"I ALWAYS HAVE A SONG IN MY HEART."

ELISABETH SCHNACKENBERG

BY DANY GANDOLY AND TANNA BROCK

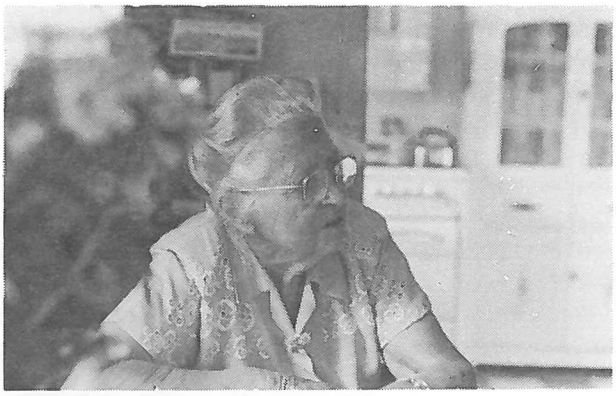
This fall as school started the Three Wire Winter staff welcomed a new student, Danny Gandoli from Switzerland. Danny spoke no English but was fluent in German. The staff decided it would be nice for Danny to understand his interview, so an interview with Elisabeth Schnackenberg was arranged. Elisabeth Schnackenberg and her family moved to Colorado fifty-five years ago. As she told her story she paused to translate for Danny in his and her native language.

"I was born in 1893 in Lunneburg, Germany. It is a real old city; thirty years ago it had a thousand year anniversary. I went to school ten years in Germany. This is medieval Lunneburg where I came from (shows a post card). This is one church where Sebastian Bach played when he was in the seminary there. I never heard him; but that was in 1700, and he was only fifteen years old."

We asked Mrs. Schnackenberg about growing up in Germany, and whether she dated, as the youth of today do. She told us about her first love. "I had an uncle who was so happy. My father was a quiet dignified man, so when my Uncle Ernest came, there was always something to laugh about. I loved Uncle Ernest, and when he married I was eleven years old. I was so sad; I cried bitter tears. He could have waited for me. That was my first love, then I met Johannes, my husband, in the singing society when I was eighteen. He was always full of joy, too.

"I was sixteen when my parents moved, and I was quite lonely, for I had no friends. But I was confirmed, and in my confirmation class there were seventy-five. I met Johannes, my husband-to-be, in a singing society in a Seaman's mission. We sang for young seamen and others for their entertainment, and we had plays sometimes.

"Then I had my eighteenth birthday. My parents invited the group for rehearsal, and my husband was my partner. A young Englishman asked him if he wanted to marry me, and he said yes. So he wrote me a letter later and asked if he



"Whoever it is, it's someone's darling!"

could take me out for a Sunday afternoon concert. The note was to my parents. My father had his doubts; he said I was a little young. I said no, not just for the afternoon outing. I didn't expect he would ask me out, but he did. I had never done any dating, and my father said, 'Well, if you go with him, you give him hopes.' Then he came on Wednesday after the Sunday walk to ask my parents if we could be married. He said I was so young that he would call me a teenager. I was eighteen then.

"We didn't marry until I was twenty. We had a two year courtship, because my parents said I had to learn this and that, and they thought I was too young. I still remember when he would come around the corner, he had a certain whistle. I could hear him, and I would come on the balcony to wave to him. We lived four stories high, and my children and I still know that whistle.

"I had to learn to sew and cook. I took a course to make good seams, and I helped in a private home where there were twelve men to cook for. I did that under a lady's direction. Once I remember we had tomato soup which was too pasty. On Sundays when Johannes would ask me out I had to ask her, and she said okay after I finished my work at dinner.

"In Germany, Johannes was an apprentice painter for three or four years. In the evening he had school and tried to learn something special. As an apprentice he worked for a boss, after he got through with his schooling. His schooling was first, then he was free to learn a trade. After three years of an apprenticeship, he went as a journeyman to Switzerland and Paris. He didn't know much French, but he went as a young man with another young man to pursue this apprenticeship. He traveled for three years, then he came back to Germany. This was before we were married. When he came back to his hometown to a special job, he was a master painter at the age of twenty-one. He was very, very good. That's what his document says. My son, Rudi, has a picture that is signed saying he was good. He was his own boss, and he liked to travel.

