

Eleanor Betler

Where: Eleanor Betler's Kitchen, Helvetia, WV

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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Eleanor Betler was born in Buckhannon, West Virginia in 1940 and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. She spent her summers in Helvetia at the farm of her maternal grandparents, James and Anna Merkli McNeal. She married Howard “Bud” Betler in 1961. The couple moved to a hilltop farm in Helvetia and raised four children. All the good cooks, many of them relatives of Mr. Betler taught Mrs. Betler about canning, preserving, cooking and baking. She was especially interested to learn the skills of butchering and preserving meat, and making sausage. Mrs. Betler loves the Swiss traditional baking but also Appalachian ways of some neighbors. She grinds her own flour for baking bread. At Fasnacht time she invites neighbors and friends to make the hosablatz and rosettes just to keep the tradition alive. She also preserves this history by collecting stories, music, and photographs for *The Helvetia Archives*.

This interview is part of a series of interviews conducted with foodways practitioners in Helvetia, West Virginia, as part of the Helvetia Foodways Oral History Project in partnership with the Southern Foodways Alliance. Learn more: <https://www.southernfoodways.org/oral-history/helvetia-west-virginia/>

[Transcriber's note: recording begins after the interviewee, Eleanor Betler, has already begun speaking...]

00:00

Eleanor Betler:

...were the Merklis, and, uh, her mother's maiden name was Bopp and they were from...Switzerland. And they came here in about 1872, I believe, and so there have been people, descendants from there living here ever since.

00:18

Emily Hilliard:

Mm-hmm. Um...[laughs]. You can just ta-, this is... you know, it's not going to be for a radio
00:30

piece or anything, so that, you can just...we can be informal. Um, I actually think I missed the first part, so I'll have you say that again when we're done. But, so how long have *you* lived in Helvetia?

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EB:

I've lived here, um, since I was married in 1961. So, I've been here, this, um, this fall it was fifty-four years that I've lived here on the farm.

00:52

EH:

Um, and your family, but you-you, you would visit when you were little?

00:57

EB:

01:00

I came here every summer, and begged to stay. [Emily laughs] I never wanted to go back to the city, I was raised in Cleveland, Ohio, and, although it was lovely at the time, and a nice place to be, I was a Helvetia girl...all my life. I always wanted to live here and never thought I could, so it was like a dream come true to be able to live here.

01:10

EH:

Uh, so what were the things that you liked as a child that made you not want to leave?

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EB:

Well, they had a dance, probably every Saturday night, or it seemed like that. We had a lot of
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dancing. Um...there were community picnics, uh...church was fun. Uh...working on my grandmother and grandfather's farm it wasn't seem, didn't ever seem like work to me. I mean, I got hot and I got tired and I got sunburned, but I didn't care because I liked it that well. [Mm-hmm] So, I'd say, uh, the Swiss events at the time, and the dancing, was the best recreation. That's what I really liked.

02:00

EH:

Uh-huh. And what were the farm chores that you would do?

02:02

EB:

Oh my! [sighs] Rake hay, they made hay with horses, no tractor or anything, so the kids would end up going out and rake, raking the hay into hay shocks, so that it could dry, after it was dry. And then they'd pick them up and make hay stacks with it, or put it in the barn. And we went from farm to farm, whatever little neighborhood of Helvetia you lived in, four or five farmers always helped each other. And so you got to know the other kids, and, and you'd go swimming, the river was right there. Um, it was just, uh...very wholesome and sure was a lot of fun.

02:39

EH:

Mm-hmm. And what do you remember eating? What would your grandparents make?

02:43

EB:

Ah! My grandmother made, um...uh, wilted lettuce salad. We had that a lot, because she had a big garden, she was quite a gardener. Uh, salsify, which is oyster plant. [Mm] Um...um, a

03:00
lot of vinegary dishes, I remember that. Um, I just loved the vegetables. They all had such good taste and life to 'em, because I was used to eating bought-canned vegetables. [clears throat] Made all the difference, and, uh... My aunt, uh, lived with my grandparents at the time and she was, she was quite a baker. [Mm-hmm] And she would make rosettes in the summer time and we would help her. And I can remember when I was nine, she asked me what kind of birthday

03:30
cake I wanted. And I wanted a chocolate cake with blue frosting, and silver sprinkles on it. And [specific!] she just shuddered and said, "who would eat blue frosting?" [They both laugh] But I got that for my ninth birthday. [laughs] Um, they smoked their own meat, their bacon, and, um, they always had canned sausage balls [oh, what is that], which is a delightful food. Well, you season sausage and roll it into small meatballs and, and can it, and it makes its own broth,

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and then when you want to use them, you just open them up and take out, you know...heat them up.

04:04

EH:

And was that beef or pork?

04:06

EB:

That was pork. [OK] They canned beef too. [Mm-hmm] But I especially liked the sausage balls. It was really good. And everybody around here had kind of their own...maybe their own formula

[sighs] of seasoning, uh, sausage. Whether it was smoked or whether it was fresh, they, uh, seasoned it the same way, and so it was whatever the combination the family particularly
04:30

liked, but it was mostly...sage and, uh, marjoram, maybe garlic, lot of pepper, and some salt [mm-hmm], that was the major things. [uh-huh] And when I made sausage myself I didn't like sage as well as thyme, and it's in the same family and I would put thyme in my sausage [yeah]. [clears throat]

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EH:

So...were...those grandparents were Swiss, or Swiss-German?

04:55

EB:

My grand- [clears throat], my grandmother was, and her family. My grandfather was Irish.

05:00

EH:

Hmm! [laughs] So, were the recipes, were they mostly Swiss? Or Irish? Or a combination?

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EB:

Oh no, Swiss. I mean, she just cooked like her mother cooked evidently [uh-huh]. Um, and, of course, you know, you learn to cook what your kids'll eat and all. And my...my grandmother, my great-grandmother, evidently, cooked with a lot of caraway seed. [Hmm] And my mother 'til the day she died would not, she wouldn't eat anything with caraway seed in it, even if you bought
05:30

a good Russian bread, she would not eat the caraway seeds. She said, "I had to eat 'em, my grandmother put them in *everything*." And I said, "What do mean, everything?" She said, "Carrots, for heaven's sake!" [Emily laughs] And she just didn't like it, you know? [Yeah] So, the only thing I put caraway seed in is when I make rye bread.

05:47

EH:

Uh-huh. Why do you think she put it in everything?

05:51

EB:

Swiss people do this in a lot of recipes. [Oh, OK] A *lot* of recipes.

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EH:

Hmm, I didn't know that.

05:56

EB:

Uh-huh.

05:57

EH:

06:00

Um...and what did your parents make...at home? Were they carrying on some of those Swiss dishes?

06:07

EB:

Mm, not so much. Not so much. Uh, we didn't have, um...well, we always had corn-, or we had a lot of cornbread at my grandmother's and my mother was allergic to corn, so I never had cornbread but once or twice 'til I got married. And, uh...you know, one of the dishes around here

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that's, has been popular forever was beans and cornbread. [Right] And, after I was married about three years, I made beans and cornbread for supper one night and my husband said, "Oh! This is so good! This is wonderful! Why didn't you ever make it before?" I said, "Well, I never thought of it, why?" "Well, it's one of my favorite things!" And I said, "Why didn't you tell me?" Yeah. I just didn't know that [right], you know? [Uh-huh] But my mother just, no, it

07:00
was...nothing fancy except desserts. And she learned to make desserts from the Slavic people in our neighborhood, so, we had mostly Slavic-type [mm-hmm], you know, pastries and things at home.

