



The Bukovina Society of the Americas NEWSLETTER

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SOCIETY BUSINESS

Last quarter we announced the new mailing labeling system for the Society's *Newsletter*. In the event the change caused anyone to miss the September '04 issue, please let us know by email or postal mail, and one will be quickly sent out. Annual memberships expire at the end of the quarter, one year after signup. This expiration date is shown on the mailing label, next to your name. We will include a self-addressed payment envelope with the *Newsletter* mailed in the quarter of the expiration date. Payment for new membership, annual renewal, or life membership can also be made on the Society's website by credit card, with secure payment to our PayPal account. Go to our site, www.bukovinasociety.org and click **Membership information**, which is on top in blue highlight, the click **Online Payment for Membership Renewal**.

BUKOVINA PEOPLE AND EVENTS

- Ken Bauer (Woodland Park, CO), whose ancestors include both Volga Germans and Bukovina Germans, has contributed a copy of his book, *Spread Your Lasso Wider, Cousin: It's a Big Herd!* to our archives. The book, in which the author details his life in Colorado with humor and self-deprecation, may be ordered by calling 1-888-795-4274. Ken has made several trips to the Society's museum for information about his ancestral Flachs family and has become a life member.
- On October 23, 2004 Society President Oren Windholz spoke at the annual Kansas Roundup of chapters affiliated with the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia. His presentation described differences between the Bukovina German and Russia German cultures, how each group has viewed the other, and their mutual and amiable co-existence in Ellis County since 1886.
- Congratulations to the Sisters of St. Agnes of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin on the celebration on September 5, 2004 of their 125th anniversary of service in Western Kansas. The German-speaking nuns first taught the Volga German children in eastern Ellis County and operated a grade school for the Bukovina German immigrant children in Ellis. In addition they

established the first hospital in Western Kansas and as well as numerous other ministries.

- On September 17-20, 2004 the German Work Group of Genealogical Organizations (Deutscher Arbeitsgemeinschaft genealogischer Verbände), the umbrella group for sixty-nine genealogical organizations with a collective membership of about 20,000, convened in Leonberg, Germany for its 56th congress. With its central theme of "Genealogical Sources beyond Church Books" as well as twenty exhibitors of software, artistic family trees, charts and the like, the congress this year attracted over 600 visitors, among them our International Board member, Michael Augustin. An avid genealogist, Michael has been tracking his Bukovinian ancestors and to date has entered over 22,000 names in his data base. Further information about the program may be gleaned on the Internet under www.genealogentag.de
- The summer 2004 issue of *Homesteader*, the quarterly publication of the Ellis County Historical Society, featured an article entitled *The Bukovina Germans of Ellis, Kansas* accompanied by photos of our headquarters, emblem, and an early Bukovina pioneer family, the Erberts.
- In May of this year Van Massierer and his daughter Laura made a trip to Galicia, now in Ukraine, the homeland of Van's forebears. Although the Massierer family traces its roots to mid-sixteenth century Rhineland-Palatinate in southwestern Germany, a branch of the family immigrated to Galicia in 1785 and then on to Texas in 1892. Van's travel account, entitled "Eine Reise zu der Heimat meiner Vorfahren - A Trip to the Homeland of My Ancestors," was published in *Galizien German Descendants* (Newsletter No. 40, October 2004), a copy of which is available in the archives of the Bukovina Society. The article provides an interesting insight into current economic conditions in Ukraine as well as commentary on cuisine, scenery and lifestyle.
- Ayrton Gonçalves Celestino (Curitiba, Brazil), former president of our sister organization, the Associação Alemã-Bucovina de Cultura - ABC reported on the success of their three-day Bucovina fest, highlighted by the restoration of their old school in Passa Tres, now the Casa Bucovina (Bukovina House), which will serve as the Society's headquarters and museum. In addition, he has

extended an invitation to any and all Bukovinians in the USA, Canada or elsewhere, to join the ABC in its 15th Bucovina fest in Rio Negro/ Mafra, Brazil in July 2005. In recognition of his contributions to the preservation and documentation of Bukovinian history and culture, the Landsmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen (Augsburg, Germany) has awarded Professor Celestino its highest distinction: the honor pin in gold. This award was presented to Professor Celestino by Erwin Koller, who on October 5 flew to Brazil for this purpose. We congratulate Professor Celestino for his many contributions to Bukoviniensis, too numerous to be elaborated here, and wish him many more fruitful years.



