

Audio transcription of Eva Frances Karges Kresha, life stories recorded, 1920 – 1950

Marriage to Adolf Kresha, Sr.

During my middle years, as mother of a large family, my first and foremost interest was in my family's welfare. My school-age children were sent to religion instruction while it--when held through school year. There was a religious vacation school during the summer. One special stands out in memory, when my small daughters were in first communion class. Due to their tender age, I consulted our pastor. Said he, "Oh yes, they know their faith, they are old enough." Thus, my girls were the first communion class of 1936: Patty Kresha, age six; Mary Kresha, age five.

During depression, of thirties, my husband was elected as road overseer, a job that was eliminated a few years later. In those days, country roads were of dirt construction, built with horse-drawn equipment. Husband drove to his work in morning, taking his lunch, feed for his horses, and returned home after closing time. Many of the family were in school, and I fixed six lunch pails each school day. Keeping family in shoes was a big order those days. In spite of tight finances, there was reason for counting our blessings. There was no serious illness during depression. We learned to make do with what we had. We formed a pattern of family life, each encouraging one another to do our best. This proved to be a good motto. We had formed a good philosophy, and all lived up to the goals we established. Determination and perseverance was our rewards.

Husband and I were well pleased with our fine family. They received an education, though none went to college. They did better, had more advantage than their parents had. We could truly be proud of our fine family. If we had this problem to solve over again, I don't think we could have done different. You do as you can, not as you would like. Yes, there were lots of prayers, and God answered most of them, sometimes beyond our expectations. We lived the faith handed down to us by our parents. We kept God's commandments. We brought up our children to love and serve God and do His will. This, I believe, is an honest endeavor and worthy of all the struggle that it takes.

My personal philosophy was quite simple throughout my life: I tried to be myself. The saying "Everybody's doing it" didn't cut any figure with me. I walked in my own shoes. I tried to train my family along the same lines. I'd say, "We're *not* keeping up with the Joneses."

There were various happenings that caused changes in my life. I believe the chief instance that caused the greatest need for adjustment was when, through an accident, I lost the sight of one eye at age fifteen. Some of my youthful ambitions had to be given up. Again, I had to do as I could, not as I would like. This convinced me that I should not try to have a hero idol, like Sister Teonilla. My ambition was to be able to be a teacher and to play the organ in church the way Sister Teonilla did. She was my ideal of what I thought could be the very highest attainment that I could reach. But I had to give it up. I loved to read, and I loved to sing, but my parents put the fear in me that I should stay away from the reading. And of course, you need to read in order to sing once in a while, too, because you can't sing by heart all the time. So I put it aside because I was so afraid that what my parents were afraid of would come true, that I would lose my eyesight entirely, and I sure didn't want to go blind. Now here I am, aged 87, I'm still able to see what I need to see, able to read, to write, to sing if need be, and I *think* I'm living a normal life. Now I'm in the process of making a hand-made quilt. I've sewed it all with needle

and thread. I made all the blocks, I assembled them together, and now I'm going to put the batting and the lining in it and have a real honest-to-goodness, hand-made quilt.

Now I want to tell you something about the food and the modes of cooking that we during my time, during the years that I was raising my family. My husband used to tell about foods that they had in the old country. They had neither corn nor tomatoes. He had to learn to like those foods when he got to America. He often said he came to America chiefly because they had plenty of meat in America--something they hardly ever had in the place where he came from, and he loved his meat, so we always had home-butchered meat--plenty of it. And of course, we always had to have plenty of bread because we had a large family. I baked bread every other day, and I usually baked eight loaves. And on Saturday, of course, we always had to have Kuchen. Well, you know, the German word for Kuchen was something like you'd say in this country, "coffee cake." But my family loved these bun-shaped ideas--rolled dough with fruit filling. And the kids called 'em Kuchen. Of course, it had come from the word, in the old country, they called 'em "hand Kuchen." They was just a hand-shaped bun that they could take in their hands, that they didn't have to cut it first--like you would coffee cake, you have to slice it, you know. Or cut it in squares. Hand Kuchen, all you had to do was just grab one and run, and that's what the kids did. Soon as they were cool enough to handle, they'd grab one and run outdoors to eat it.

Then of course there was all kinds of different other things that we did. I usually made pans of oven-baked beans. We'd take the white beans and cook 'em till they were soft and then put 'em in the oven with brown sugar and molasses or whatever we was going to add to 'em, and then they baked for a couple hours until they were just real nice and done and good to eat. And we usually fixed those to have to eat when we were doing something else and didn't have time to do a lot of getting vegetables from the garden. Well, then, we had baked beans and maybe cornbread and meat, of course, and anything else that went along with it.

