

Wilfrid Laurier University

Scholars Commons @ Laurier

---

Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)

---

2010

## Grounding Diaspora in Experience: Niagara Mennonite Identity

Cynthia Anne Jones  
*Wilfrid Laurier University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd>



Part of the [Human Geography Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Jones, Cynthia Anne, "Grounding Diaspora in Experience: Niagara Mennonite Identity" (2010). *Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)*. 1099.  
<https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/1099>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).



Library and Archives  
Canada

Published Heritage  
Branch

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque et  
Archives Canada

Direction du  
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*  
ISBN: 978-0-494-68748-2  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
ISBN: 978-0-494-68748-2

#### NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

---

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

#### AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

---

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

  
**Canada**



GROUNDING DIASPORA IN EXPERIENCE:

NIAGARA MENNONITE IDENTITY

By

Cynthia Anne Jones

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) 1997, Bachelor of Education 1998

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

Wilfrid Laurier University

© Cynthia Anne Jones 2010



**AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a copy of the thesis, including any final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study grounds theoretical notions of diaspora in personal accounts of Russian Mennonites living on the Niagara peninsula of Canada. The focus is on successive, complex interrelationships with 'place' (in a fixed sense, and a globally connected sense), with attention to gender, generation, and life-stage. How have these individuals experienced diaspora, and how has this influenced their culture and identity? Interrelationships with place are examined within an analytical framework composed of three key elements as identified in diaspora literature: cultural hybridity, social heterogeneity (internal divisions), and responsibility flows. The results are both descriptive and theoretical, featuring first person narratives of fifty individuals from three generations collected via in-depth interviews and focus group meetings. Such *in situ* studies counter essentialist and universal notions ('meta theory') by highlighting heterogeneity within diaspora experience ('minor theory').

For the many various Mennonite groups, identity has been both a determining factor and a function of their settlement and migration processes. Their historical geographies are highly complex. The individual and group identities of the Russian Mennonites of this study, for example, have been forged and re-forged across time and space and continue to be reworked in diaspora in Niagara. Experiences of religion, persecutions, successive and simultaneous place-based associations and ethnic Otherings, national immigration policies, political and military processes, economics and labour choices, and the creation of networks have intersected with myriad social variables. The rich collective experience of these people and their ancestors provides fertile opportunity to explore grounded geographies of identity through the lens of diaspora theory.

The thesis finds that the Niagara Russian Mennonites simultaneously experience an intensely local sense of place in Niagara and a 'stretched out' experience of global community, both of which are functions of diaspora. A deep sense of contentment and 'home' in a receiving country is therefore not incompatible with a continuing transnational orientation; nodes (fixed places) can be as important as networks (connectors within the wider world) in the context of specific diasporic identities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank the people of the Niagara Russian Mennonite community who so generously participated in this study. It was my great pleasure to meet you, and my great honour to have been entrusted with your stories. Thank you for welcoming me into your homes and your lives.

To my doctoral advisor, the geographer Dr. Jody Decker, thank you for your guidance, and also for the exceptional example you have been for me in the classroom. Thank you also to the other accomplished members of my doctoral committee: the anthropologist Dr. Jasmin Habib, the historian Dr. Marlene Epp, and the geographer Dr. Margaret Walton-Roberts. I also extend gratitude to my external examiner, Dr. Christl Verduyn, cross-appointed at Mount Allison University to the Department of English and the Canadian Studies Program. I thank you all for your varied perspectives of this interdisciplinary study, which will continue to inform my future work.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my family: Gary, Amy, Sandy, Forrest, Faith, Mom, Dad, Barb, and Gramma Doris. My most pervasive thought after having completed this work is that you are more important to me than any work.

At the Master's level, I received an award from the Frank H. Epp Memorial Fund, which was an early encouragement. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of those at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, especially archivist Conrad Stoesz, who took the time to collate post WW2 Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization data into a format accessible for me for this study.

Thank you also to Mr. Werner Fast and Mr. Albert Willms for being available to help me with translations.

Last, but surely not least, my thanks go to Mr. Ian Mather and Mr. Michael Jones for crucial technical support, which sadly my university did not provide, and yet without which this work could not have been accomplished.

The full funding of this research was provided by myself, and my partner for life, the unwavering Dr. Gary Epp.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to Irene and Henry. This work would not have been imagined or possible without you. Thank you both so very much.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Author's Declaration</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Dedication</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>List of Boxes</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Parable of the Sower</i>	<i>x</i>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research Question, Objectives, and Justification for work	3
1.2 Structure of Dissertation	10
1.3 Place of the Study: Niagara	12
1.4 People of the Study: Mennonites	21
1.4.1 Russian Mennonites	24
1.4.2 Niagara Mennonites (Group A – 'Russlaender')	36
1.4.3 Niagara Mennonites (Group B – 'Fluechtlinge')	39
1.4.4 Summary: People of the Study Group	45
<b>2 Methodology</b>	<b>49</b>
2.1 'New Geographies'	50
2.1.1 What is 'place'?	51
2.1.2 Feminist Methodologies	53
2.2. Methods	61
2.2.1 Qualitative Case Study	61
2.2.2 Diaspora Framework	69
2.2.3 Analytical Framework	80
2.2.4 Field Research	83
2.2.4.1 Ethics	83
2.2.4.2 Field Study Design	85
2.2.4.3 Opportunistic Data and Secondary Data	87
2.2.4.4 Summary	87

<b>3</b>	<b><i>Seeds: Back in the USSR</i></b>	<b>91</b>
	3.1 <i>Russlaender</i> (Group A, First Generation)	92
	3.1.1 Summary & Analysis	102
	3.2 <i>Fluechtlinge</i> (Group B, First Generation)	106
	3.2.1 Summary & Analysis	125
	3.3 <i>Fluechtlinge</i> (Group B, Second Generation)	128
	3.3.1 Summary & Analysis	138
<b>4</b>	<b><i>Scattering: The Journeys</i></b>	<b>141</b>
	4.1 <i>Russlaender</i> (Group A, First Generation)	142
	4.1.1 Summary & Analysis	152
	4.2 <i>Fluechtlinge</i> (Group B, First Generation)	154
	4.2.1 Summary & Analysis	179
	4.3 <i>Fluechtlinge</i> (Group B, Second Generation)	183
	4.3.1 Summary & Analysis	212
<b>5</b>	<b><i>Taking Root: Life in Niagara</i></b>	<b>217</b>
	5.1 <i>Russlaender</i> (Group A, First Generation)	218
	5.1.1 Summary & Analysis	251
	5.2 <i>Fluechtlinge</i> (Group B, First Generation)	253
	5.2.1 Summary & Analysis	277
	5.3 <i>Fluechtlinge</i> (Group B, Second Generation)	280
	5.3.1 Focus Group: <i>Fluechtlinge</i> (Group B, Second Generation)	323
	5.3.2 Summary & Analysis	328
<b>6</b>	<b><i>Good Soil: Niagara Harvest</i></b>	<b>335</b>
	6.1 <i>Russlaender</i> (Group A, Second Generation)	335
	6.1.1 Cultural Hybridity	336
	6.1.2 Social Heterogeneity	340
	6.1.3 Performance & Co-responsibility	344
	6.1.4 Mennonite Identity	348
	6.1.5 Niagara Identity	350
	6.2 <i>Fluechtlinge/Russlaender</i> (Groups A/B, Third Generation)	353
	6.2.1 Focus Groups	354
	6.2.2 Summary & Analysis	381

<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>392</b>
	7.1 Cultural Hybridity	396
	7.2 Social Heterogeneity	405
	7.3 Performance & Co-responsibility	407
	7.4 Directions for Future Research	411
	7.5 Concluding Remarks	413
	<i>Works Cited</i>	415
	<i>Appendix I – Comparison of Mennonite surnames</i>	441
	<i>Appendix II – Toronto Star Article, 1944 (“Russians Have Built Up Big Fruit Colony”)</i>	442
	<i>Appendix III – Map of Central Europe, 1550</i>	443
	<i>Appendix IV - Map of Vistula Delta</i>	444
	<i>Appendix V – Map of migration from Vistula Delta to South Russia</i>	445
	<i>Appendix VI – Map of Mennonite colonies in Russia</i>	446
	<i>Appendix VII – Map of earliest settlers in Virgil</i>	447
	<i>Appendix VIII - Comparisons of Mennonite populations, acreage, farms</i>	448
	<i>Appendix IX – Map of Great Trek</i>	449
	<i>Appendix X – Fluechtlinge settlement pattern, Niagara peninsula</i>	450
	<i>Appendix XI – List of guiding questions for interviews</i>	451
	<i>Appendix XII – List of guiding topics for Focus Group meetings</i>	458

## List of Figures

1.1 Situation of the Niagara peninsula of North America.....	13
1.2 Map of the Niagara peninsula of Canada.....	14
1.3 Map of physiology of Niagara peninsula of North America.....	14
1.4 Appellation map, Niagara peninsula.....	17
1.5 Map of St. Catharines-Niagara Census Metropolitan Area.....	20
1.6 Prince of Wales Hotel, Niagara-on-the-Lake.....	20
1.7 Migrational time line of the two study groups.....	47
1.8 Contextual reference aid for study groups.....	48
1.9 Generations within the Niagara study groups.....	48
2.1 Comparison of traditional western positivist and feminist social science research model....	62
2.2 Common features of a global diaspora.....	78
2.3 Chaordic framework for cultural diaspora in Niagara.....	83
2.4 Study design: Interviews and focus group meetings.....	85



**List of Boxes**

2.1 Thoughts on diaspora as framework.....79

3.1 ‘Unfiltered’ data?.....92

3.2 Life, stories, and ‘rollkuchen’ .....96

3.3 Weddings .....108

3.4 Questions.....110

3.5 Greta’s funeral.....113

3.6 Marta.....117

3.7 Elsie.....125

3.8 Fathers.....136

4.1 George’s grandson.....150

4.2 Facilitators.....158

4.3 Religious Othering.....189

4.4 Silences .....206

5.1 Insider/Outsider.....303

5.2 Interview ‘places’ .....318

6.1 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Focus Groups.....353

6.2 The element of choice in adult baptism.....360

“There was a man who went out to sow. As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn’t deep. When the sun came up it burned the young plants, and because the roots had not grown deep enough the plants soon dried up. Some of the seeds fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. But some seeds fell in good soil, and bore grain: some had one hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty.”

Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-8)

## 1 Introduction

There is a heavy presence of Mennonite culture in and surrounding the Region of Waterloo, Ontario, where I live. I began my Master's studies with an interest in researching some aspect of what is referred to as Old Order Mennonite culture. However, with no links into these very conservative Mennonite groups, all avenues came to dead-ends for me. Around this time, I began to spend more time in the Niagara Region of Ontario with my new partner, himself a descendent of Russian Mennonites. During family visits in his hometown of Niagara-on-the-Lake, I began to learn of the distinctions between the many different Mennonite groups, which seemed to stem in large part from differing geographic trajectories. I began to hear references to remarkable stories of migration from Russia to Niagara; eventually I became aware that these stories had never been recorded.

Discussions with my supervisor, Dr. Jody Decker, led me to research into the field of diaspora studies. I was initially very motivated by the work of Breda Gray on Irish diasporas, especially her focus on grounding diaspora theory to the lived experiences of people in specific places (1996, 1997, 2000a; 2000b). How do our theories fare in the tests of real living? What do different diasporas look like, off the page? From there, my Master's project took shape in 2004, involving research into a group of Russian Mennonite refugees who came to settle in the Niagara area in the late 1940s from the area of southern Russia (then USSR) that is now Ukraine. I had links to the Niagara Mennonites through family connections, and so established 'gatekeepers' who were able to facilitate community connections on my behalf. People seemed hungry for their stories to be known; they welcomed me, with my recording devices, into their homes.

Soon it became evident that the data was rich enough, and available enough, to warrant an expanded scope for this study: one that would also include an additional group of Russian-Mennonite settlers to Niagara. This group had settled on the peninsula in the early 1930s under very different circumstances than those who came as refugees in the 1940s. First generation participants were quite elderly; time was of the essence in order to record their stories while there was opportunity. On this basis, I was approved to accelerate to the PhD level to quickly accommodate this wider scope, and so in 2005 I immediately began completing data collection, even before writing my doctoral comprehensive exams. Soon thereafter, elderly participants did indeed begin to pass away. As I write, we have lost six members of this study. I am so grateful to have had the privilege of meeting these people, and to have preserved the valuable stories of their lives and the unique perspectives they so generously shared.

The idea of recording the stories in an audio-visual format came first out of a sense of wanting to preserve them, but also a desire to give the participants and their families something to keep from these intimate sessions, given the reality that this project is 'ours' as opposed to 'mine'. Mennonite Archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo expressed an interest in archiving the interviews (with appropriate permission) for the broader public. My decision to write in the first person is motivated by the related desire of ensuring that this work is accessible to participants involved with me in the research process. I feel that a first person approach makes the dissertation less threatening as a theoretical document. As well, it reflects the principles of feminist research, which acknowledge that a researcher is never truly objective.

Following from that onto a personal note, while I am not Mennonite, I do know something about moving between worlds. I was often struck during the course of this project by

how, as an adoptee, I could relate to certain diasporic aspects of identity, especially related to feeling 'in-between' worlds. I wondered if perhaps I was drawn to this research in part because of what I came to perceive as my own analogous struggles to work out where I fit in culturally, and who I am as an individual. Perhaps my inclination to look beyond the motif of loss associated with diaspora toward a concurrent possibility of a motif of opportunity stems from my having experienced both, as a 'displaced person' of another sort. I have reflected on the irony of how unfortunate circumstances beyond our control as individuals can, sometimes, lead us to people and places with whom, over time, we feel we belong. Still, as we move forward, we carry with us those elements of who we are as were shaped by other people, other places, other times. The balance between how we allow people and places to shape us, and how they allow us to shape them, seems key as to which motif might prevail.

In many ways then, including new affiliations with people and with ideas, this project has been a journey for me. It has been a singular privilege to work within the Niagara Mennonite community. I wish to thank all of the participants for allowing me to apply a scholarly gaze to often intimate details of their lives, and to their personal opinions and perspectives. I now turn to the academic aspect of the journey by setting out my research question and objectives.

### **1.1 Research Question, Objectives, and Justification for Work**

The research presented here draws on a case study of a community of Russian Mennonites living in diaspora for almost a century on the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario, Canada. The specific community under study resides in the jurisdictions of Vineland, St. Catharines, Virgil, and Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL). This is a gendered, generational study in which geographic understandings of 'diaspora' are used as framework for analyzing the data.

I began with the question: *How have successive, complex interrelationships with 'place' evolving over time from Europe to Canada influenced the culture and identity of the Niagara Russian Mennonites?* The following four research objectives were then developed:

- I. To assess the theoretical fit of the term 'diaspora' to this group, and to choose an appropriate diaspora framework from the social science literature.
- II. To explore the evolution of culture and identity as it evolved through time from Holland to Niagara, with attention to gendered, generational, and life-stage perspectives.
- III. To explore the interrelationships between the participants and the places they have called home, from the perspective of the participants.
- IV. To preserve the unique stories and reflections of the participants via audio-visual recordings, and to provide the participants with copies of the recordings.

Increasingly, the term diaspora appears in Mennonite literature. Royden Loewen's book "Diaspora in the Countryside"(2006), for example, is actually about the movement of Mennonites from rural to urban areas within the jurisdictions of Kansas and Manitoba. While the diaspora metaphor is illustrative in this case, its attenuation to an intra-national scale is indeed a stretch from the common features of diaspora framework as outlined in social science typologies. This project, on the other hand, examines local manifestations of global diasporic experiences.

The historian Marlene Epp's study, Mennonite Women in Canada (2008), explores and contextualizes certain aspects of diaspora theory at the national scale In "Chapter One:

Pioneers, Refugees, and Transnationals: Women Immigrate to Canada” (pp. 23-58). In contrast, this study grounds notions of diaspora in the lived experiences of individuals connected to a specific Canadian community: Niagara. Effectively, it is a constituent component of the comprehensive national picture that Epp has presented, thus allowing for more focused and in-depth exploration of aspects of diaspora, especially the crucial element of ‘place’.

In 2000, Epp published the first gendered study of Russian Mennonites who immigrated to Canada in the late 1940s: Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War. Included is her examination of how the experiences of these women in Russia, and as refugees on the move, shaped their identities in comparison to Russian Mennonite women who had emigrated earlier. In her conclusions, Epp puts out a call for community-scale research, acknowledging that the place of re-settlement in Canada would have an effect on identity formation for these women going forward: “The experiences of individuals and families (have been) further shaped by the postwar communities that became their homes. Closer comparison of the Mennonite culture and the socio-economic situation within particular regions of the country is necessary to understand how the experiences of an immigrant in British Columbia’s Fraser Valley (is) different from, or similar to, that of a person settling in Ontario’s Niagara Peninsula”(p. 192).

There is now a significant body of Mennonite literature in which gender is addressed, predominantly gendered re-interpretations of historical accounts, and studies of women’s roles at various points in time and space.<sup>1</sup> Marlene Epp (2000, 2008) has provided the richest and

---

<sup>1</sup> Examples include M. Epp, 1987, 1990, 1997, 2002, 2004; Schmidt, 1995, 2001; Epp-Theissen, 2000; Goering & Krause, 2001; Funk-Weibe, 1999; Marr, 1999; Urry, 1999; Penner, 1998; Klippenstein,

most exhaustive examples. A few publications within the last decade address masculinity.<sup>2</sup> Royden Loewen does combine intimate descriptions of men and women in his studies, which also tend to be place and time specific (1993, 2001, 2006). This study aims to be inclusive in its examination of individual experiences of diaspora by giving attention to “multiple axes of social difference” (Laurie, Dwyer, Holloway, & Smith, 1999, p. 53) including gender (how femininities and masculinities are perceived and performed), generation, and life stage. In this way, while the category of gender is not the prioritized focus of this research, its application to concepts of place and diaspora inform our understandings of differences in individual experiences of both.

It should be noted, as well, that the abovementioned are works conducted by Mennonites about Mennonites, whereas my situation as a non-Mennonite (‘outsider’) researcher may suggest differentiation.

With regard to geographic literature, I have found one other study in the past decade that deals with Russian Mennonite migrations. It is site-specific to La Crete, Alberta. “Die Auswanderung: Religion, Culture, and Migration among Old Colony Mennonites”, published in the Canadian Geographer (2001), is a qualitative study by Dawn Boewen. She examines cultural motivations behind frequent migrations among Old Colony Mennonites, concluding that preservation of lifestyle has been the primary determining factor of the group’s mobility. (This group, which emigrated from the ‘Old Colony’ of Chortitza, Russia in the 1870s, maintains an ideal of living in socially isolated communities.) The group has experienced frequent internal

---

1997; Horst, 1996; Redekop, 1996; Snyder & Huebert Hecht, 1996; Bailey, 1994; Klassen, 1994a, 1994b; Deckert Saylor, 1993; Erb, 1990; Toews, 1988; Rich, 1983; Klingelsmith, 1980; Toews, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include M. Epp, 1999; Urry, 1999; Mills, 2005.



migration since arrival to Canada, as well as immigration to points in Central and South America. The study does not employ diaspora, gender, or generational analyses.

Cross-Cultural Encounters on the Ukrainian Steppe: Settling the Molochna Basin, 1783-1861 (2003) is an important and comprehensive study by John R. Staples, which focuses on how cultural factors of various groups influenced the geographic history of this region, including settlement patterns, land use (especially agricultural), and the social construction of 'place'. He notes that historical accounts of Russian Mennonites in the Ukraine "are notorious for silence on the subject of Mennonites' interaction with their neighbours", and that they make "only passing mention of the environment" (pp. 10-11).

I have found a single other situated, gendered, generational study of a diasporic group within social science literature generally: a book entitled South Asians in Kenya: Gender, Generation and Changing Identities in Diaspora (2006) by the geographer Pascale Herzig. Factors differentiating this study from Herzig's include the serially diasporic nature of the Russian Mennonites, their profile as a conservative ethno-religious group, and scale (i.e., local versus national).

There is one other scholarly study geographically exclusive to Mennonites in Niagara. This involves audio taped interviews conducted by Ellen Baar and Trudy Funk<sup>3</sup>, which resulted in Baar's article "Patterns of Selective Accentuation among Niagara Mennonites", published in Canadian Ethnic Studies (1983). The thesis is that ethnicity is not fixed, but rather it can change in response to environmental conditions. Baar determined that the Niagara group had moved

---

<sup>3</sup> The set of 23 interviews, dated 1976-1977, is held at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, and is described as "part of a larger oral history project on the Niagara Peninsula" (Steiner, 2007a).

to emphasize religiosity over ethnicity through time as a means of differentiating itself from the broader community. She argues the sociological theory of 'selective accentuation' of group traits based on environmental factors. Canada is a multicultural society that is accepting of minority ethnic groups. Canadians generally also exhibit a trend of weakening religiosity. Baar's research suggests the Niagara Mennonites, in order to set themselves apart as a group, have moved away from an accentuation of ethnic differences, and moved toward a cohesion based on religiosity. Further, their religious cohesion is increasingly based on shared Christian beliefs, as opposed to the specific tenets of Anabaptism, which were accentuated in the past.

Henry Paetkau's Master's thesis, A Struggle for Survival: The Russian Mennonite Immigrants in Ontario, 1924-1939 (1977), and PhD dissertation, Separation or Integration? The Russian Mennonite Immigrant Community in Ontario (1986) were based on qualitative data collected from points across Ontario, of which Niagara was one. These projects were undertaken in response to a dearth of Russian Mennonite research focused at the provincial scale for Ontario, and include a call for future research to focus on communities: "A great deal of research, and analysis, remains to be done on the local and regional level. This is particularly necessary for the Russian Mennonites in Ontario, a long-neglected and misrepresented part of the post-World War 1 influx" (1986, p. 11).

Frank Epp makes reference to the Swiss and the Russian Mennonites in Niagara in his sweeping chronicles of Mennonite experiences in Canada (1962; 1974; 1982), as does T.D. Regehr (1996). These are helpful resources in terms of historical information, but discussion specific to Niagara is limited – in fact, consideration of Ontario's situation in isolation at all is slight.

The most useful secondary data sources specific to Niagara have been locally printed editions of 'yearbooks', distributed locally to congregations to mark anniversaries of Mennonite presence in the area. (e.g., C.A. Friesen, 1984; Niagara United Mennonite Church 50th Anniversary Committee, 1988).

The contributions of Mennonite farmers in terms of the transformation of the Niagara Peninsula into Canada's foremost fruit producing belt, and a world-renowned viticulture area, has neither been examined in academic literature generally, nor in Mennonite literature specifically. Fruit production took a hold in the area with the early loyalist and Swiss Mennonite settlers, and intensified after the Russian Mennonites arrived. This project invites further study on the topic. Further, the predominant (British) version of the history on display in this profitable tourist region belies the diversity of people for whom the peninsula is home, as represented in the stories and perspectives collected during this research.

In his comprehensive description of the myriad variations of what it means to be Mennonite in Canada today, "The Poetics of Peoplehood: Ethnicity & Religion Among Canada's Mennonites" ( *in* Bramadat & Seljak, 2008), Royden Loewen suggests:

Religion most often informed the Mennonites' sense of ethnicity, while ethnicity often guarded their faith. Over time, the two cultural phenomena intersected in a dynamic and even synergistic manner. In this regard, of course, Mennonite identity is like other ethnicities, which...consist not of primordial or essentialist qualities, but historically conditioned cultural constructions... Even today the phenomenon is kaleidoscopic, presenting in various and disparate forms. (p. 332)

This study presents description and analysis of one community within the kaleidoscope of Canadian Mennonite identity, as it has evolved through time and space.

## 1.2 Structure of Dissertation

The dissertation will be presented as follows: Chapter One presents a case history of the place and the people of this study. Physical and cultural aspects of the Niagara peninsula, the specific peninsula communities included in this study, and a discussion of aspects of the dominant industries are included. Discussion of Niagara unfolds to discussion of people: Who are the Mennonites, in general? Who are the Russian Mennonites? Who are *these* Russian Mennonites? How, when, and why did they arrive in Niagara?

Chapter Two addresses the conceptual framework girding this study, which is foremost informed by feminist methodologies, including postmodern, postcolonial, and poststructural tenets. Discussions of each as relate to my work are found here, following an introduction to place theory. Notions of place are revisited and expanded upon in context within other methodological considerations, and also among the narrative chapters. The Methods section follows, beginning with clarification as to how various methods may be used to differing effects, depending on the conceptual framework of a research design. A discussion of Qualitative Case Study research models is then presented, followed by descriptions of interview and focus group techniques employed. Next, is an in-depth discussion of diaspora framework as a research tool: origins of the term 'diaspora'; various theories of 'diaspora'; and current usages of the term as identified within the diaspora literature, with specific attention to diaspora typologies as viable frameworks. I situate the notion of diaspora within feminist postmodern, postcolonial and poststructural theorizations, and justify its use in this study, including the appropriate and most useful diaspora framework as was determined from the literature (as per Research Objective I). This is followed by sections related to Field Research (Ethics, Design, and Opportunistic and Secondary Data). The chapter ends with a summary of the analysis process.

The remaining chapters are comprised of study results, presented primarily as first-person narratives. The aim is to present a pastiche of sorts - the blending of individual stories into a cohesive impression of this diaspora, as it has been lived 'on the ground'. Through the life-stories of those born in Russia (Chapters 3 through 5), I geographically trace the 'roots and routes' of the diaspora, identifying interrelationships between 'place' and the evolution of cultural identities (as per Research Objectives II & III). Diaspora in Niagara is then presented in Chapter 6 from the perspective of the generations born there. The four results chapters are organized as follows<sup>4</sup>:

CHAPTER 3. Seeds: Back in the USSR

CHAPTER 4. Scattering: The Journeys

CHAPTER 5. Taking Root: Life in Niagara

CHAPTER 6. Good Soil: Niagara Harvest

In Chapter 7, I conclude my analysis by solidifying links between the case history, the narratives, and theoretical understandings of diaspora and place. Finally, questions which arose from this research, as well as directions for future research, are identified.

Having introduced the structure of this thesis, I now establish a case history of the study group with sections on Place of Study, and People of Study. For convenience of referencing as the reader carries forward, visual aids to clarify the complexity of these case history sections are provided in the last two pages of this chapter.

### **A Note on Terminology**

---

<sup>4</sup> Inspiration for chapter titles was taken from the *Parable of the Sower* (Mathew 13:1-8), as included here on page x.

Following the 1917 Bolshevic revolution, the area in which most Mennonites had settled – that is, the south Russian steppes east of the Dnieper River - became part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. After this point, the area is sometimes referred to as ‘The Ukraine’ or, most accurately, the Soviet Ukrainian Republic within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. For references to the area after its independence was declared in 1991, the term ‘Ukraine’ is accurate.<sup>5</sup>

For the purposes of this study, however, I have taken some licence in order to achieve consistency with terminology used by participants, who most often use the term ‘Russia’ when referencing their last homeland, perhaps because that was the nomenclature at the time of their ancestors’ immigration there in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Sometimes participants use the term ‘the Ukraine’. Technically, since the study groups left the area post-revolution in either the 1920s or 1940s, they actually left the Soviet Union or USSR (sometimes referred to as Soviet Russia) rather than Imperialist Russia.

### **1.3 Place of the Study: Niagara**

One is struck by the remarkable physical geography of the Niagara Peninsula of North America. The unique landform profile and spectacular vistas in this region, both natural and cultivated, impart a strong sense of place. There is a distinctive coexistence of the wild with the tame; the treacherous chaos of Niagara Falls and the gorge, for example, is offset by the ordered rows of thousands of hectares of fruit orchards and vineyards, and the civilized refinement of the marquee tourist town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

---

<sup>5</sup> See Urry, 1996 for a comprehensive discussion of changing boundaries, governances, and terminologies in regard to this area.

The 'peninsula' is actually an isthmus, joining Ontario on its western (Canadian) side, to New York on its eastern (American) side, effectively separating two of the continent's Great Lakes: Lake Ontario to the north, and Lake Erie to the south (Figure 1.1). The Niagara River runs north from Lake Erie at Buffalo, New York to Lake Ontario at Niagara-on-the-Lake in the north, spilling over the Niagara Escarpment at Niagara Falls, a little more than half-way across this tract of land that averages only about 40 km in width (Figure 1.2).

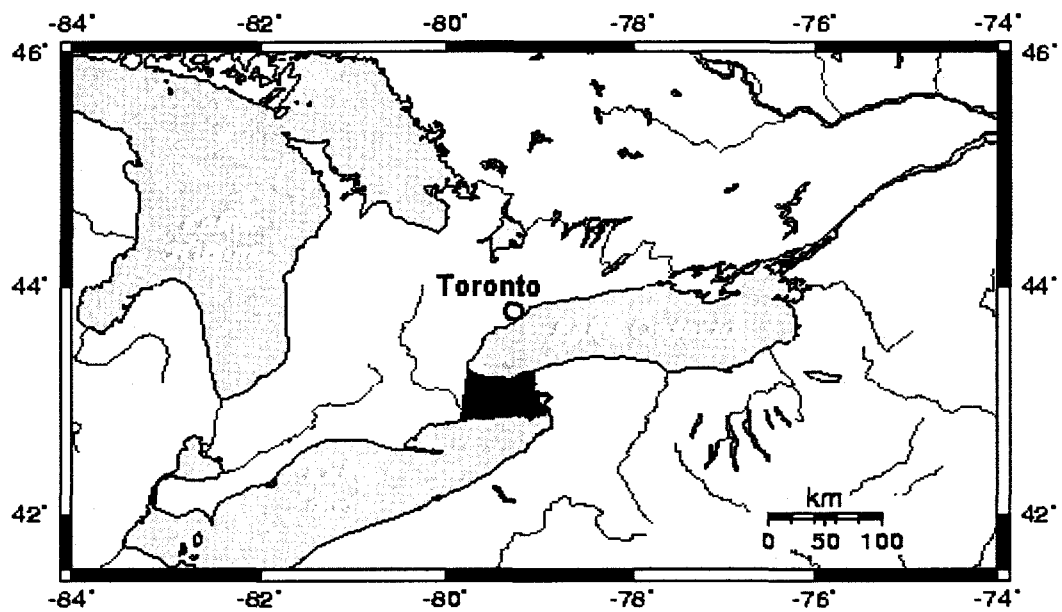


Figure 1.1. Situation of the Niagara Peninsula of North America (identified here in red)

The Niagara Escarpment, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, runs 1600 km east-west from Watertown, New York to Manitoulin Island in northern Ontario. This 245 million year old landform girds the peninsula's economic profile (Figure 1.3). Tourism and agriculture, the two major industries on the peninsula, are indebted to the presence of the escarpment. Constituting a relatively small but precious resource, Niagara agricultural land includes 15,000 acres (6070.3 ha) of tender fruit land and between 15,000 and 20,000 acres (8093.7 ha) of grape land.

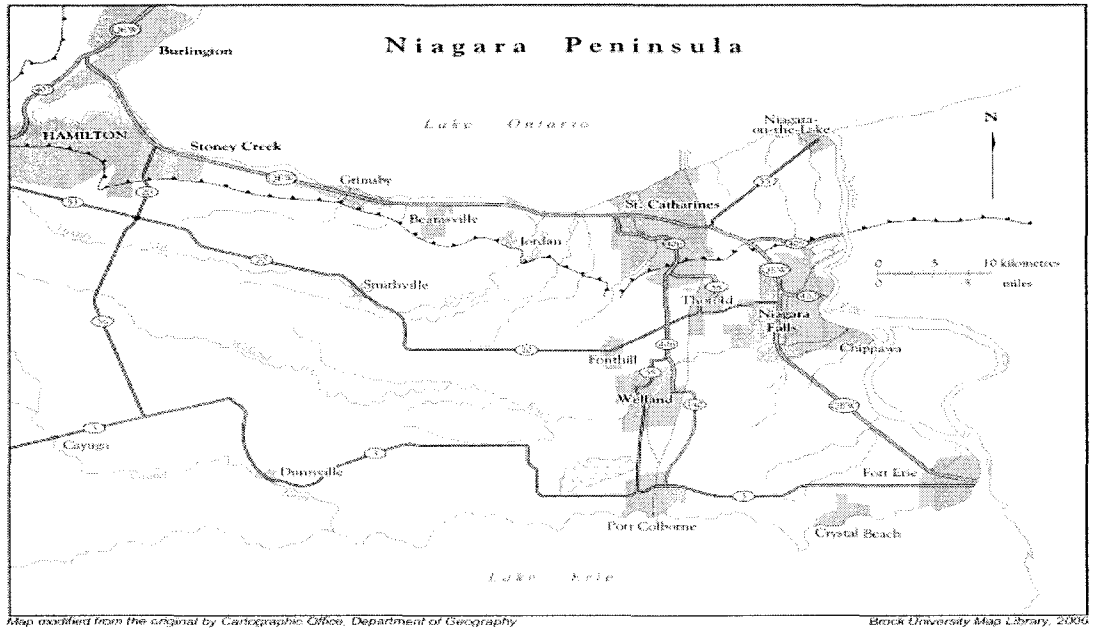


Figure 1.2. Map of Niagara Peninsula of North America (Brock University Map Library, 2000)

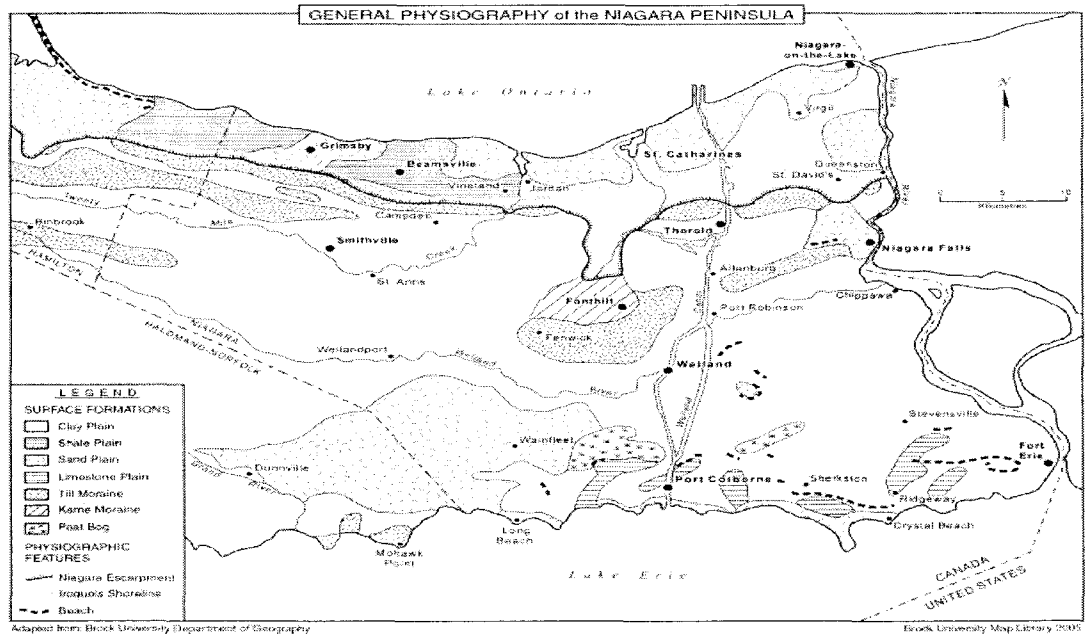


Figure 1.3. Map of the physiology of Niagara Peninsula (Brock University Map Library, 2005)



Orchards range in size on the peninsula, planted with tender fruits such as peaches, nectarines, plums, apricots, cherries, strawberries, many varieties of pears and apples, pawpaws, and more. Much of the fruit has traditionally been used for processing, although there are many small fruit stands and local markets. Since the 1990s, though, the main crop has been grape. And following the closure of fruit processing plants in the region<sup>6</sup>, 90% of the grapes grown now supply wine production (Creighton, 2009). According to the Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society, based in St. Catharines:

Most of the farmlands are classes 1-3, (and) the predominantly class 1 fruit lands comprise only 15% of a total farmland base of 232,817 acres. Yet in 1996 they were responsible for 86% of the grapes and 82% of tender fruit produced in Ontario. Today, 80% of Canada's grapes are grown in Niagara and tender fruit generated \$40 million of the approximately \$511 million in gross farm sales in 2001 and nearly \$200 million of the nearly \$11.8 billion in region-wide economic impacts. (The Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society, 2008)

The escarpment results in the formation of a microclimate. It blocks and reflects air masses from Lake Ontario, re-routing them northward again back toward the lake and through the low-lying areas. This active airflow prevents early freezing, as cold air is delayed in settling into the lowlands. It also effectively delays the development of fruit buds in spring and prevents both late spring and early fall frosts, thus lengthening the growing season. The water mass of Lake Ontario, one of the deepest of the Great Lakes, also has a moderating effect on temperatures year-round. Microclimatic conditions further enhance a latitudinal position of 41 degrees north to 44 degrees north, one that is favourable already to the production of fruit. The result is an area with temperature profiles similar to those of Burgundy and Bordeaux in France. Complex glacial soils further compliment this environment, which is precisely suited for growing grapes and other tender fruit (Canadian Vintner's Association Website, 2009).

---

<sup>6</sup> CanGro, the last canning factory on the peninsula closed in July of 2008 (See Walkom, 2008).

Intraregional variations in soils, site situations and microclimates make for the identification of ten distinct sub-appellations<sup>7</sup> on the Niagara Peninsula, with 573 distinct appellation wines (Figure 1.4). There are currently seventy Niagara wineries registered with Ontario's provincially legislated regulatory body for viticulture standards, the Vintner's Quality Alliance (VQA), and upwards of 30 additional unregistered boutique wineries. Common varietals include Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Franc.<sup>8</sup> Ice Wines are a regional specialty. Today the Niagara Peninsula is recognized internationally as an outstanding viticulture area. Tourism to the region has expanded to include upscale wineries with spectacular orchard vistas, accompanying culinary schools, and fine dining establishments. A 2004-2005 Tourism Niagara report lists 5050 wine-industry related jobs, with total wine-industry sales of over \$450 million (Tourism Niagara, 2004). VQA sales alone were 13,385,089 litres in 2009, an increase of 16.8% from 2008. This translated to a total VQA retail sales value of \$249,950,894, up by 14.1% from 2008 ((Vintner's Quality Alliance, Ontario, 2009).

The first Mennonites to settle anywhere in Canada did so along the banks of Twenty Mile Creek in Vineland in the late 1700s (Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario, 2007). These were Mennonites of Swiss lineage, who arrived via Pennsylvania. "In 1786, five families from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, settled about twenty miles west of Niagara. Soon others followed" (Weibe, 1974, p. 204) Two waves of Mennonites of Dutch lineage would later arrive via Russia ('Russian Mennonites'), first in the 1920-30s, and then in the late 1940s.

---

<sup>7</sup> Appellation, according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary is a geographical name (as of a region, village, or vineyard) under which a winegrower is authorized to identify and market wine; *also* : the area designated by such a name (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/appellation>)

<sup>8</sup> For a more thorough overview with maps of appellations, frost free days, growing degree days, precipitation, soil characteristics, topographic and physiographic maps, see the Vintners Quality Alliance website: <http://www.vqaontario.com/AboutVQA>

Mennonite settlers have played major roles in the dramatic changes to the peninsula in terms of the farming of tender fruit (Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario, The Chapter at the Twenty, 1979). The presence of the wineries, and their economic contribution to the peninsula, owes in large part to the history of agricultural /economic development and innovation by local Mennonites. The following excerpt from the Toronto Star (1944) indicates recognition of Mennonite contribution decades ago, even if it has not been widely acknowledged since:

A cooperative venture started by Russians less than 7 years ago and now embracing more than 100 farmers, and a \$416,000 business turnover in 1943, ***has changed an unproducing grain district into a prosperous fruit area.*** Beginning with 6 persons, the first year's turnover was \$5,000. (Toronto Star, Sat., April 8, 1944, p. 2, italics added)

(See APPENDIX II: Toronto Star article, 1944: "Russians Have Built Up Big Niagara Fruit Colony")

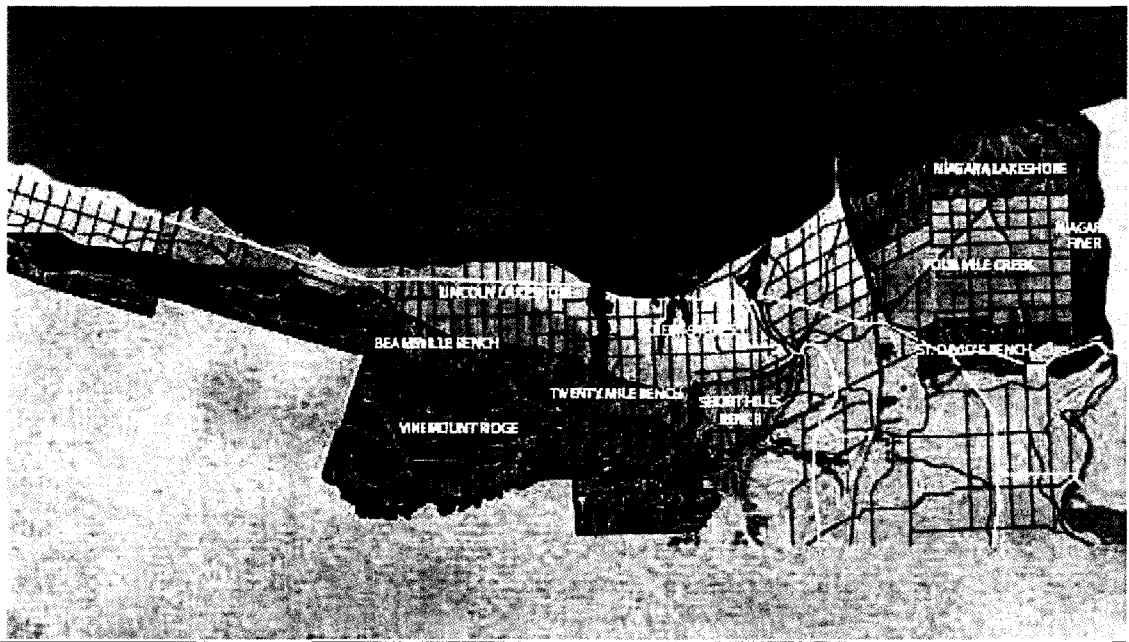


Figure 1.4. Appellation Map, Niagara Peninsula (VQA Ontario: <http://www.vqaontario.com>)

The qualitative data for this study was gathered from interviews of Russian Mennonite inhabitants of the communities of Vineland, St. Catharines, Virgil, and Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. Located along the isthmus west to east along the southern shore of Lake Ontario, they

fall within the Census Metropolitan Area of St. Catharines-Niagara (Figure 1.5). Data are focused on, although not necessarily confined to, these communities. Excepting St. Catharines, the main economic columns of these communities are congruous with the peninsula generally: tourism and agriculture. These entwine with regard to viticulture. Winery tours and the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake are the chief tourist draws within our study area. There are three prime appellations: Niagara Lakeshore in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Creek Shores in Virgil, and Lincoln Lakeshore in Vineland (Figure 1.4).

St. Catharines is the largest city on the peninsula, and the location of the region's only university (Brock University). The Welland Canal here connects Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, establishing the city as an important inland transportation hub. St. Catharines is home to a small number of wineries (e.g., Henry of Pellow), but the city stands apart as having taken a more industrial focus than the other three jurisdictions of the study. Manufacturing is its largest industry and, until recent cutbacks, General Motors was the largest employer. Especially for Mennonites who settled in Vineland, Virgil or Niagara-on-the-Lake in the late 1940s (Group B), St. Catharines was an important proximate source of non-agrarian employment opportunity. Many would later relocate to the city.

Forbes Travel International lists Niagara as the most popular tourist destination in Canada, receiving over 12 million visitors annually (Canada's Most Visited Tourist Attractions '09, 2009). The main draw remains the falls; however, the region has evolved to encompass a diversified tourism draw. Along with an extensive park system, which showcases mature Carolinian species and lush manicured gardens, there are beaches, marinas, lakeside golf courses, and conference centers. More than 20,000 Niagara residents are employed in tourism-related industry today (Office of the Prime Minister of Canada Press Release, 2009).

It is a region steeped in cultural histories, some more visible than others. United Empire Loyalist settlers began arriving here after the American War of Independence in 1776. Some of the most famous of North American battles, during the War of 1812-1814, were fought here (e.g., the Battle of Queenston Heights). This history is tangible in the several military forts and monuments to British war heroes, as well as the cobblestone road, horse-drawn carriage service, and grand facades of buildings in the stately 'Old Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake'<sup>9</sup> located 19 km north of Niagara Falls where the Niagara River enters Lake Ontario (Figure 1.6). Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) is home to the Shaw Festival, established in 1962 to showcase the plays of George Bernard Shaw, for which there are now 4 theatres. There is also an increasingly upscale main street shopping area, with tourists lining the main street year-round, despite it having become cost-prohibitive to visit.<sup>10</sup>

To the tourist, precious few clues remain of Aboriginal inhabitants who subsisted here for the 10 centuries previous to European claim.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this is because large structural evidence – the remnants of a village, for example - has not withstood time. As for the various groups of Mennonite settlers to the area, their historical presence and influence has also not been commoditized. Eighteen Mennonite churches (11 of which contain the word 'Mennonite' in their signage) do punctuate the region, though, and the local phone book reveals a plethora of distinctively Swiss and Dutch-Russian Mennonite surnames which follow from original

---

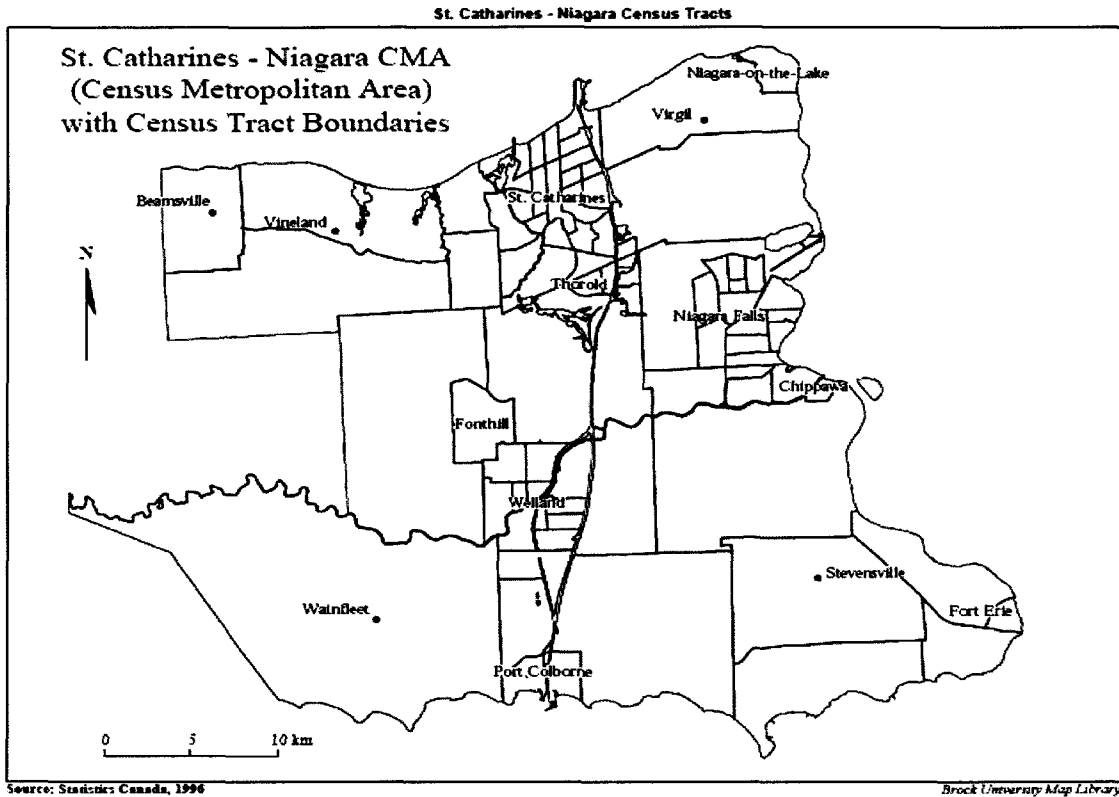
<sup>9</sup> The British purchased this land in 1781 from the Mississauga for "300 suits of clothing". It was later called Newark when it became the first parliamentary capital of the Province of Upper Canada, losing this title to York (Toronto) in 1796 when Newark was deemed situated too close to the U.S. border. Residents petitioned to return to the name 'Niagara' in 1797. During the wars of 1812-14 the town was captured by Americans and destroyed. It was rebuilt and restored by the British. For reasons related to postal confusion with Niagara Falls, the name Niagara-on-the-Lake was adopted in 1880. (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com> & <http://www.niagara-on-the-lake.com>).

<sup>10</sup> Current hotel rates within walking distance to the theatres start at an average of about \$250.00 (Cdn) per night.

<sup>11</sup>The Neutrals gave the area the name 'niagara', meaning either "thunder of the waters", or "neck". (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com>)

Mennonite settlers, many of which are monikers of businesses and agricultural operations. (See

APPENDIX I: Comparison of Mennonite Surnames)



**Figure 1.5. Map of St. Catharines-Niagara Census Metropolitan Area (Statistics Canada, 1996)**



**Figure 1.6. Prince of Wales Hotel, Niagara-on-the-Lake**

#### **1.4 People of the Study: Mennonites**

Mennonitism is a Christian denomination with a global baptized membership of over 1.6 million dispersed over 80 countries (Burkhardt, 2010; Reimer, 2008). In Canada alone it is suggested there may be 50 identifiable subgroups (M. Epp, 2007) within some 19 organized bodies (Mennonite World Conference, 2009). Canada has the fifth highest membership globally, with an increasing trend, currently summing 136,866 members (Burkhardt, 2010).<sup>12</sup> Although Mennonites, especially in the Americas, have come to be understood as highly conservative and self-isolated ethno-religious communities, in truth, the variation in spatial and temporal trajectories taken by different Mennonite groups since the Protestant Reformation has resulted in a range of cultural, religious, and ethnic lived realities among the many divisions today.

The Mennonite religion can be traced to those areas of Europe now known as Switzerland, north Germany, and Holland, where pockets of Christian radicals began to develop around 1525 (C. J. Dyck, 1993). Based on their rejection of the practice of infant baptism, these radicals came to be identified by others generally as Anabaptists (Greek for “rebaptizer”). However, they themselves rejected the term, and over time groups came to identify specifically depending on the surname of their leaders so that, for example, Dutch followers of Menno Simons became known as Mennonites, Swiss followers of Jakob Ammann became known as Amish. Characteristics of the contrary faith structures of these groups represented their “belief in the sole authority of God as revealed in the Scriptures” (Paetkau, 1986, p. 29). They rejected infant baptism in favour of baptism of adults (who, according to New Testament interpretation, could thus make a conscious choice to join a congregation upon confession of faith). They

---

<sup>12</sup> After the United States (387,103), Congo (220,444), Ethiopia (172,306), and India (156,922).

rejected central church authority (the New Testament was their authority). They espoused nonresistance over participation in war (a literal interpretation of the command to love all people, even one's enemies) and they refused to swear civil oaths. They believed in the separation of church and state, because of "the coercive power of the state in regulating religious life and faith, replacing it with the social pressure of the ban (excommunication)" (Ibid, p. 30). They practiced mutual aid, outreach and evangelism. Significant variation could exist between groups as to which tenets were accepted, though, and to what degree.<sup>13</sup> This resulted in a number of denominations within what never was an organized movement (Bender, Friedmann, & Klassen, 1990; Kauffman, 1975). Trouble was, deviation from Catholic teachings and practices was then considered illegal in the Holy Roman Empire. Fleeing persecution for their beliefs, the earliest Anabaptists scattered via several differing routes from an already geographically scattered core (Bender, 1944; Krahn, 1948; Smith, 1981). (See APPENDIX III, Map of Central Europe, around 1550)

Dispersed into new lands, these groups came to be surrounded by ethnic populations different from their own. Cultural geographer William Norton describes ethnicity as "the perceived distinctiveness of one group relative to others, usually based on a shared history that may be partly mythical and that has political associations", and further observes, "Religion is playing an increasingly important role in the formation of presumed ethnic identities" (2006, p. 23). Initial dislocation effectively marked the ethno genesis of the Mennonites; in diaspora, they shifted both from understanding themselves, and from being understood as a 'religious' people

---

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of varying views regarding pacifism and early Anabaptist groups, for example, see Koops (2009), and Loewen *in* Bramadat & Seljak (2008).



to an 'ethno-religious' people. They began their experiences of serial Otherings along varying trajectories; Mennonite ethnicities were thus constructed amid different cultural contexts.

Defensively inclined as a response to persecution, Mennonites preferred to live independently in social groupings which they called *Gemeinden* (German for 'congregation and community'). These came to be "both defined and maintained by the opposition of a hostile, external 'world'" (Urry, 1983, p. 243). A doctrine of *Absonderung* (separation) came to be adopted: *In the world, but not of it*. (For those who would come to settle in Russia, this was reinforced by the imperial mandate that settlers of different religious beliefs live apart so as to avoid conflict.) In pockets around the globe, Mennonite enclaves fostered strong senses of group identities relative to varying perceived insider/outsider dichotomies. It is a paradoxical position that Mennonites have found themselves in, to varying degrees, since the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century: the tendency to live in bounded communities, versus the Anabaptist tenets of mission outreach and evangelism (Winland, 1993). Although ethnically Dutch and Swiss Mennonite communities still exist at local levels, evangelism and mission work has naturally led Mennonites to experience more contact with "the world". The result is increasing ethnic diversity within the Mennonite membership globally so that ethnicity becomes more and more problematic in defining what it means to be Mennonite.

More Mennonites exist now globally who are not of original Swiss, Dutch or North-German Mennonite lineage. Explosive growth in Mennonite numbers is most markedly occurring on the continent of Africa, where in Zaire/Congo, Tanzania, and Ethiopia combined the numbers of ethnically African Mennonites more than tripled from 1984 (87,022) to 1998 (264,948). Membership in Ethiopia alone increased by 41,575 in the period 2006-9. In contrast,

Canadian membership increased by 5,482 in the same three year period (Burkhardt, 2010; Driedger, 2000; Mennonite World Conference, 2009).

#### **1.4.1 Russian Mennonites**

The people of this study self-identify as ‘Russian Mennonites’, and have customarily come to be referred to as such in Mennonite literature.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Russian Mennonites are predominantly of Dutch (with some north German) descent. They experienced serial diaspora *en route* east through the Vistula Delta area, West Prussia, and eventually onto the steppes of southern Russia, an area which is currently Ukraine. From Russia they left in three significant waves under various political circumstances, dispersing to various locations around the globe. The first wave left Russia in the 1870s. Members of this first wave who settled in Canada are frequently referred to in Mennonite literature as *Kanadier* (Canadians). None of these immigrants settled in Niagara. The two Russian Mennonite groups of this study are members of the second wave (*die Russlaender*, or ‘Russians’) and third wave (*die Fluechtlinge*, or ‘refugees’) to leave Russia. They arrived on the Niagara peninsula each at separate times: as immigrants in the early 1930s (hereafter *Russlaender*, or **Group A**), and as refugees in the late 1940s (hereafter *Fluechtlinge*, or **Group B**).

The Dutch-origin Mennonites (later known as ‘Russian Mennonites’) were never a homogeneous group. Even in the Netherlands, they were divided as Flemish and Frisians (with even further subdivisions). When they first fled east to live along the Baltic and North Seas and Vistula River, they “had to adjust not only to a new environment, but to each other” (Smith, 1981, p. 166). (See APPENDIX IV: Map of the Vistula Delta) These two factions would actually

---

<sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of use of this terminology, see Urry, 1996.

manage to stay very much separate from one another until mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, with endogamy rules strictly enforced by consequence of excommunication (Penner, 1950; Smith, 1981; Unruh, 1936).

The earliest Mennonites to reach Danzig, West Prussia (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) did so in small numbers as early as 1534 aboard Dutch merchant ships plying the Baltic Sea. Most arrived later, though again in small groups, upon word of a massive drainage program to take place east of Danzig on the Vistula Delta during the years 1547 to 1550. The Dutch Mennonites, with their drainage and dike-building skills, were welcomed. Eventually Mennonites purchased large tracts of land, which they divided, drained, and settled, transforming the swamps of the delta into rich farmland and establishing several Mennonite villages. Others chose not to farm, working instead as merchants and craftsmen in the larger towns and the city of Danzig. Mennonites used the capital of their esteemed agricultural skills and hard-working reputation to negotiate *Privilegia*: agreements reached with the government under which colonists would receive special privileges, such as military exemption and religious freedom (Krahn, 1948; Smith, 1981).

In West Prussia, Mennonites lived surrounded by Polish and German-speaking groups. Their Netherlandic Low German dialect of *Plautdietsch* was somewhat altered here through exposure to West Prussian Low German dialects. In this augmented form, *Plautdietsch* continued as the language of households and daily living, and is still used today by many Mennonites around the world. Dutch, however, remained the preferred language in congregations until after the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, when High German replaced it. Religious differences, original to Holland, did not diminish in Prussia (Dyck, 1993; R.Epp, 1987; Krahn, 1989; Penner, 1950).

Over the span of their two and a half century history in West Prussia, these colonies remained self-sufficient and quite isolated culturally. Distinctively Dutch traditions and Anabaptist doctrines were maintained. Studies of surnames suggest that the population remained tightly restricted to the lines of the original settlers, although a very small number of Polish converts were added. “The Dutch roots of the Mennonites here showed clearly until well into the eighteenth century...Religious ties to the homeland...helped delay Mennonite adjustment to the new environment” (Paetkau, 1986, p. 33).

The *Gemeinden* grew large and prosperous, coming to draw considerable envy from the indigenous populations. By 1772, as borders and the ruling monarchies began to shift in this region with the Polish Partitions,<sup>15</sup> Mennonites began to face economic and, later, religious restrictions. They were no longer able to purchase new land to accommodate their swelling population, for example, which by then had reached 15,000 (Krahn, 1989). Further, indications were that the new rulers would not honour elements of the *Privilegia* as negotiated with the previous rulers (Dyck, 1993; Krahn, 1948; Smith, 1981).

Meanwhile in the Russian Empire, the ethnically German Catherine II had succeeded her husband Peter III to the throne in 1762, and was now actively recruiting European Christian farmers to immigrate and “settle the frontier lands near hostile Asian nomads”(Pohl, 2009, p. 268). Imperial policies aimed to increase the population would continue for over a century, during which period hundreds of thousands from Central Europe fled religious and political persecution and found prosperity in the arms of Imperial Russia. By 1763, Catherine was “offering all Christian foreigners... free land, freedom of religion, temporary exemption from

---

<sup>15</sup> The three ‘Partitions of Poland’ occurred in 1772, 1793, 1795.

taxes, interest-free loans, internal self-government and permanent immunity from military conscription” (Auman & Chebotareva, 1993, pp.18-21 in Pohl, 2009, p. 268). Meanwhile, “most Russian peasants lived in abject poverty and bondage as serfs” (Pohl, 2009, p. 267-8), due to the absence of such privileges afforded to them, as well as to labour and other obligations which they were obliged to pay to nobility in exchange for working the land.<sup>16</sup> A large German-speaking settlement area was established in the Volga region with 104 closed colonies and a population of over 22,000 (Pohl, 2009). (See APPENDIX V: Map of Migration from the Vistula Delta to Southern Russia)

The second-most significant Russian settlement of German speakers in terms of size was the Mennonites, beginning in 1789. Catherine, who reportedly saw value in the Mennonites as “model farmers” (A. Friesen, 2006, p. 3), offered them land in 1786 in southern Russia that had been emptied with the conquest and dispersal of the Crimean Khanates in 1774 (H.Loewen, 2008; Urry, 1983). So began the first *en-masse* migration event of Mennonites of Dutch descent. A Charter of Privileges (*Privilegium*) was again negotiated and signed (1800), which included military exemption, religious and educational freedoms, family-based land grants, and regulative autonomy. The effect was a form of self-regulating ethno-religious state within the larger imperial state which, in Mennonite literature, is often referred to as the ‘Russian Mennonite commonwealth model’ (Francis, 1951). The result was “a high degree of

---

<sup>16</sup> For example, in Mennonite villages land was owned collectively. Individual plots could not be subdivided or sold outside of the colony, and allotments could only be passed on in their entirety to one heir, or in lieu could be sold to another village member with the approval of the village council and the state. Surplus land was also assigned to the village to accommodate population growth and new settlers. In contrast, peasants were granted surplus land only after the taking of each census. This set up advantages to colonists over peasants because only land owners had the right to vote. Further, the assemblies of colonist villages were assigned more power than those of peasant villages (Staples, 2003).

ethnicism, supported by almost total institutional completeness...Mennonite settlers lived in virtual isolation between 1789 and 1914" (Paetkau, 1986, p. 15). According to the following description of non-Mennonite German speaking settlements in Russia during the same time period, this arrangement was not unique to Mennonites: "They lived in self-contained and self-administered colonies centred on individual Lutheran or Catholic churches and largely maintained the language, culture and customs they had brought with them from Central Europe" (Pohl, 2009, p. 268).

Based on language, Mennonites were regarded as 'ethnic Germans' in Russia. Owing to immigration and military conquests, the ethnic composition of the imperial state was highly, and increasingly, diverse. According to Frank Epp, "the 1926 census recognized the existence of 160 nationalities,<sup>17</sup> including such main groupings as the Slavs (Great Russians, White Russians, and Ukrainians), the Turkish groups (Tatars, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and others), Mongols, Iranians, Jews, Caucasians, and Germans" (1962, p. 7). For the Ukraine region specifically, population components are complicated further when categorized as to religion: neighbours of the Mennonites included Orthodox peasants (a Christian identification assigned to settlers from various regions of the Russian empire of varying ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups, including Russian and Ukrainian); sectarian Slavic peasants (Doukhobors and Molokans); Nogai Tatars (Muslim, Turkish speaking, semi-nomadic pastoralists); and other 'ethnic Germans' (Lutherans, Catholics, and other Protestants from differing German states) (Staples, 2003, p. xiii).

---

<sup>17</sup> The term 'nationality group' is accurate to the terminology used in the USSR, and indeed generally, at this time. In this usage, 'nationality' and 'nationality group' do not refer to one's citizenship to a country or nation-state, as western scholars today would more generally use the term, but to one's 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic group'.

Between 1787 and 1870 approximately 1907 Mennonite families (8000 people) migrated to settle in the Ukraine region of Russia. (See APPENDIX VI: Map of Mennonite colonies in Russia) Approximately 400 of these families established Chortitza (Old Colony) first, along the Dnieper River. Somewhat later, 1049 families established Molotschna north of the Azov Sea. Still another 438 families went to Samara, and 20 families went to Vilna. Eastward migration continued to this area into the 19<sup>th</sup> century as late as 1850 when new *Gemeinden* were established in Volga. As their populations increased, Mennonites eventually spread into the Caucasus and Siberia (Urry, 1983). Many of those remaining in Prussia would follow to Russia a century later in response to the founding of the North Germany Confederation (1877) and Bismarck's universal military service law so that, in total, approximately 10,000 Mennonites immigrated from Prussia to Russia (Smith, 1981).

The century to follow was for the Mennonites, and indeed German colonists in Russia generally, a 'Golden Age'.<sup>18</sup> Rich soils and access to waterways contributed to prosperity. By the turn of the century, the Mennonites boasted some of the most advanced agricultural communities in Russia:

the Ukraine had become the breadbasket for much of Russia and more, because grain and flour for export in large quantities regularly left Black Sea ports for foreign destinations... Also, they had developed new techniques of tilling the soil including use of black and green fallow, use of better seed grains, rotation of crops, some use of manure as fertilizer, and extensive tree planting for both fruit and shelter. (F. Epp, 1982, p. 141)

---

<sup>18</sup> Pohl's reportage on the wider context of German speaking colonists generally for this period points out that the Mennonites were not singular in their experience of a 'Golden Age'. In the Volga region, for example, he suggests that non-Mennonite German colonists had established an even more impressive arsenal of cultural institutions (Pohl, 2009, p. 272).

There were over 100,000 Mennonites in Russia by 1914 (Urry, 1983). They achieved remarkable success in agricultural innovation (practices, as well as tools and equipment), economic development (e.g., credit unions and co-operatives), social programs, education,<sup>19</sup> religion, print presses, architecture, and the arts. An institutionally-based Russian Mennonite commonwealth had been established. Mennonites diversified their economic base, increased their urban presence, engaged servants from the peasant classes, and acquired disproportionate wealth in relation to the greater Russian population; they came to be perceived as 'set apart' in ways beyond the elements of their ethno-religiosity (Dyck, 1993; F. Epp, 1974; Friesen, 1989; Klassen, 1932; Kroeker, 2005; Smith, 1981; Urry, 1983; ). As James Urry writes, their culture was transformed:

With Russian guidance and through their own industry Mennonites flourished in Russia, evolving a new life style. The success of the Mennonites had been founded on agriculture, first with mixed farming, then sheep rearing and finally through intensive grain production. Industry developed in these colonies, machine manufacturing producing mainly agricultural tools, and a profitable milling industry. Outside the colonies many became owners of large estates. Mennonite industry and business acumen, cheap Russian labour and a generous Russian government created prosperous settlements and wealthy individuals. But the way of life the Mennonites had taken from Prussia to Russia was changed beyond recognition and conceptions and beliefs were transformed as Mennonites came to terms with a modern, capitalist world. In Russia, Mennonites were forced to live together in densely populated colonies, separated from neighbouring groups of Tartars, Russians, Russian Sectarians and other foreign colonists...the Russian authorities supported Mennonite advancement, giving the colonies a large degree of autonomy in their affairs as long as they flourished and presented a model of industry to their neighbours. The Mennonites responded to this special attention and foreign visitors were often directed through the colonies to witness the achievements of the Russian policy. (Urry, 1983, p. 244)

---

<sup>19</sup> According to Frank Epp, "In 1914 (there were) 400 elementary schools, 13 high schools, four girls' schools, two teachers' colleges, two four-year trade schools and one eight-year business college, one school for the deaf and dumb, one deaconess institution, and one Bible school. All...were supported by Mennonite funds. Many of the teachers were graduates of universities in Russia, Switzerland, or Germany" and, about 300 students were studying abroad (1962, p. 21).



In addition, though, animosity was increasingly felt among the Russian peasants, partly based on envy, but also as a result of the superior attitude pervasive of many wealthy Mennonites. According to Frank Epp, “many Russian laborers on the Mennonite farms and factories were treated distinctly inferior. They ate at separate tables and slept in separate quarters, which was the accepted custom in both Prussia and Russia” (1962, p. 24). In James Urry’s analysis:

they shifted from being an inward looking religious society dedicated to following a narrow path in opposition to the world in its advancement, knowledge, and way of life. The sense of “being different” thus shifted from one of a religiously oriented life style to one of a superior cultural tradition in which religious differentiation was no longer the key marker but merely one amongst many. (Urry *quoted in* F. Epp, 1974, p. 170).

Prosperity for German speaking colonists continued over the turn of the century, but some foreshadowing of an end to the ‘Golden Age’ did present itself beginning in 1861. A package of Russian reforms was established on the heels of defeat in the 1854 Crimean War which would abolish serfdom (1861), end special privileges such as the right to self-government for foreign colonists (1871), and set plans for military conscription (1874); effectively the German speaking colonists were being reduced to the level of Russian peasantry. These were defensive responses to changing external circumstances: “The Russian Empire came to view the special status of the Volga and Black Sea settlements as ‘German islands’ in the Russian Empire, and as such a potential security threat following the unification of Germany in 1871” (Pohl, 2009, p. 270).

Consequently, between 1873-1884, approximately 18,000 Mennonites (henceforth *Kanadier*)<sup>20</sup> left Russia for the United States and western Canada. This was part of a wider migration of German speakers who emigrated to various points in North and South America during the 1870s and 1880s, the number for which has been placed at more than 40,000 (Pohl, 2009, p. 270). 40,000 Mennonites remained in Russia following this wave of emigration (F. Epp, 1982). As it resolved, alternative forestry service in Russia was ultimately offered in lieu of military service.

The century was about to turn, and so too was life as the Mennonites and other Russian German groups had come to know it. Germany gathered military might through victories over France and Austria, which left Russia feeling increasingly insecure. A period of *Russification* began in 1880, which ended the special privilege of German schooling. So-called 'ethnic Germans' were held under increasing suspicion by the state and its indigenous peoples. In 1914, when Russia and Germany went to war, tsarist repression of the German colonists reached a nadir: all German speaking newspapers were closed, German public speech was banned, and there was forced liquidation of lands owned by 'enemy nationalities' (Urry, 1983). Several German-speaking groups, including Swiss Lutherans and Dutch Mennonites attempted to hold their lands by seeking to prove their non-German origins (F. Epp, 1962, p. 30). In Moscow, an anti-German pogrom took place in 1915. In the two years to follow, approximately 200,000 German speaking colonists were internally deported to Siberia and the Volga (Pohl, 2009). Had it not been for the overthrow of the tsarist regime, this practice of exile would have been applied to all German speakers in Russia, including the Mennonites (A. Friesen, 2006; C. Klassen, 1932).

---

<sup>20</sup> Almost half of these were from the Chortitza colony, very few from the newer Samara colony (Krahn, 1989).

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 meant the end of these discriminatory laws and practices, but relief was fleeting. Russian Mennonites and other German groups soon found themselves caught in the crosshairs of various factions during the ensuing unrest:

The Ukrainian nationals saw Mennonites as foreigners exploiting their land and people; the White Army officers occasionally viewed them as 'German' traitors; the anarchists saw them as bourgeois landlords of the old order; to Bolsheviks, Mennonites were *kulaks* (rich peasants) and religious deviants. (Urry, 1983, p. 250)

The status that Russian Germans had enjoyed was roundly resented by various factions, and had become a liability. The suffering the Mennonites came to experience during this period and going forward, which was shared by Russian Germans generally, would be the worst since the time of their religious martyrdom in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: murder, rape, property destruction, poverty, famine, disease, detainment, division of families, war, and dislocation would mark the new era. "Utter economic, cultural and social ruin" befell the Russian Mennonites (F. Epp, 1982, p. 146).

The rescission of *Privilegia* had meant that German colonies were now under direct control of the Soviets whose regional officials were made up of the poor and landless classes. Perhaps not surprisingly, they used their authority to improve their own situations at the expense of those better off (Urry, 1983). In 1918, there was a ten-week spree of terror, as lawless militia roamed the land, targeting the most prosperous German settlements with theft, rape and murder. Civil War followed, with more than 12 regime changes across the Ukraine (Epp F., 1982). For a brief period prior, the German army occupied territories surrendered under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which included all of the Ukraine region. Some 120,000 non-Mennonite Russian Germans from across the former empire took advantage of terms established under the treaty to re-migrate to Germany between 1917 and 1921 (Pohl, 2009, p. 270). Russian Germans, including the Mennonites, welcomed the German soldiers into their

villages. This was a grave political mistake. For while German troops offered protection to the Mennonites and other German speakers, they were ruthless to the surrounding peasantry who rejected German authority (Urry, 1983). There followed a peasant revolution led by an anarchist named Nestor Makhno, himself a Ukrainian peasant. The Bolsheviks first declared these bands of guerillas 'bandits' and 'outlaws', and they largely remain remembered as such in popular narrative. However, they were later recognized as a formal militia referred to as the Black Army, or the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine. Regardless, their tactics were savage and, across the Ukraine for a period of about two years, they were relentless in their targeting of German colonists, including Mennonites, with torture, murder (often by beheading), rape, and plundering (Arshinov, 1987; A. Friesen, 2006; J. Friesen, 1989).

For the Mennonites, their nonresistance stance was shaken. 2700 Mennonite men armed themselves over the winter of 1918-1919, finding themselves unable to not protect their families under such circumstances; they called their militia *Selbstschutz* (literally, 'self-protection'). Crop failures and Bolshevik interference resulted in widespread famine between 1919-1924, followed by a deadly typhoid epidemic. Another 2-3000 non-Mennonite German colonists emigrated to Germany during the famine; Germany, however, was reacting to the Russian influx by beginning to tighten its immigration restrictions (Pohl, 2009, p. 271).

Peace returned in the short term with the cementing of Soviet control; however, religious practice was henceforth outlawed. Mennonites in the U.S. established the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in 1920 to coordinate relief efforts for their co-religionists in the Ukraine. The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC) was organized in the same year in order to help Russian Mennonites who wished to leave (F. Epp, 1962). In 1922, Russian Mennonites themselves formally united to form their first political organization, called (not

without strategic deliberation) the Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage (F. Epp, 1982).<sup>21</sup> This was an effort not only to gain Soviet recognition, but also to direct aid to those devastated, and assistance to those wishing to emigrate (Urry, 2006).

During the period 1922 to 1929, Mennonites were the only Russian German colonists to emigrate in significant numbers (Pohl, 2009, p. 271). 25,000 Russian Mennonites were able to flee Russia between 1922 and 1930 in “the largest organized voluntary movement of Mennonites in history” (F. Epp, 1982, p. 139).<sup>22</sup> In Henry Paetkau’s assessment:

relatively independent and self-contained communities had been invaded by the very “world” they had sought to escape. Under the new economic and political order there was no prospect for a return to that isolated existence. Their sacrosanct communal life was irretrievably destroyed. In addition, German language and culture, which had become the only acceptable expression of their communal and spiritual values, was no longer tolerated by the Soviet authorities. Finally, the practice and proclamation of their religious faith was itself not permitted. As a result, the very essence of their identity was in danger of being lost. Many looked to Canada, therefore, to rescue them from this destruction. (1986, p. 19)

60% of these 25,000 successful emigrants were members of “the Mennonite intelligentsia (university graduates and better educated people) of the approximately 130,000 Mennonites in Russia (1930)” (G.K. Epp, 1987, p. 109). This segment of the population had the means to leave. 20,000<sup>23</sup> of these went to Canada, swelling the existing Canadian Mennonite population from 50,000 to 70,000. Travel credit (*Reiseschuld*) had been negotiated on their behalf by the CMBC with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). Canada set three conditions to acceptance of the immigrants: 1) that they settle the land as farmers, 2) that they be

---

<sup>21</sup> Soviets would not allow ‘Mennonite’ in the name, as it was a religious term.

<sup>22</sup> 4874 people left in 4 groups in 1923; 4000 left individually in 1924; smaller numbers left during 1925-1929 (Toews, J. B. 1967).

<sup>23</sup> Krahn (1989) places this number at 21,000.

sponsored, so as to not become burdens of the state, and 3) that they pass medical examinations (Weibe, 1974, p. 138).

The remaining 5000 went to Mexico, Brazil, and Paraguay.<sup>24</sup> Those who stayed behind did so because they were less well off, because family members were turned down by host countries for medical reasons, or because they were simply not fortunate enough to get out in time<sup>25</sup>. Perhaps there were some who felt things might improve (F. Epp, 1962, 1982; G. Epp, 1987; Urry, 1983; ; Weibe, 1974).

#### **1.4.2 Niagara Mennonites (Group A – ‘*Russlaender*’)**

The 20,000 Russian Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to Canada between 1923 and 1930 (*Russlaender*) settled first mainly in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. A small proportion went directly to Ontario. For economic reasons, migration within Canada continued for many of these people throughout the Great Depression of the 1930s so that, in the end, this wave of Russian Mennonite immigrants had established themselves in Canada’s five westernmost provinces. As for Ontario, 972 households were established in 17 districts (F. Epp, 1982, p. 223). Of these, 242 households were established within the study area for this research: 123 in Vineland, and 119 in Virgil (Ibid, p. 224). This group and their descendants will be referred to as **Group A**.

---

<sup>24</sup> Immigration policies in the U.S. at this time did not allow entry.

<sup>25</sup> Political factors at both the Russian and Canadian ends affected this migration. Russia was allowing out fewer and fewer people until by 1928 legal emigration was no longer possible. Mennonites demonstrated in Moscow with the result that 5461 were allowed to emigrate in 1929. These went to camps in Germany until they were re-routed to Canada and South America in 1930-1. The governing party in Canada changed in 1930 from the Liberals (under Mackenzie King) to the Progressive Conservatives (under R.B. Bennett), at which time Canadian immigration policies became less generous.

There were no other Russian Mennonites on the peninsula at the time. There were, however, Swiss-origin, 'Pennsylvania-German' Mennonites who had begun to settle as farmers around the Twenty Mile Creek area of Vineland in 1786 (F. Epp, 1974).<sup>26</sup> One of these, a Swiss Mennonite farmer from Vineland, met the Russian Mennonite immigrants directly upon their arrival at port in Quebec in July of 1924. He returned to Vineland with about 12 families who initially lived and worked on Swiss Mennonite fruit farms as they paid down their *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) (Paetkau, 1977).

In 1927 the scattered residents organized themselves into a congregation and elected... their own minister, an indication that permanence had begun to mark the group. Fifteen or twenty families were located in the area of Vineland and Beamsville<sup>27</sup> by that time, hopeful of making this their permanent home. The prospects offered by a new type of farming had overcome the tradition of wheat farming. (Paetkau, 1977, p. 68)

There was seasonal work for the women on farms and in local canning factories. By 1930 there were 200 Russian Mennonites in Vineland, by 1933 the number had risen to 400, and this count continued to increase even through the years of the Great Depression (Paetkau, 1977).

Russian Mennonites began to purchase their own farms. Four brothers first bought 36 acres, followed two years later by ten families purchasing and dividing a 100-acre plot. Slowly, other purchases followed. As the Depression waned, their success in fruit farming quickly grew, until a number of small settlements took shape named after Russian *Gemeinden*, and referred to collectively at the time as the "Vineland group" (Paetkau, 1977, p. 71). Soon the area was so successful as to be described by outsiders as a "gold mine" and "paradise" (Ibid, p. 70). The

---

<sup>26</sup>This was the first Mennonite settlement in Canada. They came to Canada from Europe via Pennsylvania. Church membership records for 1920 indicate 38 baptised (i.e., adult) Mennonites of Swiss-South German descent in the Niagara area. (Epp, F. 1982) Current membership at First Mennonite church in Vineland is approximately 100. (#20, 2005)

<sup>27</sup> Beamsville: community west of Vineland, along Lake Ontario, on Niagara peninsula.

quality of the land, the work ethic of those farming it, and also the positive relationships between the Swiss and Russian Mennonites seemed to fuel the area's success.<sup>28</sup> In Paetkau's interpretation, this absence of tension between the Russians and their neighbours may have convinced the newcomers that perhaps "the commonwealth model was no longer needed" (Ibid, p. 71).

The *Russlaender*<sup>29</sup> had expanded their presence on the peninsula to the west and south and now sought available land eastward to accommodate the arrival of members who had not met with success in the western provinces (Paetkau, 1977). A Russian Mennonite real estate developer named Peter Wall negotiated several hundred acres near Virgil to be subdivided into ten acre plots for Mennonite purchase. Other farms were purchased independently. (See APPENDIX VII: Map of earliest settlers near Virgil, 1934-1939)

By 1935, 28 families had settled at Virgil, and by 1937, 250 Russian Mennonites owned over 1000 acres in Virgil and Niagara-on-the-Lake. That year, the Niagara Township Fruit Cooperative was organized, "eventually possess(ing) its own mill, stores, cold storage plant, and loading spaces at nearby St. Catharines" (Paetkau, 1977, p. 72). Twenty Russian Mennonite females were reported to be working in the city of St. Catharines by 1936 (Paetkau, 1977). Toward the end of the decade, there was a second surge of *Russlaender* from the prairies. By

---

<sup>28</sup> According to Paetkau (1977), conflicts between Russian Mennonites and their sponsors were not uncommon in other areas of Russian Mennonite settlement in Ontario during this time.

<sup>29</sup> Note that in German *der Russlaender* is singular, and *die Russlaender* is plural. Similarly the German singular is *der Fleuchtlinge* while the plural is *die Fluechtlinge*. For the purpose of simplicity in this text, however, I have used the terms *Russlaender* and *Fluechtlinge* to refer to the groups in plural – with apologies to German-speaking readers.



1940, the Russian Mennonite settlement at Virgil stood at about 442, or 16% of the total township population of Virgil (C.A. Friesen, 1984).

Mennonite population and land ownership figures show a steady rise over the period 1940-1982; Mennonite acreage as a percentage of total acreage of Niagara rose from 5.75% to 15.3%. Between 1960 and 1982, a trend toward fewer, but larger, farms emerged so that the total number of farms decreased, but the total acreage almost doubled; average farm size increased from 12.6 acres in 1960 to 23.2 acres in 1982 (C. A. Friesen, 1984). (See APPENDIX VIII: Comparisons of Mennonite population, acreage, farms)

Four Russian Mennonite churches had been established on the peninsula: two in Vineland by 1932, a Mennonite Brethren Church in Virgil in 1937, and the Niagara United Mennonite Church in 1938 (Paetkau, 1977). Numbers on the peninsula continued to rise during the early 1940s due to natural increase and internal migration. Internal dynamics would change again when another group of Russian Mennonites (*Fluechtlinge*) arrived on the peninsula, this time as refugees, in 1948.

#### **1.4.3 Niagara Mennonites (Group B – ‘*Fluechtlinge*’)**

Following the emigration of the twenties, conditions for Russian Germans did not improve as those who remained had hoped they would. They had experienced relative peace and security in Soviet Russia following the devastating 1920s, but the Bolsheviks increasingly suspected them of associations with the Nazi regime in Germany. In accordance with Joseph Stalin’s first Five Year plan, agricultural collectivization campaigns began in 1928, at which time things began to deteriorate rapidly, and in horrific ways. Various Soviet groups were targets,

unequally, of repression and violence under the Stalin's brutal regime. Those groups living in diaspora<sup>30</sup> especially suffered, due to the state's fears of putative ties with their ancestral homelands. The largest Soviet diasporic group was the 'ethnic Germans' (Pohl, Schmaltz, & Vossler, 2009), a designation to which Mennonites were perceived to belong based on their spoken language. The association Mennonites had demonstrated with the German army under the Treaty of Brest –Litovsk reinforced this perception. In 1938, "Legal nationality (ethnicity) in the USSR became based solely on biological descent rather than ethnic culture and self-identification...Previously, nationality had been determined by self-declaration" (Pohl, 2009, pp. 273-4).

The ethnic German experience under Stalin has been highlighted and contextualized in genocide literature (within the larger assertion of 'Soviet genocide') based on comprehensions of genocide as "violence of armed groups against the unarmed (understanding that) genocide includes both the *physical* and *cultural* destruction of particular targets as viable social entities" (Pohl et al., 2009, p.324, italics original).<sup>31</sup> As consequence, primarily, of anti-German prejudices, ethnic Germans were disproportionately the targets of repression and violence among the other Soviet diasporas (Pohl et al, 2009).

Along with collectivization, *dekulakization* campaigns targeted *kulaks*, or those farmers who were considered (by no set criteria) to be either well off (which could be interpreted as owning an extra cow), or to oppose collectivization. They faced expropriation of their land and deportation to labour camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan, many never to return. Preachers,

---

<sup>30</sup> Especially ethnic Greeks, Finns, Koreans, Poles, and Germans, among others (Pohl et al., 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Pohl et al., 2009 also cite a 1991 Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) law regarding the rehabilitation of repressed peoples in which the term genocide (*Genotsid*) is actually used by the Soviets with regard to Stalin's policies against the repressed and deported during his rule (2009, p. 324).

teachers, bureaucrats, and others accused of being potentially traitorous to the Soviet regime were also regularly taken, with adult males enduring the highest rates of exile (M. Epp, 2000).

During the Great Famine of 1932-1933, areas of ethnic German concentrations were disproportionately affected, especially the Ukraine, after Stalin had purposefully sealed an internal food distribution border between Russia and the Ukraine region. Conservative estimates are that approximately 150,000 ethnic Germans alone died from hunger-related causes during this time (Pohl et al., 2009). Ukrainian peasants suffered the most. Some Mennonites received aid packages sent by North American relatives and MCC, only adding to their reputation as spies and traitors, and perhaps leading to higher rates of persecution in future years (M. Epp, 2000).

The numbers of arrests, exiles and executions reached their height during the period known as the Great Terror (Great Purges) in 1936-1938; groups of ethnic German men would sometimes be taken from a village all at once, usually in the night and in black trucks or wagons by the soviet secret police, so that "by the late 1930s, Mennonite families and villages came to be characterized as communities of 'women without men'" (M. Epp, 2000, p. 17). As much as fifty percent of Russian Mennonite families were without fathers in 1938, seventy percent in some villages (Ibid, p. 22). It has been determined that as many as 80% of ethnic Germans arrested during the Great Terror were shot, on average within 6 weeks of their arrest (Letkemann, 2008, p. 193), and that "In total, during the purges of 1937 and 1938 the proportion of Russian-Germans executed exceeded that of the general population of the USSR by a factor of more than eight times" (Pohl, 2009, p. 274).

Stalin's policies leading up to World War II had been aimed to eliminate all potential conflicts of loyalty to his regime. In 1941 there were approximately 100,000 Mennonites in

Russia, part of the larger group of approximately one million ethnic Germans (Regehr, 1996). That year, the Soviets set evacuation plans in place for ethnic German settlements in immediate danger of German occupation, starting with the men. During a four-month period, over 850,000 German colonists, including Mennonites, were deported from their traditional homelands to Siberia and Kazakhstan; more than 56,000 died en route (Pohl, 2009, p. 274). The rest would work as slaves to the regime under inhumane conditions which proved deadly.<sup>32</sup> Well over 100,000 of those who survived the journey died as result of material conditions at their various destinations in civilian commissariats, labour (Gulag) camps and fishing camps (Ibid, 275).

“Virtually the entire Russian-German population of European areas of the USSR in 1939 ended up as special settlers east of the Urals by 1946” (Pohl, 2009, p. 275). Some 100,000 Mennonites remained in the Soviet Union at the outbreak of World War II. Of these, at least 70,000 were displaced, the majority experiencing this involuntary exile (F. Epp, 1962, p. 351). Some Mennonite settlements on the east side had been partially evacuated; mostly the men were taken, but also some women and children.

The evacuation plans were only partially completed, however, before Nazi occupation was successful west of the Dnieper River. The Third Reich, therefore, occupied most Soviet Mennonite communities in the Ukraine before the end of 1941, and remained as such until Nazi forces at Stalingrad were defeated in the winter of 1942-1943. The two-year interim occupation period has been described as “years of grace for the Mennonite church in the fullest sense of the word” (G. K. Epp, 1987, p. 112). Marlene Epp reports, “The initial response to the uniforms of the German *Wehrmacht* was relief and excitement. Indeed, in some recollections,

---

<sup>32</sup> Among the many emerging accounts of experiences in the forced labour arrangements are several specific to Mennonites (e.g., Rempel & Enns, 2005; Derksen-Siemans, 2007).

the German soldiers seemed akin to lost family members... Naturally, the German language and culture shared by the occupiers and the occupied made them seem like kinfolk" (M. Epp, 2000, pp. 29-30). This commonly positive reaction of Russian Mennonites to their Nazi occupiers has been reported widely throughout the literature. In retrospect, and outside of the context of Russian Mennonite experience, the reaction is perhaps jarring. However, it is not beyond a reasonable realm of understanding, given the particular circumstances we discuss. As Connie Braun writes in her 2008 book, The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia: "Through the sharp lens of hindsight, I reflect on how the Mennonites, *Volksdeutsche*<sup>33</sup>, and Ukrainians once viewed the German occupiers as their liberators from Stalin's purges... The faces of the oppressor and liberator blur, are indistinguishable. Suffering comes into focus" (p. 144).

Many held hope that should Nazi forces prevail they would be reunited with exiled family members. It was possible to resume religious practice<sup>34</sup>, although the shortage of (male) ministers due to the purges meant that for the first time "women came to dominate the church during this period and attempted to recreate the institutions as they remembered them" (M. Epp, 2000, p. 30). While circumstances did not allow for the re-privatization of agriculture, changes were enacted which ensured adequate food supply in the occupied villages: "Families were organized into groups of about ten to bring in the harvest with the limited machinery and livestock available... They adopted antiquated methods to harvest the grain" (Ibid, p. 31). Official leadership of the villages and work groups during this time was assumed by "the few adult men, whether qualified or not... The women in this case continued to perform the heaviest labour" (Ibid). Situations also arose for the 'women without men', in which the presence of Nazi

---

<sup>33</sup> *Volksdeutsche* is a term used in the early 20th century to describe ethnic Germans living outside of the Reich.

<sup>34</sup> Religion did not re-enter the school curriculum at this time, however. (Epp M., 2000, p.30)

soldiers represented a sexual threat. In some other cases, consensual relationships developed between Russian Mennonite women – single, widowed, and some whose husbands were in exile - and their occupiers (M. Epp, 2000, pp. 30-36).

Following Nazi defeat at Stalingrad in 1942-3, German forces retreated westward. The Nazi *Schutzstaffel* or SS (Security Staff) planned and oversaw the 1943 westward evacuation ('The Great Trek'<sup>35</sup>) of approximately 350,000 ethnic Germans, predominantly women, children, and the elderly, to German-annexed Poland (Schmaltz, 2008). 35,000 of these were Mennonites (M. Epp, 2000). Some were able to move by train, but the majority travelled slowly by wagon and foot through an especially cold and wet late fall and winter. (See APPENDIX IX: Map of Great Trek) From Poland, the fortunate ones made it out to Germany where they lived with German families and in refugee camps for a period of (usually) 2+ years before finally immigrating to various points beyond. Some of their stories have been published.<sup>36</sup> The stories of those who became Niagara Mennonites have not.<sup>37</sup>

In the end, only 12,000 Mennonites successfully escaped Stalin's grip, eventually moving to refugee camps in Germany from where the MCC assisted with arrangements to settle so far away as Canada and Paraguay. Settlement, for most, meant the end of a five-year journey. The rest - 23,000 - were forcibly repatriated by the Soviets in 1945-1946 to join those already

---

<sup>35</sup> Mennonites refer to this as The Great Trek; non-Mennonite ethnic Germans refer to it as 'The Long Trek' (*Grosser Trek*).

<sup>36</sup> See esp. M.Epp (2000); and H. Loewen (2000).

<sup>37</sup> For example, Harry Loewen's 2000 Jubilee "story book", Road to Freedom, created to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Fluechtlinge* arrival in Canada, contains 2 very short entries from Niagara residents, and only two from elsewhere in Ontario; stories included are overwhelmingly those of Russian Mennonites living in Manitoba or further west.

displaced to east of the Urals. None of the repatriated was allowed to return to their traditional villages.

7,698 of the Russian Mennonites who made it out came to Canada between 1947 and 1951, settling in the five westernmost provinces, mostly in towns and cities where Mennonite communities already existed (Regehr,1996). These are referred to as *Fluechtlinge*. Of these, approximately 400 settled in communities on the Niagara Peninsula.<sup>38</sup> (See Appendix X: *Fluechtlinge* settlement data, Niagara peninsula 1947-1951) This group and their descendants will be referred to as **Group B** (Figure 1.9). Members of Group A, many of whom had come from the same villages in Russia, sponsored the newcomers to come to Niagara. By now, however, the two groups had experienced very different life circumstances in the two plus decades since their separation.

#### **1.4.4 Summary: People of the Study Group**

In general, the historical geographies of (ethnic) Mennonites are diverse and highly complex. The Niagara study groups are no exception. In order to clarify and provide quickly redeemable contextual reference for the reader, I offer three reference charts. The first (Figure 1.7) is a simplified flow chart of the roots and routes of the two Niagara study groups. It is exclusive to their paths, avoiding reference to the numerous other branches of Mennonite migrations that are not a direct focus of this study. Groups A & B are located and featured within a five century long diasporic trail. The second (Figure 1.8) presents abbreviated contextual information for Groups A & B in chart form for easy reference. I include the third

---

<sup>38</sup> Calculated by the author using Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization registration card data made available by the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg for the purpose of this study.

(Figure 1.9: Generations within the Niagara study groups) at this point in the thesis so that the three charts can be referenced easily at one location in the text; a more comprehensive picture of the structure of the research along generational lines will be provided in Chapter 2 (Field Study Design). While reading the narrative results chapters (chapters 3 to 6) it may be helpful for the reader to mark these charts and return to them periodically as reminders of the geographical and historical contexts from which individual stories from each group emerge, and of how each generation fits within the larger picture.

This establishes the case history of the community under study. It establishes the foundations for the focus of analysis, which is on the 20-21<sup>st</sup> centuries, in the form of narratives. In the concluding chapter, I link diaspora-related motifs from the narrative chapters to the broader sweep of diasporic experiences and patterns which trace back to mid-sixteenth century. Before we enter the lives of the Niagara Mennonites through their narratives, though, it is first necessary for me to explain, in Chapter 2, the methodology underpinning this project.



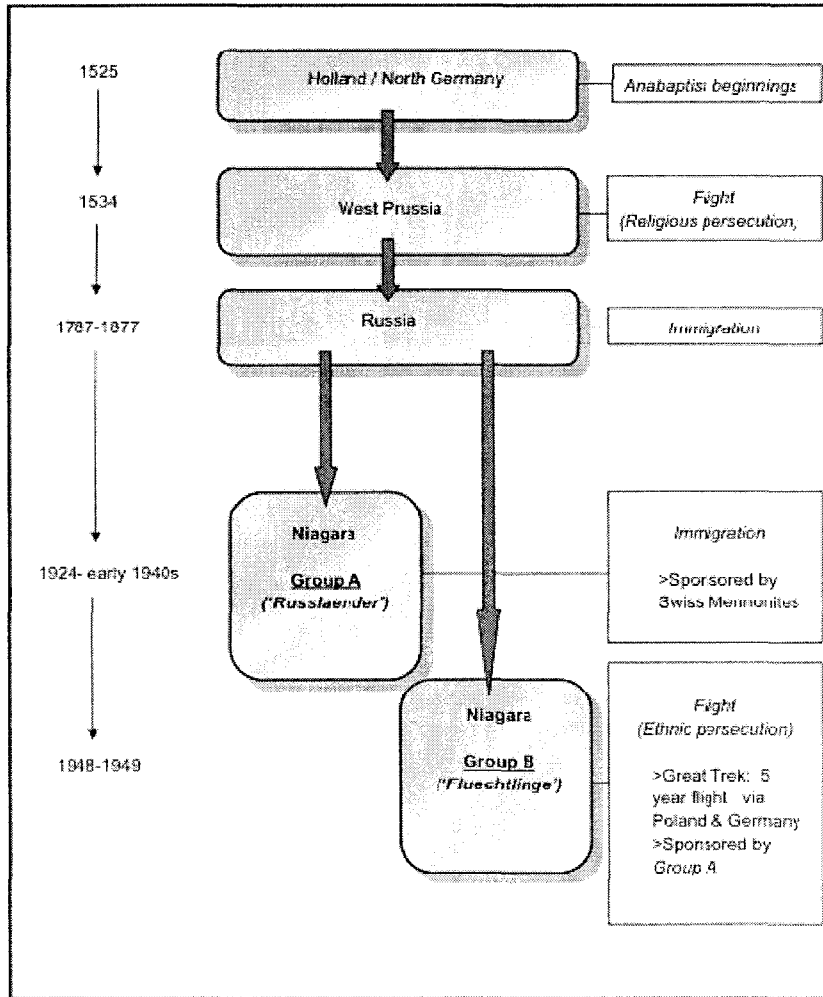


Figure 1.7. Migrational time line of the 2 study groups

GROUP A	GROUP B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Russlaender' ('Russians')</li> <li>• Left Russia in anticipation of increasing hardship following Bolshevik Revolution, Civil War, famines, terrorism</li> <li>• Immigrated as intact families</li> <li>• Condition of immigration: must farm</li> <li>• Sponsors: Swiss Mennonites</li> <li>• 1924: 12 families arrive</li> <li>• Others, who settled directly to other parts of Canada, arrive in Niagara via internal migration through to early 1940s</li> <li>• Experienced the Great Depression in Canada</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Fluechtlinge' ('Refugees')</li> <li>• Stayed, and endured collectivization, religious ban, another period of famine, Great Purges under Stalin</li> <li>• Nazi occupation 1941</li> <li>• 1943: Fled Russia by train, wagon, foot with retreating Nazi forces</li> <li>• Broken families, female-led</li> <li>• 'Great Trek': 5 years en route via Poland, Germany; temporary stops in refugee camps and on German farms</li> <li>• 'Displaced Persons'</li> <li>• Sponsors: Group A</li> <li>• 1948-1949: arrived Niagara</li> </ul>

Figure 1.8. Contextual reference aid for study groups

Group A – Russlaender	Group B - Fluechtlinge
<b>1<sup>st</sup> GENERATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Russia</li> <li>• Immigrated as children/teens within intact families</li> <li>• Age range: 75-89</li> </ul>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> GENERATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Russia</li> <li>• Adult refugees - 'Great Trek'</li> <li>• Predominantly broken families ('women without men')</li> <li>• Age range: 83-86</li> </ul>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> GENERATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Canada/Niagara</li> <li>• Age range: 64- 79</li> </ul>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> GENERATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in USSR</li> <li>• Child/teen refugees – 'Great Trek'</li> <li>• Age range: 66-74</li> </ul>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> GENERATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Niagara</li> <li>• Many are a blend: one parent from each group</li> <li>• Age range: 30s -40s</li> </ul>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> GENERATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Niagara</li> <li>• Many are a blend: with one parent from each group</li> <li>• Age range: 30s -40s</li> </ul>

Figure 1.11. Generations within the Niagara study groups

## 2. Methodology

The methodologies which represent part of the equation of this research design are consonant with my anti-naturalist approach as a social science researcher. This study is girded by critical postmodern, postcolonial and poststructuralist theorizations. It is primarily a qualitative study, with a few reductionist elements in the mix for the purposes of organization, and some minor use of quantification. Cultural geography's theorizations have necessarily evolved to be as complex as the serious questions it asks, so that mixed-methods approaches are often necessary. This was the case with regard to determining the theoretical fit of the term 'diaspora' and then choosing an appropriate organizational framework from the social science diaspora literature<sup>39</sup>, where I did take a reductionist approach (based on qualitative data), as will become clearer with the discussion of diaspora to follow. I felt I needed a framework in order to achieve organizational clarity throughout the entire research process, but especially during the analysis phase as I sifted through a large volume of qualitative data. To look beyond essentialism and universalism is to acknowledge a level of chaos, but at the same time I personally required structure when contextualizing social and cultural aspects of the data within wider geographical processes. The unwieldy nature of the data is also an argument for engaging in a smaller-scale, community level study.