- Irmgard Ellingson (Grafton, IA) has informed us that she has been commissioned as an Associate in Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Her new assignment includes weekly worship services in three congregations of the Mission Unity Lutheran Parish, all in north central Iowa. In addition she will provide spiritual care, Christian educational direction and administrative leadership within the parish.
- John and Anna (Haas) Armbrister, who arrived in Ellis in 1905 from Bukovina, used a trunk for Anna's belongings. The shipping labels from Bremen to Baltimore remain mostly intact. The couple had fifteen children whose numerous progeny make for large and lively reunions. William Armbrister has contributed the trunk in the Society's museum. Society president Oren Windholz has been invited to give a presentation at the next reunion, scheduled for July 30, 2005.

GENEALOGY SUMMERS HERE AND ABROAD

by Michael Augustin (Leonberg, Germany)

Experiences gain significance not only in themselves but assuredly also through their anticipation and through their recollection. This also holds true for the experiences I have designated as "Genealogy Summers" and about which I here wish to report.

The first summer of this type was in the year 2000 when my friends Becky Hageman (Wichita, KS) and Werner Zoglauer (Naperville, IL) visited me in Germany and, among other things, we went to the Bukovina Institute in Augsburg, my birthplace of Passau, as well as the ancestral villages of our common forebears in the Bohemian Forest in today's Czech Republic. A short time later my cousin Regina Schiessl (Passau), my uncle Franz Augustin and his wife Elisabeth (Duisburg, Germany) and I went abroad, where we joined Werner. Our group then traveled from Kansas City, MO to Ellis, KS and our first visit to the Bukovina Society before heading off to Colorado. In the Ellis area we made many acquaintances, which have since then developed into

lasting friendships.

In the summer of 2001, I, together with Sophie Welisch (Congers, NY), Steve Parke (Pueblo, CO), Werner Zoglauer along with Ed and Maria Becker (Pittstown, NJ), Ortfried Kozian (at that time Director of the Bukovina Institute in Augsburg) and his wife, Marie-Luise, accepted an invitation from Professor Ayrton Gonçalves Celestino, former president of the Associação Alemã-Bucovina de Cultura-ABC (Bukovina German Cultural Association) to attend the 13th Bucovinafest held in the two cities of Rio Negro (State of Paraná) and Mafra (State of Santa Catarina) in Brazil. Here we also met many interesting people, to some of whom we were related and most of whom were descendants of Bukovinians. The trip also afforded us the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with their circumstances as well as with their overwhelming hospitality.

In the summer of 2002 my friends Frank and Juanita Augustine (Ellis) and I attended the "International Genealogical Conference" sponsored by FEEFHS in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. On our way there we visited numerous Augustin relatives in the vicinity of Regina and gained knowledge of the history of the Bukovinian immigrants to Canada. An unbelievably hearty welcome awaited us, in particular at the home of Ed Schick and his family. The conference itself will remain a memorable experience for all who participated. Aside from numerous friends from the Bukovina community, we also personally met many like-minded people for the first time, known previously only through contacts via the Internet and the Buk-Gen Mailing List. The exchange with other East European family researchers and their organizations also proved invaluable.