And then, in the fall of the year, we always had a big how-do-you-do about digging potatoes. And anybody that could get out of picking potatoes did so--if they had something to do in the field so they could get out of picking potatoes because that was a back-breaking job: you had to bend over and pick those potatoes into a pail and that pail got pretty heavy when it was close to top. And some of these big guys that thought that they could use a five-gallon pail, well, they soon found out that the ordinary three-gallon pail was plenty big enough. But we got those potatoes picked and we usually had a wagonload of potatoes and put 'em in the cave.

And of course, we made a whole lot of sauerkraut too. First we cut the cabbage off and trimmed it off and put it in the wagon and hauled it home, and then it got a second trimming, and then it was hauled into dishpans and we spread out a clean white sheet on the porch and stacked up those heads of cabbage. And when it come to cut the sauerkraut, well then we rolled in the barrel into the kitchen and it stood right next to the water boiler that heated hot water that was next to the range. It stood there because it had to be in a warm place to ferment that kraut. We cut the cabbage and run it through a cutter on the porch and carried it into the kitchen and fixed it with salt and so on until the barrel was full. Then, when the cabbage was completely cured, then we took it out into dishpans or any large containers that could hold a large amount. Then the barrel was taken down cellar. When it was placed down there where we wanted it to be, then this cabbage in these other containers was carried down there and repacked into the barrel, and there it was during the winter.

And every once in a while during the winter when I had quite a bunch of fruit jars empty, I'd pack some in fruit jars. Canned it against the time when warm weather would come--well, cabbage didn't keep very well in an open barrel, so we had it sealed in quart jars--that was my favorite size, to put it in quart jars--and then when I come to cook it, it was just enough for our family, when the quart of kraut was cooked. And it kept. Of course, it didn't keep forever--you might know, we ate it. (laughs)

We had a root cellar, and you can imagine what a haul it contained--a wagonload of potatoes and a couple of bushels of carrots, and beets, and anything else that didn't get eaten during the summer, well, when--come fall, we took--when we hauled everything home from the garden, whatever was left out there was hauled home and carried down cellar, and then it was covered with dirt to keep the carrots and stuff crisp and fresh. We found that if we didn't cover 'em with dirt that they soon wilted, and become tough and lost their flavor. And the fresh dirt on 'em kept 'em appetizing. The kids would go down there--when they was hungry and it was too close to mealtime to eat a piece of bread, well they went down cellar and got a carrot and cleaned it and ate it.

My kitchen never had any small-size saucepans. They were usually kettles of generous size, not less than four quarts. And if we did have any saucepans, well, they were used mostly to warm up leftovers or maybe to cook icing for a cake. We made cake once in a while too because the family loved cakes. Our family was just like any other: they loved cake. And when we cooked, of course, with these large kettles, well, they had something in 'em too. There was a large kettle of potatoes, and there was cabbage, and there was other vegetables--whatever there was in the garden. And of course we brought up canned foods that were down in the basement. There was tomatoes, and beans, peas, corn, you name it. Whatever grew on the farm, that's what we ate when winter came.

Come fall and cool weather, then we had fresh, butchered meat--fresh pork, and then when the beef was ready to be butchered, it usually was real cold winter. And then when the beef was butchered, it was cut up in quarters, and we had an unused room upstairs that we could open the window and shut the door, and it would be cold in there. And well, what if the beef did freeze? We went up there with a saw and we cut off a chunk and let it thaw out and cook it. And that's the way it went through the winter. It was beef and pork. And some of it, of course, was canned, but we always had to can the meat before it froze. We didn't want to have a chance of it losing flavor. We canned as much fresh beef as we could. Of course, there was some that--like ribs, and different ones, cuts that had bone in it couldn't be canned. You can't put boned beef in a fruit jar because it's stiff and hard when you come to get it out and you might break the glass. And we didn't want any glass in our food. So the meat that was canned was usually the type that didn't have bone in it, and the boned meat, that had bones, that's what we used fresh.

When all that meat was all used up, we had to use it up--the canned meat had to be used before warm weather because our cellar wasn't deep enough and the meat--juice on the meat liquefied and then it wouldn't keep. So we didn't count on keeping it through the summer, we planned on using it before the chickens were ready, and when that time came, usually, the beef and the pork that was canned was used up too. Our family seen to it that it was. Then it was chicken every day unless Daddy brought home fresh beef from town when he went to town. We ate chicken, then, the rest of the summer until it was cool enough to butcher some pork, and later on, we butchered beef, and then the same story went on again, through the winter.

In wintertime, especially if it was on Friday--Friday for supper we'd always have tomatoes, stewed tomatoes with toasted bread cubes in it. And there was other different things that we'd have. If we had eggplant, we'd have fried eggplant. There were certain things that were specially reserved for Friday night supper, when the children were home from school, and those days we weren't permitted to eat meat, and we had fish if it was on hand. We liked salmon fish cakes.

