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ABSTRACT

This booklet features an interview conducted with Hermine Kromnik (b. 1915) and also includes acknowledgments, her family photographs, genealogy, maps, and references (n=15). The interview in the booklet is a personal testimony of Hermine's survival and the results of living in Eastern Europe during World Wars I and II. Hermine's desire was to leave a written legacy for her family. Personal interviews took place between February and May 1995 in West Chester, Pennsylvania, where Hermine lives. Hermine began the interview by remembering her life in the agriculturally rich Ukraine where her grandparents had moved from Germany to find a better life for themselves and their children. The interview describes Hermine Kromnik's experience and strong will to survive in Eastern Europe during World Wars I and II. An afterword includes 12 notes. (BT)

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Preface

This booklet includes an interview that I conducted with Hermine Komnik and also includes acknowledgments, family photographs, genealogy, maps and references. Overall, the interview is a personal testimony of Hermine's survival and the results of living in Eastern Europe during World Wars I and II.

As a Communication Studies Major at West Chester University Hermine suggested that I seek school credit for my efforts. An Independent Study was arranged for ethnographic research. Also, I created a CD-ROM—compact disk read-only memory that documents Hermine's experiences including sound, video, family photographs and text.

Hermine and I first met in 1993 at Calvary Lutheran Church where we both are members located in West Chester, PA after I attempted to find someone to translate a family letter dated 1886 that is written in old-German script. Pastor Steve's wife, Jean Godsall-Myers teaches German at Widner University so I asked her for help. Jean suggested that Hermine Komnik may enjoy translating the letter because she reads old-German script. I received a German and English translation of the letter.

One Sunday morning Jean introduced me to Hermine. She expressed her interest in my family's letter and in me and continued whispering to me without a pause as I bent over listening to her speech that still possessed a German accent. We enjoyed a delightful greeting with one another.

Often Hermine and I talked briefly at church and she always told me that she had a personal story to tell—never had told it—but wanted to tell it. She told me where she lived and to my surprise I pass her home driving from my home to West Chester University and to church. One Sunday I told her if she wanted to tell me a personal story that I would pick her up February 20, 1995 and she could tell me what she wanted to say in my home.

I picked her up on the designated day and our friendship was immediate. As she entered my home I noticed Hermine's face was filled with seriousness and urgency. Politely, I helped her take off her coat and placed it in the foyer closet. We sat down at my family, breakfast table as she began pulling out papers from her pocketbook. Immediately, I offered to take her upstairs to the computer room. I moved books on the floor so that I could place a chair for her to sit next to mine. She opened her pocketbook again bringing forth her personal notes that she had written in German on stenography paper. As Hermine began to talk I booted up the computer and I asked her if I could begin typing as she talked.

After three hours we decided to stop and I drove her home. We planned to meet the next week. I picked her up weekly and she came prepared, ready and willing to talk with me.

In retrospect, I assumed prior to the initial interview that Hermine wished to talk about her immigration to America; however, she began the interview remembering her life as a young child in the Ukraine. As we continued to meet during the year a steadfast and unshakable belief in God emerged through her discourse. Also, Hermine and I have developed a unique friendship. We have enjoyed many visits in each other's home. On occasion I have picked her up and taken her to church. Throughout the year Hermine and I have met and worked on this booklet for many hours. After the interviews were completed in May 1995 and the ethnographic, qualitative analysis and creation of the CD-ROM we decided to create a booklet.

Hermine loves her family very much and her desire to leave a written legacy for her family has reached fruition. Hermine begins the interview remembering her life in the agriculturally rich Ukraine. The Ukraine has very fertile, farm land and was considered the breadbasket of the former Soviet Union. Her grandparents moved from Germany to the Ukraine hoping to find a better life for themselves and their children. Above all, the interview describes Hermine Komnik's experiences and strong will to survive in Eastern Europe during World Wars I and II.

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Mary McCullough, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Communication Studies, West Chester University.

Ronald L. Gougher, Chairperson, Department of Foreign Languages; Associate Professor, West Chester University.

Hermine's son Henry Komnik.

My husband Stanley Oliver.

For Hermine Komnik

"May God be gracious to us and bless us,
and make his face to shine upon us,
that thy way may be known upon earth,
thy saving power among all nations."
(Psalm 67: 1-2)

"Hermine, please tell me the story you have wanted to share for so many years."

"I am Hermine Komnik, born in the Ukraine in January 22, 1915. My great-grandparents came from Germany. My friend Paula Oliver is recording this story.

It was good to live in the Ukraine until 1928. My parents, Karl and Elizabeht Jungus had a farm with horses, cows, wheat, barley and sunflower seeds seventy miles from the Black Sea in Neurosengart. I worked very hard on my family's farm. My parents were very religious and strict practicing Christians. We attended church once a week. Daily my Father read aloud Biblical verses to Mother, my siblings Maria—eldest sister, Elizabeht—second to the eldest, Karl, myself and my baby, brother Johan. He also, led us in family prayer. On Holy Friday my parents fasted until sundown. Also, on this Holy Day we were not allowed to make any noise. The entire family attended two Church services, once in the morning and one in the afternoon. Because of my Father's Biblical teaching I was prepared with a strong and steadfast faith that was tested during the war years—1941-1945—more so than any other time in my life."

"Hermine, can you remember specifically a time when your Father's Biblical lessons first became a reality for you personally?"

"There was never a time when I questioned my parents because I obeyed the fourth commandment. The times were different. We were raised differently. We believed what our parents taught us was right. I realized that Stalin gave orders, telling everyone what to do—that was different."

"Can you remember a time that your Father did something very touching and you realized that he was teaching you goodness?"

"He taught us how to pray. He explained to us that the Lord would answer all prayers. My Father told us we should never hate anyone. He always taught us manners and instructed us to show respect for old people. Also, he would always remind us to say hello to those we saw during the day; making more friends than enemies.

He taught us right from wrong. If we found something in our possessions that did not belong to us we should give it back. He always said, 'If you do not do that, you are not a Christian.'

As youngsters, my sisters and brothers always had to make up with one another whenever we had any misunderstandings.

My Father told us to live by some very simple rules: 'Remember to pray everyday, don't go to bed angry and forgive before the sun goes down.' Also, he reminded us, through prayer God offers us reassurance; God is faithful, He knows your name and uses it. Any day God may call for you to actively help someone or something. The better you know God the better you will know why, and for what reason He is calling you for."

"Hermine, I am sensing that when the Russian soldiers arrived at your door step that even though you were a very young girl, you felt within every fiber of your being the stale air of evil was imminent. Can you recall one incident that you had with these soldiers?"

"My Father said that if they take something from us that does not belong to them, it will not bring them any good."

"Hermine, where did your Father learn this?"

"He learned this from his parents.

It is not always easy when multiple traumas hit. In a matter of time you feel numb from grief and shock. You should call for Christ and not walk away. It is the living life changing that assures us that we are God's children.

In 1928 my Father became blind because of glaucoma, so I had to quit school and work on the family farm. In that same year communism began to take hold throughout the Ukraine. From that moment on everything belonged to the communistic government, everyone had to work for the state. They took all the Pastors away. Everyone was forbidden to Baptize and Confirm their children. They called it the *kollektiv.* Soon the communists took over and we were not allowed to attend church. They made the churches into night clubs and movie houses. Marriages were held at the Justice of the Peace, not church.

Many poor people lived In the Ukraine. The communist's goals were to make everyone economically equal. To equalize the wealth the communists took from the wealthy the—*kollektiv*—and distributed it among the poorer people. This was accomplished by taking cows, pigs, and agri-crops, clothes, furniture, land and homes from people who worked hard, sometimes all their life to have these aforementioned possessions. Some people were evicted from their homes which forced them to live in ditches in order to survive. These were sad times.

One time they came to our home and wanted our two cows. I was so mad, I put a string around my hands and held one cow. I was not going to give them our cow. I said to them, You can do anything to me, I'm not going to give it.