One week after we had already returned to Ellis, my wife Bärbel and my children Anja, Eva and Fabian joined us in Kansas where we all participated in the Augustin(e) family reunion in WaKeeney, the occasion being the centennial of the emigration of Michael and Anna (Adelsberger) Augustin from Bukovina to the United States. We were all very surprised that over 400 people attended, and we tremendously enjoyed meeting so many new relatives. After the family gathering we drove to Denver, CO with Frank and Juanita to see their daughter, Henrietta Rupp and her family at which time we also did some sightseeing in western Kansas and the Rocky Mountains.

My travel during 2003 was limited to participation at the Bucovinafest between September 18-21 in Ellis with very interesting presentations about resettlement, flight and expulsion after World War II followed by a trip with Werner to Yellowstone National Park; however, in the summer of 2004 another long journey lay before me. In retrospect, and after all went well, I have to admit that especially with such trips involving many stopovers and many other people, good planning is essential for a satisfactory outcome. Naturally much energy is expended in the effort.

Pivotal was the question of whether my employer would actually give me four weeks' vacation at this time, since even in Germany, despite the opinion of several American friends that we "always" have vacation, such requests are not necessarily granted, especially since I had just been in my new position at the firm for only a few months. And naturally the approval of my family that I again travel abroad in the pursuit of my hobby was also important. But by March all hurdles had finally been overcome and the feeling of anticipation intensified – above all mixed with the knowledge that in any event, the time would pass quickly.

The waiting ended by mid-May: that year's "Genealogy Summer" opened with a visit to Germany by my friend, Doug Reckmann (Portland, OR), whose research centers on the Bukovinian village of Schwarzthal. We had been in contact for some time but had only gotten to know one another in Canada two years earlier. At this time Doug had already been in Germany for two weeks and had visited relatives (besides Bukovina, he also has family roots in the region around Hamburg as well as in Switzerland) and friends in northern Germany. We spent the first day comparing our data and information, i.e., we mutually merged our data and materials and exchanged data banks, pictures, maps, copies, etc. Despite that, we still had time for a walk through the lovely old district of Leonberg, the city in which I reside.

Doug is not unfamiliar with the section of Germany in which I live. More than thirty years ago he spent a year at the same university (Stuttgart), which I attended twenty-five years ago. So we agreed to return to the sites of our activities, stroll through the campus, sit once more in an auditorium and hear a lecture – a thoroughly engrossing experience. In addition I was able to show Doug one or another nice place in Stuttgart, which he had not seen before. And as chance would have it, we met my friend Peter Grunkiewicz, whose family likewise comes from Bukovina and who grew up in Stuttgart-Büsnau, one of the most significant Bukovina settlements in all Germany, and through whom I made many contacts. We then spent a relaxed afternoon with him in a beer garden not far from Büsnau.

The next day, Tuesday, May 18, we went to my birthplace of Passau, about 400 kilometers east of Stuttgart. On the way we stopped in Tiefenbach near Landshut, where we visited Gertrud Siewi (née Rankl) and her husband, Arnold. She and Doug had earlier gotten acquainted via the Internet, and Doug's information about Gertrud's forebears had given her research base a tremendous boost. In her lovely home (Arnold is a sculptor, specializing in modeling and firing ceramic busts) Gertrud served us the traditional Bavarian veal sausages with pretzels, beer and sweet mustard. Although we were already quite tired by the time we arrived at my cousin Regina's home in Salzweg near Passau, we nonetheless took a short walk through the tri-river (Danube, Inn and Ilz) city that same evening.

The following day we reinforced this first impression by a comprehensive city tour, the high point of which included a boat trip on both the Inn and Danube rivers, which encircle the old section of the city with its majestic baroque cathedral. The mid-morning organ concert in the cathedral on the largest church organ in the world also made a lasting impression.