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EH:

So what, what's that?

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EB:

Um. Like, uh, nut horns, it's a real buttery pastry that you make with a lot of chopped nuts in, and roll it out like a pie dough, and cut in, uh, pie fashion, but out of, uh, circle that would be like twelve or fourteen inches around, you would make...forty slices in there. So then you roll them

07:30
up and they made a little, like a croissant. [OK] And they're real good. And, um, cream cheese pastries. Just a lot of rich [mm-hmm], rich, nice things. But she, I can't remember...the only thing Swiss and it's in our Swiss cookbook, is she made creamed spinach. When we ate spinach, uh, she would, in a skillet, take a little bit of maybe bacon grease and, um, a little bit of flour and

08:00
then pour some of the spinach...and I don't think she put onions in it, uh, a little bit of the spinach broth [mm-hmm] in that [uh-huh], and just...it just, it wasn't like a soppy cream sauce, it was just that it had that in it.

08:12

EH:

Like a little roux?

08:13

EB:

Yes, sort of. Uh-huh, like a white sauce, it was in it. But it wasn't, you know, like when you eat creamed peas, there's more cream than there are peas, but in the spinach it isn't like that.

08:23

EH:

08:30

Huh. That's interesting. I was just reading a Laurie Colwin book, and, it's called *Home Cooking, and The Writer in the Kitchen*, and she talks so much about creamed spinach and I'd never had it before.

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EB:

It's good! [sounds good]. And when I fixed it here, my husband said, "Why did you do that?" So evidently, that wasn't anything *he* had ever had at home, but my grandparents made it, and my mom.

08:48

EH:

And, uh, the cornbread that you made and the cornbread around here, is that sweet, or is it, is there no sugar in it?

08:54

EB:

09:00

I would say it had a little sugar, it's not real sweet, like Jiffy mix [right], you know? It's, it wasn't like some Southern corn breads don't have any sugar [right], but this was a little bit [OK], had a little bit of sugar in it.

09:05

EH:

Yeah, I had some cornbread...I guess it was the first cornbread I had in West Virginia, and...'cause I grew up in Indiana eating Jiffy mix, because it's made in Michigan, and um...so to me, I grew up with sweet cornbread, but then when I moved to the south...and, you know, people said,

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"cornbread should not be sweet! If it's sweet, it's cake!" And then I had cornbread in West Virginia in Charleston, and it was sweet, and I was like, what?!?

[They laugh]

09:34

EB:

It's a real thing here! [They laugh]

09:36

EH:

So I was just wondering what the...standard cornbread is...here if there is one?

09:42

EB:

People don't put a *lot* of sugar, but it always has a little sugar...

09:45

EH:

I like a little sugar in it.

09:46

EB:

..uh-huh, yeah, I do too. Jiffy mix, I like pancakes made out of it, [mm-hmm] because I don't get along well with white flour. And [yeah] so I just make corn cakes and...everybody that comes

10:00

will "oo, oo, oo!" And I say, "well, you know, a quarter for a box of Jiffy mix!" [They laugh]

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EH:

That blue box! Um... And so, you and your husband ran a farm.

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EB:

Mm-hmm.

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EH:

So what did you have on the farm?

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EB:

We raised hogs. And, um, and beef cattle, and had our own milk cow, and, uh, of course, you, that was nice, having all the dairy products and, and we raised sheep. And, and it was just a

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blend of all four animals and then as we got older, we didn't have cows, because they're a little bit harder to handle, so we just raised sheep and, and, uh, used the wool and had wool blankets...made.

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EH:

And those are the wool blankets, or you sent the wool away to be made?

10:46

EB:

Yeah, we sold it to, uh, or to, uh, we sent it to McAusland's Woolen Mill in Prince Edward Island. [OK] And there was, it was a small concern, so it was real nice working with them. [Mm-

11:00

hmm] We did that for...oh, I don't know. Probably more than ten years.

11:02

EH:

Wow. Um, and where did you sell your beef and...did you sell your milk, or was it mostly...

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EB:

Oh, no, we used it all. We always just had one milk cow. [OK] And whenever we, we had four kids at home, so there was six of us that were milk drinkers and we drank over a gallon a day. And, um...we had, always had a good dairy cow, so...we had a lot of cream, we had our own

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butter, we made Helvetia cheese, we made cottage cheese, so it was, you know, an important staple for us.

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EH:

Mm-hmm. So, um, this is for West Virginia Folklife and the Southern Foodways Alliance, um, so people, you know, maybe some people listening to this will know about Helvetia cheese, but could you, could you explain what that is and what recipe is being used?

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EB:

Well, Helvetia cheese is, um, is a hard cheese, kind of like Swiss cheese. Um, it doesn't have big

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round holes in it like Swiss cheese, but, the holes are a little bit smaller. I've been told by people from Switzerland that it tastes like the cheese made in the very highest Alps. And, um, say you, we'll say we're gonna make a four-pound cheese, or three and a half to four-pound

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cheese, so you need about five gallons of milk. And...in the evening you would...pour, um, about two and a half gallons of milk in a, a granite canner [mm-hmm], a small granite canner. Pretty small...

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EH:

In a crock.

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EB:

No. [No.] Like a pot that had [OK] enamel, it was enamel, with blue and white speckles [oh, yeah-yeah! mm-hmm] Yeah. So you would, uh, put about two and a half gallons of milk in there and set it where it'll stay cool...for the night. Not in the refrigerator, but cool. So in the morning you skimmed that off. The cream. You took the heavy cream off of that. As much

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cream off as you could get. And then you poured, you strained the morning's milk and put it in there. So you had half skim milk and half rich milk. [OK] And that's how you would make

it. And you heated it up to, like, baby bottle temperature, I don't remember the temperature, but you heat it up to that, and, um, you always were washed up to the armpits because you stirred it

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with your hand, you learned to, you learned the feel of it with your hands. [Clears throat] So you would heat it up that much and you would put rennet in it. And what rennet is...made from is the...lining of a calf's, calf's stomach that has never eaten grass. [Huh] So the calf is still on its...on its mother, y-you know [mm-hmm], nursing on the mother. And that congeals it, and, and, and
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it, it gets thick in about an hour and a half...and then you cut in one-inch cubes, and, um, so the, the curds start to lift a little bit and loosen up. And, um, the whey, you can see the whey, kind of a yellow, milky whey, and then you stir it again with your hand for...seems like it was about forty-five minutes, and I don't remember the temperature, it might have been higher than one hundred and twelve degrees, you know [mm-hmm], one hundred and twelve, one hundred and twenty, I don't know. But, um...you just, you stirred that and if there were
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big clumps you just...mashed them, kind of cut them with your finger [OK] and your thumb. And, um, to test it, you would put the, pick up a handful of curds and squeeze it a little bit, not hard. Just so that it would go together. And... shake it. [Mm-hmm] And, if it still came apart, but it was, you could tell that it *could* hold together, then you were done. [Huh] And
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so you would stir it just a lit-, shut the fire off, stir it a little bit, and then separate the curds from the whey. You'd pour off the whey, with a cheesecloth and, and then, you lined, um... You lined a cheese mold, which was usually made out of poplar [mm-hmm], so it wouldn't have any taste to it [OK]. You lined that with a cheesecloth and then you lifted your curds out and put them in
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that and filled the corners and put it in there and flopped the cheesecloth, uh, over it, and put a block that fit down inside of your mold, that was to make the top mold [mm-hmm]. And so it had to drain for a long time, and at first it, you know, you'd put your, you either had a little stool that had a groove, on the cheeseboard, you'd put your mold on that and it would drain into a pan. Or, I just did it on my kitchen sink, and just had a, a drain, uh, wooden drain thing to go into the sink. And you would usually leave it in the, in the mold for...overnight [mm-hmm]. You know, or at least several hours, depending on what time of day you were making it. And then, you took the cheesecloth off and, uh, rubbed it with uh, uh, not iodized salt, you know, [uh-huh] like canning salt. [Yeah, yeah] Kosher salt or something like that. You would rub that over it, and set it on a plate and, uh, see if it was, if it was draining too much, you'd still leave it upstairs,
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uh, covered. But otherwise you would put it your cheese cupboard. And then every day you turned it. And that kept the...conformation of the shape. [Mm-hmm] And you had to cure it, mmm, I'd say three weeks before you ate it [uh-huh]. And you could keep it longer than that, but three weeks, it was good, it was, it was ready to eat. It was hard. And, uh, some people actually put the salt in the curds instead of salting it, but I like to rub it, rub it on the outside because it
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seemed to make a nicer rind.