Instead they tried to take our pigs away, so I opened the pig-pen door and all the pigs ran out. They had to chase them. They began yelling at me. It was so funny watching them chase after those pigs! They got angry with me. They said that they would put me on the wagon. When they put me on the wagon I jumped off on the other side. It was springtime, and I was only thirteen-years old."

"How old were the people who came to take your possessions?"

"They were twenty to thirty-years old. Men came in groups of five, six or seven."

"Hermine, I am impressed that you had such courage as a little girl to stand up to these men."

"I had to work since I was nine-years old. I understood the experience of working. They could do nothing to my Father because he was blind."

"Why Hermine?"

"The communists had no use for a blind man. They took two women that we knew in 1927. They lived in another village.

They took my Uncle in 1928 when they were taking everything away from the people. I was too young so they could not do anything to me. My Mom was afraid that I would tell them in my anger that she told me to hold onto the cow."

"Hermine, did that ever happen?"

"No, I never said that. They would have taken her away."

"Hermine, you were not only courageous. You knew the value of working at such a tender age. How or when did you pray?"

"We thanked God they did not take everything and that we had something. They did take the meat we had butchered. My Mother would hide the lard in the well when we would hear that they were coming. They randomly visited villages for a year. Stalin tried to take everything away and give possessions to the poor. We had worked all our life for our cows and pigs. The poor had not worked and many did not want to work. Many did not know how to organize or save anything. Stalin's people seized

other people's possessions too. Nobody owned guns in the villages. Then suddenly the communists received orders not to do it any more, like before the *kollektiv*, and we began to work together."

"Hermine, where were you living at this time?"

"In 1933 I visited my sister, Maria Klatt who lived in Hohenfeld. At that time Hohenfeld was part of the Ukraine. She was expecting her second child, so I worked for the state in her place since she could not work while pregnant. I worked in the fields. Even after her son Peter was born in September I stayed with her because her husband was in the Russian Army."

"What was it like living with Maria at this time?"

"While living with Maria I met my future husband, Henry. His home was in Hohenfeld too."

"Hermine, cupid's spark never stops even through difficult times?"

(Smile.) "Yes!"

"When did you and Henry decide to get married?"

"In 1934 my sister's husband came back from the Army. Henry wanted me to stay with them and not return to my parents. He traveled with his brother-in-law on a horse-drawn sled to visit my parents to ask if he could marry me. Of course I went with him too."

"Hermine, how did that go?"

"Henry asked my parents if he could marry me, and they said since we had known each other for a year they would talk everything out. My parents gave their permission. At that time boys had to ask permission to marry the girl."

"Hermine, how soon after this did you get married?"

"Two weeks. Our families prepared for the wedding a day ahead. We were married January 22nd, my birth date in 1934. I was nineteen years-old. We had bridesmaids and things, just like today. The bridesmaids wore a floral wreath made from different colors of tissue. Four of my friends were bridesmaids. They looked pretty.

We went to the Justice of the Peace on a horse-drawn sled to get married. Afterwards we rode in the sled to my husband's village where our families planned a reception with music at a

Hall. My family accepted Henry. Henry and I were in love for quite awhile.

We moved in with his Father, his Mother was dead. I had to be the housewife and cook. Soon after we found our own place to live. We bought a house made of mud brick with a straw roof. Four years we lived together.

I had my first baby, Frieda in 1937. In that same year the Russian Army accused innocent German men for espionage activities—spying on other countries. No trials were given. Even though these men were innocent they were taken away simply because they were Germans. The men could not defend themselves. No one had knowledge to where these men were taken. It was as though these men fell in the water and were never seen of, or heard from again. Seventy-five families lived in our village and about twenty-three men plus two women were taken. Everyone was afraid that the Police would knock at their door during the middle of the night and tell them that we had to go with them.

Living in terror was awful. I prayed constantly that my husband would not be taken."

"Hermine, why were the two women taken?"

"They got packages from Germany, like care packages. So the Police told them they were involved with Germany and they had to be sent away too.

My Mother got care packages in 1933 from her brothers. That was what we called hunger years because we did not receive any rain. Many people died from hunger that year. On April 20, 1939 I gave birth to Heinrich."

"Hermine, that was a couple years prior to W. W. II wasn't it?"

"Yes. In 1941 World War II began. In that same year my twins Karl and Fred were born. In June the war began with Germany and Russia.

The Russians sent many Germans who lived in the Ukraine to Siberia including men, women and children. My parents were still living in Neurosengart. My two brothers and a sister were sent also. I was living in Hohenfeld and escaped being sent.

After they sent my family away I never knew what the Russians did with them until decades later."

"Hermine, I remember your telling me about your visit with your brother who was sent to Siberia. When did you finally hear from him?"

"After we were in America twenty years we received one letter from my older brother, Karl. He explained that my parents and sister were dead. Elizabeht, died in 1942. My sister Maria lived in Germany until she died at age seventy in 1976. We have no word about my youngest brother, Johan. My Father died in February 1944. My Mother died in March 1944.

They wanted to send us to Siberia too."

"Hermine, how did they overlook you and Henry?"

"They sent my parents Oct. 3rd and they pushed us up to Oct. 7th. We could not get away because the Germans were getting closer. They were in Mariupol.

We traveled in a wagon with the gypsies to escape the Russians. My husband was on one wagon with Frieda and Heinrich and I was on another wagon with my twins. Olga Seebert, my friend was on the same wagon with me with her twin girls. Our wagon wheel broke on the journey to the train station so we became estranged from my husband and my other children. We were stranded by the Kolmos River.

A big shot in the Russian Army dressed in a General's uniform came by in an automobile and stopped to ask, 'Why are you sitting by this river?' Olga Seebert, could speak Russian. Angrily, she said, 'the children are freezing. If you want the children to be good pioneers for the state they need food and a warm place to stay.' By this time it was beginning to snow.

The General responded, 'I am going to the city, and I will look for a room for all of you to stay overnight.' After a few hours he returned. This General took us to the city, Korang to a Greek home. We slept there until the next morning when the General arrived with a wagon and horses. We could travel to the train station. My husband was waiting on the road near the train station looking for us. He was very worried. Heinrich saw us coming. At the same time Russian soldiers marched by. One soldier who knew my husband told him to take his family and hide because the German soldiers were on their way to Mariupol close to the train station.

After being united with my family Heinrich took us to hide in a field. We hid in holes in the field. The holes were made of mud brick."

"Hermine, where was this train station?"

"The train station in Korang. The Germans arrived and began bombing the train station. Machine guns fired and the bullets flew over our heads. We stayed in the mud-brick holes overnight. In the morning everything became quiet. We went back to the train station and found everything bombed, so we could not leave on the train as planned. We found an empty house with only the walls and roof.

My sister and her family as well as my sister-in-law and her family lived in this house for two weeks—fourteen days.

One day the Russian soldiers marched through and asked where our men were. We hid my husband and two older boys both seventeen years old under the feather beds. We put the small children on top so the soldiers could not find them. The Russians would have taken them and we would not have known what would happen to them because they were German.

After two weeks Heinrich, my children and I went back to our home in Hohenfeld. The Germans had taken over our village.

Unfortunately, one of my twin boys, Fred became sick while we lived in the empty house at the train station. The house was cold and we had

no heat or fresh water. Little Fred contracted pneumonia. Since he was not Baptized a friend of ours, Maria Wischman helped me Baptize Fred using the Baptismal Sacrament—*Nottaüfe*—from the Lutheran Hymnal. Little Fred never awoke after falling asleep after the Baptism. Fred was eleven-months old when he past away."

"Hermine, was Maria one of your bridesmaids?"

"No she was an older friend of mine. Because we were German we could live in my home until February 5, 1943. During this time I became pregnant with Gerhard."

"Hermine, how long did you live at home?"