In keeping with reflections in the geographic literature regarding feminism and postmodern thought, my intention has been to present this dissertation as a process rather than a product (G. Pratt, 1993). The results of this study are descriptive and theoretical. They are not normative or prescriptive. Those measurable aspects of the research design do not extend toward anything approaching reproducibility, nor do they "erase the myriad differences that,

---

<sup>39</sup> I.e., Research Objective #1.

feminists have shown, are constitutive of radically different knowings in diverse circumstances” (Code, 2000, p. 362). The frame of diaspora supported my desire to listen for voices as opposed to seeking ‘the truth’, to convey descriptions as opposed to presenting ‘facts’. In the end, when I was left with richness – and more questions - rather than ‘answers’, this was consistent with how I understand the world.

## 2.1 ‘New Geographies’

Since the late 1980s – a point commonly referred to as the ‘cultural turn’ in social sciences– universal notions of culture have been a strong focus of critique. Previously, cultural geographers were more focused on “the *shape of shaping* the earth” (Mitchell D. , 2000, p. 29) (theories of super-organicism, for example), attributing little to human agency, and *underemphasizing values and ethics in research. The infusion of social and cultural theory into* cultural geography over the past few decades has transformed and, arguably, revitalized the sub-discipline (Atkinson, Jackson, Sibley, & Washbourne, 2005; Norton, 2006). Three often overlapping theoretical engagements which typify ‘new geographies’, including this study, are: 1) critical theories, which “involve a distinctive (and *engaged*) analysis of power and difference”, 2) postmodern theories, which “challenge traditional notions of (geographic) knowledge production, opening the academy to a diversity of Other voices” (e.g., feminist and postcolonial theories), and 3) poststructuralist theories, in which ideas about “language, subjectivity and complexity have raised important questions about the way we seek to understand the world” (Hubbard, Kitchin, Bartley, & Fuller, 2002, p. 57).

We now see place and historical events as having multiple meanings and interpretations, depending on who experiences them and when. “Those geographers who have been influenced by ‘the cultural turn’...have begun to see places as a sort of spatial text that

may be interpreted by 'readers', positioned and differentiated from each other by their gender, class, ethnicity, age and life's experiences. So, it is argued, a place is perceived differently through the eyes of different people" (McDowell, 1999, p. 227). Finally, although 'cultural' has come to eclipse 'historical' in the naming of this sub-discipline<sup>40</sup>, history remains a critical pedagogical backdrop of cultural geography, and is a foundational component of this study.

### 2.1.1 What is 'place' ?

Notions of place are interwoven into all aspects of this study, and will be discussed within other conceptual frameworks, as well as among the narratives, in a contextually appropriate manner. Fairly recent conceptualizations of place are vitally important to geographic examinations of global diaspora, for example. These theories, which will be discussed in the diaspora section of this chapter, relate specifically to intersections of local and global flows, in relation to the 'stretched out' nature of space when boundaries are blurred by mobility and technology (e.g., Massey & Jess, 1995) . Certain preceding notions of place, though, are also relevant to this study and warrant introduction here.

Beyond geography, philosophies of place trace to the writings of Plato and Aristotle in their examinations of the existential process of 'becoming'. They wrote of 3 elements in this process: 1) that which becomes, 2) that which is the model for becoming, and 3) the place, or setting, for becoming (Cresswell, 2009, p. 70). Hence, the roots of human understanding of place in relation to identity (*who we become*) are deep. Gillian Rose has written:

---

<sup>40</sup> 'Cultural-historical' geography courses tend now to be labeled as simply 'cultural' geography courses.

*A sense of place* – is the phrase used by many geographers when they want to emphasize that places are significant because they are the focus of personal feelings. Many geographers thus use ‘place’ in this quite specific sense, to refer to the significance of particular places for people. These feelings for place are not seen as trivial; geographers argue that senses of place develop from every aspect of individuals’ life experience and that senses of place pervade everyday life and experience... Identity is how we make sense of ourselves, and geographers, anthropologists and sociologists, among others, have argued that the meanings given to a place may be so strong that they become a central part of the identity of the people experiencing them... the term ‘identity’ has some quite specific connotations. It refers to lived experiences and all the subjective feelings associated with everyday consciousness, but it also suggests that such experiences are embedded in wider sets of social relations. (1995, p. 88)

Geographers, of course, have always recognized place as our disciplinary niche, even if we haven’t always fully formulated what we mean by the term in our writings. The practice of writing about place in a self-conscious way is fairly recent. The traditional geographic notion of place is as fixed, or occupied space. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, scholars such as Heidegger began to directly theorize place. He drew from Greek understandings to conceptualize the notion of ‘dwellings’: to build a dwelling was a way of ‘being in the world’. ‘Dwelling’, to Heidegger, described the (rural) physical manifestations of how humans make the world meaningful, or place-like.

However, it wasn’t until the humanist movement of the 1970s that geographers began to intently scrutinize notions of place. Humanist geographers were reacting to a focus on positivist spatial analysis during the quantitative revolution (1960s-early 1970s). They began to further conceptualize place in relation to human perception and experience, building on theory (such as Heidegger’s) that place is socially constructed but, moreover, emphasizing the personal and emotional attachment humans have to a place.<sup>41</sup> They looked to the *meaning* of place, as

---

<sup>41</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, and Anne Buttimer were among the most prominent early humanistic geographers to imbue experiential aspects to place, both in terms of how experience makes place and how place makes experience (D. Seamon & J. Sowers, *in* Hubbard, Kitchen, & Vallentine, 2008, pp.43-51).

distinct from geometric space (or material dwelling). By the early 1980s, this distinction was widely embraced in human geography (Cresswell, 2009, p. 72).

As an underlying philosophical stance, humanism is less appropriate to my work than postmodernism, due to the latter's emphasis on local narratives over meta-narratives. However, certain humanist theorizations persist beyond geography's cultural turn, and continue to inform postmodern philosophies. Currently, the ways in which new cultural geographers treat (space and) place varies; we blend older notions, and draw from different geographic traditions. Here, for example, within an understanding of diasporic flows (connections between place and the wider world), I also draw on traditional notions of place as 'fixed', and on theory original to the humanist movement (and its predecessors), such as: notions of place and placenessness; home and homeland; rootedness; place as a social construction (how humans 'make' place – and why); and place as a process (routines that give life a meaningful rhythm).<sup>42</sup> I will return to these theorizations of place, and expand upon them in relation to the narratives, in the results chapters.

### **2.1.2 Feminist Methodologies**

Feminism developed in large part out of concern for difference, and while feminist research is not exclusive to gendered approaches, gender is one of many useful and important tools with which to understand difference. (Since the cultural turn, for example, 'space', 'place' and 'nature', have been re-conceptualized according to borrowed critical (feminist) theoretical frameworks: gendered spaces, gendered places, gendered landscapes.) A gendered approach acknowledges its influences upon identity formation, the ways in which people experience the

---

<sup>42</sup> See, for example Tuan, 1997, 1991, 1976; Entrikin, 1991; Agnew, 1987; Pred, 1984; Relph, 1976.

world, what is considered to be legitimate 'knowledge', and how knowledge is produced and represented (Cope, 2002). Throughout the social sciences, notions of difference - gender, ethnicity, class, religion, physical ability, language and nationality – have come to be understood as socially constructed and intersecting variables. At varying scales, and in relation to space, place, temporality and life-stage, these variables collide and combine in a matrix of interactions and relativities. The direction for geographic research currently is toward inter-relational frameworks, which consider webs of intersections. Gender, for example, is viewed as intersecting with each of the other social variables (Jackson, Gender, 2005).

The need to deconstruct traditionally accepted gender categories themselves (i.e., 'woman' and 'man') is now widely acknowledged within feminist theory. That is, studies become yet more inclusive when they recognize multiple, space/time-based 'femininities' and 'masculinities'; this is consistent with a move away from meta-theory to minor theory in the social sciences generally (Berg & Longhurst, 2003; Bondi, 2003; Katz C. , 2001; Laurie, Dwyer, Holloway, & Smith, 1999). Overlain with mobility, examinations of these variables and their intersections can transform historically ingrained discourses, informing our understandings of even the very basic geographic concepts of place and space. Grounded, place-based diaspora research fits this complex model.

Studies of femininities and masculinities have evolved within critical approaches to gendered identities throughout the social sciences. Highly complex concepts of femininities and masculinities must be understood beyond the common historical essentialist, positivist, normative, and semiotic understandings of the terms (Berg L. , 2006; Berg & Longhurst, 2003). Connell, for example, interprets the term masculinity as "simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the



effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (1995, p. 71). Others have gone further to emphasize the ‘multiple and fractured’ nature of the terms such that there are femininities and masculinities, contingent not only upon social variables, but also upon place and time (Laurie, et al., 1999). These approaches allow us to move through theories of difference toward understandings of fluid relativity and transformation. Frameworks acknowledging that femininities and masculinities are geographically and temporally contingent can further inform diaspora and migration theory because they address heterogeneity within gender.

Formations of identities (e.g., hybrid, cosmopolitan) via globalization processes (e.g., migration) and the networks these processes create (e.g., transnational, diasporic) are thus theorized as endlessly variable. For example, gendered identities are negotiated at various scales (individual, family, community, national, global) of diaspora, and are formulated at the most intimate of these levels within ‘fields’ of ethnic, religious, political and class structures, each of which may sanction against variation from hegemonic ideals. Attention to femininities and masculinities can therefore inform diaspora theory, as “categories of difference that organize place-based belonging and exclusion, and the ways in which immigrants are affected by these processes” (Sylvey, 2004, p. 497). Amid a complex web of ‘intersectionality’ (Fine, 2006), negotiations of “contradictions, practically and subconsciously, offer a fascinating illustration of how gender shapes self and group identity” (M. Epp, 1999, p. 108) Within the context of the regulatory constraints (spoken and unspoken) of conservative groups, this type of gendered approach is a valuable critical tool in terms of re-theorizing difference.

A focus on life-stage is another feminist postmodern response to both essentialism and universalism. Consideration is given to the ways in which people's experiences and identities change through the life course:

(Identity may be) created and recreated in different ways throughout even a single (person's) life. Individuals may change, in their personal values and aspirations, in the constraints placed upon them or opportunities available to them. Lives are lived through time; they are also lived in place and through space...for example, the local labour market in which an individual lives has a tremendous influence on opportunities for paid employment. As a generalization, however, the spatiality of social life, as it intersects with temporal change, has not been well explored. This seems a significant omission, because it is likely that typical life course paths vary considerably from place to place, given differences in employment structure and cultural values concerning domestic work and ageing. Geographers' interpretations (on the other hand) have tended toward the opposite bias by seeing... work through the lens of place and space, with insufficient sensitivity to temporal change. (Pratt & Hanson *in* Katz & Monk, 1993, p. 30)

Finally, attention to generation is consistent with postmodern theorizations of difference. Relationships and rivalries between generations, the differences and similarities between generations in terms of experiences, perspectives, and self-definition are all relevant in the shaping of a (diasporic) community (Edmunds & Turner, 2002).

Ontologically, and politically, gendered studies also contribute to the liberation of subjugated knowledge. Overwhelmingly, Mennonite accounts have been recorded by males, thus normalizing male experiences and skewing the larger Mennonite narrative. I had observed this to be the case at the larger scale of Mennonite literature generally, but the same situation also became evident at the scale of family and community in Niagara. The *Russlaender* of **Group A**, for example, who arrived in Niagara as intact family units in the 1930s, had been aggressively encouraged by historians over the years to record their stories; most had done so in one form or another, many for church publications, almost all for their families. In addition, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) funded a 1976 oral history project of Russian Mennonites who had

immigrated to Canada from Russia in the 1920s.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, the *Fluechtlinge* of **Group B**, which predominantly consisted of single mothers and their children, had never received such institutional or general encouragement. Only two participants from this study group (with the help of younger family members) had recorded aspects of their stories. Only one had been asked before to share her experiences within the Niagara Mennonite community. In fact, a pair of third generation *Fluechtlinge* siblings (i.e., **Group B**) had surmised a remarkably misinformed understanding of the aspects involved in their own grandmother and mother's immigrations. The full stories of these two women had not been shared even within their immediate family.

This study also aims to correct an epistemological imbalance which exists because events in Mennonite history, even those mostly affecting women, have been overwhelmingly *interpreted* by males, thus further skewing the collective Mennonite narrative. In response, authentic voices (i.e., each individual's interpretations of his or her own experiences) make up a major portion of this work.

The incorporation of both public and private realms of life in this project is also ontologically and politically motivated. Attention is paid to the various ways in which life is made both inside and outside of work. In keeping, this project unfolds with an eye to expanding what we can know of both women's and men's roles, their work in and outside of the home, their gendered identities, and their notions of home and belonging. Feminist scholars recognize the academic tradition of placing higher value on research conducted with regard to the public

---

<sup>43</sup> The project was conducted under the direction of Walter Klaassen. Henry Paetkau and Stan Dueck conducted the interviews from 1976-1978. 82 interviews were conducted in English, German and Low German. (Steiner, 2007b).

sphere over that conducted with regard to the private sphere, a tradition representative of gender power relations (Domosh & Seager, 2001).

This work is further informed by postcolonial geographies of 'home', where identity is both nurtured and contested. Intimate details expressed through life stories/oral histories provide particularly rich sources regarding the shaping of diasporic memories and identities (Blunt, 2003, p. 73). As Avtar Brah has observed:

Multiple journeys may configure into one journey via a *confluence of narratives* as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory. It is within this confluence of narrativity that 'diasporic community' is differently imagined under different historical circumstances...the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively. (2003, pp. 617-8)

Ethnographic research offers opportunity with which to address feminist understandings of 'knowledge', as well as the inevitable power relations imbedded within discourses. Feminists reject the notion that objectivity is possible within research design, understanding research as "produced in a world already interpreted by people, including ourselves" (England, 2006, p. 287). We start from the premise of acknowledging positionalities, situated knowledges, and partial perspectives of both the participants and the researchers (Haraway, 1988). We are all differently situated in terms of social variables (race, class, gender, physical ability...), spatial locations, intellectual and lived experiences and hierarchies of privilege and power. In recognition that this positionality shapes the way we understand the world and the knowledge that we produce, critical researchers build it in to project designs. The traditional western positivist binary of subject/object is contested; indeed, the emphasis in feminist research is on intersubjectivity. "Typically uneven power relations between a researcher and her informants (are) broken down... In the collection of data, it is not assumed that the

researcher is objective or value-free, nor is she assumed to stay 'at a distance' from her subjects...commonalities of experience should be recognized and become part of a mutual exchange of views" (McDowell, 1992:405-6). Kim England notes:

In feminist research, especially in face-to-face fieldwork, the researched are not passive, they are knowledgeable agents accepted as 'experts' of their own experience. Instead of attempting to minimize interaction (in order to minimize bias), feminists deliberately and consciously seek interaction... By seeking research relationships based on empathy, mutuality and respect, feminists focus on the informant's own understanding of circumstances and the social structures in which they are implicated (rather than imposing our explanations). (2006, p. 288)

Accordingly, a cross-sharing of information during the interviews and focus group meetings for this study was both natural and a conscious act. I neither expected to create sterile, objective research environments, nor attempted to ignore relationships and intersubjectivity. There were personal exchanges between myself and participants before, during, and after the sessions in which I clarified my own positionality in terms of ethnicity (Canadian of Irish and Anishna'abe descent, raised by French-Canadian/ Welsh family), religion (raised Catholic, but no longer practicing), family status (adoptee, spouse, mother), work history (former high school geography teacher), educational background, and middle working-class origins.

Self-reflection (reflexivity) is crucial to the address of positionality and power relations within feminist and other lines of critical research. Various measures were taken to ensure context within the research process. Annotations were made on the interview question sheets so that when I later transcribed I could take gestures and inflections into account (for example, irony and humour may easily be incorrectly interpreted out of context). Interviews were re-viewed and transcriptions verified to the original recordings to ensure proper context. Some of my own personal reflections (which I began recording as interview field notes, and continued

throughout the analysis and writing processes in a reflexive journal) appear throughout this text in feature boxes. These contain contextual information such as my reactions to participants or content, my thoughts on the process, or feedback received from participants – also an important aspect of positionality. Further, I have attempted to be as transparent as possible in terms of explanations of methodology, project details, and analysis. I also opened my thoughts along the process with participants, attempting to create a reciprocal relationship of shared knowledge. Focus groups, for example, were used to report preliminary findings to participants and cross-check their impressions with my own.

The fourth objective of this project is met by returning the stories to their owners - each participant will receive a DVD copy of their interview session, a copy of the abstract, and information as to how to access this dissertation in full (in two Niagara Mennonite church libraries). I have been conscious to make this text accessible to the community of study both materially, and in terms of writing style. In reporting this case study research, I have addressed each step of the process in order to provide context for my decisions regarding research design, and for any conclusions drawn (Becker, et al., 2005).

All this having been said, if knowledge is always partial, so too is mine about myself. While measures toward transparency encourage us to think about the reactions from and effects of research on others it cannot fully remove hierarchies of power or the possibilities of exploitative relations within research (England, 2006). “Being reflexive cannot make everything completely transparent and we cannot fully locate ourselves in our research, because we never fully understand (or are aware of) our position in webs of power” (Ibid, p. 289). I therefore accept full responsibility for this research.

## **2.2 Methods**

The following sections justify and explain various methods used for this study within a feminist research design. The inherently feminist aspects of this study are not the particular methods employed, but rather the approaches to various methods, the uses to which I have put these methods, and the views reflected throughout the research process as to what knowledge is, and what constitutes valid data. I premise these discussions with the inclusion of Figure 2.1, which clarifies elements of difference between traditional western positivist models of social science research and critical feminist models (Bowles & Duelli Klein, 1983).

### **2.2.1 Qualitative Case Study**

The qualitative case study is a comprehensive research strategy used across a variety of disciplines to intensely explore and/or describe complex phenomena (in this case, a community) in context. A variety of data sources, methods, and sometimes researchers are employed within this strategy, resulting in the revelation and increased understanding of multiple and nuanced aspects of a situation because the community is explored from a variety of perspectives. Researchers collaborate closely with participants to gather first hand accounts and views of reality (life stories), an approach well suited to feminist emphasis on subjectivity and knowledge born of everyday experiences, as well as explorations of identity as shaped by “the materiality of everyday life” (Brah, 2003, p. 618). “The advantage of the case study is that it can “close in” on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 235). First-hand accounts from participants themselves are commonly a major component of qualitative case study reports.

	<b><i>Traditional western positivist</i></b>	<b><i>Critical, feminist</i></b>
Units of study	Predefined, operationalized concepts stated as hypotheses	Natural events encased in their ongoing contexts
Sharpness of focus	Limited, specialized, specific, exclusive	Broad, inclusive
Orientation	Orientation to carefully defined structures, and prediction and control of events and things; objectivity	Orientation to process, and understanding of phenomena; intersubjectivity
Data type	Reports of attitudes and actions as in questionnaires, structured interviews and archives; emphasis on quantification	Attitudes, feelings, behaviour, thoughts, insights, actions as witnessed or experienced; emphasis on qualification
Role of research:		
...in relation to environment	Control is desired, attempt to manage research conditions	Openness, immersion, being subject to and shaped by it
...in relation to subjects	Detached	Involved, sense of commitment, participation
...impact on researcher	Irrelevant	Anticipated, recorded, reported, valued
Validity of criteria	Proof, evidence, statistical, significance: study must be replicable and yield same results to have valid findings	Completeness, plausibility, illustrativeness, understanding, responsiveness to readers' subjects' experience; study cannot be replicated
The role of theory	Crucial as determinant of research design	Emerges from research implementation
Data analysis	Arranged in advance, relying on deductive logic, done when all data are "in"	Done during the study, relying on changing ideas as the research is in progress
Research objectives	Testing hypotheses	Development of understanding through grounded concepts and descriptions
Presentation format	Research report: report of conclusions with regard to hypothesis stated in advance, or presentation of data obtained from instruments	Story, description with emergent concepts including documentation of process of discovery
Values	Researchers' attitudes not revealed, recognized or analyzed, attempts to be value-free, objective	Researchers' attitudes described and discussed, value acknowledged, revealed, labelled
Goals	Producing generalized principles and completed analysis of a research problem	Uncovering partial perspectives and identifying further avenues for research
Reader	Scholarly community	Scholarly and user community

Figure 2.1 **Comparison of traditional western positivist and feminist social science research models.** (Adapted from Reinharz, S. in Bowles & Duelli Klein, 1983, pp. 168-172, Tables 11.1 & 11.4)



Criteria from key case study methodology literature was a good fit with this project in that I was asking a “how” question, I could not manipulate the behavior of the participants, contextual conditions were relevant to the study, and there were no clear boundaries between the issue and the context (Yin, 2003).

Design measures to ensure rigour and trustworthiness within case studies are consistent with feminist methodological concerns: 1) reflexivity (reflections are recorded, and open for scrutiny to an interpretive community), 2) triangulation of data sources and methods (sometimes researchers), following a corroborating mode (in this case: interviews, focus groups, archival sources, documentation, and quantification), and 3) transferring of the results (knowledge) to the community of study (in this case: a DVD copy of her/his interview, and copies of this thesis given to local Mennonite church libraries). (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995)

The case study method is long established in geography, particularly in the sub-fields of urban, social and development studies<sup>44</sup>, and within feminist qualitative research. In 1999, Linda McDowell noted: “It is often argued that qualitative, detailed, small-scale and in-depth case study work is particularly well suited to women studying women” (McDowell, 1999, p. 236). I would suggest, over a decade later, that this observation is true of gendered studies in general, not exclusive to women studying women. As she further stated: “Case study work, in particular, is seen as allowing the development of a less exploitative and more egalitarian relationship between a researcher and her participants than is possible using other methodological approaches and tools” (Ibid).

---

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the advantages of case studies in geographic research see, for example Sayer & Morgan *in* Massey & Meegan, 1985.

There are various types of case studies, this example being consistent with literature regarding exploratory and descriptive types. These are meant to be neither predictive nor representative. Any generalizations made are not from inferences, but rather they point to general situations and relations that in turn can augment understandings of issues; conclusions are drawn only about the case in question in the specific context of the study. The ultimate goal of a qualitative case study is to expose new variables and present avenues for further research. Consider the following explanation:

Case studies typically examine the interplay of all variables in order to provide as complete an understanding of an event or situation as possible. This type of comprehensive understanding is arrived at through a process known as thick description<sup>45</sup>, which involves an in-depth description of the entity being evaluated, the circumstances under which it is used, the characteristics of the people involved in it, and the nature of the community in which it is located. Thick description also involves interpreting the meaning of demographic and descriptive data such as cultural norms and mores, community values, ingrained attitudes, and motives...Case studies require a problem that seeks a holistic understanding. (Becker, et al., 2005, p. 3: Overview)

The Niagara peninsula of Ontario was chosen as study area because I was able to procure contacts within the Russian Mennonite community living in the area, because the area was understudied culturally, and because the peninsula's physical attributes demarcate and differentiate it from surrounding areas. Participant selection was not random, but based on geographical and ethno-religious criteria, generational position within the community, immigration wave, and social connections to the key informants or 'gatekeepers' with whom I collaborated for this study. 'Snowballing' took place after initial participants were approached,

---

<sup>45</sup> 'Thick description' is a term original to anthropologist Clifford Geertz' essay, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (1973). Geertz distinguishes between 'thin description', which simply relates a phenomenon, and 'thick description' which puts that phenomenon into context so that we may know what it means, or better understand it. Thick description is now used across a variety of disciplines. A related term is 'deep data'.

as other community members heard of the research project and put themselves forward. A case history is always included in order to establish geographical and historical context (Sections 1.3 Place of the Study, and 1.4 People of the Study). In this case, the concluding chapter is used to locate the case history within the longer trail of diasporic analysis established in the narrative chapters.

Literature suggests that there is no one right way to interpret qualitative data. Creative analysis need not be standardized. Writing itself is part of trying to understand the material:

Interpretation (is) a creative process, a process of fabricating plausible stories. It is not some process of testing, breaking down accounts into their constituent parts or cutting away layers to get down to the truth. (We are) trying to reconstruct world-views, to see how participants saw their localities changing through the way they reconstructed past places and communities. So (we don't) look to pick holes in their accounts, but rather to build a picture. (Crang *in* Limb & Dwyer, 2001, pp. 215-6)

Analysis should, however, be systematic and transparent (Bailey, White, & Pain, 1999; Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Jackson *in* Limb & Dwyer, 2001). In the results chapters (3-6) I have used a combination of two approaches to analysis. First is a holistic narrative approach: the chapters consist of chronological first-person stories. It should be noted that these were largely constructed out of a series of questions and answers, and that for the most part the questions are not present in the final text. The questions were formulated so as to follow a chronological sequence in order to best translate to a narrative flow.

Second is a thematic approach, which took place in two stages. It began with a transcription phase of colour-coding excerpts into emergent components or themes. I then interpreted how these components related to each other, which led to my choice of organizational framework. Data was subsequently selected and organized into chapters, allowing me to further identify key motifs from the narratives - specifically related to notions of

'place' – at each of the stages of the diaspora. I begin each results chapter with an introduction of objectives and theory specific to its content, and end each with a summary and analysis of its key motifs with attention, as data permits, to gender, generation, and life stage. The concluding chapter further links these motifs back to diaspora theory, while relating aspects of the case history (Chapter 1: People of the Study) to examples and patterns in the narratives.

The strict anthropological approach to ethnography, or the writing of culture, is not common in geography (I. Dyck *in Moss*, 2002, p. 240). Since the cultural turn in social sciences, cross-disciplinary use of ethnographic methods have evolved beyond the traditional monograph in which basic elements of a culture were addressed in discrete chapters (Visweswaran, 2000). Several modified approaches to ethnographic research (consistent with the methodology outlined above) including in-depth interviewing and focus groups are "particularly appropriate for feminist inquiry" (Nagar *in Jones, Nast, & Roberts*, 1997, p. 206).

The bulk of data for this study was collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews/partial life histories with guiding questions. The looser structure was chosen because "the path of the conversation between researcher and participant is not predetermined, nor is the spontaneity inherent in the flow of conversation truncated" (Falconer Al-Hindi & Kawabata *in Moss*, 2002, p. 106), thus better allowing for a feminist relational ontology. I chose to keep some structure for two important reasons: 1) to maintain terms of reference so that the scope remained manageable, and 2) as a novice interviewer, the security of having questions in front of me in case conversation did not flow easily was attractive. In all cases but two the interviews

took place in the homes of participants.<sup>46</sup> One of the remaining interviews took place at the home of a facilitator at the participant's request, and the other took place at my own home, at the participant's request.

In order to achieve validity, various checks were employed. As has been discussed in prior sections, I kept a running journal of my thoughts and decision-making processes. Secondly, to guard against bias I analyzed lengthy answers in their entirety and wherever possible reproduced the answers whole in written accounts. In some cases, for reasons of space, the entire answer was not reproduced. In all cases, reproductions of answers have accounted for context. Thirdly, autobiographical exchange took place as a measure of addressing researcher/researched hierarchy, and also to introduce other elements of myself beyond simply being a researcher. This is what has been termed "introducing the heterogeneity of the researcher's life" (Falconer Al-Hindi & Kawabata *in* Moss, 2002, p. 108). This was also accomplished via facilitators who would describe me, and my work, to potential participants first, then accompany me to be formally introduced, and (if requested) remain present for interviews. Fourthly, both during the interviews and subsequent focus group meetings, I made efforts to reflect back my understandings of the participants' thoughts as a crosschecking mechanism whereby they could correct any misunderstandings between us. Lastly, I was conscious to avoid use of exclusionary disciplinary jargon. Where this was unavoidable - use of the term 'diaspora', for example - I offered explanations of uses of the term and sought the participants' thoughts on various aspects of its application to their community.

---

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of questions related to where interviews take place see, for example, Elwood & Martin (2000).

Potential participants from the two study groups were identified and approached by the two Russian Mennonite community gatekeepers. Both are members of my spouse's immediate family, thus giving me a link with the community under study. I believe it would have been impossible to conduct this research as a non-Mennonite from outside of the community in question without the element of trust that this connection and their endorsement imparted. My own situation as the spouse of a Russian Mennonite from Niagara was undoubtedly a contributing factor to the success of recruiting participants. Participants routinely referred to this affiliation during interviews and group meetings.

Focus group participants were selected in the same way. All of the meetings took place in the home of one of the gatekeepers. The first focus group involved 8 women previously interviewed, including a facilitator.<sup>47</sup> The following two focus groups consisted of third generation participants not previously interviewed. Each participant was provided with a guiding agenda to take the guesswork away from what to expect, but the meetings were quite loosely structured. There is a comfort level in conducting research in groups, and the non-directive structure of the meetings allowed participants to direct conversations and to more personally interpret topics listed on the agenda. Further, because all of the participants were known to one another since childhood, there was an easy flow of emotions combined with mutual reminiscing. (Focus group literature often suggests meeting repeatedly to establish group rapport – an unnecessary measure in this case.) Frequently, participants posed questions to one another. As has been noted in the literature: “the sociality of the process was evident” (G. Pratt *in* Moss, 2002, p. 216). Further:

---

<sup>47</sup> Focus group literature recommends groups of 4-8 individuals (e.g., Crang, 2001, p. 121).

Focus groups potentially offer a safe place – literally safety in numbers – in which to discuss issues and experiences, and one in which the authority of the researcher can be challenged and negotiated. They also assume and produce a less individualistic mode of knowledge production. Focus group methodology is premised on the notion that we develop knowledge in context and in relation to others. ...In interviews, individuals tell us how they would behave or have behaved in certain circumstances; the promise of focus groups is that they provide a setting in which we observe how people behave and make sense of their world in relation to others. (Ibid, p. 215)

Mike Crang wrote that this type of familiarity among group members means that “when thinking about what they (say), each speaker is part of a dialogue that (has) started long before (this) project and (will) continue afterwards” so that we are really involved in “an ethnography of already existing groups”, which can be illuminating in terms of the “sociality of memory” (2001, p. 217). Alternately, it would hold as well that wariness of sanction within group situations might also affect data, especially in previously formed groups. (Specific details of the study design follow within this chapter.)

### **2.2.2 Diaspora Framework**

*Diaspora is an ancient term originally derived from the Greek word for scattering; it was historically used to describe the scattering or displacement of peoples from their homeland, whether voluntarily or by force (Cohen, 1997). Often the archetypal example is given of the Jews, who were exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 BCE. Babylon was for the Jews what we now refer to as a ‘contact zone’: a diasporic space invoking “the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical junctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (M.L. Pratt, 1992, pp. 6-7). In the case of this study, Niagara is the contact zone.*

The relevancy of ‘diaspora’ today rests in the ways in which the processes of both colonialism and globalization have challenged our previous notions of culture and identities as bounded or fixed. It has been pointed out that although diaspora and globalization are not

necessarily causally related, “they do ‘go together’ extraordinarily well” (Cohen, 1997, p. 175). Renegotiation of identities occurs due to an “increasingly multi-located existence in a world marked by movement and migration” (Gray, 2000b, p. 175). Hence, many have chosen to study identity politics and cultural theory within its prism.<sup>48</sup> Theories of diaspora critique universal and essential theories of identity and cultural diffusion at various spatial scales and temporal stages, and in relation to other social variables (such as, specific to this study, gender and age).

Geographers have suggested that “the changing social organization of *space* has...disrupted our existing forms of, and concepts of, *place*” (Massey & Jess, 1995, p. 54). This builds upon interpretations of space as complex, “stretched out” intersections of social relations (Ibid) where distinct borders and boundaries are blurred by movement and migration, so that we must revise our notion of just what place is, and how it relates to the negotiation of identity and community. Diaspora is a workable framework within which to examine the possibility of “communities as globalized or ‘extroverted’ webs of connections through which ‘the global’ and ‘the local’ are inextricably linked” (Dwyer, 1999). Manuel Castells observes that transportation and communication in the twentieth century has brought “the historical emergence of the space of flows, superseding the space of places...the fundamental fact is that social meaning evaporates from places, and therefore society, and becomes diluted and diffused in the reconstructed logic of a space of flows” (1989, p. 348). Kevin Robins refers to this phenomenon as “the disarticulation of place-based societies” (1991, p. 13). Heightened communications and transportation systems enable us now to hold together geographically scattered communities

---

<sup>48</sup> E.g., Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Habib, 2004; Herzig, 2006; Huang, 2000; Gilroy, 1993; Puwar, 2003; Werbner, 2002



like never before, “through the mind, through cultural artefacts, and through shared imagination” (Cohen, 1997, p. 26).

From a poststructuralist perspective, diaspora is an effective conduit toward appreciating and understanding diversity in the reworking of identities. Hall, for example, refers to the creation of ‘new ethnicities’ across borders (1995; 1999). Massey and Jess comprehend diaspora as:

the scattering and dispersal of peoples who will *never* literally be able to return to the places from which they came; who have to make some kind of difficult ‘settlement’ with the new, often oppressive cultures with which they were forced into contact; and who have succeeded in remaking themselves and fashioning new kinds of cultural identity by, consciously or unconsciously, drawing on more than one cultural *repertoire*...They are people who belong to more than one world, have more than one language (literally and metaphorically), inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home; who have learned to negotiate and translate *between* cultures, have learned to live with, and indeed to speak from *difference*. (1995, p. 206)

Postcolonialists argue that emphasizing difference normalizes that which is not, thus imposing power assumptions (Foucault, 1972; Grossberg, 1996). There is an argument for the viewing of identity in terms of ambivalence, and for an emphasis on discussions of hybridity within diaspora. Hybridity refers to the creation of new identities, which flow as a result of tensions between movement and contact. What emerge are unique “in-between spaces”, or “third spaces” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211). Terms such as ‘creolization’ and ‘syncretism’ replace ‘assimilation’ and ‘acculturation’. The postcolonial discourse of hybridity acknowledges value in emerging identities independent of ‘parent’ cultures, while at the same time recognizing that there can be no sharp breaks from the homeland. Culture and identity flow, they are neither fixed nor bounded. Within this theorization, we can move from the modern notion of subaltern identity as Other (Said, 1979), through a postmodern politics of ‘difference’, toward recognition of the possibility of “transformative politics, which operates out of detachment from current

cultural constructions of (our) interests and identities” (McDowell, 2000, p. 193). I share the view of this theorization as “a positive and progressive version of the future in which neither similarities nor differences are emphasized at the expense of the other” (Ibid).

It should be noted that hybridity does not preclude social heterogeneity within diaspora:

Early discussions of hybridity have been augmented by far broader consensual stress in the literature...that as social formations, (diasporas) are internally divided. Not just a *fusion* of discourses but a *multiplicity* of discourses, some intersecting, some mutually clashing and contradictory, is widely recognized to underpin the representation of diaspora and its organizational structures...Diaspora communities are both hybrid and heterogeneous in their own peculiar, historically determined, ways. (Werbner, 2000, p. 5, italics original)

As social formations, diasporas rarely produce and reproduce themselves uniformly, hence internal factions, even polyglot communities, are not anomalous. Globally, though, shared religious and/or cultural preoccupations (Anabaptism and/or cuisine, as examples) create ties that mitigate internal tensions (Ibid, p. 13).

Negotiations of gendered identities are “most intensive at the borders of communities, classes, cultures, and nationalities” (Ong, 1995, p. 2). Diasporic experiences are always gendered, although they have not always been studied as such. A gendered study of diaspora challenges notions of universality among cultural groups. Diasporic discourse is also always gendered, although it has also not always been recognized as such. Although women have had a history of diasporic experiences, for example, “there is a tendency for theoretical accounts of diasporas and diasporic cultures...to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experiences” (McDowell, 1999, p. 258), and not addressing the complexity of human experiences. In order to properly address this, it is important to conduct gendered case studies of the particular experiences of different diasporic groups (Huang, 2000). Diaspora is

appealing due to the duality of its applications: it can be used as a tool of resistance to essential narratives, while simultaneously allowing for postcolonial recognition of global commonality.<sup>49</sup>

By now there is a solid body of feminist work combining transnational and diaspora theory with studies of women's experiences in the migration process, women's roles and relationships, and their conceptualizations of ways of belonging<sup>50</sup>. This study is consistent with a shift in emphasis, however, away from 'women's geography' toward more inclusive 'geographies of gender identities' (Laurie, Dwyer, Holloway, & Smith, 1999). It is attentive to both male and female experiences in tandem with attention to place, time, and life-stage, with the aim of not normalizing the experiences of one gender, generation, or age group over another.

Localized case studies with an eye to both feminine and masculine identities can enrich diaspora studies by "locate(ing) the terms geographically" (K.Mitchell, 1997b, p. 534), by "grounding the notion of diaspora in the accounts" of individuals within the contact zone (Gray, 2000a, p. 173). Cindi Katz calls for a topographical approach to lived experiences: "a detailed examination of some part of the world...in order to understand its salient features and their broader relationships" (*in* Silvey, 2004, p. 497). In accordance with feminist, postmodern, postcolonial and poststructural tenets, such grounded studies challenge hegemonic notions of identity and power relations within place(s), and over space and time. Laurie et al. have noted, "Abstract ideas of femininities (and masculinities) can best be illustrated through particular

---

<sup>49</sup> Chandra Mohanty, for example, refers to 'the cartography of struggle', or an imagined global community of Third World diasporic women (1991, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> E.g., M. Epp, 2001; Gabaccia, 2002; Gray, 2000a; Kaplan, 1999; Puwar, 2003; Sylvey, 1999

examples which show how ideas about femininity (and masculinity) have been constructed and contested within different historical periods and spatial contexts” (1999, p. 4).

Diaspora has become both metaphor, and a framework of choice, across many disciplines as scholars attempt to explain the fluidity of culture and identity in a mobilized world. The current dynamism and negotiation around the term itself is reflected in its variety of uses. Typologies in the literature, for example, reflect myriad theorizations of diaspora. As a geographer, I recognize the usefulness of these tools. Their usefulness is limited, however, when the term is used indiscriminately, and without definition of exactly what the researcher means for each particular case. Not surprisingly, the number of publications devoted to a debate around uses of the term itself has rivaled the number of publications examining groups to whom the term has been applied.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the use of diaspora as metaphor (e.g., diasporas as kinds of consciousness) allows for more relaxed usage of the term. However, if one seeks (as I do) a conceptual framework (e.g., diasporas as social forms; diasporas as modes of cultural production), it is crucial that there be bones to support the messy complexity of field data (Vertovec, 1999).

The concept of diaspora can be an illuminating theoretical framework within which to examine identity formation at local and global scales in simultaneity. It can provide welcome structure to the study of highly complex identities. For the many various Mennonite groups, identity has been both a determining factor and a function of their settlement and migration processes. Their historical geographies are highly complex. The individual and group identities

---

<sup>51</sup> E.g., Bhabha, 1990; Brah, 1996; Braziel, 2003; Chun, 2001; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Ember, 2004; Fortier, 2005; Gilroy, 1993, 1999; Hall, 1999; Kaplan, 1996; Marienstras, 1999; Mishra, 1996; K.Mitchell, 1997a, 1997b; Safran, 1991; Shuval, 2000; Skinner, 1999; Smart, 1999; Van Hear, 1998; ; Wahlbeck, 2002

of the Russian Mennonites of this study, for example, have been forged and re-forged across time and space and continue to be reworked in diaspora in the towns of Vineland, St. Catharines, Virgil, and Niagara-on-the-Lake. Experiences of religion, persecutions, successive and simultaneous place-based associations and ethnic Otherings, national immigration policies, political and military processes, economics and labour choices, and the creation of networks have intersected with myriad social variables along the way. The rich collective experience of these people and their ancestors provides fertile opportunity to explore grounded geographies of identity through the lens of diaspora theory.

Daphne Winland perceives that much of the extensive discourse concerning Mennonite identity “overlook(s) the complex ethnic, religious and historical diversity of Mennonite communities in favour of perspectives which affirm the importance of Mennonite continuity” (1993, p. 119). She observes a dearth of studies that utilize “analytical frameworks capable of dealing specifically with the dynamic nature of ethno-religious group identity” (Ibid, p. 111). ‘Peoplehood’ is a term which has been suggested as perhaps more appropriate over ‘ethno-religious group’ in addressing both dynamism and a sense of belonging.<sup>52</sup> From the standpoint of cultural geography, culture and ethnicity are terribly slippery determinant variables of ‘peoplehood’, though, simply because they are always in connection with outside forces: they will always, naturally, evolve. Diaspora discourse allows us to view ethno-religious identities as transformative, and in fact inclusive, in the context of Mennonite mobility and global history.

Diaspora framework may be especially productive in its application to conservative groups, such as the Mennonites. It offers a move away from the traditional preoccupation with

---

<sup>52</sup> See, for example: F. Epp, Mennonite Peoplehood: A Plea for New Initiatives (1977); Urry, Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe--Russia--Canada, 1525-1980 (2006)

fitting such groups “into a modernization framework” (Werner, 2005, p. 31). It resists analyzing people “with the intent of cataloguing their tension with modernity...(and)...often explicitly predict(ing) the demise of their ethno-religious identities” (Ibid). It reflects an understanding that the natural state of culture is one of flux. The onus moves from loss of culture to evolution of culture, allowing for more balance in the examination of losses, outcomes, and opportunities.

Robin Cohen’s book, Global Diasporas (1997), was a starting point for me as I researched how I could most fittingly use diaspora as a framework for the Russian Mennonites of Niagara.

Cohen states:

Conceptions of diaspora, even from the earliest times, are far more diverse than the commonly accepted catastrophic tradition. The original Greek word, signifying expansion and settler colonization, can loosely be compared to the later European (especially British, Portuguese and Spanish) settlements of the mercantile and colonial period. However, this meaning was “hijacked” to describe a forcible dispersal of a people and their subsequent unhappiness (or assumed unhappiness) in their countries of exile. (p. 26)

In the early stages of research I noted that the overwhelmingly prevalent motif of diaspora presentations - be they scholarly writing, musical compositions, or other works of art – is one of longing and loss: loss of homeland, loss of culture, loss of identity. I wondered about room within a diasporic model for the possibility of recognizing experiences of contentment and positive opportunity, which participants were reporting in interviews. I came to learn that though catastrophic experiences typified such archetypal victim diasporas as the Jews, “a revisionist view of Babylon is that the benefits of integration into a rich and diverse alien culture were evident to many of the first group of Judeans and to their immediate descendents ...Judaism thrived in this hothouse through engagement, encounter, competition and the cut and thrust of intellectual debate” (Cohen, 1997, pp. 4-5). In fact, both the Torah (Jewish codified law) and the Talmud sprang from the period of Babylonian exile: this was a productive

period. Predominantly, though, in both popular and scholarly discourse, the central motifs to theorizing diaspora continue, overwhelmingly, to be loss, longing for homeland (mythical, imagined or real), and dreams of return.

Exceptions do appear in literature involving serially diasporic groups such as, for example, the Caribbean diaspora. Diaspora, for these groups, has been better understood by describing and examining the intricacy of 'routes' over longing for 'roots'. This rhizomatic type of dispersal model more clearly illuminates the hybrid cultures and identities that take form over the course of a history of multiple place-based experiences, than does a simple binary model of 'here or there' (Gilroy, 1995). It is within this theorization, referred to generally as 'cultural diaspora', that I came to better envision the essence of the diaspora experience to include room for discussions of opportunity and positive transformation alongside loss.

Cohen suggests several characteristics which would accurately differentiate a diaspora from other transnational groups. In this conception, each feature does not apply to every diaspora; however, several of these features must be present. Basic types of diasporas, each generally true to particular sets of characteristics, are then identified: 'victim', 'labour', 'imperial', 'trade', and cultural' diasporas (Figure 2.2).

At the outset of this study, I knew only that the Niagara Russian Mennonites met the first criterion of Cohen's table: dispersal from a homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions. I collected data from interviews to confirm or deny other features. During focus group sessions which followed the interviews, I steered discussions to the direct address of these diasporic features to check the impressions I had taken from interviews with the viewpoints of the participants themselves. Together we identified the Niagara Russian Mennonites as meeting five of Cohen's nine criteria: numbers 1, 3, 6, 8, and 9.

1. **Dispersal from original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;**
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. **A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;**
4. An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. The development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;
6. **A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;**
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. **A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and**
9. **The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with tolerance for pluralism.**<sup>53</sup>

Figure 2.2. Common features of a global diaspora (Cohen, 1997, p. 26) (Features which apply to the study groups are bold-typed.)

Based on these features, the Niagara diaspora could therefore best be understood via postmodern theorizations of what I have referred to from the literature as ‘cultural diaspora’. In the focus group meetings, we went on to specifically discuss notions of cultural diaspora. These are not typified by relationships to homelands. Rather, they are typified by cultural transformation: by repeated cultural production and reproduction. As participants nodded in the affirmative, I read the following description from Stuart Hall:

These are people who...have learned to ‘negotiate and translate’ between cultures... because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures... They speak from the in-between of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another, and thus finding ways of being both the

---

<sup>53</sup> This table is an enhancement by Cohen of an earlier table of characteristics by Wm. Safran (1991).



same as and different from the others amongst which they live. Of course, such people bear the marks of the particular cultures, languages, histories and traditions which 'formed' them, but they do not occupy these as if they were pure, untouched by other influences, or provide a source of fixed identities to which they could ever fully return. (1995, pp. 47-8).

The 'minutes' of these particular focus group discussions could be summarized as follows:

- Members of this diaspora experience a significant degree of commonality in the retention and affirmation of their Mennonite identities, their cultural expressions, their social conduct, and their popular attitudes (as per Cohen, 1997, pp.144-151).
- Successive place-based displacements make the traditional notion of diaspora, as typified by relationship to 'homeland', problematic. (*Where would one place the homeland? Russia? Prussia? Holland?*)
- Further, members of this study unanimously report having experienced acceptance in Niagara. They view Canada not as a host-society, but as their home.
- The essence of their diasporic experiences appear to be based in the daily living of true hybrid culture (layers on layers on layers...), accumulated through space over the past half millenium, and now firmly re-rooted in Niagara.

***Reflection Box 2.1: Thoughts on Diaspora as framework***

The effects of my decision to focus on diaspora theory began to show up early in the research process. It influenced the questions I asked, which answers I followed up on, what I was reading to prepare, and what type of incidental data I was attracted to along the way. I think very different impressions would have emerged from a study identical in methodology, excepting only the use of diaspora as analytical framework.

It also caused the process to be neither purely deductive nor inductive; rather it was circular, continually cycling from theory to observation, and again back up to theory. For example, in retrospect, I can see that I asked more questions re: mutual aid, remittances, and institutional involvement with Group A, after I had established the significant presence of these factors with Group B.

### 2.2.3 Analytical Framework

Pnina Werbner has theorized that, along with their hallmark of hybridity, cultural diasporas are “communities of co-responsibility”:

responsibility flows from the rich to the poor, the privileged to the persecuted, the powerful to the weak, the haves to the have-nots, whereas cultural authenticity... flow(s) from diasporic centre(s) to peripheries. (2000, p. 18)

In well-established diasporas, institutionalized flows of responsibility such as formal aid organizations sometimes evolve. Werbner has gone further to apply the portmanteu ‘chaordic’ (chaos + order) to cultural diasporas, because they tend to exhibit a combination of cultural hybridity (chaos) with predictable responsibility flows (order). She identifies two elements of diasporic responsibility flows: 1) *performance*, or the flow of goods and money, and 2) *co-responsibility*, or “a continuing orientation beyond the nation state” (2004, p. 545).

The chaordic conceptualization appealed to me on several counts. First, theorizations of cultural hybridity approach the notion of diaspora as a metaphor, or kind of consciousness, associated with mobility. This approach was appropriate to what I was observing in the data, but it was incomplete. What I needed was a framework within which to also examine diaspora as a social form and mode of cultural production (Vertovec, 1999). A framework based on a chaordic understanding of diaspora would allow me to encompass each of these conceptualizations.

Secondly, I had been drawing heavily on other disciplines (e.g., cultural studies, anthropology, history, sociology) for notions of hybridity, and I sought for the study to be more overtly geographic in its analysis because I could see multiple levels of scale (home, community, national, global) emerging in the data. It was becoming clear that geographic connections have come to define this particular Anabaptist group, while other co-religionists, also in diaspora,

such as the Amish and Old Order Swiss Mennonites, continue to be defined by their separateness. I needed a way to arrange evidence that had been accumulating with regard to nodes and networks of connection between the Russian Niagara Mennonites and other Mennonite sub-groups globally. I thought that an examination of these patterns and their contributing factors would fit well within the organizing category of global responsibility flows.

Thirdly, an acknowledgement of unpredictability (chaos) is consistent with my understanding that, as with any complex system, the appearance of diasporas at a macrolevel “belies a complexity of local interactions and molecular behaviours which proceed without any transcendent guides” (Plant *in* Robertson et al., 1996, p. 210). Diasporas are inherently relational systems, despite any outward presentation of pattern in the form of certain predictable, ordered features. I also sensed a good fit. I liked the way the chaordic theorization of diaspora is reflective of the physical geography of Niagara itself, where the wild and the ordered coexist.

Hence, I’ve drawn from and adapted Werbner’s chaordic conceptualization to design an analytical framework for this study. The three elemental features which make up this framework are: **CULTURAL HYBRIDITY**, **SOCIAL HETEROGENEITY**, and **RESPONSIBILITY FLOWS** (Figure 2.3).

- **CULTURAL HYBRIDITY:** New, culturally hybrid identities are created as the result of tensions between movement and contact. This is a chaotic feature, because we cannot predict how hybridity will manifest. But we can analyze what it ‘looks like on the ground’.
- **SOCIAL HETEROGENEITY:** Internal divisions are common constitutive features of diasporas as social formations (Werbner, 2000). For example, sub-groups often present

when separate migratory cohorts (Study Groups A & B here, for instance) intersect geographically - a common result of intradiasporic networking. This is a chaotic feature, because we cannot predict how these intersections, or subsequent relations between sub-groups, will manifest. But we can analyze what they 'look like on the ground'.

- **PERFORMANCE & CO-RESPONSIBILITY:** A third feature of diasporas involves two intertwined phenomena: 1) the flow of goods, money and services to areas of need (*performance*); and 2) a continuing transnational orientation (*co-responsibility*). This is an ordered feature, because we can predict that *performance & co-responsibility* will manifest as: mutual aid, remittances, immigrant sponsorship, offers of employment, loans, gifts of accommodation and labour, and travel. And we can analyze how, at various scales, these affect the lives of people 'on the ground'.

To operationalize this framework, I identified themes from the narratives and organized them into the three features. Within each feature, I then examined interrelationships with place. Attention to differences in experience with regard to gender, generation, and life stage was maintained throughout.

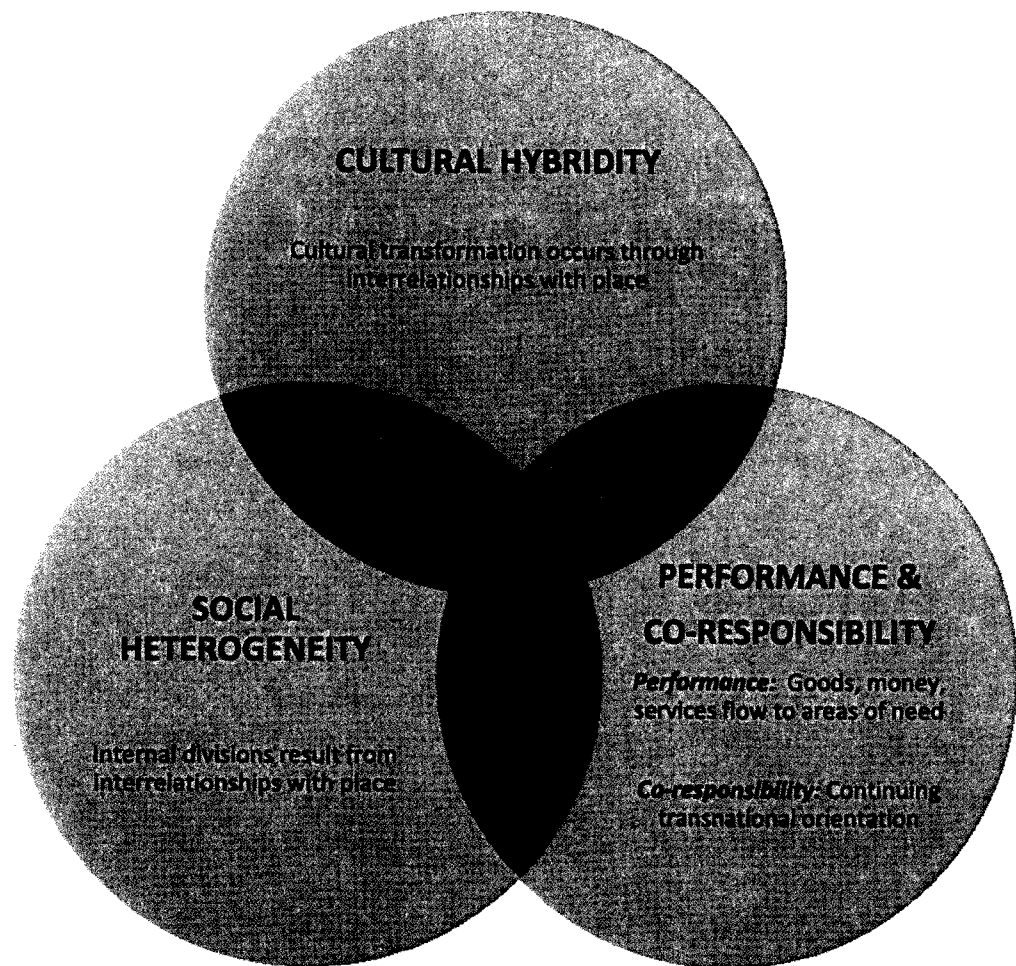


Figure 2.3. Chaordic framework for cultural diasporas

## 2.2.4 Field Research

In this section I will describe the following elements of the study: ethics, field study design, and secondary & opportunistic data.

### 2.2.4.1 Ethics

In accordance with Wilfrid Laurier University's policy for Research Involving Human Subjects, approval was obtained from the Research and Ethics Board to conduct this research.

As per Research and Ethics Board policy, proper written consent to be interviewed, and for the interview to be recorded via either video or audio format, was obtained from each participant. A further option to forward a copy of the recorded interview to the Mennonite Archives of Ontario was included in the consent form, with the stipulation that participants could withdraw consent after previewing the recording.

I transcribed all recorded sessions in full personally, following which I coded the names of the participants for anonymity, and omitted other identifying personal information. Digital transcripts were kept in my personal computer under password protection. Recordings of sessions and printed pages of transcripts were kept locked in a filing cabinet at my home office. Apart from myself, only my doctoral advisor, Dr. Jody Decker, had access to the data.

In order to ensure sensitivity to divergent values, traditions, and concepts of privacy, I engaged an individual from within **Group A** (*Russlaender*) and an individual from **Group B** (*Fluechtlinge*) who both agreed to act as facilitators/translators. They facilitated by providing lists of potential participants, and acted as contacts and liaisons in terms of the introduction of both this project and myself to potential participants. Finally, as needed and/or upon participant request, they accompanied me to interviews. Where necessary or desired, they acted as language interpreters, since a small number of participants were more comfortable communicating in German. The Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Ethics of Research Involving Humans<sup>54</sup> was reviewed with the gatekeepers prior to their work with me during the data collection process.

---

<sup>54</sup> [http://pre.ethics.gc.ca/policy-politique/tcps-eptc/docs/TCPS%20October%202005\\_E.pdf](http://pre.ethics.gc.ca/policy-politique/tcps-eptc/docs/TCPS%20October%202005_E.pdf)

For the purposes of anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout the text. In the case of quotations from focus group meetings, the focus group number only is identified (1-3).

#### 2.2.4.2 Field Study Design

As noted, there were two sample groups (**Group A** and **Group B**) selected from the Russian Mennonite population living in Niagara. Three generations from each group participated in this study between November 2004 and January 2007. Interviews and focus group discussions took place. The study group and data collection design are detailed in Figure 2.4.

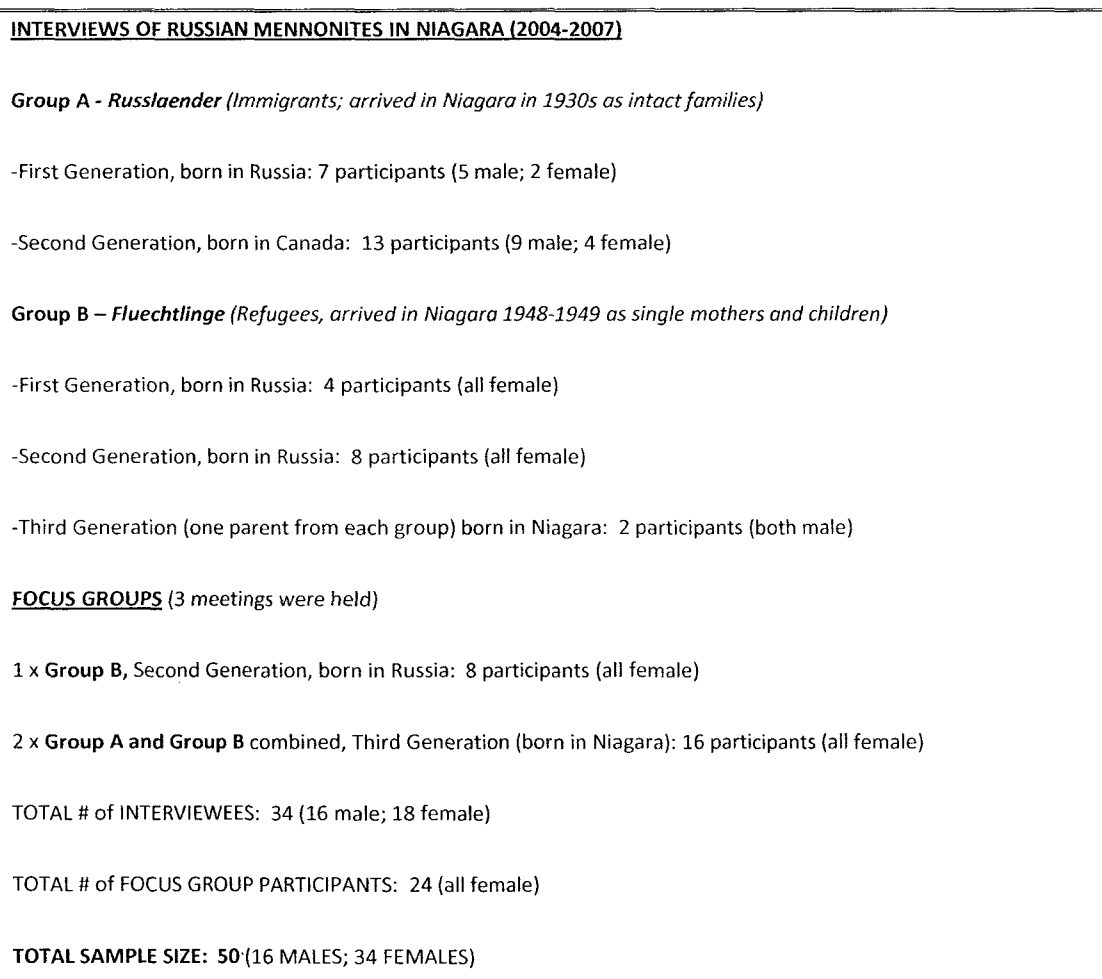


Figure 2.4. Study Design: Interviews and focus group meetings

Efforts were made to equalize the number of male vs. female interviewees, which ultimately broke down to 16 male participants and 18 female participants. However, all of the members of the three focus groups were female. Additional focus groups were planned, however, for reasons involving organizational logistics and participant availability these did not take place. Further, the predominance of women in the *Fluechtlinge* group (**Group A**) in the community influenced the result of greater overall female participation. In the end I felt this to be acceptable, since while gender differences with regard to perceptions and performances are noted throughout with regard to experiences of diaspora, the prioritized focus is not on gender alone. Further, the Niagara *Fluechtlinge* group (**A**) had never been previously studied so there was less secondary data to draw from.

The interviews/partial life histories were semi-structured, with guiding questions. (See APPENDIX XI: List of guiding questions for interviews) The interviews were generally 2 hours in length, although several (with participant approval) took place over three hours.

The focus groups were less structured; each group member was provided with an agenda, which listed guiding topics. (See APPENDIX XII: List of guiding topics for focus group meetings) Facilitators did not attend the focus groups, unless the facilitator was his or herself a member of the particular sub-group. Each group consisted of 8 Russian Mennonite participants, and myself. These sessions were engineered to be 2 hours in duration; however, they tended to last about an extra half hour. These meetings were audio-recorded only, using a cassette tape recorder and a digital audio-recorder as back-up. Three focus group meetings took place: the first involved all of the second-generation members of **Group B**, each of whom had previously been interviewed individually. The remaining two meetings involved third generation



participants who belonged either to **Group A**, **Group B**, or both **Group A** and **Group B** (i.e., several of the third generation participants had one parent from each of **Group A** and **Group B**).

Recorded data was transcribed in full, and then manually colour-coded for reference according to emergent themes. No quantitative coding software or techniques (e.g., content analysis) were employed although, as is natural with most analysis, some quantitative indicators were used in order to identify emerging themes (Crang, 2001).

#### **2.2.4.3 Opportunistic and Secondary Data**

In addition to the data collected using interviews and focus groups, I also gathered data informally as opportunities arose. In my personal life I have taken part in various family and community events with Russian Mennonites in Niagara because of my links to the community through my spouse and his family. Observations during these events have augmented my understandings and often led me to new angles of questioning in my analysis. Informal conversations with individuals in or from Niagara would sometimes lead to information about one aspect of the research or another. I was often given family genealogical documents to examine, for example. I was able to attend funerals of two of the six participants who passed away, and to obtain eulogy pamphlets distributed at the funerals of several of the others. An autobiography of a first-generation participant from **Group B**, translated by family members, was also generously provided to me and I am grateful to have been able to augment that participant's interview excerpts with passages from the provided document.

#### **2.2.4.4 SUMMARY**

In Chapter One I explored the relevance of this project, and presented contextual background for the community of study. In Chapter Two I have exposed my approaches to each

stage of the research process, and presented my own positionality. My own reflections will appear throughout the text as a further window into the ways this project will inevitably be shaped by who I am. Carrying this information forward, readers may better critically evaluate this research, including my subjective interpretations.

Before continuing into the results chapters, I offer the following review of my analysis framework. In order to answer the research question - *How have successive, complex interrelationships with 'place' over time from Europe to Canada influenced the culture and identity of the Niagara Russian Mennonites?* (Which could alternately be phrased, "*How has this community experienced diaspora?*") - I use first-person accounts to describe and explore the following theoretical understandings:

- Interrelationships with place generate diasporic experience. Diasporic people experience place both in a fixed, or static sense (the intimate local relations of neighbourhood or village) and an interconnected sense, whereby social relations are stretched out around the globe ('meeting places', or intersections of activities and influences set within a wider world).<sup>55</sup> Individuals experience place-based interrelationships differently depending on gender, generation, and life stage. ***How have these individuals experienced place in diaspora?***
  
- Cultural diasporas tend to be groups that have been scattered repeatedly, and hence are typified by repeated cultural transformations. This results in *hybrid cultural identities*. What these identities will 'look like' is unpredictable (chaos), and differs from

---

<sup>55</sup> After Massey & Jess (1995)

group to group based on exposure to 'outside', or Other, cultural influences (place-based relationships). Over time, hybridity comes to erode certain binary oppositions of 'outside' and Other,<sup>56</sup> however differing trajectories also produce sub-groups within diasporas so that internal divisions (social heterogeneity) are common.<sup>57</sup> ***How have these individuals experienced cultural hybridity and social heterogeneity in diaspora?***

- As social formations, cultural diasporas also tend to exhibit predictability (order) in the form of responsibility flows. These may be organized as *performance* (the flow of goods, money, services within the diaspora), and *co-responsibility* (a continuing orientation beyond the nation-state, as exhibited via sponsorship, travel, mutual aid, global intradiasporic associations). These flows tend to operate on, and foster, nodes and networks that are created via mobility throughout the history of the diaspora. In long-term diasporas, transnational responsibility flows often become institutionalized.<sup>58</sup> ***How have these individuals experienced responsibility flows within diaspora?***

In order to maintain clarity for the reader amid a large volume of narrative data, I have situated Summary & Analysis sections for each cohort immediately following the presentation of their narratives. Toward the same aim of clarity amid volume, I have often included in parentheses - as examples, or reminders, for the reader - very brief quotations from preceding interview transcripts following certain points made.

---

<sup>56</sup> After, for example, Gilroy (1993,1995).

<sup>57</sup> Werbner (2000)

<sup>58</sup> Werbner (2004)

We move now into the results chapters, beginning with stories of life before these Russian Mennonites became Niagara Russian Mennonites.

### 3. Seeds:<sup>59</sup> Back in the USSR

This is the first of three chapters to feature the life-story components of participants who were born in Russia. The aim of these chapters is to locate and trace the 'roots and routes' of the Niagara Russian Mennonites via the place-based relationships which have governed the material realism of their everyday lives. Life stories unfold spatially (according to trajectories), and chronologically. Elements relevant to discussions of gender, generation, and life stage are embedded within the narratives, some of which emerged organically, others of which were prompted by the guiding questions for the interviews. (See APPENDIX XI: List of guiding questions for interviews)

The stories "capture the features of place through the specifics of human interaction" (Peet, 1998, p. 149). How have these individuals experienced place? In particular, we examine interactions related to work (paid and unpaid), family structures (the cultures and relationships within them), local effects of broader political situations, and individual experiences of 'home'.

'Place', it should be noted, is explored here beyond the notion of a specific "settled, coherent, or bounded" location (Massey & Jess, 1995, p. 218). Rather, it is understood as:

constructed of myriad social relations, from intimate local relations of neighbourhood or village to those social relations which are stretched out around the globe. Thought of in this way, places are essentially 'meeting places', intersections of particular bundles of activity spaces, of connections and interrelations, of influences and movements set within a wider space. (Ibid)

Refugee experiences (and by extension, to varying degrees, the experiences of those immigrating in anticipation of worsening conditions) are characterized by a state of liminality, or

---

<sup>59</sup> "Seeds" as opposed to "Roots" because, as established in Chapter One (Section 1.4, People of Study), the roots of the diaspora are in Europe; however, living memory goes back only as far as dispersal into Russia.

transition and marginality. As a result, people experience disorientation and indeterminacy in terms of their identity. “Such liminality does not, however, abruptly begin at the point in which refugees leave their homes, but is rather founded in the turmoil of their lives even before flight and resettlement, continuing during the search for asylum and relocation” (Camino & Krulfeld, 1994, pp. ix-x). The stories of the complexities of life in Russia, then, represent the foundations of an individual’s lived diaspora experiences.

Memories of Russian life are markedly different for the *Russlaender* than for the *Fluechtlinge* who stayed behind, since conditions in Soviet Russia continued to deteriorate during the two-decade extension of their stay. Age at time of migration also differed for the first generation of each group: the first (oldest living) generation of *Russlaender* left the Soviet Union as children in the 1920s, whereas the first generation of *Fluechtlinge* left as adults in 1943.

**Reflection Box 3.1: ‘Unfiltered’ data?**

Commentary is kept to a minimum during the life-story component, with the aim of presenting authentic voices. I recognize, however, that an unavoidable degree of filtering is present in that I have selected the guiding questions for the interviews, applied punctuation while transcribing, selected which accounts to include (and to exclude), and organized placement of the featured excerpts within this text.

**3.1 *Russlaender* (Group A, First Generation)**

Even within the groups, memories of life in the Russian Mennonite colonies can vary greatly in terms of both nature and extent. Again, this can be partly attributed to age, since *Russlaender* participants were as young as 7 months and as old as 13 years at emigration. At the

time of the interviews, they were 75 to 89 years of age.<sup>60</sup> They spoke of their first-hand memories of Russian life where they could, and often also recounted their parents' stories.

**Gerhardt** (#15, 2005)<sup>61</sup> was born in Spat, Crimea in 1916 but his family returned to the Molotschna colony when he was a young boy. His parents were "*ordinary farmers*"; his Dad grew watermelons, and sunflowers for the oil, and then shipped them to Moscow in carloads. Gerhardt recalls how Russian life became Soviet life during the 1920s: "*See I was 13 years old when I came (to Niagara) but I can remember a lot on the farm: you had to help milking cows, looking after chickens and other things. Mom worked on the farm, too. It was all on the small-scale in the villages. The women worked more or less at home, but then the communist regime started the Five Year Plan - collective farming. And that's where some of our people couldn't see how that would work. Collective farm meant that everyone had the same. And then, the foreman - that was a communist now, and he usually was from the village, the poorest one that couldn't make a go of it - and he was the boss. So all this gives unsettled (sic).*"

**Harold** (#13, 2005) was born in the village of Mariawohl in the Molotschna settlement in 1924. He left Russia in 1925 when he was one year old. "*They (had been) farmers - landowners. And that was the WRONG thing to be, is a landowner - what'd they call them, Kulaks? - the rich, the wealthy. But everything wasn't perfect, either, in the way they treated them. And I've told my father that. I said, "You guys haven't been too good when you were over there. You were wealthy landowners. And you had" - and I use the word - "slaves' working for you: the Russian peasants". They would work for them. And my father told a story about how*

---

<sup>60</sup>Two first generation participants of Group B have passed away since we recorded their stories.

<sup>61</sup>So as to respect the participants' rights to confidentiality, I use pseudonyms throughout the text and in referencing.

*one of the Russian workers came to him and he wanted a little bit more money - wanted a little raise, you know? - a little more bread for his family, to feed his family. And my father says, "Yes, I'll give you a little more bread". He grabbed a stick and he beat him up. Now, is that the way to treat somebody? But this is part of the story which we're not too proud of. And there was other Mennonites that weren't as nice as they might be to the Russian slaves, or the Russian peasants. You know, they didn't treat them very nice in some cases. And when I confronted my father about that, I said, "Dad, do you think that was right the way you treated this guy?" "No", he says, "It wasn't". But you know, under those situations, you were the wealthy. You were the strong ones - the power - and the other people they had absolutely no power. See, there the peasants worked for very little money. Like, I had a nanny looking after me as a child. And (my parents) had housekeepers, and they had various other things because they were the wealthy.*

*They farmed wheat mainly, because they were living in that part of Russia, or (the) Ukraine, which was considered the bread- basket of Europe. My father tells a story that there were about 15 feet of topsoil. You never needed fertilizer...No, he said they had some of the best, beautiful land there... Climate would have been very similar (to Niagara), maybe probably a nicer spring. In the spring, my father says, it was just beautiful. But you see our spring gets marred a little bit here by the Great Lakes; we have such changing climate. But in Russia the climate was beautiful.*

*In Russia the villages were planned in such a way that every house had to be built in a certain way. My father says if every door was open in every house both going in and out, you could shoot a rifle right through the village and never hit anything. That's how they were built. Wide streets. And the farming was different. All the people lived in the villages, and then their land - the farming - was out in the country. They drove out every day; they went out with their*



*horses and their wagons, and that. That was all the equipment that they had back in those days. They did not live on the farmland... So, that's the way they lived in that village. They had a saying there, they said: "That village was too beautiful to leave it out overnight!" It should have been taken in overnight. That's just a saying that they had among themselves.*

*They had, each home, a little garden and they planted fruit trees, and so on. Then they also... would plant a field of watermelons. It was sort of a commune, you know, one field that was for the whole village. And they had what they called a night watchman. He would watch that nobody would steal the watermelons. (You are familiar with Rollkuchen?<sup>62</sup>)*

*And also the cattle went out to pasture – they were driven out; there was a common pasture. And everybody's cattle were driven out down the main street, out to the field. And then they had their herdsman looking after them all day. (This was before the collectives, but) it was, in a small way, it was (already) a collective. However, every farmer owned his own cattle. When the cattle were brought in at night for milking and that they came down the street and certain ones would pull into that driveway, and certain ones would go on into the next driveway, and so the cattle knew where they belonged, knew exactly where they had to go. But those were the only 2 things I'm aware of that they had in common, was the pasture for the cattle and the watermelons. You see, with watermelons, they also made syrup out of the watermelons. And that was sort of almost like a festival on the day they made syrup. And then they used that for baking or whatever else. It was part of their mainstay."*

---

<sup>62</sup> *Rollkuchen* is a classic Mennonite treat of deep fried pastry, eaten with watermelon.

**Reflection Box 3.2: Life, stories, and 'rollkuchen'**

I often leave these interviews on an emotional high, and have to stop to walk it off and mentally debrief before driving the hour and a half home. I find the experiences exhilarating, but at the same time the intensity is draining. If I do two interviews in one day, I am exhausted.

My Dad died 3 weeks ago, and Harold is almost exactly the same age. When he came to tears discussing his own father, it really struck me. He didn't want me to stop the tape. I thought how older people wear their emotions so honestly; they don't have the time to waste being anything but authentic. And as you get older, you have time to sit down - you're looking for an audience to hear you...

I hold on to these fragile, human stories. I guess passing them on is one way of us beating mortality. Maybe that's why people seem so "lightened" afterwards: they feel they've been heard. In some form, they'll live on. After all, "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (King, 2003, p. 2).

Harold and his wife sent me home with a bag of her *Rollkuchen* to eat later with watermelon.

In 1915, **George** (#14, 2005) was born in the village of Kleefeld, also part of the Molotschna colony. His father worked as a teacher, a farmer and a lay minister in Russia; his mother worked at home tending to eight children. The family lived in Russia until 1923, when George was 8. I asked George if he had any vivid memories of his childhood in Kleefeld:

*"Well, when I think back I had one year of schooling and I can't remember too much beyond that. Yes, I do know when the revolution was on and the different factions came, fought right in our village – what they call the White Army and the Red Army. I remember we were huddled up in one of the rooms and there was shooting going on and the next day I remember going back to the back of the farm with my brothers and there were some soldiers killed, you know. I remember that. That would have been around 1918 or so, so I would have been pretty young. I was maybe 3 or 4 when this happened, toward the end of the revolution. But my father, after all that happened in Russia, had one aim and that's to immigrate to America. Because my mother's uncles and aunts they immigrated to America in 1870...so, he always had a little bit of connections with America. Well, when the movement started for people moving out of Russia, you know, (for) all the Mennonite people Canada was the haven, was really the*

country that would accept us... And we were one of the second group in 1924 that came... (Dad) had a large family, and some of the brothers were in their teens already, and he saw what could happen if they ever stayed and integrated into the Russian culture and that. He would rather have us integrate in Canada with the Canadian English.<sup>63</sup> That was his aim. He felt there was more freedom in Canada than what would be available under communist rule. He was very concerned about his family, about what would happen to them if they stayed in Russia.

The way I remember, it was just general farming. They all had certain plots of grain farming. We had fruit orchards in the back for our own to eat; it wasn't a fruit farm like we know here in Ontario.

I remember (also) there was a time when there was a famine and eventually...Dutch help came. And they set up a kitchen in our village. And I know myself, being the youngest, (I) would qualify for one meal a day...I remember my brothers would go to the creek and pick up a certain vegetable, large leaves, and my mother would make soup from that, you know? I remember that we didn't always have enough to eat... My mother also had one sister and she lived with us. There was starvation in St. Petersburg. And they brought a bunch of boys into the village, and we still had food at the time, and my parents took one boy in. He was 15 years old... We took in this boy and he came with (the ten of) us to Canada. He was Lutheran background. In other words, my parents not only had the family, they also had him in our family and Mother's sister. And so it was hard for my parents... His mother had died in starvation, and that's how a number of boys were brought, and he was one of them."

---

<sup>63</sup> The term 'English' is commonly used by older Mennonites to describe non-Mennonite Canadians.

**John** (#16, 2005) was born in the Molotschna colony in 1926. His family arrived in Niagara in 1936. His father was a farmer. His mother looked after the household, but had done farm work as a girl: *“Her father was quite a rich man. He had mills and some stores and some farms. But the girls still had to stoop the wheat after the wheat was cut. You didn’t have combines then. So they had to work, and look after the animals, too... They grew fruit, but not to ship or sell. But they did have apple orchards and cherry orchards, just for themselves or for the people from Halbstadt,<sup>64</sup> the biggest city close by us. But the fruit industry there was nothing like you see here, or think of it as here. I think probably all of Russia maybe had grown as much fruit as (local Mennonite farmer) does by himself. Well, because he grows more peaches than the rest of this area put together, eh? He’s a real progressive chap.”*

I asked John how he thought his parents might have described a ‘good Mennonite man or woman’. His answer illuminates the rigid gender roles that were practiced in Russia, and relief in his not having to perform to the standard he describes in his own adult life. *“Oh, a hard working woman that raised children and didn’t boss her husband around too much. (smiles) That would never work in Russia, eh? Because our forefathers they came with the German work ethics, and the German dictatorial ethics, too. Men rule the roost. And I think...they ruled pretty harshly, really. Women should be subservient to the husband – it says that in the bible. What more do them men need, then, to ‘crack the whip’, so to speak? Well, I’m glad that that’s no longer the case.”*

**Peter** (#17, 2005) emigrated when he was 6 years old. He was born in Siberia, but his family returned to Village #9 of the Orenberg settlement in Middle Volga, just west of the Ural

---

<sup>64</sup> German name for the village of Molotschna.

Mountains, when he was a young boy<sup>65</sup>. Once in Canada, his parents settled in the prairies and, at the age of 22 (1942), Peter followed a brother to Niagara. What did he remember about life in Russia? *"I still have quite a few instances that stand out in my mind. I can still remember us kids used to like to go to the street when the herd - the guy called the cow herd - they'd come down the street in the morning, and everybody would let their cows loose. By that time, they would have been milked, and they'd let them out on the street and the animals knew exactly where they were going. And as they went down the street they picked up all the animals, cows, and took them out to a big pasture out in the fields, and at night when they would bring them back home, it would be in the same way, only in reverse. And every cow knew where its place was. We used to like to go out and watch the animals come and go.*

*And I do remember that sometimes when things went on in the village, something of importance, they would call certain members of the village; that was a sort of a council, a Schulz (mayor) council. These guys would get together and they would have council about something that was not right in the village and they would decide what was to happen. They were a sort of a court... There were times - even after the revolution was more or less finished, there were still bands of these guys (roving soldiers or bandits) riding. And I can still remember one night when a whole bunch of riders came into the village, and I didn't hear the discussion that went on, but I can imagine it was just decided that they would be fed and they would have their horses fed there. And they stayed the night and then they left the next day. But people were very much still afraid. I guess they remembered the revolution days that were just passed. And there were a lot of tough characters around."*

---

<sup>65</sup> NB This is the one instance of a participant who migrated from outside of the Ukraine region of the USSR.

When speaking of his parents, Peter provides insights into children's lives in large agrarian families, generational differences, gendered roles, and strikingly opposed performances of masculinities within Mennonite society - indeed within one family - in Russia: *"Well my mother had 12 children to look after and bring into the world. They were very busy people. That's the one thing I remember. They had tough times. And they didn't have washing machines you just throw things in and turn a switch. When I think of it now I realize they had a very hard life... In most families that grew up then, and especially during the depression (in Canada), when you were old enough to do a day's work, you were hired out to work somewhere. And you did not spend that much time as an individual with your parents. Another thing is I don't think our parents were - uh, they had such large families that maybe they couldn't do it, I don't know - but my mother was a very kind person. I mean she was very good to us. Whatever we needed, they struggled to provide. And a lot of times it was not what they would have liked, but that's what they had to live with. So they were sewing and mending and cooking; it was a very busy life for them.*

*(My father) was a typical authoritarian-type father that they were in those days. They believed almost in the military style of keeping order in families. It was a matter of, "You obey the rules, and these are the rules". And if you didn't, you got punished. And other than that they were fair; they were good. But I mean as far as - and it was that for most of the families that we knew - there were some that were exceptions, but most of them were very authoritarian type of family groupings...Well, you know, (then) whether you like it or not, you almost inherit part of that type of characteristic. Now mind you we objected to a lot of that in our time and we didn't go to the same level at all that they did. We were closer to our children and we tried to give them the things we couldn't have... So that's the way it was.*

*Even though I say most of them were dictatorial...my grandfather was...a very kind, gentle man. He lived with us...all those years in (Manitoba)... and they were raising their families then, and boy he did a lot of babysitting for those two ladies. Like, there were two families: my uncle – that was a huge farm, 1500 acres of land, and so we were two families looking after it. And my grandfather was one of those guys (that) could make or repair anything. He made us all sleds. He made us wagons. No matter what was needed, he'd go over to the blacksmith or wherever he needed to do it. I don't know where he learned to do all that stuff, but he could do blacksmith, he could do carpentry, he could do just about anything he wanted. And I remember one year we had – like, there was a lot of flooding. There had been a lot of snow and was a lot of flooding and a big area of land was underwater and it froze. And he had made us skates. He actually made us skates that we strapped onto our feet, and he came skating with us! So, like I said, there were unique instances of men that were very human and kind people”.*

**Margaret** (#18, 2005), who left Russia as an infant in 1926, has memories only of the stories passed down from her parents. When she is asked about what kind of a person her mother was, her response (like Peter's) illuminates gendered divisions of labour and conditions of life for children in Russia during that period, and also portrays individualized responses to gender norms. *“Well I would have to go back to when my mother was a child, I guess. Her mother died when she was about 5. Her mother died in childbirth. And there were already 9 children, so they had a lot of responsibility in looking after (each other). Like, my mother was one of the younger ones. And the youngest child was 2 years old when my mother's mother died in childbirth, so they had a lot of responsibilities. And then my grandfather...he was I think the kindest man that I have ever met, such a wonderful person. And he had decided right then that he was never going to remarry. And he didn't. And so, he couldn't afford to keep all these 9 children, so they were spread out through farms, through relatives, and they had to work. They*

*were considered workers already at a very young age. And...she also went through the revolution. Stories she would tell us that they lived with some relatives at that time, and the Red Army would go through and they left all this aftermath. And she remembers (sic) that they had to bake bread for all the soldiers, and the floor would just be covered with all these soldiers... One thing she said: a man was leaning against a tree and his leg had been shot off. Things like that they witnessed and had to go through. And then she would hire out as a maid when she was older, and she happened to be hired out to my father who was married to another woman. He was an older man; he was 15 years older than my mother. She was the maid there. But then his wife died, also in childbirth. And that was their first child. Then he became a widower, and then he married my Mom. 15 years younger. But my mother was – we still marvel at what my mother could do with 14 children, and raising us all and clothing us all. It was just amazing to us. And in all the things that she had gone through that she just could be so kind and so good.*

*But she always referred to her father. She said, “We could talk to him like he was a woman”. Like, even all our pregnancies and whatever. He always understood and –whatever (it was), they could go to him. I still remember that grandfather; he had such a resonant voice. We remember that. And we always stood around the table to say grace. And in this booming voice, he would say grace. And we revered him highly. Oh, he made such an impression on us. And I think that rubbed off on my Mom – you know, his kindness, and all...”*

### **3.1.1 Summary & Analysis**

Relationships with place drive diasporic experience. Several notions of place are illuminated through these first generation *Russlaender* stories, which we see again in subsequent sections. I’ll take some time to explain each of these as they first come. First is the notion of place as experiential. Specifically here, I refer to the experience of home-place:



humanistic geographers theorized home as a field of care, an ideal kind of place where we feel safe and nurtured, a centre of meaning (Tuan, 1997). For George, though, home in Russia had become a site of fear and hunger: he recounts memories of shooting and dead soldiers, and feeling that he didn't always have enough to eat. Peter, too, articulated uncertainty and fear associated with roving bandits. With the onset of collectivization, Gerhardt's family was stripped of their land ownership, and the meaning and sense of security ownership had entailed. The boys were experiencing home as fragile, less stable, so that their child's sense of 'being in the world' was shaken ("*all this gives unsettled*"). Their parents' aim to immigrate was a desire to recreate home as a place of safety and a centre of positive meaning for their families.

Related to this is the practice of how we 'make' home. Here, for example, the planting of home gardens, which continued through the period of collectivization, is introduced ("*They had, each home, a little garden and they planted fruit trees*"). The garden's main function is to nourish the body, but what is planted can also become part of an aesthetic associated with a soothing sense of home.

There is also the notion of place as socially constructed. Specifically, here, we see in the 'Mennonite commonwealth' model a bounded place meant to keep the 'outside' out. Harold's father's abuse of Russian peasants ("*slaves*") reveals the village as a socially produced site of belonging, in which power relations are exclusionary (e.g., Harvey *in* Bird, Curtis, Putnam, Robertson, & Tickner, 1993; Rose, 1995). Harold voices a generational shift: to him, the idea of place as an exclusionary tool is regressive. Bounded places tend to be resisted by those excluded, and indeed this eventually came to be true in the case of the Russian Mennonite villages; place is never truly free from outside forces, and therefore constructions of place are never finished.

Place can further be understood as a process: flows of objects and people through places produce (unscripted, but often habitual) routines or paths, sometimes referred to as 'time-space routines'. Collectively, as in the case of a community, these form kinds of 'place-ballets' (Pred, 1984; Seamon *in* Buttimer & Seamon, 1980; ). In other words, place is defined by movement: the daily repetition of individual practices gives place meaning. This brings us to the village cows described by both Harold and Peter. The routine of going to watch the cows, and the cows' habitual paths home ("*The cattle knew where they belonged, knew exactly where they had to go* "; "*Every cow knew where its place was*") contributed to a familiar rhythm in their respective villages, adding meaning to place for these boys. The habitual nature of it imparted a sense of surety, order, stability, which they remembered with a warm smile.

There is also the notion of 'homeland'. The descriptions of Russia that Harold recalls his father voicing are laced with nostalgia ("*15 feet of topsoil*"; "*In Russia the climate was beautiful*"; "*That village was too beautiful to leave out overnight*"). Harold holds on to these descriptions fondly. They connect him to a place that, for him, is mythical – he personally has no memories of living in Russia because he left at the age of one. His family removed him from that place before his sense of it was tested. For Harold, Russia as homeland is "place (as) an archive of (his parents') fond memories" (Tuan, 1997, p. 154).

The interconnected nature of place is evident in changing political conditions which have a direct negative effect on the materiality of everyday life for people in these villages, and ultimately lead to *Russlaender* emigration. Positive outside influence is welcomed from within the diaspora, though, to assist during famine ("*Dutch help came. And they set up a kitchen in our village*"). George is referring here to the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), started in North

America in 1920.<sup>66</sup> MCC, and the newly formed Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC), would also intervene to assist in emigration. These are the two earliest examples of institutionalized, transnational responsibility flows to directly affect the lives of these participants. George further acknowledges an informal family network predating these organizations: his father has relatives in America since 1870 (*"So we always had a little bit of connections to America"*).

In the villages, men appear to have been constrained by rigid hegemonic norms (*"most of them were dictatorial", "men ruled the roost"*). These stories, though, give evidence of heterogeneity (*"unique instances of men that were very human and kind people"*) within the male population (e.g., Peter's *"typical authoritarian-type father"* vs his grandfather as *"a very kind, gentle man"*; and Margaret's grandfather whom her mother could *"talk to like he was a woman"*). We aren't told how these *"unique"*, or apparently non-normative, performances of masculinities were received in the Russian colonies generally, but we do see that within their own families these men were loved and appreciated, even revered. Through differing place-based experiences, these normative constraints on husbands and fathers were relaxed over a generation (*"Well, I'm glad that that's no longer the case", "We objected to a lot of that in our time and we didn't go to the same level at all that they did. We were closer to our children"*).

Children, both in the Russian villages and in Canada during the Depression, were regarded at early ages as labour and revenue sources for families. Large families meant that older children also took roles as caregivers. (Gender divisions regarding children's work appear more clearly in later chapters.) As Peter suggested, parents worked very hard - there was little

---

<sup>66</sup> Among their endeavours, 'feeding operations' were established in 1922-23, with 140 field kitchens feeding 60,000 Mennonites (F. Epp, 1962).

leisure time to spend with children as Mennonite parents in Niagara do today (*“you did not spend that much time as an individual with your parents”*).

We now shift our gaze to the first generation of *Fluechtlinge* - those who stayed behind - as they describe what life was like for them in the villages after the *Russlaender* (Group A) left.

### **3.2 *Fluechtlinge* (Group B, First Generation)**

Two generations of **Group B** (*Fluechtlinge*) were born in Russia. These are the stories of the first generation participants, who lived in Russian Mennonite colonies until they were from 22 to 31 years of age. All but one lost their husbands during the Great Purges. When they shared these stories they were aged 83 to 92.<sup>67</sup>

**Justina** (#1, 2004) learned to speak four languages over her lifetime (German, *Plautdietsch*, Russian, and English – in that order).<sup>68</sup> She was a first-born child. Her father was a schoolteacher and a preacher in the village of Hamberg in the Molotschna colony, and the family made their home in the same building as the school where he taught: one end served as the school, the other end was home. Justina’s mother raised the children, carried out domestic duties for the school and the home, and also tended the stoves that heated the building. Born in 1912, Justina experienced an openly religious upbringing.

Justina recounts a time from her childhood when the family had to leave their home temporarily: *“Anytime that the government would need the houses, then we have to go with nothing. That was the Russia, the communist... They said we have to go out of that school one time; we have to go up near the Russian villages... maybe 15-25 miles, that’s all. We went in*

---

<sup>67</sup> All of these women have since passed away.

<sup>68</sup> During our interview, Justina shifted often between English and German. A facilitator was present to translate.

*they villages and there we got our food and there we got everything, but when we then came home, that was out-cleaned everything! Well, my mother she had some cups for coffee drinking and things like that. She put them in ovens – we had ovens for heat in the front and then they got heat in the rooms – and there she put them. And they were (left) standing. All the other stuff were gone. And my mother she had everything: clocks, and what you can think. But when you have around Russian people, they have nothing. They live just that they have something on; that they not were running naked around. That was all. They took everything, and what they not could do, they beat it... I cannot understand how can people be that way -the Russian people? The others, the Germans (Mennonites), they came there in from higher (Prussia, and Mennonite villages to the north) where their parents were living, and they had worked there and they had saved stuff, and they knew how to work, they knew how to save, and when they had something they would look after that. And that stuff, that was beautiful stuff, even today. But, we were everywhere in Russia, and so they had to take out everything... they took all out, the rooms were empty. There was nothing - there was not a spoon, anything, left.”*

Justina completed the standard seven years of elementary schooling,<sup>69</sup> but recalls at that point the German high schools were closed: *“I was ready to there going but that was out. They closed that school, and they left to the German people nothing. Not even my brother - they were ready to go to school there, and they could not go there”*. Justina married in 1931 when she was 19: *“We had (our wedding) on an evening. I sometimes, you know, things like that you*

---

<sup>69</sup> Each Russian Mennonite village had its own centrally located schoolhouse, which provided a seven-year course. The teacher/student ratio would generally have been 1:50. Following this, “most boys and a few girls” attended one of the high schools, or *Zentralschulen*, which offered a four year course. There were 25 high schools: 19 were boys-only; 4 were girls-only; and 2 were co-educational (Voth, 1991, p. 39).

remember. It comes. From where I don't know..." [CJ:<sup>70</sup> Nice memories?] "Ya. On daytime we went there to (another village). There was little offices there, and there we got a writing... You got married, you have to go before the wedding, you have to go for the government and you have sign..." [CJ: A licence?] "Ya, and that what we did. And then in the evening we went, we wished we would find a pastor somewhere to marry us." [CJ: Was it hard to find a pastor?] "Ya, they all was gone, too. They took them, too; they were in the first row when they took the men." [CJ: Did you have to go to a different village to find a pastor?] "Ya. And there Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ came, and in the evening, and we had a wedding in my husband's house in the evening, and that was all. Well, we stayed there and we got one room there in the house where we lived, in his parents' house, our first house, then started got to work. And then we found other place..."

**Reflection Box 3.3: Weddings**

We were focused on such serious subject matter, and yet people's faces would light up when I asked about their weddings. Even those, like Justina, whose weddings could not take place with a religious ceremony seemed to have taken comfort in the security of this ritual, as if it were an island of happiness in a sea of hardship. They seemed surprised to have been asked, as if they hadn't talked about it. They smiled and sometimes blushed. Day to day life had taken over since those wedding days; they seemed pleased with the opportunity to bring the memory back to the surface - and take pleasure from it again. I loved these glimpses of elderly people as young and in love. They re-focused me on the trails of people's life stages, as opposed to just the trials of their lives.

Justina gave birth to four children in Russia. Three survived infancy. She worked on the collective farm while raising her family and carrying out domestic work: "I just worked at the cows, too. I was milking and watching the milk... we had a big machine where the milk went out, too, and we took the cream in big tanks and brought them to the town 10-12 miles from us... (by) horse. And there they took the cream out and they made the butter... (After the children were born) my youngest sister, she had nothing from life either, and we had to stay, and so she came to my place and (watched the children). Actually, I got early up for milking, and...when the

---

<sup>70</sup> 'CJ' indicates the author and interviewer, Cynthia Jones.

*morning started then I was home, have my job done already – milked the cows all already, put that to the tank where the cream came out, and the cream they took it to the family where they made the butter. And so every (day), milked three times a day... I milked 9 to 12 cows. And they were so nice, the cows. We loved them even. One especially: \_\_\_\_\_ (name of cow). That was my love... (At home) I have to make the meals for eating, wash my wash, clean my house, the rooms.”*

Justina’s husband worked as the animal administrator at the collective. They both worked in their small garden. Her mother died in 1936, and then both her father and her husband were taken, twice each, during the Great Purges. She would never be reunited with them. Her husband was taken to Siberia the first time, where Justina was able to visit him twice at a work camp. *“The first time he was gone, they took him - they had the police - and they said to him – nobody will hear that, it was all quiet, nobody will know it – he’s to look to all the man to the whole village, and find out what kind of persons they are, and if they were still that old thing (not communist), what they knew, or if they were already communists...”* [C]: They tried to get people to tell about each other...] *“Ya,ya. And my husband said, “No. I tell nobody, and I go look nobody what he does. Everybody is by himself what he does”. And he didn’t even start – he did nothing, nothing. They left him three years. He said nobody. Said it would be a lie anyway.*

*But, he knew then already what they had in mind to do with people. And so he came home and he was a whole year sick (pleurisy). Was in the hospital while, and then he came home and then whole summer he went in the garden and lay in the sun - from 11 o’clock, he was lying in the sun. And there he made it. Then he got good again. He was still young. And then we thought, well ya, it’s now, everything all right. But that was not the end of the government, what they had on their mind. They took him again, and they took then all the men away. They*

*took them all away and brought them to the station and put them on the wagons there, and took them to Siberia... You cannot imagine that a government, or a land, that a people have to hunger like that, but that's what they did with them. And his brother was taken too after for Siberia, and he wrote a letter. We find out... that he has nothing to eat."*

Justina never saw her husband or father again. In 1943, she and her sisters and their children left their village with the retreating Nazi forces. Years later, they had word that their father had returned to the village: *"We got from other people to know that he came back from there and we thought that he would know where we went with our families, then he would come to us there. But he came home to that village where we were from, and where the men will still be around, but then they took all the (remaining) men and they took them to Siberia. And from then on we don't know anybody. Some said they were all shoot...and others said they just put them there, they want them. You know, you have to know what you have here (in Canada), when you see here all the people. They come and live, and they get even money for a month, so much to live. That was not there, because the Russian people, they have nothing either."*

**Reflection Box 3.4: Questions**

I just finished my first interview (Justina). I can tell already that there are problems with the guiding questions, and that I will need to be flexible. Questions such as *What do you recall your goals and aspirations to have been before the Trek?* are too frivolous, at least for this first generation. They were too busy surviving to have the luxury of goals and aspirations! I skipped several questions after sensing this. They may be more relevant to the next 2 generations. I also skipped at times to questions related to certain topics as she brought them up. It will be really important to be flexible like this - to let the participant set the flow. As I feel more confident as an interviewer, this should become easier.

Afterwards, Justina and I and the facilitator walked and talked, and she had lots of questions for me about my education. She repeated several times that she thought it was so good for a person to keep learning throughout life.



**Greta** (#2, 2004) was born in 1921, eleven years after Justina (and post-revolution). Justina and Greta are sisters. There are notable differences in their experiences, recollections, religious histories, and even their level of comfort in speaking English.