The next day Doug and I brought our short stay in Passau to a close and drove on about 100 kilometers north to Chamerau, where the Schwarzthal gathering convenes annually. For me these were new acquaintances but apparently well-known to Doug. For many years the former residents of Schwarzthal have come in this Bavarian vacation spot and committed themselves to an entire week of common vacation activities. Since I had already heard some time ago that there were many Augustin graves in a cemetery in Eschlkam, only about thirty kilometers from here, I wanted to use this opportunity to search them out. Accordingly, Doug and I and an interested couple drove to Eschlkam in the afternoon and indeed did find about a half dozen Augustin graves in the cemetery. Eschlkam is on the German side only a few kilometers from the Czech border and the locality from which in 1802 Johann Augustin emigrated to Bukovina. While Doug rented a room in Chamerau for the rest of the week, I drove home the

same evening.

There I spent close to a week during which time I prepared for my trip to the United States. After the Schwarzthal gathering in Chamerau, Doug visited a friend in the vicinity of Frankfurt from where he flew back to Portland the following week and on the same day that I, too, left for the States. My route took me – as so often before – from Stuttgart via Atlanta to Kansas City, where I visited my erstwhile colleagues with whom I had worked for five years on Porsche's joint venture with Harley-Davidson.

Becky Hageman met me at the airport, whereupon both us – we already had some experience with this – spent an intensive shopping day in Kansas City. Unfortunately Werner Zoglauer was not available, so that our troika was incomplete. On Sunday we drove to Ellis, i.e., to Hays, where on the occasion of Frank Augustine's birthday, a surprise party had been scheduled for him that same afternoon of May 30 at the home of his son, Daryl. The secret had leaked to Frank that I would be arriving in the States at around this time, but he was very surprised to see Becky and me as well as Steve Parke at the party. Steve was in WaKeeney for a class reunion on this weekend anyway. It was a great pleasure for us all that Frank's entire family including children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces could all gather at one place.

Becky and I spent the next three days in Ellis as guests of Frank and Juanita Augustine. A high point during this time was an excursion with Becky to Hoxie, KS, where we searched for the forebears of her adoptive father in an isolated cemetery and, after a prolonged wandering about over dusty beaten paths, actually found them. Another was assuredly the visit with Oren and Pat Windholz in Hays and in particular the good meal Pat had prepared for us. It was there that Becky, Steve, Oren and I spoke about future activities of the Bukovina Society at which time the idea of writing this article first surfaced.

On Thursday, June 3rd a new lap of our journey began: Becky had to return to Wichita while Steve and I took off for Portland to visit Doug. This was a three-day trip, and we were very glad that at the last minute Steve has abandoned his plan to use his pickup with the camper in favor of his Saturn SUV. Although we spent the first and last day of our trip almost exclusively behind the steering wheel, the second day included several stopovers in Grand Teton National Park where, among other things, we took the lift to 3,000 meter high Rendezvous Park in Jackson Hole and marveled at the snow and the lovely mountain panorama. Toward the end of our trip we drove a considerable distance along the Columbia River and were greatly impressed by the size of the river and the majestic surrounding landscape. And we were even more impressed by the German beer that Doug had cooled for our reception in Portland.

In any event Portland was in many ways quite different from what I had previously seen in America: very green, the weather cool and damp - more like at home in Germany. But a few other things also reminded me of Europe, e.g., that the people there set more value on organically healthy foods and the city is so designed that one can go shopping on foot. Steve will surely be able to attest to the fact that downtown Portland is the region with the highest concentration of coffee shops that he has seen anywhere in the universe. In addition, Doug's house is worthy of mention: old, but very well tended, and furnished very tastefully and consistently in art nouveau style. We three bachelors (I only temporarily so) could feel quite comfortable there. My attempts to replicate European cuisine in the furthest

northwestern United States met with success and were heartily accepted by my two friends.