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EH:

Mm. And so, did most families make that...

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EB:

Everybody.

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EH:

...cheese.

17:09

EB:

Yeah. I don't know anybody that didn't make cheese because it was, it was so good. [Yeah] You know? And then, uh, people wanted to buy it. You know? [Mm-hmm] But whenever the early settlers made it, make, made it, there were three...either two or three cheese houses. One up here

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is right up here on Hilltop, at Alvin Burky's. And that's a lovely place, just to go and see that. And then, the Teuscher one is down, but it was down in Helvetia. And people...those farmers would put a brenta, which is a, a tin, I don't know, it's tin? It's some kind of metal, I think it's tin, thing on their back, oh, like a rectangular...bucket sort of [mm-hmm] that was...three feet tall,

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and about...eight inches wide. And it had a lid and it had straps on it. So if I was going to take my cheese and my milk over to Burky's and sell them and let them make the cheese [uh-huh], then the man would strap it on his back and take the brenta over there and, and pour it there. [Uh-huh] And that's, I guess, they did that...with the early settlers maybe that's just the best they could do, was do it in quantity, and, and then again, maybe they did it that way in Switzerland, so they just did it [yeah] that way. And down at the museum we have a couple

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brentas up there, and I have one. I mean, [cool] they, evidently everybody who had to sell milk, had them, because you, you see them. It's, it's common here.

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EH:

Uh-huh. And why do think that was the standard recipe? Is that what is made in the Cantons?

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EB:

Yeah. Yeah. Up in, uh, the Simmental area of Switzerland, that's, uh, toward Bern, that's where most of families from here [mm-hmm] came, from that area. And, I guess, that was just how

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they did it. [Wow] And these people weren't farmers. I don't think anybody who came here was a farmer. [Emily laughs] They had a shoemaker and a milliner and, and a businessman, and, and a storekeeper, and, and everything. But you, it was, it's always been a subsistence existence. [Mm-hmm] Always.

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EH:

So is that mostly what your farm was aside from selling the beef?

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EB:

Well, [sighs], we st-, um. When you farm, you always sell your, like your, like the calves, you
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know, [yeah] in a year's time, uh, if you sell them in, uh, they get to be, I forget what the weight
is anymore, say, say 300 pounds, it's a veal and you get a lot of money for that. [Mm-hmm] You
keep them for a year, you've got way more weight on them, and then you get baby beef price,
you know. [Mm-hmm] And with lambs, um, you sell the lambs, oh I guess they're six or seven
months old, so you get a good price for the lamb. The wool isn't worth much. But, you have to
20:00

sheer 'em [mm-hmm], you know, but you don't shear the lambs, you know. [Right, yeah] And,
uh, pigs were fun to raise. I loved raising baby pigs. And, and you, well you just got the same
customers with every year, they'd call up, "Do you have baby pigs?" You know? [Uh-huh] And,
uh, it was a wonderful way to raise kids. [Yeah. I bet.] You know, they're living, living on a farm
they learn about life, they learn about death, and you know, and that sorrow isn't the end of
everything [mm-hmm], it was just a good, good, good way to raise kids.

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EH:

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And so, how many, um, children do you have?

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EB:

Four. I had four. [Mm-hmm] Two boys, and two girls.

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EH:

OK. Yeah. And what, uh, what did you make and eat as a family? Maybe what was like a daily
meal, and then what was a meal for special occasions?

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EB:

OK. Um, we both froze our meat and canned it [mm-hmm], and canned beef is just a

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gourmet...object, if you ask me. And when...

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EH:

[interrupts Eleanor] So could you tell me how... sorry...

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EB:

[they talk over each other] Well, with, how to can it?!?

21:04

EH:

Yeah!

21:04

EB:

[Tsks] OK. [Emily laughs] Um. You would, uh, some of your meat you would grind up and usually, we canned some grind, ground meat. And, and what we would do is just loosely put, uh, about two pounds of meat in a jar, and maybe a pinch of salt and after the meat was in the jar

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about, not quite two inches of boiling water, and then you just process it. And now you would process it in a canner. [Mm-hmm] In a, in a pressure canner, and, uh...I've made sausage balls and, uh...and meatballs both. The meatballs I didn't season, I just...made balls and ground them a little bit and canned them. [Mm-hmm] Sausage whenever, whenever you, when you're doing a pork,

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and we usually would butcher two at a time, because we had a big family. And, um...so you would cut up the meat however you wanted, and, and, usually one shoulder, we would put one shoulder in, because that made the sausage more lean, because you're using the scraps of meat to make the sausage with. [uh-huh] And then we would season it with thyme and pepper and maybe a little bit of sage and, uh...salt and marjoram and mix it up and just make little balls and

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sometimes I'd brown them to put 'em in the jar and sometimes not [mm-hmm] and you just process that too. And one thing that we really like to beef was to make chunks, little, like one-inch squares or, inch and a half of stew meat, and can that [mm-hmm] and then open it up and, um, make gravy over it. [Yum] And that was really good. Um, a lot of people, I never, we didn't...I don't think we did it here, over at Bud's mom's we did it though, maybe because

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we were butchering over there when we were first married. They had, big 20 gallon crocks and you would put, like your pork ribs, and, and, uh...roasts and chops down in the salt brine [mm], and you didn't have to can it. It just preserved it, but [wow] as, as time has passed, that isn't as safe a way as it used to be [hmm], to do it. [Mm-hmm] One of my neighbors said, "Oh, well, we used to always just get steak out of a crock." And I said, "What are you talking about!?" Well,

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they would slice the beef steak the size, you know, piece steak sizes [uh-huh] that they wanted it, and they would put it in a crock. Say a three...three-gallon crock maybe, and they would put a little bit of grease in the bottom [mm-hmm] and then they would put layers of, um, steak and then, another layer of grease, and they would cap it off...with grease. And that preserved

24:00

it. [Wow!] And they could, all year long, they'd just take steak out of there. [Wow.] Yeah. So it's, things have changed. [Yeah] I mean I've been here fifty-five years now and, uh, things that people did before I came here...I didn't [uh-huh], you know, I didn't do it. But now, salt, the salting the pork, everybody did that. And, and, uh, and they smoked, you smoked your bacon, you cooked the head and made the, uh, mincemeat with the he-, [uh-huh], with the meat off the head [mm-hmm], because it's very good...and tender. Uh...