Greta recalls that her father was a teacher and a preacher. When these occupations became too dangerous under communist rule he used carpentry skills to support his family of ten children. She recalls how he would go into hiding to avoid being taken. He would be weeks away and she would wonder where he was until suddenly he was home again. She described a heavy atmosphere of suspicion, in which *“they always had spies looking around for you. They know exactly what you were doing, what people around you knew about what you were doing... But Father being away so often, and then he was hiding, and then he wasn’t happy – you could tell, looking back now. And sometimes they did take him away for a while and then they let him go again. One time I ask him: “What did they do to you?” Well, they ask him crazy questions. It was - well, we didn’t feel that much then, but later on I am thinking of how we must have felt all the time. It was very uncertain.”*

Greta recalls her mother as having been very patient with her ten children. There was an inside (female)/outside (male) division of labour, except that both parents tended the home vegetable and fruit garden. Following collectivization, both parents worked at the farm: her mother with the cows, her father in an administrative position. She obtained a grade ten level of education, and she worked as a teacher in Russia. Greta had no religious training in Russia. She recalls *“just a poem, or a song we was singing, that was all. With your parents.”* She was not baptized until she lived in Germany following the Great Trek west, in her mid-twenties. When asked what part religion played in her life in Russia and on the Trek, Greta responded, “At

*that time we didn't take it that much...No, we didn't (pray). At that time, we had no religion, and well, not that much. Now it's more, but we weren't that taken by religion then."*

*She married at age 18 in 1939: "My mother had died already and I was staying partly with one and partly with the other sister. And so I got married. I had a steady boyfriend in the village and so we got married. All we had was one room then, but that's the way it was. As long as we had somewhere to sleep and somewhere to eat, then that's it." [C]: What was your wedding like?] "Well, we had all the friends and all, and my husband - he had connections - he had a lamb, a sheep. He killed that and we had a lamb for that, and actually some say they liked it very much. It was nice: a lamb roast and the trimmings to it. Because there was hardly anything to get, but he had connections. He got a sheep... We didn't have a pastor. At that time there was no religion, and was not allowed to have a pastor. So we, at that time, we went to city hall and had made on paper and that was it. That was all there was; there was no preacher or church or nothing. Just later on a meal, and some dancing... In a way, things they were happy, anyway. The older people they shook their heads; they couldn't say much. But we young we went ahead and enjoyed it. And we had little drinks, too - not much, but we had some drinking, too, on our wedding. So it was kind of nice.*

*We had one room with his parents...and that's how we lived. And he was... looking after the tractors – brigade. Like, when the (collectives) started, after they took everything away and was all the tractors altogether, he was looking after all those machines to fix them and run them. So he was really good with machines.*

*Then he went with the war; when the war started they took all the men away. They mobilized all the men they wouldn't want to give to the enemy, like, you know? And that's how they took them away, in herds, like. You know, the men. And right away they had some army*

men supervising, going with them, like, you know? They were taken right away as if they were enemy because they were German and they took them right away that way. And so he went. We never see them again. Never heard them again. 1941. We were married a year and a half, and then he was gone... All the men, they were all gone and nobody heard anything of them. Oh well, you lived on memories."

[CJ: Did you have any children?] "I had one, ya. It died. It was born and died after birth, right away. There was no doctor, no midwife, nothing. And so it was. It died. And was nothing they could do. There was a little hospital, but they couldn't do anything. A boy."

**Reflection Box 3.5: Greta's Funeral**

I attended Greta's funeral today. The ladies choir sang *God Be With Us Till We Meet Again*, the same hymn that Gerhardt remembered singing as they left their families and neighbours at the train station in the USSR. The funeral service was followed by a luncheon, during which Greta's family members sang, in 4-part harmony, songs they had sung together during the Great Trek.

It saddened me that the story of Greta's life had been edited for this occasion: there was no mention of the family she had made in Russia (husband and only child); or that she had been a teacher there; or of her personal experiences during the trek, which included her riding horse-back alone in search of food. The program read: "*Conditions in Russia deteriorated and her father and all 5 brothers were sent to Siberia as prisoners. Only one brother... was able to come to Canada. In 1943, as the German army retreated, she, along with her 4 sisters and their 9 small children were forced to join with other Mennonite groups trekking west. They endured many hardships but her strong faith in God's providence never faltered.*" The role of religion in this early period of her life seemed augmented to me here, based on our interview, although she certainly embraced religion following the trek, in Niagara.

I tried to imagine Greta as she had seemed to me from her own descriptions: so alive with the sense of her own agency - riding off into the night, taking some pleasure in adventure (in "*doing*") even within the wider indisputable tragedy of it all.

**Marta** (#3, 2004) was born in the city of Nikapol on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River in 1918. Her early childhood took place in the village of Gruenfeld, in the Schlachtin colony, however her father's persecution as a minister led her family to move frequently, so that as a child she also lived in Dnepropetrovsk, briefly in a cottage outside of Moscow, and in

Zentral. At the time of her emigration, Marta was living in Einlage, in the Old Colony of Chortitza where her husband was employed as a bookkeeper. She was 25 when she left Russia. *"My parents were on the fly, on the run, because they lived with my grandparents and the grandparents had an estate in Russia and they had to leave it in 1918, so I was born somewhere in (an) apartment where they had just got the refugees. They were refugees. And when I was five months old my mother died. But then there was a peacetime and they went back to the estate. So she died on the estate, my mother. Spanish flu; it went around. And then they had to leave again and they went to Gruenfeld. My father was teaching there. Then in the household was father, my older brother (three years older), and then the grandmother who took care of us. And the grandmother had a son and a daughter and an adopted daughter. So (we) were 7 people in the household. And then my father was asked to be a minister in another village and then we all went to father – seven people went there to the village. And then my grandmother died there (when I was four) and then my father married her other daughter - was the second mother, sister of my mother. And my uncle (and his family) immigrated to Canada... So then we had left just father, the second mother, and me. But then the siblings came. We still got six siblings more. But in that village we lived nine years, and then the churches were closed by that time. The communists had taken over, and we were driven out of the village with just this hand luggage. And father was sent to prison because he was a minister of the church, and then we went far away to another village. And then we went to Moscow (and) tried to get to leave the country but could not, and... father was there joined us. And then father was arrested in 1929 and never came home again... He could write letters...and he once escaped, but he was captured again and shot. In 1941, just before, just during, the war, you know... Dead. But later on, when the government changed - now we got the paper that he had been innocent. Well, we knew he was innocent, but he had been a minister of the church, and..."*

[CJ: How old were you when your father remarried?] *“Well, I don’t remember that wedding, because he married her before grandmother died. Because (he) was a minister – this is what I have heard by others - and the church wanted him to have a wife... The second mother said that he wanted to marry her. She didn’t want. He was 13 years older, and children, and...”* [CJ: She was your aunt and your second mother...] *“Yes. Grandmother wanted it very badly because she got older, you know, and if she died he couldn’t stay there. Who would take after us children, would care? So they married and later on she (grandmother) died. I was 4 years old when my grandmother died, maybe... Since I was the older (child) and she was young(er) than the husband... we talked of the siblings as ‘the children’. You know, I guess I felt more like a friend to her... Well, we said “mother” and we... never mentioned the word ‘step-mother’. You know, never. But last week I explained it this way to my children: when I was a child I didn’t see any, any difference. But when I was older I saw there was a difference, but then I was old enough to understand. You know what I mean? Then I saw that difference, because my sister she always slept with the mother in the bed; I have never slept with the mother in her bed. See? Was just an example. You know, doesn’t matter anything. But otherwise... I always took care of her when she was sick and died, just the same as my sister did.”*

[CJ: Did your second mother work outside the home in Russia?] *“Well she did everything in the house. She didn’t have an occupation, you know. She started to do housework still in Russia but then she got sick and our father wrote that it’s more important that you are stay alive, don’t work that you will die because it’s so important that you hold the family together. Because we were... minister’s children, we could not get education, mother could not get any job, or we children couldn’t get any (job). As soon as we would say where the father is then they wouldn’t accept (us) into any responsible job, ya? ...Well, there was a war; you couldn’t vote. Then there’s -I just know the word in Russian - it means ‘rightless’ /rechtlos, in*

*German: you didn't have a voice. I know my brother, he said when he was finishing school, he would love to have done some kind of college there, and he felt ah, it doesn't cost anything that we could (not) have afford(ed). But the first question was always: "Where's your Dad?" And if he said was a minister, was in prison, well: "We don't need you".*

*(My father) was very strict, but he was very lovable - very honest, but strict. ...He was very much away. But when he was home he was a father, you know, for the children. He would always come to each bed and say good night and say prayers (with) everybody... We always had to learn... bible verses with (the second mother). Each day at breakfast bible verses." [CJ: Did you attend Mennonite schools?] "Just communist schooling, and you can't – well, we knew our father was an honourable man, but if a child always hears, you know, at school and everywhere about religion, you know, somehow, somehow, you think maybe there IS something against it – religion, you know. But we got letters (from Father in prison), and through the letters our father influenced us. Ya, we have letters. Yes, it was hard time. But it's gone."*

*Marta's maternal grandparents had been wealthy; her second mother, because she could not work, sold family jewelry to the Soviets who wanted it for foreign trade, in order to support her family. "They could buy stuff (with gold) in the other countries. So, if they couldn't get other gold, and they couldn't steal it from the people, so they opened stores where they could buy it for money. I remember when my mother took (wedding) ring from her finger, and there she had tears in her eyes... and she told me, "Go now and see if you can get some". And I went and I got a bag with flour... And then we grew up and started to work, you know... I started to work in 1936 and then it was already a little bit - in 1936, there were thousand and millions without fathers, so they couldn't leave them always without, denied, work, you know? I worked for a business in office." [CJ: What was your highest level of education?] "Oh, I only got 7*

grades. And I studied and help myself and took any course I could get, you know? But I tried to go the high school but I got not accepted. And my brother tried - he wouldn't right away say where was the father. He went there three times but he never managed to get a degree because they always kicked him out before the exams went, you know...because of the father."

Marta married in 1936 at the age of 18: "We didn't have any wedding, just... going to the office and then, how you say it, (get) a license, yes. Later on we found a minister... But, not to get him in danger, my husband went one street and I the other street and then we didn't go the same time into the house because all they neighbours, someone might have guessed he was a minister. He was a minister. He was arrested and then he got free and we heard that and we went in separate, you know. We asked if he would give us a blessing. We are already married, but he blessed... There were no witnesses, just his wife. And then we went home and had the dinner with the mother-in-law and my mother. Because it was our wedding..." [C]: Do you recall your dreams or aspirations as a young woman in Russia? "I only wanted to be an efficient housewife; modern housewife, efficient. So I tried to do sewing and baking, and to be efficient, you know? To be capable. Because I was young, and - I wanted to study, but that was out of the question. (Study) medical. That was my only wish. Well, and then reading. I read a lot in my life."

**Reflection Box 3.6: Marta**

I learned a lot from Marta, not only about her own story, but about threads to follow up on that she had pointed out to me, and which affected the direction of the project. The interview took place in the sunroom of her house, and the backdrop to her from where I sat was books, books, and more books. I was struck by her intellect, wisdom, and curiosity. She asked for a cassette copy of the interview along with the DVD, which would be easier for her to use as her vision was poor - she seemed especially eager to have her copy. It is a huge regret to me that never received it; Marta died before completion of the project, and so her family will receive the recording of her interview.

**Elsie** (#4, 2004) was born during the revolution in 1918 in the village of Hamberg in the Molotschna colony; there she would live until she fled, with her five- year old daughter, as part of The Great Trek of 1943. In a 1989 family memoir,<sup>71</sup> Elsie recalls the first decade of her life in Hamberg prior to the implementation of collectivization in 1928 ("Elsie", 1989): *"My parents had only a small farm – 16 Desjatines (48 acres) of land. We lived with Grandma...in a small house. I can well remember that we lived in what the Mennonites called 'The Sommerstube'. It is an unheated room at the side of the house...you might call it a sunroom. My parents, my three siblings and I slept all in one room... We did not own much, but we had three horses, a cow and always one or two pigs to butcher. We always had enough to eat. In 1927 my parents built a house at the end of the village from clay bricks that they made themselves. The inside and outside of the house including the floors were brushed with clay."*

Things would change drastically with collectivization. Elsie's memoir ("Elsie", 1989) gives detailed insight into how this communist experiment was lived out by the girls and women of her village, as well as experiences during two periods of famine: *"...we all had to bring our horses and cows together to the communal farm. Our village... had 56 homesteads. Some farmers owned 36 Desjatines (144 acres) of land, and there were small farmers that owned 16 Desjatines (48 acres)... In 1928, six families of the larger estates were exiled to Siberia where most of them died and only a few survived. Their beautiful homes were converted into barns for the animals. The women had to milk up to ten cows a day. They had to feed the cows and keep them clean. They (communists) cared more about the cleanliness of the cows... than about the people who did not even have the bare necessities. In the summer the women had to milk the*

---

<sup>71</sup> Elsie wrote down her story at the age of 71. This 1989 unpublished autobiography ("Elsie", 1989), translated and edited by family members, was generously made available to me for this project.



*cows out in the fields three times a day. Besides that, the women also had to work out in the fields in the morning and the afternoon.*

*At twelve years of age I had to work on the communal farm. It was not always easy. When I think back to those days I can't imagine how it was possible. From spring until fall we had to be at work before the sun came up. We had one hour for lunch and then worked until sunset. If ever we came home earlier, we would be sent back or they would subtract a few hours. We received no money for our work. In the fall, if we had filled our quota and there was extra wheat, we would get a certain amount of grams or kilos each day we worked. We always had quite a lot of sunflowers and we made sunflower oil from them, which would also be distributed. We were always allowed to have a (home) garden. When the crop was good we had potatoes, carrots and tomatoes. We also had chickens (at home). In the winter...we brought the chickens inside. A man who was in charge would come, count the chickens, and then everyone would have to give a certain amount of eggs to the city per chicken. The chickens would lay eggs according to the amount of food they got. In the winter they laid no eggs. As children we were always concerned that we would only have a few eggs for Easter. We saved the eggs that we did not have to give away in the summer. They were not to eat but to trade, as for two dozen eggs we could get one metre of fabric. In the evening we often went to wait in line until morning to get three metres of fabric. "*

*During 1921-1922 the crops were poor and we received help from (Mennonites in) America. To us it was America, whether the help came from Canada or U.S.A. We received two portions every noon meal from the kitchen...I often went along. Sometimes they also distributed clothes. And I received a blue dress that had beautiful pearls sewn on the front. I was 4...years of age and I had never had anything so beautiful. In 1932 we experienced the second man-made*

*famine. The crops were poor and we were not able to fill our quota for the city. A committee of men came through our house and they took the little food we had from us. My mother had a bag of...millet, which they also took. As spring came along you would see many people with swollen stomachs due to lack of food. My father and his brother also had (this)... I was then already working in the collective farm. In the winter, we girls had to clean the wheat for sowing in the spring. We would fill the pockets of our raggedy jackets with corn and go outside to hide it. When it was dark, we would go and get it, often to find that someone had taken the corn from us. When we had it, we cooked it immediately and ate it. During this time the crops were very good in the Caucasus and the people (there) had food. For us in the Molotschna, if we had something to barter we would go by train to the Caucasus and bring back some food. Or there was the Tocksin (an elite store where you could buy items with German Marks or American Dollars) where people could trade in their gold for food. My parents traded their rings for a bag of flour. How happy we were! The flour was not used for baking bread or zwieback.<sup>72</sup> Instead, a water soup was cooked or thick pancakes were made, fried without fat. Winter was approaching and many farm animals died because of lack of food.*

*March 8<sup>th</sup> was Frauentag (Women's Day) and the women got their rights. All year we did not have enough to eat, but on March 8<sup>th</sup> we had a big meal. However, the women had to work very hard. The women often did not know what to prepare for a meal. I worked with horses, with oxen and also with cows. Everything quickly deteriorated in this communal farming system. Nobody cared because it wasn't their farm. That was the mentality of the people under the communist government. During harvest time they would often harvest at night if there was no dew. We girls would also have to help load the grain."*

---

<sup>72</sup> Mennonite buns

It was also Elsie's responsibility, being the eldest female child, to help her mother with domestic duties and care of the six younger siblings. During our interview, her memories from these years are of work and hunger: *"We couldn't cook very much. We find some grass what was eatable outside. We went that and cut it off and when we could we cooked it and we didn't have everything because we didn't have any electricity; just we have wood and we have to look for that, too. Just we make little fire to cook a little bit."* [CJ: Do you have any happy memories from your childhood?] *"No. Just trouble. Nothing happy."*

As for religion, there was no formal worship during her childhood or adolescence, but Elsie recalls exposure to prayers at home: *"(Father) told us Christian stories and we prayed when we went to bed and, when we couldn't, then we had a song, but we always had to look outside if nobody's listening there"*. During the Nazi occupation of her village, when public worship was again permitted, Elsie studied catechism and was baptized as a member of the Mennonite church at the age of 24.

Elsie married in 1936 when she was 18. *"My wedding day? There was nothing extra. Like every day...my husband was 28. He worked on the collective. He was like a foreman in the village."* From Elsie's memoir: *"Since there were no ministers we were just registered as being married. We had the dinner at the house. My husband was one of the bosses on the commune and as a gift he received a ham. Nothing was available to buy, so my mother gave me a few of her dishes even though she also had very little."* Elsie would bear four children, but only one would survive infancy.

The men in Elsie's life were taken. *"They came at night and knocked on the door... The boys were home at that time. Like, my husband, they were still home, and then they knocked on the door - oh, anytime at night - and they took them along and send them to Siberia. We never*

*saw (them again). Ya, and my father, in 1937 they took him away. And you never know when you went to bed if you would stay in bed till morning. Anytime of the night they knocked on the door and then you have to go and open. If not, they threw the door out.”*

Her father, a night watchman in the collective barns, was taken first and then her father-in-law, along with five others in the village on the same night in 1937. There followed interrogation of the women, some of whom were also imprisoned, and their children placed in homes. In 1940 Elsie lost her mother to failed surgery, which left Elsie and her husband solely responsible for her five siblings (two of whom were disabled), one cousin, and their own five-year old daughter. In 1941, her husband was taken to Siberia. Six years later, after she had left Russia, Elsie received news that her husband had died.

Elsie describes how the outbreak of war affected her village in 1941. In the following passage from Elsie’s unpublished memoir (“Elsie”, 1989), the ironies of war are laid bare: those Russian Mennonites in the occupied area of the Ukraine<sup>73</sup> who had not yet been exiled or killed were liberated from Soviet oppression by the Nazi S.S. *“The war between Germany and Russia began in 1941. We were terrified and wondered what would happen to us now. On the morning of Sunday July 20 1941, we were called to a meeting and were informed about what might happen. We were told a lot, including what to do if we met any spies. In September 1941 all German males 16-60 years of age were taken away. All the men from Molotschna had to walk to Charkov, guarded by police riding on horses. They would be put in train cars and sent to Siberia. One week later all the women with their children and the older men were brought to the train station to also be sent to Siberia. There they, 7000 people, were under open skies for one*

---

<sup>73</sup> Mostly the Chortitza colony, some villages in the Molotschna colony, and small villages west of the Dnieper River.

*week. During that time babies were born and many people died. At first they took the people that lived furthest away from the station. Train after train went by full of people. We lived 1 km from the train station. The Russian army was coming closer and they had no more trains and wanted to kill us right there. There were large straw piles in the field and we were sent to these straw piles by the guards on horses. When I think back, I remember how we all screamed – it was chaotic. We carried little children and held them by their hands. I was pregnant. The police did not shoot, but screamed at us.*

*Our Father in Heaven watched over us!<sup>74</sup> We saw two or three Russian planes come quite low at us. All of a sudden, like lightning, German planes came and chased the Russian planes away. We saw from a distance how the burning Russian planes went down. We were then told by our guards that we could go to the next village and they would transport us further with wagons. The Russians that lived in the village were also very scared. Every house was full of people. We lay packed like herring on the floor. We would hang our bedding in the windows so the bullets could not go through easily. The next day many hungry Russian soldiers came through the village. They took the chickens and pigs that they found, butchered them, and forced us to cook as they ate, even if it wasn't well cooked. Then they had to keep going. They could do what they wanted with us, but they asked: "You Germans, what are you doing here?" we told them we were leaving in the morning with horses.*

---

<sup>74</sup> Marlene Epp has written of the pietistic rhetorical pattern, prevalent especially in life histories written by women, to focus on divine intervention rather than personal agency in explanations of their survival. The converse is rarely true: religious disillusionment is not indicated when things go wrong. Epp suggests that, "by framing their stories within a religious culture based on a God that controls their lives, individuals and the Mennonite community of which they were part, could avoid direct confrontation with the morally ambiguous choices that many refugees made in their struggle to survive" (1997, p. 67).

*How wonderfully God took care of us. During the night there was a lot of shooting and explosions. The large grain barns were set on fire. The railways were blown up. We were very scared. In the morning it was unusually quiet. We didn't dare open the windows. Then we heard motorcycles, which was unusual because they were just not around during that time. They were well-dressed, respectable German soldiers... The German soldiers were very careful and eyed us, wondering if it was safe to take over the village. We slowly went to the street and they greeted us as Germans. Many Russian soldiers surrendered there. In the next few days we looked for food, in order to have something to eat. On the communal farm, everything that was left was distributed. With two horses, we went to the train station and got some grain. We salvaged some of the grain that was not burned. We even sowed some in the spring of 1942. The grain that we ground into flour tasted very smoky, but at least we had something to eat.*

*My brother...was 15 years old and (my male) cousin who lived with us was 16 years of age. After the Germans came we had one household together. In spring we were given extra land. We worked in groups because we did not have enough machinery to work our land. It was a good year and we all had a good harvest. We heard no news from our husbands and families that had been taken away. The men and women who were forced to take farm animals to the north came back because of the fast advancing German army. The Russians were retreating and the German army was slowly making headway into the north, but the exceptionally cold winter stopped the Germans from going any further. There were many casualties in the German army because they were not prepared for such a harsh winter. In the spring of 1943 many refugees came to us from Rostov and the surrounding area. We had no radios so we heard no news. We worked our land, harvested some, until all of a sudden we were told to prepare our horses and wagons and get ready to flee."*

**Reflection Box 3.7: Elsie**

Language was a big issue. This interview couldn't have been done without the facilitator present to translate and put Elsie at ease. Elsie lives in a nursing home and at one point expressed feeling "useless" because she could no longer cook, clean, and so on. It made me think that it's a basic human need to be functional, to have work, and also how work had so clearly defined Elsie since her childhood.

Even though Elsie had been informed (in German and English – ahead of time, and also the day of) and signed consent forms, in retrospect I am not sure that she completely understood why I was interviewing her. At the end I thanked her, and then she thanked me and asked what she could pay me!

On the way out she reached into a cupboard and took out some cookies in plastic packages of 2 (squirreled away from the dining hall), then put them into a grocery bag for me to take with me. I wondered why she had wanted to pay me, to give me something. She had already written her story at age 71. But it still seemed important to her that she be heard. I hoped it was true that we had mutually benefitted from this process, that it wasn't just me. I hoped that she had felt a kind of acknowledgement. I ate the cookies on the drive home, thinking about Elsie all the way.

**3.2.1 Summary & Analysis**

These experiences of turmoil and liminality are the roots of the adult refugee experience. We see heightened examples of interconnections - place experienced in a globalized sense - in these stories. Elsie recalls outside aid from MCC (*"To us it was America, whether the help came from Canada or U.S.A"*) in the forms of food and clothing, and recalls that she would sometimes venture out of the Ukraine for the Caucasus region to trade for food. The isolated, protectionist nature of these villages is turned on its head, with spies, Purges (men stolen by night), and politically induced famine. The women have a sense that they have lost control of their lives, elements of order and predictability have disappeared, and they take comfort, however small, where it can be found: in the familiar routines of work, the companionship of cattle (*"we loved them, even"*), pockets filled with dried corn kernels, a blue dress from *"America"*. Finally, the outside world literally marches in, embodied as German soldiers.

These *Fluechtlinge* stories speak of home as being totally emptied of meaning. There is no sense of a secure place; this is survival mode. Justina's account of Russian peasants taking all

the “stuff” (“there was nothing- there was not a spoon, anything left”) from her home is at once real and metaphoric. The ‘stuff of meaning’ had been stolen from her life (“my youngest sister, she had nothing from life either”). Over time, a sense of home for Greta was reduced to bare pragmatism (“as long as we had somewhere to sleep and somewhere to eat, then that’s it”). Eventually her husband, too, was taken, stripping even the experience of emotional intimacy from the place they had shared.

Marta experiences placelessness in Russia. She lost her mother - her primary ‘place’ (Tuan, 1997) – before she knew her, and her childhood thereafter was marked by repeated dislocation. She refers to her parents as internal refugees. Her story makes only vague reference to home. A humanist understanding of placelessness identifies mobility as an inhibiting factor to significant attachments to place (Relph, 1976). The one attachment Marta does mention is to books, a thread that would continue throughout her life. Books travel – she takes meaning and comfort from the experience of reading, and makes books a constant from place to place. Indeed, over half a century later, her home in Niagara is stacked with them.

Only Elsie makes a positive reference to home, in the context of her very early childhood. In her memoir, she remembers the house she lived in then with her parents and grandmother: its sunroom (*The Sommerstube*), and details of how the home had been ‘made’ (“In 1927 my parents built a house at the end of the village from clay bricks that they made themselves. The inside and outside of the house including the floors were brushed with clay.”). She recalls always having had enough to eat there. In subsequent chapters we will see that this hands-on making of home/dwelling that Elsie’s parents modeled becomes a pattern in her life as she attempts to recreate her early sense of security. She further signals her own understanding of the experiential nature of place when she later laments, “*The beautiful homes were converted*



to barns for the animals”, and when she references the communal system: “nobody cared, because it wasn’t their farm”.

In the absence of churches, family had become the default locus of religion (“(Father) told us Christian stories and we prayed when we went to bed and, when we couldn’t, then we had a song”). Faith and singing were thus, from an early age, associated with feeling ‘at home’.

Marta introduces the motif of women as keepers of the family. Time and again we will see examples of creative ways *Fluechtlinge* women found to keep the family together in Russia and on the trek, beginning with Marta’s example of her second mother selling jewelry for flour in lieu of working outside the home (“father wrote that it’s more important that you are stay alive, don’t work that you will die because it’s so important that you hold the family together”). This role in family survival as “shock absorbers of crisis” has been noted to be common to female refugees generally (Domosh & Seager, 2001, p. 135).

From the milieu of ambiguity that this period represents, it becomes apparent that hybridity can be an effective tool for survival. A range of cultural touch points which can be accentuated or muted depending on how best they serve one’s interests is surely an evolutionary advantage to an individual or a group in a globalized world. Elsie, for example, in the passages on German occupation, does not use the word Mennonite. To identify with German is to her advantage. (“*You Germans, what are you doing here?*”, “*We slowly went to the street and they greeted us as German*”). We will see in the next chapter how, in another situation, it serves Elsie better to identify as Dutch. These ‘optional’ aspects of hybrid identity surface repeatedly - not only in this collection of narratives, but also in the general history of the Mennonite diaspora.

Let us move now to the children of this generation, as they share memories of their lives from their natal homeland.

### **3.3 *Fluechtlinge* (Group B, Second Generation)**

This second generation of **Group B** (*Fluechtlinge*) was born and raised in Russia/USSR until the ages of from 4 to 16 years. The stories of some of their mothers were recounted above. Memories of Russian life for this generation tend to present as images rather than linear accounts. At the time of these interviews, the 'children' were aged 66 to 74 years.

At the forefront of these childhood memories, and often fraught with emotion, are details of their father's arrests. This is consistent with Marlene Epp's observations of *Fluechtlinge* children in Canada generally (M. Epp, 2000). Epp described a pattern of idealization of the father that tends to preclude negative memories, and also how men who for some reason were not taken are remembered as "heroic", whereas the mother may be referred to only sparingly (Ibid, p. 39). In the Niagara study, though, I found no evidence of such marked idealization and, further, the *Fluechtlinge* children and grandchildren were quite vocal in their reverence of their mothers and grandmothers.

**Edna** (#5, 2004) was born in 1937, and lived until she was five years old in a small Molotschna village. [CJ: Do you have any vivid memories of your childhood in Soviet Russia?] "(I remember) *not much at all. I remember looking down from a certain height, I guess, so I'm quite sure I was in my father's arms, looking down on the bed where Mother was lying, and it was at night, and he was saying good-bye to us. And (my brother) was in bed with Mother. He was still a baby, or about one year old I think, because I was 3. And (my older brother) was somewhere about in the room. That is pretty well my memory of Russia. I don't remember much else.*"

**Freda** (#6, 2004) was born in 1927, and 16 years of age when she left the USSR with her mother and siblings in 1943. She has clear memories of her village, as well as carefully defined gender roles as observed in her parents' home. When she returned to the village as an adult, her experiential reference points had changed: the place seemed different. *"It was a village, about 200 people. One of the smaller villages in the (Molotschna) colony and you could see from one end of the village to the other very plainly. The houses were pretty well uniform... They were designed inside and outside the same...built by the Mennonites who settled there. They (Russians) had much smaller houses. We thought these, when we lived there, were very big houses. Well, it's amazing how they shrunk when we went back there now! My grandmother's house was still standing...and compared to what you have now, those weren't big houses to have families of ten kids in there. The Russians were living in small - especially the Russian villages - you would almost call them huts. My Dad worked in the office commune (collective farm). He was a bookkeeper. And my Mom worked in the collective doing different jobs: milking, looked after the cows, and in summer she would work in the fields. Ya, the women worked hard. The men had mostly supervising jobs, so to speak. Like we used to say, men were sitting on fences working and the women were working hard in the fields.*

*Well, the men in those days didn't work much in the house; that was women's work. I remember my Mom would be working hard, physically, all day and Dad was sitting behind the desk. But when Dad came home, he was sitting and reading a paper, where Mom was busy making supper, getting things done in the house. Men didn't do that. That was somewhat beneath them. Ya, not even the milking. That was women's job. My dad - we had a cow, and when Mom was sick he would milk it, but most men didn't even know how to milk.*

*Ya, they had kindergartens and nurseries in the village; the collective farms organized these where the children were taken care of (during the day). We would have little uniforms to*

*wear because clothing was very, very scarce. But they would make us these. Once you started school you didn't go there anymore, you sort of fended for yourself. We had all my Mom's and Dad's siblings in the village so there was always somebody around to look after us...*

*Well, it wasn't all bad, but most of it was. Fear. And you never have enough to eat. You had so few clothes that sometimes you had to go to bed so Mom could wash them. You couldn't have shoes to wear in the winter. We just wore these - they were wooden platforms with a piece of leather nailed across them. Yet, I mean, people were still laughing and singing...but the fear of who was going to be taken next, especially starting in 1936 and '37 and '38 - when so often during the night they would come and take certain people off. Fathers. And you never know when your Dad was going to be next. My grandfather was, and some of my uncles. But that was not - well, what should I say? - not a happy time. When you're a kid, it doesn't take much (to make you happy). We always had security. That's one thing I must say. I still remember Dad was a bookkeeper and for the end of the year there was a lot of work to do, and he would bring the books home and him and Mom would sit till late at night working these books...and every once in a while they would break out in song. There was nothing else! No prayers, or nothing like that. And how good it felt to hear that. Well, everything is well with the world: Mom and Dad are singing! So this type of, I guess, security was there in spite of all the poverty."*

Freda's father was taken in 1941 when the war started. Twenty-two years later, long since in Canada, they heard from him. He was in Kazakhstan. Plans were made for him to join the family in Canada, but the father died of cancer before that happened.

Freda remembers her parents: *"(Dad) was a disciplinarian. The spankings, they were from Dad. She would more reprimand, and talk. But Dad didn't talk much. Ya, he was a very - what shall I say, a moral person? - as far as I never heard him use any foul language. He*

wouldn't - stealing and taking things was very common because you had nothing – but he was always very...I don't know if moral is the term for it. I must say I've really considered myself lucky to have been born to parents like that because it's so important how your parents are and I have always considered them both very - well, for that generation - very good parents, good role models.

My mother was a very, I would say, intelligent person. Well, she had more education, too... My Mom always wanted to learn...and she was telling me at one point her Dad had sat her down and talked to her. He wanted her to go to Germany to study medicine, but it would cost money, and she would have to repay it once she started work. But then he died. And of course there was a revolution and, so, all the upheavals. It all fell by the wayside. But as women in the villages, she had more education than most of them. And she was very - she had the logic and the energy. Well, she was progressive. For Mennonite women of her generation, she wasn't petty. She was - what shall I say? Quite liberal, considering her generation, ya."

Freda recalls life under German occupation: "Well, then actually when the Germans occupied our region, we finally lived again. And we had enough to eat. We had somehow - I don't know where they came from- clothes to wear and things were so much better. And my biggest fear once they started to retreat was to be re-occupied by the Soviets - to fall in their hands again. Our destination would then surely have been Siberia. That was actually my biggest fear... Once we left our village my aspiration was to get away from the Soviets. Nothing seemed to be a hardship as long as we could get away and not be caught again and dragged back. I would love to have gone to school, I must say. But I ...had to stay home because I would have to go 8 km away to go to school. And (my brother) was already there and my parents couldn't afford to send me, too, because they had to be kept there through the winter. As long as you could, you walked, but then you had to stay there. Well, you didn't have to pay for school, but

*the kids had to eat and there was so little to eat. And you had to have bedding for them and they had to have clothes, too. When the Germans occupied our area I did go again until we left. And we boarded. We had to go to the same place, but they had a boarding school and they fed us. They looked after us well.*

*When the Germans occupied our area (things were) quickly organized again: church, Christianity. But as far as 'Mennonite', I don't remember hearing it until I came to Germany and MCC gathered us and sort of looked after us for a while there before we left for Canada. We were German; that much I knew. But 'Mennonite', I think that's (in Germany) when I actually became conscious of being a Mennonite. I don't remember even hearing the word. No, I don't remember that Mennonite was any part of what we were at that time. German, yes."*

**Katie** (#7, 2004) was born and raised in villages of the Chortitza colony. Her parents (with her grandmother) rented two rooms in a house, which they shared with another family. Her father was not taken by the Soviets; the family fled intact. Born in the same year as Edna, 1937, she has much greater recall of that period. *"I remember when the Germans entered the area - the German occupational force - and the family had - I don't remember how - but I know that they had dug trenches and we were all hiding in the trench. And I remember a German soldier coming in and putting the butt of his rifle - is that would you call it? - into the opening. And I remember my Dad shouting, "Don't shoot! We're German!" I don't think we feared the German army; I don't think that would have been it. But of course, they wouldn't have known who WE were, you see. So, I mean they could have easily shot. And they didn't; they didn't shoot. It was a very uncertain period. There's no doubt about that...*

*I remember an air raid one night and we were all sitting in the basement. We had all run into the basement. I remember these huge jars of pickles - how they used to do them in*

*barrels? It's funny how I remember that. And I remember in the morning we got out and there was a huge crater in our backyard. So, ya, they dropped a bomb there. And ya, that's quite a vivid memory. And then, of course when we had to leave, I remember being at the railroad station... We were very fortunate that we moved out by train and I think it was because we were on the other bank of the Dnieper in the Old Colony. Because by the time they got around to evacuating others, there were just no trains available and these other people were stuck to leaving on the Trek.*

*I don't think our mother communicated the fear to us, which I think is very important, because I don't remember ever being very afraid... I can't even say that my childhood was that bad. And I remember, yes, hating the sound of airplanes, even as an adult yet...but other than that I think she did a remarkable job of keeping her anxieties either to herself or to the other adults."*

I asked Katie how she learned about being Mennonite in Russia. *"I really can't remember when the first time I heard about being Mennonite was, my first awareness of being Mennonite. It must have been when I was older, when we were later on in southern Germany and we were with a German Mennonite family who took us in. That's really the first time I would have become aware of it, and by that time I was 8 or 9. Although we did pray at home, and my Mother always told us stories and bible stories and things like that. But it was not Mennonite as such."*

**Gloria** (#8, 2004) was born in 1931 and left Russia at the age of 11. Her father worked as the manager of the butter factories for the collectives, and her family moved a lot between larger, more urban, villages in the Molotschna colony. *"My grade 1 was (living with) my grandparents, because in their village they were teaching Russian and where we lived it was Ukrainian. And the Russian language was supposed to be a little higher class than the*

*Ukrainian... We didn't have a church when we were younger. Only when the Germans came in, that's when we could have a church and Sunday school... Well, we prayed before we went to sleep, but not before meals because that wasn't done during the Soviet regime."*

When Gloria's father was taken in 1940, the family relocated to the small village of Hamberg where her mother's sisters lived, also now without their husbands. *"Well, in those days, people were imprisoned for sometimes just being Mennonites. And there were some discrepancies at the factory at the time and so naturally, he was German, so he was put in prison. So after that he was gone. Never heard from again. "*

*(After that) we lived in a house with three families: my grandmother and her one daughter lived in one side - and I mean these houses weren't big - and my mother with three children at one end of the house, and her sister in-law with 3 children at the other end of the house. So they each had more or less one and a half rooms to live in. So it was very meager living. Although we were always happy, because we played outside. There was a river close by. We got crayfish, and people would cook them while the parents – mothers - were working at the collective. We did all these things on our own. Ya, they were working in the fields. But we didn't think we were deprived. We did what children do. Huckleberry Finn."* (laughs)

**Ingrid (#11, 2004)**, who left as a six year old has memories of the way the village looked, and of her family life, but they are vague. Most of what she remembers about Russia is based on what she has been told to her by her mother. *"I was only 2 years old when my father was taken away so I don't remember from father. Like, Mother always says they came and they took him and the last thing he just threw me up in the air and said goodbye and that was it. It was at night."* [CJ: Were you ever reunited?] *"No. Mom tried everything. She went...wherever she could to find out and they said all the ones that were 1937...they were just tortured to death, ya. Grandfather, we found out later that he was alive. And he just died...not that long ago. It*



was really interesting. I mean, my husband's sister, we were writing to her in Russia - like they found out where she was, ya. And she always (saw) this man passing on the road with a donkey and he would always go and pick up some hay for his cow, I guess. And she thought, "Boy, that man, he looks German", you know? So one day she went out and she talked to him, ya. And...when they started talking, she had said too that she had some pictures, you know, and next time she brought (them) and here it was that that was my grandfather. That was quite something. Ya. So, that's how it was meant to be. That was out more in Russia...(in) Kazakhstan. And he wrote to us. But what happened there again, he ended up he was already just about dying. He was in a ditch, and this one lady she picked him up and took him in the house and took care of him, you know. Ya, and they lived together. In fact, I think they even got married. Like, they had children. And so this woman took him in, otherwise he would not have lived. So my grandmother was never angry about it. You know, they wrote letters to each other. Terrible what war does. My father, we never heard from him again."

**Lena** (#12, 2004) tells me her story is different because she lived in a larger centre in Chortitza, with no proximate extended family, just her parents and four brothers. Lena was born in 1932 and left Russia at the age of 11. She talks of their family situation while growing up: "When I was just three, my parents bought a little house. That was a little blacksmith house – der Schmiede – that they had to convert. My father was an excellent woodworker, too. Oh, I just think of what we missed! Like, he had a violin, he had a guitar, he had a flute; he was an excellent musician. He went to school higher, what they would say here university, and they had to sell these things just to stay alive... When they married, then my mother stayed home. They lived with my mother's parents and he helped there to run the farm. They still had some land. And he was a conscientious objector, so they didn't have to join the army, but he would run out and bring the wounded back - support work. And for that they had to go and train, and then

*they went and got married and by then they were already not their own bosses there, you know. It was early '20s and collectivization wasn't quite yet, but it was on the way. Oh, ya. I was about three, I guess, when I barely remember moving (from another village to Chortitza). And after that my father was taken away, in 1937. So I was 5... For my father, I can barely memorize him. There was always something that was needed. You know, didn't have enough to eat, and it was very unstable situation there. But one saving grace was that father still had bought that little house and had built on a barn yet where we could keep a cow, maybe a pig, couple of chickens. So that's what we mostly lived from."*

**Reflection Box 3.8: Fathers**

*"For my father, I can barely memorize him" - I left today with that one phrase in my head. Did she mean that she barely remembers him, but she's spent so much time trying to keep his memory that it came out as 'memorize'? [Memorize: verb 1 commit to memory, 2 learn by heart.] Did she work to not forget anything about him, to learn him by heart? Maybe subconsciously she meant that if only she could learn him by heart she'd at least never lose that little bit she'd had of him - she'd always have him with her.*

*For some reason I thought of my own experience with fathers which I guess also involves a sense of longing. The face of my adoptive Dad, who recently died, is as clear in my mind as if he were in front of me. The face of my biological father, which I saw only once over 20 years ago, is out of focus. I can't quite conjure it: *I can barely memorize him.**

*I often think of the pivotal role of fathers for the development of a girl's sense of self in terms of my own daughters - even more so as I get further into these interviews.*

*I asked Lena if her mother worked after her father was taken. "Yes, that's another story because my brother was 3 and I was 5, and the (2 older) boys had to go to school. But the oldest was 16, I think, and he had to go to work in the collective. That brought in some money, and my mother would work part-time in the store putting out shelving. So my brother and I would be sitting there all by ourselves, and my mother she would go get grey hair when she was working and not knowing (if we were alright).*

*And I remember that when we were the next year old - because this was different house- we had different windows in there; we could open the top. We could crawl out the windows to get out. We were scared but we didn't want to sit there all the time so we just play outside then. We had no (family) support. No support, ya. It was really no support. She did an excellent job. I remember when my brother he would do something in school and he needed some new clothes or something and she would make pattern and find different patches of material and sewed it all together and made him pants. Plus work. And you had to almost lock everything up, because this one time Mother was just lucky to get some pants for the older boys, to buy them, you know when stuff came in to the store, it would be gone before anybody - so, and this one time, she washed them and hung them out. And you can't do that. She looked, and they were gone.*

*We went barefoot all summer. See we had a very much harder time than what the people there who stayed in the Molotschna. Well, they had support there; they had people like aunts and uncles and cousins. My husband talks they had lots of fun. She had little bit yet for a garden, so she would cover that yet. She was amazing.*

*And then when this war started, my oldest brother had to go with all the beef - the cows and that all had to go. We were on this side (east) of the Dnieper (River). He had to (help) take them; they would take big herds of them and just get them all across to the other side for their soldiers to eat. Just so the Germans wouldn't catch them here. And whatever they could take across the bridge they would take. And then... when the Germans came closer, the bombs fell on the bridge and my brother couldn't come back. So he stayed on the other side... They took him back then to Siberia." Eventually Lena's 2 oldest brothers made it out to Germany, where they remained. The two brothers closest to her in age, one 16 and one 9, left with Lena and their mother on the trek in 1943.*

### 3.3.1 Summary & Analysis

There are significant variations in the experiences and memories of homeland among this cohort, but central to all are the affects of global forces at the village level. Edna and Ingrid, for example, were toddlers when they lost their fathers. Edna's one memory of home in Soviet Russia is of it being ripped apart. The sense of place that Edna carries with her is embodied: her father's arms are all she remembers of that place. Ingrid, too, has shared only memories related to the loss of her dad.

Lena lost her father at age 5, and recalls home as both an isolated place (no extended family, left alone while her mother worked) and an exposed place (*"you had to almost lock everything up"*). Humanists would say that a room takes on meaning based on conversations that occur in it, a rocking chair becomes a 'place' when a baby is nursed in it - and thus, the meaning of home for Lena was enhanced by the music her father made long ago in their little blacksmith house, and the memory of it provokes an expression of tremendous longing (*"Oh, I just think of what we missed!"*).

Yi-Fu Tuan wrote: "To the young child, the parent is his primary "place". The caring adult is for him a source of nurture and a haven of stability. The adult is the guarantor of meaning to the child, for whom the world can often seem baffling" (1997, p. 138). This 'parent as place' theory allows us to understand that the loss of a parent would shatter a child's sense of place, of belonging – her very sense of 'being in the world'. In effect, the children were not only fatherless, but experiencing a form of placelessness. Tuan further explains:

How does a young child understand place? If we define place broadly as a focus of value, of nurture and support, then the parent is the child's primary place. (Parents) may well be the first enduring and independent object(s) in the infant's world of fleeting impressions. Later, (they are) recognized by the child as his essential shelter and dependable source of physical and psychological comfort. A man leaves his home or hometown to explore the world; a toddler leaves his (parent's) side to explore the world. Places (to a child) stay put. Their image is one of stability and permanence. The

(parents are) mobile, but to the child (they) nonetheless stand for stability and permanence. (They are) nearly always around when needed. A strange world holds little fear for the young child provided his (parents are) nearby, for (they are) his familiar environment and haven. A child is adrift – placeless – without the supportive parent. (1997, p. 29)

Katie, on the other hand, despite dark memories of the violence of an encroaching world – hiding in trenches (with her Dad yelling, *“Don’t shoot! We’re German!”*) and crouching in bomb cellars - says, *“I don’t remember ever being very afraid”*. Her father was not taken from her in that place. She commends her parents for not having passed the fears they must have felt on to her. Although Edna and Ingrid are only a year apart in age from Katie, Katie has retained significantly more intact memories of her homeland. There is evidence to suggest that experiences of trauma, fear, or lack of a sense of belonging and security may create ‘memory blanks’ (Zonabend in Rose, 1995, p. 96).

Freda, too says, *“We always had security”*. She lived in a home with her father for ten years, and she also recalls a large extended family in her village. The experience of home is symbolized for Freda by her parents’ singing: *“How good it was to hear that. Well, everything is well with the world: Mom and Dad are singing! So, this type of security, I guess, was there in spite of all the poverty”*. As we shall see, the tradition of singing is carried forward throughout the trek and into new worlds, as a means of creating comfort (recreating a sense of home) for both the singers and the listeners. Freda remembers an atmosphere of fear once the men began to disappear, and also a period of relative happiness during the Nazi occupation, when meaningful elements of place (churches, schools, threats from outside, food to eat) were restored (*“we finally lived again”*).

Gloria’s father was taken when she was 6, yet she maintains her life was not so disrupted: *“it was very meager living. Although we were always happy, because we played*

*outside. There was a river close by. We got crayfish, and people would cook them while the parents – mothers - were working at the collective. We did all these things on our own. Ya, they were working in the fields. But we didn't think we were deprived. We did what children do. Huckleberry Finn."* At their own level, children resiliently maintained the rhythms and routines of their lives: kids continued to make the outdoor place theirs.

Although these children had inherited a hybrid cultural identity, it would not have been something they were aware of, and several do not recall having heard the word Mennonite in the villages. Freda, for example, says, *"I don't remember Mennonite being any part of who we were at that time. German, yes"*.

Gendered identities, though - how she would soon be expected to behave as a woman - seem to have been a keen focus of Freda's adolescent observation (*"That was women's work", "Men didn't do that. That was somewhat beneath them"*). In describing her mother she also indirectly comments on women's education levels and conservatism in the village: *"as women in the villages, she had more education than most of them... she was progressive. For Mennonite women of her generation, she wasn't petty. She was...quite liberal, considering her generation."* She applies the same generational caveat to a compliment to her parents, thus indicating her opinion that parenting styles have since improved: *"I have always considered them both very well, for that generation - very good parents, good role models"*.

Having described the homeland experience for these individuals, we now progress to the next chapter: stories of journeys from Russia to Niagara. We begin, once again, with the *Russlaender*.

#### 4. Scattering: The Journeys

This chapter holds stories of journeys. They are the stories of 'from there to here': crucial features of the collective mythology and particular identity of any diasporic group. In order to conceptualize the experience and relevance of place for individuals who are 'on the move', we first understand space as constituted by social relations, and that these occur simultaneously within myriad contexts, including political. Place, then, "can be seen as the articulation of a specific set of relations at a given time" (Pulido, 1997 *after* Massey & Jess, 1995). Place and identity ebb and flow in relation to one another, in relation to interconnections with "the material at hand" (Ibid), and in relation to interconnections with larger global processes. We saw evidence of interconnections with the wider world in the village experiences; however, much higher degrees of cultural exposure occur during the journeys.

Mobility further destabilizes the unfixed natures of place and identity- especially when the mobility experience is prolonged - because the "material at hand" is constantly changing, and social relations can be highly complex in comparison with a home-based, or fixed place experience. There is an absence of routine. One can conceptualize a kind of 'hyper-place' experience during extended phases of mobility, where ingrained notions of identity are relentlessly challenged, negotiated, and re-negotiated. This conceptualization can then be broadened to a larger scale in the context of generational experiences of successive diaspora.

The *Russlaender* (**Group A**) journey stories are, for the most part, stories of immigration. Not without their hardships and elements of flight, most are nonetheless stories of people who left home under (varying degrees of) their own agency. It was typical of *Russlaender* generally (i.e., not exclusive to Niagara) that they immigrated as intact family units, often as well with

complete groups of extended family. They tended to travel from their villages west by train, commonly obtaining temporary lodging in Germany and points further west while awaiting medical clearance, securing sponsorship, and obtaining acceptance into the Canadian immigration process. Since many participants were children when their journeys began, the *Russlaender* journey stories often highlight memories involving their parents, or aspects of their parents' stories as were passed down.

#### **4.1 Russlaender (Group A, First Generation)**

**Harold** (#13, 2005) emigrated in 1925 with his mother and her entire extended family. His father was held back. Seventy five years later, the emotional impacts of these circumstances on Harold as a little boy are still evident. *"My grandmother was very astute, you know. She was leading the pack. She was the old marm that looked after things. And she said, "We're going there." In fact, it was because of her that we came. There were some that said, "No, we're not going. Things are improving". She says, "We're going!" And they had an auction sale, and they sold as much as they could. I think the property was either confiscated or they just left it. But they left and it was all because of her. She was very strong willed.*

*My father was not allowed to come. This is why my mother and I came with her family. And he was told because he was military age that he'd have to stay and serve his country for couple of months and then they would let him go. That never took place. He was there for four years. Finally escaped as a refugee. And he was a kind of guy that, like myself, you know, he was always helping people, to immigrate and that...and so finally it got so hot for him, they were after him to kill him. And I still remember the story that he would tell us – he didn't speak about it in his younger years, but later on he would tell us (about) this one time when he was fleeing. The communists were after him because he had been helping people, and so they hid in this*



barn, and they could hear them coming. So he was there with (a friend). The 2 of them were together. And they got into this barn and these hoards came onto the yard, so they jumped into a feed bin – it's a big box with a lid on top where they keep the feed for the animals. But there was no feed at that time anymore, and so they were in this bin. And (this friend) had 2 revolvers on him. And that would seem strange for a Mennonite - you know, a pacifist - to be carrying revolvers, but perhaps not at that time. So he says to my father, he says, "Here, you take one and I'll take one, and if they open this lid, it's either us or them". So they sat in this box and these guys went upstairs, downstairs, everywhere in the barn, searched the whole barn – never opened that bin.

My father went to Moscow, and they had a camp outside of Moscow in the bush...and I have a little booklet. I was so interested in it. I read it because my father had written on the inside cover "This is the story of my escape from Russia". And that to me was fascinating. You know, they were camped in this camp – they were all summer cottages on the outskirts of Moscow - and he said every night the soldiers would come in, take one or two people, for NO reason at all, just take one or two – "Come on with us". There was no reason. And it was always after midnight - you know, in the darkest hour of the night. Off in the bush. And all they would hear would be a shot. So they assumed that they were all killed there, these people that they would take. Every night. And that's how they kept them tense. Until finally my father was able to get on the train and go. He went to Germany. A lot of the Mennonite refugees wound up in Germany. And then, now I'm going to enter into a little bit of a Canadian history of this: went to Germany and my father was in this refugee camp and they were going to send him to South America, because Canada at that time - and I'm going to get a little bit political – Canada at that time (1930) was not accepting any continental Europe refugees, or immigrants. Because the conservative government was in control here, until MacKenzie King came back in power, and

*then my father was allowed to come to Canada. But they were going to send him to South America, and my mother and I - and I had another brother that was born just as they came off the boat – so there was my mother with 2 little boys. She was pregnant when she came, ya. And here they were going to send my father to South America, Paraguay - into the bush!*

*Of course he came, and I still member the night that he came, landed in Vineland. We lived in Vineland at the time, and he came by train. He was supposed to come at a certain time; I think at around 8:00 the train was supposed to arrive. We went to the station to meet him, and he wasn't there. What a disappointment! So, we went to the station again to meet the next train, which was somewhere around midnight - and by that time I should have been asleep, and my younger brother he had fallen asleep. And my father didn't care because he'd never seen him. But he'd seen me (fights back tears). [CJ: You were one when you left...] "Yup. Pardon me, I..." [CJ: Would you like me to stop taping)?] "No." [CJ: It's an emotional memory...] "Now here's what my grandmother did to keep me awake: I had to meet him (tears). She put some spit in my eyes, to keep me awake. I still remember that so well..." [CJ: It must have been quite a reunion.] "I can't explain it. I can't explain it. I was 5 years old. My father had brought us some toys, you know, because we didn't know him, and at one year old (when I left), I wouldn't know who he was.*

*And so I remember my brother and I were sleeping in the same room with my mother. We all lived in the one house with my grandmother. And in the morning we'd wake up and my brother says to me "Look who's sleeping with Mom. There's a man there!". (laughter) Well, (my brother) didn't know, you see, because he'd been asleep! I knew the story of it, but he didn't know. So, of course he presented us with all these fancy toys – cars with electric lights on them, you know, and so on. He had purchased all this stuff in Germany for us to make sure that he*

would, well, gain (our) respect, first of all. So anyway, that was quite a reunion. In fact, he was even talking at times - because he couldn't get out of Germany to come to Canada - he wanted my mother to go back. In fact, even back to Russia when he was there because he couldn't get out. It was supposed to be for 3 months and here now it turned out to be 4 years and he was stuck in Russia."

**Gerhardt** (#15, 2005) left Moscow by train with his family in 1929 when he was 13. His story illuminates elements of flight present even within several of the immigration stories. It also contains elements of co-responsibility within the diaspora, whereby Mennonites assisted one another in their efforts to emigrate. *"There was a rumour that you had to go to Moscow and then the Canadian doors were open, get the papers and get to Canada. So my Dad...went to Moscow to look it over. When they came back then they had an auction sale. They sold everything. And there was 4 families auctioned the same day. They each kept a wagon and horses where they put their belongings on. And we didn't go to the station close to our place. We went to the Russian villages station. And then at midnight the train arrived. And I still remember how the light on the train came, and each family was standing at the station, and they said good-bye, and sang God Be With You 'Til We Meet Again. I'll never forget that song. And the horses and the wagon they just left them there. Who took them we don't know.*

*Then we came to Moscow... we stayed about 30 miles out of Moscow. This was in the fall - the Russian officers, that was their summer home. And our people would rent them, those cottages. And then they worked with the German consular to see if you could immigrate to Canada. There was about 15,000 of our people in three villages. And one night the Russian army came, and went from both ends: they took 10,000 people in one night. And they had their cars, their railroad cars, on the track. They piled them in there and shipped them to Siberia. And then,*

*the next morning - one of our people was a communist - and he came and (said) you give me a million rubles I can stop it. So I recall my dad he took the wallet out of the side pocket and started counting. And my mother said but what are you going to live on? Well (he said), I don't want to be sent to Siberia.*

*And then everything's quiet the next night and very unsettled. Then the German consular flew at that time to Berlin and came back... and said Germany's going to take the rest of them. And that was about 5,000 people. And all we had to do is pay the ticket to the gate, the Russian border. And my dad didn't have enough money to buy those tickets so he asked the fella that had some money, and told him "You come to Canada, I'll give you two dollars for each ruble". And then at the border they checked us out and everybody was really tense, and soon as we were over the border everybody screamed and yelled at how happy they were."*

The Red Cross checked them medically in Riga, Latvia before sending them on to a series of three camps in Germany. Gerhardt describes the atmosphere in the camps: *"Well, there was a lot of things what happened in that month or two. The communist (Soviet) party was very strong and they really hated us. We always had to be guarded by police. The communist party and the Hitler party: those two. We had to be very careful. We went to the funerals, and every day was a funeral - all these children, and small. So we went to cemetery and on the way back the communist party followed us and we had to run and get back to the gate, otherwise they would have beaten us up. Then we didn't have a Canadian doctor there, (it) was an American doctor there that checked us out. And we were the first family that was 'Okayed' to go to Canada. But the first boat-load was in February. And then when we were ready to go, my sister got the measles so they held us back for another month. And then the next month we went and we got to Hamburg and got checked out by the doctor again, and then my brother had tonsillitis.*

*So then we were sent back to (the camp) and there I recall so much as every evening they had a service and after the service they had a business meeting. And here they was talking about they was going to Canada. Well (if you go to Canada, they said) you're a black worker... Black worker, that meant the lowest work, hard labour. (They said if you) go to Brazil you work in the forest, and in Paraguay you get a team of horses. And I said "Dad, why don't you want to go to Paraguay?" "No, I want to go to Canada."*

*So then in April we got (the) OK and came to Hungary and got through the medical doctors, and we got on the boat. And my sister was a baby in the crib, and she was crying so much. And then once we were on the boat, the nurses looked and here she had the measles. Then what happened, then they said "Get off the boat". So we are on the deck with the whole family, and here the whistle blew and they had thrown the ropes in already. So they told my mother took her to isolation room. And we were in the well. There, it was the fourth class passengers... Well, right in front was noisy and the waves were hitting. So when we got to St. John's, New Brunswick -, and there they have an island where the people that come they are sick or something - for 2 days we stayed in the hospital there, then they said could go on. And mother stayed there with the baby for 3 weeks. Then we arrived in Kitchener (Ontario). We had a sponsor that was in Kitchener. Like, Dad had to sign we had to work on the farm. So in Kitchener it looked pretty hard to get a family to work (for) and then decided to go to Vineland. We stayed about a week in Kitchener and then we moved to Vineland."*

When **George** (#14, 2005) was 8 years old, his family left Kleefeld, Russia, moving first to Manitoba and then on to Vineland in 1934. I asked George what he recalled about having to leave: *"Well, I'll tell you: my father's siblings – there were 3 sisters...and 3 brothers...in the same area. And when they found out that my parents were going to immigrate to Canada they were*

very, very upset. They always said, "Why do you want to leave this wonderful colony in the Ukraine?"...there had been quite a fall out between the family (over this), you know. Later on, in the 30s, his siblings wanted my Dad to help them immigrate to Canada and it wasn't possible. And then they really realized the mistake they had made in staying because they lost everything and perished in Siberia! Like a lot of them did.

It was the first time I ever saw a train. We came in freight cars to Latvia and then onto England, South Hampton. We were there three days and then we came by boat to Canada. As a young fella you were interested in all the experiences, you know? Moment by moment. The first time I ate oranges, on the boat, I didn't like them.

(We landed) in Quebec City. And then by train. According to my father, the immigrants had to more or less promise that they would not stay in Ontario but go west and settle in farms. But we came to Kitchener and we were billeted with the Pennsylvania Mennonites. And then in the fall, after harvest, my father went to Manitoba because he felt very obligated to not stay in Ontario. And eventually we settled in a farm in a village, town, called Arnaud. A lot of farms had been mortgaged by Canadian farmers and they lost it through hard times. And these farms were available. When we moved in to the farm there was everything: there were cows, chickens, equipment, and everything. And without any money. My Dad said he had twenty-five cents when he landed in Arnaud. And he wrote to his relatives in Minnesota and they borrowed him a hundred dollars! That's how they started. The farm had another family – they bought it together, you know, because the mortgage people wouldn't hold the land for just my parents. It was too much. It lent itself for division.

*My oldest brother was married in Russia. When he came he spent one year with us, then moved on to a different place. But my other brothers all stayed, and between my mother and my one sister they looked after the household.*

*Well, when we had come through the Depression, a lot of my brothers decided to go to school, and they became teachers. So when I was finished with public school I stayed home because we had developed a dairy farm, as well as grain. My sister went a few times to Ontario, looking after my brother's family – my older brother was living there and his wife was sick. And (my sister) fell in love with Vineland and she persuaded my parents to move to Ontario. So we moved in the fall of 1934... We motored by car from there. And then we settled in a small farm in Vineland area."*

George tells me about his grandson who, before his recent death at a young age, had created a very special piece of art. The artwork indicates how important the family story was to his grandson. *"In Kitchener, we celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being in Canada, and he made this logo. And he never finished it. He showed this to me. I had a print of it, and his friend in Winnipeg completed it. You read that... My nephew wrote the tribute."* I read the tribute out loud:

*"\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (great-grandparents) left their beloved Ukraine in 1924. Passing the Red Gate marked the end of a period of terror, revolution and starvation. This gate also marked the beginning of a journey to an unknown Canada with strange customs, foreign language and an unknown future. The logo illustrates the crossing of the ocean, settling in western Canada and also the farming in Ontario. In the centre of the logo is the church, signifying a strong faith and trust in God. Reverend \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ served their God faithfully for many years in various congregations. This torch of faith they carried was passed on to their sons and daughter. Today the grandchildren are carrying that torch of faith. The logo 'Our Journey' has become a circle of comfort for family and friends..."*

George: *"That's a nice tribute isn't it? And you see the boats and the immigration, you know. He drew that. It has everything doesn't it?"*

**Reflection Box 4.1: George's Grandson**

There's a long close-up shot of George's grandson's artwork on the interview tape. The loss of his grandson was clearly a painful subject for George, but he took such pride in showing me the young man's work. The fact that it was related to their shared heritage seemed especially poignant for George. It was really moving for me.

Again, I so regret that this person has passed away before receiving his copy of the interview - especially since he had dedicated it, in a way, to this grandson. I wanted him to see that I had given his grandson's memory time and consideration – that it was important to others, too. These interviews seem to me like condensed relationships – I feel so close to people in such a short time. Of course, then I relive the experience every time I view the tape or transcribe, or work with the transcriptions, so that a few years go by and they may not remember me well at all, but I still feel quite an intimate connection.

According to **John** (#16, 2005), his father fought with Mennonites in authority in order to come to Canada, and as a result the family's immigration experience differed from most. John left Russia when he was ten years old. *"We were supposed to go to Paraguay. In (Russia), when the big congregations fled to Moscow to try and get out of the communist circle, they all ended up around Moscow. And Professor Unruh<sup>75</sup> had promised the German high command that "If you let my people in Germany, well make sure that they all leave Germany, too". Not with a sword at their back...but to emigrate. Because South America was empty. You know, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, they had a lot of land - a lot of jungle - and they needed good hard working German stock, same as Canada did (in 1870s). They needed people to settle the west, eh? So at the doors of Moscow they gathered there. Germany couldn't accept (25,000) more peasant stock Mennonites – they had to them move these people to which ever country wanted them. Like, Paraguay wanted some. Professor Unruh thought he could still rule them with a wrought iron. And by that time, the Mennonites were becoming a little self-sufficient. So, since Dad was a bit*

---

<sup>75</sup> Professor P.H. Unruh was a minister, educator, and M.C.C. representative to Russia who was instrumental in helping Russian Mennonites find homes in Canada and South America during the 1920s (A. J. Unruh & N. van der Zijpp, N., 1959).



*of a rebel-rouser, he says, "I'm not going to Paraguay. I'm going to Canada where the streets are paved with gold!". And then the professor said, "But you have to go. I promised the German people that you would empty these camps". We lived in a big four story army barracks made out of bricks, you know, well built. So Dad said, "I have to go and find the Paraguayan council, don't I, to accept me?" Professor says, "Yes, you have to." And Dad says to him - and I'm amazed that he did that - you know, he is from the steppes of Russia talking to this bigshot Professor Unruh. He said, "I'm gonna spit that council in the face! You think he's gonna give me immigration permit?" And Professor told him, "Get out of here. We can't use you. And get out of our Mennonite conference..." They wouldn't protect (Dad) if he needed them to, right? So, Dad got kicked out of Professor Unruh's clutches. But Dad didn't mind. So we came to Canada on our own. We're very few of those that did that.*

*Dad did this, and I'm amazed that he did that - how he had the nerve, the 'chutzpa' the Jewish people call that. But times were different then. So, we lived in Germany for several years and we worked among the real German people on their farms, and we boys worked hard, saved every nickel. Picked potatoes up and wherever we could earn a dime we would, and we'd give it to Dad, and he says "This is all for us to go to Canada". So, he organized it, and we paid our own trip. We didn't go through any (Mennonite organizations). Dad had 2 brothers here (in Niagara). And then I remember the \_\_\_\_ (family name) helped sponsor us, too. We had to have 1000 dollars here in a Canadian bank to allow us to come. But we had made enough money there with our work on farms to pay for our... boat ride and train. And then Mr. \_\_\_\_, the old man, (and some other relatives) had collected some money here from Mennonites - for some rebel Mennonite family that was stuck in Hamburg - to come out by ourselves, you know, because CMBC (Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization) wouldn't sponsor us now. "*

**Peter** (#17, 2005) was 6 when his family left Russia in 1926. He recalls his journey from Russia to Canada as relatively smooth once arrangements were made to leave, however life was unsettled in Canada as the family moved repeatedly in search of prosperity. *"Our house had been sold and we were ready to go, but our passports were still not there... That was a real headache getting them. It was done by greasing palms with money..."* They travelled by train by way of Riga, Latvia, and then by boat from England, penultimately settling in the prairies. *"My dad was a great mover; he didn't let the grass grow under his feet."* Peter moved 6 times around the prairie with his family, before finally coming to St. Catharines himself as an adult (age 22) in 1942, after an older brother.

#### **4.1.1 Summary & Analysis**

There are examples of placelessness within this cohort (*"My dad was a great mover; he didn't let the grass grow under his feet"*) but, for the most part, mobility for the *Russlaender* meant that 'place' as they knew it (isolated Mennonite villages) had ended, and a new life had begun. And so there were many firsts: the first time on a train or tasting an orange; the first time on a boat; the first time carrying a gun; the first time using bribery; the first time out of Russia; the first time in Europe; the first time in North America. And there were lasts: the last time seeing those who could not come (*"I'll never forget that song"*); the last time living in an isolated Mennonite community.

Global interconnections lace the narratives. Harold's experience of Niagara, for example, was coloured by his Dad's experience of Soviet Russia: political conditions on the other side of the globe, and immigration policies in Canada, held his father back so that Harold experienced home without a father for 4 years.

Such interconnections also dictated migration patterns, but because they occurred within the Mennonite diasporic community (responsibility flows), the connections tend to have a village-like, 'stretched out' feel. Swiss and *Kanadier* Mennonites extended hands to sponsor their co-religionists. Subsequent internal migration would draw on these connections even further (*co-responsibility*). George's relatives in Minnesota, mailed his father money to start up in Manitoba (*performance*), and family connections later brought them to Niagara. Gerhardt's family moved from relatives who sponsored them in Kitchener to Pennsylvania Dutch farms on the peninsula where they heard via the diaspora network that there was more work. John's rebel father, who had defied Mennonite authority, paid for his transgression by being shut out of Mennonite institutional aid (CMBC); however, he could still rely on the informal *co-responsibility* and *performance* of family members and friends from the village who had settled ahead in Niagara. Linguistic elements of their hybrid identity meant that John's family could communicate and earn a living in Germany through the intermittent years.

George's grandson wrote that the Red Gate was symbolic of the beginning of a journey to an 'unknown future in Canada', however people did begin with impressions of places (stoked by word of mouth – the diaspora grapevine), and these impressions also shaped migration patterns. John's father risked his standing in the church, for example, to come to Canada over Paraguay ("*In Canada the streets are paved with gold!*", "*I'm gonna spit that council in the face!*"), and Gerhardt's father insisted on Canada over South America ("*If you go to Canada, you're a black worker.. that meant the lowest work, hard labour. If you go to Brazil, you work in the forest. And in Paraguay, you get a team of horses.*"). John's (colonial) reference to South America having been 'empty' would also have been an impression from within the diaspora.

In terms of gender, Harold's comments about his grandmother contest the commonly referred to narrative of Mennonite families in Russia as patriarchal and male-led ("*She was leading the pack. She was the old marm that looked after things. And she said, "We're going there." In fact, it was because of her that we came*"). At the least, she indicates heterogeneity of performance within gender, and a diversity of gender roles within Russian Mennonite families.

Having examined this collection of *Russlaender* journey stories, we move now to the *Fluechtlinge* stories of scattering: the stories of refugees whose journeys to Niagara from Soviet villages lasted for five years: five years of mobility (and placelessness), five years of relying on interconnections to bring them 'home', five years during which the future was unknown, five years of performing gender outside of regulatory constraints.

#### **4.2 *Fluechtlinge* (Group B, First Generation)**

*Fluechtlinge* (Group B) journey stories are those of refugees. For both *Fluechtlinge* generations, the '*flucht*' (the flight) was the experiential shift from who they were to who they would become. Over subsequent generations within diaspora, the *flucht* narrative typically retains significant symbolic importance as to how individuals and groups view themselves. The telling of the stories within families, within the community, and indeed within the larger narrative of what it means to be (Russian) Mennonite, is therefore central to an authentic negotiation of identity within the diaspora.

Refugees come to exist between a past with at least some elements of order and predictability (their dwelling, their occupation, the climate, the language spoken, the style of clothing worn in their village, the food, the neighbours, physical landmarks, as examples...) and a future that is unpredictable. In such positions, "all aspects of their lives are called into question,

including ethnic and national identity, gender roles, social relationships, and socio-economic status” (Camino & Krulfeld, 1994, pp. ix-x).

The *Fluechtlinge* refugee stories are richly revealing in terms of the fluidity of gender performance. It is well documented that these refugee families, overwhelmingly, had been divided and were female-led (See M. Epp, 2000). They fled with the retreating Nazi occupying forces in 1943, most never to see adult male members of their families again. Operating outside of the domestic sphere to a greater extent - and differently - than they had before, these women often also took to operating outside of the confines of ideal gender models as they worked to ensure their family’s survival. Marlene Epp has noted that women’s wartime experiences, particularly for those heading families, often challenge social barriers and “free” women “to behave in response to a situation, rather than in accordance with gender limitations” (2000, p. 194). The first generation *Fluechtlinge* stories here fit Epp’s characterization of the stories of Mennonite refugees of the Second World War in general: the stories “exhibit the complex dichotomy of women as victims of the times but heroines of their own lives” (Ibid). As to why *Fluechtlinge* stories have rarely been told, Epp points to the dominant position of male figures in the collective Mennonite narrative. *Fluechtlinge* stories of ‘women without men’ do not fit within the historical patriarchal narrative of nuclear, male-led families, with its attendant normative gender roles.

It should be reinforced here that evidence of positive attitudes toward occupying Nazi forces is consistent with other documentations of the time. Soviet ‘ethnic Germans’ were of course caught between two diabolical forces (Stalinism and Nazism), and forced to follow one in

order to survive the other.<sup>76</sup> Experiences of the Great Trek are highly varied; it is more accurately described as a collection of treks. The following description sets the larger scene, outlines some orchestrational details, and accounts for some of the differences in experiences:

Because of wartime conditions and the enormous scale of the task...the SS<sup>77</sup> often had to improvise the series of mass evacuations of ethnic Germans. ...In late 1943, the SS transported the initial refugee groups, especially Mennonites...by train, since the Soviet threat was most pressing in these areas. ...Subsequent German groups who departed...by foot or by wagon...also faced many challenges. ...With the specter of advancing Soviet troops seeking revenge on all Germans looming over them, villagers' trepidation can only be imagined, especially when they saw long wagon trains from neighboring eastern communities already streaming past them. ...the SS provided itineraries to the village leaders, informing them on where the trek was to proceed. ...Occasionally the refugees had to set up make-shift shelters or find abandoned farms and barns in which to stay. Sometimes they even slept under the stars. Depending on terrain, weather, and other factors, a typical day's journey on foot and wagon covered between 5 to 15 miles, but sometimes more. ...Accompanying the flood of refugees were small groups of armed SS-men... Local village populations... were obliged by Nazi authorities to make accommodations for refugees in their dwellings. (Schmaltz, 2008, pp. 5-8)

We now move to the individual experiences of this historical evacuation from the first-generation *Fluechtlinge* participants.

**Justina** (#1, 2004) was 31 when she left the USSR by horse and wagon on the Great Trek in 1943. Her immediate travel group included her three younger sisters, and their collective 9 children. Justina's three children were ages 5, 4, and 1. They travelled first to camps in the occupied territories of Poland. After about two years, most of the group left the Polish camps for Germany where they were put up by German families and worked on their farms. By chance, the original group was reunited in Germany. There, the children (cousins) attended German schools together. In 1948, they were eventually gathered by the MCC into refugee

---

<sup>76</sup> Refer back to **Chapter 1, section 1.4: People of the Study** for a discussion of this situation.

<sup>77</sup> SS = *Schtztaffel*, or Security Staff of the Third Reich.

camps and were matched with relatives in Canada who would sponsor them to immigrate. Here is part of our conversation about leaving Russia:

[CJ: How did you feel about having to leave?] *"Well, you know when you are living in Russian land, sometimes I think that it wasn't a good thing to live there with the Russian people. And we all talked German, and the kids they would like to (go to) school and the high schools were just Russian."*

[CJ: Were you sorry to leave?] *"No, no, no."*

[CJ: Did you feel like it was your home?] *"Ya, ya. But you see that the war was after us."*

[CJ: How much time did you have to get ready?] *"Not much. Get the wagons ready, and put them full. In one village we had two wagons with all the families on them."*

[CJ: So you weren't able to take much...] *"No. when I came there, when I was in Germany, I had just something on my back and that was all."*

[CJ: Did you know where you were going when you left?] *"We thought we were going to Germany, but where we would get there and who would take us, we didn't know. But, well, everyday we came into the villages and we were not one night outside. We came in and the people took us in and slept there in their rooms and everything."*

[CJ: What did you know about Canada back then?] *"We didn't know much about Canada at all. Dad and they, they always had in mind that they would like to go to Canada...and I was not interested for Paraguay. I knew we had to be men (there) and we had no men..."*

[CJ: What was your role during the Trek?] *"I drove always sitting in the front and sometimes they (others in the group) want that we have to go back. I said no. That's our wagon. We have to look after it because the kids all were there on it. Got little bit what we have. Everybody for themselves there."*

**Reflection Box 4.2: Facilitators**

The facilitators have been crucial. They make connections, translate, and add a level of comfort for both the participant and me.

One issue came up early on, but was quickly cleared up. We've discussed that facilitators cannot interject into the conversation unless they are translating, or something is asked of them, to avoid any chance of them (inadvertently or not) steering the answers of the person being interviewed. There were a couple of early instances where I had to set aside some responses because of this. Thankfully, though, the facilitators are terrific; they understood and it never reoccurred.

Justina's youngest sister, **Greta** (#2, 2004), then 22, was in the same travelling group for the Trek. She had no children of her own with her. I asked how she felt about leaving. *"Well, we were glad to get out of there, you know, especially going first to Germany - at that time, in Germany, we didn't know yet about get to Canada - but to Germany it was really, really good getting out of Russia."*

[CJ: Did you have much time to prepare?] *"No, no there wasn't much notice, no. One day. We killed still a pig, we women, and cleaned it and roasted it and had those milk cans - a large milk can? And that's how we stored it; it cooled off and that's how we took along for the food. We were going to be on the road for weeks - we have to have something to eat. So that's what we did. We killed a pig and took it along. We cooked it and then there was the lard come out, and then the lard is on top, and then it stays good that way. If you have anything (with) lard on top it doesn't go bad. If you cook something with lard, maybe you always put the lard away so you have it later. But we were really saving it for later on for maybe bread or for potatoes and so on*



*that we had some lard or fat. Like, we didn't have butter; this lard go on the bread and everything. And jam, cooked jam. Preserves we didn't have the dishes for, you know, for taking along. Like, we had no containers. And the roasted zwieback.<sup>78</sup> Always zwieback we had."*

[CJ: How did you arrange to leave?] *"Well, we were all one house after, so as a family. And then the village, too. There was a leader and they arranged everything, too. It went always normal – so one village goes today and the other the next so the road wouldn't be packed. The road! You should have seen the road from all the villages! And so they arranged one would go now and the other one maybe tomorrow, and so on. And so we left that way, by horse and wagon. And we had the small wagon and we had the bigger one. If we see some food there needed for the horses...we had a smaller one (wagon) to go quick and get it and load it for when we get to evening. You have to have it; it's not (always) there when you go by. So we had one big one and we packed all the kids on the big one, and we had the smaller one with two horses we had for going and get things what you see on the road when you travel. So all day we travelled on the roads and whatever we could get we took along. And food for the horses, too. At night... there was nothing there for them. And so (what we saw) we took it already along.*

*We started in the morning, and we didn't just go one road. There were smaller roads, and there usually was more to pick up. The big roads, everybody has taken already what was there. And then if you know the area you can go smaller roads, then you can pick up things from the farms - for the horses, mostly. We needed some water, too. Often water was scarce to get for the horses. And they need food, too, the horses.*

---

<sup>78</sup> Zwieback is a Russian Mennonite yeast bun, made with two balls of dough pressed one on top of the other before baking. They were often double roasted into rusk form.

*At the beginning we had several cows and we took them tied them to our wagons and let them walk by. Well, they had to have something, too, but they gave us already milk. And (the children) were all at that age, were young and they all needed still milk, and for the kids milk was very good. And you couldn't get any. We tried and keep some milk, and take it along, too. Well, it got cold and we couldn't keep (the cows) much longer. We had to sell them on the road. You see, the Russian people lived on the way. There we went and we sold the cows. We didn't get much but it got colder and the cows, their feet got sore so we had to sell them. We didn't get much but at least we didn't just let them die that way. Somebody took care of them.*

*I have to look after the horses and the cows. And I had one horse so I was very good horseback riding. And I was going right away, and off we went! And on the way to that you go and pick up food. I was off right away and back to different directions, even in the evening. We had a very good horse. His name was Jarver. I still remember the name. And he knew directions. And it was dark, and I said, "Jarver, let's go!" And I packed him full as much as I could alone and I say, "You lead me back now where we came from". And we went back! Was kilometers away from where we came. And I packed on the horse and so on, and we went back and he brought back to where we came before, in a completely strange area! We picked up (things). See, everything was collective farms: just as good mine as yours. It was not private. It was not that.*

*There was no men. Mostly were gone; there weren't much. (Justina) and I, we were doing the men's job, and the other sisters looked after the children and the meals... But ("Justina") and I, we were courageous ones. We were going on horses and 'doing' - getting things done.*

*We stopped in Poland and Germany. In Poland I stayed during the war and they sisters with the kids they all had gone already and I stayed behind. I stayed with Polish people – a farm. I worked at a farm there. And then already it was the Germans were already gone. I had to go work on a farm there for a whole year with Polish people. And then when I was there, I always saw a way of getting away from things for my benefit. And so I left them and went another road on my own. On my own, and even with Russian people! I saw that there was a way and so I went with them, and it was mostly to my benefit. I came out good. You can't just depend on others and on roads like that. You have to know what you're doing. Well it is your fate too."*

[CJ: How would you know which direction you were going?] *"Well, it was at the end already. I knew the area. You go and you talk to the other people and they going that way too and you want to go too and so that's how you go along."*

[CJ: How did you meet back up then with the rest of your group?] *"Oh, the family. Well, I really was in Germany already. And there I was – I met them! They were going on the road, here I come going, you know? I met them, and I hadn't seen them for two years or so. Ya, ya, ya... Well, they recognized me right away... In a way it was interesting. But it was - you had to know. You had to have will and to do it - not just stay there being a chicken, not going. Like (another sister), she wouldn't have made it on her own. (Justina) and me were the most that went ahead and did things. More like courageous ones, like took chances."*

[CJ: And then you were in Germany for a couple of years, too?] *"Ya, well then there I get with MCC and with government. I came over to Canada as domestic. See, some had relatives. They came for their cousins - they applied for them and they got for their visas. But there were too many. My (younger) sister and I we could go by government. (We) applied as a domestic to come to Canada."*

[CJ: You mentioned before, too that on the trek you spoke one language over the other so you wouldn't be sent back?] *"Right, ya, certain words you did. They couldn't understand what we were talking about. Sometimes we knew that they were spying on us - the Russian people, and so on. In Germany was spying, too, and then we used the Low German. If we knew that they were following us a bit and listening what you talking about, then we used the other language."*

**Marta** (#3, 2004) did not lose her husband to the Soviets. She was 25 when the couple and their 3 young children (ages 5, 2, and 9 months) left Russia in Nazi-orchestrated evacuation by train in 1943. They settled in Gdansk, which then was occupied by Germany. A month before the end of the war, in 1945, her husband was conscripted by the Germans; Marta (then 25) carried on in this flight with her children, evading the advancing Soviet army on the island of Ruegen in the Baltic Sea, and ultimately coming to settle in Niagara by 1949, where her husband would manage to join the family after a 6 year separation.

In Marta's words: *"(We were) very happy to go. We had so much time that we had some animals - I guess my husband had got some, a sheep or something. We got that slaughtered and ground it, and fry it out and put in containers. That much time we had. We took it along as food... We had about 40 people from the wagon and we had our luggage. See, you couldn't take much. And then the families could group, you know? We were: we five, the 3 children and (my husband) was there as well, and then his mother and his sister. She was unmarried. And then his brother with one child and wife, and her mother and her family. So they could group."*

*We wanted just not get into the Russian hands, because we heard already the shooting. We lived on the river, the Dnieper River, and we heard already the shooting from other side and we saw already burning the fires and so we were afraid... My husband - his father and 2 brothers*

*were arrested - but (my husband) was young and lost his job and went out somewhere else (to a Russian village) to work, and so he was spared - didn't get arrested.*

*We went through Poland. And then we went as far as Gdansk – it's now Polish, but then it was German. And there... were camps and we stayed there for over a year. And then in 1945 in January we left and then went more west, you know. And then my husband had stayed there - and there he was drafted... I didn't dare to separate myself from the rest of my family because I had children. And I had 4 siblings, teenagers. See my mother not too old, and if I had stayed there and waited for my husband - I didn't dare to do it. So I went to Canada... We did cross letters.... I wrote him: "I'm leaving. I'm leaving where your uncle is". So he knew where this is: Canada. And well, he said that was smart thinking. He would fend for himself. And when he knew that I left he felt light, was he could fight for himself, you know? Because they could easily find out that he was from Russia and then they wouldn't release him. I was responsible for 3 children.*

*In April 1945, here was the war to end, but it was enough time to send them as war prisoner back to Russia. So he was back to Russia... He ripped up his papers (saying) he was from Russia, so he had only drafting papers as a German soldier, and so he came into the German soldier camp, you know, and was released as a sick – his health had declined – and war prisoner... But in meantime I had left for Canada." The two continued to exchange short notes, always via liaisons in Germany, so that his identity as a Russian and the destination of his family would not be disclosed.*

*"(In Gdansk) he worked in the factory, and then we were– I, with the children and the other women – we were sent more west, and then we came to the island of Ruegen and there we were when the war ended in May. And then the Russian army came into the village, in that*

*village where we stayed as refugees. And then they took us into a camp to send us back to Russia, and there we escaped”.*

Marta’s daughter, **Katie** (#7, 2004), tells her version of the same story: *“Well, it was evacuation by train. We had orders to leave, and then the cattle cars were provided. I remember being put on the car, and all our belongings were packed in the bottom. And we all sat – I don’t know how many, but quite a few people sitting on top of the belongings. We were forced to leave. I think it also worked out that we wanted to leave, because we wanted to get away from communism, but I don’t think it was a choice. I’ve often wondered about that and often asked my mother and she said, “Well, we certainly wanted to get out and this was our chance to get out.” But at the same time, if we hadn’t wanted to it wouldn’t have made any difference; we would have had to leave. They (German army) were very organized. I mean when you think of the turmoil of the whole war - and this was already when they were starting to lose the war - and yet they were remarkably well organized, which is very interesting.*

*(We went first to) occupied Poland, in what is now Gdansk but was Danzig at that time. We were in the refugee camp first...with ten people to a room. I have very distinct memories of that. I remember that we always had to worry about bed bugs. And we would push the beds away from the walls. Bed bugs and lice, of course. And we did have to go through a de-lousing process when we came into the German occupied Poland. I remember that clearly. All the women and children had to be in one room and they had showers, and the men in the other, and our clothes were all washed. I remember my mother saying how terrible that was, because my sister was only a year old and it was slippery.*

*And my aunt had 2 children by that time, and the other aunt had 2. We were all living in one room. We had to bring our own food. The standard, of course, was roasted zwieback. I*

*think people really stuck together. I'm sure there must have been friction under those circumstances - all living in close quarters, and (with) the times. Basically that's all you had was your family and your next of kin and the people that you knew. So certainly there was a lot of strong cohesion there. I don't remember any fighting or squabbling. The strongest sense was that we are all in this together and, you know, people are dependent upon each other. Because it was nothing else.*

*We were all in that camp, and then my Dad and a few of the other men were given jobs by a German factory owner and they built some pre-fab cottages for the workers in a suburb of Danzig. And we shared the one cottage with my aunt and uncle. They lived in one part; we lived in the other. That was up until January of 1945, because we still spent Christmas there, I remember. I remember a Christmas there, the last Christmas there. There were a number of families there; they tried to really have a Christmas celebration. It was a terrible time because the Russian front was moving towards Poland. We all knew that and everybody was very, very afraid of getting caught now by the Russians. And there was no way out. They didn't have much, but one had a little bit of flour, and one a bit of sugar, and they all got together and they baked some cookies. And they were able to put some pennies together to buy some candies and they made little bags for the children. And my mother, I remember she went to the market and got a little Christmas tree. And then in one of the homes, whichever had the most room, they all got together. I remember that very clearly: they celebrated Christmas. They were just determined to forget what was going on and just celebrate Christmas.*

*And then shortly after that the news came that the Russians were marching ever closer and that we better try and get out. And then my father and the men that worked for this man heard that the man was getting his family out into Germany, and so they literally begged him*

*whether he couldn't take at least the women and children of our group. And he did. That's how we got out. Some of the men had to stay behind. My Dad had to stay behind. And then we were taken, in a roundabout route, to the island of Ruegen, by train again. This was in January of 1945.*

*My father stayed there and then he was conscripted and we didn't know where he was for quite a while. Then we were on the island of Ruegen, which is in the north - the Baltic - north of Germany. And we were there until the Russians came. The Russians entered our village, and of course everybody was terrified. I remember that little village; it was a fishing village, but also a tourist area for many years, so they had 'Bed and Breakfasts' there and that's where we were put up. And of course, the homeowners were never too happy with all these dirty refugees being put into their living rooms, but they had no choice.*

*My mother would find some work on local farms. See, there were some German farms there. And then when the Russians came in - there was a salt building there, because there was a fishing business, this was a fishing area -so the salt was needed to preserve the fish at that time. Well, the German population wasn't allowed to get at the salt, but they needed salt badly. But the Russians actually hired some of the women to work in the salt house - to shovel salt, actually. And they were actually quite nice. Well, I don't know about nice, but they were fairly friendly to the women, and they allowed them to take some salt out in their pockets everyday. So this they would take to the market on the weekend and the German population was very anxious to buy it because they needed it to preserve their fish. So, that was a little bit. So, a little bit here, and a little bit there. Or they would trade it in for butter from the farmers. And then they also worked milking cows for local farmers. It was mainly subsistence, of course - enough to eat and get by.*



*You see we were in the Russian zone. This was East Germany. And then one day what everybody was terrified of happening happened. We got the order that we were supposed to check in: one adult from each family. I think there were around 30 Mennonite people on the island there, and one from each family was ordered to report to the local jail. And they were actually jailed, but for a weekend. My mother was the one (from our family). They were kept there for a weekend, and it was right over New Year's. And then they were questioned and, you know, interrogated, and then they were released. And I think we made several attempts to try and get off the island. It was impossible. There was just no way you could do it.*

*And then the order came we were supposed to be repatriated back to Russia. We were taken to a city on the mainland, in a barbed wire camp so we couldn't escape. And from there, they were determined that if there was a chance, that they would escape. And they managed to defer being sent back. Several trainloads were supposed to go, but they managed to defer that 3 times on the excuse that they had to go back to Ruegen to clear up their affairs – even though there was nothing to clear up there; it was just a way to (stall). And then one day there was a German electrician that was there fixing something. We were all in one room. And he was so amazed - you know, German speaking people in here - what's going on? And they told him our story and he was very sympathetic and he said "Well, if there's anything I can do to help, here's my address – you know, look me up."*

*So, my mother at that time was very sick, and she was given permission by the Russian camp commander to go into the city and see a doctor. And she took that opportunity to check out where this man lived. He lived in the city, but he had a little cottage on the outskirts of the city, and he said, "You know, if you can get away, you can stay there." So on the day the trains were supposed to leave, we got our final order and it was no backing away from it. Everybody*

*had sort of prepared. I remember my mother had sewn some important papers into the arm of her clothes – because if you did get away, it would be with nothing. And we had put on layers. I remember putting on layers of clothing. It wasn't winter, but so that you at least had something to wear. And then I remember very clearly the men – there were a few men there, (though) mostly women and children – had to load the trains. All our stuff went onto the train. And I remember there was an armed guard walking in front of the station. And then my mother took my brother – I was the oldest; I was about 7 and a half – and she said to me, "Take your brother and just walk." There was a high hedge there. And she said, "Just walk very slowly down there, and then turn the corner and then wait. And if I don't come within a certain period of time, then come back." So I did that. I remember that, slowly walking down there. And then, sure enough, my mother came with my sister. And we took a streetcar and went to this man's cottage. And, in that way, all 27 people got out.*

*They had taken us out of the wired camp to the train station, you see, and the men were loading - which took forever, I guess. It was a very slow process. And during this time – slowly – even the men that were doing the loading managed to get away. There was one family that decided they'd had enough of this – "I just want to go back" - and of course, we were promised we'd be sent back to where we came from, which never happened. They landed somewhere up in Siberia.*

*And so then we all stayed low for a couple of days - slept on the floor, just got out at night – because the Russian camp was not that far away. And this man, he took us to the mayor, and the mayor issued us false identity papers, saying we were born in Germany, and we were given a little bit of money. This was, I guess, standard for refugees. And then a couple of days later we boarded the train, and we still have to get across the border into West Germany. Now*

*the wall wasn't up but still it was guarded. And we tried one place and that wasn't successful, and then we tried another place and were able to get across. And I remember that clearly. I remember the tension in the train when the Russians were checking the papers. And I remember the tension was incredible. But then at the border we were let off and we had to get off and go through another check. I remember that very clearly: we walked across. And I remember one of the women just fell to the ground and kissed the ground out of a sense of relief that we'd gotten out of this."*

**Marta** (Katie's mother) recalls these last stages of the escape: *"Somebody other went to the town hall, and said we were refugees. So we got money and we got our papers and people took different names out in case they would look for us. And then on a certain day – it was a Sunday – we got on the train and we got out and nobody caught us. And we got out of the city and went to the border – zone border, you know? – see, Germany was divided into zones, you know? Russian and English and American... And we went there and we couldn't get in - it was closed. And we went another and we ask again and we tried there. We couldn't get over there - it was closed... and then we went to another city where there we could get over. And when we finally crossed the border where we are in English zone, oh, can you imagine our feelings?"*

**Katie** (daughter): *"And then my uncle had come...they had been in South Germany. And he came actually to look for us and he managed to meet us up just as we crossed the border. And he took us back then to South Germany, where they had found refuge. And we were also there for two and a half years. And that was a wonderful – THAT was my childhood! Because the war was over then, and it was a big estate and there were, well it had swelled to 200 people. It was filled with refugees, and they were all really good people. And the funny part of it was, my grandfather had studied in Switzerland in the early turn of the century, and had spent his*

*summer vacation here as a student! And he had always said to his family, before he was sent to Siberia, that, you know, if you can ever get out, get in touch with these people. They're good people. And so that's what happened. And then we heard of MCC, that MCC was organizing emigration. And we applied.*

*We couldn't stay there. Well, there was no future. You know, Germany was destroyed. I mean the cities were in rubble. There were no jobs. Actually, everybody did work on this farm. It was a big estate and my mother worked in the kitchen because they fed all these people everyday. And my uncles, my mother's brothers, worked on the farm. So, you know, there was a way to get a living. So that was nice. And there were little children. Oh, it was a lot of fun. Even though, you know, when I look back, we lived in one room, you know. But that didn't seem to – oh, children get used to these kind of things, you know?"*

**Marta** recalls these experiences: *"I worked in the kitchen and there we were a relaxing time, a good time. We still go and visit them, you know? Swiss Mennonites... The people who had the room they had to take refugees. They were all people there: Catholics and evangelicals and Mennonites. There was nobody ask you what you are. It was no – you were not 'Russian Mennonites', you know? They were not separate like (in Russia)... We spoke all the same language.*

*Our family did not have any deaths there at that time. I have not been raped, and I have not been treated bad – nothing about that, you know. With the Russian occupation (in Ruegen) - we lived there from May to December - nobody treated me personal ever bad. I did washing for them then they gave me bread. It was more Poland – there they were allowed to rape the women. But, after on, then the women did it maybe something for food, you know? They gave themselves, you know? But we spoke Russian and (showed) a little bit of respect, you know?"*

*And the German army never had – well, then I wasn't ever alone – but they never has treated me bad. No bad treatments from soldiers. We always treated them with respect, felt so sorry for them. But I don't want to say it's anybody's blame, you know. I don't want to question the rapes, you know."*

**Elsie** (#4, 2004) was also 25 when she left her village on the trek. Her translated autobiography ("Elsie", 1989) includes the following account of her experiences during the flight: *"On September 10, 1943 we left our house and village and we each took along a cow. One village followed another village and so we were a long trek. (A male) cousin was an interpreter for the Germans and brother \_\_\_\_\_ (15) took care of the horses.*

*So there we were: (my one brother) mentally handicapped and barely able to walk, (my one sister) badly crippled, the (other) youngest sister, my five year old (daughter) and I on the wagon. The food that we took along consisted of salted pork, roasted zwieback and bread, beans and oatmeal. We drove until over the Dnieper River where we were put into Russian homes and we had to help with the harvest. We were on our way (hopefully) to Germany and we hoped the food would last. Two weeks later we had to flee again. I walked along with the cow but soon, one after the other, they died. In the evening, when we stopped to rest, we would first look for food for our horses and cows. In the Russian villages we could take feed for the animals and food for ourselves. We would then make a hole in the ground, put bricks around it, and cooked our food. We often had to look for water for ourselves and the animals. Then we would sit around the fire and sing. How wonderfully God had led us.*

*At the end of October we found a train by which the old and the sick would travel. Aunt \_\_\_\_ and her mentally handicapped son, and my siblings...went along. The train was going to Kominezpodolsk where those of us travelling with the wagons were also going... One week later*

*another train came and (my daughter), (male cousin) and I went along with our baggage. We came to Arnswalde, not Kominezpodolsk. All of a sudden, we saw a large sign saying: "Germany greets you". The train stopped and we were all brought into a delousing room. We didn't have lice but the lice had us. Many people were very pale because of the lice. We had to undress with women and girls in one room and men and boys in another room. Some women had to have their heads shaved and some heads had more lice than hair. Our heads were all washed with a strong soap and our clothes had to be disinfected. When our clothes came back they had a burned smell. During the nights on the train everyone was quiet because we had no more lice. On our trek we often slept on straw in the barns. Every night someone else slept on the same straw. Since then (my daughter) and I have not had any lice...*

*(In) Arnswalde in a refugee camp, there was a kitchen there where we had 3 meals a day. We were all allowed to celebrate Christmas there. (We were 6) all in one room. In the winter all our people and my siblings were in Kamenetzpodolsk surrounded by the Russian army. They managed to escape and by train they went to Wartegau (Poland). Brother \_\_\_\_ stayed alone with the horse and wagon and the cow. As we were boarding the train (he) had quickly gone and traded the cow for half a bag of apples. In Wartegau everyone had to give their horses and cows to the Polish-Germans. The horses and wagons brought us here, but we should have left the poor cows at home. We were to stay in Wartegau. There we saw our horses with other people and we had to walk. In Wartegau, by Kutno, our people lived in schools. Some of us were in Arnswalde, some in Wartegau. We were already registered and organized in Arnswalde, but we had to go back to the Wartegau by train where we were all together again. We all had to work on an estate. The boss of the estate was not good to us. We received food ration cards and could buy food for the week, so we did not go hungry. Nearby, there was a train station where potatoes were being loaded. The Polish night guard would come to us in the evening and tell us*

*to come and get potatoes, saying, "I see nothing". Then we would get bowls of potatoes, grate them and make potato starch. Flour was scarce and bread was rationed. We used potato starch and flour to bake.*

*In Wartegau, (my mentally disabled) brother had been taken to an institution in Zichelin. All the undesirables were slowly put aside, like the Jewish people. This was an order from Hitler. I baked something and went to get my brother. When I arrived I saw the many homes that belonged to the institution. There were many hungry people and (brother) was very pale and skinny. They had a very large vegetable garden at the home where the people would pull out the vegetables to eat. I sat outside on a bench with (brother), opened my food box and gave him some baked goods. Many people came and also wanted food so I began to share. (My brother) became very angry. He wanted all the food for himself. He ate so fast I was afraid it would harm him. When a person is starved, they must eat very slowly or they can die suddenly. I went to the office to get permission to take (my brother) home. The answer was "NO" and "NO" again. I finally told them that my father was in exile, our mother had died, my husband and (other) brother were also in exile, and I was trying to keep my siblings all together. I said: "My sister \_\_\_\_\_ is crippled with arthritis, my sister \_\_\_\_\_ is young, and then there is me and my 5 year old (daughter). Whether you give me permission or not I am taking him along." ...I took (my brother) as he stood there...The people there all looked starved, and outside was a small house (morgue) where they put the dead bodies. Four or five times a day a horse and wagon with a coffin drove by, continually coming back for more bodies...*

*We were at the \_\_\_\_\_ estate until shortly after Christmas and then we had to flee again. By train we went to Kreis Samter. The German army was retreating west and we had to make sure we would get away from the advancing Russian army... One night (a man) was at our*

window and said we had to leave and get a horse and wagon from the estate boss. Most of us from the village of Hamberg had been together all this time and now we were put in different villages and dispersed to different estates. I ran to the estate and begged for a horse and wagon... At 3 pm I was given a wagon, 2 underfed skinny horses, and a driver. We were in a house with another family, and 3 (of the) women wanted to go with us. We packed our meager belongings. In the evening I washed the clothes, threw the wet clothes in a bag, and took them along. At midnight we stopped at a hotel to warm ourselves and feed our horses. I did not trust the whole situation and immediately went outside. The driver for our horses had disappeared. Thank God he did not take the horse and wagon. I was not surprised he had left; at home he had his family.

