If we was going to have a pupils' program, well, all the pupils had to be in it. They couldn't do any excuse, they couldn't have a cold or anything like that, they had to expect to take part. That's all there was to it. Teacher's mother was there, teacher's daddy was there, and we had to put our best foot forward. It went that way as long as we lived there. After we moved away, that school disbanded. There was only one girl left and her little brother, that's all there was left to go to school there. Well, so the district officer said we'll transfer our pupils to District 10. So that's what they did, the pupils went to District 10 after that, after we moved away. When we left there--when we moved off of Ma's homestead, we moved onto a farm. We didn't live in the hills anymore. We lived on a farm ever afterward. That's it.

The farm we moved to, it was one that Ma inherited from her father and it was on the Loup Valley. It was about five miles north of where we lived and it was on the north edge of the sandhills. Although the land was light loam, it was farmland and it raised crops, and ever after, we lived on a farm. We lived there only about a year and a half, maybe two years, and it was so far away from everything. It was, I guess, ten miles to Genoa and it was nine miles to Duncan and eighteen miles to Columbus. When you drove horse and buggy, you went right after breakfast, and when you come home, you had to get supper right away. It took that long. Not only that, but we all had sick headaches if it was in the summertime when it was hot. We had to come home in the heat of the day. Even if we went in the morning, when it was cool, it was OK, but when we come home in the heat of the day, we all had a sick headache before we got home. So we never went to town very often.

When we lived on that place, and we found out how far it was to go to town, to go to church, and we was in walking distance of school, but Frank and I needed to go to sisters' school because we needed to be prepared for first Holy Communion. So Dad took the two of us and took us to Duncan and we were boarding students with the sisters. In the meantime, the place was sold. Ma didn't care about living over there, she says, it was such a big house and so cold in winter and of course hot in summer. The house was old, uninsulated and everything, just like every other house in those days. And after the

house was sold, then--after the place was sold, they looked around where they could buy after the man made the payment where they could buy a place, so--to reinvest the money. In the meantime, Dad made the arrangement with Grandma, my stepmother's mother, he rented her place for ten years, then the house that was on the homestead got moved down to Grandma's place so we'd have a place to live. Grandma remained there, she remained in her own home. Grandma had her brother, older than she, living, making his home with her, he was a single man. And so Dad said, "No, you don't have to do anything, stay right where you are. I'll move a house for my family and we'll live on the same place, but we'll live in our house, and you'll live in yours and you'll eat at our table. You don't have to cook because you're getting old already." And that suited her alright. So that's what they did.

And when we lived there, the neighboring place joining was offered for sale, so Dad and Ma bought it. But it didn't have hardly any buildings on it, the buildings were all old. The place had been farmed, but nobody lived there. The man that owned it lived elsewhere. So that's what he did. We lived on Grandma's place and we farmed both places, both Grandma's place and the other one joining. It was owned by a man named Sirwanka and it was known as the Sirwanka place. So, through the years, that's the way it was. Both places were farmed, Dad had plenty of work to do and he still kept the pasture, the place where we lived in the sandhills, where Ma's homestead was, Dad kept that to have for pasture for his own cattle. And he took in any surplus that he thought there would be grass enough for. He wouldn't take as many cattle as he used to in former years, he'd take in pasture for maybe 25 or 30 head, because he didn't have pasture for any more. That way he had a little income from the pasture money and taxes weren't what they are now. The money from the pasture was enough to pay the taxes, and he liked that real well. And it also gave him a chance to go up there to check the cattle, he got something to do on a Sunday afternoon, drive up to the hills to see how the cattle were doing or if it was wind still, he had to go up there to see if the cattle had water, if the windmill was pumping and maybe make sure the windmill isn't broken down, and things like that. It was just a kind of an extra--something extra to think about and to do.

He worked night and day, I tell you. My dad was a hard worker. He always had plenty to do. Usually we had good crops because it was good land, although a couple of years we had floods, we didn't have very much crop in those years.