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EH:

Is that for pie?

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EB:

Mm-hmm. [They laugh] And that we would can, you know, [uh-huh] we'd usually make, oh...ten, twelve jars of mincemeat from one hock.

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EH:

And what do you put in your mincemeat?

24:42

EB:

Oh my, it's got a lot of stuff in it. Currants, apples, or applesauce. Sometimes pineapple
25:00

chunks. [Hmm!] Uh...a lot of spices, uh...some people put oranges in it, but...uh, my friend Geraldine and I decided that sometimes that made it bitter. [Oh, yeah] So we didn't do that. Um. And sometimes raisins, sometimes you, you know, if you didn't have enough currants, sometimes you would put raisins in it. [Mm-hmm] And you'd grind up the meat first and then mix it all with this, and then you cooked it down in a pan, in, like, a big pan, Dutch oven or bi-, well, bigger

25:30

than that. Like in canner. And stirred it wi-, with wine, you put [oh, wow] wine in it and cooked it down in the wine. And then canned it and...well, my son would just, my youngest son, opened a jar and would eat it with a spoon. [Emily laughs] So you gotta watch him!

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EH:

My dad would probably do that too. He loves mincemeat.

25:42

EB:

Oh, it's so good. [Yeah.] Yeah, somebody said to me, not long ago, I made a mincemeat pie, and they said, "there's meat in there!" [Emily laughs] I said, "Yeah. Why do you think they call it mincemeat?" Well, all they'd had was that pie-o-my-o or whatever that you buy at the store. [Yeah] And it's just fruit! You know? [Yeah] Whole different thing.

26:00

EH:

Yeah. And, oh, so the salt brine...would that, you would just salt the meat, would it get liquid? We can pause for a second.

26:10

EB:

The salt brine [Eleanor walks away and returns] you put... [the sounds of moving stop] I'm trying to think if you layered it first. Well, you put so much salt in it, and it has to be a lot of salt. [OK]

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And, and the test of it, to see if it's salty enough is you take an egg, and see if it'll float, and when it floats, the piece of the egg showing through, it has to be the size of a nickle. [OK] That's the test for it. And that's the only part of salting I've ever done, because our neighbor got bedfast, and they made his wife and I learn how to do that. [They laugh] He'd say, "So Elsie, you

27:00

think, uh, you think that's enough? No...a little more!" [They laugh] [Wow!] So everybody knows that, because it wouldn't, you would ruin it otherwise. [Yeah] You know? [Mm-hmm] Oh yeah.

27:11

EH:

Huh. Um. We-, what were we talking about before that? All the different meats, um...

27:20

EB:

We, we didn't, um, *we* didn't butcher lamb for ourselves, we didn't, I didn't like mutton. My

27:30

grandparents used to fix mutton and [oh yeah] I don't like it at all, but we would, uh, butcher lamb, sometimes there were some people who wanted lambs, but then my oldest son, Bruce, *liked* lamb. And so every year, after he was grown and working, he would buy two lambs and have them dressed the way he wanted to, uh, at the butcher shop. [Uh-huh] And he was an excellent lamb cook, and I like lamb, [yeah] you know. Like to make dolmas, uh, you know, ground lamb, [mm-hmm] stuff like that, I like it. But there was no point in me butchering a lamb and eating it myself. You know.

28:00

EH:

And did you butcher the hogs here. Did you do your own butchering?

28:07

EB:

Mm-hmm. Always. [Yeah] Yeah, my, my husband was a fine butcher and his dad and there was, people they just butchered for, you know [mm-hmm], they'd just go and [around town, around the village?] yeah. Yep.

28:20

EH:

Oh, yeah! So, aside from your...so you have your canned meats, what was, what else would your daily meal look like?

28:29

EB:

28:30

Oh! Well, usually, we would have a quart of vegetables, home-canned vegetables, whatever. You know, whatever seemed like it would go with the meal. In the summertime, of course, it was fresh vegetables, a lot of fresh stuff. And, uh, we made our own bread. Um, when I went to work,

I went one year, kind of, uh, and then I was going to be hired back, it was a federal program, so...at the school. And so, I said, "well, do you want me to work? Or don't work?" Because I'd
29:00

only work for one year. And, uh, so we had a little family meeting after we decided I was gonna work, how were they going to hel-, how was everybody going to help and do stuff? [Mm-hmm] And the kids said, "we will do anything if you go back to making bread." [They laugh] And so everybody shared very well in the work and we had fresh bread every week, because [wow!] taking, baking breads takes almost all day Saturday.

29:25

EH:

So what kind of bread do you make?

29:27

EB:

29:30

Um, I would make white bread and rye bread, primarily. Now, I grind my own wheat and I make mostly whole wheat bread or barley bread. [Mm-hmm] You know, and I'll put seeds in it, pumpkin seeds and, um, sunflower seeds and maybe dried, um, either raisins or, I really like cranberries in it. [Mm-hmm] And, but homemade rye bread is just to die for. [Eleanor laughs] [It's true] It's so good.

29:57

EH:

30:00

Yeah. And why did you shift to whole wheat?

30:03

EB:

Because it was healthier. And once you start eating whole wheat bread you realize it's moist, it's more of a moist bread. White bread, even good homemade white bread, tastes a little bit dry after that. It's, uh... But I, we always tried to do, to do the most healthful eating that we could. We had everything ourselves [mm-hmm] and, um, at one point one of my kids got he-, starting getting headaches, and the school counselor, who was just a friend I was talking to, she said, "Did you ever happen to think," because it was when she went to town, she got a headache. [Hmm.] So she didn't want to go shopping. And, uh, she said, "Do you ever think maybe it's preservatives, because she doesn't get that at home?" [Yeah] That's what it was. [Could be. Oh yeah.] Mm-hmm. But I just didn't think about that. [Yeah] Yeah, so. But [sighs] I don't know, growing up on a farm is good, we always had a big potato crop, so every night, almost every night we had potatoes fixed one way or another. [Mm-hmm] You know? Just...a lot of that. The potatoes grew so well up here on top of the hill that two or three farmers sold all the big potatoes to a restaurant in Clarksburg for, for French fries. [Nice!] Yeah. So,

EH:

They must have been uniform, pretty uniform...

EB:

Hmm, oh yeah.

EH:

And then what about, um, special occasions? So, Christmas or what, whatever were the special occasions?

EB:

Well, every Sunday was a special occasion. [They laugh] Ever-, I mean, we always had a lot of company, or, you know, I'd go over to my mother-in-law's and help her cook or something. Fried chicken was an important thing. Uh... Home-cured ham was [uh-huh] I guess, the most special thing. [OK] Because it is just so good [yeah], and it's, it's a big piece of meat. It's gonna serve many people. Um, always a salad if, if it wasn't a season where you an-, 'cause we didn't get lettuce and stuff real often, because we didn't go to town as much as we do now. And so, if, if, uh, if we didn't have lettuce or a green salad, we would, uh, make a Jell-O salad [huh] of some kind, you know, you could put celery or carrots, grated carrots, in it or something. [Hmm] And, uh, and always half a gallon of vegetables, and -

EH:

So that's a savory Jell-O, Jell-O salad?

EB:

Sometimes. Yeah. Uh-huh. [Huh!] Yeah. Yeah, at that time sunshine salad was pretty, pretty popular. And you would grate up, uh, finely grate carrots and put it in either orange or lemon Jell-o. [OK] And it made a good dish.

