

Ella and Peter Kress Interview
Recorded April 1998 by Peter Mock, their grand-nephew

Ella Mock Kress, was born September 26, 1930 in Kleinliebental. Her parents were Lorenz (born 1887) and Tekla Hartmann Mock (born 1890). In 1952 Ella married Peter Kress who was born on June 12, 1929, also in Kleinliebental. They have four children and, after they came to Germany in 1990, they now live in Ulm in the South of Germany.

Peter: What can you tell us about school?

Mrs. Kress: I went to the Russian school for three years, and three years to the German school. I did not finish either of them. I started school in 1939, at the age of 8. I went to the Russian school for three years, until the Germans occupied us. Then in 1940 and 1941 I went to the German school, into grade 4, 5 and 6. But again I did not finish grade 6.

P: But the school always stayed the same, just the teachers changed, right?

Mrs. K: Yes, first we had Russian teachers, then German teachers.

P: What subjects did you have?

Mrs. K: Reading, writing, calculating. Peter studied one year of German in 1938. In the past they taught German. I no longer had German when I went school.

Mr. Kress: And geometry, algebra, history, chemistry, and those things you had if you went to a higher school. In our village there were seven grades. If someone wanted to learn more, he had to go to Landau or Odessa. There were high schools there.

In the past here were only four grades all together. My father only attended four grades. At that time you were a learned man if you had finished four grades. In Grossliebental there were 10 grades. And in 1937 and 1938 it was very strict. If a child didn't go to school at that time, the father had to pay a high fine. My brother was born in 1913. He didn't learn anything at all. My brother can't read or write, either Russian or German. Those who were born in 1910 or 1912 didn't learn anything at all. They only knew how to sew and to thresh.

P: At what age did you start school?

Mrs. K: At the age of 8. I came to school in September at 8 years. At this time everything was already Russian. And when I was 14 we were driven away.

Mr. K: Now on March 30, it is 54 years since we left the Ukraine.

P: How long were vacations in school?

Mrs. K: Three months. Always from end of May until September 1st. On September 1st school started again - always. The higher grades probably had some exams to write at the end of the year, so they probably studied until June. There were also vacations in Spring and in Fall, but they never were as long as here.

Mr. K: No, there were only those three months in summer. No other vacations.

P: Did you have school only in the morning or also in the afternoon?

Mrs. K: Oh, yes, there was also school in the afternoon. That was because there was not enough space or not enough teachers, so some students had classes in the morning and some in the afternoon. But we had a big school with lots of students.

Mr. K: There were five 1st grades. And there were always 42 students in one class.

Mrs. K: A big school. And it was left when we had to leave. When we returned later for a visit, the school was still there. Only the church was destroyed. They took the steeple away. That was before the war, in 1937. During the German occupancy they set it up again.

Mr. K: Yes, but they didn't set up the steeple again. My father always told me it was 36 meters high. The Russians also destroyed the expensive organ. They took out the organ pipes and whistled on them. The organ was from Germany or Austria. You couldn't buy something like that in Russia.

P: Did you know where your ancestors came from?

Mr. K: Yes, my father always told me, that they came from Alsace-Lorraine, but they didn't know anything anymore. The books all were destroyed. I know there was a book from author called Keller. They had a book of his, but I don't know where it has gone. There you could read everything: where people came from and all that.

Mrs. K: That's because nobody was interested in that. Who would think that we might ever come to Germany?

Mr. K: If this war would not have happened then we probably would have never come here to Germany.

P: Was there a health resort in Kleinliebental, also?

Mrs. K: Yes, "the bath", or sanatorium as we called it. The Liman was next to it. It was black fen water.

P: But you could bathe in it?

Mrs. K: Oh, yes. It was beautiful. The water was very shallow near the shore so you could go into the water about 100 meter. Many children used to swim there. But you couldn't go over the Liman to the other side, it was too deep further down. My grandmother Hartmann used to live close to the Liman.

Mr. K: When they caught fish on the Liman, you could see the boats from there. It was very clean and beautiful water. Fen water but very nice. Today they are building ships there.

P: What did they do in that health resort? People came there from far away, right?

Mrs. K: Our people were not allowed to go in there. There were ill people from Tschetschenien, or from Leningrad. Many children were sent there. But there was a high fence around the area and you were not allowed to go in there if you were not employed as a cook or an attendant. But the big doctors all came from Leningrad or Moscow. As far as we can remember, the terrain was always closed when we went by. But it was a large area.

P: Was the weather warm enough to bathe?

Mrs. K: Oh, yes, in summer it was hot. And in winter it was not too cold.

Mr. K: Oh, yes, sometimes it was really cold. We had even temperatures down to -30°C. Then the ice on the Liman was frozen very deep and we could drive over it in our cartload. It was cold and we went ice skating a lot.

P: Did you have wine in Kleinliebental?

Mr. K: Oh, yes, lots of wine and fruit. Many apricots.

Mrs. K: In our village there were lots of apricots, but we didn't have any apples because the wind from the sea always blew a mist over to the gardens. But in the neighboring villages there were also other fruits. Most of the wine and fruits was cultivated west of the village in the direction to Grossliebental. There were also lots of melons, yellow and water melon. And in the gardens near that little creek we had lots of vegetables, radishes and those things. We sold those at the market in Odessa.

The houses were all covered with reed. Only one house had tiles. In every house there were two families. We always had to get our water from the well. There was one well in the "little alley". This one had good water. Most of the others didn't have good water; we just used them to water our cattle. People say the water had been better in the past.

P: When somebody married or was born in Kleinliebental, did you write that down in any church records?

Mr. K: Yes, yes, in the past they used to do that. But then it was done no longer under Soviet administration. When we had to leave the village, all those documents were still left in the church, but when many people wrote back from Poland to ask for their birth records, they answered that everything was lost. That is why we don't have any birth certificates at all. We lost everything in Poland.

P: How did you celebrate things like Christmas or Easter?

Mrs. K: We were not allowed to celebrate in church, but at home people still celebrated. And when the Germans occupied us in 1941, we had three years where we were allowed to celebrate everything official: Easter, Christmas, Communion. If we would not have had those three years, I wouldn't know anything about church. During this time church was opened and we learned everything about Communion. And then we went to Communion in white skirts. I still have a little photo from this day. That was in 1942 or 1943.

P: Were there also some musicians in the village?

Mr. K: Oh, yes, we had a big orchestra in the village. The Nieder [family name], the Kocher [family name], they all were musicians.