"We came back in October 1941, so we lived there about two years.

When the Germans lost the war we had to leave our home. We traveled by horses and covered wagons along with other people from other villages to safety. At night we stayed in barns because there was no room in local houses. People were helpful because so many people were refugees. It was very cold. Mennonite villages in Halbstadt took us in, and we rested for a month. The German army told them to take us in. It was difficult times and the Mennonites were very

kind and helpful. They probably left later on too when the Russians arrived.

After a month the Germans came and gave us the order that we had to take the train to Poland to get away from the Russian war. We ended up in Lemberg,[1] Poland. I gave birth to Gerhard in the nearby village, Kaltwasser because women did not have babies in the German refugee camp. This camp was our home until July 1944."

"Hermine, do you remember ever staying at a refugee camp that was close to a Jewish concentration camp?"

"No, we were never in a Jewish concentration camp. I never did see any of the Jewish camps. I did not want to see any of that. Some did go to see, but I didn't.

Then me and my children had to take a train to Oberschlesien to live in another refugee camp while Heinrich had to stay with horses and wagons. He was told to take food and supplies to the German front lines. My children and I stayed seven months in the Oberschlesien camp. We had bunk beds and our home was between the

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[1]Lvov, Lwow.
Gilbert, Martin. (1993). The dent atlas of the holocaust. (2nd ed.). p. 266. London: The Orion Publishing Group.
Presently, L'viv, Ukraine.

beds. Over one thousand refugees lived in this camp.

When the Russians came closer to our camp one night we were sent to Prague, Czechoslovakia by train. On our travel to Prague, we stopped at a train station in Dresden. At the Dresden train station the Americans began bombing the city. We lived three days and three nights at the train station moving from one track to another and running to the bunkers underground. At the end of three days, the city bombed and devastated—*verschlagen*—we were able to board a train to Prague.

I lost Karl at the train station but found him before we left. We spent one night in a school in Prague.

The next day we boarded another train to Vernigarode in Hartz. We lived in a Castle. It was so crowded. We were lying on a floor. We looked like a pack of matches. Among people at this castle were refugees from Russia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, etc. We had to step over one another to move about.

At the end of a month we were sent to Thüringen. We stayed at a refugee camp for women with young children. It was a movie house. I and my sister, sister-in-law and friends

all lived on a balcony. The women with older children were sent to the German farmers to work. There were only elder men and some male teenagers. People in this camp were from all over the world, Russia, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia. These people ran away from their home because they did not want to live with the communists who had taken their land, towns, and possessions.

We did not have much food. My children were swollen from hunger, and I weak without food barely escaped starvation.

One day I found cigarettes in my suitcase."

"Hermine, where did you get the cigarettes?"

"My husband sent them to me when we lived in Oberschlesien in a camp. Henry transported food to the German Army. That is where he got the cigarettes. He sent them to me so I could use them to barter. Then I took them to a village and bartered for food."

"Do you remember the name of the village?"

"No. We were so glad we could just go to the village. The farmers were smokers and they couldn't buy any, so you traded cigarettes for

food. I received little food, but enough to save us from perishing.

When we had to leave the other camp I had some cigarettes already.

In the camp I had one pound of bread for five days of breakfasts for five people. Lunch we ate potato soup—mostly broth no potatoes. For supper we had flour soup that looked like a washing starch mixture. It was horrible, but we ate it. We had to stay alive.

Our bunk beds were made of wood with thin mattresses. German mattresses were in three pieces not like here, all in one piece. They say they sleep better. Everyone had three-piece mattresses.

We all had lice on our heads. We would check each other's hair to kill the lice. We cooked our clothes to get them clean. Bed bugs hurt us too. My waist was covered in bites. When the lights were out the bed bugs were worse.

After five months at this camp the American soldiers parachuted into our area.

Prior to this the SS men wanted to blow up the whole camp with the people in it. Another soldier from Poland—German background—told us to be quiet and leave the camp with our

children and go find a safe place to hide because the SS Officer wanted to blow up the camp.

So we dressed our kids and ran to the woods to hide. We put the children in bushes. In the morning we heard that only the bridges were blown up and the camp was still there, but the windows were all shattered. In the morning it began to rain and we all wanted to go back to the camp. While my sister-in-law and sister stayed at the cemetery I took my suitcase and walked back to the camp.

Along the way Americans shot from the air with machine guns. They thought we were German military. I put my suitcase down and laid flat on the ground. I prayed during the shooting. I witnessed a little boy about six yards from me having his shoulder blown off. I can still hear his screams. There was nothing I could do for the young boy. Many other people were injured from the shooting. Fortunately, I was spared and I thanked God.

When the shooting stopped I took my suitcase and ran back to the cemetery—our hiding place—but the Americans kept shooting. I made it back to the cemetery and my family. We all stayed together until dark. We could not go back to the camp because it was filled with glass.

We walked and found a house with a family living in it. We asked if we could sit on their porch because it was raining. The rain lasted all night.

During this night an intoxicated American soldier walked by the home and he wanted special favors from the women. We persuaded him that children were here and that he would not want to do anything wrong in front of them. We were talking in German. It was difficult. We used hand language pointing to the children to explain ourselves. Finally he sat down and fell asleep.

In the morning we went back to the camp. The American soldiers came and introduced themselves to us and told us not to be afraid.

While my children and I were in Thüringen my husband Heinrich searched for us for three months on foot. His feet were all blistered from walking so far and so long.

When Heinrich arrived in Hartz he ran into the chauffeur who transferred us to Thüringen. The chauffeur explained to Heinrich that they sent the woman with little children, (me and my children) to Thüringen."

"Hermine, were the lice and bed bugs just as bad in Thüringen?"

"We only had lice. At the other camps they gave us something to get rid of the lice."

"Hermine, how were the people grouped in this camp?"

"The older children along with their Mothers were sent to an unknown destination to work for farmers. So Heinrich walked to Thüringen and he found us in the camp at Thüringen.

I was overjoyed to see Heinrich again. I never thought he would be able to find us. I felt God answered my prayers. I prayed without ceasing.

One day my friend Frieda Vogelsang looked out a balcony window and screamed, 'Oh my God Heinrich is coming.'

We learned one week after Heinrich found us that the Russians were planning to seize Thüringen. We did not want to surrender to the Russians so Heinrich built a hand wagon. We put our children and the little we had on a hand wagon. We walked out in the middle of the night—walking a whole day and night to Bavaria.

Also, Russian poachers were monitoring the Bavarian border. They let us through because some Americas were still in Thüringen

and had not signed it over yet. Politically the Russians couldn't keep us from entering Bavaria.

We met a farmer and he needed some help on his farm. The farmer's family took us in.

They gave us one room with three beds for four children and me and Heinrich. We worked on the farm while the children went to school. We awoke at 5 a.m. to milk cows and feed animals. The rest of the day we worked in the fields making hay, picking beets, earning our keep. Frieda and Heinrich walked five kilometers to school.

After seven months we found out that many friends and relatives from our village were located in Württenberg, Züttlingen.

They worked for a Graf—a Count. He owned a big castle and much land. We wanted to join our friends and relatives. We did not have any place to live, but we made room in an old and crowded government army barracks. We constructed a big room within one of the barracks. We made our own beds from boards and put straw in them for our cushion. We constructed another small room for food storage. We built a stove from bricks where we could cook and bake.

We stayed in the barracks for seven years and Heinrich worked for the Graf' for two years. Afterwards, Heinrich worked in the salt mine where he received more pay to help our family. I worked a year longer for the Graf' until I became pregnant. I gave birth to Gertrud in January 14, 1950.

Since we could not make a home in Germany because of the depression after the war, we had no future. Many were planning to travel to the United States. Heinrich decided to apply for a visa for our family to attempt the journey also. We waited three years to receive the visa.

The German government asked many questions to persons wishing to leave. They had to make certain that people who wished to leave were not communists, or involved in any crime because the United States forbid any person with that kind of history to enter the country.

The Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church in Germany worked together to find a sponsor for us to emigrate. We would not have been granted entrance to the United States without a sponsor.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas P. Harney of Strasburg Road off Highway, #162 in West Chester, Pennsylvania sponsored our family. They are

both deceased. We had to promise to stay with them for one year because the Harney's were responsible for us.

When we left Germany we traveled to Bremen May 12, 1952 and boarded *The General Harold Taylor Ship.* **After twelve days on the ocean the ship ran into a violent hurricane. At that time we shared doubts of ever arriving in the United States, but the ship survived the hurricane. On May 24, 1952 we arrived in a New York harbor.**

After successfully passing through customs we boarded a train to Philadelphia. The conductor had to tell us when to get off the train because we did not know the English language. The conductor alerted us to get off at Philadelphia.

The Harney's were looking for us on this particular train. They were notified earlier of our seating arrangements so they were standing right in front of the train car that we descended. On that Saturday Mr. Harney took my husband and the boys in one car and Mrs. Harney took me and the girls in another car. They took us to their farm where they had an extra house for us to live.

They had everything prepared for us; beds made and food in the cupboards. We were so tired. We all had to go to bed and sleep.

In the morning when we got up, I went outside and I started crying. After that Frieda came down and we were sitting on the hill. We couldn't speak English and couldn't go anywhere. After that my husband came down and he said, 'Why are you crying, and you don't know what to expect from America?'

At lunch time Mr. and Mrs. Harney came over with another couple. They were Pennsylvania Dutch so we could understand each other more.

Then they took us to the farm and showed us everything and told my husband what he would have to do and things. We went in the house for a minute and they had the television on. The Yippee Yippee Yah Yay was on! Just recently I realized the man who was singing on this commercial was Frankie Lane. That was the first time we ever saw television. It was funny and I laughed. We heard the steers, cows and singing.

On Monday Mr. Harney took my husband and the boys to West Chester to the Army/Navy store and bought them clothes. We only had

what we had on when we came, and five kids when we came over. We didn't have much.

He bought us seeds right away for the garden and then we started planting a garden. We planted it like in Germany with beds, and you walk in between them. It looked so nice people complimented how it looked. We planted vegetables. We had lettuce, onions, beans, cucumbers and lots more. The people enjoyed that.

On the next Sunday they took us to the Lutheran church in West Chester. It was Pentecost and they had Communion. Then my husband asked me if I wanted to take Communion. I said, Yes, we have to go to Communion. We have to be thankful. He said, 'Well, we don't understand anything'—meaning the language—and they did it differently. In Germany we drank from the Big Cup—*Kelch.* They had little glasses, and it was new to us.

When church was over there were a lot of German people in the congregation who could speak German, and they came and greeted us. Then we started to feel happier already. They introduced themselves to us. They asked us from where we came in Germany, and then we felt a little better.

Pastor Ralston came and introduced himself to us.

The next Sunday Pastor Ralston and Mrs. Ziebert brought us clothes and shoes, some hats, whatever we could use. We were thankful that they brought this to us.

After two weeks a retired teacher, Miss Pig whom Mrs. Harney hired came three days a week to teach the children English, writing and speaking for the whole summer. The Harney's were good people. There are not many people to find anymore like them. The children learned fast, the language.

When school started in September they were ready for that.

I, myself learned English in church reading the Epistle and the Gospel. I followed that, and that is the way I learned to read.

I've been a member of Calvary Lutheran Church for forty-three years. In 1952 we became members.

I only went to school here in America to learn how to have American Citizen. Ten nights I went to school to learn at Henderson High School. I was only five years here when I became a citizen.

I tried for American citizen the first time, and I made it the first time. My husband couldn't make it because he could not learn English and write it. He said, 'I don't mind, and I am not going to try again. I can live in the United States just as good as anywhere else, if I don't do anything bad.'

He never had any problem with Social Security. He just had his papers from when we came over. He had an alien card with his picture along with his date birth and what year he came over. The card helped him everywhere. It was just like American citizen papers.

The Harney's drove us all the way to Boyertown for a whole year, one Sunday a month, to visit a German church. St. John's Lutheran church gave a German service once a month. Many German people attended. We learned many people to know, and that is where we met a lot of friends.

So far as we were here one year things started getting better. My husband worked and my children worked after school and on weekends.

I worked two days a week. Then we start to feel like home, and we began saving money.

In 1958 we bought a lot. In 1961 we started to build a home. My husband, boys and friends helped build the house except for the electric, heating and plumbing—we contracted that out.

In 1962 on January 7th we moved into our own home that we built in America. Mr. Harney was deceased. Mrs. Harney was so proud of us because we had our own home in such a short time. We were proud, too. We never were sorry that we came to America.

I cleaned for one lady for three years until she took her life after her husband died. After that I worked eighteen years cleaning the offices of the Eachus Dairy, two days a week, on Highway #52.

I received pay along with pay for vacation. My husband and I were always invited to the Christmas banquet. Also, I received a Christmas bonus that helped me buy Christmas presents.

One time I wanted to quit and they offered me more money, so I stayed.

The manager of Eachus came and asked me if I would work for him because I had a good working reputation.

After eighteen years the boss died and some employees retired. A new manager took over and

he wanted to pay me only my salary. So then I quit.

I told him, if you take everything away from me, I quit! He said, 'You want to quit? Why?' I said, if I am not included in the other things anymore then I am not included for the work. I'll just go home and not come anymore. That is the way I told him.

After that I was home for two weeks, and I felt board. I put an ad in the paper for a cleaning job in the newspaper. I got a lot of letters. Mrs. Walker came first and picked me up. She showed me everything in her home and told me what she needed me to do. She hired me right away.

That was on Birmingham road. I worked there for eight years until I was seventy and I retired. When they went on vacation my husband and I stayed there overnight. The longest we stayed there was twenty-three days. We took care of their home and their dog.

Then the children got married one after the other. Now they have their own home and their own family. They are happy too. We have five children, twelve grandchildren and four great-grandsons.

In 1983 we learned that my husband had leukemia. After five years he passed away. I still live in my own home.

In 1990 I received a letter from my oldest brother and his wife Alwina explaining that they moved to Germany out of Siberia.

Beginning in 1941 Karl was in a prison in Siberia. After ten years in prison he was freed. Karl could not move from Siberia to Germany. When be became free he searched for his family and found only his wife—after ten years! After they found each other they had a baby, daughter Anna.

More people were finding their families and some of them built a village together. Alwina and Karl helped build a German village, and they lived in this village until Victor, Karl's son-in-law found out he had an Uncle in Germany who would sponsor Karl and his family, and they could move to Germany.

Most of my family lived in East Germany and they could not sponsor Karl, and my sister Maria died in 1976.

Friends of mine who had two daughters in Siberia searched for them through the Red Cross. Through these friends and the Red Cross I learned that my brother was alive in 1962 and

that he worked in Kazakhstan building roads. He could not leave until a relative made a visa out so he could travel to Germany. He was sent to Siberia by the Russians.

As soon as I heard from my brother in 1990 I made plans to fly over to see him in Germany.

My son Henry traveled with me. It was very tiring and very emotional to see my brother after fifty years. We had many things to talk about. It was worth the trip to see my brother Karl, after all these years. Karl looked just like my Father.

When I visited him in Germany he told me all about living in Siberia as a Russian prisoner. He told me everything he had to go through and how difficult it was to live through this experience.

Karl had to build roads and push a wheelbarrow full of stones day after day. He received little food and he always felt weak. He felt like he could hardly go on.

My sister-in-law explained to me how my parents died. My parents were with Alwina until they died. They were existing in a wooded area. The land was very sandy. The three of them even traded some of their clothes for food. My parents, already old, could not survive this living environment. No one received much food, and

my parents finally past away from lack of nourishment and exposure to the environment. Alwina and my niece, Elisabeht's daughter made a shallow grave burying their bodies in the sand. Alwina covered my mother's face with the blouse that she wore so no sand would not fall right away onto her face.