"We didn't have any children the first five years. We were married one year when WWI broke out, and he had to go right away. He was in the thick of it, in a military hospital, but he did not have to do any shooting. He had his finger cut, so he couldn't shoot a gun. I guess he was drafted and had to serve. He was in the service until the end. He came home in November, 1918. Werner was born in May, 1919, Rudi in 1921, John in 1922 and Karl in 1923. So we had four little children and no work, all of a sudden.

"There was no food in Germany because the food supply was cut off by the English. They surrounded Germany, and there was no food coming through, so there was very little to eat. I still have some pictures of hungry people.

"My husband wanted to move from Germany. We had lost everything in Germany, and we had nothing. He knew there was a country where he could work, and he had a friend who was a painter apprentice with him who thought so too. There was no work in Germany, everything was 'Kaput.' He wanted to work for his family and the four children. He made, in fact, every effort to get here, to America. He first came as a traveling salesman, and he liked America so well, he wanted to stay. He came first to Denver, and then wrote a letter to the immigration officer to see if he could stay. He had a job and wanted his family to come.

"My husband's boss was his friend who helped him come here. He painted the murals on the post office wall and he said to my husband, 'Can you do anything like that?' Johannes said sure he could. He was asked if he had anything to prove it. He had four little acrylics that he had taken along. The immigration officer asked him to take them out of the frame and send them with a petition to Washington. The answer came back to say he could stay in America as an artist.

"When he painted in Denver Mr. Timm was his boss. He had a good business with some of the old families in Denver. He made the sketches and my husband made them into murals.

"I enjoyed the boat ride over very, very much. I had three of the children come over with me. My parents kept one of the children and came over with him two years later. Werner was seven, and my mother had lost my brother in the war, and she couldn't stand to let us go. After very serious thought we left Rudi with her. His name was the same as my brother and he was the nearest to her heart. When we were settled in America my parents were to come and bring him. Two years later, in 1927, she brought him. My husband came in 1924, and I came in 1925, and Rudi came two years later.

"We came from Hamburg, and that was like New York, except here we had sunshine, and my husband was enthused. I was homesick for my

"I STILL REMEMBER WHEN JOHANNES WOULD COME AROUND THE CORNER; HE HAD A CERTAIN WHISTLE."

family, and I thought what good if I could not see my family. That was dumb of me, and when I realized it, I was over the homesickness. I realized I made it hard for my husband. We spoke only German with the children and I hadn't spoken English for eighteen years. We had French and English and German in school there, and that helped. My oldest boy was a good student, and I helped them all with their school work.

"We bought a home near Sante Fe Drive, and that was the best international neighborhood in Denver. There were Swedes, Norwegians, Spanish and German people from house to house. That was on the other side near Overland Park, and they were mostly immigrants there. We had monthly payments, and my husband had a good job. The murals on the post office wall helped him get immigration papers. That also meant when my parents came they would have a place to live.

"My parents and Rudi came two years later. My father died two years after that. He loved it here, and he said we should have come ten years earlier. But he had cancer and died, and that was hard on my mother. She was homesick for Germany, and she went back for two years. Then she wanted to come back here, but she didn't speak English. When she was back in Germany she decided many people in her hometown didn't include her, especially the younger generation. Here at our place she was the center of attention, and it was better to be here because the grandchildren could grow up with Grandma."

We wanted to know more about Germany and how Europe was during the World Wars. We asked Mrs. Schnackenberg about her memories of that time. "While I was in Germany it was the first war, not the second. Germany lost the war because of too many enemies surrounding us. It was a small country, and after World War I they took off so much of Germany, and we didn't have a peace treaty. The Versailles Treaty was not a peace treaty. That was the reason for the second World War. Hitler started right and wanted to do the right thing, and it turned just the opposite. Hitler wanted to unite Germany.

"East and West Berlin was after the second war, and that happened at Yalta. Roosevelt was also too sick and Churchill and Stalin, the leader of Russia, divided Germany. In former years in Poland and for hundreds of years, and under Bismarck in 1917 there was Germany united under the Reich. We were happy and proud of our German land. All our own hymns — the German national anthem was a hymn. I sing the German hymn with all my heart.

"I always have a song in my heart, but they are German songs. After 50 years I have lived in this country and most of the songs that come back to me are German. That makes me happy and keeps me content with my present condition. "Ich habe immer ein im scarzen Lied Herzen." (Translated: "I have a song in my heart.") It's strange that all these songs come back to me to the very last verse. So what you learn in youth stays with you, even the old words.