I now had my siblings and (daughter) with me on the wagon, as well as the 3 women. The horses had a difficult time pulling the wagon. I walked beside the tired horses and tried to encourage them. The 3 healthy women would not get off the wagon. Automobiles would often pass us and tell us to keep going because the Russian army was behind us. The 2<sup>nd</sup> day, in the evening, I stopped in a village and said I could go no further. The horses just couldn't make it and I just did not know what to do. One of the 3 women suggested going to the market in the morning. There were usually German army trucks there and she thought we should see if they would take us along. At first I laughed about the suggestion, but later was ashamed of myself. We went to the market and believe it or not, there were some German soldiers with trucks. We spoke to the soldiers and they said yes... The soldiers immediately threw the few possessions we had (including the bag of wet clothes) out on the other side of the truck. (My daughter) had a beautiful, big doll... (She) screamed, "My doll, my doll". The soldier said, "Halt deine Schnautze (shut your mouth) or we'll throw you out also". They did leave us our food.



*We left the horse and wagon standing there and went by truck to Frankfurt, on the Oder River. In the evening we arrived at a movie house where all the seats were taken by refugees....in Frankfurt, there were over 20 places, schools and halls where refugees were staying. (Some cousins from our village) were in a school. She said we should come with her immediately. (She) said she had a list of names and was going with the streetcar to find the friends she knew... we went with the streetcar to where (she) was in the school. It was packed with people but everyone moved closer together and we could all be together in one corner. The night before (my male cousin), who was 15 years of age, was drafted into the Volksturm (last minute army). This was towards the end of the war when Germany drafted the young and old men. (My female cousin) had gone with (this male cousin) so she would know where the (army) camp was. We had just settled in for the night when the guards came and said we should immediately go with the streetcar to the train station and leave. It was not so easy with our sick and crippled ones. (So, my cousin) immediately went with the streetcar to where (the drafted cousin) was. She told the guard she wanted to see (him) because he had forgotten something. They had already settled down for the night with their clothes on. She told (drafted cousin) to come quickly. The guards were not outside and were probably very tired. She managed to get (him) out and catch the streetcar to where we were already waiting to go to the train station. We pushed (the drafted cousin) under a bench and we sat in front of it, trying to hide him. The train was empty and he had to go under another bench again in the train. Is that not God's guiding hand? The train did not leave until the morning and we were terrified. We drove all day until late at night without tickets and we did not know where we were going. Finally, the train stopped and we were in Berlin...we were given places to sleep that night.*

*The next day we were on the train again all day and we were brought to a school for lodging. The next day we went to City Hall to get food ration cards... Bombs fell in Berlin just*

*about every night. Sometimes we had just gone to bed when there was an air alarm and we had to run down to a cellar. Homes were hit frequently and all the people in the cellars were casualties. How terrible those times were. We were only there for two weeks, but we became anxious because we did not know where to go and we did not know where the people from the trek were... the Russian army was getting closer...everything was chaotic.*

*Then we went on the train to Luneburg. Someone picked us up at the station and we were taken to Wester-gelarsen (Luneburgeheide). It was a quaint village and we were lodged in small wooden barracks. The nights were so cold water froze in the pails. This was February 1945. In the summer we tried to make our barracks warmer. (My female cousin and I) made clay, like in Russia, and plastered the outside walls. Bombs had fallen here, but mostly in the forest, so we were able to gather much wood. The farmer, who we were working for, gave us his horse and wagon to get the wood from the forest. We split the wood, sawed it into pieces, and piled it up for the winter. We had a small wood stove for cooking and warming our barracks.*

*In May 1945 the war ended. (My female cousin) and I went to Luneburg to buy food and there was much panic there. Luneburg had surrendered to the British and the sirens and alarms were wailing. We begged the woman in the store for meat but she said she was locking the store and we should get out. No bombs were thrown but we saw the British tanks come into Luneburg. Now, we wondered, how were we going to get home? There was a forest beside the road and we circled through the woods. Many soldiers threw away their uniforms. Was it not God's guidance that there was no shooting?*

*As we arrived home (10 km away) the road was blocked with cut down trees. But that was no problem for the tanks. (A male member of the group) came to meet us. He had tried earlier but they had turned him away. He told us something terrible had happened. (My*

younger sister) was dead. She was 15 years old and had taken time off from school because she had to work for the farmer. The farmer was a soldier who had fled from the army and was in hiding at home. He had sent his Polish worker and (my sister) to the fields to plant potatoes. In the last days of the war low flying planes came along and shot at everything that moved. She had been in the process of jumping off the wagon when a bullet or a grenade hit her in the back and both her arms were torn off. This was the news that we received. (An aunt and the man) went to get her body with a small wagon, one km away. We had her funeral at the neighbour's barn the next day, and a Lutheran pastor officiated. On the way to the cemetery we often had to go for cover in ditches, because of trigger-happy pilots in low flying planes. They could have been British or American planes. Our sister rests in Kirchgelerson Cemetery. It was the neighbouring village from where we lived.

A few days later, (I) was visiting at (my cousin's) place (our barracks were close together). (My brother) always sat near the stove. (He) had a seizure, fell against the hot stove, the stove fell over, and his wrist lay on the hot oven. I came in and was shocked to see this happen. The room was full of smoke and fire in the stove. The stovepipes to the chimney were hanging. I quickly called for help. If I had been away just a few minutes more, everything could have been burning. I quickly called a nurse and she later came to look after him consistently. His skin was burnt and his veins were exposed. In the hospital they only admitted soldiers. The nurse told us if he had another seizure the veins could burst and he could bleed to death. It took two weeks for it to heal. Later on his wrist was very stiff because there was so little skin. Whenever he did anything, the skin would crack. There was always something to deal with.

The war was over now, but the Russians had the right to take the Russian-born Germans even out of the English zone. The Russians could take all their Russian citizens out of any zone,

voluntarily or forcefully, and sent them back to Russia. My sisters-in-law were all at the Oder, the Russian zone. They knew where we were, and illegally, under false names, they came over to the temporary camp. From there they went to Gronau, near the Dutch border. All of a sudden it got very dangerous for us (near Luneburg). We were asked to come to the office authority. They wanted to know about our heritage. There were women with the surname \_\_\_\_\_ who were Russians married to Mennonite men. They voluntarily agreed to go back to Russia. We were scared. Women by the name of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were forcefully taken. During the night they escaped and two days later they arrived at our place. From our place they went to Ulzen, to a temporary holding camp. Using wrong addresses they came to Westfallen (in the British zone). We quickly packed our meager belongings together and in the fall of 1946 we went to Gronau. In Gronau (at the MCC Headquarters), the camp was filled to capacity (everyone wanted to escape from the Russians) and we were brought to a camp for people with Dutch heritage. We were there a few days and then we came to Rotenberge in Westfallen in the vicinity of Ochtrup. We often went to Gronau where we would get information about immigrating and also our future. In Gronau they would often distribute blankets and clothes which came from MCC in Canada. (German) farmers at that time had to take refugees into their homes, according to how many rooms they had. An old mother by the name of \_\_\_\_\_ had 2 older sons and one daughter. They had taken in a family of 4 and now she also took us (4 persons) into one room. (Aunt and cousins) were across the street.

C.F. Klassen<sup>79</sup> helped us find our relatives in Canada. Canada would not take sick people, and (sister) was crippled and (brother) was mentally handicapped. Paraguay accepted everyone so we decided we should go to Paraguay. C.F. Klassen suggested (my daughter) and I should go

---

<sup>79</sup> Director of the refugee and resettlement service of the Mennonite Central Committee in Europe.

*to Canada and my siblings should go to Paraguay. He said I would be able to help them more if I went to Canada. I wondered how they were going to manage in Paraguay. When I think about it now, it was a hard decision. They were helpless and they were going into the jungle. (They) left...in 1947 to Paraguay.*

*Before we came to Canada in 1948 I received news from friends in Russia that my loving husband had died, probably starved to death. (My daughter) and I sailed to Canada...in 1948. We arrived in Niagara at (my uncle's) house and stayed with them for one month. At Christmas 1949 we were able to pay for our trip, thanks be to God. (A different uncle) from B.C. had sponsored us, so we went to their place for New Year's. It was difficult to find a job there. I did get a job picking strawberries in Sardis. My aunt from Ontario wrote and said we should come back because we would find work. My uncle paid for our trip, and in July 1949 we went back to Ontario where I found work on a farm, and later in the canning factory."*

In 1961, Elsie paid for her disabled sister and brother in Paraguay to return to live in a nursing home in Germany. She was able to have her sister come to Niagara for a three-month visit in 1965.

#### **4.2.1 Summary & Analysis**

While Relph theorized that mobility can lead to a sense of placelessness, Massey has argued that mobility - the movement of people, goods and ideas - actually constitutes a globalized notion of place. These notions seem at odds until we understand mobility as a continuum with placelessness at one end and place at the other:

An excess of place can lead to a provincialism and a callousness for outsiders just as an excess of journey can lead to a loss of identity or an impartial relativity that allows for commitment to nothing. ...The importance of place and locality must be balanced with an awareness of and connections to other places and global needs. The point is that an

empathetic and compassionate understanding of the worlds beyond our own places may best be grounded in a love of a particular place to which I myself belong. In this way, we may recognize that what we need in our everyday world has parallels in the worlds of others. (Seamon & Sowers *in* Hubbard et al., 2008, pp. 49-50)

The bounded Russian commonwealth model, for example, represented “an excess of place”, a site of exclusionary practice. And certainly “an excess of journey” is applicable to these *Fluechtilinge* experiences.

Imagery of ‘the road’ is the thread through these stories (“*The Road! You should have seen the road...*”). Temporary home-places are described: trains (“*all our belongings were packed in the bottom and we all sat on top of the belongings*”), wagons (“*everything was on the wagons*”), schools, refugee camps, and farms. Forces out of their control were determining the women’s lives; they often did not know where they were going (“*everything was chaotic*”). There is no evidence of nostalgia for the homeland, nor regret about leaving. These people had no place they belonged to and, by the end, nothing left but each other to call their own (“*when I came to...Germany, I had just something on my back and that was all*”). ‘On the road’, family was their only home. Only once they had reached safe havens in Germany would the children experience once again a memorable sense of “love of a particular place to which I belong” (“*THAT was my childhood!*”, “*that was nice. And there were little children. Oh, it was a lot of fun. Even though, you know, when I look back, we lived in one room... children get used to these kind of things, you know?*”).

There is therefore a strong motif of family cohesion and codependence among extended family members (“*I was just trying to keep my siblings all together*”, “*The strongest sense was that we were all in this together and people are dependent on each other. Because it was nothing else.*”). There are efforts to create comfort: Elsie speaks of singing, and includes details about how she built fires, ground potatoes into flour for baking, gathered and chopped wood,

and prepared her cold barrack for the winter (*"My cousin and I made clay, like in Russia, and plastered the outside walls"*). Similarly, Katie remembers fondly the efforts of the adult women to create Christmas during a time of palpable tension (*"I remember that very clearly: they celebrated Christmas. They were just determined to forget what was going on and just celebrate Christmas"*).

The devastating effects of global forces beyond the women's control are clear. However, positive references to increased exposure to (what is no longer) the 'outside' emerge (*"there we were a relaxing time, a good time...They were all people there: Catholics and evangelicals and Mennonites. There was nobody ask you what you are. It was no – you were not 'Russian Mennonites', you know? They were not separate, like (in Russia)."*) Co-responsibility and Performance occur at several scales, from the local (rescuing a nephew from a German army camp), to the global (MCC refugee camps, distribution of blankets and clothing from Canada, and assistance in matching the women with family sponsors). Impressions of places - hints of diasporic routes - are also articulated (*"Dad always had in mind they would like to go to Canada, and I was not interested in Paraguay. I knew we had to be men there and we had no men", "I wondered how they were going to manage in Paraguay... they were going into the jungle"*).

Hybrid identity becomes, increasingly, a survival tool. Marta's husband destroys his Soviet Russian identity papers to avoid being repatriated by his German conscriptors, with whom he shares a language. A German electrician working in a barbed wire Soviet prisoner camp is surprised to hear *"German people"* and helps in their escape. The MCC camp in Gronau is full, so Elsie and her family are brought to a camp for *"people with Dutch heritage"*. Greta and her sisters alternate between speaking high and Low German, depending upon who is

listening, and successfully avoid revealing their identity as Soviet Russians. Families are issued false German identity papers in East Germany; they sew these into their clothing when they escape. Roasted zwieback – a Dutch tradition<sup>80</sup> - is a food staple on the trek. But now an additional element has been added to who these people are: “*dirty refugees*”.

Greta’s comments reveal how clearly defined her previous experience of gender normatives had been (“*We were doing the men’s job, and the other sisters looked after the children and the meals. We were the courageous ones. We were...’doing’ – getting things done*”), as well as the power she felt in being freed of them (“*I always saw a way of getting away from things for my benefit. And so I left them and went on a road on my own. On my own, and even with Russian people!*”). As Tuan has written: “Sense of self, whether individual or collective, grows out of the exercise of power” (1997, p. 175).

Physical ability affects the way people experience diaspora<sup>81</sup>, as we see in the examples of Elsie’s disabled siblings. Her brother and sister are marked as “*undesirables*” by the Nazis in Warthegau, but the war ends and they survive to be placed in MCC camps. Canada’s immigration policy is such that only able-bodied people are accepted, and so Elsie’s siblings go to Paraguay, separated from the rest of the family. Thus they are without support of the people they need most in a strange land (“*They were helpless and they were going into the jungle*”). Eventually Elsie is able to arrange for them to live out their lives in care facilities in Germany.

---

<sup>80</sup> These ‘double buns’ are original to the port cities of The Netherlands or Danzig where they were used as provisions on mercantile ships (Voth, N. J., 1990).

<sup>81</sup> Many families in fact stayed behind when the *Russlaender* left in the 1920s because the health and/or physical ability of a family member did not meet immigration standards of receiving countries.



As for the children these women brought with them to safety, theirs are stories of having grown up 'on the move'. We now look to the stories of their five-year journeys of displacement, temporary places, and re-displacement.

#### **4.3 *Fluechtlinge* (Group B, Second Generation)**

Dimensions of their own journey stories remain blurry to several second-generation *Fluechtlinge*. This is neither surprising nor singular to within this study, in light of the lack of attention these stories have received generally. One could argue that the young ages of many of the children at the time is a factor, but many *Russlaender* were also young children at time of immigration, and yet their journey stories seem more clearly formulated. They've told them more often before. They had more frequent exposure to their parents' stories (and published stories of *Russlaender* immigration generally) in order to round out details and fully formulate their own narratives. Nonetheless – or perhaps as a result - the second-generation *Fluechtlinge* stories strike me as particularly rich repositories of children's and teenager's perspectives of everyday life during this period. Less rounded, they are also less 'contaminated' by the memories and accounts of others. What constitutes these stories is perhaps what affected these story tellers most deeply and authentically: what made them feel afraid, what made them feel sad, what made them feel happy, what made them feel safe, what made them feel useful. These are raw glimpses into "the crucible of the materiality of everyday life" (Brah, 2003, p. 618) out of which diasporic culture and identity emerge, and "the material at hand" (Pulido, 1997 *after* Massey & Jess, 1995) with which relationships with 'place' are articulated.

Some of these stories reveal a lack of information about aspects of the collective trek experience, specifically the role and motives of Nazi forces in coordinating their evacuation. Some second-generation *Fluechtlinge* participants openly wonder why the German army would have helped them leave, instead of simply retreating without them. The information they are

missing is that Nazi racial policies applied to ethnic Germans, including Mennonites, in the USSR.

According to the Mennonite historian Frank Epp, the Germans were not just interested in

*Lebensraum*.<sup>82</sup>

The overriding German purpose was (to make) the Soviets the servants of the German *Herrenvolk* (master race). It's grand design called for a reshuffling of ethnic groups which would leave the great Russians at the lowest stratum of the new order. Jews and other undesirables would be liquidated and moved to the east... This diabolical ideology led to the harshest phase of the occupation program, the practice of genocide... The Jews in Russia were singled out for complete extermination and about 2.5 million were destroyed by the Germans. Russians and Ukrainians were also ruthlessly treated, so that about 1.5 million died as a result of the German occupation. This persecution meant that the people of the conquered areas soon turned against their German masters. All except the *Volksdeutsche*<sup>83</sup> who, as part of the *Herrenvolk* enjoyed special privileges and were generally blind to the atrocities of their 'liberators' against German peoples. The Mennonites, too, were less ready to recognize German injustice than Soviet oppression, since they were the benefactors of the former and victims of the latter. (1962, p. 356)

As the war turned against Nazi fortunes, the SS assumed responsibility of relocating the occupied ethnic German communities in the Ukraine region to parts of Poland (Warthegau) which were then controlled by the Reich. There, it was decided, these *Volksdeutsche* would be preserved from "ethnic contamination" (Schmaltz, 2008, p. 5). To this point, Elsie's story in the previous section referred to the family having being deloused, "*registered and organized*", and her disabled siblings having been put aside as "*undesirables...like the Jewish people*" by the Nazis in Warthegau<sup>84</sup> before the rest were sent to work on a (seized) Polish estate. We're not told if she is aware that this was the processing and sorting of ethnic Germans according to Nazi conceptualizations of a master race. According to Eric Schmaltz:

---

<sup>82</sup> German for "habitat" or "living space". Hitler outlined in *Mein Kampf*, the need for German acquisition of *Lebensraum* (land and natural resources) for the Master Race, and that it should be taken from the east – Ukraine was especially singled out for its agricultural potential (See N. Lower in Petropoulos & Roth, 2005, pp.185-204).

<sup>83</sup> Ethnic Germans living outside of the Reich.

<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, Elsie uses the term 'Polish-Germans' to describe officials whom she considered not kind to her in occupied Poland, as if to make sense of this by differentiating them.

new arrivals first took a bath or shower for “delousing” soon followed by screening, registration, and ultimately resettlement. ...*The examiners had instructions to be discreet, since Himmler<sup>85</sup> wanted the resettlers to think that these inspections were medical, not racial.* ...In many respects, the arrival of Ukrainian Germans into Warthegau revealed the stark racial dichotomy of the Nazi New Order. The city of Lodz by mid-1944 contained the last major Jewish Ghetto in all of Europe; only the Warsaw Ghetto had been larger before the Nazis liquidated it just a year earlier. As (Nazi immigration officials) processed the final waves of the Ukrainian German flood, a last SS “special action” deported nearly all of the remaining 74,000 Jews to Auschwitz’s gas chambers. (Schmaltz, 2008, pp. 10-11, bold type and italics added)

Within Mennonite scholarly literature, issues surrounding Nazism, from many angles, have indeed been given attention. At least within the Niagara study group, though, it is not clear that this discourse has percolated to the level of the general population. The Nazi aspect is one that has tended to not be discussed within families, and so misinformation and information gaps have been perpetuated. Arguably, this is another element of the *Fluechtlinge* experience that did not sit well within the accepted Mennonite narrative generally - an uncomfortable element, and a factor as to why their stories were not pursued.

Edna’s (#5, 2004) memories of the trek are fragmented. She was five years old when she and her mother and two brothers left their Russian home. They travelled for a period of 2-2.5 years, followed by a period of about 2 years in Germany before crossing to Canada. Some of her memories are not located geographically, while others are clearly situated. Sometimes she can’t distinguish between her actual memories of events and recollections of what she has been told over the years (“...unless I just heard it said so often that I think I remember it – you know, some things are like that”). She begins with memories of Poland: “I remember living in a school with other families and then we’d hear that the front is coming closer – oh, we have to move again. Just recently I found out that our first stop was still in the Ukraine, before we even crossed the border out of Russia, that we stopped - the whole trek - for two weeks to four weeks.

---

<sup>85</sup> Himmler oversaw Nazi police and security forces, including the SS and the Gestapo.

*I'm not sure why. But many times we felt safe, and then word would have it - always by word of mouth, maybe it was (from) the German army that was retreating. They were also helping us in various ways. Not that they were travelling with us, but they were very helpful many times. And they would say "Oh, the front is moving close, it's dangerous for us to stay here; we have to move on again further west".*

*I remember certain parts of the flight. The preparations...and at some point we took the train. But when we were in Poland we were almost sent back. But because we had some knowledge that we were going to be sent back the following day, that night Mother went to all her sisters and sisters-in-law and said, "We have to get out because we're going to be sent back tomorrow". So then we hurriedly went to the train station and got on the train and got across the border to Germany. So that was a very scary episode, and I must say I sensed my mother's fear. That was very evident. (At this point), the whole trek would have been in this village. Everybody was living with different farmers in different homes, but within this small village, so Mother didn't have far to go to notify her sisters and sisters-in-law that we needed to get away. But before that we were part of a larger trek. And there was more than one trek".*

*Bilingualism came in handy. Edna had spoken Low German (Plautdietsch) at home growing up: "We didn't want the Russians to know that we knew High German because then they'd consider that we might be collaborators with the German army." [CJ: In Germany was it the other way around?] "Right, because if we spoke (high) German we could pass as Germans and were not sent back to Russia."*

*(Mother) was like the mother hen. She would look after the children; that was her main function. Maybe it was spoken between the sisters, or unspoken, I'm not sure. (Aunt #1) was the next youngest one. Mother was actually the oldest of these three. And then there were the sisters-in-law who travelled with us. But mother was responsible for the children of these 3*

women. They each had 3 children. And (Aunt #1) was the strong one, like in planning and getting things done. She was sort of taking the role of the father or husband. She would go ahead and make arrangements when we would come to a new village looking for a place to stay and talk to the mayor - we needed to have papers, you know, and things like that. And (Aunt #2), she would help here and there, probably with the food preparations, and then there was (Aunt #3), the youngest, she would help with the horses and at one point she was left behind because of the horses, I believe, and (Aunt #4's) role, she apparently was also with the horses... Well, (my older brother) would have helped with the horses as well. (He was) 9 when we left.

In fact, when we came to Germany he was not able to stay with us. He was then separated from us and put with another family on a farm, but a different farm, because I guess he was 12 going on 13 and the farmers that took us in they probably didn't have enough room for another person. Not that far away. But still young, and after what we'd been through with the trek, and our father, I'm sure I would have missed (my brother). Because we were there for a long time and he was the father figure. I'm sure when my father left he said "You now have to be the head of the family. You're the man".

(The aunts) all got along very well and were all co-operative, I believe, and they all did what they could. And I know when we lived at the school and the camp and all it was like a community. And often times they would break out in song. It helped them through the difficult times. You know, hymns - often thankful, (such as) "Now Thank We All Our God"...And they sang so often, and some of the German songs that they sang on the trek, when we sing them again we get emotional - many of my cousins have said the same thing. (Edna sings and translates the song as) "And when I came again to sing, then everything was better" - or you have that hope that everything will be good. We sang that many times along the way. They broke into song, yes.

*We (cousins) would play together and (in Germany) went to school together and church together. In Germany we had some carefree times. We had our mothers; they had the worry of the future. You know, "Are we going to stay here or what are we going to do now?" MCC of course helped us out. I still feel quite close to all my first cousins that were on the trek together, partly because we are all similar ages, but also I think when you share a tragedy that you really are close.*

*(I remember) standing in line - food lines - for food. Food kitchen, you know? Even in Germany, because the war had just ended – it was in late '45 probably, early '46 – and MCC had set up some refugee camps in Gronau, and there was another one in Buchholz. And then eventually we were all placed in (German) farms, with Catholic farmers. They were very good to us. They gave us a room and they had an Opa,<sup>86</sup> too - like an old Grampa that lived with the young couple. And they also had a young sister and brother-in-law that helped with the farming operation as well. She was like the older sister's maid. We ate our meals with them, and I remember them all saying The Lord's Prayer. And the woman of the house, she would be making meals at the stove, maybe porridge, and she would pray. And I thought that was so strange. I thought she should stop and bow her head and say her prayers ( laughs). I was amazed that she would just keep working and pray at the same time! To me, as a child, I thought that was unheard of, I guess. (We attended) a Catholic school, but we were allowed to leave for the Catholic instructions (laughs) so we went out and had recess at that time. We did go to a church there in Germany at Christmas. I don't think they had Sunday School at those days. But that was fairly new and interesting to me when we came here to the Niagara Mennonite Church. I liked*

---

<sup>86</sup> 'Opa' is German for grandfather.

*Sunday school. And I was only turning ten shortly after we arrived, so I guess I missed about 4 years of Sunday school that people would have had here.”*

**Reflection Box 4.3: Religious Othering**

No, bowing heads to pray is not something I recall ever having been stressed in Catholic school or the Catholic Church. Edna, as a child, had been almost offended that the Catholic woman didn't bow her head when praying. I told her that I had found it strange when I first attended the United Mennonite church with my spouse, because everyone DID bow heads. Also, the practice of bowing heads and closing eyes when saying grace was new to me. We knelt at certain times during mass, and made the sign of the cross, which Mennonites do not do.

These outward signals that we belong (and which let us know quickly who does not belong), disguised as expressions of piety, are one of the things I object to about organized religion. Even Edna as a child, with no religious experience other than praying with her family, recognized a distinct boundary.

[CJ: Do you recall having heard anything about Canada before coming here?] *“I think maybe only in Germany because we received parcels of clothing and chocolates and gum and goodies. Not actually from Canada, but from North America -that was one to us in those days. One of Mother’s cousins had moved to Kansas from the UK, whereas the other brothers, had moved to the Niagara Peninsula to farm. But the one chose to settle in Kansas and they sent us parcels in Germany and we always looked forward to those parcels... Boy, that was special. Clothing and gum and probably chocolates, I’m not sure. Then I’m sure that we started hearing our mothers talking about going to Canada and that even we were excited. But I think we were all disappointed that we couldn’t all go at the same time. We were the first to go (of the extended family group) into an unknown country on a ship... I remember giving my cousins our dolls and toys and whatever we had in Germany because our common thought was that (Canada) was like the land of milk and honey. We had the idea, of course children’s ideas, that it was all for the taking, and when we came to Canada, or North America, everything was here for the taking. I wouldn’t need those toys; I would get new.*

*It was an 11-day voyage on the boat. Practically everybody was seasick except me, at least of our immediate family and relations. And here we could have had all those nice meals in the dining room! Oh boy, did we miss out! But I didn't want to go alone. I think I went to some friends of the family, or whoever was not sick at the time, to eat. I do remember going into a dining room and it was like a dream. In German, we say "Schlarafenland": like nothing we had ever seen before. Like, a banquet, even though this was not a luxury cruiser. It had been a boat in the war, but it had been painted and I think adapted for passengers."*

**Freda** (#6, 2004) tells her story: *"You could get ready with some food. We could slaughter some pigs and...we did roast a lot of breads and buns and stuff. And, we had to get wagons ready. There was my Mom, her 3 sisters, and Grandma. We were one group, sort of. We had 3 wagons between us. And I was 16. My next cousin was 3 years younger, and my brother, so they were 13. One of my aunts had 5, the other one had 3, and the other one had 5...(children). Some of them were already they could walk, but there was a whole bunch of them, of the little guys, that still had to be in the wagon, and of course Grandma, too. And we had to put a cover over these wagons, too, so that in the rain everything wouldn't get sopping wet. You probably saw pictures of (the Conestoga- type wagons). They probably had better materials to do that with than we did but somehow they (mothers) found stuff to cover and make a roof over these wagons to keep things dry. But I remember I pretty well walked the whole way...except now and then. I had to take over the reins to drive the horses, and then of course you got to sit.*

*I didn't mind that. At least I could sit. But when you're 16, for one thing, you're pretty much invincible (laughs). At least, I always felt. As long as we could get away and get away in time just so we wouldn't be caught again it didn't matter that it was cold or raining, or – I don't know, I had this terrible fear of being sent to Siberia. That would have been - I guess I must have picked up all these horrible, horror stories about people who had been there and come back - but*



*I pretty well felt, ya, as long as we are going that's the main thing. I couldn't get away quick enough. And – I don't know this, but I heard – that we actually didn't have a choice. They told us to get ready. We were going to be evacuated and that was it. But I don't think there was any resistance from any of them (adults). Two of my aunts, they stayed back because they were Ukrainian; they had married my mom's brothers. And they... had left the village before (we left) because they were somewhat afraid of what might happen. Because the rest of them were all gone, the village was pretty well - and we had to take straw into the houses so that could be ignited, too – burned. Most of the village was burned down when the Germans retreated, so I think at that point they left the village. Burned by the German occupation. (My grandmother's house) remained. I don't know why. And there was a school that remained - our school.*

*We actually thought, I think most of us, at least I thought, once we were over the River Dnieper, we were safe! That's where they would stop them for sure- the Germans. Actually the river was only I think around 100 km away from where we were. So that wasn't...this was still in September. But once we got across the river, for a month we were placed in villages. They evacuated the Ukrainians so we could have a house to live in and we stayed there. And up to then we had our cows along and they got foot-and- mouth disease; they had to be destroyed. And then they decided to put us into trains. Except for each wagon, and the horses... there should be one for each wagon left of the group...Like, my mom and her sister and my oldest of the cousins, they stayed with the 3 wagons and we were loaded by Grandma and my 2 aunts that were left. I remember looking after my 2 younger brothers when we were shipped by train to a Ukrainian village close to Poland somewhere, and we stayed there the winter. We were again placed with the Ukrainians. We were not (over the border yet).*

*Then in the spring, March, we were loaded onto wagons and taken again to Poland, to the western part they called Warthegau - that was a German place that had gone back and forth*

*with Polish to German, so... The three wagons, I don't know how far they got and then they loaded them into trains and sent them all the way into Germany. So my mom and my aunt and I think my cousin, too, they were in Germany that winter in Brandenburg, not too far I think from Berlin. And then we were reunited again in March in Poland. But I know my mom said that that winter they heard that we had been encircled by the Russians in the Ukraine and she thought she'd never see us again, and that's actually how some mothers were parted from their children. Their children were sent back to Siberia and they remained in Germany. So, but I guess the Germans managed to break that, or maybe it was just rumours, I don't know.*

*We got very little news when we were in Ukrainian village. This was a small village and we lived with... a Grandma, and a dad and a daughter – 3 people. And their mother was in Germany – they sent her to work in Germany. They sent a lot of Ukrainians to Germany to work in factories and she was one of them. And we all lived in a small (room) – I don't think the room was bigger than this - the 6 of us. We slept on the floor, and they had one bed – that's where the Grandma and the granddaughter slept.*

*We were four children. My brother \_\_\_\_\_ was the oldest of the men (17), and he was the only one. The next one was my (other brother); he was 13... The Germans were, they planned our route. They kept us away from the main activity of the army. We were never, at least I can't ever remember, being attacked or even close to being attacked. We would drive all day and come to a place that they had designated for us to stay overnight. Very often... at first, there was actually food for the horses but as it dragged on they had to go, we had to go, and scrounge for food when we got there because the horses had to be fed. When I think of it, I really don't remember much how we did that, how we kept clean, how we prepared our food. I don't remember that. I just don't remember being hungry, really. Cold, yes - cold and wet - because this was already into October and November and it got cold. But we had to walk most of*

*the way, so we didn't sit anywhere and shiver. We had to see that we got ahead. But they had things, the Germans. They were pretty good and organized so that we – at least this is how I see it from my perspective, and there are always different (perspectives) - some went through a lot more hardship. I can't actually say that I felt it was hardship. At 16, ya, we were getting away from the Russians and, ya, that was my main concern. And I think my aunts, too, and their children... you know, they knew too if we were ever overtaken by (Russians) our destination would surely have been Siberia.*

*(Mom had gone with the wagons) because she was the second oldest and I was already 16, so I could stay back and look after the boys - my bothers. And also her oldest sister's oldest daughter went. But the next one was my age. She stayed back with her younger brothers. She had 3 younger brothers to look after, where the next 2 aunts they just had smaller children. And of course Grandma stayed back, too. But she was always the one that went ahead, that 'did'. (She) was sort of the head of the family - of the greater, extended family.*

*We got to Poland, and (older brother, 17) first had a job and then once he was 18 he was drafted (by the Germans). So, when we got to Poland...I was 16 and he was 17 so he got a job in the city. So did I. This was German occupied. The post office, and a telephone, and a bus service - that was all under one umbrella. And I got a job as a telephone operator and he was with the bus. He wasn't driving; he was taking tickets and selling tickets, this type of thing... We got there in March and in August he was drafted, and so he went to war then.*

*Well, the Russians advanced and the Germans were again evacuating. They did that – they had enough to do, retreating (themselves). (I don't know) why they bothered, with the Germans, the ethnic Germans yet, to take them along into Germany...The German government,*

*they had enough to do to just to retreat and still be in the war but still they had plans that they shipped us.*

*Well I was working for the telephone so I couldn't go; they had to keep the lines open. They left in January on trains, my mom and aunts and brothers and the extended family. And I stayed back because we had to keep the lines open. So we left when we already heard the shooting. But we left by bus and the people that were in charge of the post office, telephone and bus service there, they were all from Germany. They were all, oh, around sixty (years of age). They were too old for the army, so they were there – they called it "Einsatzdiens" - to run all the infrastructure of the occupied territories. So there was a couple from Hamburg that were sort of house parents where we lived. There were a bunch of the people from Germany (these older people) and I went with them to Hamburg (Germany). We left by bus and eventually we had to board the train and somehow we got out of there and I went with them to Hamburg. So I figured my family was safe somewhere. Well, they came so close to being occupied again, or caught , within the Russian zone and just made it into the British zone of Germany , western Germany. I stayed (in Hamburg) for 3 months. But then, as the end of the war came close, I could leave because they were going to declare Hamburg – they were totally going to destroy it - they had talked at one time... And I had in the meantime found my family. They were in West Germany by that time, so I went. (They were) in the village in the province of Hanover. It wasn't all that far, about a 4 hour to 5 hour train ride from Hamburg. So I was able to get out and join them there. This was '45.*

*I think it was in the spring of '46, and then we went to Gronau, which is in Westfalia, to a camp there. In the meantime, in '45, must have been in November, the Americans made an agreement with Russia that they could repatriate all their citizens. So they were going to repatriate us and we fled to a camp again, to a displaced person's camp. They gave us all*

*different names so that ...and we were from East Germany places. I don't know how we chose places, but anyway...well, we had to go. I think they came with two trucks into the village this one day telling us we had to pack up; they were going to take us home to our villages in Russia. Well, we knew better. They had no such intentions. Our destination would have been Siberia. And we fled. We hid. Except they got a hold of my aunt...and she had a bunch of little kids. OK, they said, "We don't want you, but we want your kids". And so she was fighting with them, literally – physically. Well we had hid in attics and bushes and the people that we stayed with - "Don't you want to go home?" they said - they couldn't believe that we didn't want to go home, that we were fighting. And we were actually fighting for our life! So they left that day; they didn't pick anyone. My aunt just wouldn't go. They kept putting her kids on a truck and she jumped up there and threw them down again! So (laughs), anyway, they gave up. They said, "We'll be here tomorrow with more men and with more trucks. So we'll take you home". Well in the evening, the farmers there that we stayed with -they were really nice; they gave us wagons – well, they took us to the train station and we left for a 'DP' camp – the displaced persons camp. And you have to register there. We just told (that) we lost our papers, and here, this is where we came from – false names.*

*(Older brother who was drafted) was still not with us. He was somewhere in a prison camp. So then we were again put with some farmers until that must have been April, or maybe April and May when we heard about Gronau and MCC. So then we packed up and went there. By that time, I guess, the Americans and the British realized what was going on that not even the Russian Ukrainians wanted to go back that had been (in Germany) as workers. And we were only a very small part of the German population from Ukraine, so - and they stopped it. They didn't let them pursue this any longer, but in the meantime they had taken quite a few people*

*back. And then we went to Gronau and stayed there. We were once more placed with people in the villages till we could immigrate to Canada. That was '46- '47. Ya, we came to Canada in '48.*

*It was a matter of survival so they (group) really worked together... There must have been differences, but - when it came to the welfare of everyone - ya, they stuck together. And I think that's where I was so lucky: I had this whole group of people. As they say, there is safety in numbers. My mom's sisters and their kids, and Grandma, and we were just one. And through this whole – when we left in '43 till we came to Canada - we were always placed as a group in the same village. Not with the same people, they couldn't always accommodate that many, but in the same village until we started to be processed to come to Canada. That's when we split up. So we were actually very lucky to have this big support. And so did my mom and her sisters - they had each other as well as Grandma. That gave them, well, a sense of security.”*

**Gloria** (#8, 2004) was 11 when she left with her mother and sisters on the trek: *“The Germans had occupied and when they retreated we were told you should come with us. So they helped organize these treks and they kind of supervised; planes would drive over, kind of protect these people - all the German people. They want to take the German people with them home to the fatherland... The wagons had to be covered and things had to be gotten ready. So I guess the parents knew about it, but us children couldn't care less. We went to school and did what we had to do... That's funny, I talked to some cousins and they had this feeling of, oh, being scared and so on. But my family we moved a lot; we were never that we were so attached to a place or something. Because I never felt that there was a big loss of something...*

*The only thing they really could do is bring lots of zwieback. And we dried them, you know, roasted zwieback. Those were easy to take along and they wouldn't go bad. Do you know, I really don't know how we survived on that trek, because we always camped at night and we had food, somehow. But I guess they supplied it. We didn't really care when we were kids. So*

*we had something to eat, we didn't really care where it came from. See we always camped, I think, among villages. And the village people kind of had to help us out. I think that was the German army – they must have alerted them or something because we always had something to eat - most of the time, anyway.*

*(We travelled by) wagon, the whole village. There was a long - mile long – have you ever seen pictures of the trek? OK, the 2 sisters they were together, and then there were 2 single ones also that didn't have children. They were along, too, to help. So, five adult women. No men. We had some pictures (photos), but then a lot got lost in Germany when we always had to leave because the Russians came closer and wanted to take us back, and we had to leave in a hurry.*

*(We were first in) Poland, for almost a year. Probably in a settlement. We worked at this settlement. Like, the landlord he had a lot of workers and he put us into a school, the refugees. So we occupied a school. It was a plantation where they grew potatoes and poppies and all sorts of stuff like that.*

*(The women) worked on the plantation, because we had to buy food to eat. And we went to school. Like, we lived in the old schoolhouse. There was a new schoolhouse, and so we went to school at that. And (there was) the yard there. (My youngest sister) was 6 years younger, so she was 5. All old enough to be in school.*

*I never, to my mind, saw an argument or anything. They all had their responsibilities and they did them. I never saw any bitterness in the group. I mean there might have been, but I never saw any. I guess Tante<sup>87</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ was the outside person; she drove the wagon. (Cooking and minding the children) was shared. Well, it was done like in the olden days, the families.*

---

<sup>87</sup> German for aunt.

*Like, it wasn't like it was one person's responsibility; everybody pitched in. Whatever needed to be done they did. It was really good harmony amongst all the people.*

*A lot of (people) got sent back... to Russia and those have been very bad since they left Russia and were sent back, so the consequences were bad for them. I guess we were lucky; we were the lucky ones because we had to leave at night through the night just to escape them, and that's where MCC started coming in. Until then, we had nothing to do with MCC, until in Germany. The Russians were going to - were picking up all the people that came from Russia and send them back to 'the fatherland', they called it. And one night we left by train and there we contacted a person that was connected with MCC. And he sent us to Gronau, in Germany, and there were these big camps where people gathered. And this was deeper into Germany where the Russians wouldn't come anymore. So we escaped, not having to go back again. But a lot of people were sent back.*

*We left in fall of '43, and I guess we got to Poland in spring because there was still snow on the ground when we got to this place, Tremke. From there we had to leave in a hurry again because the Germans retreated and so on and from there we left by wagon but then we had to get onto trains to move faster and we settled in Germany. But when the occupation came, the Americans stopped right - you know the River Elbe, in Germany? -OK, the Americans stopped on this side of the River Elbe (west) and we thought they were going to cross the Elbe, but they never did. So all of a sudden the Russians were on this side of the Elbe where we lived, so we had to try and make our way out of there again. We had people helping. They got us passports that we were born in Westfalia - that that's where we were born, not Russia - all sorts of (German) people helped us to get out.*



*And then we got across the border from the Russians to the –I'm not even sure, was it the American side or was it the English? - because all three occupied a section of Germany. I think it was the English, because my aunt, when we got across, she worked at the – well, where the soldiers were in the kitchen there. She would bring the crusts. I mean the English didn't eat the crust. I mean that was the best thing! She would bring a whole pan full of crusts over! So we thought that was just great. (laughs) So that was in – I was 14 - I turned 14, when we left the east occupation to the west . So from 11 to 14 (years of age) in Germany. That was 3 years. And there, when we lived there, there the trucks came in from the Russians, trying to get us again, so we had to move further into Germany. So there we contacted MCC, and they pointed us to Gronau.*

*We found them (MCC). We listened. My mom and the aunts - Tante \_\_\_\_\_ , especially. They talked. And they found a Mr. Neufeld<sup>88</sup> that lived in Celle and he was in contact with MCC. Mr. Neufeld was one that came with us, like he was an immigrant also. Like, he lived in Celle, in Germany, and he was in contact with MCC and he steered us to Gronau. He was one of us that was on the trek also but he was sent in further to Germany already - he was from a different village. But I mean those people they knew most of each other even from different villages. They were all interrelated or something, or knew somebody. So anyway, he was from the neighbouring village.*

*Then we were in Gronau in these camps, and from there they sent us to live on farms so we lived on a farm until 1948, and this was in 1945. Ya, '45, that's when the war ended. I lived*

---

<sup>88</sup> Mr. Neufeld was described to me by another *Fluechtlinge* participant as “a patriarch for many of the refugees (especially women without men). He and his family also fled from Russia (to Niagara). He is the author of a very moving book entitled “Tiefen Wege”. This book tells of his very difficult experiences in communist prisons and his escape as the German army retreated” (personal communication, January 22, 2010).

*on the farm for about a year, and then my (single) aunts... moved to the city, back to Gronau, again. They worked in a factory there - in a cotton factory....weaving. And I moved in with them. I was about 14 at the time, and I did the spinning of the yarn in this factory. But I was 15 then already. OK, ya, a year on the farm, then 15 in Gronau...I was still 16 when we came to Canada."*

**Doreen (#9, 2004)** tells of her time living on a farm in Germany after the end of the war: *"In Germany we were with these wonderful Catholic farmers who took us in and treated us like family. They had a large family: 6 girls and 2 boys who were all teenagers at that time, or a little bit older maybe, early 20s - we were at one wedding. And they treated us just like we were part of them: we ate with them, we lived with them, and my mother at that point didn't have to work outside. She did the knitting and weaving and things like that in the house. She helped with the cooking, and also she just helped the lady of the house. They treated her very nicely, really, considering that we were refugees and, you know, they didn't really want us. They were forced to take in people. The German people were forced to do this; it wasn't that they chose to do this... It's very surprising you know how really good they were. Just a wonderful family. It was the mother really; she was a widow with teenage children, and then we came in. We were just very small, and actually it was just (next oldest sister) and myself, (oldest sister) had to go to another farmer. Just the 3 of us. Because \_\_\_\_\_ was older so she was sent to another farm as a worker on the farm.*

*It was a very nice time. We went to school there, and were totally part of the community. I don't remember about church. I know there was some church there, but I don't remember much about church at all, all through that time. Except for the women getting together and talking about church. We (all of the cousins) had a great time. We argued and fought like kids, like brothers and sisters would. Basically, we were like a family of 9 children, you know... We still are very close. I think (the women) really had to rely on each other so much that*

*it was almost like a couple. It was like a family, like a three-headed family rather than a husband and wife. They had a three-headed family. And they had their responsibilities divided up between the three of them and it worked very well that way.”*

**Agatha (1004)**, also has fragmented memories of this period, some of which are dislocated. Like others of her generation, she had no previous formal religious background, having lived her entire life under (atheist) Soviet rule. The story of her family’s journey, though, includes profound religious experiences, which would be pivotal to the courses of their lives and the lives of Agatha’s future children.

*“I don’t have many memories of the trek except that one stop in Poland. We were a number of months there, I think. And the one thing I remember is about the bombs dropping and having to rush into the basement when the bombs would go. And I guess the whole experience of my aunt \_\_\_\_\_. She was single, and anyway somehow she almost died going through a river with the horse and wagon. That was traumatic. Ya, and the bombs – like, I really remember the bombs and then the shelter. And then, actually, mainly getting to Germany. Well, I think we know it’s a miracle we got to Germany. There were drawbacks, crossing borders. I remember Mom having to give the right answer so they’d help us through and things like that. When I think of what the German soldiers did for us earlier on - to leave, and that. They did not have to. And yet, they saved us, really. What help! I just can’t think why they were so generous to us, why they bothered.*

*And the German people, too. We were placed with farmers there. And that I remember, when we were placed with these farmers in (village), and they were just as loving people as can be. Like, as a child, they were just as good to us and to Mom – their meals, and that. Like, I guess we hadn’t eaten a lot along the way, because their meals were like porridge and that, like*

*for breakfast – good meals. And they had a maid living with them who was lovely. We really took to her, and Mom and her were very good friends. My mom visited Germany later and, who knows how many times was with them. And here I thought that the farmers gladly did it. But now we know- that's one question we did ask their daughter – how come you took us, and this and that. "Well, we had to", they said. "We had no choice". But they didn't make us feel that way at all. And actually my sister, the plans were to put her in a neighbour's house, but our family said, "Nothing doing" so they took us in as my Mom with her three kids together. It was a Catholic family. I think the whole village was Catholic. Very nice. It was not far from our cousin's place where they were staying. We went to school there altogether. And I remember going on the field, like we grew potatoes there and stuff. In a child's eye, I guess it seemed all far apart (the farms), but having been there to visit now (I see) it's very close. As a kid, everything seems far away. Oh, we were just one of them; and yet they were forced! Well, I think the people we were with would have volunteered anyway, because - but a lot of them were forced to take in immigrants.*

*Oh, and Christmas! That one Christmas with the farmers! You can't imagine. And there they didn't wrap their gifts. Any were just put on the table. Once the kids were put to sleep, the gifts would be (put out), and then Christmas morning we could get up before them, I think, and go down there. Anyway, we never got much. I guess that's the first Christmas I remember. We each got a doll – it was so exciting! And the doll, those must be the dolls that we have a picture of – my sister and I with the farmer's daughter and their maid. That Christmas will always be special in my mind.*

*And the boat crossing the ocean – I love thinking about it. I have good memories. It's just the hard trek - the bombs and some of that. But then I was young enough that that I didn't really bother me. It's just the older ones that it would bother.*

*Well, I attribute our survival to God. That he led us all the way. Like, when we finally got to Germany - and this is what Mom told us later - and apparently when we were in that refugee building in Gronau, she said she was at her wit's end. She said she looked out the window and saw the rats and wished she was a rat. That's how low she was. And then I guess she met some people in Gronau when we were in a refugee camp, and they just showed her that you just have to admit Jesus into your life, and admit your sins and then you are born again: born again Christian.*

*And maybe I should just tell you about my life experience. Like, I became a Christian. You know, let's say I grew up in a Christian home, but, like, salvation wasn't stressed. And the bible says you know Jesus only in one way: I am the way, the truth, and the light - no one comes to the father but through me. That's what Jesus says. There's no other way but through Jesus Christ. You know, you just confess your sins and believe that he died for you and rose again and he's in heaven now and (will) come back for you someday. When we die we go to heaven if our sins are forgiven.*

*Anyway, we couldn't come to Canada in '48 when (other relatives) came, because my sister was sick. I think she had TB. So, she was in the hospital in Germany and I don't know why, but I was in the hospital. I don't think I had that, but I was in the hospital too, a week maybe. But there was a girl lying with us, in the same room with us. And one night she told (my sister) and I, she asked if we were ready to die. And I don't know, I guess I would have thought - I don't know what I would have answered - but by what I said I guess she knew that I didn't, I hadn't, made a personal decision. So she told us about if you don't love Jesus, if you don't accept Jesus - I don't remember all what she said, but she scared us! - then we're going to hell when we die. Well, you know we don't want to go to hell! Then, so (my sister) and I, we both prayed the sinner's prayer. And I remember: Ho! What a burden lifted! I just was a new person! Just*

*unbelievable! And I have gone backwards many times, I'm sure. But you know you confess your sins and Jesus takes you. Because the bible teaches us that once you have made a commitment then no one can take us out of God's hands. If you have made a genuine Christian commitment by accepting Jesus, then no one can. You can fall by the wayside, but I want to believe that even if you don't want a Christian life that God would say just before you die (that) he would give you another chance to make it right. You know, to ask Him to forgive. Like, now (my husband) and I are born again Christians and our three sons also became Christians when they were children."*

**Ingrid (#11, 2004)** started on the trek at the age of 6 and was twelve by the time her family's journey ended in Niagara. Her memories of the trek are sparse. Some were recently triggered by travels in Europe where her family was put up on a farm for over three years. *"I know they got this wagon and they loaded up. At the time we had a grandfather - that was my grandmother's father. And he was sick and he was in a wagon - they put him on a wagon, too. And he died on the way. There was my mother's brother - he was younger (18)... There was another brother (15) but he was sick, too. Grandmother had to take care of him, too. He (also) passed away, in Germany... My mother drove the wagon. Grandma looked after us, and the sick... And this is all I can remember: that we were on a trek. It was October. It was cold. Ya.*

*I guess we were 7 on our wagon at the time. They put everything on a wagon what they just could, ya, but I can't really remember what there all was. We had a cow, that cow had to come along. And then we were with the same trek as ("Edna") and all of them. We all left the same time. The village left together...Up to Poland... that's where we sort of went different directions. We went after Poland to \_\_\_\_\_ - that's close to Romania. And then from there we went to Frankfurt (Oder), in Germany. In a camp. And from there they put us to different farms. We split up near \_\_\_\_\_ to go to different farms and then they sent us to Luneberg. I think this is where we were not together anymore with the others.*

*And then there was ("Elsie"), we were always together with her... somehow we always stuck together. Mom always - different places she said where she went back and she found (Elsie) again and that they stayed together. (Elsie's daughter) was my cousin. See, that was a small village in Russia and everybody married. Ya.*

*Later, once we came to Gronau, and then once we came to (live on) the farm (my mother) worked outside on the farm. We were sent to the village close by. There we all had to work. I was 9. And we were there for about 3-3.5 years or something like that. Again, (Elsie), they lived close - you know, at one farm just to the right. And (my uncle) and my grandmother lived on another farm there. We all were on different farms... We did not go to Mennonite churches. The farmers were all Lutheran or Catholic. I can't really remember that we even went that much to church. We went to regular schools.*

*I went back to Germany just (recently). Mom had this little picture of where we all stayed in Gronau, at this farmer's. And she said, "Why don't you take this along?" Because, like, I went to Amsterdam, to Holland. She says, "That's so close by. Maybe you'll go there". I said, "I don't think so". Well anyway, once we were in Holland I mentioned it, and they said, "Well, sure, we'll go down there", you know. So one day we went down there and when I got to the house, I went to one door, I went to another door: nobody home. And I went to - at that time all the barns were connected to the house, you know? So I went in there and I knocked on one more door. And then this lady answers and she comes out. And then I didn't know what to say. And anyway, I just said, "I'm from Canada". She said, "Oh my! We used to have some people live with us and I often wondered what happened to them." She says, "(Mother's name), with her daughter". I said, "Well, the daughter, that's me". So naturally she was now grown up. At that time she was a small girl. She played with (Elsie's daughter). She was two years younger than I was at the time. And she was still there on the same farm. And she was now married there, and*

had children and grandchildren. And the parents, naturally, had died. But she got albums out and I said, "Oh, these pictures we have at home, too", you know? So it was quite a reunion.

And that's where we were for I guess 3 years before we came to Canada. And then I says to her, "This is what I could remember yet: this path that went to the top of the pasture", you know? She said, "Right there" (points). And there were two rows of trees. She said, "Right there where the trees are". Anyways, I had to, at the time - I was 12, ya? - with a bicycle, and then at the back I had 2 cans of milk – like, on the little wagon, you know? And every day I had to go and milk two cows at the trough. She said, "Right there". She said, "We don't have cows anymore; we have pigs". And then a lot of land, ya. So we were sitting where we could see it so clearly. I said, "Oh ya, that's where I used to go and milk the cows". On each side was a ditch, you know? And this was a narrow path."

[CJ: Was that a happy time?] "Yes, I thought it was."

[CJ: Would you say you have stronger memories of Germany than Russia?] "Yes. Yes. Ya. I guess when you are 6 or something... I know some people remember quite a bit yet, but I really don't. I always say what I know is more from Mom talking about it, ya, of Russia."

#### **Reflection Box 4.4: Silences**

Something that I've learned as I go along is to shed my discomfort with silences. When I first started interviewing, I would be quick to fill in a silence or a break in the story with a question. I've learned that if I wait, if I am comfortable with some silence, the person being interviewed will often pick up on a thought that's brewing, and take me somewhere they want to go. Often the silence is filled with their thinking, so that at the end of it comes an insight that would have been lost if I'd redirected with another question. The person I am interviewing doesn't hear it as silence. That person is just taking some time to formulate an idea, or a thought, or a question for me - or conjuring up a memory that's been the better part of a lifetime unretrieved.

**Lena** (#12, 2004) left her village at the age of eleven. "We were told that the Russians came closer, but the Germans again then before they got out all the way across the river – it's a



*big river, the Dnieper – they would bomb the bridge again so that the Russians couldn't just come across. So we had enough time to move out with two horses and one wagon. And we picked up food along the way. This was still in October, and the nights got cold. And then we came closer to Poland and there they told us to be very quiet, not to make any noises because – guerillas, they call them... ya, they would be in the woods there and so we had to have no fires, no lights. I remember that. And then we got through there. I don't know where exactly it was, where they finally put us on the railroad - but on open things- and then we left there.*

*And then some people would have to ...our brother he had to stay with (the horses and wagon) because that was all we had then, our horses and wagon that meant something yet. He had to stay. And the children and the women, and the stuff we had, would keep on going. There were some men there, too, but not many because most of them were taken. There was my brother and then some younger people like that and some older ones. Like, my older brother was already in – wasn't army, it was - the Germans would take a certain age group. And then... on the train, now we got bombed yet. They put bright lights on - it was like daylight - and the bombs just fell and we ran out of the train, and when it got light we saw everywhere and it seemed like nobody got hurt badly. So it was just like miracle, and then we all went back in and from then I don't know how the train could run after that. We couldn't – it was so bright with these big lights. They'd thrown them out - flares. It was nighttime. They throw the flares first and then the bombs. Anyway, that was only the one time. We were still in (occupied) Poland. It was Soviet planes.*

*Then we got into the German camp. All of these people - and there were more yet. And these people they had to leave finally. Like my brother, he had to leave finally too - leave the horse and buggy and the cow and the wagon and they had to all come out yet, too. It was quite a bit later, couple of weeks later."*

[CJ: What were your feelings about having to leave?] *"Oh, they were very good. I mean scary, but good. We did not want to stay there with - no German people stayed. I shouldn't say that, some were married to a Russian, because on our way back we met a lady that had married a Russian. She stayed and she was still there. A Mennonite German lady."*

[CJ: Was your destination known to you when you left?] *"We just wanted to go to Germany. That was the logical place to go because of the language and the heritage. Because our name was \_\_\_\_\_ (German surname). So when we came to Germany, that was like home to us. You know we were more comfortable there. We were very happy to just get to Germany."*

[CJ: How did you feel then when you had to leave Germany?] *"That was fine, because Germany is small and it's very hard to acquire a house, or a home, harder then even than what it is now... And my mother had a cousin here in Virgil. Actually we wanted to go to the States, California. I had an uncle there. My father had a brother that left earlier in '26 in the second wave (of immigration from Russia). And since our name was \_\_\_\_\_ (German surname), the states would not accept us. They did not accept German people at that time yet."*

[CJ: But did you have German passports made for you in Germany?] *"Yes, we were citizens - false documents. I don't know if that had anything to do (with it). They told us mainly it was (that) our name was technically German, so we couldn't. See, originally, we came from Holland... (but) there must have been some German on my dad's side."*

*There (were) a lot of different ways of...the way (the trek) happened. They're not all like your (meaning me, the interviewer's) relatives that everything goes smooth, and they stayed together even through tough times.*

*And then later my younger brother that came over with us went to this - he was taller than my older brother, and instead of (the older brother), they took the younger one. He'd just turned 17. And (then) we got the notice that he had died. They (had) conscripted him into the*

*German army – SS, even. And we got the notice that he had died during the war. And the oldest was still in Russia, and the middle one, \_\_\_\_\_, he is still here (Germany). See, he got saved because he was shorter. SS had to be a certain height.*

*And in between we had to move from \_\_\_\_\_, because the Russians were already in Poland, you know, that close. Oh, when I think about it. Then I think we still got on a train for little while. And then the trains wouldn't go anymore. And then we literally had just a little package, a little bit of clothes - and in the snow. And, oh, I still remember my shoes. They were always, like...(grimaces). So, we went closer and closer to the American side - that's where we wanted to go - by foot, and we walked through for it would have been weeks."*

[CJ: Where did you sleep?] *"The German people had left their houses and had gone away, too. We would find some barns. It was cold... We found places where people had gathered in schools and we would stay there and they would feed us and then they (Russians) would come closer again and we would find another school. So that was a couple of months, I think. We were a group of people that had come from our village; we were in bigger groups... We had only a few men there and they would go ahead and check out where we could stay for a night and if there is food somewhere.*

*And then at one point we were in this one barn and we were about 100 or 90 people. Like, my mother had us - we were already a little bit older - we could walk. It was very sad. And then at one point they had to decide – we couldn't go in a big group like that anymore - too dangerous. And too slow maybe, and maybe others wanted to go somewhere - like the biggest part (of the group), they'd known each other and were related to each other, but we were three families that did not have relatives there.*

*And then these three families they found one wagon and one horse. Somewhere, I guess (from) different farmers that had left. And then our stuff (went) in there, and whoever couldn't*

walk. So that's how we managed to outrun them, the Russians. They had overcome us already, us people, ya - the Russians. And through this whole - they had to stop then. And nothing was - you know, everything was going haywire and nobody knew what here or what there and that's when we packed up this wagon again and we went across the bridge. I think it was the Elbe (River), and we went across the bridge and somehow on the other side of the bridge was the Americans already. And we managed somehow - the men that we had on there, my brother and this older man - and through that they managed to say that, "Oh, we are going across the river, we want to go to a certain place where they all gathered to be sent back to Russia". So they let us go. And once we were across there we were free.

And we worked half a year at the farm in \_\_\_\_\_. We worked one summer there. And by then we had heard already there - there was always heard something - that there was a big farm and some of our friends were going there and they worked there. So we said we didn't want to stay there in \_\_\_\_\_ because we didn't have any, hadn't heard of any, Mennonites there. This Mennonite business, that really travels. Word of mouth. And you find someone. And then we came to (this) big farm. They would have lots of land and lots of work, and so that's where we worked and we stayed there and they gave us room and my brother worked there and I worked during the summer. You would haul wheat; you would haul whatever, in the fields. In the winter I went to German school."

[CJ: What's your memory of the German soldiers as you were going, and before you left?] "We really didn't meet up with many and they all were busy keeping the Russians back."

[CJ: So you were really on your own on the trek?] "Exactly."

[CJ: How would you describe the relationships among the adults on the trek – three families on one wagon?] "There was also an older couple with one girl. You just got along. There was no

*hierarchy. Everybody just did what they could. And I forgot to say that the other people that we left behind in this big barn, they all got sent back to Russia."*

[CJ: Would you say that a sense of community evolved among those 3 families as you travelled?] *"Yes. And we had different places. We had our work different, so was couple of miles apart. That we could walk. You didn't just jump into car if you wanted to visit, you had to walk if you wanted to visit, and we did visit each other. And this one couple that was the medium age, they left first from \_\_\_\_\_. They found a different place to work and somehow we got to - I don't know, did they write, or...? - and somehow we came here too. This was in Hesse...That's (where) the big farm was. And from there then we got to know that there (were) different camps with all Mennonites and by then the MCC had already, was already there and helped us. They connected us. This was to get them together into big groups, into big camps where there were couple of hundreds or more. And there we had again choirs and everything. But you would live in - well you had one bed there, and the next family here -one big arena, like, would house us. You got blankets, and then you would put blankets so you (had) your own little closets to change in.*

*That one (camp) we were at maybe half a year. You know, it wasn't bad; we weren't used to luxury. So I worked half a day cleaning the house for a doctor, and they would cook for you. And then my mother would try to improve on it a little bit... where (we) got a little bit of money. Well, I made a little bit. Maybe she helped in the kitchen."*

[CJ: What year was she born?] *"1901."*

[CJ: So she would have been only 41, 42 when she left. That's my age – hard for me to imagine.] *"Yes, hard to imagine from any point. I've never talked to anyone in this detail. My kids wouldn't sit still long enough, still."*

[CJ: Well, it's an extraordinary story.] *"Ya. And it's completely different. Well not completely, but it is different from the other women you know. But then when the Russians took part of Germany - like East Germany - then a lot of people had to get out, or they would even come across to the U.S. zones or to the British zones and try to get people there. And that's probably, (others) were in that situation. My husband's family, they had to hide. We didn't. We were already past. And when the MCC got in, then they started to process us to go to Canada."*

[CJ: So many did not survive the trek from Russia. Why do you think you did?] *"Well, first of all to God. But secondly, you know it's so hard to explain, or so hard to figure out and to pinpoint it, but we were a small group so we didn't attract as much, as many people. And this was yet before even - you know, they didn't know how far yet they would let the Russians in, but we got away just in time. But still, everything was in a mix-up. And that's how we got away- into the south of Germany, where(as) the Russians were more north to Berlin there. They had half of Berlin. And I see it on the map in my mind.*

*Sometimes I say my first 17 years - I was 17 when we came here - seems to be much longer than these 50 years that (my husband and I) are married. We just had our golden wedding anniversary. So, this 17 years... And once we were here, then things went into place."*

#### **4.3.1 Summary & Analysis**

In many ways these stories begin to speak for themselves when, as readers, we are conscious of the various theories of place being discussed here. The last sentence of the last story above, for example, reads as heavy with meaning: up to the age of 17 Lena had not ever experienced a secure sense of rootedness. When she finally did in Niagara, *"things (literally) went into place"*.

Here we see similar examples to those highlighted in the first-generation *Fluechtlinge* narratives: placelessness (“*We never were that we were so attached to a place or something*”), temporary places of security (“*our horses and wagons, that meant something yet*”), family as home (“*I had this whole group of people... there is safety in numbers. My mom’s sisters and their kids, and Grandma, and we were just one.*”), singing as home (“*they would break out into song*”, choirs in MCC camps), and place as associated with emotion (‘Siberia’ is synonymous with ‘fear’).

Networks of hearsay are apparent in the pre-conceived impressions of places held even by children (“*our common thought was that (Canada) was like the land of milk and honey. We had the idea... that it was all for the taking, and when we came to Canada, or North America, everything was here for the taking*”). Diasporic responsibility flows reach the girls via MCC camps, and hybridity is once again advantageous in terms of selective accentuation (false identity papers, bilingualism). The gender modeling the girls receive *en route* is nothing like what they would have received if they’d stayed put.

Positive references to Germany accelerate as we move deeper into this study. The second-generation *Fluechtlinge* stories are particularly rich in this regard, because they present us with a key factor in the evolutionary path of this diasporic community. Germany has evolved into a global centre – an alternative homeland - for the Niagara Mennonites. As put forth in Chapter 2, current discourse has challenged the assumption that diasporas are necessarily typified by an orientation to a national homeland.<sup>89</sup> Cultural diasporas, for instance, are understood to exist

---

<sup>89</sup> E.g., Werbner (2002; 2000)

without nationalist projects,<sup>90</sup> without the feature of longing for homeland and a movement to return. (Recall Figure 2.2: Common features of a global diaspora.) A less understood phenomenon, however, is the “reterritorializing” of a diaspora around an alternate centre (Goldschmidt, 2000). Werbner has written:

the mistake that diaspora scholars make...is to think of the national homeland as the only possible sacred center and place of pilgrimage for a diaspora. Stuart Hall confesses that when he first came to London he felt that he was returning home, a sense widely shared by intellectuals throughout the British Commonwealth for whom London remains a cultural Mecca. For Francophone African intellectuals, Black Paris is a hub of aesthetic creativity. As diasporas gain historic depth, they acquire alternative sacred centers, either complimentary to or in tension with the original homeland. Perceptions of where sacred centrality lies also change. (2000, p. 15)

We see clear support of this when Lena states “*when we got to Germany, that was like home to us*”, even though she had never set foot there before. Gloria refers to both Germany and Russia as ‘the fatherland’: “*(The German army) want to take the German people with them to the fatherland*”, “*The Russians were picking up all the people that came from Russia and send them back to ‘the fatherland’, they called it.*” ( Is she qualifying the application of this term to Russia by tacking on “*they called it*”?) Further, in terms of the notion of pilgrimage, all first and second-generation participants (of both Groups A & B), and all but two third-generation participants, have travelled to Germany as adults - several as many as 5 times. Many had never been there before; they knew it only mythically, as through diasporic impressions. Their experience of Germany, then, is of a mythical centre. Several *Fluechtlinge* participants (like Ingrid) have returned to visit the German farmers who billeted them. Some third generation participants, as adults on their own, have even visited and been hosted by the families who billeted their parents and grandparents in Germany - strangers to them, personally, prior to these visits.

---

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Cohen,1997; Hall, S.,1999, 1995; Gilroy,1993,1995,1999.



These are examples of diasporic nodes and networks created by mobility, yet not involving connections with other Mennonites. They're altogether outside of the ethno religious circle. With a cursory glance, the shared cultural connection seems to be the German language; there's only marginal ethnic overlap, since Russian Mennonites are predominantly of Dutch lineage. But the *Fluechtlinge* stories demonstrate well that there is more to the connection than language. Incrementally, Russian Mennonites came to more strongly self-identify as Germans during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of several factors: Soviet classification of them as 'ethnic Germans'; religious suppression; periods of German occupation which brought relative security to Mennonites (e.g., Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 1918; and WW2, 1941-3); use of the High German language as a means of survival during the flight; and, for the refugees, the idealic experiences of home in Germany which these stories describe. The fact that Mennonites were already in diaspora in Russia, and that none but a few who married Russians remained in the villages after WW2 (repatriates were sent to Siberia), effectively eliminates tension between Germany and the natal homeland, allowing for their complimentary coexistence.

A final significant aspect raised in these stories is the role of faith and religion in self-identity. The first exposure to organized religion came to this generation in Germany; the impact of this becomes clearer in the next chapter. Agatha, though, stands out among this cohort as an example of someone whose experience of religion en route proved life-changing. Via exposure to evangelicals in an MCC camp, her depressed mother found a way to embrace hope and carry on with her difficult life by accepting Jesus as her personal saviour. Agatha and her sister were only 9 when they shared a hospital room in Germany with an evangelical (*"She told us about if you don't love Jesus, if you don't accept Jesus – I don't remember all what she said, but she scared us! – then we're going to hell when we die. Well, you know, we don't want to go to hell!*

*Then, so (my sister) and I, we both prayed the sinner's prayer. And I remember: Ho! What a burden lifted! I just was a new person! Just unbelievable!"*) Under the circumstances described in these stories, who wouldn't have wished for some form of salvation? From the perspectives of Agatha and her mother, they were in the right place at the right time.

This completes the collection of journey stories. We turn our attention now back to the *Russlaender*, as they begin descriptions of life on the other side of the planet: the Niagara peninsula of Canada.

## 5. Taking Root: Life in Niagara

In this chapter we continue to focus on the materiality of everyday living. As with Chapter 3 (Seeds: Back in the USSR), experiences of 'place' herein include the dimension of rootedness and fixed location - in this case, Niagara. What was life like for these immigrants and their parents at arrival and through the years? How did it change over time? What types of work did the peninsula offer them? What does family interaction look like during the Niagara period? How did interactions with the pre-existing Niagara community (Mennonite and non-Mennonite), steer and flavour cultural identity? What are the dynamics and connections between the separate waves of Mennonite settlers to the area? How did the increasing presence of Mennonites affect Niagara? The interrelationships between these people and this place are described in their stories, and embedded within the accounts are insights into shifting perceptions of normative gender roles and gender performance through the generations.

Recall the three elemental features of our analytical framework: **CULTURAL HYBRIDITY**, **SOCIAL HETEROGENEITY** (internal divisions), and **PERFORMANCE & CO-RESPONSIBILITY** (*Performance* refers to the flow of goods, money, and services within the diaspora; *Co-responsibility* refers to an ongoing transnational orientation). (See Figure 2.3)

Here we begin to hear of *Russlaender* reaction to the *Fluechtlinge* refugees they sponsored, and *Fluechtlinge* reaction to their hosts. There were tensions between the waves, and not exclusive to Niagara. However, as we see with the second-generation *Fluechtlinge*, and those born in Niagara (Chapter 6), the young *Russlaender* and *Fluechtlinge* would eventually obscure the tensions through intermarriage. When a minister in Manitoba was once asked about this problem in his church, he answered, "*O, dee Oole jachten sich, enn dee Junge befrien sich!*" (The old quarreled, and the young got married!) (H. Loewen, 2000, pp. 242-3).

### 5.1 *Russlaender* (Group A, First Generation)

The *Russlaender* stories of Niagara often illuminate the lives and attitudes of their parents and grandparents in addition to their own. We gain insights into the early settlement conditions for *Russlaender* on the peninsula where, at varying scales, the participants and their parents all would work as fruit farmers. Most had a history of agricultural labour, but none involved commercial fruit farming; in Russia, fruit was grown for family consumption in private gardens and orchards, perhaps with the exception of common watermelon fields. In this chapter, we begin to hear of entrepreneurial, exploratory, and technological efforts by Russian Mennonites regarding the evolution of fruit farming on the peninsula.

The stories of the *Russlaender* corroborate and augment Mennonite history of the peninsula as documented elsewhere.<sup>91</sup> These detailed excerpts expose the humanity beneath the broader brush strokes of historical accounts, while highlighting heterogeneity within the diaspora. (See APPENDIX VII: Map of earliest settlers near Virgil, 1934-1939)

**Harold** (#13, 2005) and his family came directly to Vineland in 1926. He and his wife would later work as farmers, and Harold also served in municipal and federal politics. *“We came to Vineland because there were some (Pennsylvania Dutch) Mennonites there. There’s one in particular: Chris Fretz. He was one of the more prominent ones... I still remember him. Chris Fretz had a bunch of greenhouses, grew tomatoes and flowers and all this kind of stuff there. And so that’s where we came to. That was probably the main reason, because of Chris Fretz, and others like him... And then there was a Rittenhaus family; they were quite prominent in Vineland. In fact, my father, he came here and worked for the Rittenhaus family. They weren’t Old Order -*

---

<sup>91</sup> F. Epp, 1982, 1974, 1962; Friesen C. A., 1984; Paetkau, 1986, 1977; Regehr, 1996.

*they'd kind of assimilated. (There was also) a farmer named Duncan. Now he was an Anglo – or Scottish, actually – and my father worked for him until we came to Virgil here. And then the farm after that was a farmer by the name of Wismer.”*

[CJ: What did they farm at the time?] *“Fruit: strawberries, raspberries, peaches. That was all fruit in that area (Vineland). There was no fruit, or very little fruit, grown in this (Virgil) area. Anyway, there was a Mennonite fellow who had come from the Ukraine as well, and his were very wealthy people - they owned railroads, built trains, they had factories. They came to Vineland as well. And (this) fellow, by the name of Mr. Peter Wall, he could not understand that these people had been wealthy people in the Ukraine, and here now they're – they used the term “walking with a lunchbox”. That was below their dignity to “walk with a lunchbox”, you know.*

*My father's first experience was at this Duncan farm. They grew rhubarb. And rhubarb has to be pulled when it's early in the morning before it wilts - even if it rains a little, that don't hurt it. And I still remember as a kid that (Duncan) would come and pick my father up to come and work on the farm. And my father was not used to working, because he was a bit spoiled by his mother (in Russia). He didn't have to work. Working was not his thing. So, he did that, but he wanted to go back to Russia. He said “No, in Russia you don't work like that”- he wanted to go back! And there was a number of people, friends of his, that had to talk him out of it. This one day it was raining, so my father slept in - he said, “Oh, we're not working today”. All of a sudden there's a horn beeping outside, here's Mr. Duncan coming to pick him up. And my father says, “It's raining”. “Oh, so much the better! Keep the rhubarb nice and crisp!” So here he was working out there - they give 'em raincoats - and that's the kind of stuff that was his entrance into Canada. And it wasn't very nice as far as he was concerned. You know, nothing but hard work.”*

[CJ: How old would your parents have been when they emigrated?] *"My mother was probably 22 or 23. I think she was married at 18."* [CJ: So, her mother would maybe have been in her forties then - your grandmother?] *"Ya. But back then a grandmother was literally a grandmother: sat in her rocking chair, maybe did a little bit of knitting or crocheting or something, but they did NO work. The kids did the work – their daughters and that, and making the meals. The parents were looked after hand and foot and my wife, she'll tell you some horror stories about what they expected – and what they demanded! – from their kids to look after them."*

[CJ: Was there any feeling when you came of a rivalry between existing (Pennsylvania Dutch) Mennonites and the newcomers (Russlaender)?] *"No. I found there was no rivalry between them. They really hosted us Russlaender – that's how we were referred to. That means we were Russians."* [CJ: What is your actual ethnic line? It's an unusual Mennonite name.] *"I got a little bit of each. On my father's side it's Dutch. On my mother's side it's German. So during the war here, my mother and all her (siblings) had to...call in every so often- they were almost considered spies or something. (We had) Russian passports. And, oh, you know, the kids in school as we got older they would kid you, "Oh, you Russian!" and that. The language we used was German, because our heritage is German by and large. On my mother's side it was strictly German. But if we want to go back a little beyond that, on my father's side, the Dutch side, there's probably a lot of Spanish. Our name is Spanish. My uncle tells a story: if you know the history of the Spanish Conquistadors, you know they overran Holland for a while. And when they were driven out of the Netherlands, one of the soldiers stayed there, and that's where our name comes from." (laughs)*

[CJ: Did your parents end up buying land and staying here?] *"Yes. You know I mentioned Peter Wall before? When he came here he bought a farm in Vineland area. There was farmland there*

*that they started farming right away. And he said that he could not understand that all his fellow Mennonites were "walking with a lunchbox", you know? So he went and searched around for land and he came to the Virgil area and he bought some land up here... He divided it up into ten-acre parcels for everybody. He called the people together, and he sold ten acres to each one at a reasonable price that they could afford because none of them had any money. Then when that 200 acres was finished... he went to another one (on) Niven Road. That was 120 acres, and that's the farm where my parents bought in. There was a big old farmhouse there. And my father, because he had a fairly large family... bought that house with 12 acres of land.*

*He started farming tomatoes, strawberries... And then they had other kinds of vegetables that we grew: lettuce, carrots, and various other things. In the meantime, they planted trees: peach trees, cherry trees, plum trees. Took them about 5-10 years before they would bear, so we were growing these cash crops for now. Then we would go into Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) when we harvested, and peddle it door to door. My brother and I would go door to door, "Can we sell you any fresh vegetables today?" And then (we'd) go to the storekeeper (who) would (also) buy some. And the storekeeper finally said to (Dad), "Hey listen, you're expecting me to buy vegetables. You're going down the street selling them to my customers!" He said, "I can't sell any to them. So my father quit peddling them, and just sold to the stores for a few years until the trees began to bear... Strawberries continued on and raspberries continued on... One day the temperature was so hot. We were out there picking raspberries - and I'll tell you if you've ever done that that's one of the hottest jobs there is -we came in at noon. After, we went out and looked. It had been so hot, the sun had burned all the plants and the berries. So he said "That's it for the day - you can go swimming". And we took the afternoon off. But that was never, ever done. During the day we had to work. So we went down to the lake. That was*

*our place for swimming, Lake Ontario, across from Newark Park. But those years were pretty tough. But we were happy. It was happy.*

*We made a living. You know, you had a cow and a horse and pigs, and butchered in the fall. That was another thing that come with him from the Old Country was a 'butchering bee': you had a pig or two and you'd butcher it – that's meat for the winter, you had that fresh meat. And, oh boy, there's nothing better than those fresh sausages that we used to get. But what we didn't like, as kids (was) we had to sit and smoke 'em. My father built a smoke house down on the bank of the creek, and way down below you had the fire, and you had a tunnel where the smoke would go up. And boy, if we ever let it burn! We couldn't let it flame, only smoke. We had to pull out the sawdust -we had straw and sawdust. That was what we used to smoke these. And we would have liked to open up and take one of those sausages out, but my father knew exactly how many were there - we wouldn't dare! So anyway, that was our livelihood at that time: fruit trees. Started with the cash crops, and then with the fruit trees.*

*We felt there was a better livelihood and a more secure market in fruit. You can grow vegetables anywhere in Ontario, almost... –You can't grow peaches and cherries and that everywhere. (On my farm) we grew a little bit of everything, all fruit. But it didn't take me long to see there's no money in plums, no money in pears, no money in grapes – you have to have a certain type of soil, and we have the soil that lends itself to growing the tenderest tender fruit: peaches and cherries. So we went into peaches and cherries...Now it's mostly grapes (here). BUT, things are gonna change... the farmers are gonna find out that with their grapes. We've had some pretty mild winters in the last 10 years, milder than average. Last year and this year we had the old fashioned kind of winter that I remember as a child. Meantime, a lot of people have put in grapes that never grew in this area: too cold. They're frozen. They didn't get a crop*



*last year; this year it's even worse. So some of those real tender varieties are going to be a thing of the past, I'm afraid. You may have noticed some great bit towers with a windmill on top? That's to keep the air moving when it gets too cold...so you don't get the effect of the frost. My sons won't believe it...don't think it will work. We don't grow grapes; it's too labour intensive... this has been a bad year for grape growers, and there's a lot of them. And not only the buds freeze, the whole vine freezes. That's the worst of it. There's a lot of peaches frozen this year, too, but that's only they buds – the trees will come back.*

*Mennonites were very instrumental in changing this into a fruit growing area. It used to be cattle and grain. Even some tobacco was grown here – very little, but some. But the Mennonites were very instrumental. Now I don't know if that's something that came from the Ukraine, that they had in their gardens. You know, they had some of these fruits in their gardens, cause their climate was good, and a similar climate to here - and a beautiful spring, and that's what you need. But when the Mennonites came here, like my father, they planted fruit trees. Now in the last 5-6 years or so, all of a sudden everybody's going to grapes. They're taking out peaches, which I call the main crop, and growing grapes. Now this year some of their tender varieties are not going to be too good... Cherries are winter hardy, but they are less spring hearty. If you get a frost (in spring) that's a danger. We've got the lake effect here, and the escarpment... It keeps the air moving. That's what these windmills are doing for the grape farmers. And there was a study done at the Vineland Horticultural Station by (a Mennonite) Dr. John Weibe. He did a study on air movements and (identified) frost-free areas. (There are protected areas) and in between is a frost prone area where you can get frozen out. And that's showing up this year.*

*We harvested (cherries) with a machine. We bought a machine instead of getting 100 pickers, you know. And (the machine) was expensive, but it's always there and it's still there. So we did that, and the processor said, "We want hand picked cherries." You know, that sounds good... but in fact, the hand picked cherries for the processing market were not as good because you'd pick 'em into a basket, dump 'em into another basket, and that basket would be sitting in the shade or sometimes the sun all day until you take 'em to the plant, into cold storage. Now with the machine, it takes maybe a minute and a half to shake the tree, you put it into a big tank of ice-cold water and you take it in. These cherries now are protected, and they kind of float... This all evolved. At first we'd shake 'em, and didn't put 'em in water... This all comes from California. They were developed for nuts, then they adapted it for apples. And then in this area, we adapted it for cherries. Now there's nobody who would pick cherries by hand: everybody shakes 'em, and the processors accept them and know they're getting better quality."*

[CJ: Was it important to you that you children marry Mennonites?] *"No. We would have been happy if they would have, but we figured the most important thing was love, and that they get along. We have two that married Mennonite... The other one married a Ukrainian. The other, she's an Anglo... And our oldest daughter's husband is an Anglo. And we get along super well and love every one exactly the same."* Harold's wife, Erna, joins the conversation: *"Our grandson, he married a Japanese girl... I never look at her as Japanese. I don't see her Japanese. She's our grandchild. It doesn't really matter. They love each other, and what's more important? So often we've seen families where the parents will say, "Oh you're going to marry a French girl, or an English girl!" This is awful!"*

Harold: *"Well my father had a different attitude and maybe that's why we have this easier attitude. He one time made a comment, and that hurt me, hurt all of us. He said, "I'd rather*

*have you marry a bad Mennonite, than a good anything else". He obviously couldn't have thought that one through very well. That was a bad attitude. But that was something that came from the old country, when they lived in these villages isolated from the rest of the world."*

Erna: *"He used to bring people down here all the time, all his friends used to come. And the first thing he'd say was, "Das ist Russenbauer" – "This is the Russian peasant".*

Harold: *"See, her mother was Russian... That's a discussion that has been taking place within the Mennonite community. I think now it's dead."*

Erna: *"Well, that generation is gone now, that had that feeling." [CJ: A feeling toward Mennonites who married Russians over in the old country?]*

Harold: *"Yes. I'll tell you, they were racist. They were racist. Very much they were racist. And that to me, I think, is the danger from living in such isolated communities. See, we have some of that right here in Queenston.<sup>92</sup> We got the little village here, and when I ran for politics, I went into Queenston ...and somebody said there, "Well, you'll never get elected.". I said, "Oh? Well election day will prove that." And I was elected in spite of them. They wouldn't vote for me down there - and that's only a mile away from here - I was an outsider! And on top of that, I was a Mennonite and that was a foreigner. That was bad. I went back, in the meantime. I said, "What's the problem here? I got elected. I'm your alderman. What can I do for you?" "Well", he said, "they got the neighbourhood talk going that you want to get the Mennonites to run this whole town". Somebody started something. I said, "That's the last thing from my mind. I was*

---

<sup>92</sup> Queenston is a small community on the Niagara Peninsula.

worried about getting me into the council, never mind getting all everybody else! That's the kind of talk you get..."

Erna: "When we moved here when I first got married, I heard there was a little store in Queenston, so I went (there) to buy a loaf of bread. And I was lucky to buy a loaf of bread there - everybody moved out of the way, they looked at me like I was contaminated! I came home and I said to (Harold) - that's before I knew any of this - I said, "I don't know what 's wrong, but I came to the store and everybody cleared out"."

Harold: "In Queenston, they still have a little bit of that sentiment, even today - United Empire Loyalists. If you hadn't been born and raised in this little village here, you're not one of us."

Erna: "But see when I came there, they'd heard a Mennonite family moved to the River Road, and it was a no-no. This was only for the wealthy people. There were invisible boundaries."

Harold: "Let me give you another example of what happened in this respect. To get a little bit more of an income in the wintertime, I'd go out and plough the driveways and streets in the village of Queenston. The town hired me to do that, and I'd get some individual (jobs). And there was one guy there, president of (a winery), very wealthy person, had a beautiful home. In fact, prided himself that he paid the highest taxes in the whole town. And I says, "That's fine, we need the money". (laughs) I don't mind kidding people once in a while. And so as things got better, I bought a new car. I bought a Chrysler Imperial, which was a pretty classy car. And he was angry, and he wasn't fooling! He said, "You have no right to own a car like that!" He says, "You're a farmer." I said, "What do you expect me to drive, my tractor?" See he needed the farmers to supply grapes for wine, but he didn't want me to own the car because he had one like that. That was in 1968." [CJ: Do you still feel any of that in this area?] "No."

[CJ: What do you recall about when the (Fluechtlinge) came?] *"Well, they helped them. They hosted them, and worked together. There's only one little fly in the ointment. And I have told a number of them already: they come here, they lost everything they had in the old country - as we did. We lost everything. And now they have to regain it quickly - you know, the opportunity here. And so, right after the war things were going pretty well, lots of jobs were available, and so they did well. And I said, "You know, you guys have forgotten your background, where you came from". I think more so than the (Kanadier) and (Russlaender). They remember their backgrounds well, and they didn't seem to be quite as eager to do well quickly as the (Fluechtlinge). That's the only difference that I see, but otherwise there's no problem. We get along real well. We're all in the same churches. You know, the church is made up of people from the (different immigration waves). And now the church is made up of people from the community; the church that we attend, there's probably as many non- Mennonite background, ethnically, as (ethnically Mennonite). And that happens in all the Mennonite churches."*

Erna: *"Ya, but see in our church, now we have 2 services. "*

Harold: *"Ya, but it's got nothing to do with ethnicity. The 2 services is because of age. They're both in English. One is sort of traditional and then there's the new group. We have the traditional service for us older people. I don't like the music, and we don't attend that. You know, you got drums, and the music is louder than you can hear. I said, "Listen you guys: God can hear even if you play your music softly"."*

[CJ: None of that nice Mennonite four-part harmony?] *"No, there's none of that. That has always been important to the (Russian) Mennonite community, that four-part harmony. But, you know, that was not always so (with other) Mennonites. I had an uncle that came to this country and was so happy he was in a free land. He was up in Winnipeg or somewhere up there. Went*

*to church and he sang full voice, a tenor. Well it didn't take long, people were all looking at him. You know, "What's going on here?" And that was NOT done in that particular Mennonite community. THEY all sang in unison. THAT was from the devil!" (grins)*

*Erna: "My aunt, too, same way. My dad got dressed for Sunday church wearing a white shirt and a tie, and my aunt came, and she says, "Oh, we don't wear ties out here." And he says, "I'm going to church". Well, he looks around - none of the guys wore ties. Just shirts and their vests, and that's how they went to church."*

*Harold: "Oh! Wearing the tie! The tie was considered the devil's lead rope, and the devil leads you around!! That was the saying."(laughter)*

*Erna: "And the singing was same out there - all in unison. Cause I know my dad was singing, too, and the minister actually stopped and he said, "There's a devil trotting around here!" And he spoke this Pennsylvania Dutch language, and my dad was sitting there looking around, and all of a sudden he realized it was him! (laughs) So he came home. "Man, he says, "I didn't realize going to church was like the devil."*

*Harold: "We have quite an interesting history! Well, we've had to get to know one another, because you probably know that some of the ('Old') Mennonites - there was several branches - and we joined into one conference. So we're all together now. And there are a lot of them in the K-W<sup>93</sup> area. And we've had several ministers from the ('Old'), you know. Of course, now we're in one conference so we've accepted that. So we're starting to get together more than we ever did*

---

<sup>93</sup> K-W refers to the adjacent cities of Kitchener-Waterloo in southwestern Ontario.

*when we first came here. And I guess we overlook some of the differences and we work on some of the things where we are the same."*

[CJ: What are some of those things that are the same? Are they more religious or cultural? ]

Harold: *"It would be a little bit of both. It would be some culture, but not so much."*

Erna: *"You know, when I think about it, quite a bit. Because even let's say our cooking or baking stuff. Our generation is still (preparing traditional Mennonite foods) - it's about half and half. (Although) the younger ones, really, when I look there is no Mennonite cooking in there, maybe the odd piece... Well I know with my girls, when they got married, it was simply Canadian way of doing. But now... all of a sudden the girls are saying, "Mom, I'd like to have this recipe" - the pierogis, or rollkuchen and the borscht."*

Harold: *"See, all of a sudden pierogis and borscht and that become important. It used to be a poor man's lunch! But you see, things are changing with the eating habits. Even our generation is changing on all kinds of things. We are becoming more assimilated as a Mennonite group."*[CJ: How do you feel about that?] *"Sometimes it's talked about in circles that we're getting too assimilated. We're supposed to be apart from the world. And well, all right, what's 'the world'? 'The world' isn't certain groups, and it isn't the rest of Canadians. There are some that would be considered part of the world. But I don't have any problem with it."*

Erna: *"You don't need to follow the whole thing; you pick and choose."*

In 1934, **George** (#14, 2005) arrived in Niagara with his parents, after ten years on a farm in Manitoba. *"My brother had bought ten acres of open ground, just like a lot of people started here. And so we built the house... A lot of (Mennonites) originally lived in Vineland. And then in the fall of '34 there was a movement - there was land available here (in Virgil) - and this*

*is where a lot of them bought land through Mr. Peter Wall. Vineland originally was developed by the Pennsylvania Mennonites...* [CJ: Were there a large number of Pennsylvania Mennonites here when you came?] *"Ya... (but) a lot of them, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> generations joined the United (Mennonite) Church. When we came to Niagara the Pentecostal was quite strong in Vineland, too. But the First Mennonite Church is still there.*

*I was 18 old, and in (Manitoba) there (had not been) much social life. When we moved to Vineland I got acquainted with some friends that I knew that had moved here from (Manitoba). And the second Sunday that we lived here, I walked to Vineland to what we call the centre. Some of my friends were there. And the second Sunday, I met ("Gerhardt"), and we've been friends to this day. And later on they (Gerhardt's family) asked me to work for them. I was overwhelmed with the community and social life that we had, that young people stuck together. But as far as work, when I look back we should have stayed in Manitoba. Grain farming would attract me more than fruit. But I was here, and young, and I enjoyed life... I met a lot of friends. This area has been my home."*

[CJ: What was the nature of your association with the non-Mennonite community in Niagara?] *"Well basically, how should I say, through work, but social- no. Not like it is now, where younger people integrate more with other people... Our social life, visiting, was more or less with our own people... (My first wife and I met) when I first met some of the friends. My wife's brother was in the group with (Gerhardt), and that's how we met, in Vineland, through the church. We always got together, you know? Her family was much the same as my family. We had no difficulty in joining together. Family closeness was important to my wife's family and to my family, so we always were very close. Church was important to us, and a lot of get-togethers.*

*In early years, a lot of the girls worked for people in the city in housework. And (she) did housework. And then we married (age 25) and we had a little cottage on my parents' yard, and*



*that's how we lived. We were married in 1940 and in December of 1941 I was drafted into alternative service during the war, so we were separated for 2 years. After I came home, (Gerhardt's) family had some land, and they gave me an opportunity to buy some acreage and we built a house on there and started farming. We started with growing tomatoes, strawberries, and planted orchards. And I did trucking. But then (Gerhardt's family) started bothering me to come and work for them - actually before I got married I worked for the (them) cleaning strawberries, and as a helper on the truck - and I eventually became sales manager of (their large canning factory).*

*(All along) I had this little farm, when I was originally field manager - like I had time off, and they would make sure I was looked after, you know? And then (my sons) grew up and they farmed there until the Seaway expropriated us for the new Welland Canal. That's how I got rid of the farm, but I still stayed with (the canning factory)...I am grateful for (Gerhardt's) family in my life. I have only a grade 8 education, and I started working for them and they gave me an opportunity to advance... And they were always good to me... (Gerhardt's father), he was like a father to me. "*

*I asked George about the continuity of Russian Mennonite traditions in Niagara. "Well, you integrate and over the years you get into the new food recipes. My 2<sup>nd</sup> wife - she was a refugee after the war (Fluechtlinge)- my children really liked her Mennonite food. My first wife was quite young when she died... Ya, everybody still likes Mennonite food. Even my grandchildren's spouses they still love it." [CJ: And who is still cooking it in the family?] "When we're together my daughter is. Ya, the 3 girls, they stick together. I had my children really stick together, even though they live apart. There's a very close relationship and a very harmonious relationship. That I have to be thankful for."*

[CJ: Do they all still attend church?] *"Oh yes, all three are baptized... but none of their children go to church... I sense my grandchildren appreciate their parents and their upbringing, but what saddens me as a grandfather – and I don't know if I should say this – is that (my son's) children do not go to church. They're highly educated, but... that's their lifestyle."*

[CJ: Was it important to you that your children marry within the Mennonite faith?] *"Well, you have to be honest. You were concerned what happened. But they're all Christians, and that was number one."*

[CJ: Have you ever returned to Russia?] *"I never had any desire to visit Russia. Some of my brothers went back, and I, as a young boy that actually saw what happened - revolution, war – I don't want no part of it."*

George's good friend **Gerhardt** (#15, 2005) talks of his early days in Niagara. His family's story is full of examples of connections - help received, and help offered to others - both within the community and internationally. His family had been sponsored in 1930 by a relative in Kitchener who had arrived from Russia a few years previously. After a week, the family moved to Vineland where work was easier to find. *"There we rented a little house that we paid five dollars a month for. And our across-neighbour, he came to see who moved in. We didn't think we were that poor, but we didn't have no chairs, just boxes, and tin cans that we drunk our coffee from. And he announced that in the church and then on Monday we had people come in and bring us bedding and chairs and tables and different things. So it was quite something.*

*And then I got a job. I was 14 yrs old. I got a job at the antique shop and my brother got a job at (a) butcher and other brother worked at the Rittenhaus farm. And my job was cutting grass, washing dishes, and different things. And this was in May, and the grass was kinda high already. Had to mow the grass on a slope. And here, when it came to the kitchen window, she's (owner of antique shop) waving there, and I said, "Jeepers, I'm going as fast as I can". (laughs)*

*And then she came out and takes my hand, and she says, "It's time to eat!" I couldn't speak a word of English, you see? But then the third day she took me in the car, a '29 Chev. I'd never been in a car... This was Mrs. Duncan. Right by the cemetery in Vineland, that's where her place was. And then she took me to Beamsville,<sup>94</sup> and I took a pair of shorts and shoes and a shirt and then a watch (so) that I could tell the time. And that was \$5.00. And I worked there for 2 years. The mail wasn't delivered; I had to walk to Vineland to pick up the mail, and look after the furnace... And then they had a little restaurant. They fed maybe 8-10 people a day and then, (if) there's any left over, I had a container and I took that home. And my mother would make some stew out of something what was left, what nothing go to waste, you see. And this is how you help. My oldest brother, he worked for a dairy farmer in the winter time just for board: 5 o'clock in the morning till 5 at night, 7 days a week, and this is just for board. And I got \$2.00 a week, and our rent was \$5.00 a month. So, a boy of 14 brought home more than the rent, you see?*

*I just went to night school. We lived next to a school, and the teacher she came - my sister, she went to school - so (the teacher) came and checked us out, and then she... give us two nights a week night classes. And she didn't get paid by the government. All we had to do was get her from the place and walk her home. She didn't want to walk alone." [CJ: Is that how you learned to speak English?] "Learned to speak English, ya, and I learned to read and write. And afterwards this Mrs. Avril - when we were in business and so on - if we met, then she always was proud: "I'm the one that taught them English". She took quite a credit for it. She was very proud of it. And she always came if there was any do, even to funerals or something. She always was there. She took us as a family. Ya, and she's gone, too, now. Ya, those were the days.*

---

<sup>94</sup> Community west of Vineland on Niagara peninsula.

*And Mrs. Duncan here - I worked there two years, and... always wanted to thank her for the kindness that she did... " 35 years later, Gerhardt looked her up on a trip to Kingston, where she was living. "I went to the telephone and I called Mrs. Duncan up, asked if I could come and see her... I said, "I was a boy in 1930. I worked for you. Can I come and bring my wife?" She said, "Yes". She told me where she lived... so got there, and then she realized who I was. She lived all by herself. And she said, "Why? Why after all these years?" I say, "You were so kind to me". So, and she cried a lot. Then I told her about the \$5.00, and she never charged me for the \$5.00 for the clothes at the time. I said, "Those \$5.00, there's a lot of interest. I want to take you to a steak house or to a restaurant"... I took her by the arm and I said, "35 years ago you took me by my hand in your new car". Then she asked me, "What are you driving?" "Cadillac Eldorado." "Oh, that's an expensive car!" she says. (laughs)... She cried a lot, and I cried too."*

Gerhardt kept in contact with Mrs. Duncan, and came to look after financially her in her old age.