EH:

Oh yeah, I've seen that. People don't make that much anymore.

EB:

No, and there for a while the Jell-O company made, uh, uh...uh, Jell-O's that *were* savory. [Really?] Oh, my gosh! I don't know why they ever quit making them, because they were so good and you could make, put in a, like, a cucumber or something and, and it had several things in it, and maybe even it would be something like that with some walnuts in it. Really healthy things. But-

EH:

Cucumber sounds good in it.

EB:

Oh yeah. Oh, it was good. But, uh, I think anybody who came to eat on any of the farms was looking forward to warm bread of some kind. You know, either hot rolls or cornbread or fresh, homemade bread. It was just, I mean, you had it, and you'd, and so many people, uh, in towns *never* made their own bread. But they had bakeries. They had good bakeries. When I lived in Cleveland, we could go get fresh ground sausage. My dad'd go to the butcher shop and I would

go to the bakery, and, you know, it was just fresh [mm-hmm] and nice, just like in, in Switzerland and Germany, every village has a butcher, to this day. Every village has a baker. And they just do for the whole community, because I was asking one of the housewives where I was staying, "Do you make homemade bread?" And she says, "Well, no!" I mean, she just looked at me like, 'what a dumb thing to ask!' [Wow!] Well, the baker bakes the bread! [Uh-huh] They don't do it. The baker just does.

EH:

Yeah. Wow. Um. What do you, uh, remember of, um... community celebrations that either centered around food or had food as part of it? And obviously there's many that still exist today, but what are some of those?

EB:

The biggest thing is in the spring. It's the Ramp Supper and it's always the last Saturday in...April [yeah, April] yeah, in April. And, uh, now there are many festivals around it, many Ramp dinners, but ours was Richwood and Helvetia were the first two, in the state of West Virginia. And, uh, at the, early on, it was nothing to have 800 to a thousand people come to a dinner, so that was a lot to fix for, you know, a [wow!] community this size, but everybody worked on it. And so that was an important thing. And then, in the... in August, the third, third weekend in August you would have a fried chicken. [OK] That was a chicken, uh, supper. And that was to produce the income to put the fair on every year. The community fair. And we haven't had to do that recently, and we weren't, it used to be kind of a Homecoming thing. [OK] And then as people drifted away, uh, moved away, we didn't do that the last five years [mm-hmm], I'd say. Uh...[tsks]. The, now we do, um, like today we do the Fasnacht [mm-hmm], um, baking, but, uh...I think those, I, the only ones I can think of that we do. Oh! Now we do, uh, Swiss National holiday, which is a, about the first weekend in August. And we grill bratwurst and we have a, a hot brown mustard that goes with it. And, uh, fresh vegetables, you can have a, a meatless plate. You know [mm-hmm], meatless dish, um, just garden vegetables and dips and [mm-hmm] things like that.

EH:

Who makes that sausage? Or is that bratwurst?

EB:

We buy it at our local butcher over in Beverly [OK], uh, Campbell's market. Yeah, and, but it's so good grilled. Whoa! [laughs]

EH:

I love bratwurst.

EB:

Yeah! I don't like it boiled, but I like it grilled.

EH:

Yeah, grilled is the best.

EB:

Yeah, yeah.

EH:

And, uh, where's the mustard from?

EB:

Heidi makes it, from the Hutte. It's her secret recipe...

EH:

Oh! Well, I'll see if I can get it from her... [They laugh]

EB:

You may, and you may not!

EH:

Do you think it has beer in it?

EB:

No!

EH:

No beer.

EB:

Huh-uh. I would say it starts out with Coleman's mustard, you know, the hot mustard [mm-hmm] that you make Chinese [yeah] [Unintelligible] out of? I would say that's the start of it, [huh] but I don't know what else is in it, because, but it is a brown mustard. And I think bratwurst just screams for a brown mustard. [Yeah] It doesn't have to be hot, just a brown mustard.

EH:

Mm-hmm. Um. Well, so are you involved in the Ramp Supper? In the preparation of the food at all?

EB:

[groans and sighs] Ohhh yeah...

EH:

[laughs] It seems like you're involved in all of it.

EB:

Yeah, the Ramp Supper, um... You get the ramps in March, because you can't wait, you know, or the first week in April, because, uh, depending what the winter's like, you, you can't use the ramps when they're not tender [mm-hmm]. So, whenever the ramps come off, and they start getting big enough the people who dig the ramps for us will bring them in, and so you're, you spend somewhere between a week and a half, and two weeks washing and cleaning, and blanching and freezing ramps. [Mm-hmm] That's the big preparation, and then the day before the Ramp Supper, you go down and fry I don't how many pounds of bacon, uh... As chopped up bacon that goes in the, some in the beans, some in the fried potatoes [mm-hmm]. Uh...the hams. We get boneless hams and...we...separate them out and get them laid out to the next day to put in roasters, on Saturday morning. And it's just [sighs] very labor intensive [mm-hmm], but it's delicious.

EH:

So are the ramps cooked in the bacon?

EB:

Mm-hmm

EH:

OK.

EB:

Yeah. Cook them in the, fry them in the bacon grease and lard. [Yum.] Yes. It's not a heart-healthy meal. [Emily laughs] But it sure is good.

EH:

And are the beans, are your beans cooked with meat, or are they just, are the vegetarian?

EB:

No, I, they usually put, uh, a few cups of, uh, bacon cracklings in 'em [yeah]. I don't think there's anything bacon, I don't think anything at our dinner would be healthy. [They both laugh]

EH:

And does your cornbread have, um, bacon grease?

EB:

No. Huh-uh. [OK] Not the cornbread.

EH:

OK. Well, I'm looking forward to that. [They laugh]

EB:

Well, it's good. It really is good, we have a, you know for years people would come, the only time they came to Helvetia was for Ramp Supper, but it was really, it was the best ramp supper around. [Wow.] It was good. And I think it's just because we didn't alter the recipe, we made it the same way for, I don't know how, however long they've been having it, which would be... probably sixty-five, seventy years [mm-hmm], you know, for a long time. Because that was the, the good thing about that, for us, was that you could have One.Big.Thing. a year and that would cover your expenses, like to run the Community Hall, to keep the lights on, to keep the heat on, to do repairs [mm-hmm]. So the Farm Women would, uh, partner with another group, usually the Hall Association, and then it was that was your main money maker [mm-hmm] for maintenance, for maintaining things. [Yeah, OK] And it took a lot of people to do it, and everybody was willing because it, that was the whole aim, was to be able to exist on that. [Right, yeah] But you could have a lot of bake sales and never come up with that kind of money.

EH:

Yeah. So how much do you charge now?

EB:

Oh, my. Somewhere between ten and fifteen dollars.

EH:

That, that's still a deal.

EB:

Mm-hmm, oh! It's all you can eat [yeah] and it, it's good, it's just very good.

EH:

Yeah. Um. So, I, I know that the cookbook, *Oppis Guet's*...

EB:

Oppis Guet's vo Helvetia.

EH:

Okay, I'll have you say it [they laugh]. But, so I have a copy of that, but that was printed at the Centennial? Is that right?

EB:

Yep.

EH:

And, it seems like it's still a resource...both for people here and [Eleanor coughs] at the Hutte... for using recipes?