While we devoted much time to the exchange of information relating to genealogical research and Bukovina, we also made trips hither and yon of which I shall only mention the main ones: Portland itself with its verdant inner city, imposing bridges and beautiful rose garden, the Columbia River with the so-called gorge, the rain forests and the waterfalls, the Pacific Coast with Astoria and its endless beaches, impressive cliffs and water temperatures not as low as Doug had always claimed, and finally a trip south to Crater Lake, of which we could see absolutely nothing because of the fog and snow drifts. From there we traveled on to northern California and saw the redwoods (by nice weather), those ancient forests with their gigantic trees, whose impressive size one can neither photograph nor describe but rather must experience. On the homeward trip shortly before the Oregon border we visited the largest liquor store I had ever seen, the great dunes, and the rocky slopes of the coastline with its lighthouses; the seals we could only smell but not see. Yes, and back in Portland on the day before our departure we even glimpsed Mount Hood, Portland's landmark, which was shrouded in clouds during our entire stay.

After almost a week in Portland Steve wanted to press further, since he had intended to return to Colorado by cutting a wide swath northward through Washington and British Columbia. On Saturday, June 12, Doug and I saw the "Rose Parade", a large gala with many flower-laden automobiles, and on Sunday, after about 2-1/2 weeks in the United States, I returned to Stuttgart, again via Atlanta.

This short retrospective reflection of a truly marvelous experience affords me the opportunity to thank my friends and those I met along the way and hope that they enjoyed this trip as much as I.

Nemechek-Rourke

2004 Reunion/Family Camp-out

by Steve Parke (Pueblo West, CO)

The annual Rourke-Nemechek reunion and family camp were held over a three-day period from July 30th to August 1st at the Hansen Boy Scout Camp at Kirwin Reservoir near Stockton and Phillipsburg, KS. This year's attendance stood at eighty-seven, a new record due to the fact that so many of the "cousins" aged fifty to fifty-five are now grandparents! Attendance has fluctuated from sixty-five to eighty people in recent years.

The participants are descendants of two large families of Rourkes and Nemecheks. Steve F. Nemechek and Philomena Reitmeier (first wife) and Barbara Schuster (second wife), came to Ellis, KS with their parents from Fürstenthal, Bukovina, around 1900. John J. Rourke and Margaret Halbleib were first-generation Kansans who farmed near McCracken, KS. Both families lived in Trego County.

What is unique about these families is that four of the seven Rourke siblings married four of the twelve Nemechek siblings. Those who attend this camping event are primarily from the families of these intermarriages in which Carl, Steve, Leonard, and Dorothy Nemechek married Lucille, Eileen, Helen, and John Rourke, respectively.

This family get-together has a long history going back to holiday festivities celebrated at various Western Kansas Rourke and Nemechek farmsteads near WaKeeney and Goodland, KS, in the 1950s and

1960s. As a child this author remembers these Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas gatherings with plentiful food, adult card games, and the children playing various high-energy, outdoor games. But in those days the trip to and fro seemed so long.

In the 1970's the event was held at various places near WaKeeney, KS, including the American Legion Hall, Skelly Park, and later the Cedar Bluff Reservoir. Stories of notable Cedar Bluff memories were again recounted at this year's gathering.

In 1978 the group convened at Camp Adda Walden near Salina, KS, this time for an extended weekend. Most notable from the Salina years was the tornado in 1985 in which the campers were forced into a basement shelter and some car windows were blown out, but the food was still on the tables after the storm had passed. Amen!

In 1988 the event was moved to the Kirwin Reservoir Boy Scout Camp, where it is still held annually, except when significant family functions such as last summer's weddings in the Denver, CO and Kansas City, MO take the group elsewhere.

Sr. Margaret Rourke, CSJ, has been very instrumental in organizing the camping trip over the years. The families bring more than enough food, even though the men cook on Saturday evening! Additionally, the family maintains a mailing list.

Weekend activities are fairly consistent including the meals, visiting, softball games, swimming pool sessions, late night table games, and multiple pranks throughout the weekend. Several years ago this author gave a presentation on Bukovina history, and this year hard copies of database compilations of the family tree were available. Other notable events and pranks should be left to family oral tradition but plans are already underway to convert old video footage to a digital format for a "Saturday Night at the Movies" at next year's event. Popcorn will be provided but watch out!