And on Saturday, well, Kuchen was a must. My husband called it hand Kuchen. They was what they called prune-filled buns. He'd always buy prunes if he happened to be going to town and they had prunes. Sometimes during wartime, prunes weren't available. But I'd go downstairs, down cellar, and look over my canned stuff, and there'd be--if I had canned wild plums, or I'd have canned cherries, I'd bring 'em up and take the seeds out of 'em and we'd have cherry Kuchen. And if that wasn't available, well, we settled for cinnamon rolls. But my husband always missed those Kuchen.

Whenever we had Kuchen, we always had to have a lot of fresh milk. He'd tell the girls, "Now, you go to the windmill when it's pumping and have the can with the milk in a larger container and let the water pump in the can and stir the milk so it's real good and cold." I didn't think, myself, that that was good for people, to eat fresh bread and cold milk. I couldn't handle it very well myself, but everybody else liked it, so I didn't want to have--to put myself in a separate place. I believed in eating the same as the family did because I didn't want to have anybody to become picky, I didn't want to have somebody say, "Well, I don't want this," or "I don't want that." We all ate what was served. And the same way with many of the other foods. When we had fresh bread and fresh Kuchen Saturday night, well, I thought, fresh milk, cooled, was ideal to go with it, and I didn't fix anything else for Saturday night, and I always tried to manage to have enough of these prune-filled buns so we could have 'em Sunday morning for breakfast, because that was a great favorite for that meal too. If Dad was in town Saturday and brought home Polish sausage, well, we also had Polish sausage for Sunday morning breakfast.

Now I plan to tell you what I know and remember about the origins of my husband, Adolf Kresha. He was born in Austria, in the province of Moravia, and in his native tongue it was called Marrin [sp?], and he was baptized at Nighstadt [sp? or Neustadt?]. He told one time that they baptized him the same day he was born. He was born during the day, and they got him ready as a baby and took him in the evening to church to be baptized. And he also went as a young man--sometimes kids went on a excursion, they went to Gratz or they went to Vienna. He said if they had a festivity of some kind, the band would be playing, the kids would follow that band--wherever that band went, why, those kids followed. He said they got to town and they got hungry--if they had any money with them, or else could beg some from somebody that they knew, they'd buy a dill pickle for two cents or they'd buy a sandwich--something to eat. He said once he followed the band in town and they quit playing, he said the kids all decided they'd go home. And he said, was he ever hungry. He said when he come in the house, nobody was in the house, they were all out in the garden or out in the yard or someplace, and there was a large bowl setting on the table and it had a goodly amount of lettuce salad in it. He got himself a spoon and he fell to eating that lettuce and he kept on eating till it was all gone, and he was just about finished, his mother came in and said, "You, eating lettuce?" "Yes, Mama, was that ever good! I was hungry, and so . . ." "You eat all that lettuce, boy, you're gonna be sick," but he says, "I wasn't, I was hungry and I ate it all." And one time it happened that when he was sick, they killed a

chicken and they gave him some of the soup and a little piece of meat, but he said it wasn't enough to satisfy his hunger. They put everything away in a cupboard up high and they all went outdoors in the evening. So he noticed where Ma put that chicken, and when everybody was gone, he said he climbed up there and got down that dish of chicken and ate it all.

Now I'm going to tell you about my husband's family in the old country. His dad's name was Theodor and his mother's name was Cecilia and her family name was Perzikovska before her marriage, and then they had a family of children, of course. The eldest was Theodor, the next one was Cecilia, the next one was Molly, and then was Louisa, and Annie, and then Adolf, who was a teenager, and Joe was quite a bit younger, he was about eight or ten about the time when they left for America.

And Adolf always wanted to go to America because his brother Theodor and Kuhnel, that was a friend of theirs, they were already in America and they wrote glowing letters of how wonderful life was in America, and of course they wrote letters back and forth and Theodor wrote that meat was plentiful and you always had a good meal, you didn't have to go on a diet or anything like that, like kids will, you know, and they had to come to America. And the parents, of course, held back. They knew very well if they let those youngsters go to America they'd probably never see them again, because when they got to America they sure wouldn't come back to Europe anymore, they knew that.