"Deutchland Uber Alles die liebe grabe das ist drag und akt und solo weiter glinklen und die glechtezu gechlchter delischland, deuschland uber ales uber dam gluck."

As Elisabeth told us about her homeland we asked her about German inflation. She replied, "You want to know about inflation? Do you want to see a million and billion mark? We were millionaires, but we couldn't buy anything. When my youngest, Karl, was born his grandfather gave him 10 billion marks. We couldn't buy anything. I kept those billions as a memory for the children. A mark was only worth 25 cents.

"I dread to see it coming here, to this country, but at least it goes slowly here. In Germany it was within three years, 1920-1923. Even then we had no money. On October 1923, it was at an end. The Schatzmeister (the treasurer) declared it at an end, and changed it around. It was a gold

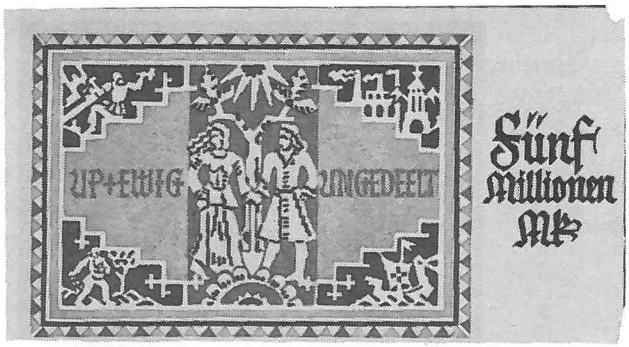
market and everyone had lost everything. I will show you some (takes out money). This is three marks to 25 and a 50 pfennig from March 1, 1920. Here's a 20 billion mark, 1,000 million mark, one hundred million, and a one billion mark. We couldn't buy anything with the one billion mark, so we just kept it. As time went by every city printed their own money; they had to have some exchange. If the old mark wouldn't buy anything anymore, then it was gone. See each mark has a date, and different banks printed their own money.

"My husband still was working when the children were born, then there was no work at all. While he was working he would come home with money, and I would be ready with my coat on to rush to the grocery store on the corner to buy some groceries. Stores closed for three hours at noon, and we couldn't buy what we had in the morning, the inflation happened so rapidly. The next day we would get even less. My father had life insurance for 4,000 marks, which in normal times was plenty, yet when he cashed it in he could only buy ten pounds of bacon. It was worthless. My parents had a house with ten apartments, and as Mother counted the rent money, it got worth less and less. This was in 1920.

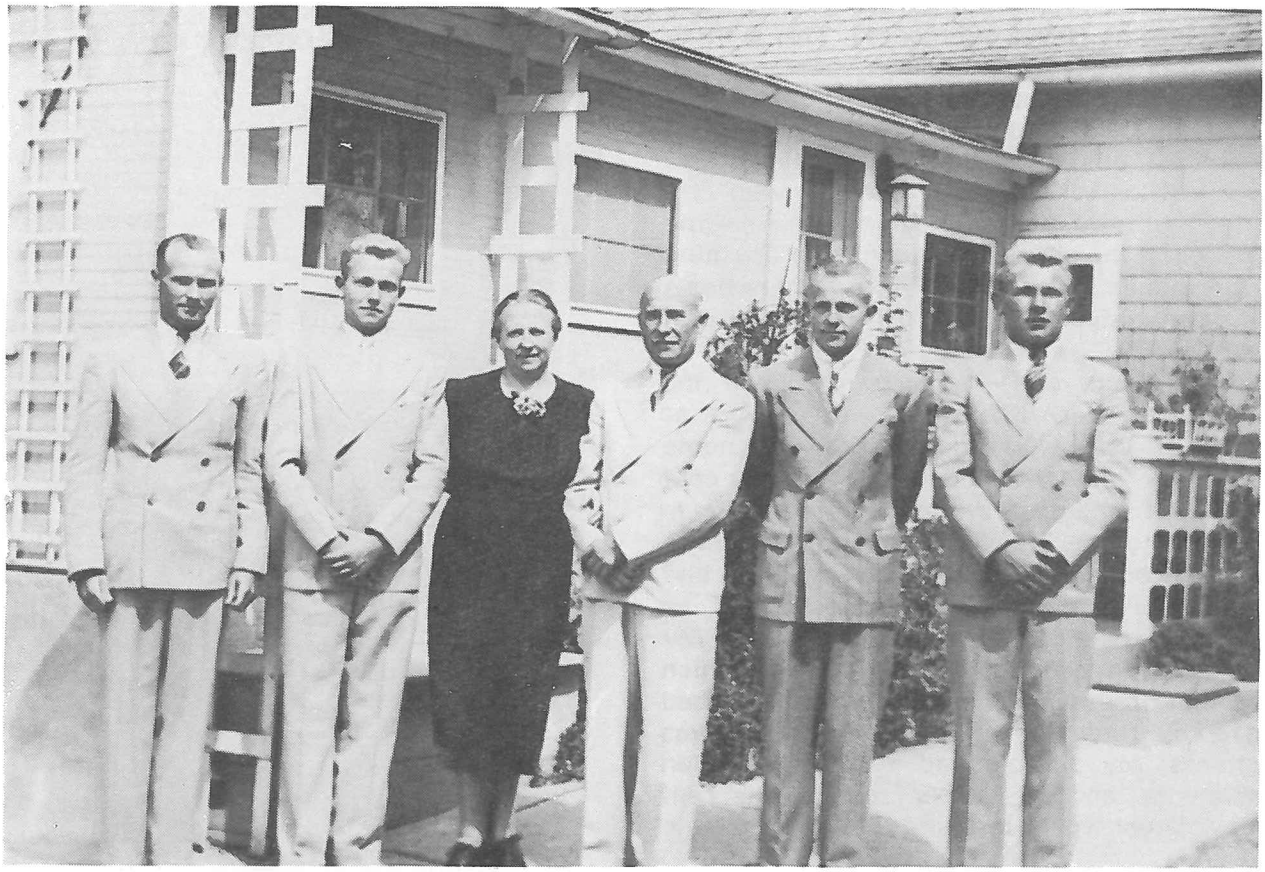
"The inflation was the same that it's getting here. My husband was once painting electric boxes, and he had to bid on a job. He got the price at nine a.m., and when he found out he had the job the price of materials had gone up three times. He worked three weeks for nothing; inflation was awful!