EB:

I don't know about the Hutte, [OK] but I use it a lot [mm-hmm], but you know, and, uh, it makes a nice little present, it's not expensive but it's, it's quaint. It's got little, uh, jokes in it and sayings, and, uh, home remedies, things like that. [Uh-huh] Some things you'd never use, but it's a fun, it's just a fun little book to have.

EH:

Yeah. Um, so before that where were you, I mean, I know that's the rosette recipe, before that did you have them written down, or where were your recipes coming before...the book was published?

EB:

Well, yeah, you just got it from your family, you know. [OK] Or your neighbor. [Uh-huh] You know. And everybody, every household, that I know of, was Swiss. You know, part of the family was Swiss, so they had all the recipes, you know [mm-hmm]. Now Sandy's [Interviewer's note: she's referring to Sandy Burky], Sandy's grandma made an excellent sweetbread, and Sandy's learned how to do it and it's a braid. [Wow!] Yeah, so she's really worked at it. So [I'll have to ask her], maybe she can tell you about that. Yeah. 'Cause if her...s-,s-, sneuflee, I don't know, it's got a cute little name. [Uh-huh] But anyway she'll, she thought everybody knew how to do that, why I'd never even heard of it, but maybe I...I mean I've made sweetbread. And my grandmother gave me a sweetbread recipe, but she didn't call it anything, it was a, for the birnwecka, you make a, a big, uh, recipe of dough and, and you make fruit filling, and, and they call it, it, it's birnwecka, and it's, uh, it was primarily dried...pears. [OK] But we've made it with ev-, whatever we could get [uh-huh], you know, if, if it wasn't a good pear year, you're pears, uh, you didn't bear that year [mm-hmm], well, what were you going to do? Well, you used apples, or you get some other kind of fruit, buy something, you know, I've had it where it had dried figs in it, and, and raisins, and lots of apple [mm-hmm], you know. But the seasoning is what's good in it, you use cinnamon, oil, and anise oil. [Oh. Sounds really good.] Really good. Yeah.

EH:

And it's a yeasted bread?

EB:

Yes. Well...in here, uh, Myrtle Koerner's recipe is not a yeasted bread, but my grandmother's was yeasted. There again, it's probably because of the canton. [Oh, yeah.] You know? But I learned to make it with y-, yeast and that's what I make it with, but I've...Nancy brought me over, um, a small loaf of bread, oh, a few weeks ago, and it, she and Bunch [Interviewer's note: she's referring to Linda "Bunch" Smith who helped us make Rosettes] made it, and it, it's not yeast. [OK] So you can do it either way. [Yeah] It just has to be stretchy and pliable because you roll up jelly, jellyroll style.

EH:

Right. Sounds really good. I'm getting hungry. [They laugh]

EB:

We'll have to eat again!

EH:

Um. Well, let me just go through...well, so how do you think people are eating now in Helvetia, and, I know there's...I guess there's a history of winemakers, you know in the past, and there are a lot of winemakers now, but how have things changed, um, what's still being...

EB:

Well, [sighs], um, there's...I guess we have quite a mix of young, young families and old families here. We don't have very many people, so you can't say there's a lot. Um, I personally cook every day. I don't like processed foods, I'd, I'd never go back to eating processed foods, heaven forbid they put me in a sen-, place where I have to eat processed food. [Emily laughs] But, um... whoever has a farm still makes their own meat and garden. I mean, young couples or old couples, they wouldn't be living on a farm probably if they didn't want to use it, you know, make, make use of it. [Mm-hmm]. Um. Oh...people butcher their own, or buy from a neighbor who will butcher meat [mm-hmm], you know. I don't, don't do that. Um...whoever does have a cow will usually at least make butter. [Yeah] Um, things have changed in the fact that young people are, a lot of young people had to move away, because it used to be the coal mines and the, the saw mills here. So, you had a good job, and now, if you're not working for the school or the state, or a store, there just isn't [yeah] employment, so you have to drive at least an hour one-way to get a jo-, you know, to work. So, in that way, it's less and less people. We try real hard to encourage parents to bring their young kids, um, to activities. But kids just don't want to put the effort into anything anymore. [Mm-hmm] And it's very sad, because when th-, when they have to come to something, they have fun, they have a good time, [yeah] but people are just too technologically geared, you know, to that. And so, I don't know if it'll always be that way, or not, but we can't have... We really struggle to have the activities we have. [Mm-hmm] You know, the, the festivals and, and just gatherings and things, public gatherings that we have, but there are still many, many people who like those things. [Uh-huh] And it may not be children, but it will be young adults, you know, [yeah] maybe twenty, thirty, forty people, and they do like to come to

things. And, and have a good time. [Mm-hmm] Uh, we still have dances once a, once a month. And then, with any of the big festivities, people always expect that if you have a dinner, you've got a dance [mm-hmm], you know, so, that's nice. Um... There's just a, a real lack of e-, of energy, but our students, we have a K-through-twelve school that always has about forty kids in it [mm-hmm], and those kids get a good education and we still have a very high incidence of further education after they graduate [uh-huh]. Very successful. [That's great] Yeah.

EH:

Um. And I know you mentioned 4-H before, so is that pretty active here?

EB:

Yes. And 4-H has always been a real important part of the community and because classes are so small in the school, that a lot of your life-long friends are going to be the people you went to camp with. [Mm-hmm] And that you did 4-H activities with [yeah], uh. That's, the best friends of my kids, for the most part are their 4-H friends.

EH:

Mm-hmm. Is that a state, sort of a state-wide program, or regional?

EB:

Yeah. And, well, they, they have a club here and then they go to a county camp, and then to a state camp [OK]. And they'll have talent contests, so you can win in, in your, uh, county, uh, and you can go on to state [mm-hmm], you know. And, so it's, you know, they're successful and they really do well. [Uh-huh] But I think the kids here, we didn't, we, I don't know that there's ever been anything I'd call juvenile delinquency, [mm-hmm] that I've even heard of, because...you go to a dance, and you may dance with your dad, or with your mother, with your grandma, with your brothers. Everybody goes and then gets entertained together [yeah], if you, if you have, a, a wiener roast at home, well, your parents are there. The kids don't go off by themselves [mm-hmm] so much. And I don't know, I-I... don't know so much even they still do. [Yeah] I think it's just a, a togetherness that you just don't have in very many places.

EH:

Yeah. That's really true. I mean, that all seems, that is what I was struck by when I went to Europe, it's... that's the European thing that a family are out celebrating together, I think. [Oh!] So I wonder... Yeah, I mean, part of it is being in a small community too, but...

EB:

Yeah, yeah because until you can drive, you can't take yourself very, very many places, and these kids there's, these days won't walk. My husband walked a long way to come visit me at my grandmother's. [They laugh] A long way! But, uh... Things just keep changing and evolving and sometimes you want things like they were, but the world isn't like it was [yeah] any more. And, um... Sometimes you want the same thing, but you don't know how to get there. [Mm-hmm] Because, uh...if parents can't, if p-, if both parents are working, maybe they *can't* let their kids be on, be in certain activities [uh-huh], because it takes away from the parents' life. I mean, maybe they're not even home to do it. So, it would be nice, a lot of things would be nice if you could

kind of hold onto some things. But you can't hold on to everything.

EH:

Yeah. So, what happens at the agricultural fair and how are kids involved with that?