So they had their pictures taken and they made their preparations and they started out. And they got to--they went by train as far as Hamburg, and there, they embarked on a ship--I don't remember the ship's name, but it was in the summertime of 1888. Molly was the oldest, I suppose she was about in the twenties, Annie was around eighteen or so, and Adolf was fourteen years old when they come to America. And they landed in New York August 8, 1888. And from there--they were in quarantine there for a while, at Ellis Island, he thought it was about two weeks, and when they first came from the old country, their name was pronounced KRAY-sah, and it was spelled K-R-E-H-S-A. They soon found out that people couldn't pronounce their names, they even said Kray-sah or Kreesey or, well, it depended on who said it. Each one pronounced it different. But they hung on. The girls of course got married and changed their names, but Adolf was stuck with his. So, after he was married, when he was eligible for his naturalization papers, the parish priest told him, "Now, Adolf, when you get your naturalization papers, also get the spelling of your name changed." He said, "You don't need to change your name, but just change the two middle letters and it'll sound altogether different and people will be able to pronounce your name." So that's what he did, he put the S where the H was and the H where the S was, and then it come out "Kree-shah." Even if they'd say "Kreh-shuh," or "Kree-shah," well, anyhow, he knew who they meant, they didn't mispronounce his name.

They came directly to Columbus after they were released from quarantine. His brother Theodor was already in Colfax County, east of Columbus, he was working on a ranch, and Kuhnel was there too. Kuhnel's name was Adolf also. And they was working on that ranch, and of course when these people came from Europe--from Austria to Columbus, well, they knew about it too, so they come there and they met 'em, and the girls soon found jobs working for families, and Adolf was just a kid, but he found a job on a farm near David City, and he worked for a man there named Anderson.

Then, of course, when they got acquainted around, they found--Kuhnel and Molly knew each other from the Old Country and they got married, and they located on a farm near Silver Creek, Nebraska. And when they was living up there, then, it also happened that Annie got acquainted with a

widower named Martin Karges. He lived west of Silver Creek in the same area where Kuhnel and Molly located, and of course, when he got acquainted with Annie, he was looking for a wife, and he got Annie--to give Annie the idea that she'd make a good housewife, a good--he had a young daughter, too young to make a home for her father, but she needed a mother's care, and so they were married. And they lived in the same area where the Kuhnels did, though the Kuhnels didn't live there too long, they had a chance to sell out and they had a chance to buy a farm near Gresham, Nebraska, so that's what they did. They sold that farm and they moved to Gresham.

And in the meantime, when Theodor left his job at Risland [sp?], he came to Silver Creek, Nebraska, and he worked in town for some time as a blacksmith, and Adolf come back from David City, of course naturally he went to where his sisters were, and he found a job living with a farmer named John Scholz, and that was in Polk County. It happened that a lot of these people in Polk County hauled their grain to Silver Creek in the wintertime because the roads were better and the farmers had time, and he got a chance to know John Scholz, so he came there for a winter's job, he herded cattle and he also went to school--they had a school there nearby--he went to school and he learned to read and write English.

And in the meantime he was growing up, of course, and when he was about twenty years old, he started out farming for himself. He rented some land--he lived with his sister and brother-in-law--he rented some land. That was in 1894. He planted corn. That was a dry year. Anybody that wanted to raise corn, they didn't have any irrigation. A spell of hot winds came from the south--blew from the south every day, and no rain. He said, in three days, the leaves of that corn just rattled, they were so dry. So his corn--his 1894 venture in farming wasn't very good 'cause his corn dried up.

When he got over to John Scholz's he got acquainted around there too, and he got acquainted with the Kropatsch family. Fact is, John Scholz's wife was a Kropatsch girl. So he naturally got acquainted with the rest of the gang, and as time went on, he married Sophie Kresha--Sophie Kropatsch, I mean. Then she became Sophie Kresha. And then the first year they lived west of Silver Creek, in the same area where his sister lived. But they only lived there one year. The following year they came back to Polk County and they located in the same area where her relatives lived. And then they belonged to St. Andrews Church, and of course they took up farming, and they lived near one of her brothers that was married and well, different ones. Quite a number of her brothers and sisters were married and living in the area, and they all come together on a Sunday to go to church, and then after that they spent the Sunday together in a social way with Grandpa and Grandma Kropatsch.

When you reach an advanced age, as I have, you sometimes wonder how would you like to be remembered. In my case, I'd like my children and their descendants to remember me as a good, simple person that tried to do God's will, keep His commandments, and raise a nice family in the way that they should go--live a good, Christian life. They should do as they have been taught, the way they were brought up.

Of course, I had my favorite poems, my favorite songs. One of my favorite Bible readings was Psalm 22. It's something like this: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He gives me rest in green pastures. He leads me to waters of peace. He refreshes my soul. He guides me by right paths for his namesake. Though I walk through a death-dark valley, I fear no harm for you are with me. Your rod and your staff reassure me. You spread a table before me in the sight of my enemies. You perfume my head

with oil and my cup brims over. Yes, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

And one of my favorite poems is one and the same that carried Christians through all the way from the East all the way through United States to settle the country. The poem was written in the eighteenth century and it was a standby for all the Christians during all that time, and this is the way it goes:

*"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear the hour that I first believed. Though through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come, 'tis grace has brought me here safe thus far, and grace shall lead me home. When we've been there 10,000 years, bright, shiny as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun."*