

The Descendants of Jakob Huebert The Brazil Branch of the Hubert/Huebert Family

In the year 1788, approximately 10,000 Mennonites left Prussian territories for Russia, where they developed settlements in the Dnieper River Basin (southwest Russia, the present Ukraine). Records of a Hübert family in the village of Margenau in the Molotschna settlement trace back to c. 1860. In Margenau Franz Hübert and his wife Elisabeth (nee Janzen) gave birth to numerous children, among them the sister of our grandfather, Anna Hübert (later Mrs. Peter Dick) and her brothers Jakob (our grandfather), Franz, Heinrich, and David.

As in most of the villages, after a few generations of growth, land became scarce, leading the younger heirs to search for new farmland. The major new agricultural areas at the time were being developed in Siberia, a giant territory on the other (east) side of the Ural Mountain Range that had for centuries been the home of indigenous nomads, principally the Kyrgyz and the Tartars. From the Sixteenth Century onwards this land had gradually been deeded to the Cossacks, largely through state benefactions. These state donations were generally considered purely theoretical, since the new beneficiaries, Cossack officers, understood little about agriculture, or didn't want to be encumbered by it. The land was therefore leased out, so many young settlers saw their future in Siberia, especially since the impressive, newly built Trans-Siberian Railway, completed by Czar Alexander III in 1891, invited the masses into this region.

And thus in the first decade of the 20th century the four brothers Hübert (Jakob, Franz, Heinrich and David) left the Molotschna Colony in southwest Russia to establish their future in Siberia. Just a few years later, their sister Anna Dick also followed. A few years prior, Jakob, the oldest son, born in 1873 to Franz and Elisabeth, had been married to the younger Katherina Kröker. Unfortunately, after only ten months of marriage, she died in childbirth, together with her newborn. On September 26, 1900 Jakob subsequently married the twenty-two-year-old Helene Kasdorf, a young girl with long, blond pigtails, from the same village. She would later become our paternal grandmother.

The new wave of settlements in Siberia eventually led to 37 villages strung along the Trans-Siberian Railway, covering a stretch of land within 380 km. around the city of Omsk. Around the turn of the century Omsk already had a population of about 100,000, and was considered of strategic importance, housing a major garrison of the Cossack army in Siberia. In the first decades of the Twentieth Century Omsk operated its own steam-powered electrical utility as well as a fire brigade, at that time all developments seldom seen around the world.

About 100 km. west of Omsk lay the railway station Gorkoje (today Margenau, obviously named after the parent village in the south). Two new villages were built there—Hamburg, c. 5 km. to the northwest, and the village of Margenau, c. 2.5 km. to the south. In Margenau, a road ran east-west, parallel to the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The new farmsteads and other settled lands were built along this road. Among these Jakob Hübert leased a plot of land, on which he built his residence and farm outbuildings. Back in the Molotschna colony in 1909 Peter Kasdorf, Helene's father, died, leaving Helena with an inheritance of 4,000 rubles.

The initial lease costs in Siberia were not especially expensive, annually on average 10 kopeks (1 ruble = 100 kopeks) per desjatine (1.09 hectare) in a 49-year lease. But Father Franz Hübert had advised buying one's own land as soon as possible. He customarily said "Land is the only security; no one can steal it from you." (How false that would later turn out to be in communist Russia!) Jakob Hübert, therefore, bought a larger tract of land, about 100 desjatines. According to family accounts, he was especially proud as he held in his hands the "*Kupschaja*" (bill of sale). All told, the village of Margenau and its outlying areas covered an area of approx. 1500 desjatines. Around 1916, the village had 14 farmyards. Other villages in the area were of the same size, or slightly larger. According to the memories of our father, Henry, it was a beautiful village, especially in the springtime. Reflecting on his childhood memories, our father often described it as follows:

The individual estates were situated on the left and right of the broad main street of the village. Hidden between large, green poplars, the houses could hardly be seen. In the front, at the street, the properties were lined with whitewashed, wooden lath fences. Carefully tended acacia hedges divided the yards from one another. The gardens in front boasted a multitude of flowers, ornamental bushes and fruit trees, such as apples, plums, cherries and raspberries, in addition to currants, gooseberries, and strawberries. Green arbours with garden benches separating the living areas from the actual cultivated acreage provided these properties with a natural and comfortable cheeriness. The land itself consisted of good, black soil, which in just a few years produced substantial crops.

The yields were especially good between 1912 and 1917. The farmers kept strong workhorses and Siberian cows, smaller than the common Holsteins but proving a richer cream content (5 – 6 % butterfat) while consuming only one-third or even one quarter of the feed.