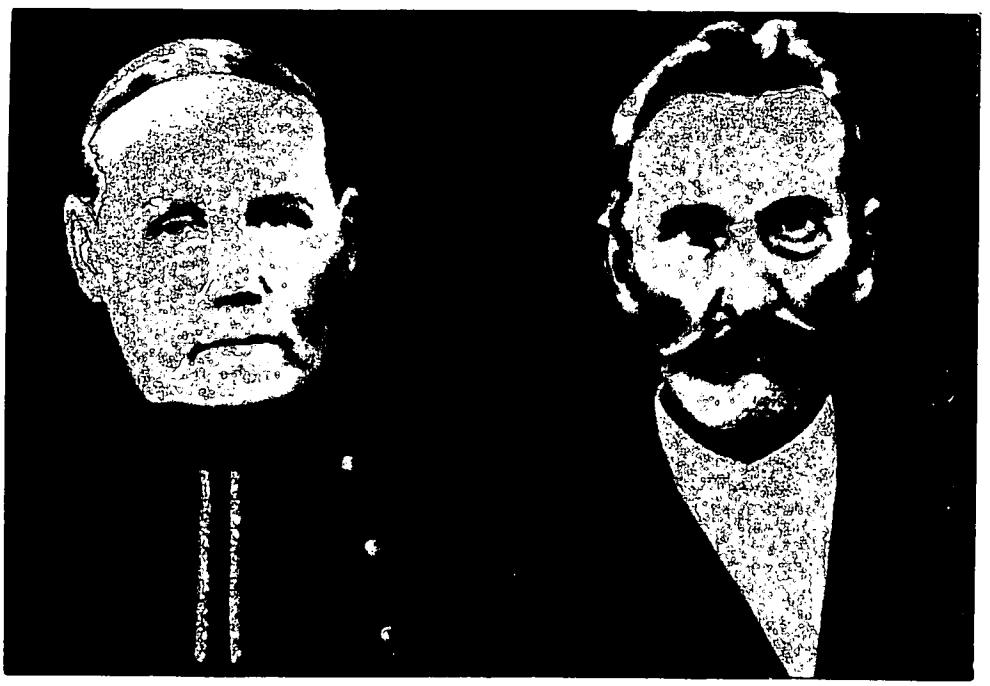
Dogs and cats are buried better here in the United States than all those who died in Siberia. My parents death causes eternal, emotional pain accompanied with vivid memories of them along with torturous thoughts of their bodies being eaten by animals.

Other people made a place for themselves in this wooded area. Sometimes people ate the dead in order to stay alive. Many people died during the winter and were buried in the spring after the winter thaw.

That is all I have to say."

Hermine Jungnus Kommik
Paula Popow Oliver

Photographs



Elizabeht Pentz Jungus and Karl Jungus.
(Hermine Komnik's parents).

Elizabeht Pentz Jungus and husband Karl Jungus. Brother, Johan's wife Olga Klasen Jungus and brother, Karl's son Karl who drowned in Siberia while fishing for food because they had nothing to eat. (Photo taken in Ukraine.)

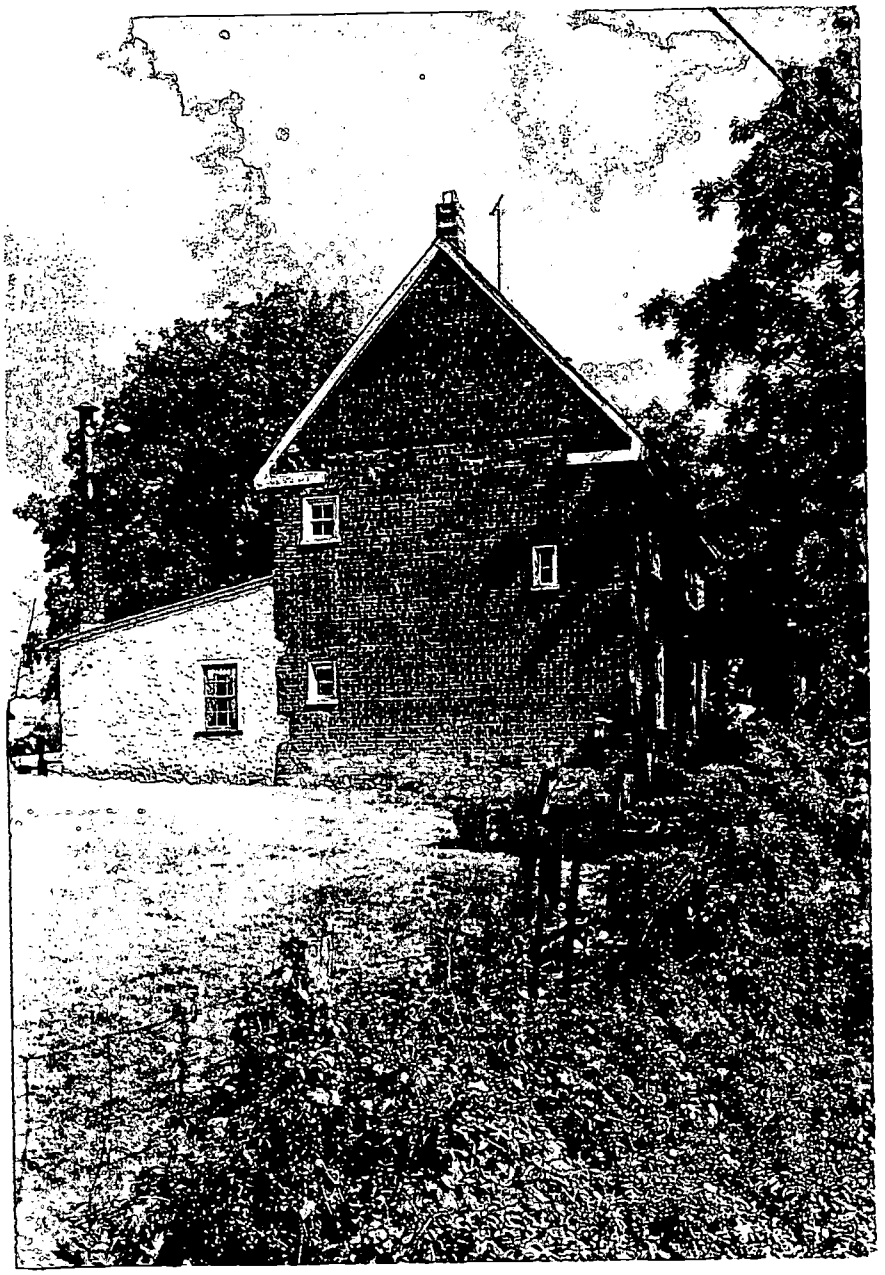
Olga Klasen and husband Johan Jungus.

Johan Jungus seated left and fellow Russian Army soldiers.