In 1904 we had a flood, and it drowned out the corn and Dad replanted it. It barely come up and another flood came. And we didn't raise corn, only on some of the high places that year. The cattle didn't even want to eat the hay because the flood waters carried sand into the grass and when wintertime come, they didn't want to eat the hay because it had sand in it. But they had to, there was nothing else. And so that's the way it was, we had to make do.

When I was 15 years old, an event occurred that changed my life. Before that, everything went along fairly . . . about like anybody else. But to me it was different, I had an accident and lost the sight in one eye. It happened right in the kitchen, by the kitchen table. Frances was teaching Adam spelling, and Adam, every once in a while he'd miss a word and I'd coach him. I was behind the cupboard door and he was sitting on the other side and I'd whisper to him. Frances was the teacher, she was hearing his spelling. "I'll show you," she says. She grabbed a table fork off of the table and threw it at me. It hit me in the eye, and that cost me my eye. I didn't see out of that eye anymore. And I suffered with that eye for nearly a year. I went to the doctor, I went to Omaha; the doctor said that eye is no good, might as

well have it removed, wear an artificial eye. And I remembered a man in Columbus that had an artificial eye, and I thought, "My, no, I don't want to look like Charley Bushman." So I said no, I'd put up with it. And the doctor told my dad, he says, "Well, you've got to look out," he says, "you have to watch that carefully." He says, "If any infection sets in, why, she's liable to lose the sight of her other eye; then she'll be blind the rest of her life."

So I didn't know what to do. I tell you, I worried and I fretted all to myself, I didn't tell anybody. I was a person that didn't cry on anybody's shoulder, but I did. I stayed with my dad's aunt in Columbus and went to the doctor every day, to a regular eye doctor. And while I was there, they took me to the hospital and they performed surgery to disconnect the nerves from--the one eye from the other, just in case if infection would set in that it could be detected before it got too much headway. And that's all they ever did. And he did that without any anesthetic. Was that some suffering! After I got over that, I went home again. Before that, my aunt Elizabeth says, "Go to sisters and ask sisters for some of that miraculous Lourdes water." She says, "Maybe that will help you." She says, "You use that water every day and you pray." She says, "You've come to the time when only God can help you." So that's what I did. I went to the sisters, and the next time I come to church, Sister says, "Come next Sunday, I'll have it for you." So she did. She had a little bottle with about a tablespoonful of water in there. And she says, "Now," she says, "when you use it, you take an eyedropper and put just one drop in each eye and pray to our Blessed Lady. She'll look out for you." And she did.

I had medicine from the doctor in Omaha, but somehow or other, it didn't seem to do anything much. But after I used the Lourdes water, I was nearly well by then, so I guess it was just all right. It worked out good anyhow.

Before my eye accident, I had aspirations to become a nun. I spoke to Mama about it one day, and she said, "Now, that's serious business, you better talk to Dad about it." So, she says, "Sometime when you have a chance, you talk to Papa and see what he thinks." So, I watched my chance when I could talk to Papa without having any sisters or brothers butting in and saying this or that. When I had him all to myself, I told Papa and he said, "Look, Eva, Mama isn't very well, she needs an operation"--that's what they called surgery in those days--"and the doctor said that she has to have that in order to be well again, and she can't have it now at this time. She needs you." He said, "The sisters don't need you, but Mama does. And I would like you to stay home until Frances, your next sister, is old enough to take over what you're doing." Frances at that time was nine years old. And within three or four months later, I had the eye accident. And after that, well, I thought with this imminent blindness staring at me, which might or might not happen, well, it changed things, believe me, it changed my outlook on life entirely. I didn't see things the same as I did before, because of what was going on, people talking. Dad'd come home and say, "So-and-so wanted to know if Eva's going blind." And I'd hear 'em and I'd go away somewhere and have a cry about it. That's the way it went on.