In general, the crop year for plowing, seeding and harvest was restricted to about five months of the year. After that, the merciless Siberian fall and winter set in, with temperatures dropping to -40 degrees, while the cattle whiled away the time in barns, and humans in their houses. To avoid suffering hunger in those long winters, the settlers were obliged to see to their duties in the spring and summer. The autumn cellars, therefore, were always well stocked, to last through the long, cold months. And in all this, one also thought of those that would surely be needy in those harsh winters. The villagers constantly cared for each other.

Edging the village on the south, a thick birch forest rose ghostly and denuded after the leaves had fallen for the winter. From its depths one often heard the howls of hungry wolves. In this Siberian home eight children were born to Jakob and Helena Hübert. Of these, three died prior to their third birthday. In Margenau, as in the whole of Siberia, there was no special medical care, a situation that provided for a tough, natural selection. Only those that thrived in those raw natural circumstances would survive. The Jakob Hübert children were as follows: Helene (b. 1901), Jakob (b. 1905), Franz (b. 1910), Maria (b. 1912), Anna (b. 1914), and Heinrich, our father (b. 1917).

Father had many vivid memories of his Siberian childhood, memories that he would occasionally recount on Saturday afternoons, while drinking his beloved *Chimmarão* (matte tea). He spoke of the long months of snow and ice, of the family gatherings in the village, the industrious cooking, frying and preparing of winter stores in the autumn. He also remembered the weekly communal baths in the *Banja*. For this the villagers gathered in wooden bathhouses, with men in separate rooms from women with children. A large woodstove in the middle of each room warmed the surrounding wood paneling and brought everyone to the point of perspiration. Following this, the men proceeded to an adjacent pond, where, in winter, they broke the ice with logs, hooks and pickaxes, and then all briefly threw themselves into the icy water. As a result, they experienced few heart and circulatory problems!

Father also enjoyed reminiscing about his experiences in the elementary, and later the secondary school. As early as 1913 the village of Margenau established a two-room, dual-language [German/ Russian] elementary school, followed by a secondary school in 1917, the year our father was born. This provided a further four years of education, also in two languages. Generally, following their school years, the villagers would gain employment on the local farms. But those so inclined could remain in school for a fifth year to study pedagogy, which provided for the future educational needs in the settlement.

The school building consisted of round pine logs, and the curriculum included German and Russian language, literature, mathematics, science and religion. Our father attended school until he was twelve years old, and always had pleasant memories of this experience, including the inevitable boys' pranks, such as pinching the girls' pigtails into the inkwells built into the classroom desks. At recess time, then, as the class rose, heads would be jerked backwards, often with the plaited tips of hair blackened by ink.

To provide quicker propulsion on the ice in the wintertime, primitive skates were fashioned, with metal strips attached to the soles of shoes. According to our father's stories,

these always provided an enjoyable run to the school, about three km. away on the flat terrain. He also reminisced about the Christmas celebrations at home, where all generations of the family gathered. But gifts were few and far between. He remembered once getting a ball that his mother Helene had fashioned out of wool remnants.

From 1907 to 1913 father Jakob Hübert served as a pastor of the Mennonite communities between the villages around Isslu Kulj, 20 km. west of Gorkoje, and Moskalenski, about 30 km. to the east. In 1913 he was ordained as Community Elder. This expanded his pastoral care of all the Mennonite communities between Petropavlovsk (100 km. west of Gorkoje) and Tatarskaja (300 km. to the east), a large area that left him with little spare time to take care of his own estate. But he was assisted in this by the village community, and, above all, by his large family, so few significant needs arose. The work that he carried out as Elder brought significant honour, but little else: his rail costs were reimbursed! This arrangement among the Mennonites required the recipient to have a solid financial foundation to allow his family to survive. Grandfather had an exceptionally fine written hand, with which he wrote endless reports and church minutes, and he himself kept many of the church records.