Both these families are Roman Catholic, and for many years the event included a Saturday evening on-site Catholic mass. Given the declining number of priests, however, Sister Margaret now organizes an evening prayer service. Various family members share leadership roles in a participative Liturgy of the Word.

Annually we remember those who have passed on in recent years. This year the memorialized deceased included Regina Nemechek-Aschenbrenner of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada; Katherine Rourke-Daigle of WaKeeney; Johnny Rourke of McCracken; and Gemma Parke-Comstock of Mt. Pleasant, MI.

With the passage of time the profile of the gathered group has changed. Of the farming generation that began this tradition about fifty years ago, three were able to attend this year: Eileen Rourke-Nemechek, Lucille Rourke-Nemechek, and Sr. Margaret Rourke. Of the author's generation of cousins who played morning, afternoon, and evening softball games twenty-five years ago, sixteen attended this year, and needless to say, we only filled two of the five traditional ball game periods due to age and injury.

But most touching was the number of tiny tots and children running about, the great-grandchildren of the original gatherers: a sure guarantee that the high-energy fun of yesteryear will continue for some time to come.



Extended Loy Family

Seated L to R: Cäcilie Loy and her daughter Marie, Marie Loy (née Braun), Agathe Loy and her mother Elisabeth Loy née Jockel

Standing L to R: Angela, daughter of Cäcilie, Brigitte and Annie Loy (daughters of Anton Loy).

(Photo: Seehausen, German Democratic Republic, 1946)

MARIA'S STORY: A FAMILY ODDYSEY

by Maria (Loy) O'Brien (Pearl River, NY)

In the September 2004 issue Maria's brother, Leon, describes the Loy family's immediate war and post-war experiences. In the following essay Maria continues the narrative, concluding with the family's arrival and adjustment to life in the United States.

The third of the four children of Adam and Cäcilie Loy, I saw the light of day on September 9, 1940 in the village of Paltinossa, Bukovina (Romania). As fate would have it, I was the last of my extended family to be born in Bukovina; by November of that year Bukovina's German population was transferred to Germany. This event ended 140 years of pioneering work for the Loy family, whose progenitors, Adam and Eva Loy, had immigrated to Bukovina from Einsiedel an der Gollnitz in the Zips (now in Slovakia) in the early 19th century. I have never returned to the village of my birth and will probably never do so.

After what amounted to temporary resettlement in German-occupied Poland, my family was forced to abandon our new home in January, 1945 to avoid being overwhelmed by the advancing Soviet troops. Given my young age, my recollection of this period is sketchy at best. But some early experiences in our new home in Seehausen, Sachsen-Anhalt, in what became the German Democratic Republic, remain indelibly fixed.

Strong family bonds helped us withstand our material privation and refugee status. My three uncles and their families along with my grandmother had also been settled in Seehausen, and we supported each other as best we could. When packages began coming from America, we shared as equitably as was possible; i.e., except when it came to chocolate, which, I have to admit, I would hoard and gobble down out of view of my cousins. But I dare say they probably did likewise!

While coffee and cigarettes in the packages from America could easily

have been bartered for basic necessities, my grandmother preferred giving them to the priest for masses. But other items served us well. With one uncle a tailor and the other a shoemaker, garments were retooled to fit us and leather goods (handbags) were made into shoes. It is an old cliché that necessity is the mother of invention. My Uncle Poldi, the tailor, sometimes turned garments inside out if the outside had been frayed. Some packages came sewn in feedbags with colorful designs. We even used these feedbags to make clothes. My sister, Angela, still has a picture of herself attired in a dress made of a feedbag decorated with apples.