*" My dad, he was a farmer. The 1<sup>st</sup> summer we worked out (for others), and then that fall Peter Wall was in the land development. He had a farm there, a 100-acre farm, and he was dividing it up, and he sold my dad 16 acres. And the down payment was \$1.75. That was the down payment. Dad was on the farm, and my mother, and then in the evening when we came home from our jobs (we) helped on the farm. My sister assisted too, in the evening. We first planted trees, then we had strawberries, and we had tomatoes, and stick tomatoes and then, well, that was more or less it, and asparagus."*

[CJ: Was it fruit growing there originally?] *"No, it was all clean land... And in Russia it was everybody for themselves, you see? Fruit trees in their own orchard or garden. Here, Dad bought a horse; he paid ten dollars, for the colouring. In the horse was ten dollars, and that's how he started. Then my brother, the first winter he was working just for board, then the second winter they bought a Model T truck for \$50.00. Then we started hauling hay, straw, manure,*

*and wood. And wasn't very long we bought a bigger one. So we got farming, and now went into the trucking business. Then in 1934, we were the first one that bought some land here on Hunter's Road, 33 acres. That was for my 2 brothers and my brother-in-law, each had 11 acres. And then my 1 brother moved here to Virgil, and the other one kept on trucking and had a 16-acre farm. After 3 years somebody came and liked the property and paid us \$4000.00 for 11 acres, cash. And with that \$4000 (as down payment) we bought a farm in Port Dalhousie: 75 acres for \$17,000.00.*

*And I got married in 1938 and I stayed - I was trucking and my wife was running the farm. We had 16 acres. On that farm where we come to, we went into peaches and grapes and cherries, and apples. So then in 1942 - that was the war year and you couldn't sell the food too well; the market wasn't there - so I got the idea of starting up a little canning factory, not to waste the ripe stuff. We started first to dry it, and that didn't pay off too much, but changed to canning. And then Ottawa said no business could be started in the war years. Then in '45, I had my heart attack, so then I couldn't pull my weight. So we bought another farm in NOTL and one brother took (it), the other brother took the St. Catharines farm. Then when we were separated 3 weeks, we got a letter from Ottawa saying we could go ahead with our canning factory. And then the (NOTL farm owner), she backed off, so then they paid us double the amount that we had (paid for) down payment. We figured it's a Godsend. Then we all got together again. My brother-in-law worked for Peter Wall in his canning factory. He then came with us - with the big family - and he had enough money, so (that) between 4 of us we had \$24,000.00. With \$24,000.00 we started a canning factory. And today it's unbelievable. Like, our boiler was on wheels. We hauled it from Toronto on a flatbed. \$500.00 for the boiler. The building there, it looked like it was a chicken farm. And here we started in '46. We started to can.*

*We had 50 women. We canned and didn't have no sugar, everything was all water packed... Well, then the factory grew... We started very small and we became the biggest private canning factory in Ontario. Started out with 50 women and when we sold out we had 1200. But - I don't know how to put it - I always kind of feel that the employees, if they have confidence in you... that made you strong. You see, not saying, "Oh, I did it." No, it's all together, you see? Not to take the attitude, "Well, you employ". No, we kept all of us as friends and we still - people that worked for us - we still get together. And not to have people (think), "Well, 'so and so' is just labour", you know? And the thing is that you went through it yourself. That you don't impose that on somebody, or think "(I am) the boss, now do what I want"... Same as the queen: we honour the queen, but the queen has got nothing to say - it's the people.*

*See, I've been to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, California, all over. I was involved in the fruit farming and getting ideas from all over the world, varieties and everything, getting advice. In 1966 I went to New Zealand, Australia with a group of American farmers. I was the only Canadian. You see we were in the canning business and we'd get stuff shipped in from Australia and (we wanted) to see why they can bring it in here cheaper than we can raise it. And the canning was completely different than here - all the employees were shareholders. It motivated the workers. And the key men they didn't go dressed up, they were in working clothes themselves. Also their season is so much longer in Australia, the picking season.*

*And another thing is what my dad's theory was. He knew how to keep the family together - work together - the family. Not that he was bossing, but he would discuss things and then say, "Let's go do it". It's not that he would do it, you see, but he inspired it...*

*Ya, those are the days. It wasn't easy, when you think back. Amazing what you went through, what you did. A lot of hard work... When we got married, our refrigerator was the well. That's where we let the milk down, and the butter, (to) keep it cool. And then there came*

*iceboxes, and after the iceboxes came the fridges. But we weren't so demanding either. Another thing is at the time when I was young, our friends when we were invited, you each had a piece of bread and jam and butter that was your meal. And you were invited. Today, someone says, "Oh, I got nothing". It was different; you shared, at that time, what you had. But today, it's different: "I got nothing. I gotta go to the store and buy something." It's a different feeling at the society. You were all poor at the same time, you see? You get along a lot better when you're all the same (in the) group. Some come ahead, and then others stay behind, and then it gets frictions."*

Gerhardt describes how early problems with the reliability of some ("English") workers on the farm came to be addressed. *"I figured something had to be done, so I had heard about Japanese people.... And looked up this Japanese, and then 3 families (came) right away in a week's time - they were up north in the concentration camp. I let my (local) help all go except my driver. So I had Japanese people coming in, and that worked out very nice. For quite a few years we had Japanese people working for us. Never had any problem.*

*When we went in the canning factory work, then we had Niagara Fruit Orchards Growers Association – they had the meeting about labour, and they think we should look into this offshore labour. We started checking out. We had to start out with St. Catharines city council and get an OK, and then we went to Toronto – provincial. No problem. Kingston (Jamaica), Ottawa - then we had problems... But we went there to ask, "Let us try it". Not that the government had to put anything into it, "Let us try this project". And then it came out that, since we belonged to the commonwealth countries, they let us try it. In 1966 was the first year and I was the first one that signed the first application for the Jamaicans. The first season we had 254 Jamaicans coming into Ontario. 44 of them we had... See, all these Jamaicans, they were all hand picked. They were all ambassadors from Jamaica to make this thing work, you see. Then in*

'67, in February, I went to visit them so I got quite an experience living with them in their homes, their villages. So I really appreciated that they appreciated it a lot. Like, I came to Kingston, Jamaica on a Friday and I had the idea I would rent a car and then go out to see these fellas. Then the Department of Labour had their man at the airport, and they picked me up and he said it's not that easy, the roads are not marked. And so the (Jamaican) Minister of Labour gave me one of their fellas and he took me around and I (saw) 90% of Jamaica, he said I had seen. And these fellas, they lived in villages, and up the hill in shacks. So we started out Monday morning and the 2<sup>nd</sup> stop was this father who had worked for me, and there was a whole group of children and neighbours there. And usually (there) was the post office or grocery store, (but) this was all just shacks. And here this girl kneeled down and said, "I hope my dad can work for you for years to come, and if it wasn't for you I wouldn't have this dress and my mother wouldn't have that hat, and I hope he can come and work for you". And I broke out in tears and I said, "I have to thank you. If your dad didn't come help pick the crop I couldn't been here." So that was quite emotional. To go and see in their homes... They lived in the hills and they had to walk up to where they lived, you see? And all these fathers that come they're not out in the city; they're out in the rural area. You see, the city fellas there are just as bad as here: they don't want to work. They were quite nice... 8 years still I had the farm. I always had Jamaicans. That worked out very well. And the Jamaican government - every year they'd come to Toronto for a trade show or something - they would always ask us over for a dinner to meet the Minister of Labour or Prime Minister of Jamaica. Worthwhile. Ya, and now they claim 6000 people in Ontario now, these offshore labourers. We had 44.

My local help, I have to give them credit, too. They was very good. They fit in quite nicely with them. Sometimes (others might) say, "Oh, this is the coloured people. Well I don't want nothing to do with them", you see? But my local help that I had they took them in and we



*became very close friends.” [CJ: Did you mostly hire Mennonite people locally?] “Ya, mostly Mennonite, ya.” [CJ: And in the canning factory?] “Ya, canning factory, a big percentage of them are Mennonites.*

*My dad, in 1949, he went to Paraguay. His mother and his stepfather, they had to go to Paraguay (in 1920s) and he wanted to go to see his mother’s grave and stepfather’s grave... My dad knew quite a few of those people in Paraguay since he had worked... with them... in Moscow. When he came home here, he said, “There’s no future there, we gotta help them, help them to get out.” So, we did bring quite a few people out from Paraguay...from Brazil, Paraguay - and from Europe, besides. And sometimes we’d say “Dad, be careful”. But he said, “Somebody helped us and we have to help others”.*

*They had one year - the people who came after the 2nd World War (Fluechtlinge) - they had the picnic in Queenston, and they had invited my dad and my mother, and there was Mr. Wall, and there was Mr. Theissen from the Mennonite board in Winnipeg. And there they announced that (our) family had brought more people over than the province of Saskatchewan! All in that, we had signed for 245 families. And the thing was, we couldn’t give them all work, but the government was - at first when they started then they had to come and see what kind of living quarters you had - but then, after, they had no problem. As soon as our signature was on, then there was no problem. And so, out of those, we only had 3 families that we had a little bit of problem with. We didn’t sponsor them always with money, but just some relatives would come and signed up, and that’s how we helped a lot of people in the Niagara district here.”*

**John** (#16, 2005) talks about his father’s success as a farmer and land prospector, and his own family life in Niagara. *“When we came to Canada, Dad had no money and 5 kids at that time. So we 5 kids all went out to work, picked strawberries, worked wherever we could, and had*

*to bring every penny home, and Dad would keep it all together... And my sister went to work for a basket factory... once they took her out to work in Waterloo in the wintertime as a housemaid for some richer people. And she had to bring every penny home, too. Things were tough at that time... And then he bought the first 12 acres on Lakeshore Road... a 12 acre farm with nothing on it, just a house, barn, and fruit trees. And all the Mennonites here, the older ones, said, "You're crazy to pay (that much) for 12 acres". But my dad says – like, we had lived in Germany, in Hamberg, on paved streets in the city. Well the Mennonites around here, they could only buy empty land, started cheaply. And Dad says, "I got 5 kids. I want to be close to a school. I want a paved road". He says, "I'm not going to live on a big muddy road, like on Niven Road". And it paid off for us because we grew all kinds of vegetables, we were on the farm already, and we could haul them out on the paved roads... We could haul out our asparagus and produce to Virgil. And then he bought and sold more farms, more farms, and his last bunch was 200 acres that he bought here: 2 farms with 100 acres each. And that sold very quickly. Mennonites came from all over, and Polish people. They wanted to buy good vegetable land, fruit land, and this was it. It's the same thing as (Gerhardt's family) did, split up big farms, cause no one could afford to buy 100 acres of good land - that's \$10,000.00. That'd be like a million dollars today, pretty well.*

*And Dad could buy and sell - the old English people around here they wanted to get rid of their big farms, because their children went to university; they didn't want to farm. And dad took a chance - he bought a lot of the big farms around the area.*

*So Dad bought... a chunk of land here, 200 acres...and then he subdivided it right away: 5 acres, 10 acres, 2 acres. And then they built houses on them, these Mennonites that came from Saskatchewan, and from Germany. And they eventually paid for the land, and then Dad went and paid for it to the English people. And then Dad usually had a yard and 25 acres left for*

*free, so he became quite wealthy in 6 years. He came in 1929, and by 1936 Dad was considered a wealthy man. He bought 2 tractors right away, and two trucks - one for me, and one for (my brother). So we did tractor work and trucking work and all kinds of stuff like that."*

[CJ: Did he purchase his land through Mr. Wall?] *"No, but I'm sure he learned from Mr. Wall. He knew Mr. Wall from Russia yet. And the Walls made a lot of money buying and selling big properties and cutting them up, and so Dad did the same thing. Dad built a reputation among the old English people of a real honest real estate dealer, agent. 'Cause if Dad promised them he would bring them \$10,000.00 at the end of the year interest, he would bring them that, whether he had it or not - he would go and borrow from the Dominion Bank. And so they knew that if they sold 100 acres to my dad he would be bringing them the money. And that's all that they really wanted. They were retiring... And it worked out real good for Dad. Dad was a bit of an entrepreneur. He took the risks where a lot of the other Mennonites (said), "You're gonna go bankrupt, you can't pay (that much) an acre". Well, you know what land is (worth) now. He took the risks and he made profits. And the other poor people who couldn't bring the down payment, well, they got by, but they didn't prosper in the same way. A lot of them they were afraid, they'd bought their 10 acres, and then they started making payments on that, and paid for it... Well, they all prospered, too. You can just see - this whole area, well, it's changed here tremendously."*

[CJ: How much fruit farming was there before the Mennonite settlers?] *"There was a lot of land planted out, but really badly planted out. They had one peach tree here with one big arm out, and another one over here...and it's nothing like (what's done) now."* [CJ: Was that knowledge that they learned over here, or...?] *"Ya. They didn't bring it from Russia. In fact, ("Gerhardt" and other Mennonite farmers), they went to California to scout out how they grew peaches on a hundred and some acres, eh?"*

[CJ: Did your mother work on the farm here as well?] *"Oh yes. She is one of the 1<sup>st</sup> ladies that drove a tractor, and got her license to drive a car on the road. Some of the old people at our old church, and the other women, didn't drive cars yet until way after. Mom was one of the first. But she was a pretty lively lady, pretty brave. She'd gone through the revolution there."*

[CJ: Would you have associated much with the non-Mennonite community in Niagara then?] *"Not really. See I think they were afraid of us 'cause we were gobbling up their land quicker than they even wanted to sell it, eh? And so the old English were afraid that they'd get left here with a whole bunch of (slang for Russians), and Mennonites. Some didn't even let their children play with Mennonites. (My wife) was telling me about the (English family) – they were quite rich, big farmers. And (my wife's friend) went home with the (English) girl, and the old lady wouldn't let her come in the house even, for fear of bringing diseases, and lice, or whatever."*

[CJ: Did this change over time?] *"Oh sure. Sure it does. Just like my daughter. Her husband, he's a Catholic. I didn't allow that marriage either - but I lost. And it's a good thing I lost; he's a great guy. He's the best, couldn't get better."* [CJ: Did you attend the wedding?] *"Oh, of course. I was a little biased, but I wasn't that stupid; I wasn't going to lose my daughter. 'Cause we had gone through the same thing, with my wife and I. My wife comes from the Brethren Church (Mennonite Brethren, or MB). And they said, "OK, you can get married in our church, but you have to join our church. I says, "No, I'm not going to join that church". That's a complete different, separate issue. I guess I recognized the hypocrisy of some straight-laced people who used Jesus' name every second word, or sentence, but they weren't that religious in their daily practice, eh?"*

*And you should never judge a church, I guess, by a few bad individuals – we've had them in our churches, too. We split off from our big church. That was a different story completely, and I was always pleased that I had a hand in that. We chose to break off and become Bethany*

*Mennonite Church, because we needed the English language, eh, for our children. 'Cause our children couldn't speak German, and the Paraguayans when they came in from Paraguay<sup>95</sup> – that was a whole generation later - they needed German language, cause they couldn't speak English. They could speak Spanish, but that's no good here. And our old people, they needed German, and we needed English. Friendly break-up.*

*(In my family) the older three kids that came from Russia, we spoke Low German with our parents. And between us kids we spoke English. But (younger siblings), when they were born in Germany, then we all spoke High German with them. [CJ: How did you learn to speak English?] "Oh, just by living. We had the school." [CJ: Did your parents learn to speak English?] "No." [CJ: Were you able to pass on the German language to your own kids?] "No. We did that with our oldest daughter and the other daughter, but our son, he was a slower learner, and I thought, "This is ridiculous, you know, he has a hard enough time learning English and why teach him another language that he'll probably never need? So we didn't teach him German. But the other girls still (can speak it)." [CJ: And how about their children now?] "Oh no. They don't know it. No, we're switched over completely to English. It would look funny now if we had forced German on (my son) and his Chinese wife. And their kids: Chinese people speaking Low German... (smiles) [CJ: I wonder if they'll teach Chinese to their kids?] "Yes, they do."*

*[CJ: How did you meet (your wife)?] "Back in '44-45, since we had 2 trucks, I would get up at 5:30 in the morning and I... picked up all the women on the truck to go down to (work at Peter Wall's) canning factory. They peeled tomatoes and pears, strawberries. And then at 5:30 pm I would go down there again, pick 'em up and take 'em all back home again. And it was funny: I saw these two girls, pretty girls - my wife and her sister they're really good looking - and*

---

<sup>95</sup> Paraguayan (Russian) Mennonites began immigrating to Niagara in the 1950s.

*they all wore white smocks and these white aprons. And the other women all looked dirty and icky, you know leaks from the tomato juice and stuff, and (my wife and her sister), after working 7-8 hours with all the slop wagons around in the canning factory, they always looked as clean as they went in the morning, you know? Wow... And I could always see them climbing up the ladder up to work. And there was no tomato stains on their nice looking legs, and their dresses were clean. So finally I made a contact.... We used to haul hay around, too, and (my wife's mother), because she had 9 kids, she needed hay, so we hauled a load of hay there. And when I brought it to her I saw the 5 girls- all good looking. And (my wife) said the first thing that I said to her was, "Has your cow eaten all the hay yet that I brought?" Memorable words! (smiling). But anyway it was a start, and I finally got her.*

*The whole church was against it. Her mother was against it. [CJ: Because of the different churches?] "Oh sure. But we married in their church. Because those people from the MBs knew me quite well. I had done a lot of tractor work for them. And every Sunday Dad would put me in a car with a list: you go to Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, or Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, and so on, and collect 10 dollars here, or 5 there - had to collect money from all these poor Mennonites who couldn't pay for it upfront. We hauled gravel, hay, we hauled fruit to the canning factories for all the Mennonites and English, anybody. So that's how we got to meet. But I was afraid of (her mother), of course. There was no father there; he had died in Saskatchewan. So she had those 9 kids all by herself to raise. She came from Saskatchewan with 9 children. Oh ya, she was a marvelous woman. I'm astounded what some women can do, eh? From Saskatchewan, with no money, she brought 'em here- 'cause she had one sister here. And here there was lots of work for little fingers - picking cherries, picking strawberries, canning factories. Whereas, B.C. (British Columbia) wasn't that relevant yet. So she brought her family here, and her sister helped her get started here. They lived close to the canning factory in NOTL here. Ya, all the kids they worked hard, put it all together, and*

*they bought a little house, on 2 acres of land. They grew tomatoes for the factory there. And (she) remembers to this day (they'd) pick tomatoes on Mom's 2 acres, and then (they'd) put the bushels on little coaster wagons - two bushels on - then dragged it to the factory. They'd weigh them, and they kept track. And then they made a few dollars with that, too."*

**Peter** (#17, 2005) moved to St. Catharines at the age of 22 (1942) after being advised that working in a feed mill in Winnipeg<sup>96</sup> was damaging his lungs. In this interview excerpt he talks of military service, social life and links carried from Russia, aspirations for the next generation, and the tough work of running small fruit farms in Niagara. *"I quit there and wrote to my brother who was living in St. Catharines already, and he says, "Ya, there's jobs here". So, I came here and I've been in this area ever since. Now mind you in between I was in the services for 2 years. Well, it was called (active duty), but actually we were in a posting camp in Holland when the war ended. I got that close to it and then the war ended. So, we had to stay in occupation Germany for a little over a year. Which was a good thing, actually, for me. I saw what it's like after a war, what the aftermath of that horrible conflagration was. And not only that, it was a good deal in that we could go on leaves every three months. And I went to all the countries I could get to, so it was a good thing. I went to Ireland and Scotland several times, places like that." [C]: You didn't choose the alternative service?] "Conscientious objectors? No, to tell the truth, I don't know if I would have if I had known all about it. But I knew very little about it. For some reason I wasn't up on the information on it, and so when I got my call I just answered it and that was it. If I'd have been, say, a member of a church group here at that time and all the guys that I was with would have been gone – well, I found out later that a lot of them had gone already when I came to this. But they had been well informed. Their pastors had gotten all the information that*

---

<sup>96</sup> As described in Chapter 4, Peter's family emigrated from Russia in 1926 when he was 6.

*was necessary and the young men had been told what their choices were. I didn't have the pleasure, so I didn't get to it, alternative service. I don't know just whether I would have done it. Certainly after I saw Europe I kept telling myself there just is no possible excuse for justifying war. But, what are you going to do with guys like Hitler? ...After I was in the service, and I got to look at all these other countries in Europe, as far as I was concerned, that's it: Canada – that's my country, and I don't want to hear of any other one...*

*My first wife, I got to know her when I came from Winnipeg...in 1942. I came here just in time for my sister's wedding and I met her there. And it came out later that in the village where I was born in Siberia, there was a big flour mill there – it sounds strange because you think, "It's Siberia – what are they doing with a flour mill?" But they grew good grain crops and stuff; that they could grow... And I found out after I had met her here, that her parents were actually involved in running that flourmill where my dad happened to be working. And later on we met here and got married. It was weird... It gets kind of strange when you think about it, how fluky it is that some people got together, intertwined from way back, and different paths to get here.*

*We had 5 children. Well, by today's standards that's a big family. Things that we couldn't have growing up – well, not only growing up, but getting along in life – you came out of the depression where finally, hey, some people could actually afford to educate their kids. Where our families couldn't. At least ours couldn't. Well, my younger sisters and brothers managed to finish high school, but by the time I was finished public school that was it. You were out. My age group, you were out at work and that was it. We tried to get our kids a little better than that -the best we could do, if they were willing and able. I remember one year I had three kids in university and it was like being on a treadmill. And I was a wage earner – boy, (laughs) you weren't making much progress in those days. But I don't care. We sent them to school to give them a chance – a chance we thought we had been deprived of."*



[CJ: What were your first impressions of Niagara?] *"To tell the truth, I was rather disappointed. But mainly that was because I just didn't know what to expect. When I came to St. Catharines it was a city of 3000, and a lot of it was old. It was an old city by comparison. Where I'd come from (Winnipeg) had been at that time a relatively new city and quite a bit bigger, so when I came here and I saw some of these places that were kinda old and some of them kinda falling apart, I was really disappointed in the general outlook of the place. But you know how that is: eventually it becomes home and that's it. As for the land, I loved the actual fruit orchards and that. And when I came out of the armed services... I bought land. Like, your veteran benefit that you get after you leave, you can either take it in cash or in other things, and I bought 25 acres of land off the East and West Line. I did like the fruit farming.*

*I would say there were more Mennonite farmers than any other kind of farmers. But they were willing to work small farms, and work very hard to make them go, whereas the established older farmers, they didn't have the families, to work. Mennonites seemed to have the larger families, and they had 'free labour', you might say. And they made small plots work, which the older, the other, the established farmers couldn't do. So a lot of (Mennonites) bought land from the established growers and made it work. It was difficult, hard work. Long hours. And even after the war it was a real struggle to make a living out of it. I can still remember in the early '50s, I was still farming then, and I was at some of the meetings where some of the farmers got together and they said, "We can't make a living at this". We were selling a huge heaped basket of peaches for 25 cents. They said, "It's costing us more to grow than what we're selling it for. Something has to be done." So those were the first organizational meetings that they had for fruit growers, and it grew from there. Eventually, they did have an organization that allowed them to have some say about what they would sell stuff for and how it would be marketed. So today, most of these organizations are directly related to our marketing boards..."*

[CJ: Were the Mennonite farmers very influential in these initial boards?] *“Oh yes, they were in there. Quite a few of them were in the organizing end of it, and after they got it organized quite a few of them were some of the leaders in it.”*

[CJ: What role did the pre-existing Mennonite community play in your life at this time?] *“The communities were more or less just starting in this area. I spent my first few years in St. Catharines and there was no real community, but they did start having churches – oh, they’d rent a hall or something. I remember on St. Paul Street there was a dance hall – it was used actually as a dance lesson hall – and that’s where we had church at one time, for a while. And then Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ bought the first church on Carleton Street and after a while that got too small, and built another one... A lot of the social activities for people our age are still church-connected – friends that we know from the churches. And we still, even to this day, we still work in our churches. Like last month we baked 300 pies for the New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale.<sup>97</sup> Every year, we all still work at that stuff, and at anything else that the church does. And therefore, your social activities very often are with the same people.”*

[CJ: Did you have much association at that time with non-Mennonites in the area?] *“Well, just as much as working with people you would. But socially not really too much, other than occasionally you might go out with someone. But as a general rule, it was still mostly Mennonite.”* [CJ: Has that changed over time?] *“To some extent it has because there’s a certain percentage of the people that are not connected with the church anymore. They used to be, but through inter-marriage (endogamy) or something they lost contact with the Mennonite church, and so the social thing gets a little more mixed up.”*

---

<sup>97</sup> Since 1967, this sale has been held annually on the last weekend in May in the town of New Hamburg, west of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, and has raised over 14 million dollars for relief work, channeled through the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). (<http://www.nhmrs.com/>)

[CJ: What traditions or customs from your parents home were most important for you to maintain in Niagara?] *"I think I would have to say that the most important thing in that area would have been the connection with the church. That would have been almost number one. But there were of course ethnic things, like we still have our own traditional ethnic foods that we use that other people don't. Well, a couple of weeks ago, Father's Day, my whole gang was in here, grandkids and everything – we had rollkuchen and watermelon... I think ours is the last generation that is doing a lot of that."*

Rollkuchen

¼ cup butter, ½ cup milk, 3 cups flour, 1 tsp. salt, 3 eggs. Melt butter and add milk. Combine flour, salt in mixing bowl. Add milk mixture and eggs. Mix well to a smooth, hard dough. Roll out on lightly floured surface as thin as possible (1/8 inch). Sprinkle with a little flour to prevent sticking. Cut in rectangles or desired shape. Fry in deep fat (375°F) till nicely brown, turning once. Drain on paper towel. Serve with Borscht or watermelon on a hot summer day.

(Altona Women's Institute, Canadian Mennonite Cookbook, 1984, p. 24)

**Margaret (#18, 2005)** was 21 and married when she came to Niagara from Manitoba.<sup>98</sup>

It was 1947, just before the *Fluechtlinge* began to arrive. Given that her age was within the range of *Fluechtlinge* women refugees, her memories are an interesting window into the time. That the *Fluechtlinge* stories of Russia and the treks were not then publicized, and still have not received great attention, seems a likely factor in the resentments toward this group that Margaret recalls from within the community. There wasn't then, and perhaps still is not now, the information made available in order for the community to place their impressions in the context of actual *Fluechtlinge* hardships. Perhaps the *Fluechtlinge*, too, lacked contextual information about *Russlaender* hardships through the Depression.

---

<sup>98</sup> As described in Chapter 4, Margaret's family emigrated from Russia in 1926 when she was an infant.

Margaret begins with recollections of a community still strongly connected by ties from Russia, and of social life on the peninsula. *"When (Mother) came here, she met people she knew from the (Russian) villages. Even my parents knew (my second husband's) parents. And they became reunited here and did a lot of visiting together... I guess most of our social life revolved around the church. We had sewing circles then. Also, coming from a large family, I think we were so involved with families that most of our - like, all of us mostly lived around this area, and still do - and we would all bake something on Saturday night, and we'd put it into the car on Sunday morning and we'd drive around in the car to see where they were meeting. When we saw the cars, we knew that's where they are! And all (would) bring stuff and that's where we'd spend the day. We never knew who: nobody invited! It just so happened that 'so and so' went to see 'so and so', and then..."* [C]: You had to make sure you had things on hand, I guess, in case it happened to be at your house!] *(laughter)* *"Well, we all brought food. Everybody brought food. And then it wasn't really like a meal; it was more like what we call 'Faspa'.<sup>99</sup> Ya, and that was just mostly sweet stuff and maybe some buns. And so somebody would bring buns, and somebody would bring cake, and somebody would bring something else - we all always made sure everybody brought something to eat. It's not done anymore."*

[C]: You came to Niagara just before the *Fluechtlinge* came - the refugees who were displaced after WW2. What was that like? Did you find common ground with some of these refugees who came via such different routes?] *"There were some conflicts there because of some treatment they got when they got here. Like, when we arrived, we had almost no help whatsoever, except for people that we lived with. When they came, they were given showers;*

---

<sup>99</sup> *Faspa* is a Low German term for late afternoon lunch traditionally served in Mennonite homes. It might typically include zwieback, butter, jam, coffee, cheese, perhaps sausage or cold cuts, and dessert. Often relatives would stop by unannounced.

*they were given all kinds of things that our parents never got. So there was a little bit of conflict.... I remember there was that sort of talk. And even later, much later, they (Fluechtlinge) would say something like, "Well, if we had come when you came, we would be millionaires by now". They didn't understand what our parents went through with the Depression and all - there was no chance of getting anywhere financially. And when they came, they immediately got jobs, and all the kids got jobs, and they flourished. And (they) were pretty well almost at the same level as our parents were at that time. So they couldn't understand why that was, why our parents couldn't have done better. I remember that well."*

### **5.1.1 Summary & Analysis**

While hybridity is a foundational feature of diasporic identity, it does not preclude internal divisions and even binary perceptions ('insider' – 'outsider') between sub-groups. There is increased pressure for the diasporic immigrant entering a community that has been previously settled by diasporic co-members. An immigrant has to navigate the terrain of the receiving society. The *diasporic* immigrant entering an existing diasporic community has to navigate the terrains of the *diasporic* receiving society within a broader receiving society. While there were no reports of tensions in Niagara between the Swiss sponsors and the *Russlaender*,<sup>100</sup> tensions between the *Russlaender* and *Fluechtlinge* were tangible, despite the generosity of the *Russlaender* in helping, and the gratitude of the *Fluechtlinge* for the help.

Sub-groups unrelated to migratory patterns existed on the peninsula, as well. A religious rift surfaces in John's reference to having married a Mennonite Brethren (MB) woman in the 1950s when he was a member of the General Conference (GC) Mennonite church. This

---

<sup>100</sup> Although it has been documented that tensions between *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* existed in other Canadian communities (e.g., Petkau, 1977, 1986).

was not well received. Apparently it wasn't good enough to marry a Mennonite; one was expected to marry one's *own kind* of Mennonite. The rift between these two church factions, which dates back to 1860 in Russia, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 in the context of additional references to the situation. As we see now among the *Russlaender*, however, things have changed: intermarriage between the churches is no longer sanctioned and, further, marrying non-Mennonite Christians has become generally accepted. Old tensions involving Mennonite 'purity' ("*Russian peasant*") appear to also have faded in Niagara to the point where, for example, there is genuine acceptance expressed in cases where *Russlaender* grandchildren have married members of visible (Christian) minorities.

At a national scale, sub-group divisions within the diaspora (e.g., 'Old' Mennonite and Russian Mennonite) appear to be recently softened with the merger of church conferences ("*We've had to get to know one another...we're starting to get together more than we ever did when we first got here*"). Aesthetic differences in dress (ties as "*the devil's lead rope*") and singing styles (four-part harmony vs. unison), for example, are treated with good humour. There was some mention of class tensions between Mennonites and non-Mennonite United Empire Loyalists in the 1960s, but these are perceived to have dissolved as well.

Church is the centre of social life. There is little evidence of significant change in this regard since the early days. In many ways, then, although the community is not bounded politically, and is diasporically connected in a global sense, it remains socially inward at the local level. Cultural practices from Russia which had persisted in the early years in Niagara (family butchering bees, and Sunday visiting for *Faspa*) have not continued. Family get-togethers, though, including frequent family reunions (and the ubiquitous large-group photos), are a distinguishing feature.

Families dynamics have changed, especially the role of children as “*free labour*” on family farms, prevalent in early days. Harold recalls that in Russia, the “*kids did the work...the parents (and grandparents) were looked after hand and foot*”. Although children of this generation were still required to work for the benefit of the family, as adults they encouraged their own children to pursue education: “*We sent them to school to give them a chance – a chance we thought we had been deprived of*”. Gendered roles within families, because of the continued predominance of farming, does not appear to have changed significantly (at least until retirement stage) however the harsh model of stoic and authoritarian men in Russia seems significantly relaxed, and there are references to strong male friendships. Some women, before marrying farmers, took work outside of the home.

Tuan has written: “farmers are keenly aware of their place, which they have created themselves and which they must defend against the incursions of wild nature. To the passerby or visitor, the fields and houses also constitute a well-defined place” (Tuan, 1997, p. 166). Like their ancestors who worked to drain the Vistula Delta, Mennonite farmers worked to transform the peninsula. With this process, the orchards have become increasingly reflective of Niagara Mennonite cultural identity. Mennonite farmers intensified fruit farming on the peninsula. They worked as land prospectors and entrepreneurs, instigators in importing technology and labour, organizers of cooperatives and (the precursors to) marketing boards. There are concerns today amongst Mennonite farmers, though, about the long-term viability of an increasing trend on the peninsula toward viticulture, when it is to the exclusion of other tender fruits.

## **5.2 *Fluechtlinge* (Group B, First Generation)**

From the beginning, links to the land in Niagara were strong for the *Fluechtlinge* families, but in a less proprietary way than for the *Russlaender* families who came to prosper through owning their own farms. *Fluechtlinge* families did not buy farms, and therefore their

children would be less likely than *Russlaender* children, many of whom took over farms as their parents retired, to be career farmers as adults. Some *Fluechtlinge* children, however, did marry *Russlaender* farmers, therefore assuming a life in farming. Further, *Fluechtlinge* were not mandated by the Canadian government to work as farmers upon condition of their migration. *Fluechtlinge* mothers and their children consistently spoke of seasonal farm work and canning factory work upon arrival, but the end result was the purchase of a small home rather than a block of agricultural land. Service sector and manufacturing occupations unrelated to farming were also eventually assumed by this first generation, such as domestic work in the city of St. Catharines, hairdressing, work at the General Motors plant, institutional cooking, and bookkeeping. To the *Fluechtlinge* advantage, non-farm employment opportunities were more plentiful when they arrived than had been immediately before and during the Depression when the *Russlaender* arrived. For this study group, *Fluechtlinge* travel debts were owed to sponsoring relatives rather than to the CPR (as had been the case with *Reiseschuld* for the *Russlaender*), and were quickly paid down.

Pre-existing *Russlaender* institutions, such as churches and schools, benefitted the *Fluechtlinge*. The second generation, for example, who had only been introduced to religious life in Germany, took to Sunday school, choir, and youth groups, and attended the local Mennonite high school (Eden). One of the second-generation participants would go on to attend Bible College in Alberta prior to marrying.

Family ties between *Fluechtlinge* families, especially those together on the trek, tend to assume deeper meaning perhaps than they might have if the families had been intact. This is in keeping with the few published accounts of *Fluechtlinge* in Canada generally, which point to



family cohesion as distinctively strong.<sup>101</sup> The mothers and aunts had established patterns en route of relying on one another in ways that traditional married couples might, patterns that continued in Niagara for child-care, for company, for love, and for support.

All first and second-generation participants had returned to visit Germany; none of the first generation, but four of the second generation, had travelled back to Russia.

**Justina** (#1, 2004) and her children were sponsored in 1948 by *Russlaender* cousins in Niagara. She found work on farms in summer, housekeeping work in the cities in winter, and eventually work in the Mennonite canning factories. She took comfort in the existing German-speaking Mennonite community at the time, socializing throughout her Niagara life almost exclusively with other Mennonites, primarily *Fluechtlinge*. Our interview took place at her room in a Mennonite senior's home in Virgil.<sup>102</sup>

[CJ: Did you find any differences between yourselves and the Mennonites that were already here when you arrived?] *"Well, I would think they were not done too much, not enough yet. That was very slowly when they came here. And we were after them. They were all around men were there. We were all just women. We had to go to church, and they had their regulations, too – well, every church has the regulations. They have to go there, and they had to get baptized when getting older, and Sunday school."* [CJ: Were there chances for you to tell your stories there?] *"Not when we went working, but when we came together - Sundays we were all together. Were there most always people just what came over (Fluechtlinge)."* [CJ: Did you

---

<sup>101</sup> E.g., M. Epp, 2000; H. Loewen, 2000

<sup>102</sup> Established in 1977, the complex is owned and operated by the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. English and German are the languages of operation.

ever tell your stories to people who didn't come over with you?] *"Well, if they liked it, then we would tell them, but when we had no time, when you're working here and all that, it's very, very fast – you get in it."* [CJ: Do you recall any times that you were asked to tell your story, to talk about what had happened, apart from with each other?] *"No. No."* [CJ: Did you see much of non-Mennonites at that time?] *"No. We go to Niagara for things, but we were not too much there – just working, and went to buy there."*

[CJ: How important was it to maintain your culture when you got here?] *"We live here and we have to learn new... Here is one thing that's now: when we were in a village, we lived there all nearby more, and the parents with the children. And the children, when they got married they let to stay, build their own homes, and yet - when there was birthdays or other gatherings - together coming, with families. That's first doing (first priority). But here is that a little bit different. And that shakes the families when that's not so necessary, that they have to (come together). Well, the birthdays, yes, the families they celebrate that - but the other stuff they... Some they are going away. The kids they going away from home already before they get married and they going to other lands and everything, and then there they get used to stay there... They lose it when they go away from here. No, that's not so good. And here we have the churches, and we are with the churches together, and we are feeling that we are together here."*

[CJ: What were your hopes and dreams for your daughters?] *"Well, there is not much to open and to think. They are themselves. They went to school here, and they are home here."* [CJ: What about for your sons? What were your hopes and dreams for your sons?] *"Well, that's a little different. That's too bad. My son he not knew a father, see? That's where apart. That's where apart... The mother is there for the girls. And the boys, that's different."* [CJ: Were you worried about that; was that a concern for you?] *"Well, we had no time to worry much about it"*

*(laughs). We had them all with us, and when he got married and met a nice girl that was for us enough."*

[CJ: What would you say makes you most Mennonite?] *"I don't think I put so much on Mennonite. Sure, it's we had the children, how we bring them up...but there is always some – how you can talk it – well, we come TOGETHER and we KNEW each other. Everybody's free can do what he wants, but we go to church and we listen there..."*

[CJ: How important is it to you that your stories are preserved for your grandchildren?] *"Just so they know about it, what we went through together. But to have to know, too, that life is not forever... Like, here in Canada they people that came here and start here, looks like they have one country like that to keep them more without troubles like we had. I think sometimes that our people should NEVER have go to Russia – and we had such nice village and everything. And here they can go to school. If they interested, can go and can learn something. They have that. They enjoy it."*

**Greta** (#2, 2004) and one of her sisters, neither having children, registered as domestic workers to come to Canada in 1948. Greta worked for a year for a German-speaking Jewish family in St. Catharines. Through work, she had more contact with non-Mennonites than her sister Justina did, but Greta's social life also was, and remained, almost exclusively Mennonite-centred. This interview took place in a different wing of the same Mennonite retirement complex. *"I had to sign up for one year and then I could go wherever I wanted to. See, they paid my road and I had to work for them for the money, for paying my way here to Canada. (Then), we went on our own. Like, for instance I was weaving, making materials in St. Catharines. I went for a job in St. Catharines here. I applied and I worked for 8 years making*

*cloth. And then I got (re) married. My schooling with the English it wasn't enough, otherwise I could have had another job as a secretary or something.*

*I took two years (to learn English). I took it on my own. I didn't go to any school, I read a lot and talked to others and that's how I picked it up." [CJ: And now you speak four languages? Russian, German, Plautdietsch, and English?] "Ya." [CJ: Do you still speak German a lot now?] "Ya, we speak it a lot, ya, with sisters. (And) Low German. We do both, it doesn't matter which. And (one sister), see they spoke at home Plautdietsch. (Another sister), they wanted their kids to learn High German. And we stayed with the Low German. And well, later on they went all mixed up anyway! See, if you go ahead going higher schools you have to know the High German. The Low German it's just for home purposes- domestic, and so on. It's good enough, the Low German, but otherwise you have to have the High German... Well, my grandchildren, they want to keep up with the Russian. To me, it doesn't matter, but to them they want to keep it up. They speak Russian in between, always. I hate it. I have a stepson, you know. They were born and raised in Russia. They came out later. They are here now 20 years, and we are here 50 years. See, we had that much longer here. And they want to keep that Russian language - they really hanging on. And we tell them, "What for?" But they still think they kids might need it some day. And when they're together, they always speak Russian. They want to remember the Russian language."*

[CJ: That's your stepson – you said you remarried after ten years in Canada...] *"(My second husband) didn't have anybody – (his family) were in Russia and they couldn't get out. The wife and one son, they couldn't get out. And then finally we got married. But by then she (had already) died. And the son, he stayed with the grandparents and so that he came out later, the son as an adult already."*

[CJ: What was your first impression of the Niagara area?] *"Oh well, we liked it very much, very much. Everybody was happy coming here. Well, the land (was) almost similar to where we grew up... Like, temperature hot, and – just, like, the seasons. We can buy more and afford more and all this, but otherwise living at the landscape the same as was here. But here people work; they wouldn't neglect their houses and so on. In Russia, they don't do anything. They take the vodka bottle and the drink and they neglect things. We looked after it, and then the whole thing looks different if it's looked after."* [CJ: Were there things that you missed about Russia] *"No, not much. No."*

Greta attended a Mennonite church in St. Catharines. Later she moved to Virgil where her extended family was living. [CJ: How important was the Mennonite community in Virgil to you at that point?] *"Well, we all were always together... They seemed right away as if you belonged, like they really feel they (were) the own. You felt like at home. The surroundings, people, language, everything, it felt like being home. Well, my people were all around me. See, I've been separated from them for so long, and being together again that meant like home..."*

[CJ: Did you work with other Mennonites when you were weaving?] *"Ya, was some others - because I learned how to weave in Germany, and I got friends in. I asked the bosses. Everybody was looking for a job here. I got 2 of my friends in there to get a job. First they just do the spools in, and then they learned to weave."*

Greta, a teacher in Russia, studied hairdressing after her remarriage and eventually had an addition built at the back of her home from where she ran a salon. *"(My husband), he was carpenter and then he – well, he didn't have any education - he bought house and he rented apartments. He had several homes in St. Catharines and he fixed them up and rented them."*

[CJ: So, you were both working. Who would prepare the meals, and...] *"Oh, I had to, ya. He*

said 12 o'clock was dinner! Ya, "Make it so 12 o'clock is dinner" – that's it. I had to make my appointments according to that "12 o'clock is dinner". That's how strict he was; he wanted his meals on time. Not 1:00, or so on. And in a way it's very good that we have regular meals. Well, somehow I took less (appointments) or I changed the appointments the way I wanted them. That worked out. And often you worked evenings, too."

[CJ: What do you think makes a good Mennonite woman?] "Well, one thing, my husband - I had a bad habit – I was always interrupting him and correcting him, because in some ways I knew more than he. And oh, and he was so mad - he was saying something. Well, I had more schooling, and I corrected, and he always told me later on that he objected to it."

[CJ: What are you most proud of in your life?] "I am well, and well-adjusted, and that's about it. And I'm glad that I went the way I went. Like, you know the choices I moved to, and so on. I'm quite all right that I did that way. Being in Poland, and leaving that, and going to other places, it was just the way it went. And I'm glad that it went that way. That's often what I say: it's God's will that you went that way, was not my doing. He leads us that way. Often He makes you think, and that's good for you. If you believe or not, but He does it."

[CJ: Have you ever returned to Russia?] "No. I had such a bad childhood there I don't want to. I had a chance - I had bought a ticket already, and the people that had gone there said, "Don't go. There is not much to see, anyway - stay where you are, and keep in mind what you remember from before, and that's it. Don't go back."

[CJ: Do you have any relatives that you support there?] "Ya, I have 2 nieces. The one I support, but the other one, she married an army man and somehow they can't have contact with the west. Now maybe they could already, but they said it's better not to - later on things might

*change, and they get after you when you have relatives there. Because we've seen it before when my father was that age, at that time. But later on always they prosecuted because you had relatives there. And this one niece's husband, he doesn't want nothing to do... I don't even know their family name, they are very secretive about that."*

**Marta (#3, 2004)** makes a point to tell me that during the first 31 years of her life she moved 40 times. During her next 55 years in Canada, however, she has lived in only one home, where we now hold our interview. Marta's mother had settled directly in Niagara, but Marta and her children were sponsored by relatives in Manitoba, where they lived for their first 5 months in Canada. *"Those relatives, because there was no work, they connected (with) relatives here in Niagara.... and they (said we) could come here and work in the canning factory, because it was September. That's why we don't have any relatives here. These relatives were distant relatives – they didn't feel any responsibility to us because they were not the sponsors. I was treated there with showers in Manitoba. Here nobody cared, you know... And then I started here, I did housework and the children stayed with my mother, and then they started school, and after school with my mother... we lived with the mother."*

*"I came here with 3 children to Canada. And we built this house and we have lived there in this house since... Well, we started 18 X 20 (feet). We moved the house once – the house was there, and then my husband came (1951),<sup>103</sup> and he dig the basement here. You know when you don't have anything you want to keep what you have. See here we have a roof over our head; we wouldn't dare to leave that and start because we didn't have anything else... And I had already built the little house when he came. My brothers built it to me. I bought the lot. I did*

---

<sup>103</sup> As described in Chapter 4, Marta's husband was conscripted by the German army in 1945, during the flight.

*housework for 50 cents an hour, and with 3 children, and bought the lot for \$300.00, and paid it off. And he came, and then I had paid for the lot but I had not paid for the little house, you know. That we did later.”*

[CJ: What were your first impressions of Niagara?] *“When we came to Niagara, and we drove on the Lakeshore Road, I couldn’t believe how pretty it was... how pretty that street is - the river, you know? Manitoba is very bare. Except you go in the harvest time and they have the sunflowers there, and the wheat and it looks nice, but in the winter it is very bare... Where we lived (in Russia) there were a lot of trees and orchards, but the Russian villages they were very bare. They don’t plant so much. When they need firewood they wouldn’t hesitate to cut up a good tree and burn it, you know? They’re not tree lovers.”*

[CJ: What role did the existing Mennonite community play in your life when you first arrived in Niagara?] *“Well, very friendly; they took us in. We went always to church, you know, the children all went to Sunday school. Well, they were here 20 years earlier. Nowadays, 20 years doesn’t make much difference, but then it made difference. It took another 20 years until we were even thinking, you know? [CJ: In terms of what?] “Well, when we started – well, maybe we shouldn’t - but when we started to talk about our experiences, then they right away said, “Oh, we had Depression, we had hard time, too.” So that’s why we started maybe to stop talking about too much. But it was hard to come (through) the Depression. Because the people that come in the ‘20s, they left a more normal life and came here, you know. When they came here, when those people went to do housework, they thought it was degrading for them. When we came 20 years later – you see, in Russia they had all workers to work for them, Russian workers, and here they came and had to do that work, yes? That was no problem for us – was NO problem for me to come and do other peoples’ toilets, you know?”*



*That was already the difference, you know? But after 20 years, we learned to go here, you know. When we left Germany, the MCC – like, this Peter Dyck,<sup>104</sup> he said, “Don’t judge when you come. Wait at least 2 years and then you criticize; don’t criticize anything when you come over. Observe, accept, but don’t criticize”. And he want to give us this because when they people, when they came here in the ‘20s, I have heard they had a hard time to accepting. But see, they have a hard time to find work, that’s what I have heard, you know. And they obviously thought about - well, one expression, when we were in Manitoba, they say, “What do you want to go to Ontario? People just go there with a lunchbox!” (We) say, “What’s wrong with go with the lunchbox?” There they had all land , you know, on the farm. Well, what’s wrong with go with the lunchbox? That means you are all working. See, that’s the thinking. But see the people, they just thought they can come right from Russia, they had just thought about you are only a whole person if you have a property. And the only thing here was to have property. See, they paid a high price for this land, when they had the farms here. They paid high prices. My sister married a man who had lived here longer (Russlaender); and his father , he wrote his life story, and I read it and I told him, “You paid a high price for the land you have.” He had the children, and the wife, and (she) do the canning...Oh, how they, how much they pay for that land. Just to have a few acres of land. They had 5 children, and she brought the children to the mother for the whole week. She brought them there on Monday and picked them up on Saturday. To work in the canning factory. To pay for the land. And he planted tomatoes - and the trees were too young yet - and he picked the tomatoes, and then he delivered the tomatoes, and then he had more children and they delivered the tomatoes and brought them back. But the babies, they stayed for the whole week, you know. Just to pay for the land, you know. We didn’t. Well, we*

---

<sup>104</sup> Peter and Elfrieda Dyck were well known MCC workers who helped thousands of displaced Russian Mennonites resettle after WW2 (See P. Dyck, & E. Dyck, 1991).

*had (not as many)...but see they come 20,000 (immigrants). There was not too much housework for them to do.”*

[CJ: So you were told not to judge or criticize for 2 years...] *“At least, he said.”* [CJ: Did you feel that the existing Mennonite community did that – did you feel accepted by them?] *“Well, not completely as for a mature person. You are accepted as a refugee with friendliness, but I don’t remember in the beginning that anybody was voted into anything in the church, you know. We were welcome very much as refugees, and helped and everything - but accepted as refugees, ya. Not, well - when Bethany, other church split up here - they were mostly didn’t want any German (language) anymore. They were mostly the old-timers. And then the neighbour church, like, mine, they had watched our church how we would do as refugees, you know. We were grown ups come as refugees, you know. And they would watch. Just recently my sister told me that, you know, they had watched how we would do nice. I don’t remember that we ever didn’t meet the budget. See (Fluechtlinge) people worked at GM (General Motors) and they made the money, but the other people who had been here longer didn’t like to go to GM; that was degrading, you know, factory work. See for them the only respecting work was a farmer, you know.”* [CJ: And they wouldn’t have been single mothers, either...] *“No.(laughs) I had the experience in Manitoba, they would invite me everywhere, but they had trouble to sit me, where to sit me. Everywhere, everyone was in couples. So they would change place and make sure I would sit between 2 women! Inside I was laughing. I didn’t say anything.”* [CJ: Did you have much contact with the non-Mennonite community in Niagara?] *“Oh, our neighbours were the non-Mennonites. They invited us – I never been there but the children they always play together. But, well, I didn’t know what to talk with them, you know.”*

[CJ: What other traditions were most important for you to maintain from your home in Russia?]

*"Well, everything that I do and be and am, is still the same. I don't think I've changed. Maybe others would say I changed, I don't know. Everything I do, it's from the young (days)..."* [CJ: Cooking?] *"Yes. I've never made a pie. I admire pie, but that's – I just don't care, you know? Its not that I don't like it. I don't bake any zwieback anymore, though... I rather buy at the store the buns, you know. We were 5 years in Germany, and we took a lot from there, you know. Oh yes, a lot. And cooking. Like, where we were I worked in the kitchen and they always have more French-style cooking: a soup, then a meal, you know. And I had to always have the soup before the meal."* [CJ: You wouldn't have done that in Russia?] *"No. So we picked it there (in Germany). And I talked with my sister and she does it the same, she says. A bowl of soup before because we had only lunch, and I thought the body needs it."*

[CJ: How did you learn to speak English?] *"Oh, I went to night school. And I read a lot. My first book that I read was – have you ever seen the Smith's book of the Mennonites?<sup>105</sup> – that was my first book. I had the flu and I wanted to know more about the Mennonite story so I borrowed it. And then I had a dictionary beside and then a pen and a paper and then I wrote every word out what I didn't know. I wrote out in English and then in German. By the time I finish the book I had very little to write. You forget if you don't use it; you don't own it yet, but you know what it means. When you use it, you own it."*

[CJ: Have you felt like you belong in Niagara?] *"Yes. Well, I don't have any connections with the city, I would say, but the children grew up here, and I went here to night schools. But you always have to see this from the background (that) we lived (in Russia) separately because the*

---

<sup>105</sup> Marta is referring to *Smith's Story of the Mennonites*, by C. Henry Smith, first published in 1941 by the Mennonite Publication Office in Newton, Kansas. (My 1957 copy is 820 pages in length.)

*government made us. We didn't know it, but it was the custom and tradition to live in the village by ourselves. So, that was nothing what you wanted, it was just your being - like you belong to a family." [CJ: It was the way it was, and what you became used to?] "Yes. And in that light you have to look at the Mennonites. When they came to Russia they were a bunch of colonists from all different places who had just answered the invitation from the Russian government to come and settle. But there they formed communities, in Russia. And, like the immigrants in South America, they were from ALL kind of background came, and formed villages... See, were only allowed to have a Russian in the village if you wanted be a shepherd for the livestock, or to be storekeeper... or because the government wanted the Mennonites to teach the Russian populations how to farm right."*

*[CJ: What were your hopes and aspirations for your daughters?] "Well, I told them you don't have to marry to be happy. Be happy first. Be a happy person, build up your character first. Then if you are happy, get married, and then don't blame if you are not happy on the partner. Because a partner can't make you happy... They all pick their partners, and I adjusted to them, you know. If they divorce, well then you say good-bye to (their partners). But my children aren't divorced, my grandchildren some are divorced... Well, you make so much effort to love (their partners), and to be fair and good and then suddenly you should meet them as strangers... And then they get the new partner, I accept the new partner and try to love them the same. The same as the first, you know. It's just like it is; it's life.*

*I had to adjust to my husband, too - we were 6 years separate. You change. Well, I guess I changed, because I got too independent. I had a very independent husband, and I never questioned what he did, and then I got independent. I was alone, I made all decisions alone, and now he came - now I had to try not to be bossy. I had an aunt and she said, when we heard that*

he would come, "I can't imagine how you will handle it when he comes because you are so bossy." [CJ: Was it difficult?] "Well, I don't know - I shouldn't say it. I stayed much independent for myself, but I could not convince him to be dependent on me. Like, I see now sometimes the man they do a lot or they do some cooking or cleaning. My husband would never do that. He worked very hard, but outside. I never did anything outside either - he loved that, so I let him do. But he never did anything inside. That's yours and that's mine. But if I would try to plant something outside he would just pull it out and plant something that he wanted. But it was the style - the style, you know. And you accept him as he is. I know I had there roses and he didn't like them - they were climbing - oh, no, he pulled them all out, cut them all off.

[CJ: You must have been different people after those 6 years than you were before you separated...] "Ya, ya. I got different, too, you know. Well, maybe he felt that I had built already little house, and it was in my name, and it stayed (as such), and he thought, "Do what you want with the house - it's yours." [CJ: Did you try to be less independent when he came back, or did you think, "Well, this is the way I am now"?] "No, I stayed there, I guess. Because I knew already more English and I had to be (the one) reading. And then he wanted to have a business, but then he - but we had still two (more) children (in Niagara) - he asked me if I would help him with the business. And I didn't think I would still do but then I still worked for 30 years; I worked until I was 72. " [CJ: "You did the books, you said. What was your business?"] "Well, a kind of factory, making sheet metal. Oh, I loved the work, you know. We worked together, same desk - well, double desk - with him for all the years. He worked at the back with shop, too. Well, I was 7 years home. When the little one went to first grade then he asked me if I would come. I came. I was home (after school). I asked them now, "Did you suffer?" And she said, "You were always there when we were." So I took work home then, work at home. In the morning, I left when they left."

[CJ: What about for your sons – what would you say your hopes and dreams for them would have been?] *“Well, they filled up everything I could dream of them. The oldest one is a professor, and... they all have university degrees, all the 5 children. Well, if you have the gifts, then use them. And we helped them, you know. They worked as much as they could, earned some money, then we helped.”*

[CJ: Was it important to you that they marry within the Mennonite faith?] *“They haven’t all married a Mennonite. Two haven’t. Well, we didn’t say this, but we knew that it’s easier if you marry the same background. But then there is always the danger that you could be related – there’s so much relatives, you know. I don’t like that when they marry relatives.”*

[CJ: What are your thoughts about the roles women play today in society?] *“I guess it’s not free enough yet. They should have more rights... The woman should have the same rights as the man. But what the danger is now is that the man don’t protect the rights. The women got liberation but the men got, how you say? - tied down in traditions. I’m very happy that I see now in the church bulletin that they have their somewhere a man’s meetings. I don’t know what it is about, but I like. See, a man should be a very, oh, what I say? - they should know that they are the leading people in the world. The man are the leading, you know what I mean? They are the most important people in the world, the man, but the woman should have the same rights... We need man who know to go to the world, and the man should not be the shadow of the woman. They should know what to do. But they should never treat the woman as less. But now it’s come so far that the man don’t know their place in the world. The man don’t know their place in the world. Because the men are even afraid to ask a girl to marry sometimes, because of what happens, you know. Afraid of losing everything, if anything wrong. The man should not court the whole life. When they courting, then the wedding, the courting stops, then the man should*

*be the head of the house.” [CJ: And you don’t think that’s happening?] “Not now in families. They think they have to do everything to please the woman, and the woman is not made for that - the woman is made to be dependant on the man. The man should lead. And if the man doesn’t lead, the woman loses her direction, and then she demands. I don’t know if I’m right expressing myself, but that’s what I feel. But equal personalities, not pushing her down.”*

[CJ: When you were for those 6 years without your husband to lead your family, did you feel lost in terms of direction?] *“No, I had my children. I had the aim, you know. See, a woman – maybe this illustrates it more – a woman can give up her career, everything, for a child. But a man not. For a man, he will protect it, but he can go for the war, or he can go (to be) leading persons. We can’t work against what we are made for - the woman is made for the family. I don’t know if I express myself right - or if I do the same.”*

[CJ: What are you most proud of in your life?] *“Well, that I was able to survive that long. I don’t mean physically survive, I mean to be myself so long. I am 86. I’m happy that I could go there. I made mistakes, but I survived them, you know. And so I am happy that I could stand so long and exist so long, sound-minded, you know - sound minded, and managing it. “*

[CJ: Have you ever returned to Russia?] *“No, never. We were to Germany 5 times but not Russia. We don’t have anybody there. I don’t miss. I have my family and I have my life here. I don’t miss anything.”*

[CJ: Have you ever taken on a leadership role in the church?] *“I did, I taught Sunday school, I taught vacation bible school, I managed the library for 18 years, and I did women’s group. I was president.”*

[CJ: What about preaching – how do you feel about women preaching?] *“Oh, I’m not against it. I’m not against it. I mean, if the women have the gifts to preach, let them preach. But a leading minister, I don’t know. As I said, a woman is not made for the leading person; very seldom can a woman be a good leader. A woman is more a follower. How come they can have one husband and have a second husband and they can adjust to each husband? So the woman is made for that. The woman is made to adjust to the circumstances. I have always marvelled at how a woman can adjust to one husband and second husband and third husband sometimes, and has to adjust to others and children, in-laws and everybody – but the woman is made like that. A man goes more his way. A man goes more his way. He won’t bend down to each one much, you know. Maybe I’m old fashioned, I don’t know.”*

[CJ: What do you think makes you most Mennonite?] *“Well, the cultural plays a role here. See when we were in Germany, when we heard somebody speaking Low German, well then you feel home. That’s cultural; it has nothing to do with the church. The dialect, it comes from Holland I guess. And now they try always to have that food - but actually that’s Russian food: *wareniki*,<sup>106</sup> that’s Russian. And *borscht*<sup>107</sup> is Russian-Ukrainian. And *paska*,<sup>108</sup> that’s Ukrainian. In Russian, ‘*paska*’ means Easter - it comes from (peace), *paska*. Well, then take it over and becomes ‘Mennonite food’ and people don’t even know that it’s actually Russian... I don’t like it when they say here ‘Mennonite food’, ‘Mennonite Sausage’, because the sausage is not Mennonite. I don’t like that. But it’s developed. They had food and everybody made it and was called ‘Mennonite food’! But you wouldn’t say Catholic food, or Lutheran food, or ...”*

---

<sup>106</sup> Dough pockets, traditionally filled with cottage cheese and boiled, similar to pierogis.

<sup>107</sup> Soup, traditionally made using cabbage.

<sup>108</sup> Egg bread, traditionally made at Easter.



[CJ: Are you saying you feel that it's not so much the cultural aspects that make you most Mennonite?] *"First, one point, is the togetherness. They STICK together. They stick together, that's one point. They help each other, you know? And the old times in Russia there was no beggars. If they ever want food then the other would help. And I have read - and (a friend's) grandmother told me - see Mennonite people they want always land and there was no more land in Ukraine so they went where land is now, even in Siberia. And then they went to Siberia and had colonies there. And once there was a sickness, and they are dying many people, typhus or something. And many orphans stayed and then they took a big bunch of orphans with some adults and nurses, and told them, "Send them to Ukraine to give these orphans to the Mennonite villages so they would raise them". And (she) took 2 girls on. So they were took to the villages and then they adopted them there. That's one. And then they build orphanage, in Russia.*

*They started the Credit Union, so people would put their money and then the other would get - it's like here, too. And then they build hospitals, and they build senior citizen's homes, you know, and schools, and if some were too poor to send to school then they helped them, like this MCC helps now, you know. This one man here once - he was not a Mennonite - and he has spoke at a meeting, you know, he said, "You Mennonites are the best known in the social work. You don't have immense doctrines; doctrines we can't learn from you. But social work, everybody looks up at you.""*

**Elsie (#4, 2004)** arrived in Niagara when she was 30 years old with her ten year old daughter. Elsie's daughter died of cancer at age 28, and Elsie helped in raising her grandchildren, whom she refers to as her children during our interview. We spoke at her room in the Mennonite senior's complex in Virgil.

[CJ: Was there anything that you missed about Russia when you arrived in Niagara?] *“Never! Not even today. We couldn’t even think very much because we saw here for the first time and could hardly believe we that it was real. We worked all the time. The first thing we did (was) look for something that we could find to work, always, and then when they saw that we were from the other side of the world, then they helped us right away. We had lots of help all over, that much I say. We lived on the land, and we worked on farms, too. We worked right away... I worked in a canning factory in NOTL, and then later on I worked in St. Catharines in a canning factory. That was in fall more, but we worked in the orchards too, and helped. They knew we needed work. We even had our money to buy our own food that time. Very rich! We had to go there and then they came out and then they had big box full of fruit, and, oh, we were so lucky! Later on we could help other people, too. When we came here and we got our apartment where we could live, then we were home here. And we had lots of relatives around, all over around this country here.*

*We never belonged before to a church, never, because in Russia we didn’t have churches and when somebody had community, was always secret – nobody had to know it – those people they went out in the evening and they couldn’t talk about that so other people didn’t hear it. That was very strong, and when I think now it was very bad, too. Here different: churches here right away in Niagara, different churches, and I still am in a church that I started in.”* [CJ: Were there any opportunities for you to tell the story of what happened to you?] *“I have once I have done a little bit. They called me from our church, a group they called me, and I had to tell something, and I said, “Stop that.” I didn’t like this. Tears come...”*

[CJ: Did you have any association with the non-Mennonites here?] *“The English, well they stayed away from us because we couldn’t speak English. After, then I worked in a factory just*

*with English girls and ladies, ya. I worked many years in a factory, beside (them, and) I had other work to do – some days in the week I had to do housework – I was never, never without work, had always tomorrow and day after and after – housework for other people.”*

[CJ: Was it important to you that you speak German with the children at home?] *“I don’t care much for that, but my kids they care, they like it. They both can speak, too, because they were for a while in my house when (my daughter) passed away, then I had the kids and I just spoke German, and now when they come to me they always speak German to me. [CJ: Have they taught their children, too?] “No.”*

[CJ: Was it difficult for you as a single mother here?] *“We just could do that what we had learned and what we did, and... I wasn’t alone - so many - all my sisters-in-law - was all men taken away, not just mine, so...”*

[CJ: How would you describe a ‘good Mennonite woman?] *“She is a good cook and she can bake and she has a family and everything in order with the family – that’s what we learned at home. (Now) they not really like what we were learn(ing). No, that’s different now. Times are changed... and that isn’t quite what we started as, but so many people they are very strong and they stay right on the place where they have started. We come together as family - like at Christmas and New Year’s and all that holiday same - all the Mennonites have that the same! Well other people, too, but we are just with the Mennonites so close.”*

[CJ: Was it important to you that the children marry within the Mennonite faith?] *“Ya, I am happy when they marry somebody that they know the Mennonites, too. From the first beginning the Mennonites were very separated, but now it’s different. Now they are mixed up with all the people already.” [CJ: How do you feel about that?] “That’s good. Ich leibe – I love (the*

children). *I won't say one thing, no. What they do, as long as they all stay Christians, then they don't go far away, then the rest, that's OK."*

[CJ: What would you say makes you most Mennonite?] *"Well, I am proud about my Mennonites. They way they handle everything. There are other people too, but the main thing is they are all the same, the Mennonites."*

Following are excerpts from Elsie's (translated) autobiography ("Elsie", 1989). She and her daughter had originally gone to B.C. to live with family sponsors. Work was difficult to find, and on the advice of an aunt in Niagara, they came to the peninsula in July of 1949. *"I found work on a farm, and later in the canning factory. We rented one room in a house on Charlotte St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, and in the winter I did housework. We lived very frugally. (My daughter) went to school in Niagara and on Sundays we took the bus to go to church. For Sunday dinner we were always invited to my uncle and aunt's house in Virgil. We lived (there) until 1951 and then we rented a room in Virgil... we bought a lot on Penner St. and in 1953 we built a small house. We had saved only \$1000.00 when we started to build as much of our money was sent to Paraguay for my siblings.<sup>109</sup>*

*My 2 siblings were in a home in Voldendam with other helpless people – it was very pitiful. As time went on, the churches there (with financial help from MCC) built a new home for these poor helpless people. I sent screening for windows, and many other things for this home, which took up to 3 months to get there. Everything arrived safe and sound. My siblings stayed in Paraguay for 13 years. Since Germany had been at war, everything had been destroyed and*

---

<sup>109</sup> As described in Chapter 4, Elsie's two disabled siblings went to Paraguay due to Canadian immigration health restrictions.

*there was no refuge for these poor helpless refugees. A few years later the economy changed and Germany was willing to take their German citizens back. In 1961 I paid for their trip back to Germany. They were accepted into a nursing home in Padaborn. How well they were taken care of! In 1965 (my sister) came with (a Mennonite caregiver) to visit me here in Canada for 3 months.*

*When we built our house in 1953, (a Mennonite man) helped us to borrow \$2000.00 from (man with English surname), and he vouched for us. We could repay him as we could afford it. (A male cousin) did the roughing work voluntarily. (My daughter and this cousin) drew up the house plans. We went to the Town Office and they gave us permission to build. (Another Mennonite man) came with his tractor and pulled out all of the grapes and pear trees on our lot. A young man from Leamington that worked for (the male cousin) voluntarily did the roofing. It was so wonderful how God took care of us. On October 7, 1953 we moved into our house, and in the winter the house got stuccoed. The house was not yet finished on the inside and there were no cupboards and no bathroom – just the subfloor. Before (my daughter) got married in 1958, she suggested we borrow money from the Credit Union and finish our home, which is what we did. I am so thankful to God and for my (daughter) who worked so hard, and to all the ones that helped us build our home. (My daughter) and I put all the insulation in the walls. In the winter I plastered and smoothed all the cracks and then painted the walls. In 1958 everything was finished.*

*When (my disabled siblings) were settled in the nursing home in Germany I did not have to send money there. They both received a German pension. In 1967 it was possible to send parcels to Russia. It was expensive, but I was able to send many to my (other 2) brothers. (One) brother was able to come and visit me in 1972. I gave him money to buy a motorcycle with a*

*side car, for which he was very thankful. He later built a house in Russia and the materials he needed he transported with his vehicle. (My female cousin who had travelled with me from Russia) had a money shower for him when he visited here, so he was able to take another \$600.00 with him to Russia.*

*(My daughter and her husband) were very happy and they had... 2 healthy children. In 1965 (my daughter) began experiencing pain, and on November she had her first surgery for her stomach. It was diagnosed as cancer... (After several further surgeries) she died on March 5, 1967 at 9:05 a.m. at the Niagara Falls Hospital. (My friend) and I had been with her all night.*

*I moved in with (her husband) and the children to help him with the children. In the same year, my sister died in Germany... I flew to Germany and was with her for 3 weeks in the hospital until she died. This was also a very difficult time but God held me by my hand. (My daughter's children) were 7 and 5 years of age when their mother died.*

*Time does not stop, and (my granddaughter) was baptized in 1977. She married... in 1981. They had 3 children. (My grandson) was baptized in 1979, and married... in 1988. They had 3 children. (My daughter's husband) married (again) in 1969 and I moved back into my little house which I had rented out (during this time).*

*With the help of (a male friend) I was able to get my driver's licence at age 57 and (son-in-law's) brother helped me buy a car in 1975. How thankful I was for (these people). Over Christmas in 1987 I was able to buy a new car. I had no profession but I always found work in a variety of places. The last 7 years I worked in the kitchen at (Mennonite nursing home). I have been retired since 1983 and am thankful to God for leading my life. I am 71 years of age and have been driving a car for 14 years. Years ago I did not have the opportunity to own or drive a*

*car, but God always saw to it that I had the opportunity to go to work and church with someone – to Him be the honour. I am thankful for my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.”*

### **5.2.1 Summary & Analysis**

The maturity of the diaspora following these two 20<sup>th</sup> century waves of immigration is visible here, both globally (institutional and otherwise) and at the level of community, in the strength of internal flows of responsibility. Elsie’s story especially is full of references to help she received and help she gave. When asked what it means to be Mennonite, the characteristic common to all answers is togetherness (“*they stick together*”, “*they help each other*”). An extended period of placelessness in which family means everything, combined with elements of religious tradition that stress mutual aid and outreach, and a prolonged history of living in self-sufficient isolated communities, have all fostered this facet of their Mennonite identity.

Each of the women now speaks at least four languages, and continues to enjoy (even if they no longer prepare) Mennonite cuisine – which, as Marta points out, is a fusion from along the diasporic route. This doesn’t mean that Mennonite foods are not ‘Mennonite’, however; rather food is an example of Russian Mennonite cultural hybridity.

The women of this cohort were not cultural purists; they took of culture what had been handed to them on a platter of generations, and eagerly heaped on top of that what it meant to be Canadian. But despite this, and having lived most of their lives in an open society (exposed to non-Mennonites in neighbourhoods and at work, and travelling extensively for pleasure in their later years) this cohort has maintained a highly inward existence. They socialized almost solely within the diaspora, and especially within their own *Fluechtlinge* sub-group. Three out of these four women were still surrounded by Mennonites in their retirement complex (the fourth maintained her own home). The institutional completeness of the diaspora in Niagara facilitated

an inward orientation, but I would differentiate this from an exclusive orientation as designed to keep the 'outside' out. These people were simply content (rather than consciously intent) to keep the 'inside in'. "Cosmic views can be adjusted to suit new circumstances. With the destruction of one "centre of the world," another can be built next to it, or in another location altogether, and it in turn becomes the "centre of the world" (Tuan, 1997, p. 150). The *Fluechtlinge* did not view Canada as their host country, but as their new homeland (no attachment for Russia remained), and the safe social formation they created in Niagara was home. ("We were always together...They seemed right away as if you belonged, like they really feel they were they own. You felt like at home. The surroundings, people, language, everything, it felt like being home"). They appear to have experienced what Tuan has described as "quiet attachment" in Niagara:

Attachment of a deep though subconscious sort may come simply with familiarity and ease, with the assurance of nurture and security, with memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time... Contentment is a warm positive feeling, but it is most easily described as incuriosity toward the outside world and as absence of desire for a change of scene. (Tuan, 1997, p. 159)

There is a perception that a greater value was placed by *Russlaender* on owning farm land than doing "lunchbox" (waged) work, and a perception among *Fluechtlinge* that the price the *Russlaender* had paid for that land was more than monetary – it had meant dear costs in terms of time spent away from family. *Fluechtlinge* were happy to do work that *Russlaender* found "degrading" - largely because of their relative experience as refugees as to what constituted 'degrading'.

For the two women with husbands, the gendered division of domestic duties apparently remained quite rigid: women prepared the meals ("12 o'clock dinner"), carried out all the inside work, and were the primary caregivers of children. In terms of paid work, they all did some



housekeeping in the beginning. Eventually both Greta and Marta worked at family owned businesses based in their homes, which enabled them to adjust their schedules around domestic responsibilities. Before she remarried, Greta supported herself by weaving, a skill she had learned in Germany. Justina and Elsie went from working on the collective grain and dairy farms in Russia, to seasonally picking fruit, canning fruit in factories, and cooking at Mennonite institutions in Niagara. The availability of work meant that all were able to repay travel debts quickly and purchase homes.

Marta seemed disappointed that her husband couldn't accept the increased sense of independence her journey and settlement without him had brought; she had to try to not "*be too bossy*". We hear her views on issues of gender: she supports equal rights and opportunities, but perceives clear differences in the intrinsic natures of men and women, and observes that while women have been liberated, men have remained "*tied down in traditions*". Cooking, baking, running an efficient home, keeping order in the family, and not correcting your husband ("*because in some ways I knew more than he*") are perceived as important aspects of being a 'good Mennonite woman'. What Greta and Marta say they are most proud of in their lives involve their own agency, their own strength. The freedom from gendered constraints they had experienced on the trek gave them a new sense of themselves: they were survivors whose own choices and actions had brought them to safety.

We now move to end this chapter with the last collection of narratives of those born in Russia: the second-generation *Fluechtlinge*, who were aged 9-21 when they arrived in Niagara in 1948-9.

### 5.3 *Fluechtlinge* (Group B, Second Generation)

Depending on age at arrival, the second generation would have the opportunity to attend school in Niagara, and many would later receive some form of post-secondary education, such as Business College. One of the second-generation *Fluechtlinge* participants obtained university degrees after she was married. All but two married *Russlaender*. Three worked with their spouses on family-run fruit farms. Their children attended post-secondary institutions, with the exception of a few who directly entered the family farming business, and one who apprenticed in a trade. As adults, this generation has travelled widely for pleasure and work, although often expressing a desire for rootedness in Niagara, which presents materially, for example, in the maintenance of the same home throughout their married lives.

**Edna** (#5, 2004) speaks of life in Niagara, where she settled with her mother and two brothers when she was 10. Her memories from this point on are notably clearer than those of Russia and her journey. She seems to be making sense of them as she talks. Although her background as a fatherless refugee has been central to her life, for example, she seems only now into her sixties to be beginning to sort out many of the details, what they have meant for her, how she feels about them. As an adult, two decades after her mother brought her across the ocean to Canada, Edna and her husband took their own small children on a (joyful) journey to live for three years on another continent. The couple has continued to travel extensively throughout the world. *"When I came to Vineland, the Mennonite church there had a sort of shower for refugees, like a bridal shower. We had come with practically nothing. In fact I didn't even have a pair of shoes. I lost one of my shoes - it went over board on the ship, so that my uncle had to take me to St. Catharines to buy a pair of shoes. I remember walking along the sidewalk in the city of St. Catharines going to the shoe store, and I think I was in slippers. I was embarrassed."*

Edna's family stayed with the sponsoring relatives in Vineland for about a year before moving out onto their own to Niagara-on-the-Lake. *"Mother's cousins paid for our passage and then when we came here they provided half a house, that they rented for us, and then when the other aunts and cousins came, then they found another place nearby where another of the families moved in. And two of our families lived in this one house. We had a roof over our heads but we were still cramped, and so that's why Mother and I shared a bedroom, and a bed even.*

*Immediately, Mother said the first thing we do is pay off our (travel) debt that the relatives had paid for us. So we worked on their fruit farms - all of us, mother and everybody - and we went to school. But always holidays (we worked) - Easter time, we would pick up brush, and we'd work at (a seed company) if it was too cold, or it wasn't seasonal fruit times. A variety of work all summer and every holiday we would work, so we had that paid off."*

[CJ: What were your first impressions of Niagara?] *"Well, it was strange, to say the least. I didn't feel at home for quite a while. We weren't at home for years. But we were (at home) in Germany, and that's what I remember - the trek of course is something you don't want to remember. I mean we hadn't had a place to call our own. Even in Vineland I felt strange, even though we were with relatives, but they were strangers. They were related to mother and we were grateful that they were kind and they welcomed us into their home and had us come to Canada, but it took a while to adjust or feel at home. However we were very happy to have the food they were able to supply for us. I started school there. I think I was the only one - well, (my older brother), too - that didn't know English. It was a small school, fortunately. They didn't laugh at us. When we moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) and we went to Virgil there were others that were of Mennonite background, too, and yet sometimes we felt that they laughed at us more than the non-Mennonites when we'd say something wrong, mispronounce a word. One*

*thing that stands out in my memory that's strange to me was the train whistle that we heard in Vineland. I thought it sounded so eerie, compared to the German whistles. There, they were a happy, higher note. And here they are so (hums). It just felt eerie, especially at night.*

*It took a long time I think, because at one time I had a dream about the war and I woke up with that awful, scary feeling, you know? I looked out the window, and there in the ditch, (were men) crawling in the ditch, playing war! They had a camp up here, you know, National Defense had a training camp... They are Department of Defense lands, and they would use those lands for training for war. And it was just so eerie for me that I'd had that dream of soldiers in war again, because when we were in Poland and Germany toward the end of the war we would hear air raid sirens and have to go to shelters. And then when I had this dream - years later - I thought, "Oh this is not just a dream - it's real; the war has come to Canada." It was like a continuation of my dream when I woke up. That awful feeling stayed with me all day. It was pretty scary. I didn't like watching war movies for years - even now I don't... it isn't entertainment for me. Too close."*

[CJ: Did you ever think, "I want to go back home", after you were here?] *"No – home? Where is home? Like, we didn't have a home for years. I couldn't remember the home in the Ukraine. Germany wasn't that great, either, because we just had that one room - it was better of course... (but) as I said we were almost sent back. That was scary. You know we didn't feel secure, safe until we came to Canada. So that was an elated feeling of course.*

*(Mother) continued to work on the farm during the day, and in the evenings in the canning factory, and then she still had housework. But I helped her with the household chores: cleaning and baking and washing. On Sundays we 'd go to church and then she'd often have friends come to visit in the afternoon and I would help set the table and help with serving the*

*baked goods and whatever she'd made. She took pride in her baking. If the zwieback wasn't 'just so' she would be very upset with herself.*

*There were many other refugee women like her that worked on the assembly line like Mother did, on the conveyor belts with tomatoes, with peaches. They made the tomato juice and they canned peaches and pears, cherries. And I, and my cousins, we used to work in the warehouse, even though we probably weren't of the age. We would work there with the rusty cans; we would use SOS<sup>110</sup> pads on them to remove the rust. At some point later - which was really quite heavy, I think - it was with the cans where they go into the carton, the box. And I would place the cardboard box toward the machine and the cans would all come off."*

[CJ: What role did the existing Mennonite community play in your life at this time?] *"A big role. Oh yes, they were very, very helpful: the church community, the church family. They were our social life. That, and the school, I would say for me - my class, but more so in Sunday school with my age. The girls and I would get together and go for walks, and sing. One of the girls had a piano and I thought, "Oh, she can play the piano." I would have liked to have taken piano lessons, but we couldn't afford a piano. But most of my closest friends were also Mennonites, that first year anyway.*

*I felt like we belonged in some ways, and yet other times, other ways... Of course with my friends I felt like I belonged, and there was hardly a Sunday that I was ever alone when I was growing up, and as a teenager. But there were times when it was still evident, or brought home. In fact, I'll just mention this one little episode in high school - even a Mennonite high school. I was dating a boy, (and) at some point I didn't want to see him anymore. I guess maybe I saw*

---

<sup>110</sup> Brand name of steel wool pads infused with cleanser.

*someone else, from our church – this one was not from our church. Then when I did not show an interest in him anymore, I guess he was annoyed, and at one point I remember I was outside and he was out there to go to his car, and he called me “DP” – displaced person. I guess he wanted to hurt me because maybe he felt hurt.”* [CJ: That was meant to be a put-down?] *“Yes. Oh, yes. Sure.”* [CJ: What was the perceived difference between you and someone who had come here 20 years before?] *“Well that generation was born here. They were born here, and we were not.”* [CJ: So, you didn’t feel always looked upon as an equal because you weren’t born here?] *“Yes, that would sum it up. We had (Mennonite) friends that came across with us, and others (that came separately from us), and others that were born here, like the girlfriend that had the piano. And she had a father. You know, so we felt... (pause) that there were things lacking in our life. And it was some things like a piano, and your own house and property. And a father. But I don’t know if I really missed my father as much as when I saw (her with her father) - you know, when we were there. Another girlfriend would come over, and she (also) had a father. And they had a nice house. We would often go to their house... (Edna begins to cry) I really have not talked about it.”* (We stop tape.) We get Kleenex, make tea, and discuss whether Edna would like to stop the interview here, or perhaps continue another day. She tells me that she’d rather continue after a break. She tells me she wants her children to know her story.

[CJ: Can you talk about how responsibilities were divided in your mother’s home here?] *“Well, initially we all went to school. I helped with the housework, and (my older brother, 14) was the head of the house, or the family. He looked after major decisions, I imagine, such as water- we had an outside pump – and to make sure also that we had transportation to church and back. Eventually we bought a car and (he) got his license first, of course. And (my younger brother) helped with various things. Well, we also acquired bicycles, too. We used the bikes to get around*

*the immediate area. But to church, initially we had to get a ride with our cousins because they went to the same church. [CJ: Did your mother learn to drive?] "No."*

In high school, Edna completed grade 10, then went on to Business College in St. Catharines for one year. She began secretarial work in St. Catharines. *"I felt like I was a fish out of water; I was not prepared for the business community. I was shy and timid and I think some of the male workers had a lot of laughs at me, especially about sex, and then they'd laugh because I'd turn red. I mean at that time I knew enough English, but, at Eden<sup>111</sup> I felt so sheltered – it was Mennonites then, grade 9 and 10 religious training. Of course up to grade 8 it was public and I did have non-Mennonite friends there, but at Eden it was just Mennonites. We had bible study, we memorized bible verses, we sang hymns, we had a devotional first of all in the morning to start off the day and... (I went) to church on Sunday, sat at home with my mother or with my cousins, friends down the road. We would play games together, or go bicycling down the road, sing, whatnot. But I was not prepared for this community, I'm telling you. (laughs) So I was there for about a year, maybe less, then I got (another) job and I felt a little more prepared for that after that first year's experience, and I did better there. That was in mid to late '50s. I quite liked it there. I worked there 2 years until I got married, and then we moved to Hamilton.*

*"We were engaged on my birthday. Oh, it was the happiest day of my life - second happiest: when I was baptized was the happiest, at 16. (We met) through Young People's<sup>112</sup> socials. They were every Friday night. That was another way for socializing through the church ...We often double dated with my cousin and her boyfriend."*

---

<sup>111</sup> Eden high school in Niagara-on-the-Lake, formerly operated by the Mennonite Brethren Conference. A publicly funded, Christian faith-based high school located in St. Catharines now operates under the same name.

<sup>112</sup> Church youth group.

Edna and her brothers all married *Russlaender*. The first few years Edna and her husband lived out of town, where her husband took teaching positions. *"Away from Niagara I didn't feel quite at home. We made a lot of good friends - (my husband) knew more people than I did... But I didn't have my friends that I grew up with here, my teenage friends. And our parents would come here to visit, and we would go there. But when we would come to visit we didn't have time to visit friends, our time was taken up with visiting both sides of the family."*

[CJ: Is it important to you to live in a Mennonite community?] *"Well, I quite like it. When we were in Leamington,<sup>113</sup> there too was a Mennonite community, but our immediate neighbours were not Mennonite. And we had a good relationship -we didn't exactly visit in each other's homes, but we visited outside over the fence, so to speak, and their children played with ours. There was a Dutch family that was nice enough. But not a lot. I guess because (my husband) taught in a Mennonite school, too. And the children were at home, too. I didn't have a job there.*

*(My husband) applied with the local school board (in Niagara) and got it. We bought our first house that we owned - that we're still in- in 1965. I said, "I like this house, and I will help pay for it by getting an office job". I started off part time as a secretary. It was ironic - when I went for an interview it was to fill in for my cousin who was working there, and she was leaving to work on the farm. Her husband wanted her to work on the farm and not in the office so much. I came in her place and the clerk said, "Well, if it isn't a (Mennonite surname), it's a (another Mennonite surname)". He thought that was pretty funny. He was not Mennonite. But he knew that the Mennonite community was pretty large here, and there were a lot of (families with these surnames). And I've (worked) there on and off for many, many years."*

---

<sup>113</sup> Leamington: Community in southwestern Ontario



[CJ: So the only time you've not lived in a Mennonite community was in Africa?] "Ya. We went there with CIDA, as ambassadors; it wasn't a Mennonite mission. We did apply with MCC however we were a family of 5 and they did prefer couples without children or with maybe 1 child – smaller families that wouldn't cost so much, I think. Also a 3 year minimum stay we would have had to sign up for, and that sounded a bit much for me, to leave Mother and go across to another continent. But CIDA was a 2-year minimum and by then I guess I was ready to try it for a 2-year term. But by then we quite liked it, and (my husband) felt he really hadn't contributed that much in 2 years. It takes a while to get settled into a new culture like that and to develop friends and to develop...skills. And he... felt he could more effectively contribute by maybe going another year, so he applied for a third year leave of absence from the school board and it was granted. In the meantime, though, we had home-leave and we saw our parents, and lived (in Niagara), for two or three months. I felt that wasn't so bad, but I think Mother was probably disappointed that he did.

I taught kindergarten (in west Africa). I hadn't had training as a teacher, but in the Christian setting I had taught Sunday school and daily vacation bible school, so I quite enjoyed it. And there was a need for the kindergarten group. Many of the wives were qualified teachers and they taught grades 1-5." [CJ: Were there other Mennonites in your community there?] "Not in our campus, but in the other campus there were. We met them there; they were from Winnipeg. And then we also met some Mennonites that lived in (another city). They were missionaries, one was a minister and we went with them through the bush to a church service and a Mennonite baptism of Africans." [CJ: Were their Mennonite churches there?] "Well it was a small handful of people, and likely not regular. But they were training their own pastors in bible study so they could continue in teaching the bible in the Mennonite way, the Anabaptist

*faith - so that they could be baptized as adults upon confession of faith. And so that was quite an experience, really - literally going through the jungle to this service."*

[CJ: It was quite adventurous really that you did that, taking into account both of your backgrounds...] *"Yes, it was. (My husband) was quite surprised in the end that I agreed to go – my first reaction was, "No! I don't ever want to leave Canada." I was so happy to be here, to have a country, to have a home that I thought I'd never want to leave even for 2-3 years. But in the end I thought, "Well, you know, maybe it would be interesting, maybe we could contribute, have an experience that our children would remember. It might make a difference in that culture." From '69 to '72 we were there. But we got a lot of travel experience when we were there, too. We travelled a lot in Africa, and in the summer's all through Europe."*

[CJ: What traditions (customs) from your mother's home were most important for you to maintain?] *"One way, in going to church - although during the war years or the trek we couldn't. But it became very important to me when we started going to church here that we took our children to church and Sunday school. And that was a custom and tradition that developed, evolved, here actually but still that was something I wanted to pass on to our children and grandchildren. And I suppose some of the ceremonies, like Easter - they celebrate it here too, but (I mean) the Christian Easter, not the Easter rabbit type. And Christmas, that we celebrate it as a family, and as Christ's birth. And Pentecost, that we celebrate with baptism of new members.*

*(And) I guess some of the baking things - they are actually Ukrainian, but the Mennonites adopted them from the Ukrainian. It's not high on my priority list, but I just like to do it because mother baked those things and I enjoyed them.*

*Also singing - I love to sing very much. And in Young People's I did sing as part of a trio and a double-trio and we would sing as part of our Young People's meetings, or we would sing at*

*old people's homes in Vineland, and at various functions or ceremonies. And I still am part of the choir.*

*(And) all three of (our) children spoke High German. We spoke it to them. Not Low German, although they picked up some. (One daughter) likes some of the expressions in Low German. (They're) funny, Low German sayings. But (my husband's) family grew up with the High German language and I knew it as well, and in church the services and the songs were in High German."*

[CJ: Can you identify any new Canadian customs that you picked up, or your mother did?] *"One is clothing. We found it very unusual, I guess the older ones more so, how much the women liked to match things up: colours, the fashions. Then we got caught up in it, of course, but at first we thought, "Why did it have to match?" When we were in Russia and on the trek you put on the clothing that was warm and clean. You didn't have much choice in colour coordination...*

*(Mother) sewed some of my clothing in elementary school, and when I look at the pictures I was probably a little embarrassed at how home-made they looked. Now homemade things are special, right? How it goes around - isn't that strange? Mother sewed because of the need: clothes were too expensive. Now you can buy clothing for less than what you can sew them for.*

[CJ: Has your notion of what is meant by "family' changed over time?] *"Well, I'm not sure how I got the notion of what a husband is supposed to be like, because I never had a father role model with my mother and father. But I think I read a lot of books of happy families. And a family is - I still think the old fashioned way: mother, father, children. And then the children marry and have their own children and become grandparents. But the modern or nuclear family is slightly different in that there are blended families, and that is also an enriching experience. They can add a lot to the ordinary family. It's sort of a stretching experience, maybe - like not having such*

*a narrow view- and also with our emotions, being more inclusive. I think we Mennonites have traditionally been more exclusive. And we can learn from - we really need to be more inclusive."*

[CJ: What is a "good Mennonite woman" to you today?] *"To me, with regards to Mennonite, it's the Anabaptist faith. Otherwise, I don't think you are really Mennonite. The faith, that's what really started it...and I hope that it will always be a part of our family's thinking and belief, because we had a lot of martyrs in our forefathers who had chosen to die for their faith. Now I don't think I would; it's not necessary these days. But some people say that these days you do need to speak up for your faith more than, say, 50 years ago. There's a lot of evil out in this world and we are often too quiet about our faith, except among ourselves -the Mennonites that agree with us! And I feel badly about that myself. I'm not courageous enough to even speak to my family about my history. And so I'm glad we're doing this; maybe they'll see this one day. Maybe I'll talk to them about it before I die. But I'm glad to have this opportunity."* [CJ: When you say "not courageous enough" that would imply that you maybe have been afraid. I wonder why?] *"I don't know, exactly. I guess the opportunity hasn't arisen. Like sometimes I think I'm going to be more thankful and say a proper prayer at Thanksgiving, but maybe the opportunity doesn't arise because the grandchildren want to eat - and sometimes it's not in my home and I think well maybe if it were, we could maybe start Christmas tradition at Oma and Opa's - you know, the way it used to be. And then when it's at our house we would be in our rights to say a proper prayer...and even have a little - not sermonette but, you know, the sharing before the meal and after the meal."*

[CJ: Have you ever returned to Russia?] *"No, and I'm not that interested in returning, either."*

[CJ: Do you keep in contact with the relatives you were on the trek with?] *"Oh yes, especially those that are closer in age. The others that are a bit older we get together on certain occasions like anniversaries and weddings and funerals, but others that are close to my age, we see them A*

*LOT. They're close to us, too - most of them are in the Niagara peninsula. Then we have some other cousins that had to go to Paraguay... they are (now) in Waterloo,<sup>114</sup> and we are very close with them, too. We reconnected after they came to Ontario."*

In 1956, 16 years after her father had been taken in the Great Purges, Edna's mother was put into written contact with her exiled husband, who had indeed survived five years in the prison camps. Upon his release he had learned through friends and relatives that his family had left Russia, and assumed they would never be reunited. In time, he had remarried and fathered three additional children. Edna's mother, elated by the news that her husband had survived, was devastated by the reality of his second family. *"I do remember the two waves of disappointments: first, when she found out that he was married and then, some time later, that he had a family. And that really crushed her, too, because she thought there was probably no hope of ever getting together again. But they did correspond all that time, and before and after. She kept writing."*

Edna's brother recalls that the portrait of their father that had hung in the living room was put away the day their mother found out of his new family, despite her continuing to maintain correspondence for decades. Finally in 1987, 46 years after he had last seen his father, Edna's oldest brother travelled to Russia where the two were reunited. There were embraces between the half-siblings, meeting for the first time. In a touchingly simple and symbolic gesture, Edna's mother had sent money with her son to buy a new suit for his father. Although he never wore it, one year later the new family in Kyrgisien<sup>115</sup> dressed their father in the suit for

---

<sup>114</sup> City in southwestern Ontario adjacent to Kitchener.

<sup>115</sup> 'Kyrgisien' is the German version of Kyrgyzstan, used by the father in his correspondence.

his burial. Both parents now deceased, Edna and her brothers in Niagara regularly correspond and visit with their half-siblings who now live in Germany.

**Freda** (#6, 2004) was 21 when she arrived in St. Catharines with her family. Relatives had arranged for jobs with a farmer in Louth Township.<sup>116</sup> *"We thought, "Oh, this is just great. We're together as a family for a change. (My brother) couldn't come, because when they drafted him – and (he) had no choice - they just gave him the tattoo that indicated SS, and so of course they (immigration officials) saw that, and at that time they wouldn't let (him) come to Canada yet. So he had to go to Paraguay and he was there for 5 years (before coming to Canada). By that time, we were on the farm - I was married, and Mom and the boys were in Virgil. One of my brothers got a job at GM (General Motors) and the other brother was working, too. They were building a house in Virgil."*

[CJ: What were your first impressions of the peninsula?] *"Well, actually, where I grew up it was more flat. This was a lot more (motions up and down with hands), with the creeks and all. And also the climate - the climate where I lived was more like the (Canadian) prairies. But I remember coming from Quebec by train - and that goes somewhere up north, and this was August – everything looked grey. The grass was dried up by then, and rocky. And I thought, "Oh, what a desolate country!" - coming from Europe where everything is green and close, you know - all the forests. But Niagara, of course, the area, that was more like Europe, or at least parts that we lived in once we left the Ukraine."*

[CJ: How did your mother support your family in Niagara?] *"Actually we were very lucky. You see I was 21, my youngest brother was 15, and he was working on a farm, and (another brother) was 17, and so we were all working. When we first came, we figured she wasn't going to work."*

---

<sup>116</sup> Community on the Niagara peninsula, approximately 6 km outside of St. Catharines.

*She was going to stay home and have meals ready, that kind of thing. But it didn't take long (before) she figured out she couldn't just stay home. She was 46; she was still relatively young. She needed to do more than just that, so she went back to the farm as well. So we had all our (travel) debts paid off in the fall yet. And then I went to work as a domestic, a live-in maid, in St. Catharines.*

*We were always considered outsiders somewhat, because we were different: we didn't know the language, and we had gone through a lot more than the people here. We had experienced a lot more. And that already makes you have a different outlook. They had led a pretty sheltered life, even though they were poor and they went through the Depression. But outside of that they didn't have any hardships, like being afraid, or exiled, or this kind of thing. And also, the whole time, they had a church where they grew up in a faith community. Where we, the years from 1930 at least until the German occupation of '41, the church's were all turned into clubs where you have dances, and this type of thing. So the life in the (Soviet) Mennonite community had morally deteriorated a lot. That you could tell, that the church was not present. I mean we always had a bible in the house, but you have to be able to practice it. And that showed... We had a little bit when the Germans were there, but once we left, on the road, there wasn't anything. For one thing there weren't many men to lead the services until the MCC gathered us and again organized services and told us who we were – Mennonites - and what we were all about...*

*These (Russlaender) families here, they had never had separations. They didn't – like, the farm where we worked, they were (Mennonites), and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ would say, "Well, you can tell, you kids, where you grew up without the father." Well, I didn't think (we) were any less behaving than his boys, but for some reason, this already. Personally, I think those women did a wonderful job with all their children. Most of them turned out to be very well adjusted and*

*productive citizens, to say nothing of nice human beings. Ya, most families here had a father. Where we all came from: without. There were very few fathered families. They were mostly women that came. It never occurred to me - when I think back, my mom's 3 sisters, my dad's 5 sisters, they all raised these kids. And in Paraguay they had a whole village – not a man! – just women with children. They called it The Women's Village.”<sup>117</sup>*

Freda married a *Russlaender* farmer when she was 22, and they had 6 children. Both adults worked the farm. *“We only had 25 acres, and a wife was absolutely essential. Our main income was peaches, but we had grapes and pears, cherries and plums.”* To an extent, household duties were shared: *“I usually would go in and make supper and (he) would usually come in and maybe read the paper. And then he would go out again and usually I would stay in and look after the children and do whatever needed to be done. However, in our family (Dad) made breakfast. One of our kids, when she started school, I (asked her), “Is she married, your teacher?” “No”, she said. “She isn’t. She said she had to make her own breakfast”. See, that’s what they grew up with, because we had all these babies and he rather did that than look after diapers. (laughs) I mean, nothing like (the next) generation is. He was a great Dad. I could send him out (on errands) and they’d be out with him somewhere, which made it so much easier for me. So it was a really great way to raise kids, and he was really good with the kids.”*

[CJ: Did you speak German at home?] (He) spoke (English and) mainly Low German. I had acquired a pretty good High German in Germany, and I spoke High German to the oldest 2, to the point where... (they) were under the impression women only speak German and men only speak English! If we got company where they weren't speaking German at all, they would still speak to the women in German. (laughs) (My husband and I) would speak Low German when we

---

<sup>117</sup> In Paraguay, the Neuland Colony, with almost all of its 147 adult inhabitants being women, came to be known as Frauendorf, or ‘Women’s Village’. There were only three men (H. Loewen,2008).



*didn't want (the children) to understand us. And that's amazing: within one generation we have lost the German language. And that goes for most of my friends; most of them, their children don't speak. Well, it would have been a good thing, just putting out a little more effort on my part for them to take along. I mean the German language isn't sacred to me, or anything. It's a nice language; I like it. But it would be easy for them, and the more languages you speak (the better), especially today. And they keep saying, "Why didn't you keep it up?" "Ya," I said. "I tried, and that was too much work".*

[CJ: What traditions from your mother's home were most important for you to maintain?]

*"Well, food is one thing: Mennonite food. And the minute you hear of zwieback and borscht and wareniki and rollkuchen, you think Mennonite. One of my grandsons, he says, "Oma, do you have zwieback?" "Oh", I said. "Who wants zwieback?" "Well, I have friends, they would like zwieback: (friend's name)" "Oh", I said. "They're Mennonites!" (laughs) The girls were going to Brock<sup>118</sup> here, and their parents lived (out of town), and so they hadn't had zwieback in a while. This type of thing, you know. The food is one thing.*

*Also, they call it 'The Mennonite Game': when you hear the name Rempel or Dyck, or Willms, you right away want to know, "Oh, where are you from? Who are your parents?" I went to Cuba last Christmas with (my brother) and his 2 daughters and some friends of theirs and their daughters. When we got to the airport, I said, because I didn't really know, "What's your name?" "Oh", he said. "So-and-So Hildebrand". "Hildebrand?", I said. "Who are your parents?" "Well, So-and-So and So-and-So." Well, I know them, you see, from Winnipeg, because we were good friends with his uncle and they would come here to visit and we got to know them. I mean, this kind of thing, our children won't be doing. They call it "The Mennonite Game".*

---

<sup>118</sup> Brock University in St. Catharines.