Father Jakob, therefore, always had a lot to do within the church community, but Christmas was always a special holiday, with many personal greetings and other activities. In October 1926, Helene, father's sister and the oldest daughter, had married Abram Dück, from the neighbouring village of Waldheim. He was a robust, powerful man, large in stature, who had served in the medical corps during the war. Waldheim was situated about 30 km. north of Gorkoje. For Christmas, Abram normally hitched a strong, well nourished horse to a sleigh, which he covered with woollen blankets, fur coats and provisions, before venturing forth on the trip to Margenau. The trip normally took four to five hours along forest and meadow trails, through snow and ice. But in winter hungry wolves were invariably on the prowl, so the trip was not necessarily the safest. Our father recounted of his brother-in-law that on one of these trips a pack of wolves suddenly appeared behind the sleigh. One of the wolves approached so close that, before he knew it, Abram Dück found his arm in the jaws of a wolf. Luckily the arm was well protected by Dück's thick fur coat. Through a sudden wrenching sweep of his strong arm, he broke the lower jaw of the wolf. The remainder of the pack quickly cast itself onto its now-injured member, allowing Dück's journey to proceed uneventfully. Another time, in Omsk, when Abram once found the hand of a pickpocket in his fur coat pocket, he squeezed it so hard that he almost left it as mousse! His hands were as wide as a windmill blade and as strong as a nutcracker. And that is how I came to know him in Brazil as well.

Our father's childhood was also strongly imprinted by the Bolshevik Revolution. In the first years after the revolution, the troops loyal to the czar, the so-called Whites, fought the insurgent Reds. It happened now and again that squadrons of White soldiers would appear on our yard, hand over their scrawny nags and simply seize our stallions and mares. And whatever provisions were available were simply confiscated. With the Whites hardly gone, the Reds appeared. It sometimes occurred that the Reds then accused the settlers of aiding the Whites, thereby ending the process in short order. During this period, whole families were simply lined up against the wall of the house and shot. Often one could also hear shots ringing out around railway stations. Our father told the story of once, when he was a boy, a Russian ran into their yard, shouting "*Pomoschitje!! Pomoschitje!! Paschalujsta, Woda!!* (Help! Help! Please, water!!) . In haste the man grabbed a bucket of water and drank, as if possessed. But the water simply ran out of his body. He had been shot in the stomach. Shortly after he died in great pain.

Of course, the revolution had wide repercussions. The settlers soon had their land confiscated, and all private property forbidden. The land that until then had been seen as the sole and constant security now no longer belonged to the owners. Existing owners were offered one quarter of their previous property, all of which was now state land. The rest was then "granted" to willing citizens in the district. However, the result was that the new "owners," who knew little or nothing about farming, had nothing but "crop failures" to show in the ensuing years. In spite of the difficulties, until about 1924 the whole situation was still somewhat manageable, since the

earlier farmers were able to continue with their industry on the lands that had been allowed to them. However, during the following regime under Stalin, the former landowners were branded as *Kulaks* (greedy vultures, class enemies; literally “greedy necks”) and persecuted. In the schools, especially in the private schools, all religious instruction was summarily forbidden as “spiritual co-optation.” The very existence of each spiritual community was thus fraught with difficulties. Religious services could be held only in open buildings, and services were constantly spied upon. An atmosphere of terror soon spread ever wider, typified, for instance, by a loud knocking at the door in the middle of the night. Fathers of families that had been seen in churches or in gatherings were shackled, led away and subjected to special hearings. Many did not return. And then began the transports to the Siberian concentration camps.

At the beginning of October 1929 the village of Margenau had just begun rehearsals for the elementary school’s Christmas program. One evening various teachers and assistants had assembled, including the Elder of the Mennonite churches—our grandfather, Jakob Hübert. Suddenly a knock at the door sounded — and the Secret Police entered. Without any explanation they simply led away all the teachers and assistants, including Jakob Hübert. All were led to the train to Omsk, where they were deposited in the state prison, and then, under great stress, taken to hearings. The prisoners feared the worst.

However, a few German citizens were also arrested, and as soon as appropriate circumstances allowed, they sought diplomatic support. To avoid formal repercussions, all the prisoners were soon freed, although complaints against them were registered, one of them being “anti-soviet agitation.” Depending on the court, possible accusations included high treason, leading to the death penalty. Therefore many of the community elders now advised Jakob Hübert to flee.

As a result of all this, and with a view to his family and his exceptionally exposed position, he determined to emigrate as soon as possible. Because of his work in the church, and as a former landowner, in the new order he would be especially targeted. At the end of the past August news had come from Moscow that 60 families of German extraction had still been able to emigrate to Canada. Thus, in the following days, drawing as little attention as possible, Jakob Hübert attempted to sell as much of his village property as possible. In the middle of October the family packed basic necessities into two horse-drawn sleighs and left the village in the middle of the night, in the direction of Waldheim. The nearest train station, Gorkoje, would have been far too dangerous as a point of departure. The sleigh ride led them through icy, dark forest lanes and trails to daughter Helene, where they eventually bedded down on the bare floor, under just a few available blankets—for Abram Dück had also just sold everything that he could. But, as would have been proper, Jakob Hübert had also brought with him all the church records, which he then transferred to Jakob Kasdorf in Waldheim. Kasdorf later then returned these books and records to the community.