Thus the time went on. Many a time, when I went after the cows in the evening, I'd think about those deep swimming holes that I knew about. And I thought, well, now, I'd take the easy way out and jump in. But my Catholic upbringing prevented me. My deep faith and no doubt my folks were praying for me too that everything would be well; of course, I prayed too. And I always did live a devout life, as much as I was able to, knowing the way--different people that knew my mother said that she was a devout Catholic all her life, and I thought, I couldn't do any better than that. If I could do as well as my

mother did, well, I'd be satisfied. I figured that God would repay me for anything and any sacrifices that I'd ever make.

When I was 21 years old, I started out on my job, the first one I had away from home. It happened that my brother Adam was through school, Frances was through school, that is, they didn't elect to go to school anymore. And the next ones--there was three sisters in a row, and Dad figured, oh, they wouldn't be able to take care of a horse and drive in all kinds of weather and so on, so he met with the president of the telephone company in Columbus one day and they were looking for a telephone operator for the Duncan exchange. And between the two of them--they was both good talkers--between the two of them they figured if he could find a girl that would live in Duncan--because they had to move the telephone exchange and they wanted somebody that would move in right away when the exchange was moved, so--to make the move expedient, so it'd be smooth sailing. Telephone service and so on. So that's what they did. Ma rented part of a building that she owned for the telephone office and they fixed it up. I was supposed to be the telephone girl, and my two sisters were supposed to live with me and go to school. That was in the agreement. So that's the way they did.

And while I was working there, it was the next year, after I was established there as a telephone operator, once I come home from church one evening, and I had a great big pain in my side. And first thing I know, the girl that lived with me--there was two of us who lived there all the time, and the girls always went home, my sisters went home for the weekend. And the girl that lived with me was scared, she called the doctor. The doctor came, "Yah, appendicitis." And what to do. So I stayed in bed the next day and she took care of the switchboard. And it just kind of dragged on for a while and I wasn't able to work. They had to get a different girl to take my place because the girl that stayed with me had a job--she had a job working in a store. I had to do what all the rest of them did, I had to go to the hospital and have the appendix removed, and then after I recovered, I went back there again and it went on as before for a while. One day, the girl that I lived with--that is, we both lived there together--she says, "I'm engaged to be married. How is it, suppose we change jobs, I take the telephone office so I'll have a place to live and you take my place in the store and you can stay here then too? And, you never know, you might be able to find a nice other place to live?" And it turned out that way too.

When Stella got married, Ma decided she'd move to town so the town kids could--when she found out what was going on--she owned a house in town, so she moved to town during the school year and the school kids lived with her, and my sister Frances was old enough to take over by then and she took care of the farmhouse. She cooked for Dad and for the hired men and for--Adam lived at home too then yet.

So that's the way we did. Stella got married and she lived in the telephone office. I lived there for a time and I went to work in the store. And after Ma moved to town, I went to live with Ma, of course. It was a little farther to walk, but I enjoyed being . . . it was just like home, being with Mama. And inside of six months the store had financial reverses and closed for business.

So what did I do? I went back to the farm. They didn't need me at the telephone office because Stella had that job. So here I was, out of a job, and I was pretty well past marriageable age because . . . and I had a sightless eye and I had an appendectomy. It was an old wives' tale going around that anybody had surgery, why, they couldn't have children anymore. So what prospect was there for me? Well, it bothered me now and then but not too much.

When I went back home, there was plenty to do on the farm. I was right back where I started from. I knew my way around, and in the meantime, well, now and then I'd go to a party. You know how it was at the party? When I went to the party, I went because Ma insisted that the girls couldn't go unless I went along, because she thought the girls (laughing) weren't able to take care of their selves! When I got there--of course I never told her that--when I got there I found out that most of the girls my age, if they weren't already married, they were "going steady." So I went to the dance, but I was a wallflower. Believe it or not, I didn't know how to dance. The other girls sailed around like tops and I sat on the sidelines.