EB:

Well, the 4-H Club has a, a section at the, at the fair, at the community fair. And... Uh, we always made them, uh, complete their project. In order to belong to the art club, you had to complete your project. [Mm-hmm] So, if you've got it completed, you might as well work for a blue ribbon, and they did. [Emily laughs] Uh, very seldom, unless you had, unless the kid had more than one project, they might get a red ribbon on one if there were, if they took two or three projects [mm-hmm], but it was a lot of work. 4-H is, and 4-H is a family togetherness, you know. And then the kids, you know, they're in the parade, a lot of them. They folk dance, some of them sing in our yodel group. So, the Community Fair is something that everybody attends [mm-hmm]. And a lot of, um, old Helvetia people come from different parts of the state, or the country for that. It's, it, it ended up kind of being a homecoming type thing [mm-hmm], and we have this silly little community parade, that's just hilarious. And, uh, I don't know, it's just a fun thing to do. [So] It's nice to keep it up, our, we always have nice exhibits. There's a lot of, uh, produce [mm-hmm], flowers, sewing, many handicraft things, uh, photography [mm-hmm], just a lot of, a lot of things that people, and they, you don't have to be from here, but you have to know when to come and enter it in the fair [OK] in order for it to be judged here.

EH:

And that, the 4-H pro-, projects would be...those are produce, or animal raising, or...?

EB:

Anything that the 4-H, or a lot of times they have, um, sp-, spring wildflowers, you have wildflowers, that'll be a project, uh, West Virginia trees is a project. Bicycle repair. Small engine repair, are those... 4-H is pretty endless [uh-huh], you know, it can do, you can do about anything. Not a lot of kids do produce anymore, because there aren't that many farms. And [yeah], I just haven't seen produce things, it's mostly learning about life, or something pretty [mm-hmm]. You know, maybe they'll take a flower arranging [yeah] project. Or making, uh, healthy lunches.[Mm-hmm] Things like that.

EH:

OK. And do you enter in it?

EB:

Oh yeah. [laughs]

EH:

What do you enter?

EB:

Well. It's pretty standard, since I don't have a garden and I don't do much handicraft. I make my own soaps, so I take down soap, and...apples. I have quite extensive apples, and grapes, and, uh, if I have done any kind of a handiwork project, that. [Mm-hmm] Uh...flowers. [Mm-hmm] I have a lot of flowers, so I, I grow a lot of flowers, so I'll take flowers. And, uh...I just like to go. And, of course, we have a yodel group, so I sing in that and that's fun. [Mm-hmm] And, uh, and then there's, uh, peop-, vendors come, mostly private, uh, small vendors [mm-hmm], nothing big. But they'll have, uh, uh, woodworking things, things that they, they've made that they bring, and, uh, uh... Pictures, paintings, drawings. [Mm-hmm] Um...pottery, sometimes we'll have potters come. And then the Helvetia Archives has the museum open and the archive building so that they, it's attached to the library, so people can see what our heritage was. [Mm-hmm] And, uh, and that's on Saturday and Sunday, the fair always...

EH:

What kind of apple trees do you have on the property here? [Eleanor gasps, Emily laughs] Or what's your favorite, what are your favorites?

EB:

Well, Grimes Golden is probably my favorite, and Grimes that's supposed to, Grimes Golden, that was a West Virginia tree, uh, made in West Virginia tree [huh], and when Stark Brothers found that tree, they were having, uh, they, they sent out to everybody that they got, uh, that bought catalogs from them and said, "Do you have a special apple?" And, uh, this one man in West Virginia said he did, because it had to have cer-, certain qualities [mm-hmm] like keeping, flavor, texture, [mm-hmm] whatever. And, so they went to his farm and they decided that that *was* the best apple. [Mmm!] And so that's what has become, that was the root of go-, uh, of Golden Delicious. [OK] But Grime's Golden, if you bit into a Grime's Golden it has a spicy [mm] flavor, I like it. We have one over there, my father-in-law planted it, and it's my favorite on the place. But we have Russets...Scarlets, Summer Scarlets. Uh...Northern Spy [I love Northern Spy!], that's all-purpose pie, and that's a big tree, we have a huge tree there. And we have Golden Delicious and Yellow Delicious. And, uh...then we have two kinds of pear trees. No, we have *three* kinds of pear trees. One's a Bartlett, one's a Kieffer, and the other is Starkling Delicious. [Starkling Delicious] It's red, a red kind of pear [hmm], it's good. And then we have a plum tree. [Yum.] Yeah, so...

EH:

Do you have to do any maintenance on the apple trees?

EB:

They all need to be, all fruit trees need to be pruned [pruned]. Yeah, so I, I have a fellow, that probably is going to come trim this year, but...Bruce used to do that. And...[Emily laughs] it's a little far off.

EH:

Yeah. And you were telling me earlier about, your grapes.

EB:

Oh, my. Yeah, we have, uh, about thirty feet, maybe twenty to thirty feet of Concord grapes and

they bear very heavily most years, and this year we got enough to make, we got, I would say, five hundred and fifty quarts off of them. [Wow!] And some of it was wine, I didn't make it, but I gave people grapes for wine, but I made grape juice. [Mm-hmm] I made a hundred quarts of grape juice. But-
57:12

EH:

And you just drink that throughout the year?

EB:

Uh-huh. [Yeah] Yeah, it's got more Vitamin C than orange juice.

EH:

Yeah. It's good for you. Um. Well, let's see, lemme just make sure we hit all my main points... Um... But... Oh, so I guess, um... Remind me of the tool that carries milk. What's it called? A burr?

EB:

Brenta.

EH:

A bretta?

EB:

B-R-E-N-T-A.

EH:

Brenta. OK. Were there any other sort of tools, special tools that you may not have seen elsewhere that Helvetians used?

EB:

Well, I don't know that, I don't *know* that, but it, always there was in ads, that they cut logs [uh-huh]. Squared-up logs. [Yeah, yep] Yeah, to build with. Uh, oh, and they had, um... The one tool we have here- it's a funny-looking thing. It, it kind of looks like...a harness maker's bench, but it's, uh, no, it looks like a sh-, *rail* shaving bench, but it's a harness, harness making bench [mm-hmm]. And you sit on one end of it, and then it's, it's smooth and long, but you can shape a saddle [oh, OK!] on or something like that. And, uh, the Betlers had stuff like that, because they were very handy with their hands. [Yeah] They did a lot of things. And everybody used to repair their own shoes, even up until the '60s.

EH:

Wow! I wish I had those skills. [laughs]

EB:

In, in my garage there's quite a display of lasts, from a little's baby's [wow] shoe, you know,

[cool] to bigger shoes, or... Because we would go to sales and I would say to Bud, "Why don't you buy that? Look how cool that is!" [Emily laughs] And, and he would say, "El, we have one." And then I'd forget that [Emily laughs] and then we'd go to someplace else and I'd say, "Well, why don't we get that?" "We have two." And so, one day, we were coming home from an auction and I said, "Well, if we have all that stuff, why don't I see it? Can't you do something with it so that I can see it? Bring it in the house or something." Well he decorated the whole end of the garage with it, and I, you know, you stand there, and you look at all this stuff, and you go, "Oh, that's nice." [They laugh]

EH:

Yeah, one, this summer I was picking trees on our friend's farm in Maine and they have the big apple bags that you wear around the front. I'd never seen one before, with the little, so you can just, you unbuckle it, so it goes right in the basket.

EB:

Nice!

EH:

It's very cool. [They laugh] Very practical. Um. Well, uh... I guess two more things, and one is sort of going back, um, to what we were up to today. But, um... Are there any recipes that you might say are, are lost? That no one is really making anymore?