Together, the next night they then pushed on from Waldheim in the direction of Nasevajevska, a village 20 km. to the northwest, where all boarded the next train for distant Moscow, 2000 km. away. So now almost the whole family was together: father Jakob, mother Helene, daughter Helene with husband Abram Dück, with their two children Abram and Liz, as well as the siblings Franz, Maria, Anna and Heinrich. Jacob, the oldest son of our grandfather, at that time was studying philosophy at the University of Leningrad (St. Petersburg). The timing of their flight was just still appropriate, since most of those of German heritage remaining behind in villages along the railroad were harassed, and then between 1930 and 1937 forcibly resettled in north Siberian labour camps, which many of them did not survive.

Later, all the Hübert brothers, the sons of Franz and Elisabeth Hübert of the Molotschna, were to be scattered around the globe. Brother Franz had appropriately left earlier, in 1927 emigrating to Canada, where he had begun a new life. In 1930, when his brother Jakob and his family fled Russia, he would advocate with various authorities as much as possible in order to enable his brother’s family to come to Canada. But his entreaties with Canadian authorities proved futile. After the horrors of the First World War, and possibly because of the worldwide

depression at the beginning of the 1930s, Germans and eastern Europeans were not welcome immigrants. Of those brothers that remained in Siberia (Heinrich and David) little is known, only that Heinrich died of typhus at a young age. His family wandered toward Slavgorod, toward the south of Omsk. Of David virtually nothing is known. Later, after the Jakob Hübert family had settled in Brazil, letters were exchanged with a daughter of Heinrich Hübert in Russia. This was Maria Hübert Kliewer, who lived with her children in Alma Ata (south Siberia) around 1960. Owing to the political situation, exchanging letters in the first thirty years after the emigration was, of course, almost impossible. Many years later we learned that Maria Kliewer, with her whole family, had managed to emigrate to Germany. One of her nephews, Erwin Hübert, after many years, visited us in Brazil in 2007.

But now, back to October 1929 and the flight of the Jakob Hübert family through Nasevjevskaja and Omsk. Depressed by the loss of everything that had been won through hard labour, as well as by the absolutely unknown future, after almost three days the family finally arrived at the main train station in Moscow. From German friends that either already lived in Moscow or that had also gathered there, the family gained addresses of shelters in the Moscow suburbs, where they could find reasonably priced temporary accommodation. One of these places was named Perlovka, where some residents rented out their own rooms, lofts, or residences to gain some income. And in the days that followed, vigorous attempts were made in Moscow to get the necessary travel documents to continue on to Leningrad (St. Petersburg), to complete the journey originally to end in Canada. Through various attempts and numerous deals, the leaders of the potential emigrants eventually gained special emigration permission from the ZIK (*Zentralvollzugskomitee*-- the Central Executive Committee) of the Soviet Union for those citizens whose names were written on a special list—but only for those that had come to Moscow by a special, given date. In the meantime, potential emigrants helped each other out with money to pay the fee of 220 rubles, the cost of each certificate.

On October 27 news spread that early the next morning, at five o'clock, a train was to arrive in Perlovka, in order to take the emigrants onward. Suddenly the news changed: the train was to leave that same night at twelve o'clock. A hasty scrounging to repack everything followed, together with the settling of accounts with those that had provided rental space. But it was all in vain. Neither that night, nor in the three days or nights to follow, did any train appear in order to bring the emigrants on their way. In the meantime, in the now already cold Moscow winter mothers with children were crowded into the narrow waiting room of the train station, while the others waited outside in the seemingly endless hours of uncertainty. Finally, on October 31, 1929 a train pulled into the station, ready to pick up the emigrants. Soon it rumbled onwards into the night, toward Moscow, but about three km. before reaching the city the train stopped without notice, and then parked on a parallel track. Four more days and nights followed, leading to November 4. During this wait the Russian security did all in its power to negotiate their last rubles from the German settlers. When no more negotiations were possible, the train finally set in motion again, in the direction of Leningrad, entering the station on November 6.