When World War I broke out, there was--a neighbor's boy was going to go to the service, and so they had a farewell party for him. It was in the summertime and they had it on . . . out along a stream of water that ran through our place. And it was lovely, under the trees, the stream running by, the kids puddled around in the water. The girls, different girls that I grew up with were there--married, of course, but they were there. They were invited to the party and they were there. That day I met Adolf Kresha. He was romantically inclined, his wife had been dead for over two years and he thought, well . . . He told me afterward, I didn't know about it before, but his sister told me afterward that she told him, "Why don't he get married again?" So, he said then--then the girls don't have to stay home to make a home for him and they can make their own life. That's what she told him.

He didn't tell me about it until, oh, we were married I guess a couple of years and he thought of it. We was sitting there on the porch one day, and he got to talking about this and that and reminiscing and he told how it happened that he--he said he never thought of getting married again until his sister told him. His sister told him, "I know a girl that she'd make a good wife for you. She's a good girl, I knew her all her life and I know she's a good girl. She's kind of 'in the family' but she's not related to you. She's my husband's nephew's daughter and she's not a 'young chicken.' She's one of these gals that's got a good head on her and she'll make you a good wife." So . . . he thought of that when--down by the creek when they was passing out ice cream and I was helping the girls dish up the ice cream to the kids, and he come up there to get his dish of ice cream too, and he, he--I just thought to myself, I wonder why he's got such a big smile. But then I didn't know anything about it until after they all went home and my dad told afterward. He says, "Aha, he's got an eye on you!" (laughs) You know, every time they'd have a chance to tease me about something, they really did. And that time, Dad did the teasing.

So that's the way it was. The Lord sent him my way.

It went along till the fall of the year and the neighbor's boy went on to service. And we were about ready to move to our new home on the next farm, right--next farm to where we had been living. And Frances says, "Eva, we got to push this thing. We gotta get moved here." She says, "The flu is going around and if it ever hits us, here we'll be, half of our belongings are in the new house and half is here and we won't be able to even take care of ourselves." She says, "Let's us, whenever there's a team of horses that isn't working, we'll hitch up the team of horses and haul over what we can. And as soon as the men folks have time, why, we'll corner 'em up and say 'Let's get moved' so we can get settled." And that's what we did.

The weather was nice that fall, and we moved part what we could, what Frances and I could move. Of course, we couldn't move the heavy furniture or the beds. And one Sunday, here comes Adolf and his daughter Sophie to visit us on a Sunday afternoon. So, the house was tore up, but then we made

'em welcome and we visited. And shortly after that, we got moved. We barely got ourselves moved, I guess it was the first week in December, Dad got sick. And he never was so sick before, and he says, "I think I got the flu," and he went upstairs into one of the rooms that already had a bed, it was Frances's room, but he took charge of it because he wanted to be isolated. He didn't want to have anybody else catching it, if it was the flu. And so we waited on him, we run up and down stairs to wait on him. He barely got out of bed, and we kept cautioning him all the time, "Now Pa, don't you go out running around getting a back-set. That's what's been happening to these people around: they feel good and they think that they're over it, and they get out and then they get pneumonia and then they carry 'em out to the cemetery. And you ain't ready for that yet." And Dad thought, well, that's a mouthful. But it didn't take long. Dad was barely able to be up and around and he had to get out and go and see how the hogs were doing and how the chickens were doing. He had chickens across the creek, in a house over there. And they were doing real well. He had to be over there to gather the eggs. And (laughing) so we just didn't know what to do about Dad because he was kind of willful that way. He wouldn't mind us. Ma talked to him and us kids talked to him, but he had his own way. It didn't take long, one after the other of us got the flu too, we all come down with the flu in the same week.