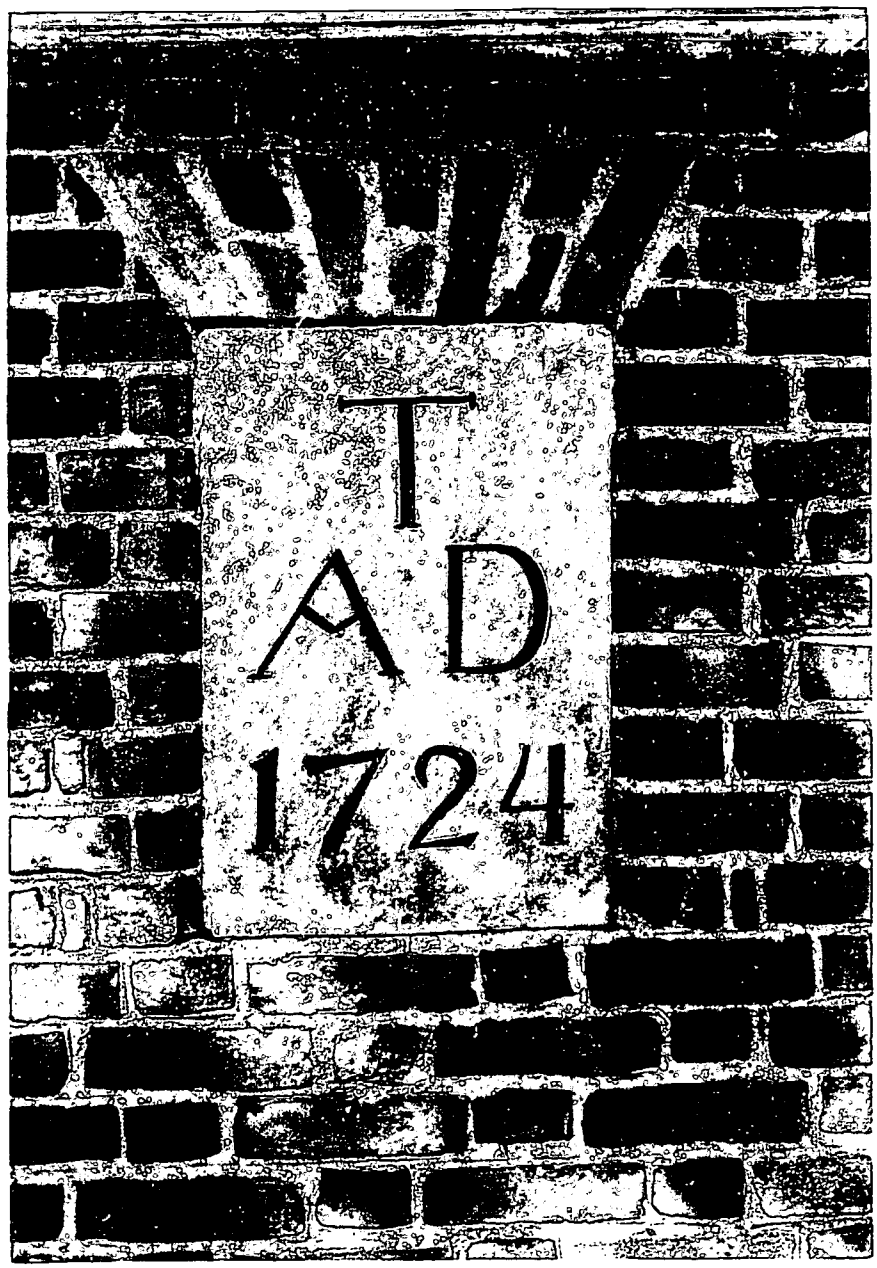
Hermine's nephew Eric Peters (Elizabeht's son) and wife Lydia and their two sons. Eric was sent with Elizabeht to Siberia. Today Eric lives in Germany. Elizabeht died in 1942 in Siberia.

(L to R) Edward and Rosalia Engels (Gertrud's Godparents), Hermine and Heinrich Komnik outside of Barracks in Württenburg, Züttlingen in Germany.

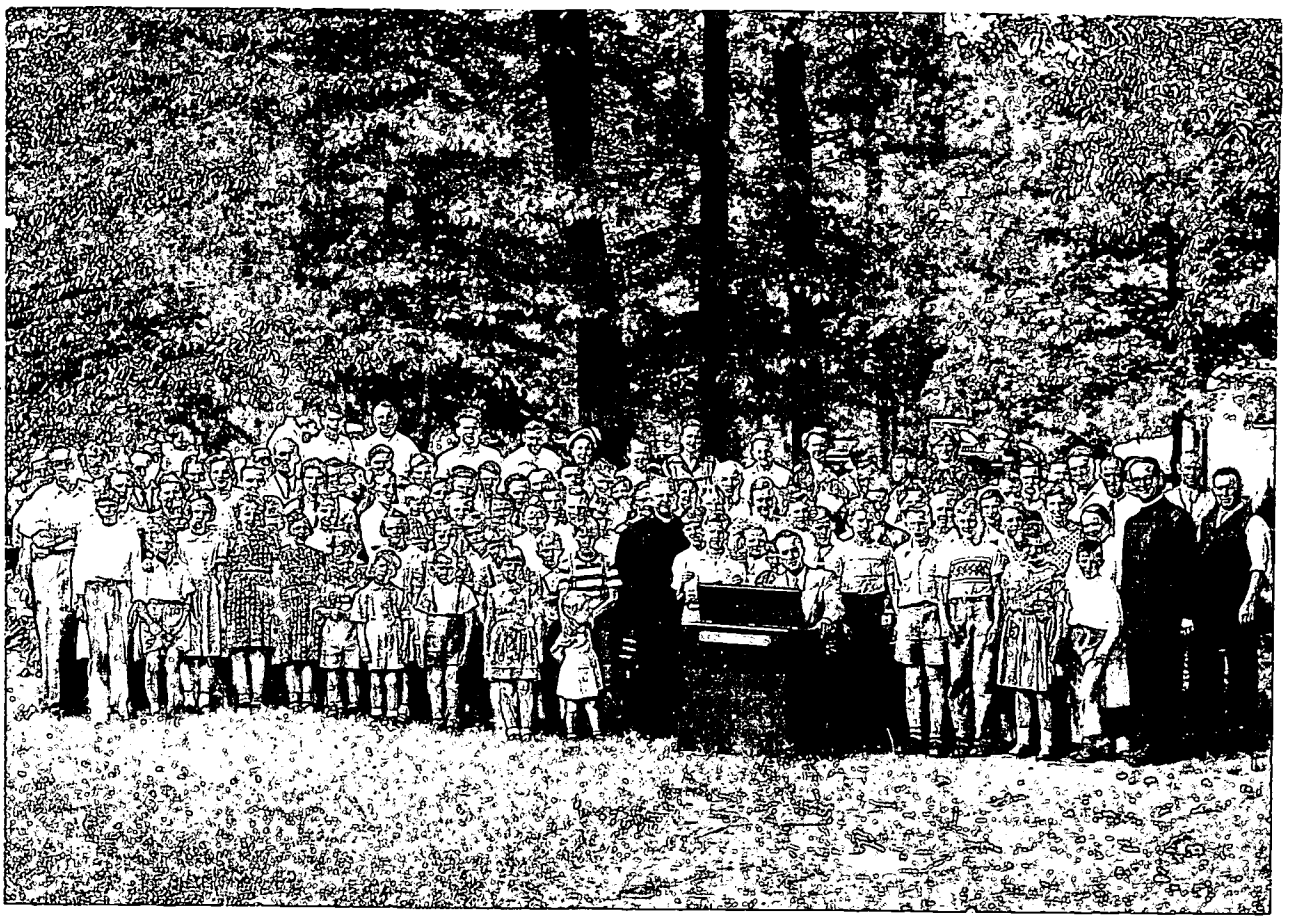
Heinrich Komnik and his sister Olga outside of Barracks in Württenburg, Züttlingen in Germany.



Hermine and Heinrich Komnik's home when first arriving in America. This home is located on Creek Road, off Strasburg Road, West Chester, Pa.



Historical marker of home on Creek Road.



St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Boyertown, Pa. Congregatinal photograph of German refugees who came to America after World War II. (1952).

Hermine Jungus Komnik
(Photo taken, 1950's)

Heinrich Komnik
(Photo taken, 1950's)

Hermine and Heinrich Komink's home, 1310 Bridge Road, West Chester, Pa. Home was built in 1961.

Daughters Gertrud and Freida, Hermine and son Henry.

Hermine's son Gerhard, wife LuAnn and daughter Katie on Confirmation Day.