Unfortunately, in the end a nasty fate awaited most of these travellers, as few of those in such despair were finally able to leave. Between August and October of 1929, approximately 14,000 Germans and other citizens of German extraction had gathered in the suburbs of Moscow. However, after the loss of the First World War, the country of Germany found itself in economic and political difficulty, a situation that did not permit taking in huge numbers of refugees. In spite of charitable initiatives by the German Red Cross, for example, with the motto "Brothers in Distress," which raised almost one million reichsmarks by January 30, assistance simply came too late for most of the people. On November 13, the Soviet Union initiated a forced return transport of German settlers. Even when Germany declared itself willing to take all 14,000 emigrants, the Soviets did not change their decision. Only about 5,000 were able to emigrate to Germany. The rest were now the pawns of the Russian state discretion.

Gruesome indeed was the forced return of the roughly nine thousand that remained behind. It was clear to most of them that they now travelled toward their certain death. After the

imprisonment and chicanery of the secret police, on November 17, the c. 9,000 persons of German extraction that did not gain the exit from Russia, fathers, mothers, and children, were forcibly herded into cattle and coal cars that had only been quickly cleaned. These railcars were not heated in the icy winter cold, and in the multi-day trip the refugees were provided with no care and no water. Following pleas to the guards for at least some snow at the stops along the way, they were told, “Croak, you kulaks!” Children froze in the arms of their mothers. According to a report from Dr. Quiring in *Before the Gates of Moscow* (p. 121), at one of the railroad stations 35 corpses of children were carried out and piled in layers. Parents were unable to bury their little ones. And so mothers in tears had to watch their dead children, stacked high beside the railroad, left behind as the freight train rolled away into the night. For most of these people, the final stations were soviet concentration and labour camps, the end of their striving and their hope for a new life.

But the desire to emigrate was fulfilled for a small group. Jakob Hübert and his family were lucky to enter the train that reached Leningrad from Moscow on November 6. As our father later recounted, entering the city, “one saw the large Njeva River snaking into the distance to the harbour, where the ships swayed between the ice floes.” After the arrival, authorities took the travellers into security, housing them in a supervisory facility named *Sowtorgflot*. There they were summarily relieved of any money they still retained. In addition, they were strongly forbidden to leave the building. Between the 7th and 13th of November the emigrants in the supervised housing were provided with three simple but sufficient meals per day. But after the 13th there was no more. Upon questions regarding further nourishment, the only answer given was that the money was now used up, and “the state could no longer support the emigrants at the expense of the taxpayers.” However, following the repeated crying of hungry children, and continued urging and negotiation, five residents of the building were finally allowed to go to the market to find some food. These five took any available coats and watches to the city market and pawned them, primarily to buy bread for the women and children. At the same time, these five envoys were able to contact the German embassy in Leningrad, notifying it of the needs of the travelers. This led to some emergency support.

And through these five envoys Jakob Hübert was also able to inform his oldest son at the university about their presence in the city. As a student at the university, he was able to visit his parents and siblings in the facility. At this meeting his father pleaded with him to give up everything and to leave with the family. However, the son reasoned that he had only one semester left to finish his studies. As a university graduate, he would then immediately follow the family. All the pleas and urging of the parents were in vain. In sorrow, the parents and siblings took leave of their oldest son and brother. They were never to see him again. Just a few weeks after this farewell he was charged with “Belonging to ones that fled the republic,” imprisoned, and shipped away to a work camp in Siberia. The parents later received two letters from him. In the last letter he requested that the parents not write any more, since the letters brought him “into even greater danger.” A number of years later Jakob Hübert received news from a Russia refugee that son Jakob had starved to death in a Siberian prison camp. After the arrest and a short trial he had been sentenced to many years of forced labour, which he did not survive. This news was again confirmed years later by Erwin Hübert, our grand [second] cousin.

The migrants, meanwhile, concerned themselves with surviving in the supervised facility, now with the aid of the German embassy and the determined cooperation of various German charitable organizations. Finally, on November 27, 1929 the details of the voyage to Germany were completed. Two days later, on the 29th of November, the migrants were led to the Russian ship *Alexander Rykow*, tied up in the harbour. Before they left, however, the emigrants were relieved of all their Russian credentials. They were now to begin their new life as citizens without a state.

Slowly, hampered by technical difficulties, the vessel left the port, only to have to return soon. Apparently the ship had trouble with its steering, so it was forced back into the harbour. Here the apparent “problem” was solved by dockyard mechanics, allowing the ship to return to its

voyage. The nightmare of the Russian experience ultimately remained behind in the fog of the port of Leningrad, exchanged for the hope of a new, better future.