We eight Loy cousins played, laughed and cried together. Lacking store-bought toys, we made up games and entertained each other. I was especially close to my cousin, Agathe, daughter of Uncle Poldi. Agathe and I were like sisters and were in the same class in school. Our parents shielded us from the grim realities of life as well as they could and tried to make the best of a bad situation. I still remember the excitement when Uncle Poldi came home after several years of internment in the Soviet Union. Anticipating this event, Aunt Lisi, had bartered some extra food for a doll, which she then said Uncle Poldi had brought for her. While I was very happy for Agathe, I tearfully hoped that my father would also bring me a doll after his discharge from the POW camp.

Incarceration had impaired Uncle Poldi's health. Afflicted with malaria, quinine and/or other such medications were unavailable in the Soviet sector of Germany. But Uncle Alois "Loisi" proved to be in even worse physical and psychological condition. After his discharge from an American POW camp, he found our address through the German Red Cross but lacked the money for the train fare to Seehausen. My mother sent him 20 marks and encouraged him to join us. Unfortunately for Uncle Loisi, his wife Aunt Rosl and infant son Hans had been forcibly repatriated to Bukovina in 1945; political circumstances prevented their reunion. Living behind the Iron Curtain had its drawbacks, and leaving the country was one of them. On one occasion Aunt Rosl and Hans attempted an escape but were caught and returned to Bukovina. Uncle Loisi sank into a deep depression which, along with alcoholism, undoubtedly contributed to his early demise in 1950 at age forty-four.

My Uncle Anton also returned from the war and was reunited with his family. But we waited in vain for my father. Word in 1948 that he had died in Ulyanov on the Volga left us in an unsettled state. My sister, Angela, was especially distraught. At an early age she had had to leave home and work on a nearby farm as a servant. Although she wanted to become a nurse, there was no possibility of continuing her education beyond elementary school. So when my father's Uncle Michael Nowecki and his wife Aunt Ludwina of Detroit offered to sponsor her to America, Angela jumped at the chance. However, since the United States did not grant immigration visas to people resident behind the Iron Curtain, this necessitated escaping across the border into West Germany and establishing a West German address. At age sixteen Angela set off on her own, crossing the border after having made contacts with relatives in West Germany, who offered her temporary shelter. It was Angela's break with the family, which prompted my mother to follow her a year later.

My Aunt Susanna (Loy) Welisch died six months after Uncle Loisi. Sometime in 1951 her daughter (my cousin Sophie), wrote to my mother, offering to sponsor her as well as my brother Leon and myself to the United States. After a short family conference, we reached the decision to "go West."

Little could we anticipate what lay ahead. Should we be caught attempting to cross the border, we would be returned and who knows what may then have awaited us. In any event, through the grapevine we knew of a Landsmann from Bukovina, Josef Rankel, who for a fee, would escort people across the border. Putting our trust in his hands, we, along with about five other people, set off on the journey. So as not to be identified as possible fugitives, we carried no luggage but each wore two sets of clothes. My mother strapped the family documents onto her body and worked twenty marks into my ponytail.

My last glimpse of Seehausen was that of my cousin Agathe leaning out the window, crying, and calling out to me, "Where are you going, Maria?" I turned to say good-bye while struggling to choke back the tears. Later she told me that the following day the teacher asked why I was not in school. "She went on vacation," Agathe prevaricated, not knowing what else to say at the spur of the moment.

We boarded the train at Blönsdorf and exited at Helmstedt, the last station before the train crossed into West Germany. Since we had no valid papers for entry into West Germany, we had to get off at the last stop and make our way across the border surreptitiously. This entailed a walk through the forest through which we could move only when a train was approaching, since border guards were stationed everywhere, and they would hear the crackling of twigs under our feet. The crossing itself took place in the dark of night, from 9:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. I was so nervous that I had the dry heaves almost the entire time. Nonetheless, we knew that as soon as we crossed the Autobahn, we would be free in West Germany, and I, in my eagerness to get it all behind me, was the first to get across the highway. The date: September 1, 1951. Mr. Rankel had done his job well. We were all safe and sound. But where do we turn now? We were on our own: no family support group, no food, and precious little cash.