"After World War I everything was lost in Germany. During the twenties and during inflation everything was devalued in just three years. One spool of yarn or thread was worth 36 hundred marks. Many people in the country paid 20,000 marks for a dozen eggs, and a bar of soap went for 1,400 marks. Two pounds of sugar was 2,200 marks, cocoa for 2,500, and one pound of rice 1,500 marks. My husband come over to this country on borrowed money and a prayer, and he paid 20% interest on the money he borrowed. We couldn't afford the money at the time for me to come over.

"When people today talk about inflation, I know what it means, but I'm glad it goes slowly here. I've had enough of it, I don't see how government can let it go on. Why they don't try for peace? The government should stop the arms race; I've seen the destruction. We should have money for the young people for schooling or something worthwhile."



Do you want to see a million and billion mark?



Then Mrs. Schnackenberg talked about the depression. We wondered how she felt coming from inflationary times to depression times. "My mother was sick, and I couldn't go back to Germany with her after Dad died; we didn't have the money. My husband worked at everything, even dishwashing. We had some money to get along, and we were very frugal. We had our own garden, and we worked hard, and we were used to hard times.

"When I came here Steamboat Springs was a sweet little town with friendly people. We knew everyone. Ice cream was just five cents a cone. I miss ice cream and black bread from Germany. A double chocolate cone was a nickel. Those days are gone forever, I am afraid.

"Once I had arthritis and went to the doctor. There was a lady there visiting her husband, and she asked if I was a worrier. I said no I wasn't a worrier. She said she read in the Reader's Digest that arthritis can come from worry. After she had gone I said, 'Oh, Rudi and Karl are going over to Italy,' and naturally I thought I might be worried. Then was when I learned to trust in God, to pray and leave it to God. I cannot do anything with my worrying. That helped me get rid of my arthritis. I didn't know why I was so worried; I'm not a worrier by heart, but it was natural that I had lost my only brother in the first war and my grandmother used to say, 'Whoever it is it's someone's darling.' So that gives a different sensation to war, and there was nothing I could do about it. I just had to trust God.

"I don't see how our government can go on like it is. Why they don't try for peace? I'm a Democrat and I'm glad to see that more Democrats got in on the '82 election, because they see the need. Maybe I don't judge it right, the rich people don't know what it is to suffer. I voted in Germany before I came over here, and the women in the United States were just getting started in voting. Of course, I voted in the '82 election, it is very essential, even if it is just one vote."

ELISABETH AND JOHANNES
WITH THEIR FOUR SONS

WERNER, KARL, JOHN & RUDI