[CJ: To what extent did you maintain relationships with the groups you migrated with?] *"When my aunts were still living, in B.C., they would come here a lot and Mom would go there, and the cousins would come to visit. That generation is all gone, now. And for some reason we always felt close, and maybe the aunts were keeping it also - whenever somebody went there, even the next generation, everybody knew right away, and they had to be in touch there. We are the oldest, (my brother) and I, so we remember the most - and there are a few that remember a lot too, yet, from Hamberg, in Russia. That we share. But even the young ones that are 12 years younger than I, even they feel this closeness that we have. And maybe that was due, too, to all the things that they together went through and heard from their parents. My kids aren't as close with their cousins, or with the extended family, as we were.*

*And I think we have been a lot more affluent, and the more affluent people get the less they depend on each other. There's some price to be paid for everything, and I don't think affluence is totally good. There doesn't seem to be anything that is totally good. Well, independence does not lend itself to a lot of closeness, financially or materially. If you need each other - and you don't need each other here as far as material things - sure, emotionally we do, but when you need for both of it that really keeps people close. I know my mom's sisters, they didn't always see eye to eye, but they were always there when things counted; they united."*

[CJ: Was it important to you that your children marry within the Mennonite faith?] *"I would have liked for them maybe to marry Christian, not necessarily Mennonite, but above all that they marry nice human beings. I know for some people - it really hasn't been all that important to me that they marry Mennonites rather than that they be good people. And maybe that's part, too, because we didn't grow up in this mindset as much as maybe my generation that grew up here and was never anywhere else (Russlaender)."*

[CJ: Has your notion of 'family' changed over time?] *"As far as the feeling that the family is really important, I don't think that there's any difference. My kids feel that family is as important to be there for them as I suppose we felt. Well, the relationship between Mom and Dad, the sharing of chores, of the work, definitely that has changed from what I grew up with and from what happened in our home. As for Dad to be the head - although I can't say that that was that important for Dad to be the head of the house; he didn't insist on that. We sort of agreed on different things, or disagreed. As far as discipline, I didn't tell my kids, "You wait till Dad comes home." If they needed discipline, I could administer that as well as (he) could. So other than that - well, there are so many different families now, and that happens in the Mennonites, too. There are step children, there are common-law marriages, there are - one of my daughters lives common-law but that home is no less a home than any married home of my children... the commitment is there. I don't think it's any less than in a marriage except they haven't done it openly or publicly, whichever you want to call it."*

[CJ: What were/are your hopes and aspirations for your daughters and for your sons?] *"I want them to be reasonably content in life, to be safe. They don't need to be rich, but to have enough, to not have to want. And so far they do -you never know what the future brings. And I don't think hardship has ever hurt anyone. So many people say these days, "Oh if our kids had to..." I said, "If they had to, they would." I'm pretty sure they have the tools, even though they never had to use them. They would rise to the occasion if they came into really bad times, where they had to. And ya, to be able to cope with life, and cope reasonably well. To have good values.*

[CJ: Have you ever taken on a leadership role in the church yourself?] *"I've been teaching Sunday school and been on different committees. I've been a deacon... Now music is a BIG thing in the churches, where there are a lot of divisions. Where (my son) goes in Waterloo, that's one of the oldest Russian Mennonite churches and they had at one time the traditional, and then the*

*contemporary that wanted different themes - they just didn't want to sit on their hands the whole service, they wanted to raise them now and then, they wanted to say things if they approved, they wanted to clap, and sing different songs. And of course, my generation, so many of them say, "If that's what they want, then let them go somewhere else!" (laughs) So quite a few just can't stand that, people being in any way animated. I felt so often, when I heard a really good music piece in church, like, how are you going to express it? You can't just by sitting on your hands. But we couldn't (be animated) or sing these contemporary - well, they're not hymns, some people say, "singing off the wall". We have all these hymns. Well, most of the hymns they were from 200 years ago..." [CJ: I guess at one time they, too, were new...] "At one time - but they are pretty well, to me at least, pretty well the same. But this repeating a line, maybe x number of times, some people feel, "What is that for? It doesn't teach you anything." (And others reply,) "Well, maybe you should think about what it actually says. How do we learn? By repeating things."*

[CJ: What is it about yourself that you might say makes you 'most Mennonite'?] *"I guess the whole Mennonite game, the food, the friends. My closest friends are just Mennonite: the people we associated with when we were younger, or kids, growing up. We went to the same church, our kids knew (theirs) from Sunday school, and we got together with them."*

[CJ: What are the qualities you admire about your children & grandchildren?] *"OK, they are really there for each other. They have their differences, but they really stick together. And basically they are very honest people. Not just because they are my kids, but you can soon tell what kind of human beings they are."*

[CJ: Can you comment on outcomes and opportunities you and your children have had because you left your native land and immigrated to the Niagara Peninsula?] *"Oh, that is absolutely no comparison. Well for one thing, I wouldn't have married who I did. That wouldn't have been*

*their father, and they had a very good memory of their dad. So that's one thing. And all the opportunities they've had! Even if it was hard on the farm, even if I had to work hard, I always thought, "Wow, I have it so much better than my mom - there was never enough to eat, there were never enough clothes to wear, it was just awful. Yet, she would see here our children were always well fed and they had a nice home and they had extras: they had music lessons, they did sports, they did these things that enrich life. So there's no comparison. If I hadn't come here, if I had been sent to Siberia, to raise a family there..."*

[CJ: Have you ever returned to Russia?] *"Yes, we were there in '95."* [CJ: Is there anything you miss about your natal land?] *"No. NOT a thing!" (laughs)* [CJ: Do you contribute monetarily to relatives or causes in Russia?] *"Yes. I have 3 cousins from my mom's side and probably 4 from my dad's. I think there about 3 living in Kazakhstan, in the Asian part of Russia. And one lives in Russia, and one lives in Ukraine. And actually, one of my cousins, we visited him in Hamberg. And the widow of his brother, she lives (there). And when we were there, there was the wife of one of my uncles, still living, who has died since. We saw some of the cousins there. One lives in Ukraine and she is very involved, because she's very ambitious for her children. She has two boys, and they are well educated, but there aren't the opportunities that are in Canada. She wants them, in the worst way, to come to Canada. But not possible so far."*

[CJ: How important is the preservation of your memories and thoughts to you?] *"Well, it is. I would like them to know this story, and the children are now getting older and they're more and more curious. They want to know. I've been telling them different things, and they've said, "Oh Mom, what an adventurous life you had." And it was. I mean, I was young when we were bumming around Europe and we didn't have to be afraid of anyone being deported or exiled somewhere...(My brother's) story is practically my story as well - he wrote a book. And as (the kids) get older - and I think that's also natural that as you get older you're more and more*

curious - like, now I feel, "Oh, I should have asked Mom more than I did". You never have asked enough."

Katie (#7, 2004), who arrived when she was 11, recalls her early life in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL). "Well, we came to Manitoba first for 6 months. The first day of school, now that was a scary experience. I was very shy, and I already changed schools numerous times. That was traumatic. And then 2 months later we moved to (another village) and I changed schools again, and then in August I came (to Niagara). You have to start right in grade 1 because you didn't speak any English. Children learn fast, especially if you're dumped into an environment in which no one speaks German! English immersion: that was how it was.

NOTL did not have a Mennonite community at that time. Virgil did. We didn't have a car in the beginning, so the only thing we would do is have Sunday school. I think we felt accepted in the church. The school, of course was different. I remember being the only Mennonite child in my class, and it was soon after the war, so German slurs were not that infrequent, and teasing. And of course you stuck out like a sore thumb, because you looked different, didn't have the clothes. We wore only hand-me-downs at that point. My mother would sew them at night, and in the daytime she worked, so it was hard for the adults. It was mainly the Mennonite community. Other than being in school, we had nothing to do with other people."

Katie recalls when her father came to Niagara, in 1951. "You know, having been gone 6 years, during which time we were without a father, he fitted in very well. I've heard other families where it was quite difficult, because children would all of a sudden have an authority figure now. It was not a problem at all. He just fitted in very nicely, probably because he wasn't your typical authoritarian Mennonite father. We all really adored our father.

I was married young, and then I went back to school after my youngest son started school and I did a B.A. and, an M.A. eventually. I was 19, which was sort of the age that

*Mennonite girls got married at. It seems terrible today, but, ya, a year after high school. We met through the church. We were both in the choir and in Young People's. His family came over in the 1920s. We had four children, and we were farmers. And two of our children, the boys, have become farmers as well. Our daughters, one is (an academic) and the other is (a musician).*

*(In the early days) we both worked on the farm, but not all year round – mine was more seasonal. I think it was very traditional. My husband always worked long hours, longer hours than I did, so I pretty well did all the work in the house and garden. There was some overlapping of course because I worked on the farm, but he never had time to do housework. I think he would have. I mean I'm all for boys learning how to cook and do housework, but it wasn't practical because they always worked more hours on the farm, the work that the girls probably wouldn't have been strong enough to do. So you couldn't very well expect the boys to do housework as well. And when we all worked on the farm, at harvest time, then I never had the nerve or the courage to ask the boys to work in the evenings yet. I mean, they were just young children, so then I did it myself in the evenings. But I know my husband would have never sat on the couch while I was working, so... it's just one of those situations."*

*We started off speaking High German to our kids. It was VERY important to me, the second language. Just as a second language - I wouldn't have cared if it was Greek or French or whatever, just the enormous advantage to speak a 2<sup>nd</sup> language. And we did start out with the older ones, but it became harder and harder when the younger ones come along."*

[CJ: What traditions (customs) from your mother's home were most important for you to maintain?] *"I guess family traditions, you know the importance of family. It's in all other cultures as well: family celebrations, the birthdays, Christmas, the holidays. I still also do quite a bit of Mennonite foods - not exclusively so, but some things I still do.*

[CJ: What new traditions (customs) did you embrace over time in Niagara?] *"Well, Thanksgiving is one. They used to have a thanksgiving celebration in the churches when we were growing up in Niagara, but that was totally different from the turkey and the pumpkins and all that. In September, they always had 'Erntedankfest',<sup>119</sup> which was a harvest festival, a thanking for the harvest, because they were all farmers then. That's all changed now. But eventually they dropped that in favour of the Thanksgiving holiday that we have now and the families now have the turkey and so on. For "Erntedankfest" we wouldn't have had anything in terms of meals; this was just a church service and it would have been mentioned about the harvest and things like that. But the family holiday, yes, that's Canadian - and the turkeys at Christmas. A lot of the foods we do the same things now as here. I still haven't gotten used to pumpkin pie yet, but one of these days I will."* (laughs) [CJ: Did you find it challenging trying to hold on to the old ways or trying to adapt to the new?] *"No. I think it's probably the older you are when you make that transition. And I'm not hung up on the old ways, so no, can't say that was a challenge. I think you get into it very gradually when you come as a child. I think it must be very different when you come as an adult person. And also if you very strongly believe that the old ways are best then I suppose it would be difficult, but I've never had that problem."*

[CJ: Was it important to you that your children marry within the Mennonite faith?] *"No. It would have been - it was when I was younger. It's very strange how that changes. But not today."* [CJ: Do you attend church services regularly?] *"No."* [CJ: Your children?] *"Actually,*

---

<sup>119</sup> Another participant described *Erntedankfest*: "Everyone would bring the best of their crops - my father would bring bushels of pears and apples and peaches - and they were all lined up in front of the church. Others would bring baked goods, bread, platz (Mennonite cake topped with fruit), and so on. They were representative products of their farms. And at the end of the church service they were auctioned off. Later it was evolved to just making a donation for whatever you wanted to take" (#32, 2006).



*none of them does. I think one of them does occasionally; he's still a church member. But no, we've sort of gotten away from it. I think I studied too much." (laughs)*

**Reflection Box 5.1: Insider/Outsider**

Katie is one of only 2 members of this study to have self-identified as not attending church. As a lapsed Catholic myself, I was very aware of how comfortable that made me feel around her. We had both eschewed organized religion as adults. Further, she and I had both pursued university degrees as mothers. So, on these levels I felt more like an 'insider' than an 'outsider' with Katie.

I am increasingly aware, anyway, that the binary of Insider/Outsider is not really a binary at all. I am not Mennonite, but I am a member of a Mennonite family; I am not a Mennonite, but I am a woman like you, or a parent like you, or a Canadian like you; I am not Mennonite, but I baked zwieback yesterday and I understand more and more of your cultural references; I am not an immigrant or a refugee, but I was adopted and displaced into a cultural milieu different than that of my ancestors – I have questions about who I am; I am not Mennonite, but through these studies I can understand many of your historical references... it's not so difficult for people to find and then explore common ground with each other.

Also, as a qualitative researcher, the more deeply I come to know the community I'm working with, the more hybrid I find myself feeling. Our acquaintances become increasingly mutual; I know who you are talking about when you reference a friend or a relative, and often have interviewed that person. In a way, I become a (peripheral) feature of this community that I explore.

Not to mention that the community itself is so heterogeneous, that even an 'insider' with a Mennonite surname would embody 'outsider' elements to some...

[C]: Has your notion of what is meant by "home" changed over time?] *"Well, I remember, when we were refugees, one little boy was asked where his home was, and he said, "Well, where my suitcases are". And in a way, it's where your things are and where your family is – that's home. But I would not like to live in a lot of different places today. I don't think I would find it that easy to uproot. And that could be because of all the moving around we did as children. I love to travel, and I've travelled a lot. But I still would like to have one base and stay there, preferably in the same house for the rest of my life. And that could be a result of the uprootedness that we had when we were children. But not everyone feels like that. Even though I had a great curiosity to travel to as many places as possible, I think I would find it hard to say, "Oh, well we're just going to move to Florida, or wherever". I think I would find that very difficult. But being on the farm, I guess that's not been a problem anyway, so..." (laughs). [C]: Where do you think of as*

'home'?) *"Oh, right here, NOTL!! Yes. Definitely. I belong here, absolutely. Oh, I see this question as perhaps directed at people who might have a longing for the old country. And I don't think that happens when people come here as children. I could be wrong, but..."* [CJ: Actually no one from the 1<sup>st</sup> generation expressed such a longing either...] *"Ya, I think that's understandable because the times when we left were so terrible. And they were already visitors in a strange land – foreigners- in a Russia. Even their passports have the German on it. Even though they were born there, and their fathers and grandfathers were probably born there, their passports still stated that they were German."*

CJ: What would you say it means to be a 'good Mennonite Woman' to you today? *"Again, since I'm no longer 'a good Mennonite woman' (laughs), that is very interesting. Well, I think some of the old criteria still stand: to manage the home and to be a good cook - although this depends very much on the age group. But you're asking my perspective, right? [CJ: Yes. Another way of putting it might be what do you feel makes you 'most Mennonite'?] My cultural heritage, not my present practices. So it's a history, which is not just a religious history, but also the history of an ethnic group. And that is what is most important to me today. I'm very interested in Mennonite history, and I've made 2 trips back to Russia and I've done a lot of reading. So that part of it I find very interesting. But the church-related, I've gotten away from that. I mean it interests me to the extent that it is part of the history. I have to be honest. But that is probably different than most women my age. And I don't know whether you can say whether family is more emphasized than other groups. I'm not sure. It depends. I could probably answer your question better if I was still, you know, in the church, and very active in the church. Then it might be easier to answer. Looking at it from the outside, there still maybe is, you know, a little more conformity there. You know, certain things are expected of women."* [CJ: You mean in terms of the church?] *"Well, Mennonite - in our culture. But again, that's maybe generalizing. And that*

*may also be the case in any very close-knit group: that there's a little bit of people tending to think the same, and act the same, to some extent. But again, I shouldn't comment on that because I'm really on the outside looking in, in some ways.* [CJ: You feel on the outside looking in?] *"Yes. Yes. I'm happy to be that way, though, so... (laughs). I mean, it's my choice."* [CJ: Do you still feel part of the Mennonite community here, though?] *"Well, our friends are still mostly Mennonite, so yes - and they're friends that we've had since I was a teenager. I don't think I would get into philosophical discussions with them on the nature of religion or anything like that - I'd stay away from that. You know, it's just plain manners a lot of that. (laughs) But in other ways, ya, we get together and we have a good time and so I don't feel any different there."*

[CJ: What are you (most) proud of in your own life?] *"Well my family of course, that's number one. I don't know about proud of, but I feel good about having gone back to school. The music, too. I started taking lessons in my forties. And the contribution to (a local facility) - I've been on the board for years. When I got on the board I really felt, you know, this is paying back to the community for what it was to me when I was young. It's a volunteer position."*

[CJ: You have returned to Russia?] *"Twice. Once on the Heritage Cruise,<sup>120</sup> and the next time on TourMagination<sup>121</sup> - that was 8 of us. And it was a tour of Moscow, St. Petersburg and some of the former Mennonite villages. Actually my grandmother grew up on an estate in that area, and they were, of course, driven off the estate in 1917, I think, so I was really interested in trying to find the place. For us that was always the Shangri-La - you know, The Golden Age. Well, my grandmother, she often talked about her childhood as being a Golden Age, and everything was so beautiful and perfect, you know. I just read over a letter she had written where she writes*

---

<sup>120</sup> Mennonite Heritage Cruises (<http://home.ica.net/~walterunger/>)

<sup>121</sup> TourMagination "builds bridges among Mennonites, Christians and other faiths around the world through custom-designed travel" (<http://www.tourmagination.com/index.php>).

*about her school days where all the children were obedient and listened to their teachers - you know, the very idealistic sense of it all then. I guess I just had an interest in seeing whether I could find anything that I still remembered. And that was very moving. An interest in the history of the places - I've done a lot of reading about Mennonite history. But mainly the memories, ya, to see if what you remember as a five year old, whether there's any connection."* [CJ: Did you feel any sense of belonging there?] *"Oh no. Oh, absolutely not. But there is that sense of yes, wanting to - not relive your childhood - but touch base with it. I don't know. In fact, I would still like to go back, it's really strange. I am the only of my siblings to have gone, so far. Well of course 2 of them were not born there. My mother has not gone back. Oh, for years they were too afraid. And I think the memories would have been too overwhelming; I don't know whether we could have handled that. For my mother especially - their childhood was really dreadful. [CJ: Is there anything you miss about Russia?] "No. This is my homeland. This is my home. I do love Russian literature and Russian music - as well as German literature and German music."*

[CJ: How important is the preservation of your memories and thoughts to you? *"Actually I've been working on a book about my grandfather and my family's story - some of it is ours, in the end. So in that sense it will be recorded for the ones that are interested - they may not be. I find that sometimes when you're younger you're not that interested, but that changes as you get older, and I'm hoping that will happen with my children and grandchildren, too. Because there's a period in your life - maybe because the road ahead is shorter than the road behind - that you start to look back, you start to look at the past. And I want to preserve those memories for whoever comes that may find it interesting. Well, for the historical record of course. The individual stories are interesting. And I've gone back and looked at different things. I just found a few letters that my great grandmother had written in the early 1900s, and these things are fascinating! My mother always kept all sorts of things like that, as well photo albums, and so on.*

*So often things like that get lost.” [CJ: Or were never written...] “Or were never written, yes. Ya, it makes you realize how important the written word still is because when you’re gone, you can’t tell anyone, if someone were to be interested. But if they are in writing, you can go back years later – or today it will all be on computer discs or whatever. It’s recorded; it doesn’t matter how. Once that generation is gone, then you can’t ask them anymore.”*

*Gloria (#8, 2004) was 17 upon arrival in Niagara. “Mom’s cousin picked us up and then we lived in Vineland. I was there for 3 days and then they shipped me out to work as domestic help in St. Catharines. I was there for 6 months. I was like a nanny looking after the children. The little girl, she could only speak English, but these were Jews and they could speak German.*

*When I first came all I wanted to do was go back to Germany. [CJ: To Germany, not to the Ukraine?] “No. (laughs, shakes head) But to Germany because there we knew everything, and we lived in a city, and because here we didn’t know the language, and I didn’t know anybody. I was alone in this domestic work - although we got together every Thursday afternoon at the Y<sup>122</sup> with other girls- domestic help there- and shared our sorrows. I mean they were lonely (days) - after a year or so I would never go back, but the first impression I thought, “I’m going to earn enough money, and I want to go back.” I was 16 (in Germany) and I earned money, I had money to spend, and there were a lot of young people there because this was in a city and the Mennonite camps were still there. There were a lot of Mennonites there, so we had a great time in Germany - at least, once we moved into the city.”*

*[CJ: And here in the Niagara region there were also a lot of Mennonites...] “Yes. See when I went to work in the city, my mother and (“Edna’s) mother, they moved to NOTL. There was a little farmerette house, and Tante \_\_\_\_\_ and my mom we lived on one side of the house*

---

<sup>122</sup> YMCA (recreational complex of the Young Men’s Christian Association).

*and a different family lived on the other side yet. It was just a small house - there was a big common room, and then 2 bedrooms, and that's what we shared. I earned \$35 a month, I kept \$5 for myself, and \$30 supported them through the winter. We came here in October, so we had November, December when there was no work for (my mother and aunt). In spring they started to work, but this \$30 kept them through the winter."*

[CJ: Did you have any schooling in can once you came?] *"Only night school, a little bit. I started going with my husband when I was 18, and he made it his job to teach me English. He was born in Canada (Russlaender). I mean he was born here already, but his parents came here.*

*(Mother worked) mainly on the farm, and she worked as a cook at a high school for a while. Well after 6 months at that household I came back for the summer. We worked on the farm all summer long to pay off our debt for coming here, and after that I got a job - I worked at a canning factory for quite a bit, and then I got a job at GM. I worked there for 2 years till I had my fist child and then I was a homemaker.*

[CJ: What similarities or differences existed between the *Fluechtlinge* and the existing Mennonite community in NOTL?] *"Well we kept kind of separate, because we were such a big group. We got together Sunday afternoon. I think the people that lived here they kind of envied us because we were so close. And we always had, in the summertime, Sunday afternoon either at the beach or at somebody's house; we always had big parties, like we were singing and playing games, and we were actually, I think, envied, because a lot of the Mennonites, like the people from here, they tried to join us. Because I guess we were having so much fun. (laughs)*

[CJ: Did you ever have a chance to tell your stories to them?] *"I don't think we dwelled on the past. At least I didn't."*

[CJ: At what age did you marry?] *"Just about 20."* [CJ: Did you have a church wedding?] *"Yes. In those days they were big, everybody was invited. There wasn't an invitation that said*

*'Mr. & Mrs.', it was sent to the family. And you served sandwiches and squares, in the afternoon. I think we had 400 people there. We had 3 settings, because they had to keep making more sandwiches. (laughs) I remember this one couple came walking up to us. She said, "We came to your wedding. We didn't get an invitation, but I KNOW there must have been a misunderstanding somewhere!" (laughs) [CJ: Was there dancing, a reception?] "No, there was a reception, but mainly playing games. There was all sorts of games that we used to play - at the public school or in the auditorium - that was after the wedding. The reception, like the food, was in church and then they went on to the school in Virgil.*

*We had 5 children. My husband worked at GM. We met in church singing in choir. But after we met we realized we were both working (at GM). A coincidence." [CJ: How would you describe the balance of domestic responsibilities between you and your husband in your home?] "It was one-sided because in those days they got laid off a lot in the summer. My husband quite often had 2 jobs: he worked there and then he had a part time job- worked at a basket factory in Niagara in spare time and so on- so he did what he could and I did what I could. But he was very supportive at home, too. It wasn't like, "That was your job, and this was my job." I had to be home with the children, and he supplied us with whatever we needed. Cooking and cleaning was mainly my job because I was mainly at home. That was not frowned upon; that was expected."*

[CJ: What traditions (customs) from your mother's home were most important for you to maintain?] *"Well, get-togethers, like Christmases. We were always at my mother's on Christmas Eve. Easter egg hunt - that's still important. Our kids were still getting bigger and we thought we were going to stop Easter egg hunt and the kids were like, "Mom, we can't stop Easter egg hunt!" So that continues even now with my grandchildren. Some of them are 23 already, "Oma, you want to give up Easter egg hunt? You can't!" So my husband has about 60 eggs out in the backyard somewhere. That's the highlight of Easter, Easter egg hunt. Well,*

*different things: get-togethers, family get-togethers, we get together quite a bit. And so many birthdays! I have already 12 grandchildren, so there are lots of birthdays.*

[CJ: Can you think of any specifically Mennonite customs that you may have carried on?] *"Well, wardeniki, and paska for Easter, borscht. But I don't know it's really Mennonite. I think borscht comes from the Russian, but that's a tradition. Rollkuchen and watermelon."*

[CJ: How was your mother cared for as she aged?] *"You know she was so long on her own, because we got married within 5 years, all three of us, and she was about 46 when we were all married. She lived by herself in a house and then later on she got an apartment in Virgil (in a Mennonite retirement complex). And that's where she lived until she died."*

[CJ: Was it important to you that your children marry within the Mennonite faith?] *"Yes. But that didn't mean that they would do it. We have two Mennonite daughters-in-law, and that's it. You know, it makes a difference. They have a common background. When the daughters-in-law talk about anything I know exactly what they're talking about because I know their background. Whereas the other, I know the girl and the family, but I don't know their background, I don't know their family background, grandparents and whatever. So it is kind of nice. I remember we lived in St. Catharines when we were first married and the landlady she said her uncle married a Russian and he had told the nieces, "You know girls, I love my wife VERY much but it's not the same as having the same faith. He said, "Stay with your own people". So it makes sense in a way: they know your background, you know their background. A familiarity."*

[CJ: What are your thoughts about the roles women play today in society?] *"I think they play a lot of roles but I don't know if the roles are all that good. I mean I'm happy in the role that I am. I feel a woman should be a woman, and a man should be a man. A man should be the head of the house, and the woman... but it's not always possible, I guess."*



[CJ: In the church?] *"Women are very good but I still like to have a man preach."* [CJ: Is that a comfort factor do you think, because it's what you've always been used to, or a question of ability?] *"I think that's what the bible teaches."*

[CJ: What is it about yourself that you might say makes you 'most Mennonite'?] *"Well Mennonite is only a religion. Like we go to church, it is our faith. I don't think Mennonite is a culture. Mennonite is a faith. It's like being a Catholic. This is how I think it is."*

[CJ: Have you ever returned to Russia?] *"On a cruise. We were there 3 years ago, my sister and her husband and myself. My husband didn't want to go. He had no interest, he said. I thought it would be nice to see the old village where we lived and (in) that village we had some cousins yet, but they only speak Russian still. We had an interpreter with us. We were there for lunch. They did not leave because their mother was Russian, and their father was taken away, so she did not want to leave her family. When we got there she had passed away already, these were the children. They are our age."* [CJ: Did they comment on their lives there?] *"It is funny, when you are in a position and you don't know any better, you live the life that all your neighbours then do and you don't think you are that bad off, I don't think. When we were on the trek that's the way it was, and that's the way you live. And for them I think it's the same thing. They've lived there all their life. They wouldn't want to move, they said; that's their home. That's where they live. And they've never been to Canada or anywhere to see anything different. It's just a small village and they've lived there all their lives, so I guess it's what you are used to."*

[CJ: How important to you is the preservation of your memories and thoughts?] *"It's always nice to look back at things...but I am not a sentimentalist."*

**Doreen** (#9, 2004) arrived in Niagara when she was 6. *"We were pretty well surrounded by Mennonites, so we really didn't get into the community until we got into the workforce, and you were then exposed to the surrounding community. But basically our friendships and our*

*whole interaction was in the church - our social life, with Young People's when we were young, and choir, and you know we were involved in all kinds of different things in the church. So I would say our social life basically was the church. Most of our friends are still church friends that we made when we were teenagers. It's very nice. We're very happy about that. And actually our children are the same.*

*(I finished) grade 10 at Eden, then went to St. Catharines Business College. I worked as a secretary for a number of years until our son was born and after that I stayed home for a number of years until our youngest went to school and then I started working as an accountant for (my husband's) business. (Later, I) got my schooling to work in real estate (with my husband). While I stayed home I did the work at home. While we were both working I think it basically stayed the same. (laughs) Well, (he) would help with it. Because it was our business I could come and go; I wasn't confined to being there. I could be home at (lunch)... and after school, so basically they didn't even know I was working... Now, (my husband and I) do everything: if I cook, he cleans. If I mow the lawn, he'll vacuum the house -whoever has time can do it. We are both retired."*

[CJ: How important was it for you to retain German in your home?] *"It was when (the children) were young because (our) mother(s) didn't speak English. I think language is very important. In fact, it was very strongly encouraged in the church to keep the language. Our grandchildren don't know any German at all."*

[CJ: What traditions (customs) from your mother's home were most important for you to maintain?] *"I imagine that food would be one of the biggest ones- some of the meals that have been carried on over the generations, coming from Mother to us, to our children. Maybe not as much anymore. You know, there's meals like borscht, and wareniki, and rollkuchen...that are still*

*being done. Christmas was always turkey, but then there would be bubbat,<sup>123</sup> which is a kind of cake that would always come with it. It was like a pudding, like the English have Yorkshire pudding instead of stuffing, which is what we do. When we were young it was always bubbat, and I still often make it along with stuffing because our kids like it. That came from Ukraine, ya.”*

[CJ: Was it important to you that your children marry within the Mennonite faith?] *“Yes, it was. Not that we said they had to, but we STRONGLY encouraged them to. It’s easier for people to raise a family if the background is the same. There aren’t the same arguments and frustrations with, “OK, you do it this way, I’ll do it this way.” The faith would be the same. They wouldn’t have the struggles of working through faith issues with other non-Christians or non-Mennonites. So, in those days it was very important. I don’t know if it’s as important today. We still would be very happy if (our grandchildren) married a Christian. That would be more important to us than Mennonite. They’d have a lot of things in common which would help a lot, because there’s enough stresses on a marriage without – and often these things don’t show up until you have a family. That’s when your beliefs come out, your stronger beliefs that you don’t even think about until you are raising children and you suddenly think back to how you were raised and you know how you want your child to be raised.”*

[CJ: What is it about yourself that you might say makes you ‘most Mennonite’?] *“I don’t know. One thing I’m very strong on is to be Christian. Mennonite comes down the line, but that’s what I was born, you know? I imagine if I was born in another setting I would not feel as strongly about being Mennonite. Having been born as a Mennonite, though, I’m totally happy to be there.”*

---

<sup>123</sup> Poultry dressing, baked in a cake pan.

[CJ: Has your notion of what is meant by “family” changed over time?] *“Well, today I see a lot of single parent families. I still find that is a hard way to raise a family. If it’s possible, it takes 2 – it’s a hard job to raise a family, to give them stability. I always missed the fact that I didn’t have a father; to me that was always a HUGE loss. And so I would always think that if children didn’t have their father that would be a loss. Because I always wished for a father and missed my father, even though I had spent so little time with him. Still, that was a life thing - I always thought, “Well, maybe I’ll see my father some day...”*

Doreen has returned to Russia twice. *“The first time we went with a family group of (my husband’s family)... They put together a tour. We went to Holland, and we went to where Menno Simons started...then we went to Poland, to Gdansk, where the Mennonites moved...to Ukraine. Then in 2001 we decide to go back with the Heritage Cruise.<sup>124</sup> We found the village. We met these cousins. They all came together and prepared a meal for us. It was very interesting to see the land, although I have so few memories of that time - seeing the land and seeing the area. The thing that really spoke to all of us was the train station ...where we were all waiting to be sent to Siberia, and then things changed...and we went back to our villages.”* [CJ: is there anything you feel you miss about your natal land?] *“Nothing. Not at all. I was too young to have any strong attachments, but even my mother never said, “I want to go back.” See they went through very, very hard times before we actually left, so I think the feelings of, “This is a safe place” were long gone.”*

**Agatha** (#10, 2004) *“Mom had cousins (sponsors) living in Alberta but we had my aunts and cousins all settling in Niagara. We just moved in with the them. At some point Mom contacted the cousin in Alberta, and he said that was OK. For him it was just the idea to get us*

---

<sup>124</sup> Mennonite Heritage Cruises run along the Dnieper River and on the Black Sea. (<http://home.ica.net/~walterunger/>)

*over, but we could decide where we wanted to live. We took a train to St. Catharines, and nobody was there for us, so we took a taxi. I don't know how Mom discussed that because we didn't know any English, but I guess Mom had our aunts' address and he took us to various places, this taxi, and finally people told us where our aunts lived. And then, what a welcome!*

*We would walk to Virgil Public School - 3 ½ miles, but we did that. And then I went to Eden<sup>125</sup> for high school. And at Eden, I changed my name. I wanted it to sound more English, so I (changed the lettering). But you know, I really wish I had changed my name completely. I wish I'd changed it to 'Heather'. I talked to other people who came to Canada and they just changed it completely from a Dutch name to , you know, any name. And I wish I had done it when I entered high school at least, if not earlier. I like the name Heather because it's more English. You know, I envy people that have easy names like Carol – more English names. At least in Canada, I never liked my name. I guess maybe in Russia or Germany I was OK with my name, but not here. Anyway, I really enjoyed Eden. We just had so many friends. Some of us knew each other from Germany, but others were born here. We didn't stick to just us (Fluechtlinge), us kids. We mixed in school. Like, our social life - well many of us married others who were born here (Russlaender).*

*But they would tease us as "DPs", eh? I think it was more teasing. Well, talking now to people who were born here, it sounds like they had a little trouble with us that came later. (One friend) told me that she had to fight with herself to accept us, I guess just as regulars. If she hadn't been a Christian, I guess she wouldn't have felt bad not accepting us, let's say. Well, I mean we were poor, poorer than they were when they got here. Like, hand-me-downs. I don't remember starving, but we sure didn't have any more than the necessities of living. As far as*

---

<sup>125</sup> Eden high school in NOTL, formerly operated by Mennonite Brethren Conference. A publicly funded Christian Faith-based school located in St. Catharines now operates under the same name.

*having just a mother, I don't think it really affected me. I did like to be in families where their families were all there because that gave me a little bit idea of how families would be. Three of my friends all had their fathers, so it was nice to be in these homes and have the father figure there. Like, these friends had a Dad. That was great. I'm sure I wished my Dad was there. I don't think I cried about it when we were in Canada. I don't know, we felt secure with just our Moms.*

*Something that's puzzled us is that our Moms didn't remarry here. Like my mom was 37 when she came. And she had chances, apparently, but she just was not interested. I think at the beginning, I think she didn't consider that at all, but I mean after we were married she had chances. They were just so independent. They had been alone for so long and running the family that I guess she never really – and they had lots of friends that were in the same boat. They would all visit on Sundays with other friends who were single, too – widows who'd lost their husbands in Russia. Many of them were in the same circles, and so their need was met in being a single Mom because they had support from each other.”*

[CJ: What traditions (customs) from your mother's home were most important for you to maintain?] *“Well, OK, see I guess I'm not – sure, I love piroshki<sup>126</sup> and borscht and certain things that I grew up with, but I don't need zwieback shaped like zwieback- like the two-deckers? I haven't done that. If I have, maybe once or twice in our married life. The one-deckers, or any other shape are fine. I still like home-made buns, but they don't have to be zwieback. Ya, and many other things I have discontinued. Our kids like chocolate, so I made a lot of chocolate things instead of platz and that. I mean I still like platz, and I still make it, and, like I say, I make*

---

<sup>126</sup> Folded tarts with either fruit or meat filling.

*my own home-made buns as a rule, but other things like cheesecake and Napoleans, those are our favourites. Pierogis,<sup>127</sup> that's one thing our guys did love that we grew up with."*

[CJ: What would you say makes you 'most Mennonite'?] *"Mennonite isn't that important to me. Christian is more important. Well, to me I'm a proud Canadian, and I'm a Christian, and I just, you know, want to mix with everyone. I mean sure, I like the Mennonites, I like my heritage, but..."*

Agatha notes that her association with non-Mennonites has increased over time, through interactions in her church where there is strong emphasis on proselytizing. *"Our church has a lot of non-Mennonites. I go to Orchard Park,<sup>128</sup> and there are many non-Mennonite background families."* [CJ: Was it important for you that your children marry within the Mennonite faith?] *"Not really. Ya, it's nice, but main thing was if they were born-again Christian... We said, "As long as she's a Christian" that is the main thing. Mennonite is secondary, or third, or fourth, or fifth! No, I have always actually almost fit more with the non-Mennonites. I like to make friends more almost with non-Mennonite background people, because they are something different. Not that different, but you get different experiences of what their background is. I like getting to know other people, really. I mean Mennonites, too, but other backgrounds, too. Somehow I know I have leaned that way."*

[CJ: Is there anything you miss about your natal land?] *"No. Germany, though – oh, the people were so nice when we lived with the farmers."*

---

<sup>127</sup> Wareniki.

<sup>128</sup> Orchard Park Bible Church, in NOTL, originated through division from Virgil Mennonite Brethren Church over a desire to use the English language in worship. Notably, it has dropped the word Mennonite altogether from its title, and neither does the word appear anywhere on the church website. (See: <http://www.orchardparkbiblechurch.org/media/ci/15>)

[CJ: How important is it to you that your story be preserved?] *"I think it is important. And yet our oldest son and youngest son are not so interested. Our middle son, he's the one that really appreciates that heritage and the Mennonite story. And he, well, now it's been 7-8 years maybe that he has quit going to church. The others do go to church."*

**Reflection Box 5.2: Interview 'places'**

I made a practice to note my surroundings during interviews, most of which took place in the homes of the participants. All contained some variation of family photo 'galleries', often encompassing 4 generations of photos of individuals (graduations, school photos), anniversary celebration group photos, extended family get-togethers of huge numbers of people - you can see the groups expanding over the years. And everyone is eager to spend some time giving me a guided "photo tour", which I really love.

Another interesting element is the presence of framed family trees, Mennonite-made cuckoo clocks, German beer steins or other such cultural items, German quotations framed on the walls... these are all prominent in most of the homes, even those which are rooms in retirement complexes. Edna's family room stood out for its African artefacts, cherished memories of her home away from home in Africa.

Agatha's was one of only three homes in which I did not see any visible cultural expressions of Mennonite or German culture. It's interesting to see these elements of 'making place' - creating a home - and then relate them to the context of the participant's perspectives as expressed in the interview.

*Ingrid (#11, 2004) was sponsored by an uncle in Virgil. "I was 12 and I went to Virgil Public School... This one, she was 32 already, and she started in grade one. You know, we all started in grade one! I went till I was 16. I finished grade 8. And we were with the little kids...just to learn the language. We all talked Low German (at home).*

*We just went along with the flow at that time. Whatever. My uncle, they went to Niagara Mennonite Church, so that's where we went. Somehow we just went along with whatever they told us to do. I think everybody was very nice... (My mother) must have been 29. She took care of everybody... We really stuck together very much. Like, friends. And it would always be with our (Mennonites). We always stuck together, just about to this day.*

*I was 20 (when I married) and had 4 children. My husband, he was a builder... 1952 he came to Ontario. He first was in Manitoba. He left (Russia) around the same time (as me). We were from the same colony, Molotschna, but we never met there. (We met) here in the church*



*group – Young People’s... we dated 4 years already before we got married. I got my education and I got my hairdressing, and...I got a job and I worked there for 3 ½ years. Meantime we got married, and then I was pregnant...then I stopped. And we built the house and (my husband) built right away a shop for me so I had right away my own business. I worked from that day on. I still do hairdressing, ya. I had two girls working for me, so it was a real business. And I raised my children with my grandmother, she would babysit. My mother would help a lot. She would come over – they just lived down the street. Even to this day, she lives with me. She’s 85 and she does very good yet, and she drives a car yet.”*

[CJ: Was it important to you that your children marry Mennonites?] *“No, I couldn’t say that. It was as long as they found the right (person). (Two) did marry (Mennonites).”*

[CJ: What would you say makes you ‘most Mennonite?’] *“I think that’s with other churches, too, but you’re brought up, Sunday you go to church and you are active”* [CJ: Do you think of it more as a religious group, then, than a cultural group?] *“No. Not really”* [CJ: What is it culturally that makes you Mennonite?] *“It’s funny. I mean we just live and we don’t think of these things. You take everything so for granted.”* [CJ: How would you describe a ‘good Mennonite woman’?] *“I think they are average. They are good, caring. And togetherness as Mennonites -it’s hard to explain. To be close.”*

[CJ: How important is it to you that your story is preserved?] *“I think now that they get older. It’s getting more important to them. Like, before, years ago, when they were younger and we would talk about it, or Mother would – I would maybe not talk about it – well, they would maybe not listen to it, you know? And now they will start asking and all of a sudden they want to know a lot about it, too. Even when my husband was alive, I once said, “Maybe you should start to write your life story”, you know? ... It’s funny, you just don’t ever think of all that until once you start talking like that.”*

Lena (#12, 2004) came to Canada at age 17. *"We came to Manitoba to a farmer. They were so good. You know, Mennonites help each other a lot. They paid for our way over, and then we worked. We came in November, and after Christmas I went to Winnipeg and worked as a maid... And then my mother got in touch with her cousin here (in Niagara) and he said here was lots of work with fruit on farms. And so we... came to Ontario right in this area in June... they had a little house, together for us with another family. And they still do that; our church does that. We pay for people that want to come over and then we –not look after them, but stay in touch with them until they are on their own. And that's how it was."* I ask Lena who her family knew in Niagara when they arrived, since they had been on the trek without extended family. *"Well my mother just knew the cousin. She knew them from Russia. They came in the '20s."*

*I worked in GM for 5-6 years and by then I was married and had 2 children and then I quit, which I shouldn't have – GM pays well. But I raised my (5) children, and I worked the fruit in the fall when the children were a little bit older. My mother looked after them, and I worked in the canning factories... We came in 1950 and in 1953 (Mother was) building already a little house. My brother, 17 by then, did most of the building and everybody helped him... we had the basement dug up and started building! After we were married, we lived there (too) till after we could manage to build a house."*

[CJ: What role did the existing Mennonite community play in your life? You were more isolated than others I've spoken with.] *"My mother got friends with the whole group, the other women that came with their families. They met through church, and things go fast- connections- and my husband's mother, she came already and my mother got to know her, and all those Tantens,<sup>129</sup>*

---

<sup>129</sup> German for 'aunts' - Tante is singular; Tantens is plural.

*we call them. Ya, it was very easy because everybody knew what they had gone through and they could talk about a lot of things.” [CJ: How about Russlaender?] “There were some. My Dad had a cousin here and she knew other people here from Russia, so you know it kind of – there was no problem getting along. And through the church we get together... At that time I think we were perceived quite well. But, how should I say that? – but then some got ahead faster - because times were hard (during the Depression), too, and they were here, too, for quite a while. And we just came when (the economy) came up a little more, ya? When things got better a little. And so sometimes they thought that we newcomers we went too fast. But we worked hard.”*

[CJ: How did you learn to speak English?] *“I didn’t go to school. Because I was home- I was a Mom- my CBC, it’s on in the morning until I got to bed. And that’s my education. So I learned how to speak English by just listening to that.”*

[CJ: How did you split up the responsibilities around the home when the kids were young, and how do you now that you two are here alone?] *“Housework, cooking, and children were my responsibilities, and half of the farmwork: the picking and packing and all that. My husband would do the spraying and different things. And I sewed a lot of clothes when they were small. It was busy, very busy. But I had no time for nonsense. I was always busy. They were always happy. We had no problems. We are both retired now, so it’s a little different. The house doesn’t get so dirty, and the food – my husband is very easy-going now. Before, when he was busy with (farming) I had to have meat and everything. But now that’s very easy. We have a very good life right now... He does vacuum, but only every once in a while. I have to do the real cleaning and vaccuuming, but it doesn’t get as dirty now.”*

[CJ: What traditions (customs) from your mother’s home were most important for you to maintain?] *“As far as family goes, and church, and all that, she has instilled that quite well in*

*me, which I tried to with the children, too. I don't think we have traditions. See, we weren't brought up with that, we were constantly on the go. Well, we've put down our traditions now. Like birthdays now we have together. And we come together once a month where we see each other, the whole family. And we go camping together. We went camping with our kids when they were small. It was not easy for me, but it was fun. It's just family things. I've learned how to bake pies, make a turkey, and now the daughters do that." [CJ: Do you still cook Mennonite foods?] "No. Well, wareniki is so much work, and zwieback. My husband does not insist on that. And I eat brown breads since the kids are gone. Before that, I made borscht and wareniki and all that stuff but now it's not important anymore. My husband wouldn't mind if I gave him wareniki, but it's too much work!"*

[CJ: What were/are your hopes and aspirations for your children?] *"For the longest time I was too busy to think about that and then when it came to that we really recommended them to go to university and get an education. Three did go and all did take some college. We didn't push them, but recommended and helped them a lot. And they are all really great. They live close by. They go to church and are involved in the church."*

Lena travelled back to Russia with her children. *"The Mennonites actually are a travelling, a moveable, lot. And wherever we are the family means a lot – or everything. And I'm glad that our children went there and saw what was going on there so we didn't have to explain it. Well, this trip...with the boat, you go up and down the (Dnieper) river and then go with buses into the villages. Others go with a train, too, but I'm still scared." [CJ: Of the train itself?] "Of going too far away from the boat. Sleep (on the boat) and go and come back (same day), that's fine, but...ya, ya, it's still not quite...I don't want to be there."*

[CJ: Is there anything you miss about Russia?] *"Not miss, because I had most of my life here, but nostalgia somehow, that our people lived there and what it looks like now and what it used to."*

*There's a big difference. They still live in old houses - and the churches, most of them were ruined. Like they stand there, just a frame of a roof – oh, our girls they really had to look at all that, just dilapidated. And the schools – our Mennonite schools – there was a girl's school, and they have rebuilt that all now and that looks like it used to. Well, that's where the MCC has a group there.<sup>130</sup> And they have that open now for the people there, I think, for older people to do. I read it in Der Bote<sup>131</sup> or somewhere.”*

[C]: How important is the preservation of your memories to you? *“To me it's important. But it's very hard to get them to listen like you do. Because you are interested, and you know already part of it. But they are quite busy here making a living and raising their kids. But if you put somewhere that they could read it, or see it, it would be nice.”*

### **5.3.1 Focus Group: *Fluechtlinge* (Group B, Second Generation)**

The following are excerpts from the focus group of second-generation *Fluechtlinge* participants, whose stories we've just read. A large part of the discussion centred on conceptualizations of diaspora. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.3 Diaspora framework), I cross-checked the participants' perspectives with my own (post-interview) impressions of the nature of their diaspora. The following passage ensued, related to notions of 'homeland' (each bullet indicates a change of speaker):

- *“We never thought of ourselves as Russian...I don't think Mennonites EVER thought of Russia as their homeland. They were like a country within a country.*
- *They thought of themselves that way – they paid their taxes and that to the government, but they felt that they were autonomous.*

---

<sup>130</sup> 'The Mennonite Centre in Ukraine', a social agency, has been established in a former Mennonite Girl's School in Molotschna (See <http://www.mennonitecentre.ca/Mennocentre.html>)

<sup>131</sup> *Der Bote* ("The Messenger") was a German-language Mennonite newspaper published in Winnipeg, running from 1924-2008.

- *We have people going back now trying to build up the area, not to go back to live there – it's to help the people that are there...No, it's more of a pity thing that we even send money: feeling sorry for the people who are there, and helping them because there was our land - "there but for the grace of God go I".*
- *Well, you wouldn't believe it how nostalgic people are today...*
- *But is it nostalgia for Russia or because of the Mennonite community we had there?*
- *Mennonite community, definitely.*
- *See, when we grew up there, all we knew was fear and poverty – things were so deteriorated. But when they grew up – the generation above us – like, they still had some very good memories.*
- *Yes, that would have been my grandmother. She still had wonderful memories- of her childhood only, though.*
- *I don't think we every thought of Russia as our homeland. I think we thought of ourselves as German all the time.*
- *Oh no, not Russian for sure.*
- *So the loyalty there would have been to the Mennonite community...*
- *... the German community, ya*
- *... because they did have a form of self-government, so...*
- *Because even their help had to learn German. I mean the Russian maids and cooks and so on, they had to learn German because the mothers wouldn't learn Russian. The younger people did in school later on when Russian was imposed, but the older people would not...*
- *Although I think, in terms of the large estate owners, that was already a little different. They felt a little more cross-cultural. At least, that's my understanding. And many of them associated with Russian people, whereas in the villages I don't think that was the case. My grandmother, who grew up on an estate spoke perfect Russian, whereas my grandfather who grew up in a village did not.*
- *Ya, of course, in a bigger village there was more Russian.*
- *Well, the Tantens, they said they were happy to leave and did NOT want to return to visit. And we usually say our ancestors came from the Netherlands – I mean to people who don't know about Mennonites...*

- *Oh, that was used to get us into Canada, of course, so it was very practical, but before that nobody really talked about Dutch ancestry.*
- *Well, I tell people that. Like, that our background is Dutch-German.*
- *See, we couldn't get into the States now, after the war, because our name had an umlaut... It was a German name.*
- *Well, German nationals were not allowed into Canada either until early 1950s – 1951? – So, we actually came in under refugee status on Dutch origin.*
- *In Canada they could –*
- *No, not before 1950. We claimed Dutch ancestry; that's how we got in. Yes, Canada would allow (Dutch), but German citizenship were not allowed until later.*
- *Our passports said 'Staatenlos' - 'without a country'*
- *Refugee status...*
- *Even though we had all been made German citizens.*
- *Well, there's a difference between our status and general German citizen status – we were 'volk'.*
- *It means you were "in the land" – you were volk.*
- *We were German citizens, but... MCC claimed that we were refugees and that German citizenship papers had been forced on us, and on that basis they considered us 'Staatenlos', without a country. We all came in under that.*

In response to the idea of cultural diasporas being typified by hybridity - cultural transformation - the following conversation occurred:

- *Well, transformation does happen eventually, but it's very slow in Mennonite communities, I think, and it's always with a struggle.*
- *It's amazing what going through different countries does to a group. For instance we came from Russia to Poland, to Germany, to Canada. Then there's the group that couldn't come to Canada, that went to Paraguay, and then 10 years later they came here. Their thinking is VERY different from that 10 year difference there, because they worked very hard building up a village, working in the woods and that. Their thinking is much, much different – MUCH - from that 10 year time.*

- *And even seems to remain that way...*
- *Yes, they seem to remain – I mean, we still call them ‘The Paraguayans’ after 40 years!*
- *They stick together.*
- *Like I say, when I work with these Paraguayan people, they always speak Low German. They didn’t go to school here, they came later.*
- *I must say they will speak Low German until the last day!*
- *I think that’s why, you know, I don’t feel as at home with them. They will always be “The Paraguayans”.*
- *I think the transformation does happen, but there is tension and it takes time. And actually it changes the whole group. I know my husband was born in Canada and he often talks about the way the Niagara Church was before we (Fluechtlinge) came, and how we DEFINITELY brought about change. But it isn’t without it’s tensions. But it always does happen. You know, they come together with another Mennonite group, and they bring changes and the transformation.*
- *My husband, too, was born here, but his parents came from Russia in ‘23. And we came from the very same area, but their thinking is very different because they didn’t go through that trek that we went through. We were much more, I would say, worldly when we came. We brought a lot of things into the church that I would say were shocking to the Mennonites that came directly from Russia to here. We were much more open to things. I mean I think the church was very shocked when we came. There were so many of us, you know, and so many women with children, so then they had to change the whole order of the church. It used to be ‘Bruderschaft’, meaning ‘a men’s meeting’, and it had to become ‘Gemeinschaft’, which meant ‘the members’. That was a huge change at the time. I think it happened in the early ‘50s.*
- *So that the women had a voice...*
- *My husband said that before that, the men would go to Bruderschaft, they’d come home for supper, then they’d talk about what had been discussed, and then they’d go back and make a decision –based on whatever the wives had told them to do! (laughter)*
- *But families that just had women, would never hear that – had no idea what had been said in the meetings...*



- *Ya, it wasn't an easy transition. I think the women had done all these, you know heroic things in bringing their children through this whole thing, and when they came here to the churches, the others thought, "They're going to take over". It was so...*
- *So there was transformation, slowly, but it wasn't without it's tensions.*
- *Oh, tensions! Many tensions. And then there was the struggle in the churches what to do with the women who had illegitimate children, because for one reason or another, whether it was willingly or unwillingly... But how do you treat them now in church? And how do you treat women who think their husband is dead, but don't know it for sure, and have met someone else and want to be married? Those were huge struggles in the church, you know?<sup>132</sup>*
- *They were a minority – most did not want to remarry.*
- *They weren't allowed to be married in the church, you know. (My aunt) had to get married in a Lutheran Church because our church wouldn't marry her because she didn't know whether her husband was dead. Like, he had been exiled years before in Russia. So she had to get married outside of the church - and then you could rejoin the church later.*

Later on, we discussed how strongly participants identify themselves according to such labels as 'Mennonite', and 'Canadian' – not in terms of choosing one over another, but rather ranking the order in which they might apply these categories to themselves:

- *How about hyphenated?*
- *I think Canadian is a given, and Mennonite is a choice. Somehow I think the choice is greater to maybe not be a Mennonite than not be a Canadian. I mean I would never leave Canada. You might leave the Mennonite church and maybe do something else.*
- *I'd put Canadian first, ya.*
- *I would put Candian first.*
- *Canadian Mennonite*
- *Canadian is the first thing that comes to my mind.*

---

<sup>132</sup> For an in-depth discussion of these issues in Canada following WW2, see M. Epp (2000) Chapter 6: "Re-creating Families", pp.139-164.

- *The religious is so much a part of our life – like, the church, the Mennonite church, the choir, we’re so connected with both the Mennonite faith and the Mennonite church. To me, I’m all Mennonite. And...but I’m all Canadian.*

### 5.3.2 Summary & Analysis

Several motifs stand out from these narratives: fatherlessness, family cohesion (“*sticking together*”), singing, the refugee experience for children, social heterogeneity, the ‘Mennonite Game’, the place of Germany within the diaspora, and (something new for this cohort) church as a centre of meaning.

Fatherlessness had a significant effect on how the children experienced place in Niagara. It was one of the many ways in which they felt Othered during the earlier years, and several expressed a sense of life-long longing, a feeling that something was lacking. It resulted as well in ambiguity about the roles of fathers and husbands when this cohort eventually created their own homes. Edna’s references to her 14 year old brother’s notional position as “*head of the family*” (as opposed to her mother) suggests increased pressure on some sons of the ‘women without men’ to take on adult male-normative responsibilities at an early age. In fact, Edna referred to her brother as such first in association with her father having been taken (the brother was 8), and again with the start of the trek (the brother was 11). Presumably the sons, too, were unsure of what Mennonite adult male norms actually were, and so performed masculinity in response to cues from mothers. (This leads me to wonder if masculinities among the fatherless sons may have presented as more homogeneous than otherwise might have been, since the possibility for nuance in gender directives - ‘wildcard’, or non-normative, male models, for instance - would have been eliminated.) Katie felt that her father “*fit in*”, that there was little adjustment necessary when they were reunited in 1951, and she attributed this to him not being “*your typical authoritarian Mennonite father*”. Freda’s comments on changes in

men's and women's roles in Mennonite homes suggest that in her parents' home in Soviet Russia her father was head of the family, and the disciplinarian: *"the relationship between Mom and Dad, the sharing of chores, of the work, definitely that has changed now from what I grew up with, and from what happened in (my adult) home. As for Dad to be the head - although I can't say that that was that important for (my husband) to be the head of the house; he didn't insist on that. We sort of agreed on different things, or disagreed. As far as discipline, I didn't tell my kids, "You wait till Dad comes home." If they needed discipline, I could administer that as well as (he) could"*).

The gendered division of domestic labour in the adult homes of this generation remained largely *"traditional"*, with more sharing of inside chores occurring after retirement when the nests were empty. Husbands were described as less resistant to performing domestic chores than men of the previous generation; however, pragmatic reasons (farming, or other paid work) were often associated with why they did not. Similarly, sons worked outside on family farms based on relative physical strength, whereas girls worked inside the home. In one case, a biblical foundation for gendered roles was cited. Women working for pay took flexible jobs (or studies) to be available as primary care-givers when their children were young. Mothers and grandmothers often provided childcare and baking/cooking for their adult children; none of the mothers of these participants remarried in Niagara.

An already distinctive closeness between mothers, siblings, cousins and aunts based on shared experiences en route, was further developed in co-family living arrangements in Niagara, often extensions of family formations during the trek. Domestic responsibilities were shared by these groupings of mothers and children and, like on the journeys, children (here as young as 9) were expected to work for pay (farms, seed companies, canning factories); travel debts had to be paid, living expenses covered, and homes purchased.

As refugees, the children experienced Niagara at two levels. First was with a sense of relief, appreciation, even "*elation*". Families, who had come with nothing, were met by relatives and welcomed with the refugee equivalent of bridal showers at the churches when they first arrived. Over time, though, these feelings were tempered by experiences through which the children came to see themselves as "*outsiders*". While learning to speak English, they were teased - especially by Niagara-born Mennonite kids. They dressed differently; they looked poor. Exposure to *Russlaender* kids with fathers (...and pianos and homes and land) alerted them that "*there were things lacking in our life*". *Russlaender* adults perceived that being raised without a father had meant being raised without discipline. They were differentiated because they weren't born on the peninsula; *Russlaender* kids used the term "DPs" (Displaced Persons - a category established for Europeans displaced by the war) as an insult. And lingering effects of their traumatic, placeless childhoods meant that a real sense of this new place as safe - as home - took a long time to register.

West Prussia had effectively marked the ethno genesis of the Mennonite ancestors; in diaspora, they had shifted both from understanding themselves (and from being understood as) a 'religious' people to an 'ethno-religious' people. Subsequently, life in Mennonite enclaves fostered strong senses of group identities relative to perceived insider/outsider dichotomies. Niagara was not dissimilar for the *Fluechtlinge* children, except that it marked their religious genesis. They shifted from both understanding themselves (and from being understood) as an ethnic people (i.e., German) to an 'ethno-religious' people (Mennonite). Niagara was not an enclave, but rather part of an open, diverse society. This did not pose the greatest challenge for the *Fluechtlinge*, who had been exposed to the wider world *en route*. The greater challenge was found in having to re-negotiate identity while immersed in a community of Mennonites with whom they shared neither common experience, language, family structure, nor religion. The

children, and many of their mothers, had to learn to be Mennonite in Niagara. The first mention of the word 'Mennonite' came to most of them in Germany. As Freda recalls, "*the MCC gathered us and...organized services and told us who we were – Mennonites - and what we were all about...*" Hence, Niagara has not been experienced without its own perceived insider/outsider dichotomies and, as such, strong group identity was fostered within the *Fluechtlinge* sub-group.

Over 50 years of re-negotiation later, second-generation *Fluechtlinge* participants have a variety of different conceptualizations as to what makes them 'most Mennonite':

- "*To me, it's the Anabaptist faith. Otherwise I don't think you're really a Mennonite.*"
- "*The whole Mennonite Game, the food, the friends.*"
- "*My cultural heritage, not my present practices. So, it's a history, which is not just a religious history, but also the history of an ethnic group. And that is what is most important to me today.*"
- "*Mennonite is only a religion. Like, we go to church, it is our faith. I don't think Mennonite is a culture. Mennonite is a faith. It's like being Catholic.*"
- "*One thing I'm very strong on is to be Christian. Mennonite comes down the line, but that's what I was born, you know? I imagine if I was born in another setting I would not feel as strongly about being Mennonite. Having been born as a Mennonite, though, I'm totally happy to be there.*"
- "*You're brought up, Sunday you go to church... And togetherness as Mennonites - it's hard to explain. To be close. ... It's funny. I mean we just live and we don't think of these things. (We) take everything so for granted.*"
- "*Mennonite isn't that important to me. Christian is more important. Well, to me I'm a proud Canadian, and I'm a Christian, and I just, you know, want to mix with everyone. I mean sure, I like the Mennonites, I like my heritage, but...*"

Despite their lack of religious training, the *Fluechtlinge* children embraced the church; it became the focus of their lives. They attended Sunday School, sang in the choir, were baptized,

and met their husbands through “*Young People’s*” (Friday night youth groups). Their closest friendships today remain those made as young people in association with the church community (“*the church family*”), and church remains their social core. The experience of church was quite literally life-changing, then. Even for Katie, who no longer attends regularly, it has shaped her life. It did not, however, represent a change in the cultural profile of the diaspora because, in effect, the children were being reconditioned to a religious and cultural position that their ancestors had previously held. What did change the cultural profile, as we see most clearly in the focus group passages, was the the presence of these children and their mothers in the church. The church changed. Thus, the experiences the *Fluechtlinge* brought with them transformed the peninsula.

The idea of ‘*The Mennonite Game*’ is an example of diasporic networking. That is, the practice of Russian Mennonites, when they first meet, establishing their familial relationship by the exchange of surnames. There is a very small pool of instantly recognizable (mostly Dutch) Russian Mennonite surnames. This is illustrated by a 1912 study of Mennonites in Russia: 369 surnames were counted in a population of 10,000, and close to *half of that population was accounted for in the first 21 names.*<sup>133</sup> Subsequently, a comparison study was conducted in Niagara in 1980 using the telephone directory and the top 34 names from the Russian study: the 34 most common Mennonite names had remained the same, with some differences in rank. I repeated this comparison in Niagara in 2009 to the same effect: the top 34 Mennonite names in Russia in 1912 were the same as the top 34 Mennonite names in Niagara a century later. This gives an indication, then, of how effectively The Mennonite Game might be ‘played’ - how easy

---

<sup>133</sup> The other half - 348 names - was almost all comprised of one or two families who had joined the church in Prussia.

it is to instantly perceive membership to this group. (See APPENDIX I: Comparison of Mennonite surnames)

The notion of Germany as a centre of cultural authenticity is reinforced through these narratives (“*We didn’t feel at home for years. But we were at home in Germany, and that’s the part (of my life before Niagara) that I remember*”). According to Tuan, “While it takes time to form an attachment to place, the quality and intensity of experience matters more than simple duration” (1997, p. 198). Even the sound of the train whistle in Germany sounded like home (“*a happy, higher note*”).

It was discussed in Chapter 2 that, “as social formations, diasporas are internally divided... Diaspora communities are both hybrid and heterogeneous in their own peculiar, historically determined ways” (Werbner, 2000, p. 5); internal divisions are an expected occurrence because disparate branches of a global diaspora tend to merge as a function of their connections with one another. Shared cultural and religious characteristics act to relieve intergroup tensions, and eventually intermarriage blurs the edges. The *Fluechtlinge* focus group transcript underscores what a difference place can make with an example of more recent tensions between social sub-groups. The Paraguayan Mennonites in Niagara left the same Russian colonies as the *Fluechtlinge*, at the same time (1943). They experienced a five year trek with intermittent years in Poland and Germany, just as the *Fluechtlinge* did. The only difference was that MCC set them up to go to Paraguay instead of Canada - for whatever individual reasons there were at that time, they could not access Canada for another ten years. The *Fluechtlinge* Mennonites discuss the Paraguayan Mennonites:

- *Their thinking is much, much different – MUCH - from that 10 year time (in Paraguay).*
- *And even seems to remain that way...*
- *Yes, they seem to remain – I mean, we still call them ‘The Paraguayans’ after 40 years!*
- *They stick together.*

- *Like I say, when I work with these Paraguayan people, they always speak Low German. They didn't go to school here, they came later.*
- *I must say they will speak Low German until the last day!*
- *I think that's why, you know, I don't feel as at home with them. They will always be 'The Paraguayans'.*

A continuing orientation beyond the nation state plays out in the form of the flow of remittances, mutual aid, immigrant sponsorship, and travel. Mennonite travel organizations such as TourMagination and Mennonite Heritage Cruises facilitate travel within the diaspora which includes pilgrimage to both diasporic centres – Russia/Ukraine as the (latest) ancestral homeland, and Germany as a source of cultural authenticity which Ukraine does not provide. A strong interest in Mennonite history is present, exhibited in return visits to Ukraine - based on curiosity as opposed to longing and nostalgia. “When a people deliberately change their environment and feel they are in control of their destiny, they have little cause for nostalgia. Historic societies need not be backward-looking; they may be founded to preserve materials that mark the stages of confident growth and point to the future” (Tuan, 1997, p. 195). Endeavours such as ‘Friends of Ukraine,’ established in the former Molotschna girls’ school, is both a Mennonite memorial, and a service centre for people living in the former colony. Apart from an outreach example, it is also a way of ensuring that events of the past have a positive impact on the present and future.

This concludes the narratives of the Russian-born Niagara Mennonites. The next chapter contains the stories and perspectives of their children, those members of the diaspora for whom Niagara has always been home.



## 6. Good Soil: Niagara Harvest

These are the stories and perspectives of Niagara Mennonites born in Canada. The chapter is broken into two sections: the first is comprised of excerpts from interviews of second-generation *Russlaender*, and the second is comprised of focus group passages involving third generation participants whose lineage is a mix of both *Russlaender* and *Fluechtlinge* (Groups A & B).

We might conjecture that the experiences of their parents will have had profound effects on the lives of the Niagara-born Mennonites, but we can't predict how this history has manifested without looking to their stories and perspectives. Eight decades have passed since Russian Mennonites arrived on the peninsula; the generation born in Niagara has experienced migration only vicariously, through their parents' experiences. How have the children of the Russian-born Mennonites experienced diaspora? In other words, how have they experienced place in relation to cultural hybridity, social heterogeneity, and performance & co-responsibility? What does 'being Mennonite' in Niagara mean for these participants, and what does it 'look like on the ground'?

### 6.1 *Russlaender* (Group A, Generation 2)

Members of this cohort are the second living generation of Niagara *Russlaender*; they ranged in age at the time of their interviews from 65 to 79 years. Due to space limitations related to the number of participants born in Niagara and the resulting volume of data, I have chosen to structure this section differently: rather than presenting lengthy transcripts of each interview, I've aggregated narrative excerpts here in relation to the three chaotic features of cultural diasporas (Cultural hybridity, social heterogeneity, performance & co-responsibility) (See Figure 2.3). Following these sections, we then look at how the participants view

themselves as Mennonites, and how they view the effects of their diaspora on Niagara, the place they call home.

### 6.1.1 CULTURAL HYBRIDITY

Content with their new home, the previous generations created a social formation in Niagara that, although not exclusionary, was church-centred and inward in nature. To facilitate community-level responsibility flows, they built a Mennonite institutional infrastructure to serve all life stages in the forms churches, schools, credit unions, and retirement facilities. This generation was born into that social formation, and the following passages allow us to see aspects of what it has been like for them, as well as how it has evolved over time.

- *The one-room school that I attended on Lakeshore Road basically had 99% Mennonite kids in it. So we did a lot of socializing with Mennonite people at the time – we were very close with our cousins. We were about 15-20 cousins in the area, so we were in that family circle ALL THE TIME. It wasn't until after high school that through work and other social activities we were able to make contact with other non-Mennonites. (#25, 2005)*
- *Looking back, we had a lot of fun. We had friends, but we didn't have to go out, because we had friends in each other (siblings). Our childhood was fantastic...we had a loving, caring mother, and a fun-loving dad, but a taskmaster. We all had to work. I'd say 3-4 years old we started picking strawberries...cherries and tomatoes... and then we could go and play. (#27, 2005)*
- *The farthest place we'd go was to Grandma's place in Vineland. That was the highlight. And that was quite an experience, too, because...the (12) kids were just crammed in there in the one car. And it took him an hour to drive from Vineland to (NOTL), which today you can do in 20 minutes. It was a real adventure, and as far as we adventured. (#28, 2005)*
- *Once or twice a year the (extended) family would get together and slaughter 5-6 pigs and a couple of beef... and then all the meat would be shared amongst the families so that everybody had their share for the winter. (#25, 2005)*
- *Somehow or other the church seemed to be the centre, and where we would get together. (#19, 2005)*
- *I think we do more socializing now with non-church people, non-Mennonite people, than we did in our growing up years, but (then) it was very much a part of our life: our*

*neighbours, our friends were basically Mennonite. When we moved away and we were not living in Mennonite communities for 5 years, we got to be very good friends with non-Mennonites. Then, when we moved back we had non-Mennonite neighbours that we got to be close with. And now, in our church, for example, we have many who have different backgrounds but who have adopted the Mennonite faith, but are not Mennonite by tradition, as we understand Mennonite. (#26, 2005)*

Glimpses of transformation in terms of gendered norms appear in the following passages:

- *My father dried a lot of dishes. We only had 2 sisters and there were 5 of us boys, so there was help needed in the house. And my mother would pack peaches, but my father also took a role in the house... We boys were expected to take our turn washing floors and this kind of thing. (#20, 2005)*
- *Mother was very committed (to Dad) and very committed to the household, and there's probably a lot of background reason for that: the lack of education, the lack of fluently speaking English all contributed to the household (being) the most important key thing – the household, the church, and immediate neighbourhood. (#25, 2005)*
- *In the house, my husband was good. That's how come I never remarried...the first one was so good, I didn't dare. Because he had no sisters and his dad helped his mom inside all the time, so they were used to that. There was no way that he wouldn't help inside, just as well as I did outside. (#19, 2005)*
- *My mother was very much of the opinion that girls had to get their school(ing). Their highest expectations were to get an education... Both my sisters had a university education (as well as the boys)...My mother was sometimes told she should keep my sister out of school because she needed her so much (at home). My mother always insisted she go to school, because she would have to live her life. (#20, 2005)*
- *(My mother) was a very sweet, beautiful Mennonite woman and she grew up believing that the man always knows best, which was kind of cute because she had 3 daughters who didn't necessarily think so... But she really worked very hard. She came from a very wealthy family in Russia, and here she had to do not only her own work, but she had to work for other people, anything to make money to help feed the family. She would sew clothes for us in the evening out of clothes that people had given her... and we never knew we were poor. My father) farmed, but he was not a farmer. He was a teacher in Russia... and he spoke 4-5 languages fluently. He loved Russian poetry. He was going to school in Canada, actually, to be a teacher (here) but we were born and he had to feed the family. In a way, it was a shame, but he did very well... So they both really worked very, very hard, and they never complained. They were just so happy to be here. They could go to church, take their children outside safely and go to bed at night. I had no idea how bad it had been, until after Mother had her first stroke, and she would wake up and say, "They're coming! They're coming! Hide the girls!". (#24, 2005)*
- *My mom and dad always spoke Low German to each other, but High German to us. So I learned Low German fluently... "on the street". Because I had a number of friends who*

*came from Paraguay and who came from Germany who were Low German speaking people, and our association was with them. And I have a number of good friends even to this day who speak mainly Low German. (#25, 2005)*

- *Our granddaughters were sitting around the pool in Florida and someone said to them, "Well, your grandparents are very nice, but they're very unsociable." These girls smiled like ever, because there is something going on at our place almost all the time, and we have big gatherings. So I thought about it. The reason (we came across as unsociable) was that we had so many friends there that we really don't have time to do a lot of socializing with the people in our condo complex. And many of them did not have this church-centred social-life. We would have regular picnics in Florida every Saturday. And this was all the Mennonites that were in Florida would get together for this picnic. Because we know them all, from (here) – not just (Niagara): from Leamington, Manitoba, B.C., all over. People come and we've known them for years through church affiliations. (#23, 2005)*

In a post-WW2 milieu, German aspects of hybridity were not advantageous. The German-speaking Mennonite community experienced discrimination from the wider community, as these passages describe:

- *When we moved to Niagara – I guess I was in grade 6, and the war was on – the first day of school some guys followed me. They were going to beat me up because I was German. And there was this fellow in the same grade, his last name was (also a German name). He waived to them, "You touch her, and I'm getting in!" So, he walked me home...and we were friends for years after that. But you can imagine. And I hadn't felt that in school in Leamington, or in Windsor where we were for almost a year before we moved. I don't know why that was. It was different here. Or the timeframe was different. (#24, 2005)*
- *We were the German kids, and we got a lot of hassle about that because at home the Germans were the enemies. Some of the older brothers were off fighting the Germans, and here we had some of the German kids in school – ya, we took a good beating that way. I can remember as a young boy, 7 maybe, going to church in the morning to Sunday school and here the bottom of the church was burned out – some of the ones that felt most strongly about the Germans thought they would try to burn this place down. Something intervened and it didn't burn – just blackened the basement. That was one of the events that kind of gave us some feeling of how we were thought of in the community. A lot of that later on, of course, disappeared, but certainly among the Legion there is still some of that. You get the odd remark (from) the older ones. (#23, 2005)*

The work we do greatly affects how we see ourselves, and where we live can greatly affect the opportunities we have for work. How did the experience of work evolve on the peninsula? Although many of the previous generation were grain and dairy farmers in Russia, for example,

their farms (and identities) were associated with fruit in Niagara. These people grew up on their parents' fruit farms, and were expected to work the farms (or off-farm) at young ages. Most, though, had more choice than the previous generation when it came to career. We see a range of paths in this cohort: some went directly into a work setting after grade school, several participants obtained university educations and pursued professional careers, while others took on and expanded their parents' fruit farming enterprises. Through references to their parents' work, we can see generational change:

- *You only had to go to school in those days till you were 12 years old. All of a sudden, when I got passed into grade 8, I saw our principal (at our house). They didn't know I was listening... He says, "Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, please, your daughter passed with honours into grade 8 in all her subjects. Please let her go one more year." And I heard my Dad say, "I'm sorry, but she's got to go to work." On the farm I had helped all along, but...now my first job started on St. Catharines... I was supposed to look after a 2 year old little fella. I didn't hold it against my parents, because that's the way it was. Turn 12, and then you went to work. (#19, 2005)* This woman took other service jobs until she married, when she and her husband farmed. After he died, she started a retail business with her sister.
- *Dad, having been brought up under such dire, difficult circumstances, was in a sense a workaholic. He...worked very hard in those first 15-20 years in Niagara. He had a night job and then he worked the day on the farm so that all of us kids could enjoy an education... My father could never leave the farm, so he turned around and bought another little farm after he retired – because he thought he had to work! I think they had a theology that said, "It's wrong not to work." ...The difficult history of their lifestyle sort of underscored the need for work. (#25, 2005)*
- *(My Dad) had to learn the hard way - much of his youth happened in very unsettled times. By the time he was in his early teens, things were falling apart in Russia. He was a farmer. When they moved from the west to Vineland area (1928) I thought he was quite an entrepreneur. He worked on a farm, then in the evening he would go up what we called 'the mountain' in Vineland and he would size and buy eggs, and sell them. One memory I have of him: I was quite small was hearing this egg grader – it weighted a single egg at one time, and I can recall hearing it until all hours of the night until I fell asleep. He was an artist, as well. My father got along very well on 10 acres at first, and later on 20 acres of land, and he supported his family on that as well. In contrast, my grandfather, when he came in 1929, he supported his family on a 4 acre farm and did very well – you know, going to market, and he grew fruit, and had chickens and eggs. These people could be described as very innovative. (#23, 2005)*
- *In Russia, my parents were farming people...peasants, not knowing really much about the world...Here, they had a difficult start-up. They were married soon after they came in 1928. They were labourers on the farms, and soon owned their own farm, and became progressively better off. This country is so open to that. My parents came here with nothing, with debt. And yet two of (my siblings) are doctors, one was a graduate in*

*social work, and 2 of us were principals of schools...(eventually) I became superintendant of schools. (#20, 2005)*

Due to a history of serial diaspora, relationships with the (latest) homeland are complex, and issues of identity sometimes ambiguous. This is evident in the following passages:

- *We think of our homeland as being Ukraine. (But) I've explained many times to people who say, "who are the Mennonites, anyway?" that the Mennonites are a people without a home country. We Mennonites really don't have a homeland, other than our very early beginning, which is Holland. (#25, 2005)*
- *We don't know for sure where we're from... I feel akin to the Dutch and akin to the Swiss, and - I suppose maybe because we could speak German- southern Europe. (#23, 2005)*
- *When we got just out of Russian territory, flying, (my daughter) turned to me and she said "Thank you so much for coming to Canada" because she was so impressed with how terrible it still was, and this was in the 1980s. (#29, 2005)*
- *We were under that old 'Chortitza Oak'<sup>134</sup> (in Russia, on a visit, and unknown to me, my mother put some acorns in her purse). So from the acorns on this tree, I planted about 100 seedlings and we give them to anyone what wants one, but we suggest that you send \$50.00 donation to the Friends of Ukraine... I think it's an outreach philosophy somewhat. There might even be a tinge of what the bible suggests is 'fiery coals'. That fact that they treated us like dirt, and we like to repay with something not quite as hurtful. I think there's a little element of that. (#23, 2005)*

### 6.1.2 SOCIAL HETEROGENEITY

There's an interesting tension in the co-existence of an assertive, tangible sense of co-responsibility within the Mennonite diaspora from its earliest beginnings, and internal rivalries between sub-groups. *Russlaender/Fluechtlinge* tension was introduced here in Chapter 5. This cohort reflects on the *Fluechtlinge* arrival, and a rift that seems to have healed cleanly with the genetic merging of the waves.

---

<sup>134</sup> In the first Mennonite settlement in Russia, Chortitza, a giant oak tree grew by the Chortitza River, under which family and church outings were held. 'The Chortitza Oak' has become symbolic of the endurance of the Mennonite people. A descendant of the oak (with a plaque acknowledging the *Russlaender* and previous immigrations - although not the *Fluechtlinge* wave) grows at the Lakeshore Cemetery in NOTL.

- *The Fluechtlinge women were strong women. And the women had to cope on their own and it's as though something that most of us have rose to the surface faster (in them). I've got great respect for some of those women...They got ahead quickly because they were strong. (#24, 2005)*
- *Most of us had relatives in that group... There was one problem that existed because they'd been absent from each other for so long. One of the leaders of the (Russlaender) said, "When they come, let's not expect that they've been living in a democracy for these years that we've been here." ...They wished to retain German longer... but I think we very quickly moved together. (#20, 2005)*
- *I very much as a teenager grew up with (Fluechtlinge). I think in our small community (in Manitoba) these new immigrants got assimilated very quickly because we were not a big community. We soon had good friends among them. I do remember when we moved here, among some other people that we knew, they differentiated quite a bit, "Oh, these are new Canadians." I think they called them DPs at the time, which stood for Displaced Persons. It was kind of used as a derogatory term. And I remember one of my classmates, they were kind of, "Oh, she's only a DP." - you know, that type of thing... I couldn't see the big difference. You know, they were good people, they hadn't had a chance, and now they had come to Canada. And we became good friends... I know my family felt this very much coming from the west, because there it had not been (an issue). And we did feel when we first came that... some kind of thought, "Are you going to be friends with them? You know, they are DPs." That type of thing. (#26, 2005)*
- *One of the memories I have - and it was probably a misstep on my part - in talking to some of the young people, I referred to someone among them as a DP. To me, DP, you know, it wasn't a derogatory term. But they thought of it that way, so I was careful ever after not to refer to them as DPs, being Displaced Persons - and that's how they had been spoken of in the press, in general. And so, I suppose this is very close to their hearts that they didn't want to be displaced persons. They wanted a HOME, I imagine, so I was very careful after not to do that. (#23, 2005)*
- *I know that the term 'DP' was very prevalent here. I always took objection to it because, well, what's the difference? These people need a home, and the opportunity to come to Canada just like our parents had. It really bothered me that the term was used. And then, possibly as a result of it, I got into a group of a number of (Fluechtlinge) and we became good friends - and remain good friends to this day. (#25, 2005)*
- *Every time I drive along the Victoria Avenue in Vineland, and (see) the Kieffer pears there - and they're all on the ground because the Kieffer pear is not really a desirable fruit, you can't really sell it anymore - I'm always reminded of the starvation our people went through. And 2 of the (Fluechtlinge) young people had said to me that was the first thing they saw when they were brought to Vineland. They'd come from famine, and here all these pears were lying on the ground and they just couldn't get over it... We got along well with these people. They integrated fast so that it wasn't long (before you) hardly sensed a difference. We have in Virgil a whole row of houses that started out as quite small houses, and these were all by women with no husbands. The first thing they*

*thought of is making sure they saved every penny so they could start a little house of their own... and they certainly were a heroic bunch. (#23, 2005)*

Closer to the surface with the Niagara-born participants are discussions of a cleavage in the community between churches, which appears to have reached a nadir in the mid-fifties. (Recall, that John - see page 243 - first referred to this rift with regard to his marriage in the 1950s: there had been objection to the marriage because he was a General Conference Church member and his wife was Mennonite Brethren. ) This is a division carried to Canada from Russia. There were “concerns about the materialism and secularism of some Mennonites, and the ethnic pride and worldliness that blinded some to their lack of spirituality” (H. Loewen, 2008, p. 17). As a result, in 1860, a group of pietistic, reform-minded Russian Mennonites broke away to establish the Mennonite Brethren (MB) church.<sup>135</sup> General Conference (GC) was an association of North American Mennonite congregations established in the same year, which would come to include the Niagara United Mennonite congregations.<sup>136</sup> The organization of Mennonite congregations within conferences or churches is dynamic and more highly complex than the confines of this text will allow. Simplistically put, Niagara MB congregations differ from Niagara United Mennonite (UM) congregations most visibly in the extent of their emphasis on personal salvation through relationship with Jesus Christ (‘born again’ Christianity), evangelism, and the MB practice of full immersion baptism. MB churches through proselytizing have become a much more ethnically diverse Mennonite presence on the peninsula. Following is an exchange between a couple (interviewed together) as to how they experienced this division in the 1950s.

---

<sup>135</sup> MB churches are currently represented in this country by the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

<sup>136</sup> GC was dissolved in 2002 to be replaced by smaller conferences. The United Mennonite churches in Niagara currently belong to the Mennonite Church of Eastern Canada (MCEC).



They see this as having been a particularly bitter situation in Niagara, as opposed to other settlement areas:

- *PAUL: (We were married in the) MB church (although I was not MB)... I think we would be very remiss, though, in not talking about the fact that shortly after our wedding, my wife was excommunicated from the MB church. I think we'd be very remiss if we did not mention that here. Because she married someone who had not been baptized with enough water – full immersion baptism. And furthermore, when she wanted to join our (UM) church after and we asked for a recommendation...*
- *AGNES: (That means) we asked for my papers -they 'didn't exist' anymore. ...I grew up in Leamington, and there I didn't even know there was a difference between the MBs and the GCs... Mother was an MB. My mom and dad had just as many friends in the General Conference church as the MB church and they're still good friends of mine, those families. And also...Mom & Dad had friends who were not Mennonite. It was a little different in Leamington than in Niagara, I think. Or was it because of the way my parents were brought up, I don't know. The difference wasn't there... And if it were for people like my parents, there wouldn't have been the division... There was a general concept that (those with) this certain belief... were the only ones going to heaven. (Only one of our kids) lasted through Eden.<sup>137</sup> Some of (the others) tried it, but there was that feeling there, (as if) you weren't quite the same. For a while. It wasn't always there. There were some really good years when it wasn't a biased school...*
- *PAUL: It certainly was the same bias that said, "Well, this gal is marrying someone who wasn't baptized with enough water, and therefore is a bit second class. I think that was there. What amazed me was that it was such a strong feeling amongst them that they didn't even want to give (my wife) her affirmation – the fact that she had been a member in good standing. But as soon as she married me, she was out of good standing... And while we're on the subject, I think it would be good to interject a few other things: for instance, one of the lay ministers in the MB church said... "That's God's judgment upon (you)...for marrying a GC boy." And we thought that was not very good MB theology... and it certainly hurt (my wife's) father deeply... The head of the MB conference for Ontario many, many years later came to us and they were going to mend fences. And I was THRILLED about this – I thought this was long overdue and I was so happy about it. But we were not into this discussion more than a few minutes when (he) leaned over to my wife and said, "But wouldn't it have been nice if your husband would have had a river baptism?" Now, to make that comment when you're on a mending fences mission seems to me either a little senile, or there's a thorough lack of repentance there. And that view seems to be lingering far too long among many.*

CJ: Do you sense these same divisions still today between the MB and GC populations?

---

<sup>137</sup> High school at the time run by the MB Conference.

- PAUL: *I think that our LOCAL area just happened to get a few very, very biased leaders. But I do not believe this was all over. We now have universities in Winnipeg that have joined up and I think these are tremendous signs. I think we were stuck with a few fellows in the local MB church and they preached this thing so much that it became very deep-seated among the people and I think we're going to have to wait until some of those members die off until there's change. But this is a rather localized thing.*
- AGNES: *I think the problem was, though...that there were about 5 different girls among my friends who ended up marrying GC boys, and I think that was starting to wrangle them. I was one of the last ones, and I think it just was getting to be too much. And I don't think there are too many people who still feel that way. Well, there were very many people in that particular church which really didn't have the courage – or because Mennonites are quiet or something – didn't speak out. But there were very many people who didn't agree with what was being done to these 5 girls. And a lot of them are still my friends. And one of the neat things is that we can still live in the same community, we can do things together, and we can have people working (for us) – I've got to say that (MB people) make a good work force – oh, boy. Those women work a lot harder than some other women. Oh, man, they were good. And their children – we've had generations of (these people) and they're really good.*
- PAUL: *And we had an MB minister who came (here) from Brazil, and lived here something like 25 years anyway, and he worked for us for all of those 25 years. He was a tremendous person. (#23, 2005) (#24, 2005)*

### 6.1.3 PERFORMANCE & CO-RESPONSIBILITY

At various scales, diasporic connections (informal and institutionalized) are highly developed at this stage:

- HUSBAND: *Dad had opened a blacksmith shop in Saskatoon...and worked for the area farmers. But that was the Depression, and ...some people just couldn't pay. And so in 1937 all the (extended) family decided to come to (Niagara) where the prospects seemed better. And Dad picked farming here...They didn't know any Swiss Mennonites, but there was a contact point. (#25, 2005) WIFE: Well, other people had already left for Ontario before that, and the word was out that the Niagara area was open for settlement...This was a different type of farming, but it was still a farming background that they could get into. I think it was just word of mouth. I don't think they had any relatives here at the time. (#26, 2005)*
- *(We read) Der Bote, a magazine of German Canadian (Russlaender) people. That has become more narrow for us, now; the news isn't as broad as it used to be. Then we subscribe to The Canadian Mennonite, and also The Mennonite, which is a U.S. Mennonite paper.*

- *(We contribute financially) through MCC and there's also a group here organized in Canada to do some work in Ukraine... Friends of Ukraine. There's a museum in an old girl's school my mother went to...it's maintained as...an interpretive centre... They're running it for the local Russian people, and it's not a religious thing, it's sort of to help them to have more of the up-to-date conveniences. The people are there not as organizers, but just as friends doing something for them. (#20, 2005)*
- *6 years ago we joined a "SOWERS"<sup>138</sup> program, which opened up a whole new world for us in North America. It stands for "Servants On Wheels Ever Ready" and it involves seniors who want to do meaningful work in their retirement years in any part of the country... We do that every winter for 2-3 months. It's a volunteer mission. (#25, 2005)*
- *(When) our 4<sup>th</sup> child was about 1 1/2, we took foster children for a number of years and it was part of our way to say thank you for the goodness and the things that had been given to us and our children. (#26, 2005)*
- *My parents were always volunteer(ing) in community things. My dad used to say that he would have liked to be a missionary, but circumstances just didn't happen that way and he was very happy when one of his children did go into mission work, or to full-time service. In our home, service was stressed very much, was a very important part of our life. And it didn't matter where we were serving, whether it was overseas or in our own country. (#26, 2005)*

The following passage from an interview of a married couple is a dramatic example of interconnections, responsibility flows, and the shared cultural links that bind sub-groups within the global diaspora. They likened their experiences in a Siberian Mennonite village as to having travelled back through time and space:

- *RUDY: We've travelled back to Russia – we were not born in Russia, but we've always supported the MCC structure as a global organization. Mennonites by and large – no matter which groups of Mennonites they are – support the MCC as their number one missions organization... and it came to be that when we were making a transfer of our farm to (our children), there were some people that I had served with on committees and boards of MCC who said, "You are just the right people. We're going to send you to Siberia!" And of course we laughed about it: "What did we do to deserve to go to Siberia?" We love to tell our story; it's really been the most important chapter in our entire life, our experience in Siberia. And it wasn't like we were going home – we were born in Niagara. But we made that expression every time we got to Siberia: that it feels like we've come home. There was an automatic connection to our forefathers, our*

---

<sup>138</sup> SOWERS (Servants On Wheels Ever Ready) is a relief agency serviced by born-again Christian RVers across North America (<http://www.sowerministry.org/>).

parents, our grandparents having come to this country from Russia, and that we had roots there. We were invited to go to a little community named Neudachino that had its beginnings in 1895 by a people who voluntarily left the Ukraine in search of religious freedom and land... Later on it turned out to be that many were exiled to Siberia. One of the most interesting aspects of our stay was to discover a mixture of these people there – people who had gone voluntarily and people who had been exiled and survived and ended up there. We discovered that our Low German dialect was the same, our cultural practices were the same, and we just fit in right away with that community... and we were a hundred years removed from each other – that was 1993... There's a cluster of 24 Mennonite villages established north and south of the Trans-Siberian Railway, within a 50 km radius of each other. Neudachino was 300 km east of this cluster, having settled there all by themselves, and maintaining a strong connection to the cluster of Mennonites there.

(We were to) go and live with these people and share what (we'd) learned about life in Canada as an entrepreneur... they wanted somebody with economy-driven market ideas to come and live with them so that they could have some ideas how people lived in the free world. (They'd just been privatized – de-collectivized – in 1992.)...We were told, "your assignment is community development and/or presence ministry" and we said that we'd never done that before, we needed a different job description, and MCC told us, "just go – you'll find your job description there", which proved to be exactly (true). It suited us very well because we immediately immersed into their agricultural community there, became good friends with the directors of the village, and were allowed to do basically what we thought would help the village become an individual private community. And so we were involved in the introduction of a large raspberry farm there, (my wife) taught German and English in the local school, which they very much wanted and asked for, we became involved in the construction of a huge hog operation and meat slaughtering plant which they didn't have beforehand, and then in '96 we went back to build a cheese plant there. (We were there) 2 years the first time, then went back to introduce cheese making into the community and we stayed about 8 months that time. (Despite the similarities), there were still many cultural differences; we really had to make a big switch in our lifestyle to...live like they did.

- SARAH: Yes. Well, one of the first things – like, we had pictures of our kids with us and we were asked, "Which of the children live with you?" They don't have senior citizen's homes. And when we said, "No, we all have our own home", that was a big revelation because of course there in the village you couldn't really live alone – you need a big garden cause they don't have stores, (you) need a cow and chickens and pigs because (you can't) buy...so once you get too old, you have to have somebody who'll help you with these things. And then the (grand)mother helps in the house. I think we were very astounded, too, that they didn't know much about the North American world.
- RUDY: Well, they have television now, and they have radio.
- SARAH: The people in their 30s and 40s would say to us, "You know, up to a few years ago, we actually thought we were the most privileged people in the world, because we didn't know what was going on."

- *RUDY: But you know we often said, having two daughters at home, we were so glad our parents came to Canada so that our daughters wouldn't have to milk cows daily like they do over there.*
- *SARAH: And the men themselves in the village admitted that the women worked harder. In the dairy farm, as soon as something got mechanized, then the men would take over. They used to feed by hand, and then they got tractor pulling the feed through – suddenly the men were feeding the animals. And they joked about it; they talked about it.*
- *RUDY: Many people from here had the opportunity to go back (to Russia) for a visit... but many of them were of the opinion, "No, I will never go back - what they did to (our people)"...And they were afraid to go back, as well. And this is why a lot of our friends were just blown away that we volunteered to go to Siberia. Because they were warning us: "They're going to keep you there. They're going to keep you there." (#25, 2005) (#26, 2005)*

The phone rang while this interview ended: the call was from Neudachino. While the husband conversed in *Plautdietsch* with his "Siberian cousin" over the phone, his wife explained to me that they had been waiting for an e-mail response from the caller for weeks – apparently things had changed a lot since 1992: not only were there telephones in the village now, but also a computer. Up for discussion was the timing of a summer stay-over in Neudachino by a large Mennonite tour group,<sup>139</sup> who would billet for five days with these Siberian Mennonites. The caller hoped to confirm the coincidence of their arrival with a massive outdoor "worship festival of religious goodness and freedom" (#26, 2005) to be held in the Siberian forest involving choir-song and Mennonites travelling from other Mennonite villages in Siberia and around the globe. Mennonites from Niagara could even play the 'Mennonite Game' in Siberia, it would seem, since residents in both locations shared common surnames. Indeed, it was discovered that the Niagara couple does in fact have relatives in Siberia: two Neudachino families on the husband's maternal side.

---

<sup>139</sup> TourMagination, 2006 ( <http://www.tourmagination.com/index.php>)

It's useful to look at transformation within Neudachino as a result of contact with the wider world. At time of this interview, approximately half of the village's original residents (650 people/137 households, in 1991) had left the colony since privatization- most for Germany. The official language had changed to Russian *"to accommodate new converts and visitors who are slowly being attracted to the church"* (#25, 26, 2005). Diasporic institutions such as MCC, in mobilizing Mennonites with entrepreneurial and farming experience in Niagara, for example, have changed both the landscape and the workscape in this small Siberian village. Hence, we see in this couple's story how global networks facilitate the transfer and sharing of accumulated cultural capital between places in the diaspora. One sub-group's interrelationship with place in Niagara has directly affected another sub-group's interrelationship with place on the other side of the planet.

#### **6.1.4 Mennonite identity**

As noted with the *Fluechtlinge* group, 'being Mennonite' in Niagara has been a complex task. As these passages describe, there is hybridity in terms of ethnicity, but also in terms of religiosity - and in terms of the individual balance struck between the two. We also see glimpses here of how the parents of this generation experienced their Mennoniteness on the peninsula.

- *(My mother-in-law) was a wonderful woman. She was really – I would say, with her background of being a Lutheran – she very much, not knuckled under, but became a Mennonite. But when (our daughter) got married to a Catholic, Mother (in-law) asked me would I mind if she gave (daughter) her little gold cross? I said, "Mother, I think it's wonderful." So, (daughter) got it, and she said, "Boy, am I glad they didn't get all the Lutheran out of her!" (laughter) I thought it was pretty cute. She was a wonderful woman. She kept her balance; she kept her own self and her own feelings, but she did what was expected. That's pretty good. (#24, 2005)*
- *Mennonite certainly isn't (just) being a member of a certain church because our granddaughter said to me one time, "I consider myself a Mennonite." Well, her mother is of Scottish/English background, and (our granddaughter) herself joined the Anglican Church. And she said, "It's funny, Oma: I still think I'm a Mennonite." (#24, 2005)*

- *First it's the ethnic. Because there's something about being Mennonite in your religion that is really no different than most religions. I mean, honesty, truth, following what Christ would do – that's the basics, right? But it's these different things that you do as being in a Mennonite situation... and it seems all the Mennonites can get together and talk quite easily whether they are from different areas or what – there is a difference because you had that borscht and zwieback background, which is silly, but simplifying. (#23, 2005)*
- *Number one was borscht. We still love that. And you lived on the farm and you butchered pigs, you know? Canned your meat. Zwieback. (#19, 2005)*
- *We realized very quickly that the children would go to Gramma and want wareniki and the old kinds of food, so my wife started making zwieback and that kind of thing, but that was more because (they) liked it so much. We're not keeping it so it won't change; it's because they liked what Gramma was doing. Otherwise, I don't know if there's a lot of ethnicity that remains. We don't worry about that. Outsiders could objectively tell us, I suppose. But attending church services was important to us, and in a way that isn't quite only religious.... most of our functions move around the Mennonite church, the Mennonite tradition.*
- *God comes first: your belief and being part of the church. And to be able to forgive one another and be there for one another. I think that is of utmost importance. I got that from my mom & dad... At a young age we had evangelistic meetings. I always think that was very important, how the young people were all encouraged. They'd put up a tent on Lakeshore Road, and they'd have an evangelist come. Very often I had to help there with those that would come forward as they make their decisions, and so forth. We should put more weight on that. (#19, 2005)*
- *(One) thing that was quite strong in all the families was that the families got together. You have an 'Oma Party'. Even though my mother died years ago, we still celebrate her birthday, and (last weekend) we had 45 people, sometimes we have 60. And when it comes to other fine customs you ask about, our grandchildren were here this weekend, and given the choice between Trick-or-Treat candy and zwieback, they go for the zwieback every time... (Another) strong tradition we seem to have is that at funerals you seem to have lots of raisin bread, and I've already left instructions that at my funeral I want the raisin bread to have at least double the amount of raisins we sometimes see in these things. (#23, 2005)*
- *There are more black Mennonites in the world than white ones because of the Africans and Indians who have accepted the Mennonite religion. But I guess, coming from a Mennonite background we still feel very much (it's) the names – in the news, if I hear a name like Friesen, or an Epp, or a Dirkson, or a Klassen – "Oh, that's a Mennonite name." Whereas in our church now we have McLellan's, we have Jones', we have Smith's, you know? We're all Mennonite. But I guess in my thinking it is always the name. Some of the very Mennonite traditions like zwieback... and 'pluma moos', which is a fruit pudding*

*which is a very Russian tradition, watermelon and rollkuchen, borscht...a lot of these things our daughters or daughters-in-law have picked up as well. (#26, 2005)*

- *(We must be the) luckiest people in the world: we have Dutch and German and Russian and Ukrainian and now Canadian foods, among other things – we must be the best-fed group on the planet. (#28, 2005)*

### 6.1.5 Niagara Identity

Human interrelationships with place transform both the people and the place. The most obvious physical manifestation of this diaspora on the peninsula landscape is seen in the now distinctive orchard vistas. This cohort, most now retired, remained involved with fruit farming to varying degrees, and the largest fruit producers on the peninsula remain Mennonite-run operations. Among these participants there is more occupational diversity, linked with opportunities for higher education, than we saw in the previous generation. Nonetheless, time after time during these interviews Mennonite contributions to the evolution of farming on the peninsula were raised, not only in terms of perseverance on the land and the small-farm factor in success, but in the areas of technological exploration, import, and innovation. A continuing sense of place as 'stretched out' - the global orientation of the diaspora - proved a defining feature of Mennonite contributions. As globalization increasingly affected agriculture, Niagara Mennonite farmers were well poised to keep up with it. Cultural practices, such as the establishment of co-operative institutions (a cultural practice which has followed the Mennonites from as far back as Holland) and credit unions (a cultural feature developed in Russia), and skills in transforming marginal land into productive land (practiced in Holland and West Prussia), were also operationalized to the benefit of both Mennonites and their new homeland.