My mother knew that there was a refugee camp in Giessen, where she then went to register. West Germany was still under Allied military occupation with the Cold War in full swing. In short, a veil of suspicion surrounded everyone from an Eastern bloc country, and we were denied legal status. In her ire against the system, she informed the camp attendants: "I'm not going back, and I'm not going to hang myself." Denial of legal standing meant denial of civil rights and any benefits for which an applicant may otherwise be eligible. Undaunted, my mother contacted Franz Hieronymi, my father's army friend, who had earlier written to my mother about his passing. Mr. Hieronymi went with her from farm to farm until finally the Wettlaufer family in Kloppenheim, Hesse, took in the three of us. Leon, who was thirteen years old at the time, first had to finish grammar school after which he wanted to continue his education to become an electrician. My mother had to plead strenuously with Mrs. Wettlaufer to allow him to do this, since she anticipated using Leon as a field hand when he reached fourteen. Happily she kept her word and in 1955 Leon completed a three-year program in Frankfurt, culminating in his becoming a licensed electrician.

Leon and I also had tasks around the farm and in the house. At the Wettlaufers' we had one room and ate with the family in addition to which my mother was paid one mark per day. [In 1952 the rate of exchange was 4.25 DM to \$1.] A pair of shoes cost 30 DM. Not surprisingly, I seldom, if ever, had any new clothes: all hand-me-downs, for which I was nonetheless grateful. While material goods were becoming increasingly available, we were merely Zaungäste (observers).

While I liked school and easily made friends, certain aspects of the learning experience proved very difficult. When appearing for school in Kloppenheim, I informed the teacher that I should be in fifth grade. He, however, first decided to test me. His method for doing so would undoubtedly be challenged if attempted anywhere in the USA today. When he said he was going to check my math skills, I felt relieved, since this had always been one of my favorite subjects. Then, in front of the entire class he sent me to the blackboard and asked me to work out a series of problems. Nervous and confused, I was unable to solve the problems to his satisfaction, whereupon he assigned me to the fourth grade.

It was after becoming established in Kloppenheim that we again saw Angela, who then relocated to Gross Karben, a neighboring village. Here she met and married Friedrich Stelz, thus dropping her plans to immigrate to the United States. We, on the other hand, though still anxious to cross the Atlantic, were denied entrance visas until 1955, after the Refugee Relief Act had liberalized the immigration quota. One month before we set sail for New York, my mother began to receive a widow's pension from the state. With her emigration these payments ceased.

The SS General Langfitt, a refitted United States army transport ship, served as the vessel which carried us to our new destination. I enjoyed the sea voyage until we reached the white cliffs of Dover, after which, for the next thirteen days, I was constantly hanging over the railing, unable to keep down any food. My next concern was about my future environment. Having seen pictures of New York City, I feared I would never see any trees again. How delightfully surprised I was to glimpse the beautiful vegetation of the Hudson Valley and that of my new home in Rockland County!

Not so beautiful was my adjustment to school life at Clarkstown High in New City, NY. While I had changed schools when moving from East to West Germany, instruction was still in my mother tongue of German. However, I was now confronted with a new language, a new curriculum, school buses, and a centralized school system. But I survived! Not only did I graduate in 1959, but I also got the prize for best student in beauty culture and cosmetology!

Before coming to America neither Leon nor I had ever been to a dentist and with one exception, I had never been treated by a doctor. During the first eighteen years of my life I lived in six countries (Romania, Austria, German-occupied Poland, East Germany, West Germany, USA) and changed residence eleven times, which averages about one move every twenty months. But with my high school graduation and a marketable job skill, I finally gained a measure of fulfillment and confidence to which my marriage two years later to Gerard "Jerry" O'Brien added the stability and security so sorely lacking in my earlier years. My life then concentrated on family, church and community. Although Jerry passed on in 1994, he lived to see our three children, Michael, Kathleen and Carolyn, all college graduates with advanced degrees and all holding responsible jobs.