Karl, Mark and Phebe Ann Komnik

Hermine, Heinrich, Maria—Hermine's sister, Friedrich—Maria's son , Josephine—Friedrich's wife, Gudrun—Alex's wife, Rose Marie Klatt—Friedrich's daughter, Alex—Maria's son. (Photo taken in Winnipeg, Canada at Friedrich's son's wedding.)

Karl Jungus and musician friends. They played at weddings.

Alwina Klein Jungus, Karl Jungus' wife.

Karl and Alwina Jungus** (center) with friends and family celebrating their **Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary** (**Goldne Hochseit**) **at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Kazakstan.

(L to R) Alwina and Karl Jungus, their son-in law, Victor; Lydia and Eric Peters, and their two sons on each end. (Photo taken December 25, 1993.)

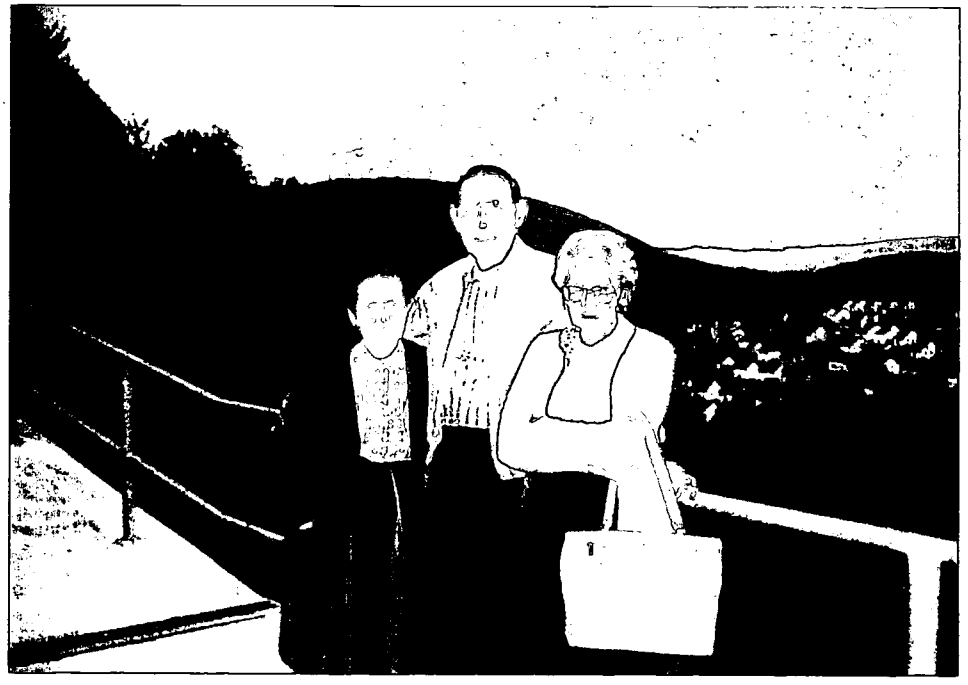
Heinrich and Hermine Komnik

Hermine's reunion with her brother Karl in Germany after fifty-years separation in 1991.

Hermine's arrival in the Frankfort Airport .
Greeted by her niece Anna—Karl and Alwina's daughter.

Hermine and her brother Karl.
(Photo taken in Niederlahnstein on the Rhine.)

(L to R) Victor—Karl's son-in-law, Alwina—Karl's wife, Hermine, Karl, Victor's cousin's wife, Anna—Alwina and Karl's daughter, Victor's cousin. (Photo taken in Niederlahnstein, Germany, 1991.)



Alwina—Karl's wife, Henry—Hermine's son who accompanied her to Germany and Hermine. (Photo taken while sightseeing in Niederlahnstein.)

Genealogy

Hermine Jungus Family

Grandparents

Grandfather: Johan Pentz
Grandmother: Elisabeht

Parents

	Born	Died
Elisabeht Pentz Jungus	May 12,1884	March 1944
Karl Jungus	July 23,1882	February 1944

Children

1. Maria Jungus — Born: December 11, 1906 — Died: 1976
   (Married Peter Klatt—Russians took him away in 1937.
   Sons: 1. Friedrich
   2. Peter, born September 1933—Deceased.)
   (Married Alexander Lietke,
   Son, Alexander Lietke born March 10, 1945 on the way to Thuringia. The train stopped and Maria was taken to the hospital.
   One Grandson, Alexander Lietke II.)

2. Elisabeht Jungus — December 26, 1908 — 1942
   (Married Gustav Peters—son Eric)

3. Alexander Jungus — 1910 — Typhus

4. Karl Jungus — July 27, 1913 — June 6, 1995
   (Karl suffered a stroke June 1 and was buried in Bendorf, Germany June 9.)
   (Married Alwina Klein
   Son Karl—Deceased.
   Daughter, Anna)

5. Hermine Jungus — January 22, 1915

6. Johan Jungus — January 27, 1919. — Missing In Action—Siberia.

7. Brother — 1921 — Infancy

Hermine Jungus married Heinrich Komnik: January 22,1934.

	Born	Died
Heinrich Komnik	October 9, 1913	October 2, 1988

Hermine and Heinrich Komnik Children

	Born
1. Frieda	May 29, 1937
2. Heinrich	April 20, 1939
Twin boys:	
3. Karl	January 16, 1941
4. Fred	January 16, 1941—*Died eleven months old.*
5. Gerhard	August 18, 1943
6. Gertrud	January 14, 1950

Hermine and Henrich Komnik Grandchildren

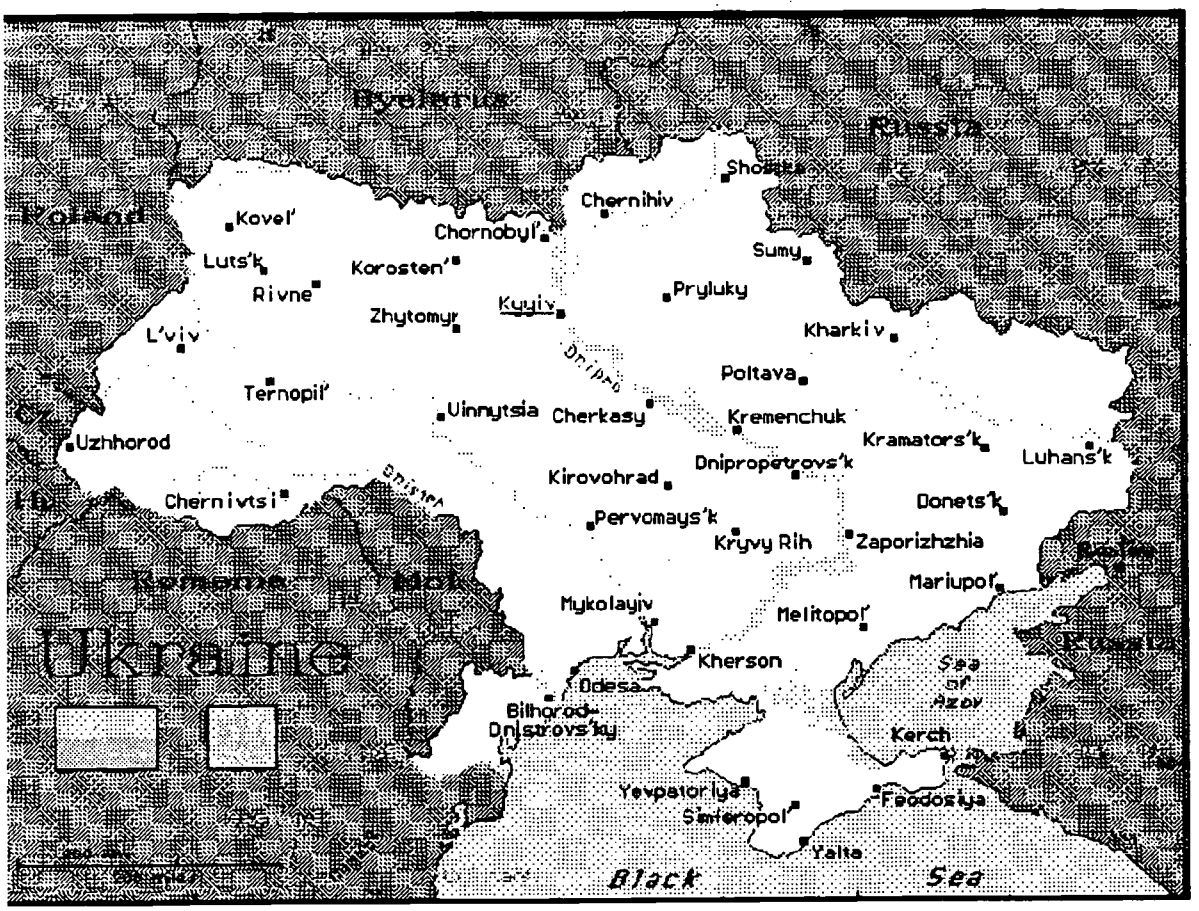
	Born
Frieda's children:	
Barbara Brozene	April 18, 1957
John Hofmanner	July 19, 1968
Ronny Hofmanner	February 26, 1971
Henry's children:	
Wendy Komnik	May 20, 1966
Wayne Komnik	January 6, 1967
Karl's child:	
Mark Komnik	September 14, 1964
Gerhard's children:	
Ty Komnik	October 13, 1967
Troy Komnik	May, 19, 1970
Daniel Komnik	March 30, 1979
Katrina Komnik	December 2, 1980
Gertrud's children:	
Lisa McGlauflin	June 22, 1972
Christine McGlauflin	December 23, 1974

