

Report from Maria Kliewer (1915 – 2008)

From the years 1903 – 1948

The Family [Heinrich] Hübert

I never knew my grandparents, Franz and Elisabeth Hübert (née Janzen). They migrated from the Ukraine in 1903 and 1910, and settled in Slawgorod. Their children Jakob, Franz, Heinrich, David, and Anna were all born in the village of Margenau, District of Poltawa.

As is well known, in 1786 the Czarina Catherine II of Russia formally invited the Mennonite farmers in the region of Danzig to come to Russia. She offered them land, freedom of religion and state support for resettlement. And the farmers came, first to the Ukraine, and then, as land became scarce, on to Siberia. Our grandparents settled around Slawgorod, the children all in the region of Omsk.

As we know, the Germans are voles [lit. rooting mice], and now the work began in earnest. Villages bloomed and farmers worked hard at earning a livelihood, but this became a burden for them in bolshevist Russia. In the '20s the farmers were hit with huge taxes, and their property was to be confiscated, given to large communes. Therefore many farmers decided to flee. From 1923 – 1926, a total of 19,896 Mennonites emigrated to Canada, among them also Uncle Franz with his family of 9. They managed to get permission to emigrate and came to Coaldale, Alberta. Initially they worked the land, since Uncle Franz was a good farmer. But as he aged, all of them moved into town. There they opened a flower business and made a good living. [As Canadian family, we are not sure how this faulty understanding about a flower business arose.]

Uncle Franz lived to be 88 years of age. We had a continuous exchange of letters with his daughter Maria. But she died a number of years ago, so I know nothing about them now.

Another group of farmers fled. It was in the winter of 1929. Very quietly they left their farmhouse and property and left for Moscow in order to get an emigration visa. Among them was also my very dearest Uncle Jacob Hübert. His situation had become ever more critical. He was a minister and founder of the Mennonite Brethren community here. He had led the community for 16 years, and he had also been arrested.

Their oldest son Jacob worked in Leningrad. He was a professor and led the work in the largest Lenin library in Russia. He came to Moscow to wish his parents and siblings good luck [lit. "live well"]. All of them begged "Jacob, come with us." "Maybe later!" But "later" never happened. He suffered a terrible death of starvation in the Russian work camps.

Of the 13,000 that fled only 5670 received permission to travel; the rest of the 7000 farmers had to suffer the heavy sorrow and shuddering road of banishment and torture in the northern forests of Siberia. And those that were freed? Initially Germany accepted them, but they arrived there without

any resources. But then a true Christian appeared in Canada, a certain Professor Benjamin Unruh, who personally appealed to all the countries of the world to help the refugees.

And they all helped. Brazil and Paraguay declared themselves ready to accept the refugees. And thus my Uncle Jakob Hübert arrived in the jungle. Greeted by snakes, monkeys, predators, a host of insects and worms of all sorts. The beginning was difficult. The forest had to be partially cleared in order to put a roof over their heads. My uncle also [led] that community there (some 13 years).

Then he suffered a heart attack, which affected his speech. But he still made house-calls and worked at nourishing souls. In September 1964 his situation deteriorated, and in his last days he repeatedly murmured, "I want to go home. Take me home." And at the age of 91 his heavenly father called him home. He leaves a blessed memory.

Uncle David Hübert lived behind Omsk in the village of Chaldeewka. With his family he often visited us, but beyond that I don't know him. He was apparently a colourful bird, because he left his family and remained foreign to them. No cock has crowed in his memory, and neither have I.

Aunt Anna Dück (née Hübert) lived in Tiegerweide (Solnzewka). She was a very beloved aunt, and in addition, welcoming to everyone. She died of tuberculosis. Of her six children, two still live in Russia and one granddaughter and family in Germany.

Our parents married in 1905. Father worked as a teacher and mama was the oldest of 15 siblings and was only 17 when she married. Why she left her family so early I don't understand, but maybe she just could not bear remaining at home since grandfather demanded a great deal of work. So the twins Henry and Katie (Heinrich and Katja) were born in 1906. Katie died within a year and Henry grew up without his father's love. It was jealousy. Father was stern, bordering on brutality. I firmly believe that he loved none of his children. All feared him and thus all the children ran to mother for protection, to the anger of the father. But he was a good farmer. His fields always stood out from the rest, but to some extent that was no wonder. Father cared only about the business outside, and for quality seed, good tools and also good agricultural machinery. As we know, in 1910 the parents moved to the Siberian village of Nikolaifeld, where good, new fertile cropland was available. But the poor mother strained to clothe her rattling band of children: she wove, she knit, and she patched, day and night.

In the year 1922 the typhus epidemic raged through Siberia. And the disease did not spare our family. First Blandina and then Anna were stricken, and then the father. Father did not weather the disease and died July 18, 1922 in Nikolaifeld, and was buried there, where 5 of his children were also buried.

After father's death my youngest sister Lena was born. Eight of 14 children were still alive. For mother everything became too difficult, so she asked her brother Jacob with his family into the home to become manager and spokesman. In 1924 we moved over to the neighbouring village of Putschkowo. We now had a piece of land of 2 hectares, an old house with many additions (all told, 23 doors). And the barn was so long that one had to strain to see the far end. It was a sorry farmstead, and demanded a lot of work for each of us. According to our age, each of us also attended our respective classes of our

elementary school. After that it was off to Margenau to the district central school, except for our Anna, who preferred the kitchen.

In the '20s then the collectives were firmly established, and property confiscated. Eight horses, the whole inventory, including all the machinery so carefully chosen by our father, everything was taken from our property, and the land itself cut by one half. We were left with only 2 cows and the long, empty barn. We were, thank the Lord, spared exile.

All worked diligently in the collective. Every day we learned to be more careful. Even our words and thoughts were picked up by ears that immediately passed them on.

Blandina married in 1931, and then Anna and Gerhard in 1934. All of you know me, with my highs and lows, as well as Johann and Lena.

Our mother became sick in the '40s. She had cancer. She had an operation in June 1948 in Omsk, but she was sewed up immediately because the cancer had taken hold in her nervous system. She lost her mind completely and died December 18, 1948 in Heimtal.

Presented by Daughter Maria Kliewer

	Born	Died
1. Heinrich	06 April, 1907	March 1943
2. Katja	06 April, 1907	Infancy
3. Gerhard	1909	Infancy
4. Blandina	26 Feb. 1910	19 May, 1987
5. Anna	23 Sept. 1911	24 Feb. 2001
6. Katja	1912	Infancy
7. Gerhard	29 Jan. 1913	19 Nov. 1980
8. Franz	29 Jan. 1913	Nov. 1944
9. Jakob	1914	Infancy
10. Maria	10 Dec. 1915	[20 Mar. 2008]
11. Margarete	10 Dec. 1915	Infancy (2.5 years)
12. Jakob	1917	Infancy
13. Johann	12 July 1919	24 Sept. 1996
14. Lena	26 Nov. 1922	01 Jan. 1987