After three days at sea, the emigrants landed safely in the German harbour of Swinemünde. Here a joyous reception awaited them. Through the cooperation of some private charities, the newcomers were provided with the necessities of clothing and medications. And then they were brought to a refugee station in Rostock—in a train decorated in pine boughs. For the family Hübert, the full stay in Germany was to last nine weeks. Given the poor economy as well as the political chaos of the inter-war period, it was firmly understood that Germany could not keep the migrants indefinitely. As a result, a new land to accept the emigrants was desperately sought. As noted, Canada was now out of the question; however, Paraguay and Brazil then opened their borders to these new refugees.

But while they awaited the end of negotiations with these countries, the migrants were well taken care of in Germany. In order to house the migrants, a former officers' school in Mölln was converted into a large reception depot, which provided an exceptionally fine spirit of order and organization. The refugees were placed into work groups, according to their abilities, with work stations that lacked no materials, tools, or even necessary machinery. As a result, the refugees produced shoes, clothing, tools, and furniture. The children were separated into school classes, according to their age and level of education. Teachers for this were taken from the refugee group itself or brought in from neighbouring villages. Sustenance and clothing were both plentiful. Even a genuine German Christmas was organized for the children, complete with a Christmas tree and toys. Most helpful in this venture was the Red Cross, calling on support from numerous programs in Germany, Switzerland, and Holland.

Finally the hour of departure arrived. Together with the full emigrant group, Jacob Hübert and his family boarded a German ship that left the Hamburg harbour on February 3, 1930, bound for Rio de Janeiro. As a farewell, the harbour band played "*Muss I denn, muss I denn zum Städtele hinaus, Und Du, Mein Schatz, bleibst hier. .*" (Must I then, must I then leave this charming little town, And you, my love, remain. . .) Our father allowed later that this was the only time in his life that he had seen his father Jakob cry.

At the time, our father had just turned thirteen. He was especially happy to celebrate his birthday on January 8, in the camp in Mölln. As a result, the whole emigration and the voyage to Brazil were vivid, lifelong memories for him. But now they had departed for a completely unknown country, heading into a totally unknown future. Through many detours and numerous generations, via Siberia, Southern Russia, Northern Germany, and potentially uprooted from France, this historic Hübert family was now on its way to distant Brazil. Our father often recounted tales of the voyage, which mightily impressed his youthful soul. For instance, the ship docked briefly for fuel and provisions on the Island of Madeira. After the cold and gray of the Siberian winter, the world had suddenly turned sunny, lively and unbelievably colourful. Coming from dark birch forests and ice- and snow-covered vistas, he suddenly saw birds, vegetation, and fish that he had never seen before. He often remembered the youths in the harbour, diving into the crystal clear water for coins thrown by the sailors. And then, after another number of days, the ship entered the tropical, warm destination harbour of Rio de Janeiro. Initially the heat is said to have been unbearable. Throughout the day, any suitable flat object was chosen to fan for fresh air. Our father also recounted how he arranged for safety pins and thread from his mother, and then, with bread for bait from the cook in the ship's galley, he went fishing in the harbour. According to reliable testimony, his attempts actually led to some success. However, one of Otto von Bismarck's famous insights supposedly includes a saying, "Never is there more fibbing than after fishing or before elections...." Always an avid fisherman, our father continually found this comment amusing.

Our immigrants were now removed from the large ocean liner to the *Ilha das Flores*, Flower Island, where they were quarantined for a few days and given health inspections, following which the immigrants were led onto a coastal steamship leaving for São Francisco do Sul and Itajai, in the state of Santa Catarina. The travelers quickly became used to the genuine,

very tasty Brazilian diet of rice, beans, and manioc meal, with pickled and smoked meat garnishes. After three days along the coast, with short calls in the ports of von Santos and São Francisco, they finally arrived at the more southerly port of Itajai. Here the immigrants, together with their few belongings, were brought to a riverboat named *Blumenau*, whose throbbing steam engines brought them up the Itajai River to the “South American Hanseatic City of Blumenau,” where the immigrants summarily disembarked. With broad vision, a former Hamburg Senator Schröder had purchased the whole region between today’s Sao Bento do Sul and Blumenau from the reigning Kaiser’s family and transformed it into the “South American Hansa.” From Blumenau covered wagons took them upstream along the Itajai River shore, to the town of Ibirama, where the journey left the river in the direction of the mountains, along ever narrowing trails, until, after two days, they reached a high plateau along one of the tributaries of the Itajai River. Along the Krauel River there, two new settlements were to be established—*Witmarsum* and *Stolzplateau* (“*Stolzplateau*” means “Plateau of Pride,” the name reflecting the geography) .