EB:

Yep, bearst. Bearst is, it's in the cookbook here [OK], but, um, you make it with...I think it says the fifth milking from, uh, when a cow is freshening. Whenever they have a calf. [OK] You can't keep, you can't use the milk for a few days, because the milk may be bloody or [uh-huh] cloudy. You know, [yeah] and mother's milk strange at first, but the colostrum is in there, so it's [oh yeah] very powerful. [Mm-hmm] Very protein-rich and has the antibodies for, uh, not catching diseases [mm-hmm], you know. Immunity. [Yeah] And so, Ella Betler has a recipe in here for bearst. And I think it's kind of like a warm pudding. And [hmmm], and, uh, her family, her guys have told me it's really good, you know. But nobody does that anymore. I would say that's one that's really lost.

EH:

Mm-hmm, and you can only make it with the fifth milking, because it's the end of the bad milk, but it still has colostrum in it?

EB:

Uh-huh.

EH:

OK

EB:

It's, it's very rich.

EH:

Whoa.

EB:

Yeah.

EH:

Could you do it without, do you think it would work without fresh milk?

EB:

Uh-uh. [expressing no]

EH:

OK. You'd have to...

EB:

Yeah. You'd have to have a cow. [They laugh] [OK!] And know how to milk it! [Eleanor laughs]

EH:

How many cows are in Helvetia? How many milk cows exist in Helvetia?

EB:

[she starts before Emily is done] I only know one. [Really?] I only know one. Next door. Yeah.

EH:

And there used to be, everyone had one?

EB:

Oh, everybody had a cow. So [yeah], yeah. Some had more than one, but mostly for, um, unless you wanted to, like Burkys make, made cheese. A lot [mm-hmm], themselves, I mean [yeah] that was part of their financial support and so they made cheese, probably the most cheese for the longest that I know of, since I've been living here. [Mm-hmm] And they don't make it anymore,

but, uh...[sighs]. Yeah, everybody, uh, and you always had fresh cream and, you know, when my son went to the army, he was highly insulted that, because they didn't have thick cream. [Emily laughs] In the army. He always put it on his cereal, and he just thought that was the pits.

EH:

Wow, he must have thought it wasn't...

1:02:39

EB:

So now [overlap], now his wife is on this, uh, "Trim Healthy Mama" thing and she keeps fresh cream, so Brian uses it in everything. He's a happy boy now. [They laugh]

EH:

Um, and, uh, so, I guess the first three minutes got cut-off, but, um...

EB:

[Laughs] You want me to start over?

EH:

Well, I can...I can, uh, squeeze them, back together, but, so first of all, um...I'll have, just have you say your name at the end, just to identify it, but, um, so we were here today making, um, hozablatz and rosettes for Fasnacht. And, could you talk about what those are and why you make them? And how long you've been making them?

EB:

The reason we make these deep-fat-fried treats is because, it's like Fat Tuesday, it's before the Lenten fast. They would eat rich foods for the last time for forty days. People don't do *that* so much anymore as general, but here it was a general thing. They didn't dance during Lent and they, they had a big celebration before Ash Wednesday. And then it was shut off until Easter Sunday. Um, the rosettes, I...I don't even know if that's a Swiss thing, I, well, it *has* to be because everybody, every family has a, a big rosette iron that they brought from Switzerland, so it must have been very important. Um, I didn't realize that when I started making them as a child. [OK] But rosettes, you have a rosette iron, which you get hot in your deep fat and then you dip it down in the batter, just so that it won't cover the top, because you just, it comes out like a shell. Um, the hozablatz, are, you make a real rich dough and roll it out real thin, supposed to be as thin enough to read the newspapers [Emily laughs] through. And cut it in little, well, cut it in whatever size things you want and deep-fat fry that, and then put sugar on it. They both have sugar. And, uh...we do this because our Fasnacht celebration is always the Saturday before Ash Wednesday, and so that's our big Fat Tuesday thing, and, um, there...it's a costume ball. And we have some very unique costumes, and, uh, we judge the costumes. And people get Swiss flags for prizes. And it's a big dance. And people come from all over the world to it.

EH:

Mm-hmm. And how many people do you generally have for that?

EB:

I don't know. I would guess about three hundred. [Mm-hmm] And that's, pretty much, probably capacity for 'danceability' in our hall. [Mm-hmm] And, of course, we burn Old Man Winter at midnight, and so, a lot of people are outside around the bonfire once it's lit, about 11 o'clock. [Mm-hmm] So you have people inside and out, but I, I don't really know how many we have, and I don't know, I've never heard anybody say, but I'd say...probably three hundred.

EH:

Mm-hmm. And the hozablatz and the rosettes are served at this, during this square dance, right?

EB:

Yeah. During the, the dinner we, or the, the dance, we set up tables with all kinds of goodies on it. Some fresh things, we have oranges that are cut, to eat. And, uh, cookies and rosettes and cakes and, um, fresh vegetables and dip. [Mm-hmm] And, and, uh, soft drinks.

EH:

Mm-hmm. And you said before you use vegetable oil, but in the past you used to use lard.

EB:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, and, um, lard, uh, was what everybody had, because when you butcher hogs, you had a lot of lard. [Mm-hmm] And now the fatness has been bred out of pork, and so lard's very expensive. [Mm] You know, I buy lard, uh, I keep lard because I make homemade soap with it, but...it's very, very expensive, where it used to be the cheapest thing you could get. And around here, people would butcher in the last twenty-five years and say, "Hey, you want my lard?" [Mm-hmm] And I would render the lard then. [Mm-hmm, mm-hmm] You know, to make it myself, but, yeah, I think, um, probably we went to the other because it's just a healthier... [yeah] you know, to use canola oil or corn oil or something [yeah]. Not that deep-fat fried is healthy. Whatsoever. [They laugh]

EH:

Yeah. It's all relative. Um, yeah, so could you tell me your name [laughs]? And your birth date and where we are right now?

EB:

My name is Eleanor Betler. I was born in 1940. I live on my farm, in Helvetia, West Virginia.

EH:

Thank you very much. [They laugh] Well, is there anything else that I didn't talk about? So this is mostly food-related, and obviously agriculture is so tied-in to that, so it doesn't necessarily have to be...you know, it can be wool and that sort of thing, but, um...

EB:

Well, [clears throat] we, we've made our own comforts for years, you know, you sheer your sheep and wash the wool, and then card it. [Uh-huh] And I have a comfort that I made, just because I wanted to experience carding, you know, [Oh, OK!] I thought 'I can do that!' [Uh-huh] [Eleanor laughs] And so, I pulled the wool, there's a whole system from when you sheer until you get something made out of it, but, um, I did. And, and you just make these little, in Swiss it's 'rugilies.' That's 'little rugs' about this size. [Uh-huh] And then you just, you butt them up against each other, you don't overlap them [mm-hmm] and then put, you have fabric on the bottom, you lay out this and then you put fabric on the top and then you knot it. And tie it [oh, OK!]. And, uh, they'll last you a lifetime.

EH:

So it's sort of like, you're making the batting...

EB:

Uh-huh, yeah, you're making...

EH:

...of the quilt?

EB:

...it, mm-hmm.

EH:

Yeah. OK.

EB:

Yeah.

EH:

Cool. Um, well, I think that's all I have. Unless you have anything else.

EB:

I think we got it.

EH:

We could talk about food all day.

EB:

[They laugh] That's right! We'd enjoy it!

EH:

Alright. Thank you.

END TAPE: 69:18