Hermine and Heinrich Komnik Great-grandchilren

	Born
Frieda's grandchilren:	
Darrin Brozene	July 8, 1982
Keith Brozene	August 19, 1985
Jeffrey Brozene	March 19, 1987
Zachery Hofmanner	April 29, 1989

Maps

http://www.physics.mcgill.ca/WWW/oleh/map.html



This map will be clickable soon.

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Clickable map of Ukraine (Volodymyr Kindratenko)
Map of Ukraine (from www.polynet.lviv.ua)
Map of Ukraine The Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection.
Map of Galicia as part of Austro-Hungarian Empire from East European MAP ROOM
Ukraine and Bessarabia as part of Russian Empire from East European MAP ROOM
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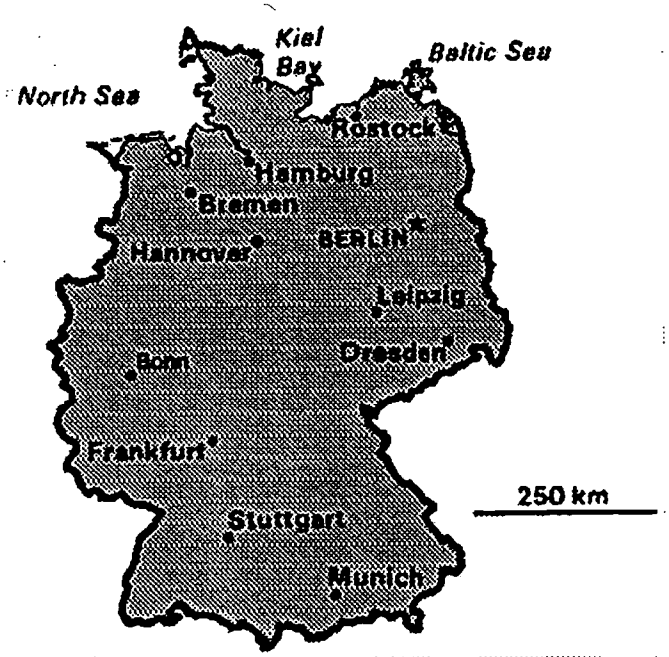

Germany

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Paula Popow Oliver and Hermine Jungus Komnik

Afterword

As a result of World War II over 8,000,000 people fled their homes.[1] By 1946 almost 7,000,000 returned; however, over 1,000,000 needed assistance to return to their homes.[2] Hermine and Heinrich's future looked bleak. Germany's economy and country remained devastated. Hermine and her husband wanted their own home and a better life for their children. Under the direction of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) began assisting displaced person's throughout Europe by providing food, medicine and shelter.[3] The IRO helped to return thousands to their homeland. Hermine and Heinrich were displaced persons with no national citizenship or birth certificates—people without a country. They had no interest in returning to their Ukrainian villages. Desiring to live in the United States they talked with the German government and learned that the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) offered assistance to displaced Lutherans living in Germany.

Between 1945 and 1952 the United States struggled with admitting displaced persons into the country. The Citizens Committee On Displaced Persons worked very hard to educate American citizens concerning the plight of displaced persons living in Eastern Europe. Based in New York, committees had representation in all states except southern states that included Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Tennessee and mid-western states Oklahoma and Missouri.[4] Overall, this Committee politically supported the admission of displaced persons. Well organized, the committee produced many news articles, radio shows, and a Displaced Person's Readers Digest for mass distribution.[5] Encouraging congressmen through

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1 Frank L. Auerbach, *The admission and resettlement of displaced persons in the United States; a handbook of legal and technical information for the use of local social and civic agencies,* (New York: Common Council for American Unity, 1950), 7.

2 Ibid., Auerbach, *The admission and resettlement of displaced persons in the United States,* 7.

3 Ibid., Auerbach, *The admission and resettlement of displaced persons in the United States,* 7.

4 Citizens Committee on Displaced Persons, *Collection 1946-1949,* Report, NY, July 28, 1947, Peace Collection, Swarthmore College Library, Springfield, PA.

5 Citizens Committee on Displaced Persons, *Collection 1946-1949,* The displaced persons digest", New York, 1947-48, Peace Collection, Swarthmore College Library, Springfield, PA.

letters and visits, their work helped bring about passage of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948.[6] However, this act excluded German refugees. After many congressional debates, Congress amended the 1948 act to include persons of German ethnic origin on June 16, 1950.[7] A total of 205,000 displaced persons and 3,000 orphans already entered the United States.[8] This amendment allowed a total of 341,000 more displaced persons to enter, and the Komnik's were among the 54,744 persons of German ethnic origin given visas to enter the country.[9]

After the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, the Lutheran World Relief (LWR) created a central office located in Geneva. It was called the Resettlement and Emigration Division with funds available for displaced persons as well as for overseas migrations.[10] Through communications with the LWR the Komniks filled out the necessary assurance forms. After receiving a sponsor they were granted permission to enter the United States.

Concerned over the plight of displaced persons, Thomas P. and Susan Grum Harney became sponsors for the Komnik family. Mrs. Harney, originally from Virginia, lived with her husband on their farm between Marshalton and West Chester, PA. The Harney's accepted legal responsibility for the Komnik family. Later, in 1956, Thomas P. Harney was elected as a Republican Member of the Pennsylvania state senate representing the 19th District.[11]

After the Komnik's gained approval they traveled on the second to the last ship that transported displaced persons to the United States. July 1, 1952, marked the end of displaced persons admission into the United States.[12]

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6 Ibid., Auerbach, *The admission and resettlement of displaced persons in the United States*, 9.

7 Ibid., Auerbach, *The admission and resettlement of displaced persons in the United States*, 9.

8 Ibid., Auerbach, *The admission and resettlement of displaced persons in the United States*, 8.

9 Ibid., Auerbach, *The admission and resettlement of displaced persons in the United States*, 9.

10 Richard W. Solberg, *Open doors: the story of Lutherans resettling refugees,* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 29.

11 Lawrence Kestenbaum, http://politicalgraveyard.com/bio/harms-harpending.html, *Index to Politicians: Harms to Harpending*, 2001.

12 Ibid., Auerbach, *The admission and resettlement of displaced persons in the United States*, 9.

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