Here the settlers were left completely to their own ingenuity, provided with only simple hand tools, seed, and provisions for the first six months. In her 1937 book, Maria Kahle described the beginning of this German settlement on the banks of the Krauel River as follows:

There, now, facing the boundless jungle, stood this small collection of German immigrants, with its few crates and bundles. Civilization lay far behind them. There were no roads, no streets for traffic, there was no settlement, no city nearby. There stood the individual human (*Mensch*), faced with the millennial wilderness, thrust completely upon oneself, upon the strength of one’s arms, one’s own courage, one’s own will to work. The work of clearing began. . . .

Survival was supported by the settlers’ sense of cohesion, their community of faith, and their will to work.

The beginning was difficult. First enough of the dense jungle had to be cleared with primitive axes. Bamboo huts with roofs of palm branches were built for the first weeks and months, and with them immediately a school and a church. The community elders, Jakob Hübert, Heinrich Ekk and Heinrich Martins, assumed the leadership of the new settlement. Jakob Hübert had already demonstrated a fine talent for leadership. In Russia he had directed the spiritual care of a large region. It was natural, therefore, that he would be entrusted with the leadership of the village here in the totally unfamiliar Brazilian jungle, with the survival of the entire settlement at stake.

Jakob Hübert was a determined, energetic man. In Siberia he had already shown this determination as well as notable accomplishment. Without that and his rock steady faith, he would surely not have overcome the hardships of leading this settlement on the banks of the Krauel, complete with the responsibility for the fate of so many souls. The beginning included the seeding of the first crop. But the wait for the first harvest proved futile. The climate, the soil, the pests, and other various threats were totally different from anything any of the settlers had known. And the hard labour quickly led to the end of the provisions left with them.

Thus hunger soon set in. Even the largely unknown fruits of the jungle and the occasional game were not enough to provide the necessities of survival, so the continued existence of the settlement might be credited exclusively to the mutual cooperation and the steadfast will of the settlers. In spite of this, the formal 1932 annual report of the settlement read “ The German settlements on the Krauel River and on the Plateau of Pride have developed well, in spite of the difficult economic conditions. Both settlements boast rows of houses, and the early, primitive huts have all virtually disappeared.” However, the debt for purchasing the land, which the HKG (*Hanseatische Kolonisationsgesellschaft* [Hanseatic Colonial Company]) had initially paid, could not be covered. As a result, the German federal government stepped in. Initially only guarantees were offered, but in the end the debts for the settlers were forgiven.

But in the immediate years to follow the situation remained highly uncertain. As a result, serious discussions arose about the future potential for survival within the settlement at the Krauel River. Youthful girls were sent to Blumenau to help in the households, and especially to

help with children in the homes of German-speaking citizens. This venture then also included the daughters of Jakob Hübert, Maria and Anna. Their meagre earnings were dutifully returned to the parents in the settlement. In addition, a new and successful textile industry in Blumenau, established a generation earlier by German immigrants, now looked for a workforce among the youth, especially young women from the surrounding German settlements. And in this manner the child-rich settler families managed to find the basic means to cover the necessities of life.

In 1930, at the very beginning of the settlement, Präses Dohms, a leading pastor in the Lutheran Evangelical Synod out of São Leopoldo, came for a visit to the new German settlements in Santa Catarina province. A few years earlier, with German assistance, the Synod had begun educating Brazilian teachers for new German-Brazilian schools. So the search was on for German evangelical youth, which, at no cost to their families, could be sent to São Leopoldo to be educated. Jakob Hübert immediately saw an opportunity here to provide a paid education for his own family. Franz, his older son, by seven years, was clearly interested in other pursuits, but Heinrich had just reached his thirteenth birthday, and was ready for this opportunity. And thus, Heinrich was brought to the residence and registered in the Pedagogical School in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul.

He completed his education in 1936. Immediately thereafter he was offered a teaching position in a German-Brazilian school on the "Sanderstation" (*Estação Sander –Rio Grande do Sul*), a posting he accepted. But in 1937 numerous schools with non-national curricula were simply closed and forbidden to reopen, among them those featuring the German-Brazilian curriculum. Heinrich Hübert, therefore, lost the position he had so recently won, as well as the vocation he had so ardently pursued. At this time he did not yet recognize that some day he would have a family and children, who would gain immeasurably from his being a teacher deeply familiar with a highly developed cultural curriculum. Now, however, deeply disappointed, he returned to his parents' home.

