

Life History of Abram and Blandina (née Hübert) Dyck

Written by Ernst Dyck

Our parents were born in the Mennonite Colonies of the Ukraine. As a result of the persecutions of the Germans, begun after World War I, for their security they were advised to go to Siberia, where other Mennonites that had left earlier already had their own land. The Mennonites established a number of German colonies along the western Transsiberian Railroad. In 1902 three Hübert brothers participated in establishing the community of Margenau in the Omsk area. (Heinrich, our grandfather; Jakob and Franz—uncles of our mother) Heinrich died of typhus in 1922. The marriage of our parents, Abram Dyck and Blandina Hübert, took place in August 1931.

As a result of the arrest of our father Bernhard Dyck, our parents were forced to leave Siberia and to settle in a communal settlement (Colchos) in the north Caucasus. Our father was an educated person and worked as a bookkeeper in the settlement. In many of the meetings he was asked to accept a position in the leadership of the Colchos, but for this he was required to become a member of the Communist Party. Because he categorically rejected this, he eventually had no choice but to flee, essentially to disappear. In preparation for this he sent his wife and son Gerhard to Putschkovo to her mother. Together with his parents he was able to evade his potential captors and to get to Rostov, where his sister Greta lived. That was on December 1, 1932. After this, he drove to his wife in Putschkovo.

Because he knew that he would be sought, he moved to Kazakhstan, where he took employment as bookkeeper on a state farm (Sowchose) 20 km. from Petropavlovsk. They lived there until September 5, 1941, and here their other children were born: Margarita, Ernst and Heinrich. His sister Lena and her family also lived in the same village. Her husband Konstantin Pachotin served as a veterinarian.

With the advent of the Second World War (22.6.41) it was recommended that persons of German nationality not live in the vicinity of strategically important cities. Father was deported to a neighbouring state farm, Woswischenski, in the north Caucasus. He worked here as a bookkeeper until his retirement in 1967, and it is here that Margita was born. During the war, Lena, the sister of my mother, worked as a teacher of the German language in Woswischenski. In February 1942 she had a son Harri. She lived with our family until 1946.

We lived in horribly cramped quarters and in desperate poverty. One room of about 10 square meters total contained 4 children and Aunt Lena with her baby. The other room of about 15 square meters served alternately as kitchen and as bedroom for the parents. And in the winter, the space under the table sheltered the chickens or the newborn calf. One incident has stayed in our memory. During the war and in the following years bread was distributed via coupons, normally given out for the following month. One winter Aunt Lena arrived with the bread and the monthly coupons, which she laid on the table. Early the next morning she wanted to get bread, but the coupons were gone. The whole family began a search, but the coupons were not to be found. The whole day without a crumb of bread, and fear for a bad month. That evening Father came home from work, sat down in his chair and twisted

himself a cigarette out of homegrown tobacco. We sat on the [tile] oven and watched as the smoke from the cigarette dissolved in the air. Suddenly he lurched toward the table, let all the chickens out from underneath and began rooting through the rubble. The somewhat torn and dirtied spool of coupons emerged. The tension of the situation eased.

Although Woswischenka was situated 60 km. from Isilkul, in Kazakhstan it was as if we were isolated from our relatives that lived generally in the area around Isilkul. Because of the special area regulations, we were seldom able to see them. We remember especially the hungry years following the war, a period in which we had to seek nourishment from rotten potatoes and ears of wheat gathered through the winter following the harvest. We ate saffron milk caps (pine mushrooms) and the residue of pressed flax—we couldn't get the tailings from pressed sunflower oil. I probably remember all this because I had to glean the ears of wheat in the fields, since children were not allowed to be arrested by watchmen that might suddenly discover them. In the spring of 1947 we were not in school—we were out collecting ears of wheat.

My older brother remembers one incident in which our father came home in December 1946, with a loaf of bread. With that he said, "Here is the bread for the whole of December." How our mother then dealt that bread is unimaginable. I can still remember well the psychological pressure that we as persons with German heritage suffered. In the eyes of those around us, we were somehow worthless individuals. The monthly registration at headquarters, the loss of rights, including regulations to remain within 5 km. of the village, except with permission of the authorities. We were called Nazis and fascists; among other things, we were denied the right to enter the military at 18. We were forced to bear all manner of harassment.

In 1943 mother became very ill, and after this she suffered from swollen legs. She walked in constant pain, but she was forced to work in the harvest, shoveling grain on the threshing floor. She suffered through this, working to exhaustion on her knees. Not until 1954 were we as family struck from the headquarters' lists of those denied their normal rights. Then we gained the right to leave Kazakhstan. After this move our parents bought their own home in Koktschetaw, where they lived their final years.

We are thankful to our parents that in spite of all the hardships they always urged all of us children to strive for an education, and the completion of higher education. Three of us completed the pedagogical training, and two completed medical training. Our oldest sister Margarita lives in St. Petersburg with the family of son Oleg, the younger brother Heinrich lives and works in Tschelyabinsk. The others are all in Germany.