- *(Dad's farm) was 12 acres, and we had strawberries, we had tomatoes, we had peach trees, we had cherry trees, and we had one acre of grapes. It all had to be planted. It was all just the land. Everything we grew, we had to plant. I do remember seeing an*



*apple orchard when we went to Virgil school, but on the whole... I think it really increased quite a bit after we moved there. My husband and I had a farm, too, before it was expropriated for the Seaway. Today, I think it's much more grapes...I think other fruit has gone down. When you go to St. Catharines and take Line One all the way down, you really see a lot of grapes. Because you don't need grape cutters anymore...you just drive around with a tractor. And then of course with having wineries, I think that has changed. There's still a lot of Mennonite farmers, maybe not as much as used to be, but even from the ones that came here first. I think of my brother – it's a huge farm. But a lot of grapes, that's what I see again and again. (#19, 2005)*

- *(My parents did) mixed farming (in Russia) - grain and some animals. Very little (fruit) – some for their own consumption. (Here, they did) fruit farming. I've sometimes wondered, "Why didn't you go to Brandt County – that would have been mixed farming." But they settled here because of the first wave of Mennonites here. (#20, 2005)*
- *The fruit was already established by the Swiss Mennonites. I understand a Mr. Frye brought some fruit or seeds or seedlings from Pennsylvania. The peach was brought here by the Swiss Mennonites, and (they) helped our people in many ways. Many of our people worked on the farms in Vineland area, and that's where they learned about the fruit farming. But we have to admit that the originals were the Swiss Mennonites... (#23, 2005)*
- *There's an awful lot to be said about this. I've often heard that when the Mennonites first came into the area, they may not have been as welcome as they turned out to be later on, and so were given land that was really not the best land for farming and were allowed to purchase that land because people who had been here earlier didn't want it, or it wasn't considered to be good fruit farming land, and actually I'm proud to say that I think the Mennonites proved them wrong, because the fruit farms that were established in the late or mid '30s and into the '40s all turned out to be very successful fruit farms. A large influx of Mennonites came into this peninsula to do farming, and I think really made the Niagara Peninsula a larger fruit growing area than it ever would have been without them. I think largely because it was settled by people who had been involved in some type of fruit production in Russia, and were used to marginal land being able to produce fruit. And so the marginal land was transformed through many different cultural practices into productive land. (My dad) did grow tomatoes and ground crops for a number of years and then planted later fruit trees and discovered that they did OK, and so it just continued. And when we took over, well, we just expanded that, and when the boys took over they just expanded it again. A lot had to do with climactic conditions as well. This particular peninsula is very suitable for growing fruit because of cold protection in the winter by its proximity to Lake Ontario. That is a big factor – you can't grow fruit consistently year after year in (just) any area of the peninsula - the closer you are to the lake, the more protection one receives from the cold winter effects. And most of our (Mennonite) farms are located near Lake Ontario. (#25, 2005)*
- *I recall once in Florida in one of the Presbyterian churches we were attending there, someone (had asked) the question, "Who are these Mennonites?" And one of the old timers from around here – a non-Mennonite – got up and gave this very glowing report as to what these people had done to the Niagara Peninsula. So, you know, there were*

*both sides...he was talking about people coming in where there was very little economic activities, and here you had (Mennonite) people coming and planting tomatoes and planting orchards and making commerce happen. And things like someone would get together and start a fruit co-op to sell the fruit. Then you had another person who had the experience in Russia with credit unions, and he decided to start a credit union, and before you know it today we have that same credit union that has capital in the billions. So, it was that kind of thing that he was talking about – the fact that these people helped with the prosperity of the region in a great way. (#23, 2005)*

- *When (my husband's parents) came, the place they bought used to be used for pastureland. And there were 6-7 (Mennonite) couples that bought all in that area and that's where our kids grew up, where we grew up, where our family is now. And that's one of the largest fruit growing areas right in our peninsula, but at that time that was only pastureland. And still there is Epp, and Falk, and Willms, and Martin's, Schmidt – like, all the Mennonite names there yet. And that was not fruit growing land (before). (#26, 2005)*
- *Some co-ops have existed here since the '20s already. There's one large co-op that was established in the '20s that still exists - Vineland Growers Association – by the Swiss Mennonites in the Vineland area. There were a number of First Mennonites involved in that establishment and it has maintained its business aspects to this very day, although it's experienced many different changes. There have been other co-operatives established. I'm thinking of one that came out of the difficult time in the fruit production of the '60s, perhaps when sales through normal channels were suffering and the provincial and federal governments became involved. In our years of farming in the late '70s, there were 8 of us fruit growers who united to form a co-op, unassisted by government or any other organization. We established it all on our own – all Mennonite fellow farmers – and then when some of us started retiring in the late '90s this organization was sold to Vineland Growers Co-operative, which I mentioned, and is very strong today. There are several other tender fruit organizations known as co-operatives operating in the peninsula even to this day. I think the co-operative aspect has been an aid to furthering and promoting the agriculture industry on the peninsula. It's undergone many, many changes, of course, over the last 30-40 years, and more so in the last 60-70 years insofar as the small family farm is losing its way (here), making way for larger family farms or even co-operative farms. I can recall so vividly when there used to be some 29 different processing plants on the peninsula in the '40s and '50s – canning peaches and cherries and pears and apples – and that's been reduced now to one major processing plant. And that plant processes much more fruit today than the 29 did. So it all boils down to modernization and technology, and so on. And there's absolutely no question about it that a number of our individuals have gone on their own even, to California and other countries, and have brought back tremendous ideas and put them into reality. For example, breeding of nursery stock for tender fruit varieties that lend themselves more aptly to the Niagara peninsula. We are proud to know that a number of (Mennonite) individuals have done this and have enhanced the entire Niagara peninsula fruit industry as such. (They've gone to) New Zealand, Australia, Europe...Argentina, Bolivia – particularly because (these areas) have become strong competitors. We very often heard in the '50s and '60s, people from the big cities in Ontario would come to the farm in May & June and say, "When will the peaches be*

*ready? And when will the fresh fruit be in our stores?" But (with) globalization that's no longer the case because we see fresh fruit from almost every country in the world almost every day of the week in every store in Canada today. So, it's that type of competition that has caused the fruit industry in Niagara are to sharpen its view on how to do promotion and how to do sales. (#25, 2005)*

This concludes the stories and experiences of the second-generation, Niagara-born *Russlaender*. The final section of the results chapters involves the third generation from both groups A and B (*Russlaender & Fluechtlinge*).

### **6.2 *Fluechtlinge / Russlaender* (Groups A/B, Third Generation)**

Two focus group meetings took place involving third generation participants who were born in Niagara and whose parental mix is *Russlaender/Fluechtlinge*. To avoid overlap I've edited and merged the two meetings, preserving the flow as much as possible to retain context. Analysis follows the uninterrupted transcript.

How has this generation of Niagara Mennonites experienced diaspora? In other words, how have they experienced place in relation to cultural hybridity, social heterogeneity, and performance & co-responsibility? What has 'being Mennonite' meant to the daily lives of these people, and how do they see themselves along the generational trail of Mennonites on the peninsula? ( See APPENDIX XII: List of guiding topics for focus group meetings)

#### **Reflection Box 6.3: *Third generation focus groups***

The participants of these third generation groups were all close to my own age. All of the participants have known one another all of their lives. We had more in common than not, and also they grew up with my spouse in Niagara. In each group I knew at least two people prior. There was a lot of laughter! Everyone seemed happy to be getting together, which was a relief.

There was some last minute shuffling due to availability of participants, making one group smaller, so there is less data from that group. I think the dynamics were better with the larger group. Conversation flowed more naturally with more people so I had to do less prompting and I was more relaxed.

I will note that a silence is broken here concerning sexual assault during wartime. This generation refers specifically to the story of rape of one Niagara *Fluechtlinge* member (now

deceased). It is unsurprising that this would have affected the Niagara *Fluechtlinge* community; evidence suggests that ethnic German women raped during WW2 numbered in the millions (H. Loewen, 2008). The issue of rape among Mennonite women during WW2, and the memory, reportage and treatment of rape within an accepted Mennonite narrative, has most thoroughly been addressed by Marlene Epp (1997; 2000; 2008) and Pamela Klassen (1994a). Epp has written:

it is essential that scholarly expectations go beyond factual confirmations of rape, or numbers of women raped, or reasons for the rapes, or conclusions regarding representative scenarios. While the historian generally wants to know “what really happened,” in this case the search is also for an understanding of the impact of experience, the ways in which it becomes part of an individual’s life story *and also part of their community’s story*. (1997, p. 63, italics added)

It is with this aim of exploring the impact of the experience of rape on individuals, families, and the community that I include the discussion in this transcript.

### 6.2.1 Focus Groups (Groups A/B, Third Generation)

CJ: What is ‘a good Mennonite woman’ to you?<sup>140</sup>

- *Food, church, service.*<sup>141</sup>
- *My first response is the food, the ethnic food, that they can cook it – and do it well. Borscht, wareniki, zwieback -that’s Mennonite. I mean religion is Christian, Catholic, whatever. Whereas Mennonite is FOOD.*
- *Making Mennonite foods – not that I can, but that’s what I’d say.*

---

<sup>140</sup> N.B. These focus groups were undertaken at the Master’s level, when the study was focused on the (all-female) *Fluechtlinge* study group (Group B) only – i.e., before the scope of this project was expanded to also include *Russlaender* upon my acceleration to the PhD level. Therefore, as with this particular question in interviews of the older *Fluechtlinge* generations, “What is a ‘good Mennonite woman’ to you?” was not countered with “What is a ‘good Mennonite man’ to you?” It was, however, in subsequent interviews with *Russlaender*, and would be in focus groups for any similar future projects.

<sup>141</sup> Each bullet denotes a change in speaker.

- *I do it when I have time: zwieback. I even did rollkuchen once.*
- *Plus strong faith, of course, very strong faith.*
- *But I think service, too. Our Mom's were always in the 'Verein',<sup>142</sup> the Ladies' Circle, in the church. I find that women of our age are starting to do this again. Quilting circle, sewing circle, and service oriented.*
- *Even in our generation. I think that's the main thing, you know, is making blankets, the whole service aspect.*
- *But for us isn't it a different reason than our mothers? You hear this again and again from the older Verein groups: "We're doing this because when we were coming over MCC did all this for us, and these churches were supporting us and we will forever, EVER, be indebted back." And so they were doing this out of a sense of duty and service. Our generation is enough removed that I don't think we feel that kind of connection. I look at it as more of a church thing, to get together, to feel a sense of purpose, I guess, but not working. Mostly a socialization. Like, we want to go, as opposed to it being a duty.*
- *Yes, I look at it as a way to find a groove to come back to – to get to know people.*
- *My kids say, "You know, Mom, you better learn the Mennonite cooking. What about when Gramma doesn't make that anymore?"*
- *In our children's view, that's what they'd say: the whole home baker idea, but tossed in with that now is also working outside of the home, which the previous generation didn't do as much as we do now. Whereas the first generation did. They had to.*
- *And not as much as a career, I don't think. Like, we have an education and a career.*
- *For our mothers, it was more a 'good Mennonite' to marry young, have kids and stay home and look after them.*

CJ: Did you, then, feel any pressure to do the same?

- *I never felt pressure, but then I did get married and have kids, so...*
- *Well, I feel pressure, for sure, to get married. And whether I put it on myself, too, I don't know... Like, church-wise. Not society, really. At work, for example - people outside – there's more single women outside of the Mennonite circle.*

---

<sup>142</sup> Verein: women's group

- *I think a lot of it is Mennonite. And this area. There's a lot of Mennonites in this area. Because if you go to Toronto, let's say, you wouldn't feel it.*

CJ: What would you say makes you 'most Mennonite'?

- *In terms of food, before, I was thinking more of my mother's generation; that part of it will be lost in my generation. I don't make wareniki. Although I make borscht...*
- *Well, when I got married, I changed my name and became an (English surname). And my Mom at the time said, "You should hyphenate your name," and my Dad said, "Oh, no, you have to take on the man's name." Well, of course I went with my Dad. And for the whole time I was there I felt so frustrated that I hadn't hyphenated my name! After 9 years of marriage I finally hyphenated it. I just found that while I was talking to Mennonites where I worked I had (an English name) on my nametag. And to me there was a cultural connection that it really frustrated me that I didn't have. Identity. Identity. It was just this element of culture that was missing. So I hyphenated it, and it made all the world of difference to me. I found when Mennonites came in to the front desk I'd see their name and I'd think, "Oh, you're a Weibe, or Willms, or... but all they saw was (this English name). And it hurt me that they wouldn't know who I was - not having that connection, not having the name. I longed for more. I longed for that connection. Not having the name, I was nothing.*
- *Well, with Mennonites, names we connect or identify with. Even on TV - we saw last night a Neufeldt on TV, and I thought, "Well, he's a Mennonite. Somewhere down the line there's probably a connection..."*
- *Oh, yes, 'The Mennonite Game', all the time - two, three generations back max, you can connect. After I hyphenated, a (customer) saw my nametag and said, "Oh, you're a (Mennonite surname). Where are you from?"*
- *We ask kids' friends last names and can tell who the parents are right away. Poor kids walk in - "And what's your last name?!" (laughter) Like, you ALWAYS know who's Mennonite by the names. That's something that's very strong. Those names you know right away. You always know there's some Mennonite roots when you hear certain names.*
- *Cindy, do you notice that Mennonites hyphenate their names more often than other people – and not just women, men as well? I feel like we do. And I don't think it's even an independence issue. It's identity. And it's more than just identification of being a Mennonite. It's WHICH Mennonites are you related to, the 'Name Game' thing. I also battled for a long time whether or not to hyphenate, and I didn't. And most of my marriage I've been sorry that I didn't. And we are both Mennonites, my husband and I, so even though I took on another Mennonite name, that wasn't good enough. I want this sense of identity with my particular family. You have that connection, right? It tells something about who I am. So now I spend my life telling people I'm an \_\_\_\_\_, and I have to explain it. You with hyphens don't have to; it's there already.*

- *Does it have something to do with how we feel in our relationships as wives that we don't want to be absorbed, like we're not identified by our husbands anymore? We're very different in that sense from our mother's generation. That's a huge difference.*
- *Well, my Mom told me that, too. She surprises me sometimes. There again, my ultimate respect for that woman. She comes out with these things and yet she seems so under my father's umbrella. Throughout my adult years, I just see how much of a woman she is, how independent she is, and how she structured our family into what she wants. Everyone thinks it's Dad, everyone thinks that he's "the man", but she is truly – he may be the head, but she's the neck! Like in the movie, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding"! My mother said, hyphenate your name; don't lose your identity. She did not want me to lose my heritage. She was really, really frustrated when I didn't. She said, "I understand that you're not marrying a Mennonite", but she really didn't want me to lose my Mennonitism, and she felt it was important. And it turned out to be totally true. I totally lost it. I was totally taken, and not all his fault, I followed along, but he was not a Christian and I followed right behind him. And that was one component of the whole thing, the failed marriage.*
- *To get back to your question, about being Mennonite, I know I've struggled and been frustrated with, "Well, what's your background – are you German? What are you?" I don't feel – like I speak German, but we're not 'Germany Germans'. We're not Russian, but yet Dad was born in part of the Ukraine. You know? That part is the really frustrating part. That you don't know. Like 'Mennonite' isn't a country, it's not a place of origin where you can say where you are from.*
- *We are wanderers. I always answer "Mennonite". Well, what does that mean? Well, it's a big umbrella.*
- *Well, I was told by my grandmother that we were German. Oh ya, she insisted. And I bristled against that from the youngest age. I couldn't bear that. That's why we had to go to German school – "You're German!" – "Well, no, we're not!" I couldn't handle that idea. And it turns out it's all part of this, "Well, it's the Germans that rescued us so we must have been German, because there we were in Russia, and...*
- *And we are DEFINITELY NOT Russian! Oh!*
- *Right! Even though we had lived THERE forever, you know?*
- *Definitely not! When they left, it was like, "We're moving on!" NO connection there, WHATSOEVER.*
- *But I loved it when Oma would say we're German, and then if you brought somebody else home, they're "English". I mean, EVERYONE else was "English"...you married the "Hanglish" (laughter)*
- *Well, there are common threads in the faith, but then there's the cultural things...I think it is SO tied together...It's really hard to separate. Like, our church is called Orchard Park Bible Church. We don't have the Mennonite name in there, and there's a reason for*

*that, too, because sometimes in the past it was too ingrown. Like, the Mennonites focused too much on themselves.*

CJ: So, your church has moved away from that?

- *Ya, well, Mennonite Brethren has more so than United Mennonite moved into that evangelical thrust. But still for myself personally, like I LOVE some of the things that are Mennonite. But I don't like that exclusivity of what it used to be. That, I don't think, is right. It's nice to have fresh blood come in.*

CJ: What are some of the Mennonite things that you love?

- *Well, the food. It's all about the food! (laughter) Food is a really big thing! And a sense of family. That's HUGE.*
- *People can't believe how much – like (my husband) is Mennonite Brethren - how much we socialize and get together -with our families, with our siblings, with our parents - in general. I don't know if that's true in all cultures, but in a lot of other families, they're not very close with their siblings, and certainly not with their cousins. They might never see their cousins in twenty years, whereas we are close with second cousins. And we have showers, bridal showers, where everybody gets together.*
- *I agree - that's a huge part. My kids get together with their cousins on my side of the family twice a week, and with (my husband's) side of the family once a week. That does not happen outside.*
- *I was going to say that I think our family is unique because when my Oma came over she came over with that whole group of sisters and their children. They lived in one house even, with like 9 children. So they were a family. They were immediate family; they weren't like cousins. I always thought that was a really cool thing that we have that.*
- *But then of course, too, they were very inclusive of those that weren't living in the same yard. Like your Oma, and the sisters, they were all Tantens to us, too.*
- *Oh ya, they were all like aunts. I never knew who my real aunts were! They were like parents, even. At some point, I had to stop calling them Tante and Oncle. And now what do you call them - Mr.? Mrs.? First name?*

CJ: Those of you married to people with no mix of *Fluechtlinge* background, are they as close with their cousins as you all are with yours?

- *My husband's family is very close with cousins, yes. We do just as many family reunions and stuff with his side as we do on my side.*
- *My (husband's family) is not as close, but still close compared to most non-Mennonite families. Just not as close as we are coming from those single women who went through all that together and some even having lived together here. They're very close with their immediate families, though.*



- *My dad's (Russlaender) family, no, we were never as close with that side as we are with my mom's (Fluechtlinge) side. We did up to the point where (my husband's) Oma died, but that's the point where the get-togethers stopped.*
- *Actually, that's funny because on our (Russlaender) side, we only got together on our Oma's birthday every year. And after she died, we still always get together on her birthday. The one time all year, on Oma's birthday. We're closer to the (Fluechtlinge) side, definitely.*
- *But that's what it's all about with this whole coming over, like these women, they're relational. So it's all about relations. So no wonder we're so close.*

CJ: Do you all speak German?

- *I would say my German is 80%. I lived in Germany for a year, which made a big difference.*
- *Most of us have German still, maybe rusty...*
- *We spoke it before we spoke English*

CJ: And your children?

- *No. The language is going to be totally lost with us.*
- *Well, my daughter wanted to learn, so she signed up for German classes.*
- *But you know, for many of us now, living in Canada, our children are better to learn French. They are now learning French, some French immersion, some core French in English schools.*
- *Well, we say grace in German, we say our prayers at bedtime in German, too. They understand. And every now and then I'll speak German, so they know. But - I have to use the word - my German is a bastardized German: it's English, it's German, it's Low German. I don't know which one I'm speaking at any given time.*
- *I think the Mennonite culture is really evolving. It's really becoming more of a Christian community instead of a culture.*
- *Yes, I hear our kids expressing it. Up until a few years ago our kids would never have used the word 'Mennonite' - I mean, we have not been involved with the Mennonite church for a number of years, too, being at Orchard Park Bible School - but they were not sure they were Mennonite. And I think what's happened is now they would say that they're Christians first, and they're able to appreciate what the Mennonite culture has given to their Christian faith and they're ready to embrace it. Our son, for example, who couldn't buy the whole pacifist stance, is beginning to understand.*

CJ: The pacifism stance hasn't been tested in a long time...

- *That's right, and our kids don't really understand it, and neither did our generation, really. We don't know it at all. Some of these aspects for our kids now, if they embrace it I think they do because they want to, not because it's coming from their culture. I think it's coming from the outside.*

CJ: Embracing Mennonite culture didn't used to involve so much choice, would you say, then?

- *Oh, we had NO choice. There was NO question! Well, we grew up in NOTL, and we didn't have a lot of Mennonite friends there, and my parents said, "You have to hang around with your church friends, because when you get older, that's who are going to be your friends in the end." That is accepted that your friends, your Mennonite friends, would be your friends when you grew up. Your English friends, ah, you'll see them at school and all that stuff...*
- *I think they were also afraid that we'd be infiltrated, you know? Because then we'd be taken away.*
- *Yes, like now our kids have all kinds of friends. You know, like when I think of how my parents have been afraid of somebody who was, you know, Catholic or something like that – like, that all seemed like the ultimate fear, you know? (laughter) You might bring one home some day!*

**Reflection Box 6.2: The element of choice in adult baptism.**

Two third-generation participants refused baptism as young adults, and yet still strongly self-identify culturally as Mennonites (#33, 2006; #34, 2006).

Their refusing baptism was considered an act of defiance, and yet the premise of rejecting infant baptism is that adults make a conscious choice to join the church (believer's baptism, upon confession of faith...). Yet when these individuals chose not to join the church, family members were upset and hurt, a situation which over 30 years later still has raw edges and is not discussed. So it appears that although on the surface individuals are given a choice, there is clear messaging and pressure within families and the community as to what that choice should be.

- *Well, it was just a fear, I guess, that it would somehow – well, basically fear of what's happened now. Ya, we're more Christian now than Mennonite. The churches, they want – you're encouraged to reach out to the community. And yet the older generation, they don't want to lose their Mennonite culture. Well, you know, if you want to grow you gotta get out into the community.*
- *And we're even a little bit behind in all that in the United Mennonite Church. The MBs<sup>143</sup> don't even have 'Mennonite' in their church name anymore. They don't want to be associated with the Mennonites. And now you've got Oriental Mennonites, Laotian*

---

<sup>143</sup> Mennonite Brethren Churches

*Mennonites, and didn't they say that black African Mennonite is the biggest Mennonite church? It's evolution.*

- *It's also just time. From our grandparents, when they lived in the Ukraine, you had a community that existed "here". And you couldn't really travel very far. Technology was such that you couldn't go far. And in Niagara, to begin with, your community still was pretty much isolated. But now it's global, right? You can go any which way. And I think that really affects the idea of 'Mennonite', and our generation, and our expectations of our children, you know? And where we are - as in, bringing people into the church, too. That's why I think, maybe that generation before us is so closed, because that was always what they knew, this little community.*
- *Well, look at my grandmother: 3 out of the 7 children in her family married brothers and sisters from one other family! Like, there are three families that are double cousins. So, I mean, it was a closed community in that village.*
- *But they weren't allowed to marry out of the community. And of my aunts and uncles – our parents' generation – the ones that married outside of the Mennonite faith, they all stayed in Russia. Everyone that married Mennonite upon Mennonite came to Canada. The others all stayed in Russia because they had Russian families. I met some of them, by the way, in Ukraine. It was really cool... the next generation there, their daughters, were dressed so nicely, so modernly, like the bell bottoms, the leather jackets...but our older cousins over there, and our age, they still have that 'babushka' look, like with the head scarves and the whole bit.*
- *Our parents' generation here, they are modern looking...*
- *Yes, our parents look young compared to what our grandparents looked at that age.*
- *My (Russlaender) Oma, even photos of her in her forties and fifties, she looked old. She always had her hair up in a bun, and it was the whole manner. It was just the whole married thing: you're married? Now you're old. Even when all her boys were little, she looked old. Whereas my other Oma (Fluechtlinge) looked young.*
- *Look, those (Fluechtlinge) ladies all kept themselves quite young. They had no men, and they made it! And none of them that I know remarried when they got here. None of them.*

CJ: Did they have opportunities?

- *Oh yes. And they said, "No, thank you. We are FINALLY here."*
- *I don't think they thought they could handle it. I think they knew how independent they were. They weren't going to be told by anybody what to do. I know for a fact that with my grandmother that's what it was.*

- *I went to Florida one year with a friend, and my uncle and aunt had taken the Omas (three sisters who travelled together on the trek). And those ladies were in their room playing cards and laughing, and laughing, and partying – my uncle had to knock on the door and tell them to be quiet! (laughter)*
- *That's what kept them young: laughing. Those women loved to laugh.*
- *(My cousins) took our Oma to New York City, and Oma walked them off their feet! She could walk, and walk, and walk. And they were like, "Can we sit?" "Ya, we sit and talk for coffee a little bit, and then we go!" I mean, she was not one to take ANY time for granted – "We are here, and let's take it all in!"*
- *I agree, the whole crossing made them so strong. Like, they had had their husbands. They would have been more than happy to have them still. But they were not going to go down that path again. No.*
- *They had that independence. And in that age, it was like the husband was in control. Well, not for these women. I asked my Oma once and she said, "No way."*
- *And my Oma really loved her husband a lot. She still talks about him. So there was just a love there. And an independence gained that was too hard to give up.*
- *And the women had each other, so it was not like it was just one parent.*
- *Right. And they covered childcare for each other, you know.*
- *Your Oma was actually more of a mother/ nurturer to my mom than her own mother was.*
- *Ya, she was the mother, the caregiver. My Oma was the male figure almost. But see, the negative thing is that both my parents grew up without a father, because both my parents are (Fluechtlinge). So then, like, my Mom didn't know what it was to have a husband or a father figure. And my dad was the same way! He didn't have anybody that he could look up to – how should a husband act, or how should a father be with his children?*

CJ: Can we talk about the legacy of your parents and grandparents having left Russia?

- *My (Fluechtlinge) Oma is still alive, and I would say that the great thing that came out of her life is her faith. I think about it a lot, actually, because I know that when they left she was really one of the driving forces. And we lived together – I grew up with my Oma living with us, and so we got to be together a lot. And she said to me that that's where she relied on God. There was no way out unless God was going to help them. And there she had this personal experience with Jesus Christ. And looking back over the years I can now see that that has poured over into her children, into us, and into our children. To me, that's probably the biggest outcome.*

- *As a result of them coming to Canada as single women with all of these children, for myself, I felt like I grew up in a matriarchal society - that women ruled the roost. And what these women said went, and that their daughters – like what was said earlier about we were the neck and we turned the head – these daughters learned to deal with their husbands the very same way. I always thought that the women were – what they said was the bottom line. We set the pace and the guys had to keep up with it. And our generation, too, like I've had to re-learn some of the old thinking because now I have to compromise more because it's not just me on my own. But I think if that were me in that position, I would be just as strong as my grandmother was: "OK, let's go. You DO."*
- *One of the biggest things is just the way they made this special effort and really did the hard work of getting the family together. The family things. And I see it in my mother and I see myself doing it now, as in just being more aware of, "When can we all be together"?*
- *Our families, like my mom and her sisters and families, we still get together twice a year, faithfully. We have those dates set and we get together. But as an extended family, that has now stopped.*
- *If we took the initiative and did it on our own it would be well received, though.*
- *Oh, would it ever. It would be so well received*

CJ: Who use to organize these larger gatherings?

- *The Omas. The Tantens.*
- *As long as they were there, that happened. And once they started passing on, that really nose-dived.*
- *Our family does still have two "Oma Parties" each year. Around the birthdays of each Oma. And it is extended family, with all the cousins and aunts and uncles, and so on.*
- *Our family, too, has twice a year extended family get-togethers. When Oma passed away it then became, "We gotta keep this thing going in her honour and her memory." So I think, until my mom and aunt are gone, those family gatherings will keep going strong twice a year.*
- *But, you know, that's because they're sisters. In my dad's family, there are 3 brothers, and one sister that lives a little further away. And I think we don't do it anymore because the women are not there. You hear the difference here, the talk of matriarchal power. I wouldn't say that's true in my family. We lost my mother when I was a child, so then that was gone.*
- *In our family, I didn't have one Oma, I had 3 (3 sisters who made the trek together). Because they travelled together through the hard times, it just felt like we were all so much closer because they were so much closer. But, yikes, you didn't have one Oma- you had 3.*

CJ: Why has everyone either stayed here in Niagara, or come back after having left a while?

- *I moved away for a while. You know, somehow even just moving 20-25 km away – like, even just to Beamsville – you’re still ‘away’. I was in a different Mennonite community then. I was no longer in the Niagara Mennonite community. Without relatives. There were others, though, that had also been from the Niagara Mennonite community. And suddenly, because your family is so far away, so you make all these other people your family. (One of them) just took me under her wing, like, “Oh, you’re from Niagara, too!” We always wanted to move back here. Beamsville was central because my husband travelled a lot to Toronto and around the world. Then he lost his mother so his father was all alone, so that was incentive to come back.*
- *We moved to the U.S. for 8 years, and came back for work reasons. It’s just that whole connection. To me, it’s not the church - our Christianity - it’s much more. I believe that it’s the whole family and community ties.*
- *Sometimes I think I would be stretched to move away. Like, I live in the house I grew up in – it doesn’t get any more close. And my sister lives only blocks away and my parents even closer. And I think, “Gee, I’ve never been challenged or stretched to have to go into a new community, like you did, and have to make it all on my own”. I’ve always had all these people around me. And grandparents (my parents), “Oh, can you pick up so-and-so - can you help out driving?” We’ve always had that. So it’s been a great thing, but sometimes I think I might be a better person if I had to sink or swim.*
- *I’ve never either, but I think it just must open your eyes to what’s out there. Because I think our outlook on the world is narrower because we haven’t seen a lot of it. We’re really sheltered here, I think. And shelter is a great thing. I think that’s the reason so many of us still choose to live here. And for our kids to have that, too.*
- *Ya, family. Plus it’s so beautiful here. That landscape, you know.*
- *We moved away, too, for 6 years (out west), for a job. But I was really surprised when we came back after we got married how many couples said to me, or how many of my friends said to me, (whispers) “You are so lucky when you live away in your first years of marriage. Like, you have NO INTERFERENCE.” Ya, that shocked me. That never really entered my mind that there’d be interference. From parents.*
- *For me, anyway, the benefits outweigh the negatives. Like having childcare and support so close. Ya, sometimes you fantasize about being away, but...*
- *When we moved back, it was hard getting used to the obligations of getting together for all the family things. Like, we used to take so many family trips on Sundays, for example. But now, you feel like we’re a little bit tied back because Mom wants us to be there for lunch. So I often have this guilt thing if I’m not there.*
- *We also moved away for just a year, but it was enough to give you a different perspective. You know, you had a break, and you just could see a bit more the wider community, wider world, than just what you grew up with. Like was said, parents tried to keep it church-focused, and that kind of thing. So now I really think it’s, like was said,*

*evolving here. You go to (the grocery store) – you still figure it’s a small community – but you hardly know anybody there anymore.*

CJ: Does it matter to you to use the services of other Mennonites where possible?

- *Oh, totally. Ya, we just (did renovations) and we used a Mennonite – totally, for sure! Not saying that Mennonites are better tradesmen, but people will say that – people who are not Mennonite will say that: “Oh, ya, you want to hire a Mennonite.” So definitely we would want to use Mennonite services rather than not.*
- *I think that we tend to, also. But I never thought of it before. Is it more tied to the fact that I know the person?*
- *It’s true that if you recommended somebody who wasn’t a Mennonite, I would use them over say, someone from our church.*
- *But I think I tend to attribute honesty and integrity to Mennonites. And hard work. Like if it was just, say, going to the phone book and there was a Mennonite name and a non-Mennonite name, I would gravitate to the Mennonite name.*
- *Yes, if I had a choice, and I didn’t know, I’d do that, too.*

CJ: What cultural traditions have you carried on?

- *Food.*
- *German grace.*
- *You know what else we haven’t mentioned at all is the musical tradition.*
- *That’s true! Which TOTALLY will carry on. Even at home. I really think that one will continue.*
- *When we’re at home, and when we get together, even with my sibling’s families, we always say grace and it always breaks into 3-4 part harmony. Always. And we sing at the ‘Oma Parties’, too...*
- *For some reason it may lapse for a year or so, and then someone will say, “We really should sing.”*
- *Dad always wants us to sing – a hymn, or grace, or a Christmas a carol...*
- *Well, like I say, it may carry on in a different fashion. Our kids all do something musical, and I think it’s because of the tradition. Like I think of (my daughter). She plays in a worship band with (my friend’s) son. So I see that music being passed on to the next generation.*
- *It brings me back to when we were kids. We had that family band. (laughter)*

- *I played the violin at anniversaries, remember? Our parents all celebrated in big fashion on their 25<sup>th</sup> (wedding anniversaries). But now our brothers are all coming up to their 25<sup>th</sup> and nothing is happening. Not a big event like what we used to play our musical instruments for. It was a full, formal thing – so grand. And to this day, their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries...*
- *Oh, my parents talk about them (anniversaries) all the time! “So-and-so had the most recent, and we did this and this...” And they compare them. I mean in a nice way.*
- *Not always! It’s a competition! (laughter)*
- *Mine had their 50<sup>th</sup> this summer and the entire generation of their cousins all came together for this event. And they sang. They often do, our parents.*
- *Visiting relatives is a big thing – you gotta make allowances for at least 5-6 extra people at a wedding – guests that may be visiting people you’ve invited.*
- *At our wedding I recall somebody standing up and introducing 2 guests from Germany. I had no clue who they were or that they were there: these were guests of somebody else that was invited, and so they came...*
- *I have a feeling our generation really is trying hard to break free of the restriction of expectations. Our parents were – and as kids, we too were expected- YOU WERE EXPECTED to sing in church. You were expected to go to all these things, you were expected to be part of the youth group. All of these expectations... I mean I have no regrets about them, but as teenagers, you go (makes a face). Whereas now, we want our kids to think, “I want to do this because I want to do it”, not out of a sense of obligation.*

CJ: So, are you trying to be conscious not to pressure your own kids?

- *Probably. Hoping they’ll come around sooner or later. We almost can’t help it, though. We say to our children, “Do what you want to do.” And at the same time, we’re going, “You really should be doing that; you should be singing in church!” You still feel that pressure inside, and we have to fight that. It was a guilt thing.*
- *I still feel that way with Mom and Dad. Mom can tell me to do something in such a way that I don’t even know that I’m doing it – and I’m doing it because she has suggested it. (laughs) She will just make a “suggestion”. Well, I am not a mother. That’s the BIG difference, too. So I am seen as still just the CHILD. Whereas if you are a mother, OK, well now you are that.*
- *You know, it’s funny you should have said that about moving away in your first year of marriage, because we didn’t live in Niagara then. So suddenly, it felt like, “OK, the pressure is off.” All of these pressures. No one was there all the time expecting things, so you could just become who you are without all of that. You need to be outside of the grip. We should tell our kids that, you know? Get married? You have to leave...(laughs)*
- *Ya, I was that way, too. Well, I went to university and then stayed away for 7 years.*



CJ: Where did you all meet your spouses?

- *Bible college.*
- *Actually at a wedding, at our church at Conrad Grebel,<sup>144</sup> while at university. He's Mennonite, too, but from (another town).*
- *I also married a Mennonite, so at church and Bible College.*
- *My husband is not Mennonite. We met in a bar when I was picking up my sister from work. (laughter)*
- *That's the worst nightmare of your mother!*

CJ: In terms of marrying Mennonites, did you feel pressure at all?

- *VERY. (laughter)*
- *I don't know – I got married so young.*
- *Ya, me too. I didn't even think about it. I wasn't looking for a Mennonite. We went to Mennonite schools, so we met in high school.*
- *I think our social circle was so based around the church that the chances of you meeting someone non-Mennonite were slight compared to meeting and marrying a Mennonite. You meet either at church, or at school, or at youth group.*
- *And of our friends, the ones that married non-Mennonites were ones that went to university away from home. I went to Brock in St. Catharines so I lived at home, so I just wasn't exposed to – I kept that whole social circle.*
- *You know, for – as someone not married - I used to always think I had to marry a Mennonite, for the longest time. And, well I guess I wanted to. I shouldn't say had to. And then later in life it was like, "Well, it can be a Christian." That happened a lot later, though. And Mom, too. You know, like if I ever dated it would be, "Is he Mennonite?" You know, the pressure... and here I am in my forties and not married yet.*
- *To some extent it makes life easier if you have a common background. Whether it's Italian, or Jewish...you have an understanding of each other's background.*

CJ: Is it important for you that your kids marry Mennonites?

- *No. It's important that they be Christian. Cause see, 20 or 30 years ago, Mennonite and Christian were almost the same. Which is wrong, you know, because a Christian doesn't have to be a Mennonite. But that was closely linked together and now it's not anymore. It doesn't have to be a Mennonite anymore.*
- *Well, I always told our kids they should. I've talked about that with them for YEARS. And we haven't even lived in a Mennonite culture everywhere we've been, and yet...Now,*

---

<sup>144</sup> Conrad Grebel University College is a Mennonite institution affiliated with the University of Waterloo, in southern Ontario.

while we were in Africa (working as missionaries) we worked with a team, and there were 12 kids who were all within 5 years of each other in age who were best friends, and they called them their African cousins. And they were all Mennonite kids, so I said, "You can marry within this group." (laughter) But part of me was always serious, and I'm not worshipping our Mennonite culture AT ALL, but I would say that coming from a Mennonite marriage it has definitely made it easier. My husband and I were raised on two different continents, because his parents also worked in Africa, and yet our families were virtually the same. And so the way we blended in, to how the functioning of our lives together goes, we didn't have to discuss too much. Less conflict. It's definitely one less thing.

- *I regret that I did not marry a Mennonite. Definitely. I tell my nieces when they're about 19, basically I say to them, you know what? Whoever you marry, just marry Christian. You have NO IDEA what the church will mean to you. Maybe not this year, maybe not next year, but when you get older if you don't have that – your church connection – you will feel a HUGE void in your life. And THAT, in the end, if you read ANY stories of long-term relationships, SO many of them say, "We went to church together – the church, the church, the church – our faith held us together. Through hard times and good." What if it gets really hard? If you have no faith, if you have no church, you're standing so far back from the starting gate, you have no idea how far you have to go. So, marry a Christian. Marry someone you can go to church together with, whether they're Mennonite or not. At least it will give you a chance of a better life. So, I'm really sad I didn't, and you can only look back and learn from it. That's what I say to them.*
- *Well, I think it's important. I only have one daughter, 17, but we talk about it. Ya, I think you have an easier start in your marriage; you have a better common understanding. I would never be upset if she didn't marry a Mennonite. I feel the same as you that Christian is very important. And the other thing is cultural – the heritage factor.*
- *My daughter is engaged to a Mennonite, but I agree that the Christianity is more important to me. His parents have split up and Dad is remarried. His Dad and original Mom were quite involved with the church. He said something once to the effect that their divorce never should have happened. Well, that's life, I don't hold it against them, but he seemed to be almost feeling a little embarrassed, you know, that the whole thing was a blemish, you know?*
- *Oh, I was TOTALLY embarrassed to come back to the community (after my marriage ended)! Coming back to the community like that? And yet, I find more and more it's more common. But, boy...*
- *Well, I think these are areas in which we as Mennonites need to be more stretched-minded. We still have areas to be more inclusive instead of exclusive. Trying to hold on to our ideas of marriage and this sort of thing, where you're more hurting people by saying, "This is what we believe" – which is good, but yet excluding them.*
- *Even though they're Mennonite, there are still differences in families – how they function. And our boys are even different - you know, they go out with different kinds of*

girls. And you can tell that (one son) doesn't go out with the ones that aren't necessarily church ones. He meets them in bars or something...

- *Worked out for me! (laughter)*
- *But you feel more comfortable with certain girls because you know you've got similar backgrounds. Like our other son has a Mennonite girlfriend and you feel more like she understands.*
- *Ya, similar values. So that can be a concern. Mennonite thing secondary, the Christian faith thing secondary.*
- *Can I ask you all a question? My kids aren't old enough yet, but we have Eden high school, which is a Christian background – it used to be a Mennonite - school. Was that really that important that your kids went there?*
- *Well, for me it was because our kids had lived away and returning in the middle of high school and I felt like that's one place they'd be able to slip into and feel some commonality. And I agree so much with you that even though I tell my kids they should marry a Mennonite, that I've been stretched a lot about that over the years. For all of my kids' lives, like all of us do, we pray for our kids' lives, right? That God will find the right person for that child. And so my son now for a while has been dating a young woman from Bible College, not from here, who comes from a broken home, in fact a single Mom who never got married. (whispers) And I was just stunned by this. In part because they're quite serious. And I remember over the last year thinking how much work God's done in my heart about this. When I thought that the perfect mate comes from the perfect family, God's idea was: this child that He just put into your son's life actually has gone through a lot and is a very Godly young woman and comes from a very Godly mother, too, who have learned so much through their pain and suffering, and is probably a perfect mate for my son, whereas a Mennonite girl from a perfect family wouldn't necessarily be as perfect for him.*
- *To me, (Mennonite high school) is not the 'be all and the end all'. I had encouraged my daughter to go there, because I could see her fitting in there, but she went there and she is very devout in her faith, but I find also she is – how do I say it - judgemental? Well, it's kind of, you know, holier than thou. My one son went there and, you know what? He found the smokers to hang with, and the grades dropped. And meanwhile, the other goes to Niagara District (public high school) and he's got a good sense of self, and of faith.*
- *A lot of my friends who my parents told me to hang around with – all my church friends - they went to Eden. After school I'd leave and hang with my Niagara District friends because I found them more real. They didn't judge me for anything; I was just me. And yet at Eden I was expected to be a certain person and I didn't want to be that certain person.*

- *Each kid is different. Like, our daughter has excelled there. She loves it, has great friends. I do sense a bit of that, "I'm a better Christian than you are" in her, but we've talked about that.*
- *I grew up in Eden, and hated it, for exactly that reason.*
- *Me too, in high school. I couldn't wait to get out of there. I loved the school for what it gave me value-wise, but I hated the social aspect of it. Well, it was a tough time, because I wasn't the smartest, I wasn't the prettiest, and I wasn't a holy roller. I always felt 'outside' at a Mennonite school.*

CJ: Who went to Eden here?

- *We all did. I connected more with the girls at our church, even, that went to Niagara District than to the ones that went to Eden. There was an inner sanctum, and I never fit into that group.*
- *Ya, it was very selective.*
- *Well, some of that is gone now at Eden...*
- *Oh, come on!*
- *No, I really think it's different than when we went, because number one, that whole MB issue is not as strong, right? We were second-class, as United Mennonites, to Mennonite Brethren. I always felt a second-class Mennonite. The other thing is there are piles and piles of non-Mennonites at Eden now. When we were there it was just Mennonites, and a few others...*
- *Part of what we are talking about here, Cindy, is how important our parents felt it was to keep us within the Mennonite faith. And that really disconnected us and kept us exclusive, and these are some ways that that has had some bad side effects.*
- *My mother went back to work so that (my sister) and I could go to Eden. I think the idea of us going to Eden was really important. And I left, too, after grade 11 and we talked to Mom after about this rift, and how uncomfortable it felt. And she was like, "Really?" You know, like she just didn't see it; she just thought it was such a good thing to send your kid to a Christian Mennonite high school. What a good thing you were doing for your children. And you know there was a lot of resentment and not good feelings about the whole thing.*
- *You know what? My Mom and Dad went too. And they even then had that disconnect, even back then. They still have this stigma of feeling that they were, you know, lower. And yet still they wanted to send all of us.*
- *I actually wanted to go to Eden, and sensed some reservation on my mom's part. I think there was a part of her that did not want me to go to Eden.*

- *Well, in our parents' generation, there were 4 couples... who were in this MB/UM (United Mennonite) mix of marriages, who had – the MB shunned them. Four couples. And that was TRAUMATIC for our community. They'd be celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries in about 6 months (names them). Those women were MBs, they were shunned from the church – I don't know if officially excommunicated, but it was extremely traumatic. For marrying people from outside of the MB church. And those 4 couples carried huge resentment. And it had some repercussions. So any of our parents who are in that generation still carry the pain of what happened there, and so for some parents, as was just mentioned, maybe it would have been, "How can we put our kids through sending them to that school (then run by the MB conference) when look at what they've done to our friends?"*
- *We have cousins that are MB, and one of the Tantens, so that was a bit of a bridge for us. Because we had cousins that were in the other camp. And we knew they weren't too bad. (laughter) They're wonderful people.*
- *A lot of those kids were my age. We had this weird connection: you're my cousin, and yet you're MB. You're kind of there, but you're not there.*
- *You know, my Oma, like, she came over - she was UM, and yet she chose to go to the MB church here.*
- *Why did she?*
- *Well, it was a personal relationship with Christ, was her basis for that. And she chose to. And it was a very hard thing. She was incredibly brave. But you can just see the solidness of the family there. And the love that made that OK, when all of her sisters and their kids were UM and she and her kids were MB.*
- *Because it was huge actually, there was a HUGE distinction between the 2 back then. As the years go on, things that were just taken for granted the new generation shakes their heads at. There were even tensions before between the (Fluechtlinge and Russlaender) waves. Like, my husband's grandfather came over in 1920 and then came here after Saskatchewan. And my grandmother, when she came over in the 40s and went to Virgil UM church, became a good friend of my husband's grandmother. But my husband's grandmother was quite subservient. And then there was my Oma who was feisty. And there was tension between my grandfather-in-law and my Oma. And I can see looking back that there was a distinction between these two waves. The (Fluechtlinge) was almost a class lower.*
- *They weren't very old when they came; they were only in their 30s, our Omas.*
- *I wonder, too, if there wasn't a feeling of superiority among the (Russlaender) wave for having had the foresight to leave when they could, right? And these others didn't, for whatever reasons.*

- *I have thought about that, too. And I thought of the people that stayed behind past the 20s. Then it got so bad, like they must have been so sorry to have not left. Like, you know, I think of that with the Jews, and a lot of them were told, "It's getting bad. It's getting bad."*
- *You know what? These animosities were cultured at home. There was SUCH animosity. That's very – that's this area, Niagara. But that has really gone away in the last 15-20 years, that, "You're MB; you're UM" thing. They have really slowly melded together more, which is great.*
- *Because those boundaries were SO distinct! Oh, ya!*
- *You know, it's funny, for our generation, most of my family and my cousins have married United Mennonites. We have not mixed.*
- *Well, my family is completely different. All 3 of my siblings married MBs. I've always felt a very close affinity to the MBs, personally. Both at Eden, and elsewhere. I didn't feel so much the rub of it, as I just thought, "We're UMs; you're MBs. Whatever." And so I can't tell if that came from my Dad's re-marriage – well, he wouldn't have married an MB if he didn't accept them. And by that time, it was already OK. It was no big deal.*
- *It's funny because they have a VERY different attitude at Conrad Grebel<sup>145</sup> than what we have been discussing about Eden. It is very inclusive and non-hierarchical at Grebel. And I was hoping that experience would round out my daughter a bit after Eden –round out the extremes, you know?*

CJ: How about differences in gender roles and choices between generations?

- *I see a huge difference in where my mom and that generation was compared to where we are now. And kind of what's expected, or what we do, even in the role of a mother. I grew up with my mom at home and we had a hobby farm, so she worked, but it's not like she had to. And there were many ladies that were in the same boat as she was, or that were part-time. But I just feel now we're almost expected to have our career and almost all work full time or at least part-time. And if you're not working at all, that's odd - like a reverse stigma.*
- *I think part of it, though, is that we have so much and we feel that we can't survive on a one-income family anymore. You need to have a second job so you can do extra things.*
- *I don't think there's pressure from the Mennonite community. I think it's a lifestyle. And the biggest difference is women our age have careers. I mean a woman your mom's age worked, but I don't think they had careers.*

---

<sup>145</sup> Conrad Grebel University College, a Mennonite institution in Waterloo, Ontario.

- *Ya, my mom was self-employed out of her home.*
- *Yes, it's a lifestyle we want, but it's in keeping with everyone else in the general community. As was the case with our mothers. I mean, there weren't that many restaurants then; they didn't go out to eat a lot.*
- *And travelling. I mean people travelled a little bit but not like they do now. You come home on a plane, not a wagon! (laughter) You made do then with what you had.*
- *But I would say the roles haven't changed much, really. Not in my situation. I mean, I cook, I do the cleaning, I do the laundry. And (my husband) does, you know... he works – wait, what else DOES he do? (laughter) No, he has his own business, so he brings in the bulk of the income. So first of all he works all day and the work is physical so I feel a little bit bad because I don't (do physical work). I've got a nice desk job. I've got quite an easy job. And then at night he's got phone calls to make and quotes to do and estimates to work out, you know, so it works out well for us. I don't resent it at all, but it's very traditional. And some people would say it's not progressive, but for me it's a balanced division of labour. And definitely it's just like my mom and dad.*
- *And I'm the same way. I do the same thing as my mom and dad.*
- *Well, I'm single, so I do everything. (laughter)*
- *I cook, I clean, I shoveled the ice rink today, I did (my husband's) tax return today, too. We're very traditional in these ways, I think. When I worked full time he helped a little bit then. I think you look at it and you assess what's fair.*

CJ: Let's move to talk about the place of your faith in your lives... the importance of attending church, and the social role of church in your lives as well...

- *I have to say for me personally I think church plays a huge part in my life. Not intentionally, but my closest group of friends are friends that came from Sunday school, that came from church. And they're still my closest friends. And the socializing we do is for the most part with church couples. It just happens to be that on Friday and Saturday nights it's almost always church people. We have friends outside of our church community, but the bulk of them are Mennonite*
- *There is a lot of Mennonite. I have a gang of friends - all couples except me – that we get together every month and they're all Mennonite. For years, we've done that. Socializing, though, I try to do things with and without. Like, a lot of my other single friends are outside.*
- *Which is OK. You need to. In fact, some friendships I keep outside, specifically, so that I don't get too narrow. Well, not specifically as in, "I'm in control of the friendship", but I mean I make a conscious effort to widen my circle so that I don't get too narrow.*
- *But those friendships take more effort.*

- *They do. They do – you’re right!*
- *Because you don’t see them on a regular basis. You don’t just say, “What are you doing tonight?” I think with the church circle, it’s just so easy to invite them over.*
- *Well, first of all, you see each other every Sunday, at least. And if you are involved in other things in the church, there you see them again. It’s the more time you spend with people, the closer you get and the easier it gets.*

CJ: How would you describe yourself to a stranger – if you were confined to 4 adjectives, say?

- *I think Mennonite would be in there. Maybe Christian Mennonite now, as opposed to just Mennonite, but Mennonite would be in there, for me.*
- *Reliable. Sacrificing. And long-suffering! (laughter)*
- *I think maybe kind of ‘breaking out’?*
- *Strong*
- *You said breaking out, and at the same time, I thought traditional. I think we’re still very traditional, and traditions are important to us.*
- *We’re trying to find the middle ground between those two: breaking out and tradition.*
- *Yes, we keep the traditions we choose to, and that become important to us. I think as we hit our 40s we go back to the stuff that is important as opposed to doing this because, you know, your parents say this is what we do.*
- *Ya, now we’re doing it not out of a sense of duty, but out of a sense of...*
- *Longing*
- *Desire, ya. It’s like a homing device. My coming back here, it was something – no matter what happened in my personal life - I SO needed it for my soul. I needed to come back into my community, to get back to the church, and do something within the church. And my family – my Christian family and my community. But this WHOLE Mennonite community- oh, just to get back to it, it felt SO good for my soul.*
- *Is it a sense of faithfulness, then? Like, are we then faithful to our roots, to our heritage?*
- *To what our grandmothers would like to see us be.*
- *Absolutely. That’s the legacy they left us.*



- *I still remember often thinking, "What would Oma think?" I would walk along thinking, "What would Oma think?" Like, you know, she would take her tongue and make that sound and go "Ayhaya."*
- *But I try to think of something OUR children have done, where I have ever felt like they just haven't ridden as high as they might have, and like everyone's looking at me, and thinking, "You haven't done well with your children." Because that's the response that my grandmother would have given: "Oh, there's \_\_\_\_\_ again. She talks too much, she uses her hands, and..." I would see that. And now I think, "That's something I don't want to be." I want to be proud of my child whoever they are. You know, if they're bubbly, if they're lively, if they're quiet, if they don't get it – that's fine, too. So that's something that I have to work at NOT accepting in my heritage. I don't want to be that judgmental person.*
- *And see, that's where I think we're transitional. My Oma, too, she could be so judgmental.*
- *At my wedding I was dancing to the B52s, Rock Lobster, like you know, you go down, down...OK, it was my wedding! (laughs) And my Oma, she gave me the look that she was very embarrassed. Women weren't like that!*
- *My one Oma wasn't like that, but the other one was. She would be totally ashamed when I wore shorts to the church picnic. And she insisted I go and change. We had two mothers, because Oma lived with us, right? And that was one of the few times when Mom said, "Let her go. Just let her go."*
- *Interesting that the Oma's had that much say, eh?*
- *My Oma did NOT like to be embarrassed. Her role on the trek was the worker. My Oma was one of the tough-nosed ones. Oh ya, she was the task-master. Sometimes it's hard to think about that. I don't like to think about her like that, because I absolutely adored her. But sometimes I think about growing up, and she would judge us an awful lot, and that was passed on. And so you were always ashamed or embarrassed, or always wondering, "Am I doing the right thing? Am I going to embarrass anyone?" It was always about how it reflected upon her.*
- *I'm not sure, with my Oma, about embarrassing so much, but everything had to flow through her. Everything had to suit her, and to make her feel better or make her feel happy. I'm not so sure about the appearance thing, but it was probably in there, too. But it had to do more with her own emotional/psychological needs, which were pretty intense. She was pretty emotionally demanding.*
- *And then there was (another younger, not-yet-married aunt who came over) who got raped as a young lady, and so that affected her all her life, even though she (later) had all those children.*

- *Don't you sometimes wonder how her daughters are? I wish they could be in this group. They're (in another part of Canada).*
- *You know what? They would have just a TOTALLY different perspective. And they were such nice people.*
- *I think there was a lot of psychological damage, among particularly a few of them. Whether it was exactly from the trauma they went through or there were already predisposing factors before that, but they were just not well AT ALL. A lot of mental illness there, I think. And I'm convinced that although some of them came out very, very strong, there's others who may have only appeared to come out strong. My grandmother I think was an extremely strong person given what she'd gone through. And yet very, very dysfunctional. I think there's probably damage that's been passed on. I often think of these (other) cousins ( just mentioned), because I know that their mother was not well, either. They have experienced some of this. They, to me, had a sort of really odd life. Not only was their mother odd, but they didn't have that same cousin connection that we have. I'm just wondering if you think you were cruel when you were a kid? I think all of us probably were at some point. And I remember playing with them, but you always knew they were different.*
- *We were TOLD they were different*
- *Exactly. Exactly!*

CJ: Do you mean different because they lived outside of your community?

- *No, they lived here then. They grew up and got married, then they moved out.*
- *We didn't know why they were different.*
- *Because they were Tante \_\_\_\_\_'s children, and Tante \_\_\_\_\_ was so very odd. And you were told by your parents that, well, Tante \_\_\_\_\_ was not quite stable, and, well, they just had this stigma to them.*
- *The story, you may have heard, is that she got raped, like in the 'fluecht', and she got pregnant.*
- *Yes, that baby (died)...and she never recovered from that. It actually was a specific incident - they all know she snapped from that event. I guess, you'd always be questioning yourself.*
- *And remember we're talking about a tight, TIGHT family, community, a tight Mennonite community.*
- *This is the version I have.*
- *Yes, I have heard the same version.*

- *Was it a German soldier, or the Russians? I thought Russians.*
- *It doesn't matter: she was raped.*

CJ: Was she stigmatized by the community then?

- *I think by everybody. Like, she was always accepted by the family. They were always part of it – like, her family came to the showers. And yet there was a difference. It was like taking care of somebody that was...*
- *I think she was always given special treatment. Like, we always got along really well with them. I think the family, like a lot of the ones who understood her and knew her were wrapped around her and tried to protect her. Those of us who were younger, like was said, were told that they were just a little different. Or if you weren't told that, you GOT it. You figured it out pretty quickly.*
- *And she never took care of them the way our mothers took care of us.*
- *But they were always very "Shhhhhh, shhhhhhhhh."*
- *Ya, quiet. But to the point where you thought they were all very insecure, uncomfortable.*
- *Usually in a family there's somebody who's the outgoing person, but none of them was...they had a way of talking that was - like they would talk, then stop... Halting.*
- *Very. I don't know whether they thought that they were competent enough to carry on a conversation. They just seemed to be very insecure. Thinking back, that was sad.*

CJ: How important is it for you that your children know and pass along these stories?

- *It is important. I don't know how much of it is actually recorded. I always thought while my grandmother was alive I should get her story, but I didn't know if she really wanted to talk about it. Like, that was in the past; she didn't elaborate on it a lot. It wasn't like, "Oh, it brings back terrible memories", it was more that it WAS – she had left it in the PAST, you know? She was very pragmatic.*
- *I found all of them that I knew like that. Maybe they had to be.*
- *Maybe they thought that we wouldn't understand. If I ever asked Oma a question, she would say, "You wouldn't understand."*
- *I think it's very important. First of all, it's very interesting. It's your family history. I guess maybe because I was so close to my grandmother and I wouldn't want my kids not to now where they came from. Because she was a great lady and I wouldn't want them not to know what a great lady she was. And what they went through for their families.*
- *Ya. Like, I know my Dad's family came over here in the 20s, and he often says he's grateful every day for the decisions his parents made. Like, he was not born in Russia. He's thankful every day that he's born in Canada - every day. He's so thankful they had*

*the foresight and the time to get out – you know, they didn't know what they were going to go through. You know, it was hard for them – they did it for their children. He is so thankful.*

- *And they had to give up a life. Both of my father's parents were the only siblings that came to Canada. They left everything. It would be like (my husband) and I saying, you know what? There's no future for us here in Canada, and picking up and leaving EVERYTHING. And his father was some sort of desk person in Russia, came here and farmed. Hated farming, but it was all for their kids.*
- *I think, too, persecution, just being so close to that. They were persecuted. And we just hear of that more with the Jews, but that is part of our history, too, and it's so close. I mean my mom has vivid memories of having to stay in hospitals for months, and no one could come and visit her because it was so far away. And here you were a child – like 8, 9 years old.*
- *That's something I have to say: I have a total interest with the whole story of the Holocaust. And I have since I was young. I don't know if that was spawned by my heritage, or what. But those stories of courage and survival, and then the whole other side of depravity and the perpetrators of all the horror...*
- *Well, the story has its similarities.*
- *Funny you say that, because I used to get confused over it. When I was younger I thought we went through the Holocaust.*
- *What confused you?*
- *Whether or not we were persecuted by the Nazis. We kids always thought that we were like the Jews, and that's why our ancestors had to go on the trek, like they were fleeing the Nazis like the Jews did.*
- *Ya, as if the Russians were the bad guys, and the Germans were so good. Well, obviously it wasn't really the Nazis, though. Like, the German PEOPLE took our people in and were so good to our families.*
- *We always think we are so blessed living here. And I think that it's good to be aware that things can change. So we have to be so careful.*
- *Ya, I think that's why it's good to pass on their stories: you can't take anything for granted.*
- *Well, even in our family, Oma has been much more open with Mom now within the last 5-10 years than ever before about things that went on.*
- *The horror of the war, that really stretched them, and especially for the one sister of my Oma, that was something that happened that she could never get over.*

- *I think that goes back to the whole protection mentality, eh?*
- *Yes, you don't talk about things...*
- *For it to even have happened, even though there was nothing she could do, it was considered so shameful for the family. And she never got over it, of course.*
- *Well, and still is in many parts of the world, I mean women are still blamed in some parts of the world.*
- *I would say that the family closeness is a result of at least one of our parents being raised by these single mothers with their sisters and their friends in the same boat. Very close. And the sticking together. I think that came directly from those women sticking together: this is our family. I would say that that gets passed on then. Stick together, no matter what. You just do.*
- *That is our Mennonite theme, though, and it's good and bad. This very strong sense of "what is told within the family stays in the family". But I think that has kind of gotten better over the years, like people have gotten better at opening up and not being so closed.*
- *But there is still even a real protectiveness. I always am amazed at how some people are very open about their family problems, or will say, "I don't talk to my sister", or whatever. I don't EVER talk about things like that. Like I'm very protective. Sure there's things that bug me about her, but I'm very protective, and I think that has come down through the generations. That sense of "you just don't talk to people about things that bug you about your family." Does anyone else find that? I'm always shocked when someone says, "Ya, my sister – blah, blah, blah". I think moreso non-Mennonites. They're very open about things that upset them about their siblings, and so on. And I just would not share that.*
- *I've noticed that, too. I've wondered why. I think there's a lot of - in other families, there isn't that – like, somehow we do have, actually, a lot of love for each other. We don't want to malign them because we love them so much. We don't want to make them look bad.*
- *You don't always get along, but I notice that that is particular to a lot of our families.*
- *Even in the extended families. We still get together with all my cousins twice a year and everybody wants to come to those things. It's important. I think that has to have come from being a close group down from our grandmothers.*
- *Ya, I also think we're protective, for sure. It's true about other people. But I won't say anything bad, ever, about members of my family.*

CJ: What are your thoughts about connections to 'homeland', be it Russia, Holland, etc.?

- *No, I don't think our family has a feeling of that connection. I know my mom has said no when anyone has suggested going back.*
- *My parents have been back, but I don't have the desire.*
- *No, I don't either.*
- *And I know my Oma, it was kind of, "over my dead body."*
- *That's right. Mine too, That's what she said.*
- *Well, my one Oma did go back. She was from the (Russlaender) wave. She did have 2 sisters there, and she went back to visit.*

CJ: Can you talk about this idea we've discussed of hybridity of culture in terms of your diaspora?

- *I think there's a richness just in the fact that there are so many different things that all make it Mennonite. And that is something that you can't really pigeon-hole. I think that's very positive, very rich. It's unique.*
- *It's hard to say. I mean there are things I would like to retain, and not get diluted. I'm trying to think of what I would like to keep – how about the zwieback! Well, I think that sense of family, for sure. The sense of community. I have to say I really appreciate that. And I LOVE that you can go somewhere – anywhere- and run into someone named, say, Friesen, and you could FIND a connection – some aunt or uncle, and somebody, somewhere that's related to you, or that someone you know is related to. You can always find a connection. That to me is very special, that community. That you can go anywhere in the world, and connect. I don't know of other groups that can do that. Maybe there are, but for me that's a neat thing.*
- *I think, too, the Mennonites, like a lot of it is faith-based - it came out of Menno Simons, it's based on that – and yet, somehow, that has really changed, as well, over time. In some ways that's a good thing but in some ways it's not. At some point, somebody went into the bible and said, "Well, this is the only way to be a good Christian." Well, it's not. And I think some others have really gone into the cultural track of things and lost the faith aspect. And if they lose the faith aspect, that's sad.*
- *I don't know. If you lost the faith aspect, I don't think you would cling to the cultural aspect, either. Like I ran into somebody years ago at a conference in Calgary, and the guy said, "Oh, ya, my mother was a Mennonite." And I thought, "How can you 'used to be' a Mennonite?" Like, aren't you always a Mennonite? And I think very quickly when the faith goes, that connection to the Mennonitism goes with it. Why would you want to keep that? I think down the line you lose the Mennonite when you lose the faith. Or you lose the desire to be connected to Mennonites when you lose the faith.*
- *Although I also see in some people the faith aspect being questioned in certain things. The whole intellectual aspect of faith. Even some basic things in the bible are being questioned in some Mennonite circles, and yet in those circles the cultural things are still strong. Sometimes they seem even stronger. And upheld more than the basic faith principles.*

- *There are so many different groups of Mennonites; it's so varied, even in our community.*
- *I talk about "The Name Game" because that's our community. But I mean there are huge, huge communities of Mennonites, like in Africa, that have nothing to do with the Janzens and Epps and Weibes...*

## 6.2.2 Summary & Analysis

### Cultural hybridity

This generation displays significant cultural transformation. Although German was their first language, they speak English in their adult homes, their children study French in the Canadian school system,<sup>146</sup> and Canadian food customs and holiday traditions are the norm. For these people, political situations have not necessitated the selective accentuation of cultural traits for reasons of survival, or even acceptance. Although they still strongly identify traditional foods with 'Mennonite', the practice of preparing these foods may be waning. Religiously, there appears to be a stronger identification with Christianity than Mennonitism. Consistency between generations is most evident in the area of family and social formations.

The inward, parochial social formation established by previous generations in Niagara is still functional: most met their spouses through church, friendships remain largely church-centred, and family cohesion remains paramount. The edges of this formation are blurring, though, and we hear a desire for more outward orientation. Many participants left the peninsula temporarily to pursue education or employment. (Many others, not involved in this study, have done so and not returned.) New experiences away from the normative pressures of

---

<sup>146</sup> Canada's two official languages are English and French.

the home community, and outside of the fixed confines of institutional completeness in Niagara, have allowed these people the opportunity to view themselves differently, and to view the Mennonite community in Niagara within a wider context (*"you had a break, and you could just see a bit more the wider community, wider world, than just what you grew up with"; "no one was there all the time expecting things, so you could just become who you are...you need to be outside of the grip"*).

The participants recognize their generation as one of transition. Culturally and religiously, they have more choice as to what they hold on to from previous generations. In other words, hegemonic restraints as to what it means to be Mennonite in Niagara are relaxing considerably with this generation. As adults, they perform their Mennoniteness based on desire as opposed to obligation. Or at least they try to. At the least, they are conscious of the distinction, and actively making an effort to make this true for their own children.

As was noted by the previous generation, transformation happens in Mennonite communities, but it is slow, and not without its struggles. Socially, for example, a situation such as divorce would have been unheard of in Russia. For previous generations in Niagara, divorce was exceedingly rare and resulted in disgrace: effective shunning from the church community, and often from family. The sanctions have now relaxed. Divorced individuals, and their families, still feel embarrassment or shame within the community (*"the whole thing was a blemish"*), but they are eventually, if at first reluctantly, accepted. Individuals who have left the community evidently do feel enough acceptance so as to return to Niagara following marital break-up.

There is continuing evidence of ambivalence and ambiguity concerning cultural identity (*"My German is a bastardized German: it's English, it's German, it's Low German. I don't know which one I'm speaking at any given time."*; *"What are you?...I speak German, but we're not*



*'Germany Germans'. We're not Russian...That part is the really frustrating part. That you don't know.')*. We hear for the first time, from one participant, a kind of push-back against the idea of being 'German' (*"I bristled against that from the youngest age. I couldn't bear that"*). She is selectively de-accentuating this cultural association out of personal preference, based on her objections to Nazi-related aspects of German history. Still, more participants have travelled to Germany than to Russia, and there continues to be consensus that Russia is not, and was not, 'homeland'.

Food traditions are still strongly associated with Mennonitism (*"Mennonite is FOOD"*), and food preparation of Mennonite foods continues to be strongly associated with being female - a 'good Mennonite woman'. Marlene Epp has discussed the relationship between Mennonite women and food ways in some depth. Across cultures, food is a highly gendered aspect of identity propagation:

As much as it connotes ethnicity, food also signifies gender...Especially for mothers, whose most fundamental relationship with their children is that of providing physical sustenance, self-identity is intrinsically linked with their ability to fulfill that role. ...Women have been the primary conveyors of ethnic culinary traditions, passing their knowledge through generations of daughters. As immigrants, women assume the responsibility of maintaining food customs often in a social environment that is inhospitable to such ethnic persistence... women's roles in immigrant communities have often been evaluated in terms of their contribution to 'ethnic cohesion'. At the same time, however, the kitchen is quite often the setting in which particular traditions are transformed through the introduction of 'outside' cultures to the act of food preparation... The relationship between food and culture is singularly important for immigrant women for whom preparing, serving, and eating meals is often the site at which the old and new worlds meet. (M. Epp, 2004, p. 315)

This generation of women, who tend to lead busy lives involving their own careers, appear not to have carried on food traditions to the extent that previous generations have - and neither is there evidence here to suggest that men have taken up the task. There is the suggestion that Mennonite culinary customs might be lost with this generation. Based on the life-stage of these participants, though, it is too soon to say. Unlike language, food ways are relatively easy to

learn at any age (as long as there are recipes), and previous generations of women did not regularly prepare Mennonite foods themselves until their own mothers stopped doing so. The mothers of these women are still baking zwieback and making wareniki, these participants and their families are still enjoying it, and the association of Mennonite cultural identity with food shows no sign of slowing down. Up to this point it is clear that, by way of food, Mennonite women have been highly influential cultural hybridizers, performers, and conduits throughout their diasporic history. Whether this generation will continue as such at a later stage of life remains to be seen.

An association of music with Mennoniteness has withstood movement through space and time. As a cultural practice associated with comfort and celebration, it has evoked a sense of home within this diaspora for generations. During periods of time when home could not be located on a map, singing brought comfort, and continues to be an evocative component of Mennonite religious and cultural life in the community. Celebrations and family gatherings are marked by Mennonites coming together via the familiar strains of four-part harmonies.

'The Mennonite Game' as a cultural feature remains strong with this generation. Family, the original human institution, looms large in conceptualizations of both group and individual identities (*"Not having the name, I was nothing"; "it's more than just identification of being a Mennonite. It's WHICH Mennonites you are related to"*). This clan-like culture, a remnant of the small pool of surnames original to the first Mennonites scattered from Europe, is by now symbolic of the diaspora. Hyphenated surnames are commonplace among both genders as a means of retaining outwardly identifying markers of specific family lines. Instant name recognition is an expression of how generations have experienced culture in relation to place: simultaneously as a *"tight community"* in a bounded space, and as a stretched-out, extroverted

web of connections (*"my husband and I were raised on two different continents, because his parents worked in Africa, and yet our families were virtually the same"*).

The fostering of tight family cohesion is attributed repeatedly to the work of the women. *Fluechtlinge* grandmothers, especially, who held their families together on the trek, remained seemingly tireless in their efforts to keep families together in Niagara; a tradition of regular, extended family get-togethers, for example, has continued. That these are often held on or near the Oma's birth date, and in her honour, is telling of Oma's role as the family 'glue', and the depth of her impact on the family.

Change in family structure is evident. There are several references to *Fluechtlinge* influence upon family structure (*"I felt like a grew up in a matriarchal<sup>147</sup> society"*). Several parents of this generation grew up in households where adult women (sometimes several, hiving in one family grouping) "*ruled the roost*", and where adult male role models were absent. In families where *Fluechtlinge* women married *Russlaender* men, some women achieved a sort of subterranean matriarchal influence (*"Dad was the head, but Mom was the neck"; "Mom will just make a 'suggestion'"*). This would enable them to perform femininities modeled after their dominant (single) mothers, but in such a way as to also fit within a traditional (male-led) model for Mennonite nuclear families.

Other socially regulated family ideals were transmitted clearly. This is apparent in the high incidence of endogamy, which was facilitated by parental emphasis on church-focused

---

<sup>147</sup> James Urry has pointed out that a better word might be 'matrifocal', as families may be focused on female figures of authority, but this does not mean that Mennonite society as a whole is "ruled by females". (Urry, J. 1999, p. 97).

social life (*"the chances of you meeting someone non-Mennonite were slight"*). It is also apparent in pressure to marry and have children in the first place (*"Oh, I think it is a pressure for sure...church-wise"; "I am not a mother... So I am seen as still just the CHILD"*). An association of marriage and parenthood with adulthood in agrarian Russian Mennonite societies in western Canada has been noted by James Urry:

The path to full adulthood in Mennonite communities passed through a number of stages marked particularly by baptism and marriage. ...(adulthood was) further confirmed by the birth of children which signaled the assumption of additional duties and obligations involved with the creation of a new generation and the continuance of community, congregation and the faith. ...(unmarried men and women) were isolated...socially from the normal life of the family cycle. They stood apart and were not connected in the same way as others. This referred to both their social identities and their duties and obligations, especially for bachelors. Bachelors were permitted to act like children...and basically could remain unaccountable in ways that no married man could. ...Undefined by circumstance and not bound by responsibilities for the production of future generations, they did not undergo major changes in status as they aged. ...whereas bachelors were permanent adolescents, (unmarried women) were juniorized further back into childhood a move that further denied them status and authority. (Urry, 1999, pp. 102-3)

Urry attributes an agrarian lifestyle to such lack of choice in terms of self-identity, stating that it is "only in modern, industrialized societies that people build personal, individualized identities, fabricated by self from a mass of possibilities". However, the two women in question here did not grow up in farming families in Niagara. Further, both live on their own and work within a broader "modern, industrialized society". While it may be that hegemonic pressures within the Mennonite community in Niagara are vestigial of a history with agriculture in Russia, it seems clear that these social pressures within the diasporic community are more strongly conveyed

than the “mass of possibilities” beyond. Expectations associated with stages of the life-cycle appear unchanged.<sup>148</sup>

The division of labour in the domestic sphere looks to have remained relatively unchanged with this generation, with women continuing to carry the heavier in-house work load, even while engaged in full-time careers. A real generational change, though, can be seen in the lives of children. This is the first generation of the diaspora that, as children, were not expected to work in order to help support the family. The lives of seniors, too, have changed. Whereas in Russia parents were cared for in their children’s homes as they aged, elderly family members in Niagara overwhelmingly live in Mennonite senior’s complexes, which are staged to address differing need levels.

The legacy of refugee experience has left a mark on this Niagara-born cohort. Socially, perhaps as a result of having been made to feel morally or religiously inferior themselves upon arrival (‘DPs’, ‘women without men’, lacking religious foundation), the Omas seemed always vigilant as to how others might view their family’s behaviour (*“they would judge us a lot, and that was passed on”*). Although they themselves broke moulds on many fronts during their lifetimes, in Niagara they seem to have attended closely to ensuring that their families ‘fit in’. Acting as de facto hegemonic enforcers, the ‘Tantens’ retained strong influence over their adult children and grandchildren (*“interesting that the Oma’s had that much say”*). The grandchildren have reacted negatively to this aspect, choosing to negotiate aspects of their own identities in opposition to it (*“That’s something that I don’t want to be. I want to be proud of my child, whoever they are”*).

---

<sup>148</sup> See also, Goering & Krause (2001). “Odd Wo(man) out: The Systematic Marginalization of Mennonite Singles by the Church’s Focus on Family”. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Volume 75 , 211-230.

The theme of “protectiveness” within families is discussed at some length, and perceived positively. One aspect of this protective nature, though, has been silence. Silence can be positive if it translates into support (*“I won’t say anything bad, ever, about members of my family”; “we don’t want to malign them because we love them so much”*); however, an excess of silence within families (and communities) can negatively generate misperceptions and confusion (*“I thought we went through the Holocaust...we kids always thought that we were like the Jews, and that’s why our ancestors had to go on the trek. Like, they were fleeing the Nazis like the Jews did”*). As humans, we need our ancestor’s stories in order to authentically and fully formulate our own identities.

Quantitative psychological studies, one in particular pertaining to families of *Russlaender* immigrants to North America, have supported the hypothesis that “the negative effects of severe family trauma... can be transmitted across generations” (Klassen Reynolds, 1997, p. 78). There is anecdotal evidence here to suggest warrant for a similar study involving families of *Fluechtlinge* (*“A lot of mental illness there, I think...although some came out very, very strong, there’s others who may have only appeared to come out strong. My grandmother I think was an extremely strong person...and yet very, very dysfunctional. I think there’s probably damage that’s been passed on”*). With respect to the woman who was raped on the trek and subsequently lost that child, it seems clear that she and the family she later created lived under the shadow of her experience. Socially, the extended family *“wrapped around her and tried to protect her”* from alienation within the community - as related to both the event and its apparent psychological aftereffects. At the same time, the protective family unit clearly transmitted a stigma within its own boundaries. Thinking about this situation now, the women wonder if they were *“cruel as kids”*. Aware of the *“difference”* - but ignorant of its source - did they add to their cousins’ sense of alienation in Niagara?

## **Social Heterogeneity**

Despite the strong association of the Niagara Mennonite community as 'home' (*"It's like a homing device... this WHOLE Mennonite community – oh, I just needed it for my soul"*), there is clear social differentiation within the community. This generation's experience as such is deeply influenced by their parents' and grandparents' experiences (*"it was cultured at home. There was SUCH animosity."*). Tensions, for example, over the religious rift that began with the Mennonite Brethren split in Russia in 1860, and which reached a peak of tension in Niagara in the mid-fifties, were still palpable to these participants as teens who all attended Mennonite Brethren-run high school in the 1970s and 1980s (*"We were second class, as United Mennonites, to Mennonite Brethren. I always felt a second class Mennonite"; "I loved the school for what it taught me value-wise, but I hated the social aspect of it... I always felt on the outside"*). Although it appears the tensions have diminished, there remain concerns about a lingering class system based on religiosity on the peninsula, especially as still experienced by the next (fourth) generation at the Christian high school that eventually replaced the older MB institution. The ranking system seems to have shifted now, though, from 'who is the better Mennonite' to 'who is the better Christian'.

This generation, a blend of *Russlaender* and *Fluechtlinge* parents, is living proof that the dynamics of sub-group tensions change over time. Although there is still differentiation in identifying who is *Russlaender* and who is *Fluechtlinge*, these tensions persist for this generation only in memory (*"As the years go on, things that were just taken for granted, the new generation just shakes their heads at"*).

## **Performance & Co-responsibility**

Service (*"a focus on mission"*) continues to be an active, defining feature of what it means to be Mennonite for this generation. These participants have been actively involved in Mennonite responsibility flows through involvement in such areas as women's groups at the church, general philanthropy through MCC, and foreign mission work. Travel is a focus, although not yet to the extent of the previous generation. This could be a function of life-stage, since travel is costly and many of the participants still have young families.

Institutional completeness in Niagara remains extremely strong. The growth of Mennonite presence on the peninsula has made it easy to find Mennonite service and business providers, and third-generation participants have expressed a preference and/or tendency toward doing so. This seems at odds with the desire to become less inclusive that was also expressed in both focus groups - and, by extension, at odds with the whole notion of *experiencing place in diaspora in an outward and connected sense*. When viewed alongside endogamy in marriages and friendships, this generation begins to look somewhat more ethnic than diasporic. Arguably, institutional completeness at the local level is actually a product of *diasporic responsibility flows, and is operationalized as a means of maintaining an experience of home-place as 'fixed', or grounded, within a web of extroverted networks*.

To introduce another angle, though, evidence in the literature supports the understanding that diasporic identities are influenced by national policies in new homelands. In Canada, for example, a tendency toward parochial experiences of diaspora may be fostered by state multicultural policy: since 1971, federal policy has supported the maintenance of (soft) delineations around cultural groups.<sup>149</sup> Karen Leonard has considered national policies in her

---

<sup>149</sup> Federal multicultural legislation was passed in 1985.



examination of South Asian communities in the United States and Canada, and found that different profiles emerge in terms of diasporic features such as hybridity and responsibility flows. Among her conclusions is that Canadian policies can lead to “building not only diasporic communities but also, and perhaps more often, broader and non-diasporic communities” (Leonard, 2000, p. 32). Regardless, incongruencies in lived experiences within diasporas - such as this generation appearing as perhaps less diasporic in certain aspects - are actually congruent with the understanding of diaspora as a critique of universal and essential theories of identity. That which might initially seem anomalous is actually consistent with an understanding that elements of chaos co-exist with elements of order. Further, ‘exclusive’ and ‘hybrid’ are diasporic orientations, not distinctions. These Mennonites live their diasporic identities somewhere “in the tense space between the two” (Werbner, 2000, p. 16), and it is the purpose of presenting these stories to explore that situation. We may organize diasporic identity discourses within frameworks (such as the chaordic example I have used) but there can be no models, no easy assumptions. How diaspora is experienced (what it ‘looks like on the ground’) “is always a matter for empirical research” (Ibid, p. 17).

With these four chapters, we’ve looked inside the lives of three generations of Russian Mennonites living in diaspora on the Niagara peninsula of Canada. This is not a representative study of diasporas, nor of Mennonite diasporas. Neither is it a snapshot. It is a record of change through time and space. Through people’s stories, we see the character of their journeys. This study examines the identity discourse of a people who have experienced successive, complex interrelationships with ‘place’ over the past five centuries - people for whom culture continues to evolve ‘on the ground’ on the Niagara peninsula. In the final chapter, I will tie the threads from the narratives to the longer case history of the diaspora.



## 7. Conclusion

Diaspora is a useful tool to understanding constructions of identity, because – whether understood as metaphor, social formation, or mode of cultural production (or all three) – diasporic experience is driven by interrelationships with place, and place is at the core of human experience. Place-based experiences (in a fixed sense, and an interconnected sense) shape both human character and landscapes. Therefore, in order to address my original research question,<sup>150</sup> I have asked: *How have the Niagara Russian Mennonites experienced diaspora?*

The experience of migration alone does not make one a member of a diasporic group. ‘Transnational’ is another term used to describe displaced peoples, however diaspora is more accurate in this case because while diasporas are transnational phenomena, their theoretical constructions can extend beyond the traditional associations of ‘transnational’ with binaries of homeland and host country. The participants of this study see Canada not as their host country, but as their home. Further, their culture and identities have been influenced by experiences of place beyond the binary of their putative homeland of Russia and their new home, Niagara.

As a group of people scattered from their original homeland to one or more locations, Russian Mennonites fit the basic definition of a diaspora. However, experiences of successive scatterings make the traditional notion of diaspora, as typified by ties to a homeland, problematic (Figure 2.2). A history of serial mobility has resulted in an accumulation of cultural attributes, so that the Niagara Mennonites are people with a multi-layered, hybrid culture. Participants in this study have unanimously stated that their Mennoniteness has neither been diluted nor diminished as a result: they feel themselves to be culturally enriched, as opposed to

---

<sup>150</sup> *How have successive, complex interrelationships with ‘place’, evolving over time from Europe to Canada influenced the culture and identity of the Niagara Russian Mennonites?*

culturally threatened, by ancestral and personal exposure to different places and people. Hybridity has in fact become a valued and defining feature of what it means for them to be Mennonite. Their diaspora therefore is best understood as a kind of 'cultural diaspora', and best examined via descriptions of the intricacy of routes rather than any longing for (past) roots; cultural diasporas are understood as having experienced repeated cultural transformations as a result of mobility and successive place-based relationships. The route: a severely persecuted religious sect in Holland; a privileged ethno-religious minority in West Prussia and Russia; part of an ethnic minority the target of genocide in the USSR; and a valued component of a culturally and religiously diverse egalitarian society in Niagara, Canada.

In formulating an organizational framework to add structure to this theorization of cultural diaspora, I have incorporated elements of 'order' alongside the 'chaos' of hybridity (Figure 2.3: Chaordic framework for cultural diasporas).<sup>151</sup> Three established elements of diaspora make up this framework: cultural hybridity, social heterogeneity, and responsibility flows. I emphasize the distinction between a framework and a model: although the presence of these features may be predictable, what they 'look like on the ground' is not. In critique of essentialist and universalist notions, feminist cultural geographers have called for a topographical approach to lived experiences (Katz *in Sylvey*, 2004, p. 497), for "grounding the notion of diaspora in the accounts" of individuals within contact zones (Gray, 2000a, p. 173). In keeping, this study examines elements of order and chaos *in situ* - with attention to differences in experience based on social variables - in order to understand it.

---

<sup>151</sup> I drew heavily on the work of Phina Werbner (2000, 2002, 2004) in the formulation of this framework.

In discussing the relevance of place in geographic research, Nigel Thrift asserts that “place *is* alive and well and understanding place should be a crucial concern of the social sciences and humanities. *But* this can only happen if we *stop looking at things in the usual way. And that is difficult*” (Thrift *in* Massey, Allen, & Sarre, 1999, p. 296, italics original). Thrift then goes on to quote his “touchstone”, the great 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein:

The difficulty – I might say – is not that of finding a solution but rather of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it... This is connected, I believe, with wrongly expecting an explanation, whereas the solution of the difficulty is description, if we give it the right place in our considerations. (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.27 *in* Thrift 1999, p. 296)

Description itself then, as found in the individual narratives of these participants, must be held as valuable knowledge, and indeed it is the power of narratives (often erroneously viewed as ‘soft’ data) to uncover lived realities ‘off the page’, which challenge universal and essentialist assumptions. To better understand the evolution of culture and identity as described in the narratives, I have drawn on theoretical understandings of place and diaspora within a framework that allows this in an open-ended and relational way. Both the theory and the results are non-representational.

Using narrative sources here has illuminated the actors in a dynamic social construction. Their differences in experience based on social variables are exposed along with differences in experience based on diasporic trajectory. Notions of home, ways of belonging, and cultural fluidity are embodied in successive generations of male and female members of the diaspora of differing life stages in Niagara. Their roles in private and public spheres, the constraints placed upon them at different times and in different situations, and changes in these roles and constraints, are revealed along with their reflections on it all. Through their stories, and even their different speech patterns, we come to know these people: George has a personality

different from Gerhardt's, Harold's dry humour makes us laugh (*"the tie is the devil's rope..."*), Marta is a different woman altogether than Elsie, Agatha and Katie are worlds apart in their approaches to religion and social issues, the banter of the third generation focus groups gives us a sense of peers and the ways they interact in this community that no questionnaire could provide. Their experiences are brought to life. We *"get together"* with them to better learn who they are. Together they create a breathing image of the community.

A shared history of cultural transformation over the past five centuries has influenced the individual and group identities of the people of this study at a variety of spatial scales. However, the experience of diaspora does not end at the contact zone. Diasporic identities continue to evolve in Niagara informed by rich generational capital. These identities take new shape in response to Niagara, even as Niagara itself takes new shape – materially and immaterially – in response to them. Culture continues to be socially reproduced at the household level in the contact zone, as well as at the level of transnational networks created by diasporic trajectories. The diaspora continues to evolve: cultural hybridity deepens, characteristics of social heterogeneity (internal divisions) change, and responsibility flows mature.

In the results chapters, I have explored – descriptively via the narratives, and theoretically in the Summary & Analysis sections- the interrelationships between the participants and the places they have called home, and the evolution of culture and identity as it has evolved over time from Russia to Niagara, with attention to gendered, generational, and life-stage perspectives. Rather than simply repeat these explorations here, I have chosen instead to use the concluding chapter to complete my objectives by locating descriptions and analyses from the results chapters within the wider historical context of Russian Mennonite diaspora -

from its mid-16<sup>th</sup> century roots in the Netherlands. The study group and their ancestors have experienced three contact zones for significant lengths of time: the Vistula Delta of West Prussia (250+ years), the Ukrainian steppes of Russia (150+ years), and the Niagara peninsula of Canada (80+ years). Here, I tie the threads from the narratives to this longer diasporic experience and raise some questions about what the future may hold for the Niagara Russian Mennonite diaspora.

### **7.1 Cultural Hybridity**

The evolution of language for this group has included several transformations over five centuries. The Netherlandic Low German dialect of *Plautdietsch* was altered in West Prussia with exposure to Polish and German-speaking groups, and remained the language of daily living until Mennonites left Russia. High German replaced Dutch in church services mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Mennonites later learned to speak Russian in the Soviet school system, and some also learned to speak Ukrainian, however these were neither practiced at home, nor transferred to Niagara. During periods of German occupation and the flight from Russia, High German gained dominance. The language was both a liability, as Soviets targeted ‘ethnic Germans’, and a valuable survival tool, as Germans orchestrated the evacuation of ethnic Germans from Soviet soil.

In Niagara schools, the second and third generations studied English primarily, and French (Canada’s second official language) secondarily. Unlike in Russia, the language taught in Canadian schools has become the language of daily living for these Mennonites, despite all three generations having learned German at home as their first language. Today, Niagara church services are held in English, although High German services are still scheduled to accommodate seniors and German-speaking Paraguayan Mennonites. German is retained in song and some

forms of prayer, and certain Low German phrases are appreciated and fondly remembered (largely for their humour). Some children of the third generation study in French immersion format in the Ontario public school system.

Canada's open society and state multicultural policies are factors with regard to language: in the absence of both bounded communities and exogenous pressures to conform, Mennonites are free to participate fully as national citizens, and to differentiate themselves as a group through selective accentuation of traits other than language. (Baar, 1983) (Similarly, since privatization of the Siberian Mennonite village of Neudachino, Russian has replaced *Plautdietsch* as the official language, although *Plautdietsch* continues as the language of most households.) This raises the question of how the eventual loss of language as a shared cultural connector will affect networks within the global diaspora, and how it will affect the place of Germany as an alternative homeland for the Niagara diaspora community in the future. As is noted in the literature, diasporic perceptions of sacred centrality, or centres of authentic culture, do change as diasporas evolve (Goldschmidt, 2000; Werbner, 2000).

Cultural traditions related to foods have been accumulating over the life of the diaspora. Zwieback, for example, once a provision of merchant ships in Danzig, also became a staple during periods of diasporic mobility so that it now holds importance as a symbol of (mobile, survivalist) Russian Mennonite identity.<sup>152</sup> Other culinary examples original to Holland, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine continue to be enjoyed in Niagara, and are strongly linked with Mennonite identity. Accumulation continues now, at an accelerated pace, with Canadian food ways. Canada's population is culturally heterogeneous so that 'Canadian foods', like 'Mennonite

---

<sup>152</sup> See M. Epp (2004)



foods', are an amalgamation of diverse cultural traditions. A young Mennonite family in Niagara today would be likely to have Italian or Thai cuisine one night, wardeniki or borscht the next, paska at Easter, and turkey with bubbat and pumpkin pie at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Third generation women (traditionally the gender to transmit food customs) who tend to have full-time careers have little time for labour-intensive food preparations, Mennonite or otherwise. It remains to be seen how strongly traditional Mennonite foods will persist; this generation may (as was true for their mothers) prepare traditional Mennonite foods more regularly as they age and as their mothers stop doing so for them, and once they retire from the paid workforce.

Foods remain a central feature of Mennonite festivals and events and, since cultural events are promoted by Canadian multicultural policy, this seems likely to persist. Participants regularly participate in the New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale,<sup>153</sup> for example, where food is the undisputed drawing card. Thousands attend every year to raise money for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) global relief projects. At this event, Laotian spring rolls and 'Mennonite pies' are sold alongside the traditional rollkuchen and wardeniki. Mennonites leave with thousands of boxes of the spring rolls and thousands of pies for their tables and freezers. Laotians refugees were sponsored to immigrate to Canada by diasporic Mennonites (many in Niagara<sup>154</sup>) and have since converted to Mennonitism; pies are a 'Mennonite food' original to Canada. So, the food ways persist even as they continue to evolve, and they evolve in a way

---

<sup>153</sup> Since 1967, this sale has been held annually on the last weekend in May in the town of New Hamburg, west of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, and has raised over 14 million dollars for relief work, channeled through the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) (<http://www.nhmrs.com/>).

<sup>154</sup> See A. Epp (2010, April 19). Grateful for God's Mercy: Niagara celebrates 30th anniversary of the arrival of its Laotian community. *Canadian Mennonite*, 14 (8), pp. 16-17.

that is inclusive to the changing face of Mennonitism worldwide - in and out of the cultural diaspora.

Farming has been a leitmotif for this diaspora, and the land and the people have once again come to re-define one another in Niagara. Farming practices have evolved in response to each receiving country. In West Prussia, where Dutch Mennonite experience in drainage and dike building was sought after, they transformed the swamps of the Vistula Delta into rich farmland. Later, they were recruited to Russia as “model farmers” (A. Friesen, 2006, p. 3) where their development and implementation of new agricultural techniques proved highly instrumental in the conversion of the Ukraine into the coveted (eventually, even by Hitler<sup>155</sup>) “breadbasket for much of Russia and more” (F. Epp, 1982, p. 141). In Canada, the first Russian Mennonite settlers were mandated to farm and through hard work, technological import, and innovation they have been the impetus behind transforming the Niagara peninsula - previously an “unproducing grain district” (Star, 1944, p. 2) - into the major fruit-producing belt that it is today. Further, cultural practices of establishing credit unions and co-operatives followed the Mennonites from Holland, and have been an integral component of agricultural success in each of the contact zones. The Niagara Mennonites now identify themselves as a fruit-farming people. Mennonite farms have trended toward larger operations and the largest fruit farms on the peninsula remain Mennonite-run; Mennonite-owned acreage continues to increase, even as the total number of Mennonite farms has decreased. (See APPENDIX VIII: Comparison of Mennonite population, acreage, farms)

---

<sup>155</sup> See N. Lower (2005). “Hitler's 'Garden of Eden' in Ukraine: Nazi Collaboration, Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust, 1941-1944” in Petropoulos, & Roth, *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (pp. 185-204). New York: Berghahn Books.

That said, it was also never an experience of homogeneity; we know that even from diasporic beginnings in West Prussia, some Mennonites chose not to farm, working instead as prosperous merchants and craftsmen in the larger towns and in Danzig. In Russia, farming was the initial mandate, but creative and economic activities expanded to include a vast array of occupations during the 'Golden Age'. In Niagara, although all were at one time involved with fruit farming work in one way or another, we see increasing diversity in occupations as the generations progress, especially among descendents of *Fluechtlinge* who did not enter Canada under occupational mandate. Rather than an intrinsic Dutch Mennonite trait, then, the propensity to farm has historically been strongly influenced by state immigration policies. Further, according to C. Henry Smith (1981):

The first Anabaptist congregations were all found in the big cities. It was only after the Brethren were driven underground by persecution that they forsook the cities and found refuge in remote country places and mountain fastnesses. (p. 12)

For the first time in their diasporic history, these Mennonites are living within a state that did not recruit them with agreements of special status, or *Privilegia*, and as such they are not set apart in terms of class. Where Mennonites succeed in Niagara, they do so along with the wider Niagara community and the state; the entire peninsula and indeed the country benefits from economic success of the Mennonites.<sup>156</sup> Diverse players, for example, are involved in the viticulture and winery operations so central now to tourism on the peninsula, and to which Mennonite enterprise was foundational. In contrast, recall how Mennonite economic success in both West Prussia and Russia came to be resented by the wider populations. This privileged status was to the eventual detriment of Mennonites in Russia, and changed the orientation of

---

<sup>156</sup> Every \$10 million in wine sales, for example, translates into \$14.8 million in economic activity in the province of Ontario. Sales for 2003-4 were \$450 million (Tourism Niagara, 2004).

their identity: “the sense of “being different” ...shifted from one of a religiously oriented life style to one of a superior cultural tradition in which religious differentiation was no longer the key marker, but merely one amongst many” (Urry, in F. Epp, 1974, p. 170).

It has been suggested By Ellen Baar that this shift has reversed itself in Niagara: that Niagara Mennonites increasingly “emphasize religious rather than ethnic identification” (1983, Abstract). The idea that religion and ethnicity are variables that must be chosen between is derivative of the paradoxical position that Mennonites have found themselves in generally, to varying degrees, since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, whereby identity was negotiated relative to perceived insider/outsider dichotomies, and yet at the same time Anabaptist tenets called for evangelism. (Bender, 1944; Winland, 1993) I cannot address the ethno-religiosity question, which so dominates Mennonite discourse,<sup>157</sup> by making conclusive statements as to whether Mennonite identity is tied more strongly in Niagara with religion or culture/ethnicity. This study in fact confirms that to categorize Mennonites as an ethno-religious group is inadequate to the address of the diaspora’s heterogeneity from its beginnings: Mennonites have never been homogeneous group, in terms of either religion or ethnicity, thus any attempt to reclaim a singular ‘Mennonite identity’ is a revisionist attempt to manufacture a mythical past.

In Niagara, notions as to ‘*what makes you most Mennonite*’ were highly varied, and overlaps were variously ranked. This reflects both the ambivalent nature of a hybrid identity, and a situation in Niagara less regulated by both internal and external constraints than ever before along the diasporic route, so that individual choice trumps hegemonic group ideals. In

---

<sup>157</sup> As letters to the editor of most editions of the periodical *Canadian Mennonite* will attest. For example, see Letters: “Faith, not DNA, at the heart of being Mennonite”, “DNA does not a Mennonite make” (March 8, 2010, p. 5) as well as “Where Mennonites came from actually is important” and “Mennonite DNA project detractors have over-reacted” (April 5, 2010, pp. 8-9).

Niagara, where power relations between Mennonites and the wider society are not asymmetrical, identity is articulated less in response to a construction of an Other (perceived insider /outsider dichotomies) than ever before. Further, for the first time (although there was suspicion of 'Germans' around the time of WW2<sup>158</sup>) there is no need to selectively accentuate features of identity (religious or otherwise) as a survival strategy in the multicultural society in which Niagara sits. Mennonites are free to openly embrace their diasporic identities in whatever ways they wish within general Canadian parameters of justice. This is another example, then, of state policy being of great influence to the evolution of culture and identity of this diaspora.

Specific to the character of the religion itself, though, it does seem that Ellen Baar's findings are at least partially supported by data herein. That is, among Niagara participants, an emphasis on the Anabaptist component of Mennonitism seems to be increasingly secondary to an emphasis on the Christian component. This is traceable, for instance, through individual responses to the importance of endogamy, which is now regarded as of lesser importance than marrying Christian. The MB churches lead in this trend – they have dropped the word Mennonite entirely from their moniker, and are the most assertive proselytizers.

Despite full membership and participation within Canadian society, a history of living in self-sufficient villages in the style of the Russian Mennonite Commonwealth model (a 'state within a state') has resulted in the cultural practice of building social support infrastructures. This practice continues in Niagara such that institutional completeness is well established.

---

<sup>158</sup> The Canadian government announced in 1940 that immigrants of German or Italian descent must register as enemy aliens. Subsequently, the 1941 Census shows that in Mennonite areas those claiming Dutch descent increased while those claiming German descent decreased dramatically (Urry, 1983, p. 254).

Mennonite-run churches, schools, senior's residences, credit unions, and co-operatives serve the population at all life-stages. This has resulted in an experience of (fixed) place that remains, even through the third generation, somewhat sheltered and inwardly inclined, a situation that has likely also been fostered by Canadian multicultural policy in place since 1971,<sup>159</sup> which supports the maintenance of ethnically-based cultures. The nature of the *Gemeinde*<sup>160</sup> has changed in Niagara, though, to be no longer "defined and maintained by the opposition of a hostile, external world" (Urry, 1983, p. 243). This example is neither an exclusionary social formation, nor a reactionary one created to provide an alternative, safe place in response to Othering by the wider society. In Niagara, "the world" is no longer external, and no longer hostile. The doctrine of *Absonderung* (separation - *In the world but not of it*), which came to be adopted in the early stages of Mennonite diaspora - and is still a feature of other Anabaptist groups in Canada such as Old Order Mennonites and Amish - has been shed. The group is now comfortable with a relatively high degree of ambivalence and, indeed, the Niagara Russian Mennonites are more defined by connections with the world than separation from it. The parochial nature of this social formation is a function of contentment with Canada as homeland, and of diasporically-based cultural practices. The Niagara *Gemeinde* exists comfortably and productively within the wider Niagara (and Canadian) society. By the third generation, the decision whether to engage with Mennonite institutions - particularly schools - is a matter of much debate for which this study shows neither consensus nor trend. (A debate shared by many other religious groups in Canada.)