Here much had changed in the seven intervening years. Owing to the ongoing economic difficulties, a number of families had decided to vacate the Witmarsum settlement on the Krauel River. As capital city of the federal state of Paraná, to the north, the quickly growing city of Curitiba promised better possibilities for success. At that time already Curitiba offered a stable German immigrant community that had established itself as early as 1850. The second generation of German immigrants was now comfortably involved in industry and business. In fact, the larger part of the community could even be described as prosperous. And the growing economy of the city brought with it a growing need for agricultural products. The German immigrants took advantage of this, which was soon reflected in their businesses, their small industries, and their other avenues of interest. Not only this success, but the much milder climate in Curitiba was quickly noticed in the settlements on the Krauel River. All of these factors eventually led to the decision to relocate to the outskirts of Curitiba, where the settlers had been able to purchase suitable larger, flat, arable acreages. And thus the German settlement of *Boqueirão* became an important dairy district for the city of Curitiba.

Thus our father found that the deprivations and difficulties of the Krauel River settlement had turned to opportunities in Curitiba. Maria, the elder sister, still unmarried, was responsible for matters in the paternal household and dairy. Grandfather Hübert owned a fairly substantial acreage with its own pasture in close proximity to the village centre. And our father's other siblings, Helene, Franz and Anna, each had their own families. Still, according to his later reports, Heinrich's return raised mixed feelings for him. On the one hand, it was good to be back in the security of the parental home, and to be among family again. On the other hand, the continual proximity to family now brought with it palpable intellectual constraints for the teacher now educated in broad humanistic thought. As a result he joined the German-speaking evangelical Lutheran church in Curitiba, at the time under the leadership of the highly cultured, worldly wise Pastor Karl Frank. With a Professor Dötzer, Pastor Frank belonged to a specially chosen German school of theologians and teachers, at that time specifically sent to care for the intellectual and spiritual needs of German immigrants in Brazil. Especially Pastor Frank can be

credited with educating a whole generation of German-speaking citizens of Curitiba in the arts, music, philosophy and the natural sciences.

In the meantime, Johann Regier, a good friend of Jakob Hübert, set out to find a suitable work placement for Heinrich. "Hans" Regier had also experienced the harrowing flight from Russia, through which Jakob Hübert had been of great assistance. And in the settlement on the Krauel River, Jakob's helping hand had also always been available. Thus Regier felt thankful, so he determined to find Jakob's son Heinrich a placement in the office of Leuenberger, a Swiss wood flooring firm (*Fàbrica de Lâminas de Imbuia Selectas*), where, thanks to his technical aptitudes, Regier had himself risen to a leading position.

For our grandfather, the distancing of his youngest son from the Mennonite community was surely not easy, given especially that Jakob Hübert still filled the role of church elder. He was undoubtedly asked about this by members of the community. But thanks to his open-mindedness and foresight, he was able to cope with the situation. In the Mennonite community he was certainly seen as wise under the circumstances, and as such widely respected. Additionally, he had experienced much in his own life and in the communities he had served, and he was also well read in religious matters. Many years later our Uncle Hans Görtz, Anna Hübert's husband, recounted to me that he had discussed the situation with our grandfather, asking whether Heinrich should not be brought back into the Mennonite community, upon which Grandfather had supposedly answered, "Just let it be! That Hank, he knows what he wants." (Low German: "*Loot nu! De Hein de tchaant sin Weeg!*") I vividly remember the long, confidential chats our father had in Low German with Grandfather during family visits in Boqueirão. In spite of the cultural differences that developed between our father and our grandfather over the years, the relationship between the two obviously remained strong.

Helene Goossen Hübert passed away in September 1960, four days after she had celebrated her diamond wedding (60 years) with Grandfather Hübert. Jakob Hübert passed away almost exactly four years later, in full mental clarity, at the age of 92. Perhaps because of the problems he had overcome during his life, he knew how to deal with the difficulties of daily life. One of his personal favourite expressions, full of peasant humour, was "Life is not nearly as difficult as we make it for ourselves. I, for example, love to eat cooked chicken eggs. I don't understand, therefore, why I find it so difficult to eat more than fifteen on the same day!" He was constantly a great example of energy, of spiritual strength and stability of character, steadfast, and radiating confidence and trust. For him and, indeed, for the whole community in the most fearful days of the flight out of Russia, as well as in the early Brazilian settlement, in the darkest hours, these traits proved most supportive. He projected an obviously strong and pronounced talent for leadership, which invited the trust of others. And he possessed patience, another part of his character that helped him accept in quiet confidence his lot of personal tragedies, such as the loss of his first wife, his children in his early years, and later his sons, Jacob in Russia, and then Franz in Brazil.

His faith lent him strength. As grandfather, and simply as a human being, as a "Mensch," we cherished him. He had a wonderful, open heart.

Curitiba, November 9, 2014