They moved the piano in the living room, they moved it over to in the middle and they made a bed on one side for Frances and on the other side for Adam. And the dining room became the hospital beds for the girls. I didn't get it till toward the last. Ma's bedroom had me and Celia and Ma and Mary in it. Martin was just a young kid then, he was only, I guess, eight or nine, and . . . I don't know just where, they had everybody on the ground floor and they got a lady from Duncan, the doctor got a lady from Duncan to come out and stay with us, to take care of us. As far as I know, none of our relatives and none of our people in our neighborhood died of the 1918 flu. But we'd see it in the paper or hear tell of different people in town that felt good, they thought that they were well and they got out and then they'd get a back-set and a few days later they were dead. So that put scares into a lot of people. They better took care of their selves. And when you went to church, the priest didn't preach a sermon, he only said mass in the shortest possible time so people wouldn't be exposed to each other, come in contact with each other.

At age 25, I had a boyfriend, Stanley Sotarsky, and we were serious about each other. We went to the priest and had the priest make the announcements in church. Then there were different ones telling him about the situation, how my eyes were, that I might go blind or something like that. What would he do with a blind wife? And you know, there were some people, among the Polish folks anyhow, that they did that just to see whether they'd get cold feet or not. And he did, he got cold feet. So, I told him, "Well, I'm not going to hold you to it. If that's the way you feel about it, alright, go to the priest and stop the proceedings." So he did. And I felt that I owed it to Adolf Kresha to tell him, so I'd tell him, so it wouldn't be someone *else* telling him. I felt that I should tell him myself. Then he'd know the truth. If he heard it from somebody else, he might think it's only gossip. And I knew he was interested in me and he told me so when they come over. They come over for New Year's, and they had supper with us, and when he was ready to go home, why, he told me how he felt about it. And I told him, "Well, I can't give you any answer right now." He says, "Maybe I can tell you more about it later on." Well, it was . . . children were running around there and it was right there among the family, and so I thought it would be best to write a letter. That's what I did.

After I wrote the letter, told him how things were, it seemed like his announcement was just-- maybe just a week or so ahead of this other happening, that I just got through telling you. And then things went forward from then on. He renewed his courtship. He didn't care. He says, "Stanley or no Stanley. If Stanley would get cold feet, well, that's his hard luck." (laughs)

So, it didn't take long, we were making wedding plans. He wanted to get married in May, after Easter, in May. And I said, "No, Dad insists that Frank be home before our wedding," which--I told about it here a while back. So we waited, but we did set our wedding date for the last week in June. We thought surely Frank would be home by then because the Armistice was signed in November and we'd watch the papers and we'd see where different divisions of soldiers, and different regiments and so on, were coming home from overseas, and we thought surely Frank would be home by then. And that's the way it was.

And when we had our wedding, Dad says, "We're going to have a real old Polish wedding." They put up a platform out in the yard, they hired a Polish orchestra, and they danced Polish, and they sang Polish, and we had a Polish wedding dinner. Of course, he wasn't Polish, Adolf Kresha wasn't Polish, but he had a lot of Polish relatives in the married circle. And of course, I lived in a Polish community, and it was just all right. We went to Polish weddings, and so Dad insisted that I have a Polish wedding, too.

When I married Adolf Kresha, there was a lot of adjustment to be made. He was twenty years older than I, and I was only five years older than his eldest daughter! But we decided we was going to make a go of it. And the give and take was more or less on both sides. We didn't let anything spoil our good resolve; we resolved to make a go of it. We was going to have a harmonious home, and we did.

The following year, Sophie and her brother Leo moved to another farm. Her brother Leo started farming, and he rented a farm from his uncle, and she went along to keep house for him because he wasn't ready yet to get married. And so the rest of them were all at home and we had a ready-made family. We didn't go on a honeymoon, we didn't go on any trips or anything like that. After the wedding, I gathered up my wedding gifts and my personal belongings and I moved into his home and took up my duties as a wife and a mother. I became a mother right away because there were stepchildren that needed a mother's love.