---

<sup>159</sup> Federally legislated as of 1985.

<sup>160</sup> German for 'congregation and community'.

Notions of family and *Gemeinde* have traditionally been central to Mennonite self-understandings. Studies of surnames in West Prussia suggest that the population remained tightly restricted to the lines of the original Dutch settlers, with evidence of some Polish conversions. The original pool of diasporic surnames was quite small and remained so due to endogamy. Studies in Russia (1912), and Niagara (1980, 2009) suggest that this is still the case for the study group. (See APPENDIX I: Comparison of Mennonite surnames) Over five centuries, this small surname pool has produced a tendency toward clan-like identification along family lines ("*The Mennonite Game*"). Participants cite connections related to surnames as highly important in terms of their cultural identity. Russian Mennonites are easily identifiable to one another and, in this way within a geographically dispersed global diaspora, family connections can be easily established within about three generations. An emphasis on evangelism, however, is changing the face of the global Mennonite population, so that more Mennonites are now not original to diasporic groups than are. Within Niagara, even if endogamy rates remain high, this will eventually change the way things 'look on the ground' as diasporic Mennonites marry converts. At present, though, "*The Mennonite Game*" is enthusiastically practiced through each of the generations of this diaspora - at the local level, via media, and wherever travels lead.

It is noted of the Mennonites in West Prussia that, "Dutch roots... showed clearly until well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century (2 centuries after arrival). Religious ties to the homeland...helped delay Mennonite adjustment to the new environment" (Paetkau, 1986, p. 33). In contrast, an absence of ties – religious, material, and emotional - to Russia, contributed to the quick adjustment to a new homeland for the participants of this study. Negative experiences under Soviet rule greatly diminished any sense of that land as being home for the *Russlaender*, and all but erased it for the *Fluechtlinge* who suffered there longer. There is no evidence of longing for

the natal homeland, no movement to return. Any sense of connection remaining is either mythical, philanthropic, or of historic interest. Yi-Fu Tuan has written:

Home is the focal point of a cosmic structure. Such a conception of place ought to give it supreme value; to abandon it would be hard to imagine. Should destruction occur we may reasonably conclude that the people would be thoroughly demoralized, since the ruin of their settlement implies the ruin of their cosmos. Yet this does not necessarily happen. Human beings have strong recuperative powers. Cosmic views can be adjusted to suit new circumstances. With the destruction of one "center of the world", another can be built next to it, or in another location altogether, and it in turn becomes "the center of the world". "Center" is not a particular point on the earth's surface; it is a concept in mythic thought rather than a deeply felt value bound to unique events and locality...Space that is stretched out over a grid of cardinal points makes the idea of place vivid, but it does not make any particular geographical locality *the* place. A spatial frame determined by the stars is anthropocentric rather than place-centric, and it can be moved as human beings themselves move. (1997, pp. 149-50)

For these participants, with no home to return to, efforts and desires were channeled into *re-placing* home in Niagara. Their ancestors in West Prussia had similarly experienced the erosion of a sense of home in Holland, but connections there had remained in the form of family members, religious community, and physical structures. No Mennonites were left in the Soviet Russian villages after this last dispersal: repatriates were relocated to Siberia, and Mennonite villages were razed with the withdrawal of German troops, leaving few structures standing and no religious infrastructure. This left a void that Germany has (for now) filled as alternative homeland, or centre of authentic culture, for the diaspora.

## **7.2 Social Heterogeneity**

Arguably, the rejection of church central authority and an encouragement from Menno Simons to allow personal consciences to govern has fostered factions and divisions among Mennonites generally, thus resulting in the plethora of religious sub-groups existing today. Internal divisions were common among even the earliest Mennonites:



It would seem that the common hardships which the Dutch Mennonites had to endure throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century would have united them into a solid and cohesive body of believers. But such was not the case. Even in periods of the most bitter persecution they found time to argue over minor details of religious beliefs and human conduct, sometimes hardly more than the cut of a coat or the ceremonial manner of washing feet... They were individualists. (Smith, 1981, p. 109)

Recall that Mennonites with Dutch origins were never a homogeneous group, having been divided prior to their initial scattering in the 1530s as Flemish and Frisians, and that these factions (divided over issues including language, religious customs, and the authority of church elders on issues of spirituality) remained endogamous for nearly two hundred years, until mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, "excommunicating those who intermarried with any other branch" (Smith, 1981, p. 111). Further sub-divisions included the socially tolerant, yet theologically orthodox Waterlanders from north of Amsterdam, and the moderate Upper Germans (which included some Dutch congregations). In West Prussia, this socially heterogeneous mix "had to adjust not only to a new environment, but to each other" (Ibid, p. 166). Indeed, strong senior church leaders were necessary to keep the peace. Even Menno Simons spent time with his followers in West Prussia in 1549 for the purpose of "preaching and admonishing them to brotherly love and unity" (Ibid).

Divisions based on differing strengths of connections to the homeland also developed shortly after initial dispersal. The urban Mennonites often sent their sons back to Amsterdam to apprentice in trades, thus maintaining contacts, continuing an exchange of ministers, and intermarrying. As a result, the urban Mennonites held the Dutch dialect longer and were slower to make the shift from Dutch to High German in church services (Ibid, 167). Hence, already in the first century of diaspora this was a polyglot group as the result of variations in diasporic experience.

In Russia, too, there was a dynamic of sub-groups based on home colony (the Old Colony of Chortitza, and the Molotschna colony), urban/rural division, and church-related differences such as the previously discussed Mennonite Brethren split in 1860.

Internal divisions among Mennonites, such as those between the *Russlaender / Fluechtlinge*, and Mennonite Brethren/ General Conference churches, are thus not a new phenomenon to Niagara. Nor, as has been discussed, are such divisions unique to this diaspora; they are documented in the literature as regularly occurring features of diasporas, particularly as ongoing mobility causes previously scattered groups to re-intersect. However, the ways in which these divisions evolve 'on the ground', and how they differently affect generations, will differ from group to group and place to place, depending on the interplay of individuals. They tend to become a part of the cultural infrastructure of diasporas at fixed locations. They can produce very strong feelings and have potentially long-lasting repercussions, until eventually the boundaries are blurred by intermarriage, and subsequent generations (as one third generation participant noted) "*shake their heads*". Diaspora is a process: these social aspects, along with cultural aspects and networks of connections, evolve. A subsequent study specifically focused on the social heterogeneity of this diaspora in Niagara – that is, the evolution of relations through time between the Swiss Mennonites, the Russian Mennonites, and the Paraguayan Mennonites (and any others of the original Dutch Mennonite diasporic line) - would be a valuable addition to this work.

### **7.3 Performance & Co-responsibility**

Notions of family and *Gemeinde*, traditionally central to Mennonite self-understandings, have generated the extensive networks of Mennonite outreach and inter-Mennonite cooperation that have evolved over time. The specific nodes and trajectories which pattern

these networks as they exist today are largely a function of diaspora. Mobility relies on and results in networks, which, as we have seen, can prove crucial to survival. People on the move learn the value of maintaining networks. This is certainly evident with the Mennonites of Niagara, who maintain a seemingly exhaustive network of connections via correspondence, philanthropy, mission work, and travel. *What makes you most Mennonite?* Through the generations, the most common thread in answer to this question was actually neither religion nor culture, but the idea of ‘togetherness’ – family get-togethers and reunions, “*sticking together*”, helping each other. In other words: connections.

Understandings of diasporas as social formations and modes of cultural production facilitate an examination of new meanings of Mennonite *Gemeinden* within the context of globalization. According to Daphne Winland:

The idea of community or *Gemeinde* has served to situate expressions of Mennonite peoplehood in particular time and space, that is, specific context. The importance of community as central theme in Mennonite reality is reflected historically in changes to its form and meaning, from community as geographically-bounded social entity (community of place) to community with symbolic connotations (community of believers). In spite of these transformations, the strong attachment many Mennonites have to the *idea* of community has not diminished. (1993, p. 118).

Ordered elements of diaspora (co-responsibility & performance) bring new forms and meanings of *Gemeinde* beyond the realm of symbolism. The Niagara *Gemeinde* is situated within larger networks. The global Mennonite *Gemeinde* – linked at once in concrete and imagined ways – shares faith, and the very perception of itself as a community, with all that perception implies in terms of contact, support, and celebration. Networking is facilitated now more than ever before by technology, and the Niagara Mennonites take full advantage of it.

While traditional global cultural connectors such as the Low and High German languages appear set to disappear in Niagara with the third generation, institutional connectors are

strengthening. The creation of these institutional responsibility flows has been culturally generated, but they have evolved beyond just the cultural diaspora to include the entire Mennonite global population. Patterns and circulations of flows were born of diaspora and experiences of isolation and yet in time, influenced by an encouraging host society, these Mennonites have evolved to feel secure enough so that evangelism no longer presents the paradoxical situation it did for their ancestors. Evangelism may be increasingly accommodated in future through the maturation of the diasporic social formation. My impression from population figures, and from reading Mennonite periodicals (articles such as “Convert...or die” (Wagler, 2010), as one example of many) is that an emphasis on ‘witness’, or “sharing the faith with outsiders” (Benner, 2010, p. 16) is on the rise in Mennonite discourse. An examination of how global diasporic networks are facilitating this trend would be a useful future study.

In addition to frequent examples of individual remittances sent to family members in former Soviet areas and South America, the Niagara participants report high levels of engagement with organizations including Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Mennonite Disaster Relief Services (MDS), Mennonite Economic Development Agency (MEDA), Friends of Ukraine, TourMagination (‘Mennonite travel and Christian tours’), Mennonite Heritage Cruises (Russian Mennonite cruises along the Dnieper River and on the Black Sea), and Mennonite Your Way<sup>161</sup> (a network of Mennonite and Christian hosts offering in-home accommodations “for a donation” in North America, Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia).<sup>162</sup> In the case of the travel organizations, participants customarily bring an extra suitcase filled with supplies, which is left for people in need. Niagara links have also been made to work with other Christian outreach

---

<sup>161</sup> <http://www.mennoniteyourway.com/Myw/>

<sup>162</sup> These examples were mentioned by participants; it is not a comprehensive list of Mennonite aid institutions.

institutions such as SOWERS.<sup>163</sup> Participants also show a strong propensity to take on positions around the globe in terms of mission and relief work (Africa, Siberia, New Orleans, Texas, Florida), most subscribe to international Mennonite and German language publications, and they eagerly combine the use of modern technology (telephone, e-mail, Internet discussion groups, blogs, list-serves) with a zest for travel in their maintenance of extensive networks of connections.

The participants of this study simultaneously experience an intensely local sense of place in Niagara and a 'stretched out' experience of global *Gemeinde*, both of which are functions of diaspora. In a sense, this is another facet of their hybrid culture. These results contest claims that globalization brings "the historical emergence of the space of flows, superseding the space of places...(that) social meaning evaporates from places, and therefore society, and becomes diluted and diffused in the reconstructed logic of a space of flows" (Castells, 1989, p. 348), and the prediction of "the disarticulation of place-based societies" (Robins, 1991, p. 13) as globalization increases. A deep sense of contentment and 'home' in a receiving country is not incompatible with a continuing transnational orientation; in fact, it may strengthen the ability of individuals to act as positive players in world-systems (i.e., as contributors, rather than recipients, of responsibility flows). The nodes (fixed places) in these systems are as important as the networks (connectors with the wider world). As was recounted earlier, "An empathetic and compassionate understanding of the worlds beyond our own places may be best grounded in a love of a particular place to which I myself belong. In this way, we

---

<sup>163</sup> SOWERS (Servants On Wheels Ever Ready) is a relief agency serviced by born-again Christian RVers across North America. (<http://www.sowerministry.org/>)

may recognize that what we need in our everyday world has parallels in the worlds of others (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p. 50 *after* Relph, 1981, 1993).

As Mennonite culture continues to transform itself in contact zones such as Niagara, even those with traditional surnames find themselves living quite different realities than the generations of Mennonites before them. Participants in the Niagara study groups have expressed high levels of comfort with this. An ever-increasing emphasis on global consciousness, mutual aid and cooperation may be replacing some cultural markers traditionally associated with Mennoniteness. From the standpoint of Cultural Geography, culture and ethnicity are slippery determinants of peoplehood, simply because they will always, naturally, evolve. *Diaspora discourse allows us to view ethno-religious identities as transformative, and in fact inclusive, in the context of Mennonite mobility, global history, and increasing evangelism.* The Niagara community is actively involved at both the local level and in an ethnically diverse Mennonite *Gemeinde*. Their geographic history places them at an advantage in an age of global community due to their hybrid cultural identities, and strong generational capital in terms of their ability to adapt to change and to maintain connections. Ironically, this group that started out five centuries ago living in isolated enclaves has developed a cosmopolitan side. Particular geographic experiences of place have contributed to the transformation of these Mennonites into citizens very much “in the world” in Niagara, and “of the world” within the wider diaspora.

#### **7.4 Directions for Future Research**

As is typical of case studies generally, this project raises many new questions. Qualitative case studies of other Mennonite diasporic communities, both within and outside of Canada, would offer comparative benefit and more clearly expose the influence of state policies. The community of Neudachino, Siberia would be a fascinating follow-up case study in relation to

the influence of connections with Niagara Mennonites. A specific case study of Paraguayan Mennonites in Niagara would enhance this work, as would a case study of Swiss Mennonites on the peninsula. As mentioned, a study of social relations between all of the diasporic Mennonite sub-groups in this community would also be of further benefit to understanding the place, the people, and diasporic dynamics. As well, it would be beneficial to incorporate a study of groups of converted Mennonites in Niagara, such as the Laotians (and others), who came to the peninsula as non-Mennonites sponsored by the existing Mennonite community.

*In situ*, gendered, generational case studies of other diasporic groups within Canada would also be of comparative benefit. A study of a community in which two different mature diasporic groups co-exist would be fascinating: in Abbotsford, British Columbia (Canada), for example, there is a Mennonite diasporic community living alongside a Sikh diasporic community – how do their case histories and experiences of place within the contact zone compare? How do they interact? How have they differently experienced diaspora and, consequently, how have these factors influenced the coordinates of their cultures and identities?

A study focused on issues of cultural representation in Niagara would also be useful: how is 'sense of place' in Niagara increasingly defined by dominant corporate interests, and what does this say about authentic Niagara-ness? Who decides what is worth defining on the peninsula, how does this affect the lives of local residents, and how do they feel about it? A quantitative study of agricultural trends on the peninsula specific to Mennonites is also absent from scholarly literature.

In terms of measures to improve future similar studies, multiple researchers could further address rigour, and introduce varying interpretations. For example, male and female researchers as well as researchers of differing life stages working together on such case studies

would be beneficial. Also, the addition of children as participants (although ethically more complex) would add further dimension to the life-stages component and extend the generational scope. Finally, the availability of technical support (e.g., recording devices, dubbing services, transcription software) for researchers at the institutional level would greatly accelerate the completion of such a project.

### **7.5 Concluding Remarks**

As a qualitative researcher, my interpretations are braided with those of the storytellers. Further, by writing in the first person, I myself am a narrator. I embrace the subjective nature of this research, with its power to expose nuance, silences, differences in experience, and the “crucible of the materiality of everyday life” for individuals (Brah, 2003, p. 618).

At the same time, I have made my best attempts to address issues of representation and positionality. Who I am permeates every stage of the research process. I have had freedom to exert my own agency: I’ve imposed my own order on the project design, the data, and my own interpretations according to my personal background and training as a geographer. As a narrative researcher I am not an authority; my central responsibility is to be respectful and supportive of the thoughts of others. To demonstrate respect I have offered transparency throughout the research process, examples of my own reflexivity, and presented extensive excerpts so as to preserve context, and so that authentic voices are open to interpretation by others who may wish to read them. Mine is one interpretation, explored around notions of place. Others could take any number of different approaches to these sources outside of the parameters I have set, and offer different interpretations. I speak differently than another would, not better or worse.



Metaphorically, thanks to my own connections with the people of this diaspora, I too have relocated. In many ways, this experience was one of liminality for me. Finally, the place this work has brought me to (academically and personally) is much different than the place I started out from. But the experience will not stop here. I look forward to revisiting the participants of this study to share some of the story of my own journey with them, and to meet the final objective of this project by providing each person with the DVD recording of his or her unique story and reflections. Copies of this thesis will be made available in Niagara church libraries, and I will value any feedback others may offer as an opportunity for further understanding.

## Works Cited

"Elsie". (1989). The Life Story of \_\_\_\_\_ or Oma \_\_\_\_\_ (as most of us know her). *Translated and edited by family members, names withheld* . Unpublished.

#1. (2004 2-October). Interview: "Justina" (Group B, Generation 1). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#10. (2004 04-October). Interview: "Agatha" (Group B, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#11. (2004 22-October). Interview: "Ingrid" (Group B, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#11. (2004 22-October). Interview: "Ingrid" (Group B, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#12. (2004 3-November). Interview: "Lena" (Group B, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#13. (2005 14-May). Interview: "Harold" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#14. (2005 11-June). Interview: "George" (Group A, Generation 1). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#15. (2005 14-May). Interview: "Gerhardt" (Group A, Generation 1). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#16. (2005 11-June). Interview: "John" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#17. (2005 25-June). Interview: "Peter" (Group A, Generation 1). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#18. (2005 25-June). Interview: "Margaret" (Group A, Generation 1). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#19. (2005 25-June). Interview: "Laureen" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

- #2. (2004 2-October). Interview: "Greta" (Group B, Generation 1). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #20. (2005 2-November). Interview: "Conrad" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #21. (2005 2-November). Interview: "Frank" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #22. (2005 2-November). Interview: "Helen" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #23. (2005 8-November). Interview: "Paul" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #24. (2005 8-November). Interview: "Agnes" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #25. (2005 23-November). Interview: "Rudy" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #26. (2005 23-November). Interview: "Sarah" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #27. (2005 24-October). Interview: "Hans" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #28. (2005 24-October). Interview: "Albert" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #29. (2005 24-October). Interview: "Edith" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #3, I. (2004 3-October). "Marta" (Group B, Generation 1). (C. Jones, Interviewer)
- #30. (2005 14-November). Interview: "Sam" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#31. (2005 8-November). Interview: "Abram" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#32. (2006 30-January). Interview: "Howard" (Group A, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#33. (2006 30-January). Interview: "Brian" (Group A/B, Generation 3). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#34. (2006 30-January). Interview: "Rob" (Group A/B, Generation 3). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#4. (2004 6-October). Interview: "Elsie" (Group B, Generation 1). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#5. (2004 4-October). Interview: "Edna" (Group B, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#6. (2004 13-October). Interview: "Freda" (Group B, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#7. (2004 20-October). Interview: "Katie" (Group B, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#8. (2004 21-October). Interview: "Gloria" (Group B, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

#9. (2004 21-October). Interview: "Doreen" (Group B, Generation 2). (C. Jones, Interviewer)

Agnew, J. (1987). *Place & Politics*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Altona Women's Institute. (1984). Rollkuchen. In A. W. Institute, *Canadian Mennonite Cookbook* (p. 24). Don Mills, Ontario, Canada: General Publishing Company Ltd.

Anderson, A. (1988). The Sociology of Mennonite Identity: A Critical Review. In C. a. Redekop, *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Lanham: University Press of America.

- Arshinov, P. (1987). *History of the Makhnovist Movement, 1918-1921*. London: Free Press.
- Atkinson, D., Jackson, P., Sibley, D., & Washbourne, N. (2005). *Cultural Geography: A Critical dictionary of Key Concepts*. New York: I.B. Taurus.
- Auman, V. a. (1993). *Istorria Rossiiskikh Nemtsev v Dokumentakh (1763-1992 gg.)*. Moscow: MIGP.
- Baar, E. (1983). Patterns of Selective Accentuation Among Niagara Mennonites. *Canadian Ethnic Studies* , 15 (2), 77-91.
- Bailey, C., White, C., & Pain, R. (1999). Evaluating Qualitative Research: Dealing with the tension between 'science' and 'creativity'. *Area*, V31,N2 , 169-78.
- Bailey, W. A. (1994). Hagar: A model for an Anabaptist feminist? *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Volume 68, Number 2 , 219-228.
- Baxter, J., & Eyles, J. (1997). Evaluating qualitative research in social geography: establishing rigour in interview analysis. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, V22,N4 , 505-525.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (December, 2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*,V13,N4 , 544-559.
- Becker, B., Dawson, P., Devine, K., Hannum, C., Hill, S., Leydens, J., et al. (2005). *Case Studies*. Retrieved 2009 22-December from Writing@CSU. Colorado State University Department of English: <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/casestudy/>
- Bender, H. S. (1990). *Anabaptism*. Retrieved 2009 7-November from Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online: <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/A533ME.html>
- Bender, H. (1944). *The Anabaptist Vision*. Scottdale, Pa: Herald Press.
- Benner, D. (2010 22-March). From 'exhortation to incarnation' in witness. *Canadian Mennonite* , 14 (6), p. 16.

Berg, L. (2006). Masculinities. In B. a. Warf, *The Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 296-298). London: SAGE.

Berg, L., & Longhurst, R. (2003). Placing masculinities and geography. *Gender, Place and Culture*, V10, N4 , 351-360.

Bhabha, H. K. (1990). The Third Space. In J. E. Rutherford, *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 207-221). London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Bird, J., Curtis, B., Putnam, T., Robertson, G., & Tickner, L. .. (1993). *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*. London: Routledge.

Blunt, A. (2003). Home and Identity: Life Stories in Text and in Person. In A. a. Blunt, *Cultural Geography in Practice*. New York: Oxford Press.

Boewen, D. S. (2001). Die Auswanderung: Religion, culture, and migration among Old Order Mennonites. *Canadian Geographer, Volume 45* , 461-473.

Bondi, L. a. (2003). Troubling the place of gender. In K. a. Anderson, *Handbook of Cultural Geography* (pp. 325-345). London: SAGE.

Bowles, G., & Duelli Klein, R. (1983) *Theories of Women's Studies*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul Inc.

Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of Diaspora*. New York: Routledge.

Brah, A. (2003). Diaspora, Border, and Transnational Identities. In R. a. Lewis, *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (pp. 613-634). New York: Routledge.

Bramadat, P., & Seljak, D. (2008). *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Braun, C. (2008). *The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia: A Mennonite Memoir*. Vancouver: Ronsdale Press.

Braziel, J. E. (2003). *Theorizing Diaspora*. Minnesota: Blackwell Press.

Burkhardt, F. (2010 25-January). New map updates world's Anabaptists. (D. Benner, Ed.) *Canadian Mennonite* , 14 (2), p. 20.

Buttimer, A., & Seamon, D. (1980). *The Human Experience of Space and Place*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Camino, L. A., & Krulfeld, R. M. (1994). *Reconstructing Lives, Recapturing Meaning*. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach .

*Canada`s Most Visited Tourist Attractions `09*. (2009). Retrieved 2009 6-October from Forbes Traveler.com: <http://www.forbestraveler.com/best-lists/canadas-popular-attractions-2009-slide-4.html?thisSpeed=25000>

Canadian Vintner's Association Website. (2009). *Wine Growing Regions of Ontario*. Retrieved 2009 3-October from Canadian Vintner's Association: <http://www.canadianvintners.com/woc/ontario.html>

Castells, M. (1989). *The Informational City*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Chun, A. (2001). Diasporas of mind, or why there ain't no Black Atlantic in cultural China. *Communal/Plural* , V9,N1 , 95-109.

Chun, A. (2001). Diasporas of mind, or why there ain't no black atlantic in cultural China. *Communal/Plural* , 95-109.

City of St. Catharines . (2009). *City of St. Catharines*. Retrieved 2009 5-October from City of St. Catharines Web Site: <http://www.stcatharines.ca>

Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural Anthology, Volume 9, Number 3* .

Code, L. (2000). *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. New York: Routledge.

Cohen, R. (1997). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

- Cohen, R. (1999). Rethinking 'Babylon': Iconoclastic conceptions of the diasporic experience. In S. Vertovec, & R. E. Cohen, *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cope, M. (2002). Feminist Epistemology in Geography. In P. Moss, *Feminist Geography in Practice* (pp. 43-56). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Crang, M. (2001). Field work: Making sense of group interviews. In M. Limb, & C. Dwyer, *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers* (pp. 215-233). London: Arnold.
- Creighton, J. (2009 12-July). *Niagara growing like a wild vine*. Retrieved 2009 3-October from Toronto sun: <http://www.torontosun.com/travel/ontario/2009/07/12/10104596-sun.html>
- Cresswell, T. (2009). Place. In R. Kitchen, & N. Thrift (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (pp. 169-177). Oxford: Elsevier.
- Deckert Saylor, E. (1993). *Fabric and Pattern: Portraits of Some Rural Kansas Mennonite Women*. Newton, Kansas: Wordsworth Press.
- Derksen-Siemans, R. (2007). *Remember Us: Letters from Stalin's Gulag (1930-1937) Volume One: The Regehr Family*. Kitchener: Pandora Press.
- Domosh, M. a. (2003). Travels with Feminist Historical Geography. *Gender, Place and Culture*, V10, N3 , 257-264.
- Domosh, M., & Seager, J. (2001). *Putting Women In Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Driedger, L. (2000). *Mennonites in the Global Village*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Dwyer, C. (1999). Contradictions of Community: Questions of identity for young British Muslim women. *Environment and Planning A*, V31, 53-68.
- Dyck, C. J. (1993). *An Introduction to Mennonite History*. Waterloo: Herald Press.



- Dyck, H. L. (1991). *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Dyck, I. (2002). Further notes on feminist research. In P. Moss, *Feminist Geography in Practice* (pp. 234-244). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dyck, P., & Dyck, E. (1991). *Up From the Rubble*. Waterloo: HERALD PRESS.
- Edmunds, J., & Turner, B. S. (2002). *Generations, Culture, Society*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Elwood, S., & Martin, D. (2000). 'Placing' interviews: Location and scales of power in qualitative research. *Professional Geographer*, *V52,N4*, 649-57.
- Ember, M. C. (2004). *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*. New York: Kluwer/Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- England, K. (2006). Producing Feminist Geographies: Theory, Methodologies and Research Strategies. In S. Aitkin, & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Approaches to Human Geography* (pp. 286-297). London: SAGE.
- Entrikin, J. N. (1991). *The Characterization of Place*. Worcester, MA: Clark University Press.
- Epp, A. (2010 19-April) Grateful for God's mercy: Niagara celebrates 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of its Laotian community. In *Canadian Mennonite*, *V14,N8*, 16-17.
- Epp, F. (1962). *Mennonite Exodus*. Altona, Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd.
- Epp, F. (1977). *Mennonite Peoplehood: A Plea for New Initiatives*. Waterloo: Conrad Press.
- Epp, F. (1974). *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People*. Toronto: MacMillan Canada.
- Epp, F. (1982). *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada.

Epp, G. K. (1987). Mennonite Immigration to Canada After World War II. *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, V5 , 108-119.

Epp, M. (2002). "Weak Families" in the Green Hell of Paraguay. In K. D. Schmidt, D. Zimmerman Umble, & S. E. Reschly, *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History* (pp. 136-160). Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Epp, M. (1990). Carrying the Banner of Non-conformity: Ontario Mennonite Women and the Dress Question. *Conrad Grebel Review*, Volume 8, Number 3 , 237-257.

Epp, M. (1999). Heroes or Yellow-Bellies? Masculinity and the Conscientious Objector. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* , 107-117.

Epp, M. (2008). *Mennonite Women in Canada*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Epp, M. (1994). *Mennonites in Ontario*. Waterloo: The Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

Epp, M. (2001). Pioneers, Refugees, Exiles, and Transnationals: Gendering diaspora in an ethno-religious context. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Society* , 137-153.

Epp, M. (2007 April). *Review of Urry, James, Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe--Russia--Canada, 1525-1980*. Retrieved 2009 08-November from H-Canada, H-Net Reviews, H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13034>

Epp, M. (1997). The Memory of Violence: Soviet and East European Mennonite Refugees and Rape in the Second World War. *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 9 , 58-87.

Epp, M. (2004). The Semiotics of Zwieback: Feast and Famine in the Narratives of Mennonite Refugee Women. In M. Epp, F. Iacovetta, & F. Swyripa, *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant , Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (pp. 314-340). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Epp, M. (1987). Women in Canadian Mennonite History: Uncovering the "Underside". *Journal of Mennonite Studies* , 90-107.

Epp, M. (2000). *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Epp-Thiessen. (2000). Gains and Losses: The experiences of Mennonite women immigrants of the late nineteenth century. *Journal of Mennonite Studies, Volume 18* , 146-156.

Erb, B. (1990). Reading the Source: Menno Simons on Women, Marriage, Children, and Family. *Conrad Grebel Review, Volume 8* , 301-319.

Falconer Al-Hindi, K., & Kawabata, H. (2002). Reflexive Feminist Geography. In P. Moss, *Feminist Geography in Practice* (pp. 103-115). Oxford: Blackwell.

Fine, M. a. (2006). Forging and performing masculine identities within social spaces: Boys and men negotiating the crucible of dominant cultural representations at the intersection of class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. *Men and Masculinities, V8, N3* , 257-261.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry, V12, N2* , 219-245.

Fortier, A.-M. (2005). Diaspora. In D. Atkinson, P. Jackson, D. Sibley, & N. Washbourne, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*. New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Press.

Francis, E. (1951). The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia, 1789-1914: A Sociological Interpretation. *The Mennonite Quarterly Review, N25:3* , 173-182.

Francis, E. (September, 1948). The Russian Mennonites: From Religious Group to Ethnic Group. *The American Journal of Sociology, VLIV, N2* , 101-107.

Friesen, A. (2006). *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and After World War I*. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions.

Friesen, C. A. (1984). *Memoirs of the Virgil-Niagara Mennonites: History of Mennonite Settlement in Niagara-on-the-Lake Ontario, 1934-84*. Fonthill, Ontario: Niagara Yearbook Services, Ltd.

- Friesen, E. E. (2003). *Journey Into Freedom: One Family's Real-Life Drama*. Winnipeg: Raduga Publications.
- Friesen, H. G. (1990). *Daydreams and Nightmares: Life on the Wintergruen Estate*. Winnipeg: CMBC Publications.
- Friesen, J. (1989). *Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz*. Winnipeg: CMBC Publications.
- Funk-Weibe. (1999). Me Tarzan, Son of Menno - You Jane, Mennonite Mama. *Journal of Mennonite Studies, Volume 17*, 8-21.
- Gabaccia, D. a. (2002). *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (pp. 3-30). New York: Basic Books.
- Gerbrandt, G. (2005 31-October). Who Is A Mennonite? *Canadian Mennonite*, pp. 6-8.
- Gilroy, P. (1999). Diaspora. In S. Vertovec, & R. E. Cohen, *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- Gilroy, P. (1995). Roots & Routes: Black identity as an outernational project. In H. a. Harris, *Racial & Ethnic Identity: Psychological Development and Creative Expressions*. New York : Routledge.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.
- Glaser, B. (1992). *Emergence vs. forcing: The basics of grounded theory analysis*. Mill Valley, California: Sociology Press.
- Goering, E. M., & Krause, A. (2001). Odd Wo(man) out: The Systematic Marginalization of Mennonite Singles by the Church's Focus on Family. *Mennonite Quarterly Review, Volume 75*, 211-230.

Goldschmidt, H. (2000). "Crown Heights is the Center of the World": Reterritorializing a Jewish Diaspora. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* , 9 (1), 81-104.

Gray, B. (2000a). Gendering the Irish Diaspora. *Women's Studies International Forum* , 167-185.

Gray, B. (1996). The home of our mothers and our birthright forages: Nation, diaspora, and Irish women. In M. a. Maynard, *New Frontiers in Women's Studies: Knowledge, Identity, and Nationalism*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Gray, B. (1997). Unmasking Irishness and Home. In J. E. MacLoughlan, *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.

Gray, B. (2000b). *Women and the Irish Diaspora*. New York: Routledge.

Grossberg, L. (1996). Identity and Cultural Studies: Is that all there is? In S. a. Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.

Habib, J. (2004). *Israel, Diaspora, and the Routes of National Belonging*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Hall, S. (1999). Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In S. Vertovec, & R. E. Cohen, *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

Hall, S. (1995). New Cultures for Old. In D. Massey, & P. E. Jess, *A Place In the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press .

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The Science question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies* , 575-99.

Harder, J. E. (2003). *From Kleefeld with Love*. Kitchener and Waterloo: Pandora Press and Herald Press.

Harvey, D. (1993). From space to place and back again. In J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson, & L. Tucker, *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (pp. 3-29). London: Routledge.

Herzig, P. (2006). *South Asians in Kenya: Gender, Generation and Changing Identities in Diaspora*. London: Transaction Publishers.

Horst, M. A. (1996). *Reminiscings of Mennonite Life in Waterloo County*. Kitchener: The author.

Huang, S. P. (2000). Diasporic subjects and identity negotiation: Women in and from Asia. *Women's Studies International Forum* , 391-398.

Hubbard, P., Kitchen, R., & Vallentine, G. (2008). *Key Texts in Human Geography*. London: SAGE.

Hubbard, P., Kitchin, R., Bartley, B., & Fuller, D. (2002). *Thinking Geographically: Space, Theory and Contemporary Human Geography*. New York: Continuum.

Jackson, P. (2005). Gender. In D. a. Atkinson, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*. New York: I.B. Taurus.

Jackson, P. (2001). Making Sense of Qualitative Data. In M. Limb, & C. Dwyer (Eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers* (pp. 199-214). London: Arnold.

Jones, J.P., Nast, H., & Roberts, Susan. (1997). *Thresholds in Feminist Geography: difference, Methodology, Representation*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Kaplan, C. (1999). *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Kaplan, C. (1996). *Post-Modern Discourses of Displacements*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Katz, Cindi, and Janice Monk (1993). *Full Circles: Geographies of Women Over the Life Course*. NewYork: Routledge.

- Katz, C. (2001). On the grounds of globalization: A topography for feminist political engagement. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, V6, N4 , 1213-1234.
- Kauffman, J. H. (1975). *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*. Kitchener, ON: Herald Press.
- Kay, J. (1990). The future of historical geography in the United States. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* , 618-621.
- King, T. (2003). *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press Inc.
- Kitchen, R., & Thrift, N. (. (2009). *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Klassen Reynolds, L. (1997). *The aftermath of trauma and immigration: Detections of multigenerational effects on Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to Canada in the 1920s (Ph.D Dissertation)*. Fresno, California: California School of Professional Psychology.
- Klassen, C. (1932). The Mennonites of Russia, 1917-1928. *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* , 69-80.
- Klassen, P. E. (1994a). *Going By the Moon and the Stars: Stories of Two Russian-Mennonite Women*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press.
- Klassen, P. (1994b). What's Bre(a)d in the Bone: The bodily heritage of Mennonite women. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Volume 68, Number 2 , 229-247.
- Klingel Smith, S. (1980). Women in the Mennonite Church, 1900-1930. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Volume 54, Number 3 , 163-207.
- Klippenstein, F. E. (1997). Gender and Mennonites: A Response to Mennonites in Canada, 1930-1970. *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Volume 15 , 142-149.
- Koop, K. (2009 5-October). Evangelism and ethics in historical tension. *Canadian Mennonite*, Volume 1, Number 19 , pp. 4-8.

Krahn, C. (1957). *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Retrieved 2009 09-November from Memrik Mennonite Settlement (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, Ukraine): <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M46040.html>

Krahn, C. H. (1989). *Migrations*. Retrieved 2009 08-July from Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online: <http://333.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M542ME.html>

Krahn, C. (1948). The Ethnic Origin of the Mennonites from Russia. *Mennonite Life*, V1-3 , 45-48.

Kroeger, A. (2007). *Hard Passage: A Mennonite Family's Long Journey from Russia to Canada*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.

Kroeker, W. (2005). *An Introduction to Russian Mennonites*. Intercourse, Pa: Good Books.

Krulfeld, R. M. (1999). Changing Concepts of Gender Roles and Identities in Refugee Communities. In L. A. Camino, *Reconstructing Lives, Recapturing Meaning: Refugee identity, gender, and culture change* (pp. 71-75). Switzerland: Gordon & Breach.

Laurie, N., Dwyer, C., Holloway, S., & Smith, F. (1999). *Geographies of New Femininities*. NewYork: Pearson Education Limited.

Lehman, M. W. (2010). *Roots & Branches: A Narrative History of the Amish and Mennonites in Southeast United States, 1892-1992*. Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press.

Leonard, K. (2000). State, Culture, and Religion: Political Action and Representation Among South Asians in North America. *Diaspora* , 9 (1), 21 -38.

Letskemann, P. (2008). The Fate of Mennonites in the Volga-Ural Region, 1929-1941. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* , 26, 181-200.

Loewen, H. (2008 18-November). *Mennonite Refugees After WW2: Those Who Were Sent Back and Those Who Were Sent Back East*. Retrieved 2010 27-February from Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia: <http://www.mhsbc.com/20081018/Harry.htm>



Loewen, H. (n.d.). *Mennonites*. Retrieved 2009 11-November from Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples: <http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/Encyclopedia/A-Z/m6>

Loewen, H. (2000). *Road to Freedom: Mennonites Escape the Land of Suffering*. (H. Loewen, Ed.) Kitchener: Pandora Press.

Loewen, R. (2006). *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Loewen, R. (1993). *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Loewen, R. (2001). *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Loewen, R. (2008). The Poetics of Peoplehood: Ethnicity & Religion Among Canada's Mennonites. In P. Bramadat, & D. Seljak, *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada* (pp. 330-364). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Longhauffer, J. (1993). Specifying the commons: Mennonites, intensive agriculture, and landlessness in nineteenth century Russia. *Ethnohistory*, *V40,N3* , 384-409.

Lower, N. (2005). Hitler's 'Garden of Eden' in Ukraine: Nazi Collaboration, Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust, 1941-1944. In J. Petropoulos, & J. K. Roth, *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (pp. 185-204). New York: Berghahn Books.

Marienstrass, R. (1999). On the notion of diaspora. In S. Vertovec, & R. E. Cohen, *Migrations, Diasporas, and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

Massey, D., & Jess, P. (1995). *A Place in the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Massey, D., Allen, J., & Sarre, P. (Eds.). (1999). *Human Geography Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McDowell, L. (2000). Economy, culture, difference and justice. In I. a. Cook, *Cultural Turns, Geographical Turns* (pp. 182-195). Don Mills: Prentice Hall.

McDowell, L. (1999). *Gender, Identity, Place*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mennonite World Conference. (2009). *World Directory*. Retrieved 2010 22-February from Mennonite World Conference: A Community of Anabaptist-related Churches: [http://www.mwc-cmm.org/en15/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=13&Itemid=16](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/en15/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13&Itemid=16)

Metcalf, D. (2010 8-March). Letter to Editor: Faith, not DNA, at the heart of being Mennonite. *Canadian Mennonite* , 14 (5), p. 12.

Mishra, V. (1996). The diasporic imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora. *Textual Practice, Volume 10* , 421-447.

Mitchell, D. (2000). *Cultural Geography: A Critical introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Press.

Mitchell, K. (1997b). Different Diasporas and the hype of hybridity. *Environment and Planning D, Volume 15* , 533-553.

Mitchell, K. (1997a). Transnational discourse: Bringing geography back in. *Antipode, Volume 29* , 101-114.

Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. London and Durham: Duke University Press.

Mohanty, C. T. (1991). *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Morin, K. a. (1999). Emplacing Current Trends in Feminist Historical Geography. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography, V6, N4* , 311-330.

Morton, M. (2010 8-March). Letter to Editor: DNA does not a Mennonite make. *Canadian Mennonite* , 14 (5), p. 13.

Moss, P. (. (2002). *Feminist Geography in Practice*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Nagar, R. (1997). Exploring Methodological Borderlands. In J. P. Jones, H. J. Nast, & S. E. Roberts, *Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, Representation* (pp. 203-224). New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Niagara United Mennonite Church 50th Anniversary Committee, E. (1988). *50th Anniversary of the Niagara United Mennonite Church, 1938-1988*. Fonthill: Niagara Yearbook Services, Ltd.

Nolt, S. (1999). A 'Two-Kingdom' People in a World of Multiple Identities: Religion, Ethnicity and American Mennonites. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, V.33 , 485-502.

Norton, W. (2006). *Cultural Geography: Environments, Landscapes, Identities, Inequalities*. Don Mills: Oxford Press.

Office of the Prime Minister of Canada Press Release. (2009 03-09). *PM meets with owners and operators of Niagara Region tourism businesses*. Retrieved 2009 30-09 from Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada: <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=2796>

Ong, A. a. (1995). Introduction. In A. a. Ong, *Bewitching women, pious men: Gender and body politics in Southeast Asia*. Berkely: University of California Press.

Paetkau, H. (1977). *A Struggle for Survival: The Russian Mennonite Immigrants in Ontario, 1924-1939, Masters Thesis*. Waterloo, Ontario: University of Waterloo.

Paetkau, H. (1986). *Separation or Integration? The Russian Mennonite Immigrant Community in Ontario, PhD Thesis*. London, Ontario: University of Western Ontario.

Peet, R. (1998). *Modern Geographical Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Penner, C. (1998). *Women & Men: Gender in the Church*. Waterloo: Herald Press.

Penner, H. a. (1989). *West Prussia*. Retrieved 2009 08-11 from Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online: <http://www.gemeo.org/encyclopedia>

Penner, H. (1950). West Prussian Mennonites Through Four Centuries. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, V.24 , 124-129.

Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario. (2007). *Early Life & Times in the Twenty, Including the Life and Legacy of Samuel Fry*. Markham: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario.

Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario, The Chapter at the Twenty. (1979). *Canadian-German Folklore: Tales of the Twenty*. Canada: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario.

Petropoulos, J., & Roth, J. K. (2005). *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Plant, S. (1996). The virtual complexity of culture. In G. Robertson, M. Mash, L. Tickner, J. Bird, B. Curtis, & T. Putnam (Eds.), *FutureNatural: Nature, Science, Culture* (pp. 203-217). London: Routledge.

Pohl, J. O. (June - September, 2009). "In our hearts we felt the sentence of death": Ethnic German recollections of mass violence in the USSR, 1928-48. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 11(203) , 323-354.

Pohl, J. O. (2009). Volk auf dem Weg: Transnational Migration of the Russian-Germans from 1763 to the Present Day. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, V9, N2, 267-286.

Pratt, G. (1993). Reflections on poststructuralism and feminist empirics, theory and practice. *Antipode*, V25 , 51-63.

Pratt, G. (2002). Studying Immigrants in Focus Groups. In P. Moss, *Feminist Geography in Practice* (pp. 214-229). Oxford: Blackwell.

Pratt, G., & Hanson, S. (1993). Women and Work Across the Life Course: Moving Beyond Essentialism. In C. a. Katz, *Full Circles: Geographies of Women of the Life Course* (pp. 27-55). New York: Routledge.

Pratt, M. L. (1992). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Pred, A. (1984). Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places. *Association of American Geographers* , 74 (2), 279-97.

Pulido, L. (1997). Community, Place, and Identity. In J. P. Jones, H. J. Nast, & S. M. Roberts, *Thresholds in Feminist Geography* (pp. 11-28). New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.

Puwar, N. a. (2003). *South Asian Women in the Diaspora*. New York: Oxford.

Redekop, G. (1996). *The Work of Their Hands: Mennonite Women's Societies in Canada*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press.

Regehr, T. (1996). *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Regehr, T. (1987). The influence of World War II on Mennonites in Canada. *Journal of Mennonite Studies* , 73-89.

Reimer, M. L. (2008). *One Quilt Many Pieces: A guide to Mennonite Groups in Canada*. Waterloo: Herald Press.

Reinharz, S. (1983). Experiential analysis: A contribution to feminist research. In G. Bowles, & R. Duelli Klwin, *Theories of Women's Studies* (pp. 162-191). London: Routledge and kegan Paul.

Relph, E. (1976). *Place & Placelessness*. London: Pion.

Rempel, A. a. (2005). *Hope is Our Deliverance: The tragic experience of a Mennonite leader and his family in Stalin's Russia*. Kitchener: Pandora Press.

Rich, E. S. (1983). *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness, 1683-1983*. Kitchener: Herald Press.

Robertson, G., Mash, M., Tickner, L., Bird, J., & Curtis, B. P. (1996). *FutureNatural: Nature, Science, Culture*. London: Routledge.

Robins, K. (1991). Prisoners of the city: Whatever could a postmodern city be? *New Formations*, N15 , 1-22.

Rose, G. (1995). Place and Identity: A sense of place. In D. Massey, & P. Jess (Eds.), *A Place in the World?* (pp. 87-132). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ryder, N. (1955). The interpretation of origin statistics. *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* , 466-479.

Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1 .

Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.

Sayer, A., & Morgan, K. (1985). A modern industry in a declining region: Links between theory, method, practice. In D. Massey, & R. Meegan, *Politics and Methods*. London: Methuen.

Schmaltz, E. J. (2008). THE "Long Trek": The SS Population Transfer of Ukrainian Germans to the Polish Warthegau and Its Consequences, 1943-1944. *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia*, V31,N3 , 31 (3), 1-23.

Schmidt, K. (1995). Transforming Tradition: Women's work and the effects of religion and economics in two rural Mennonite communities, 1930, 1990. *PhD Thesis* . Binghamton: State University of New York.

Schroeder, W., & Huebert, H. T. (1996). *Mennonite Historical Atlas 2nd Edition*. Winnipeg, Canada: Springfield.

Seamon, D. (1980). Body-subject, time-space routines, and place-ballets. In A. Buttimer, & D. Seamon, *The Human Experience of Space and Place* (pp. 148-165). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Seamon, D., & Sowers, J. (2008). Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph. In P. Hubbard, R. Kitchen, & G. Vallentine, *Key Texts in Human Geography* (pp. 43-51). London: SAGE.

Shuval, J. (2000). Diaspora Migration: Definitional Ambiguities. *International Migration*, Volume 38, Number 5 , 41-56.

Silvey, R. (2004). Power, difference and mobility: Feminist advances in migration studies. *Progress in Human Geography* , 490-506.

Simonson, K. (1996). What kind of space in what kind of social theory? *Progress in Human Geography*, V20 , 494-512.

Skinner, E. P. (1999). The Dialect Between Diasporas and Homelands. In S. Vertovec, & R. E. Cohen, *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalisms*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

Smart, N. (1999). the Importance of Diasporas. In S. Vertovec, & R. E. Cohen, *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

Smith, C. H. (1981). *Smith's Story of the Mennonites, 5th Edition Revised and Enlarged by Cornelius Krahn*. Newton: Faith and Life Press.

Snyder, C. Arnold; Huebert Hecht, Linda A. (1996). *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: sixteenth Century Reforming Pioneers*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press.

Stake, R. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.

Staples, J. R. (2003). *Cross-Cultural Encounters on the Ukrainian Steppe*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Steiner, S. (2007 21-February). *Mennonites on the Niagara Peninsula*. Retrieved 2009 13-November from Mennonite Archives of Ontario:  
<http://grebel.uwaterloo.ca/mao/oralhistory/Hist.Mss9.21.html>

Steiner, S. (2007 21-February). *Russian Mennonite Immigrants Oral History Project*. Retrieved 2009 13-November from Mennonite Archives of Ontario:  
<http://www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca/mao/oralhistory/Hist.Mss.22.2htm>

Sylvey, R. (1999). Placing the Migrant. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, V89, N1 , 121-132.

Sylvey, R. (2004). Power, difference, and mobility: Feminist advances in migration studies. *Progress in Human Geography* , 490-506.

The Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society. (2008). *About Niagara Fruit Lands*. Retrieved 2009 2-October from The Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society: <http://people.becon.org/~pals/niagara.html>

Thrift, N. (1999). Steps to an ecology of place. In D. Massey, J. Allen, & P. Sarre (Eds.), *Human Geography Today* (pp. 295-322). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Toews, J. B. (1998). *Journeys: Mennonite Stories of Faith and Survival in Stalin's Russia*. Winnipeg: Kindred Productions.

Toews, J. B. (1988). *Letters From Susan: A Woman's View of the Russian-Mennonite Experience (1928-1941)*. North Newton, Kansas: Bethel College.

Toews, J. B. (1967). *Lost Fatherland: The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Russia, 1921-1927*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.

Toews, J. E. (1988). *Letters from Susan: A Woman's View of the Russian Mennonite Experience*. North Newton, Kansas: Bethel College.

Toews, Susanna; Megli, Helen(translator). (1976). *Trek to Freedom: The Escape of Two Sisters from South Russia During World War II*. Winkler, Manitoba: Heritage Valley Publications.

Toronto Daily Star (1944 8-APril). Russians Have Built Up big Niagara Fruit Colony. *Toronto Daily Star* , p. 2.

TourismNiagara. (2004). *Wine Statistics for Niagara (2003-4)*. Retrieved 2010 29-January from Tourism Niagara: <http://www.tourismniagara.com/home.html>

Tuan, Y.-F. (1976). Humanistic Geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* , 66 (2), 266-276.



Tuan, Y.-F. (1991). Language and the Making of Places: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81 (4), 684-696.

Tuan, Y.-F. (1997). *Space & Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Unruh, A. J., & van der Zijpp, N. (1959). *Unruh (Unru, Unrau, Onrouw) family*. Retrieved 2010 01-February from Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online: <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/U5788ME.html>

Unruh, B. H. (1936). Dutch Backgrounds of Mennonite Migration of the 16th Century to Prussia. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, V.X, 173-181.

Urry, J. (1999). Gender, Generation and Social Identity in Russian Mennonite Society. *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Volume 17, 94-105.

Urry, J. (2006). *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe--Russia--Canada, 1525-1980*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Urry, J. (1983). Who are the Mennonites? 241-262.

Urry, J. (1996). Writing about the "Russian Mennonites": Concerning Peoples, Places and Identities in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. *Ontario Mennonite History*, Volume XIV, Number 1, 1-5.

Van Hear, N. (1998). *New Diasporas: The mass exodus, dispersal and regrouping of migrant communities*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Vertovec, S. a. (1999). *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

Vintner's Quality Alliance, Ontario. (2009). *2009 Annual Report*. Retrieved 2009 2-October from Vintner's Quality Alliance, Ontario: <http://www.vqaontario.com/Home>

Visweswaran, K. (2000). ethnography. In L. Code, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories* (pp. 183-4). New York: Routledge.

Voth, N. J. (1991). *Mennonite Folkways and Traditions from South Russia, Volume II*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

Voth, N. J. (1990). *Mennonite Foods & Folkways from South Russia, Volume I*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

Wagler, P. (2010 March 22). Convert...or die. *Canadian Mennonite*, 14 (6), p. 9.

Wahlbeck, O. (2002). The concept of diaspora as an analytical tool in the study of refugee communities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Volume 28, Number-2, 221-238.

Walkom, T. (2008 23-April). *Ontario's Neglected Cornucopia*. Retrieved 2009 3-October from Toronto Star: <http://www.thestar.com/News/Ontario/article/417212>

Warkenten, J. (1959). Mennonite Agricultural Settlements of Southern Manitoba. *Geographical Review*, Volume 49, 342-368.

Weibe, D. V. (1974). *They Seek a Country: A Survey of Mennonite Migrations, 2nd Edition*. Freeman, South Dakota: Pine Hill Press.

Werbner, P. (2004). Chaordic Diasporas. In M. Ember, C. Ember, & I. E. Skoggard, *Encyclopedia of Diasporas* (pp. 544-551). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

Werbner, P. (2002). *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Werbner, P. (2000). The materiality of diaspora: Between aesthetics and "real" politics. *Diaspora*, 9 (1), 5-20.

Werner, H. (2005). Peoplehoods of the Past. *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, V23, 23-36.

Winland, D. (1993). The quest for Mennonite peoplehood: Ethno-religious identity and the dilemma of definitions. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, V.30, N.1, 110-137.

Yin, R. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.



**APPENDIX I: Comparison of Mennonite surnames (Russia 1912; Niagara 1980 & 2009)**

<b>Russia, 1912*</b>	<b>Niagara, 1980** (Number of households)</b>	<b>Niagara, 2009*** (Number of households)</b>
Penner ( 527)	Dueck, Dyck (36)	Peters (152)
Wiens (499)	Neufeld (28)	Klassen (139)
Dueck, Dyck 492)	Weins (25)	Penner (110)
Klassen (409)	Janzen (22)	Janzen (108)
Wiebe (434)	Goerz,Goertz, Goertzen (19)	Neufeld (107)
Janzen (292)	Klassen (18)	Wiens (99)
Enns (275)	Epp (15)	Wiebe (88)
Janz, Jantz (254)	Weibe (14)	Thiessen, Tiessen (87)
Froese (254)	Penner (13)	Friesen (85)
Regehr, Regier (253)	Enns (13)	Fast (77)
Harder (184)	Friesen (12)	Epp (67)
Ewert (166)	Reimer (11)	Reimer (60)
Pauls (163)	Theissen, Teissen ((11)	Sawatsky (60)
Neufeld (161)	Fast (10)	Warkentin (59)
Fast (157)	Regehr, Regier (10)	Goerz, Goertz, Goertzen (58)
Freisen (140)	Warkentin (9)	Enns (55)
Reimer (140)	Nickel (8)	Froese (46)
Epp (131)	Peters (8)	Unrau, Unruh (44)
Nickel (118)	Harder (7)	Harder (42)
Peters (107)	Froese (7)	Dueck, Dyck (42)
Thiesen, Tiessen	Pauls (6)	Nickel (39)
Warkentin	Rogalsky (4)	Dirksen, Derksen, Doerksen (34)
Dirksen, Derksen, Doerksen	Dirksen, Derksen, Doerksen (3)	Schroeder (34)
Funk	Sawatsky (3)	Voth (33)
Unger	Schroeder (3)	Unger (31)
Goerz,Goertz, Goertzen	Unrau, Unruh (3)	Funk( 28)
Kliewer	Janz, Jantz (2)	Regehr, Regier (23)
Schroeder	Kliewer (2)	Pauls (17)
Unrau, Unruh	Suckau (2)	Ewert (12)
Voth	Unger (2)	Janz (10)
Ratzlaff	Voth (2)	Rogalsky (7)
Rogalsky	Ewert (1)	Kliewer (1)
Sawatsky	Funk (1)	Suckau (1)
Suckau	Ratzlaff (1)	Ratzlaff (0)

\*Figures for Russia are from Smith, 1981, pp. 172. Smith reports a study of Russian-Mennonites in 1912, which accounts a total of 369 surnames, in a population of 10,000. Close to half of the population is accounted for in the first twenty-one names. The other half (348 names) is almost all comprised of one, sometimes two, families who joined the church in Prussia. The 34 names listed here are from Smith's original list. N.B. Smith neither clarifies whether the Russian figures are for households or families, nor the original source of the study.

\*\* Figures for Niagara, 1980, are from Friesen, 1984 as compiled by him from the Bell Telephone Directory.

\*\*\* Figures for Niagara, 2009, were compiled by the author using the Regional Municipality of Niagara-St. Catharines and Area Bell Telephone Directory, 2008-2009. The surnames enumerated are the same as those used by Smith. They are not exhaustive of the complete list of Russian Mennonite surnames appearing in the directory.

TORONTO DAILY STAR: FRUIT BELT BRINGS PROSPERITY TO RUSSIAN SETTLERS  
 Sat., April 8, 1944



ONE YEAR OLD when her parents came to Canada from the suburbs of Dniepropetrovsk, Soviet power plant site, Helen Klassen, 18, works in the community's capping factory.



WHEN JAKE TRIESEN arrived at Niagara-on-the-Lake to join the co-operative he had \$500 and shared a crude shed with livestock. Now he owns a farm which is valued at \$12,000.



RUSSIAN ABACUS is still used for figures in the co-operative's main office for Russian-born members. Lillian Wilkins, eight, is "accounting" with the gadget.

RUSSIANS HAVE BUILT UP BIG NIAGARA FRUIT COLONY

Special to The Star  
 Niagara-on-the-Lake, April 8.—A co-operative venture started by Russians less than seven years ago and now embracing more than 100 farmers and a \$218,000 business enterprise in 1943, has changed an unproductive grain district into a prosperous fruit area. Beginning with six persons the first year's turnover was only \$3,000.

Russian-born Canadians, some from the west and some from distant parts settled in this area extending to Virgil and beyond St. Catharines to Vineland. The two main places are the Niagara Township Fruit Co-operative, founded by A. Wilkins, manager, and the Niagara Canadian Co. headed by Peter Wall, a former Russian millionaire.

Wall, whose father built the collieries in southern Ontario, came to the Sea of Anzov with the present fruit. Founded by the settlers, which has 200 families. He bought large grain farms to use productive and exhausted soil. He subdivided this land and rented it in 10 to 12-acre lots to Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Czechs, many of whom were day laborers. Some were so tired by intense cultivation, hard labor, and frugal eating they have turned failure to success.

About five years ago as the fruit trees began to bear, three groups Russian-born farmers organized the idea of a co-operative to handle their own produce. They persuaded six other farmers to join them. The original agreement outlined allowed

RAKE LAWNS HERE SKI AT 'TALLY-HO'

While Toronto residents were raking their lawns and doing exterior spring chores, Good Friday visitors to Tally-Ho Inn, near Hardville, were skiing and snowshoeing over the trails. Although ideal conditions prevailed in the early hours of the day, but a strong sun softened the snow during the afternoon.

"The sun is shining today, but the skiing was good for those who got out early," said Colin Sharp, assistant manager. "By afternoon the snow was in a state of softness."

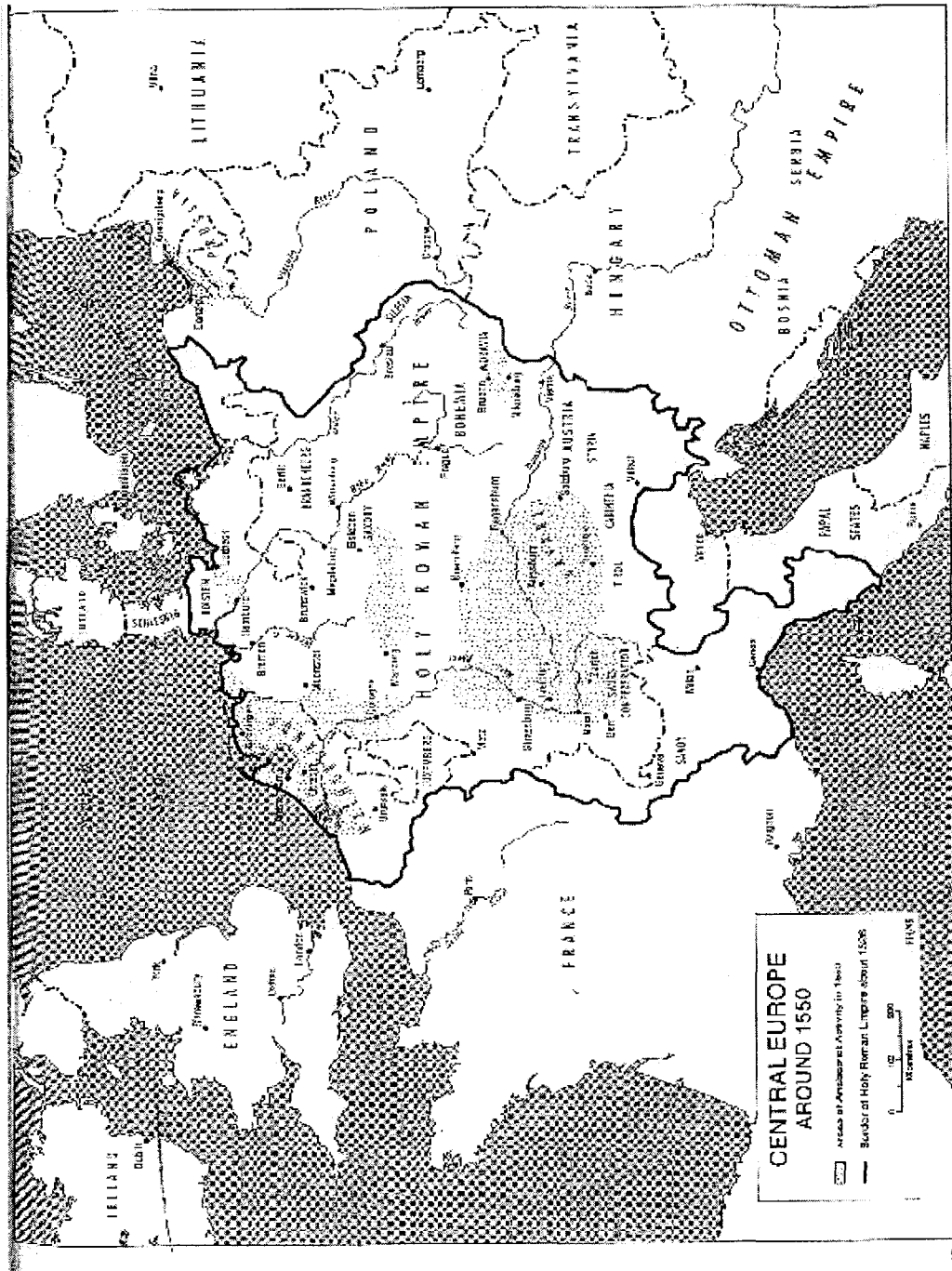
Conditions for skiers and snowshoers in the Hardville district are good by Mr. Sharp to be the best since 1943 for this time of the year.

"In 1940, when Easter came in March, we had good skiing, but that is the only Easter I can remember skiing then as we are having now," Mr. Sharp added.

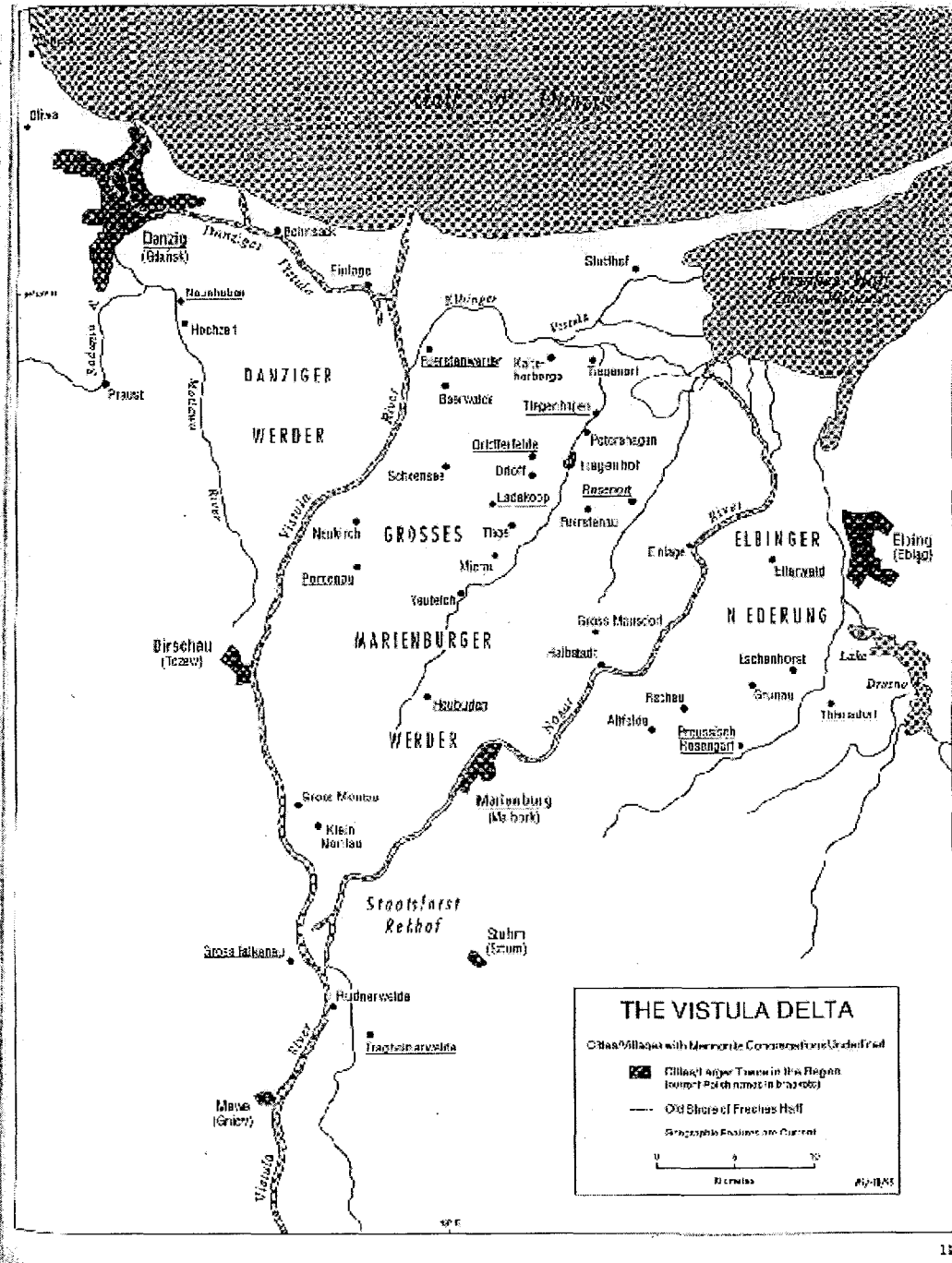


RUSSIAN-BORN A. Wilkins, right, manager of the Niagara Township Fruit Growers Co-operative, is one of the originals of the enterprise who struggled to get it into

APPENDIX III: Map of Central Europe, around 1550 (Schroeder & Huebert, 1996, p. 9)

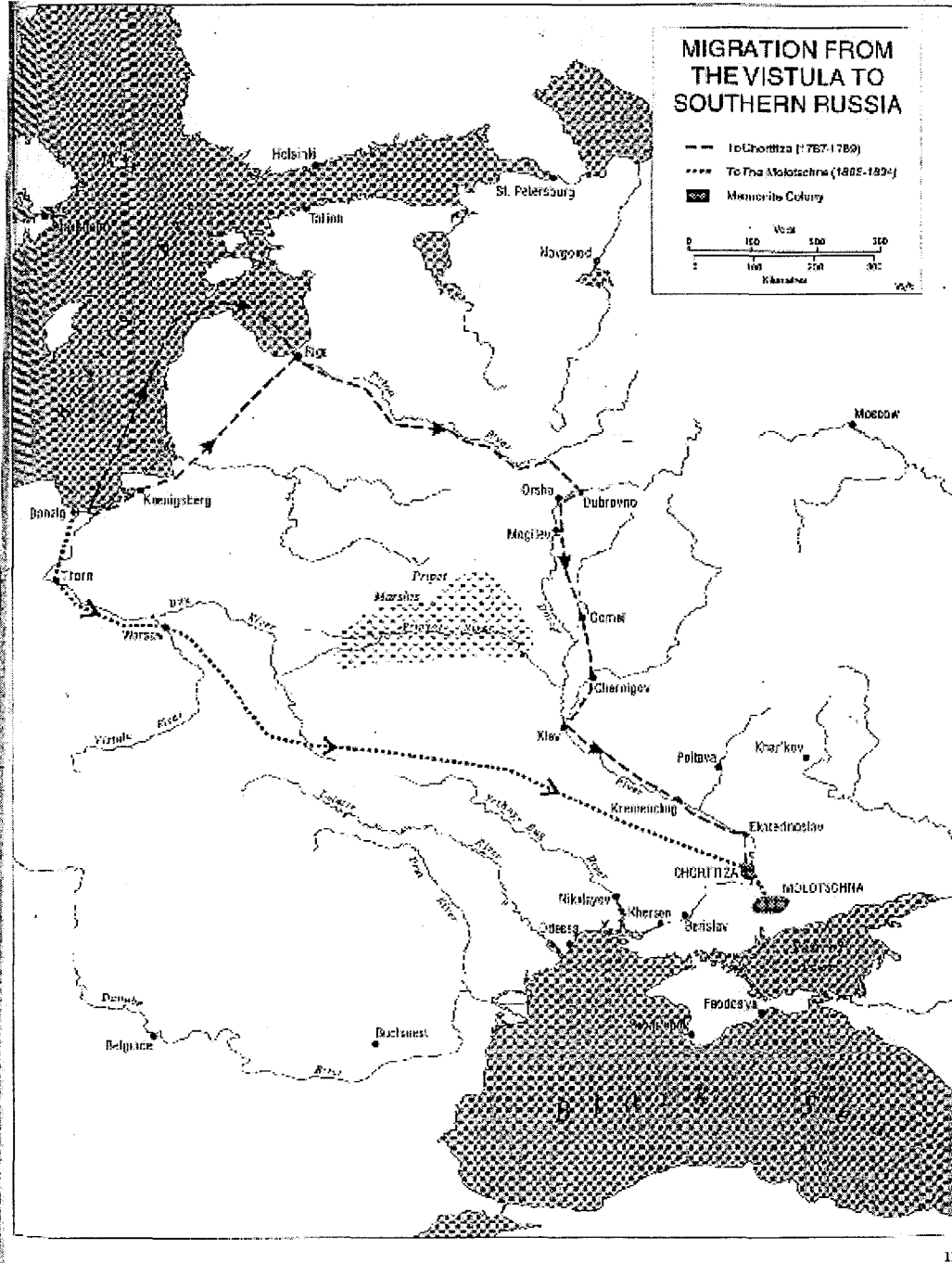


APPENDIX IV: Map of the Vistula Delta, West Prussia (Schroeder & Huebert, 1996, p. 11)



11

APPENDIX V: Map of Migration from Vistula Delta to South Russia (Schroeder & Huebert, 1996, p. 13)

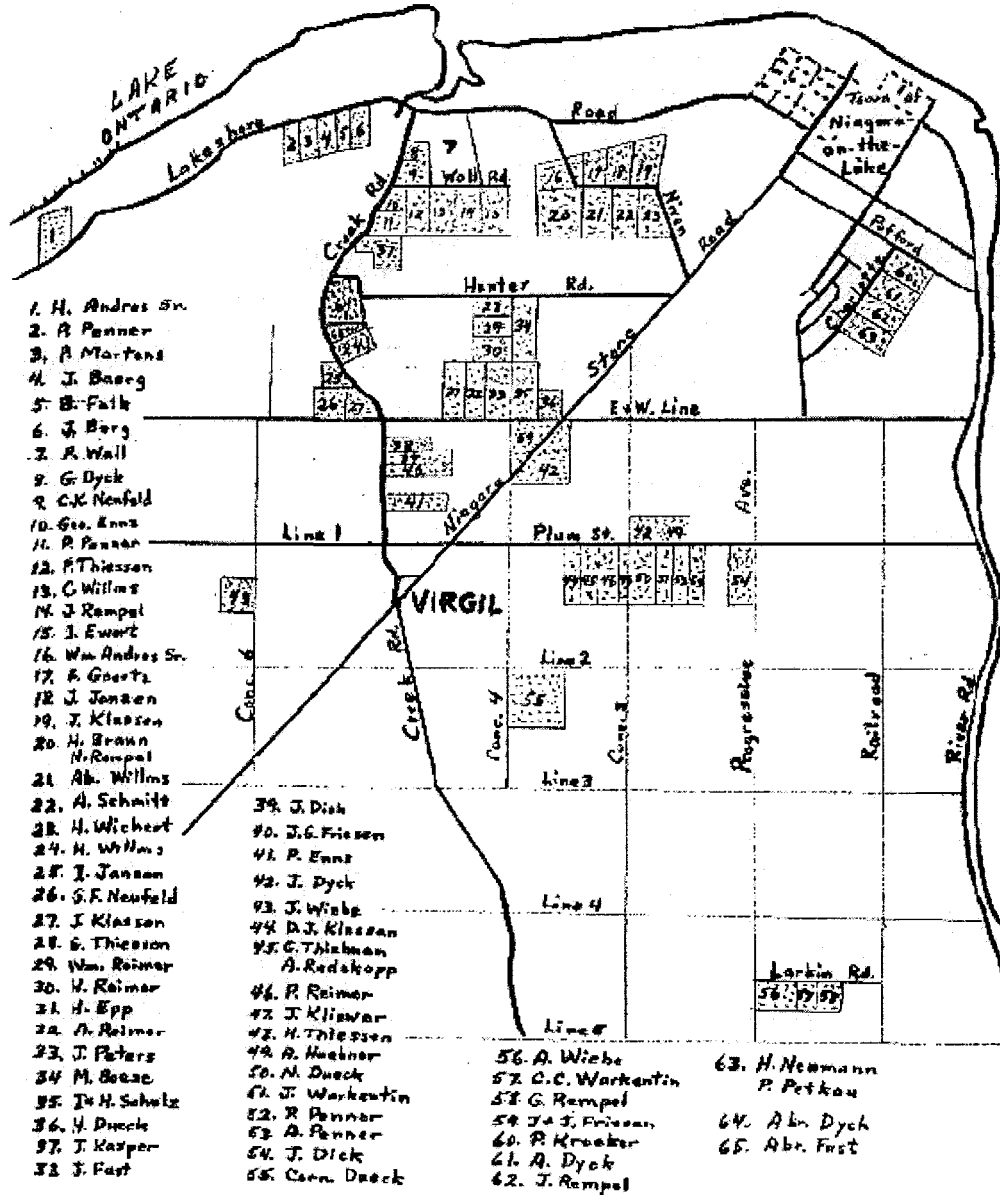






1984, p. 21)

## EARLIEST MENNONITE SETTLERS NEAR VIRGIL - 1934-39



**APPENDIX VIII: Comparisons of Mennonite population, acreage, farms**

**A. COMPARISON CHART OF MENNONITE POPULATION AND ACREAGE (1940, 1960, 1982)**

	Total Population of Niagara	Mennonite Population of Niagara	Mennonite Population as % of Total	Total Acreage of Niagara	Mennonite Acreage in Niagara	Mennonite Acreage as % of Total
1940	2745	442	17	21954	1263.25	5.75
1960	6947	1962	28.2	22155.25	2947.25***	13.3
1982	12186*	2400**	20**	31134*	4774.21***	15.3

FIGURES FROM ASSESSMENT OFFICE FILES – NIAGARA TOWNSHIP OFFICE

\* In 1970 the western boundary of Niagara Township was extended to the Welland Canal, increasing acreage by 40% and the population by 1,000 (including the towns of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Queenston and St. Davids).

\*\* Assessment rolls (1982) list 1,227 Mennonites as property owners or tenants but the total number of residents in each family is not given (as in 1960 and 1940). Thus, 2,400 is an estimate.

\*\*\*These figures include 235 lots with a total acreage of 150.65. Most of these are located in Virgil. (See APPENDIX VII: Map of earliest settlers near Virgil, 1934-1939).

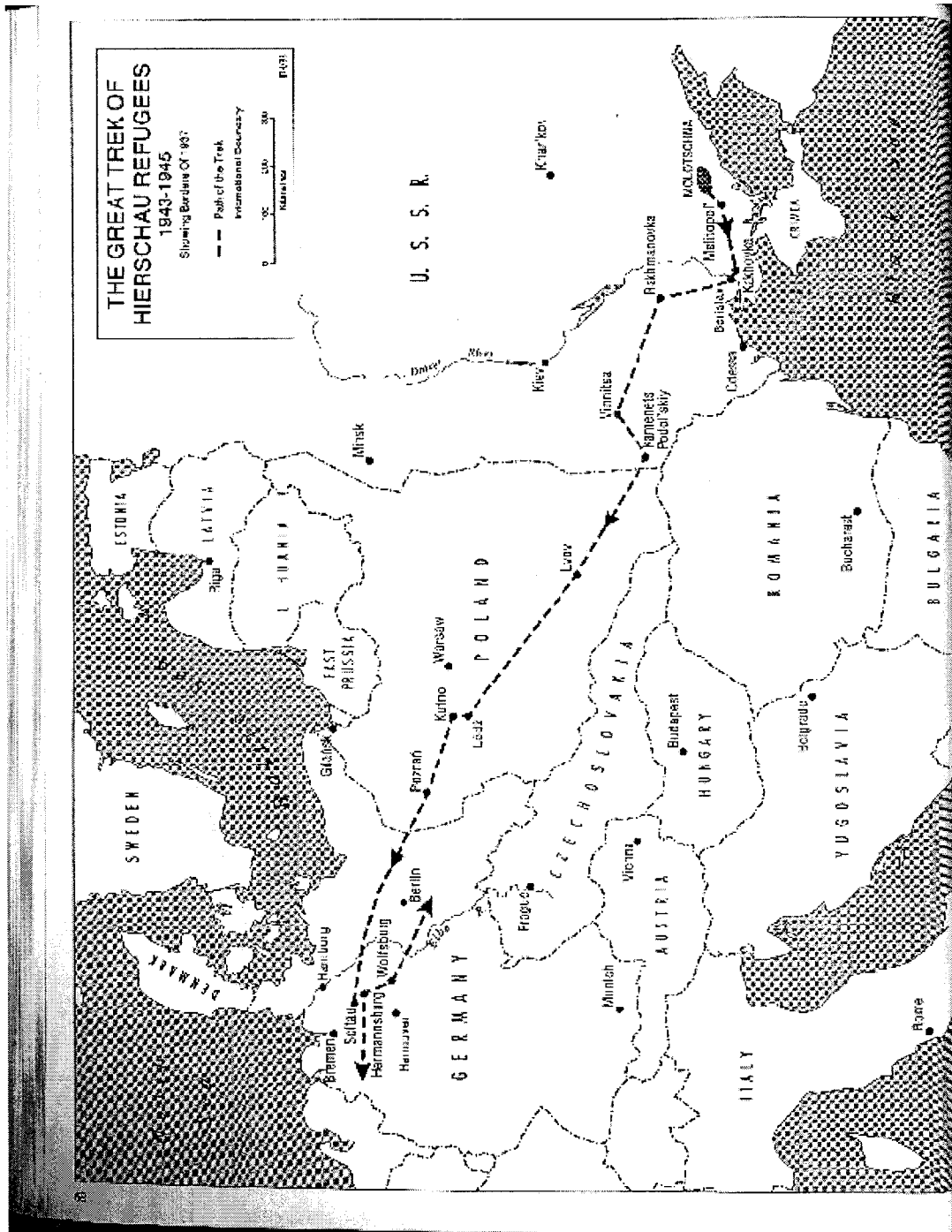
SOURCE: (Friesen C. A., 1984, p. 35)

**B. COMPARISON OF MENNONITE FARMS (1940, 1960, 1982)**

Number of acres	1940			1960			1982		
	# of farms	Total acres	% of total	# of farms	Total acres	% of total	# of farms	Total acres	% of total
1-4	1	4	.3	56	128.74	4.6	33	72	1.6
5-9	29	168	13.3	46	331.74	11.9	49	339.15	7.3
10-19	47	552.5	43.7	84	1063.5	38	65	784.24	17.0
20-29	9	216.25	16.3	21	498.62	17.8	16	362.88	7.9
30-39	1	35	2.8	5	170.5	6.1	9	321.14	6.9
40-49	0	0	0	5	223.5	8	6	287.71	6.2
50+	5	297.5	23.6	5	380	13.6	21	2457.44	53.1
<b>TOTALS</b>	92	1263.25	100.0	222	2796.6	100	199	4624.56	100.0
<b>AVERAGE SIZE</b>	<b>13.7</b>			<b>12.6</b>			<b>23.2</b>		

SOURCE: (Friesen C.A., 1984, p. 97)

APPENDIX IX: Map of Great Trek (Schroeder & Huebert, 1996, p. 68)



**APPENDIX X: Fluechtlinge Settlement Data, Niagara Peninsula 1947-1951\***

TOTAL FLUECHTLINGE TO CANADA, 1947-51: 7698 (Regehr, 1996, p.79)

ESTIMATED TOTAL TO PENINSULA: 419 (5.4%)

Peninsula Community	# Refugees received (Est.)
Niagara-on-the-Lake	107**
St. Catharines	104
Vineland	73
Virgil	53
Beamsville	49
Jordan	12
Jordan Station	11
Port Dalhousie	8
Vineland Station	2

**Notes on data**

Calculated by the author using Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Registration card data made available by the Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC), 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 (Conrad Stoesz, Archivist)

*Total # of entries on spreadsheet: 12, 191*

**Unusable entries:**

- *Can't make out destination: 4*
- *Domestics – no destination listed: 2*
- *Unlisted destination: 143*
- *Dates not given with entries for the above destinations: 22*
- **TOTAL UNUSABLE: 171**

\* These figures are estimates only, based on the best data available. Figures do not take into account internal migration, which took place to and from Niagara for economic, family or spiritual reasons after initial settlement. Calculations may also be skewed by the arrival of immigrants to Niagara from other locations (e.g., Paraguay, beginning around 1950).

\*\* This figure is corroborated by The United Mennonite Church 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 'yearbook' publication (1988), which on page 32 lists 107 new members from Russia via Germany after 1945.

## **APPENDIX XI: List of guiding questions for interviews**

### **A// GROUP A (Russlaender) – Generation 1 (**

#### **Born in Russia, emigrated as children/teens)...**

##### In Russia:

1. Where and when were you born?
2. Can you describe the area in which you lived – rural, urban, etc.?
3. What were your parents' occupations?
4. What was your kinship group at home – kids, grandparents, etc.?
5. What are your memories of your childhood in Russia? (any particularly vivid memories?)
6. Do you recall, as a young child, having thought about your goals and aspirations – what life might be like for you as an adult?
7. How did you learn about being Mennonite in Russia?
8. What religious exposure did you receive?
9. What was your knowledge of Canada as a young child in Russia?
10. What was your mother like?
11. Were there qualities that you admired about your mother? Expand.
12. What were your mother's roles & responsibilities in your home in Russia?
13. What was your father like?
14. Were there qualities that you admired about your father? Expand.
15. What were your father's roles and responsibilities in your home in Russia?
16. How do you imagine your parents would have described a 'good Mennonite man/woman'?
17. How bad had things gotten in Russia prior to your leaving?

##### Preparing to leave:

1. At what age did you leave Russia? What year?
2. How did you find out you had to leave?
3. What were your feelings about having to leave?
4. Was your destination known to you when you left?
5. What would your knowledge of Canada have been prior to emigration?
6. How did you travel? How many were in your group? Who traveled with you?
7. How was your departure arranged?
8. Do you remember what you brought?

##### En route:

1. What temporary stops did you make en route? Can you describe your experience en route?
2. (What were your mother's roles and responsibilities during this time? Your father's?)
3. (What roles and responsibilities did you have during this time? The other children?)
4. How would you describe the relationships among the women who emigrated with you? The men?
5. How would you describe the relationships among the children?
6. Did you feel a strengthened sense of community evolve en route?

##### In Canada (as children):

1. Where did you first settle and what is the story of your eventually coming to the Niagara Region? (Virgil? Vineland? Etc.)
2. What were your first impressions of the Niagara region?
3. How did the physical landscape compare to your previous homeland?
4. Did you attend Mennonite schools upon your arrival?
5. How did your parents support your family in NOTL?
6. How did family roles compare between Canada and Russia?
7. What role did the existing Mennonite community play in your life at this time? (Swiss)
8. Did you feel accepted by the existing Mennonite community? Why or why not? Did this change over time?
9. What similarities and differences existed between yourselves and the existing Mennonite community in NOTL? (Swiss Vs. Russlaender)
10. What was the nature of your association with the non-Mennonite community in NOTL?
11. How did this change over time?
12. How did you learn to speak English?

(as adults):

13. What was your highest level of education?
14. Did you marry – if so, at what age? (What was your wedding like?)
15. Did you have children? How many? Genders?
16. How did you and your spouse support your family?
17. What were your roles and responsibilities during this time in the home?
18. What were your spouse's roles and responsibilities during this time in the home?
19. How important was it for you to continue to speak your native language and teach it to your own children?
20. What traditions (customs) from your parent's home were most important for you to maintain? Were their challenges involved in this?
21. What new traditions (customs) did you embrace over time in Niagara?
22. What were your biggest challenges in this process?
23. How were your parents cared for as they aged?
24. To what extent did you maintain relationships with the groups you migrated with? How were these networks maintained?
25. Did your children attend Mennonite schools?
26. What levels of education have your children have received?
27. Was it important to you that your children marry within the Mennonite faith?
28. (Do you attend church services regularly?)
29. Where do your children live? Thoughts.
30. Where do you think of as 'home' now? In your heart, where do you belong?
31. What would you identify as your 'ancestral home'?
32. Has your notion of what is meant by 'home' changed over time? Expand.
33. Has your notion of what is meant by 'family' changed over time? Expand.
34. What are your hopes and aspirations for yourself?
35. What were/are your hopes and aspirations for your daughters and for your sons?
36. What are your thoughts about the roles women play today in society?
37. In the church?
38. Have you ever taken on a leadership role in the church yourself?
39. What would your ideal of a 'good Mennonite woman' to you today? A 'good Mennonite man'?
40. What is it about yourself that you might say, makes you 'most Mennonite'?
41. What are the qualities you admire about your children & grandchildren?
42. Can you comment on outcomes and opportunities you and your children have had because you left your native land and immigrated to the Niagara Peninsula?
43. What are you (most) proud of in your own life?
44. Have you ever returned to Russia? Why or why not?
45. Is there anything you miss about your natal land?
46. Do you contribute monetarily to relatives or philanthropic causes in Russia? Other?
47. To what extent have you participated politically in Canada?
48. How important is the preservation of your memories and thoughts to you?
49. Have you had other opportunities to record your story before?

## **B// GROUP A (Russlaender) – Generation 2**

### **Born in Canada...**

*As children:*

1. Where and when were you born? (If elsewhere in Canada, what were the circumstances of your internal migration to Niagara?)
2. What were your parents' occupations?
3. (What were the circumstances of their having left Russia?)
4. What was your kinship group at home in Niagara?
5. What are your memories of your childhood in Niagara?
6. Do you recall, as a child, what your goals and aspirations were – how you might have envisioned your life as an adult?
7. What was your religious education/ exposure? Did you attend Mennonite schools?

8. What was your mother like? Were their qualities you admired about her? (Did she work outside the home?) What were her domestic responsibilities?
9. What was your father like? Were their qualities you admired about him? What were his domestic responsibilities?
10. How do you think your parents would have described a 'good Mennonite man/woman'?
11. How would you describe the Mennonite community in Niagara while you were growing up?
12. What was the nature of your association with non-Mennonites? Did this change over time?

*As adults:*

1. What was your highest level of education?
2. Did you marry? If so, at what age? (What was your wedding like?)
3. Did you have children? How many? Genders?
4. How have you and your spouse supported your family?
5. What are/were your roles and responsibilities in the home? Your spouse?
6. How important was it for you to continue to speak German and teach it to your children?
7. What traditions/ customs from your parents' home were most important for you to maintain and why? Were their challenges involved in this?
8. What new traditions (customs) did you embrace over time in Niagara? Challenges involved in this?
9. How were your parents cared for as they aged?
10. How would you describe the nature of your association with non-Mennonites now?
11. Did your children attend Mennonite schools? Why or why not?
12. What levels of education have your children received?
13. What are their occupations?
14. Where do they live? Thoughts.
15. Was it important to you that your children marry Mennonites?
16. (Do you attend church regularly?) Do your children?
17. What would you identify as your homeland?
18. What were/are your hopes and aspirations for yourself? Your daughters? Sons?
19. What are your thoughts about gender roles in society today?
20. What would your ideal of a 'good Mennonite woman / man' be today?
21. What is it about yourself that you might say makes you 'most Mennonite'?
22. What qualities do you admire about your children and grandchildren?
23. What are you most proud of in your own life?
24. Have you ever travelled to Russia? Why or why not?
25. Germany?
26. Do you contribute monetarily to relatives of other philanthropic causes in Russia or through other Mennonite (or other) institutions?
27. To what extent have you participated politically in Canada?
28. How important is the preservation of your family's story, your memories and thoughts to you?
29. How were your parents cared for as they aged?
30. Did your parents record their story?

### **C// GROUP B (Fluechtlinge) - Generation 1**

**Born in Russia, emigrated as adults...**



*In Russia:*

1. What year were you born?
2. As a child, did you live in a rural or urban area?
3. What was your kinship group at home – kids, grandparents, etc. (*Who lived in your home?*)
4. What are your memories of your childhood? (*Do you have any particularly vivid memories of your childhood?*)
5. Can you recall what your dreams and goals were as a child?
6. What was your mother like? Were there qualities that you admired about your mother?  
Expand.
7. Did your mother work outside the home?
8. What was your father like? Were there qualities that you admired about your father?
9. What was your father's occupation?
10. Was your father taken by the Soviets?
11. What was your own highest level of education?
12. Did you receive a religious education – Mennonite schools, Sunday school, etc.?
13. If you had siblings, what was their education?
14. Did you marry in Russia? At what age did you marry? (Can you describe your wedding?)
15. Did you have children? How many? Genders?
16. After marrying, did you live in a rural or urban area? Was it the same area you grew up in?
17. Did you hold employment outside of the home?
18. As an adult, what were your roles & responsibilities in your home? Your spouse?
19. What religious education did your children receive in Russia before leaving?
20. Did you play any role in the religious education of your children? Expand.
21. What did you know about Canada back then?
22. (What would you say your goals and aspirations were as an adult in Russia?)

*Preparing to leave:*

1. What can you share with us about when your husband/father was taken?
2. At what age did you leave Russia? What year?
3. (How old were your children?)
4. What were your feelings about having to leave?
5. How much time was there to prepare?
6. Was your destination known to you when you left? Where did you imagine you might end up?
7. How did you network with others in preparing for your departure?
8. How was the departure arranged?

*En route:*

9. How did you travel? What did you bring?
10. What temporary stops did you make?
11. Who traveled with you? (Were there any adult men with you?)
12. What were your roles and responsibilities during the Trek?
13. (Can you describe your experiences *en route*?)
14. Did you feel a sense of community evolve between you and others on the Trek?
15. Did MCC play a role during your journey?
16. To what do you attribute your survival on the Trek?

*In Canada:*

1. What year did you arrive in Canada? What season?
2. Where did you first arrive (what city)?
3. How did you come to settle in Niagara?
4. Were there any relatives of yours already in Niagara?
5. What were your first impressions of Niagara?

6. How did the physical landscape compare to your previous homeland?
7. Were there things you missed about your homeland? Expand.
8. What were your first thoughts about the food available to you here?
9. How did you support your family in Niagara?
10. What role did the existing Mennonite community play in your life at this time? (*Russlaender, Swiss*)
11. What similarities and differences existed between yourselves and the existing Mennonite community in Niagara?
12. Did you feel accepted by the existing Mennonite community? Why or why not?
  - Did this change over time?
13. Were there opportunities for you to share your story with the Niagara Mennonites who had not experienced your hardship?
14. What was the nature of your association with the non-Mennonite community in NOTL?
  - Did this change over time?
15. How important was it for you to continue to speak your native language?
16. What traditions (customs/rituals) were most important for you to maintain?
  - What were the biggest challenges in this?
17. What new traditions (customs) did you embrace over time?
  - What were the biggest challenges in this?
18. How did you learn to speak English?
19. Has your notion of what is meant by 'home' changed over time? Expand.
20. (Where is 'home'?)
21. Has your notion of what is meant by 'family' changed over time? Expand.
22. Has your notion of roles that identify with women and men changed over time?
23. To what extent did you maintain relationships with the groups you migrated with? How were these networks maintained?
24. What were your hopes and aspirations for your daughters?
25. What were your hopes and aspirations for your sons?
26. Was it important to you that your children marry within the Mennonite faith?
27. What are your thoughts about the roles women play in your community today, and in society at large?
28. What are the qualities you admire about your children & grandchildren?
29. What are you (most) proud of in your own life?
30. Have you ever returned to Russia? Why or why not?
31. Are there things you miss about Russia?
32. Can you talk about what you feel makes you 'most Mennonite'?
33. With the gift of hindsight, do you see any opportunities that you and your families have had because you were forced to leave your homeland, (and because you and the children survived the Trek)?
34. Do you contribute monetarily to relatives in Russia, or other Mennonite aid programs?
35. How important to you is the preservation of your stories and thoughts?

**D// GROUP B (*Fluechtlinge*) - Generation 2**

Born in Russia, emigrated as children/ teens...

*In Russia:*

1. Where and when were you born?
2. Can you describe the area in which you lived – rural, urban, etc.?
3. What were your parents' occupations?
4. What was your kinship group at home – kids, grandparents, etc.?
5. What are your memories of your childhood?
6. Do you recall, as a young child, having thought about your goals and aspirations?
7. How did you learn about being Mennonite in Russia?
8. What religious exposure did you receive?
9. What was your knowledge of Canada as a young child in Russia?
10. What was your mother like?
11. Were there qualities that you admired about your mother? Expand.
12. What were your mother's roles & responsibilities in your home?
13. How do you imagine your mother would have described a 'good Mennonite woman'? (NB: the Fluechtlinge interviews were conducted at the Master's level when this project only involved women and the gendered aspect did not include attention to masculinities and femininities in tandem. Were I to re-do the project I would include also 'good Mennonite man' here.)
14. What was your father like?
15. Were there qualities that you admired about your father? Expand.
16. What were your father's roles and responsibilities in your home?
17. Was your father taken by the soviets? What do you recall about this event? Your mother's reaction? (Were you ever reunited?)

*Preparing to leave:*

9. At what age did you leave Russia? What year?
10. How did you find out you had to leave?
11. What were your feelings about having to leave?
12. Was your destination known to you when you left?
13. How did you travel? How many were in your group? Who traveled with you?
14. Were there adult men among you?
15. Do you remember what you brought?

*En route:*

1. What temporary stops did you make *en route*? Can you describe your experience *en route*?
2. What were your mother's (father's?) roles and responsibilities during this time?
3. What roles and responsibilities did you have during this time? The other children?
4. How would you describe the relationships among the women on the Trek?
5. How would you describe the relationships among the children on the Trek?
6. Did you feel a sense of community evolve *en route*?
7. So many did not survive the Trek from Russia. Why do you think you did?

*In Canada (as children):*

1. What were your first impressions of the Niagara region?
2. How did the physical landscape compare to your previous homeland?
3. Did the MCC play a role with regard to your arrival and settlement?
4. Did you attend Mennonite schools?
5. How did your mother support your family in Niagara?
6. Did your mother remarry?
7. What role did the existing Mennonite community play in your life at this time? (*Russlaender*, Swiss)
8. Did you feel accepted by the existing Mennonite community? Why or why not? Did this change over time?

9. What similarities and differences existed between yourselves and the existing Mennonite community in Niagara?
10. What was the nature of your association with the non-Mennonite community in NOTL?
11. How did this change over time?
12. How did you learn to speak English?

(as adults):

13. What was your highest level of education?
14. Did you marry – if so, at what age? (What was your wedding like?)
15. Did you have children? How many? Genders?
16. How did you and your spouse support your family?
17. What were your roles and responsibilities during this time in the home?
18. What were your spouse's roles and responsibilities during this time in the home?
19. How important was it for you to continue to speak your native language and teach it to your own children?
20. What traditions (customs) from your mother's home were most important for you to maintain? Were their challenges involved in this?
21. What new traditions (customs) did you embrace over time in Niagara?
22. What were your biggest challenges in this process?
23. How was your mother (father?) cared for as she (he?) aged?
24. To what extent did you maintain relationships with the groups you migrated with? How were these networks maintained?
25. Did your children attend Mennonite schools?
26. What levels of education have your children have received?
27. Was it important to you that your children marry within the Mennonite faith?
28. (Do you attend church services regularly?)
29. Where do your children live? Thoughts.
30. Has your notion of what is meant by 'home' changed over time? Expand.
31. Where do you think of as home?
32. Has your notion of what is meant by 'family' changed over time? Expand.
33. In your heart, where do you belong?
34. What are your hopes and aspirations for yourself?
35. What were/are your hopes and aspirations for your daughters and for your sons?
36. What are your thoughts about the roles women play today in society?
37. In the church?
38. Have you ever taken on a leadership role in the church yourself?
18. What is a 'good Mennonite woman to you, today? (NB: the Fluechtlinge interviews were conducted at the Master's level when this project only involved women and the gendered aspect did not include attention to masculinities and femininities in tandem. Were I to re-do the project I would include also 'good Mennonite man' here.)
39. What is it about yourself that you might say makes you 'most Mennonite'?
40. What are the qualities you admire about your children & grandchildren?
41. Can you comment on outcomes and opportunities you and your children have had because you left your native land and immigrated to the Niagara Peninsula?
42. What are you (most) proud of in your own life?
43. Have you ever returned to Russia? Why or why not?
44. Is there anything you miss about your natal land?
45. Do you contribute monetarily to relatives or causes in Russia? Other?
46. How important is the preservation of your memories and thoughts to you?

## APPENDIX XII: List of guiding topics for focus group meetings

### A) Focus Group: *Fluechtlinge, Generation 2*

1. Following interviews, what questions remain to be answered from this group?

2. DIASPORA criteria (Cohen):  
- go through each one and allow for comments

- **Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions.**
- **A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements.**
- An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even its creation
- The development of a return movement that gains collective approbation
- **A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate.**
- A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least, or the possibility that another calamity will befall the group.
- **A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement**
- **The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (Cohen, 1997:26)**

3. 'Cultural' Vs. 'victim' diaspora...
- your impressions of my impressions (cross-check)
  - discussion
4. Identity: Who are you?

### B) Focus Groups: *Fluechtlinge/Russlaender, Generation 3*

1. What is a 'good Mennonite woman / man' ?
2. What makes you 'most Mennonite'?
3. Cultural traditions
4. Geography & Community – Niagara Region
5. Education & work (paid & unpaid)
6. Gender roles/responsibilities – family, community, church, changes over time
7. Faith
8. Outcomes & Opportunities – for you as 3<sup>rd</sup> generation

9. Hopes & Dreams – childhood / adults / for children

10. Legacy of mobility

11. 'Homeland'

12. 'Diaspora' – cultural hybridity, connections

13. Who are you?