

Interview with Joe Goebel
Interviewer: Charles Petranek
February 1980

Q: Were you born in this area here or were you born in Germany?

A: No, I was born here.

Q: You were born here. What year?

A: In 1891. I will be eighty-nine years old next month.

Q: Eighty-nine. That's pretty good. Have you lived right around here all of your life?

A: Yes. In German Township all of my life.

Q: In this house?

A: No, I lived on No.6 School Road . That's where I was raised. I've lived here fifty years now.

Q: Where? In this house here?

A: Yes.

Q: This is a nice area here. You have a nice view here. Do you have a garden back here too?

A: Yes, I have two acres.

Q: Oh, you have two acres. How much of that is in garden?

A: Oh, all of it back here. I would say about half an acre.

Q: That keeps you pretty busy then, doesn't it?

A: It does but I'm going to cut down on it this year. I'm getting too old for that.

Q: Yes, that's quite a bit in garden .

A: You know last year I picked one hundred and eighty-four boxes of strawberries.

Q: One hundred and eighty - four boxes? Do you have a pretty big patch?

A: Well, I had five rows.

Q: Do you sell those or what do you do with all of those?

A: People come here and pick them up. I don't have to call them up. All I have to do is raise them. They'll get them.

Q: Oh, I see. Do you advertise anyplace or ... ?

A: Well, I've got my old customers like up here at Smith Lane. All of those people who moved in there don't raise nothing. They come here and buy them.

Q: Oh. Well, maybe I'll come here and get some strawberries this next year because we really like them. When do yours usually come in, do you know? The end of May?

A: It's always in June isn't it? Or the last of May?

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Q: The last of May. That's when they start. Well, I'll give you a call then because we always go picking strawberries. We really like it.

A: You know, there's a place out here on St. Joe Avenue where they've got thirty-five acres of strawberries where you can pick your own.

Q: Yes. We went there last year. That was pretty nice. They had some beautiful berries.

A: I know they have. But still, you know, they sell them by the pound. I sell mine by the quart. You still pay sixty-five cents a box if you pick your own.

Q: So, you make some money, then. Do you sell anything else?

A: Oh, everything. Peas, red beets, potatoes. I want to plant my peas this month if it gets dry enough.

Q: That's what I was thinking about doing. I have about a quarter of an acre in garden.

A: Have you?

Q: I want to put my peas out early, too.

A: If you don't get them out in February they just don't bear.

Q: That's right. You almost have to, don't you?

A: What kind do you plant? The Alaska.

Q: No, I plant the edible pea pods. You eat the whole thing. Burpee had a new seed last year called the snap pea. They're really good. You eat the whole thing. They're about that big and about that thick. You eat the whole thing.

A: You don't have to hull them?

Q: No. Snap Pea by Burpee. I'll give you some seeds if you want to try them.

A: I always raise the regular kind.

Q: Well, those are good too but you're just going for the regular peas and those are good. I do a lot of Chinese cooking and so I use the edible pea pods in that. There are different types. Normal pea pods are real thin, but these are real thick. They are really great. You're right. You have to get them out early.

A: If you don't get them out in February they just won't bear with the hot weather.

Q: Even if your ground is a little wet do you try putting them in there or not?

A: Oh, yes. I put mine out. That wet don't hurt them. They'll come up. Those Alaska's will. One year on a day like today when the ground was dry, I started in the morning, tilled up my ground and worked around all afternoon and, don't you know, by three o'clock it got so darned cold. The next morning, we had a chill. Everybody said why them peas, they're shot. I said that won't hurt them. Three years ago, they were about that high and were ready to bloom and they froze down to the ground. I said, "Now they are shot. I'm just going to plow them under." And Charlie over there came over here and said, "Don't you plow them under. They'll come back again." And don't you know they did.

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Q: No kidding. How far did they freeze down?

A: They froze down to the ground and you couldn't see nothing.

Q: There was still enough time for them to come up.

A: I was ready to plow on them. He said don't you plow them under. They'll come back again.

Q: Yes, they are real hardy. I have even had ... Well, if you get a light snow it isn't too bad. They don't think anything about a light snow. As long as it stays above twenty-six or so. I put out cauliflower, too. I want to get my cauliflower out early, too. I started that in-doors two days ago.

A: Have you had any luck raising that cauliflower?

Q: I'll tell you when I had my best luck was in the Fall. I grew some this last Fall. I put it in about mid-August, but I think it was a little late. If I could have gotten plants in about that big by August 1, I would have had some big heads. Two years ago, I got them in early just as a fluke and they were really nice. So, if you can get in plants about that big by August 1 ... I had heads that big as it was, and I got them in by mid-August. That's the best time. If you get them in a little late, as far as the Spring, the heat gets them, and they wilt.

A: I know I tried it one year. I didn't have no luck with it.

Q: Sometimes, it depends. I don't know. In the Fall you don't have to worry about it so much because the leaves are so big, and the plants were like this. They were beautiful. It was just real sweet. I like to plant broccoli, too. It works real well, too.

A: It keeps the worms out, too.

Q: One thing about the Fall is I only had a couple attacks of those white butterflies. Those are the ones that lay all the eggs.

A: Yes, sure.

Q: There was only one or two times where I had to dust them. The rest of the time the white butterflies were not around. In the Spring they are just all over the place. But, in the Fall I tell you that is the best time to grow them.

A: I know last year they were lousy out here. I kept the spray on them.

Q: When you were growing up what was it like being at your house? Was your father pretty strict? Did your mother run the household? What was it like growing up in your house when you were growing up? In a German household? Was your mother German?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they come from Germany?

A: No, my dad did but my mother didn't.

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Q: Your mother didn't.

A: No. My mother was raised over here on No. 6 School Road.

Q: When did your dad come then?

A: He was two years old when he came here from Germany.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: What year was that?

A: I don't know.

Q: Well, how old was your dad?

A: He was seventy-nine years old when he died?

Q: When did he die?

A: December 3.

Q: What year? He died on the third of December.

A: Yes.

Q: Well, what was it like in your house then? Was your dad pretty strict with you or was your mother?

A: I would say I had good parents.

Q: Why were they good parents?

A: They just took care of us. Of course, we had to obey them. Whenever they said we had to be home at five o'clock at night we had to be there.

Q: How many children were in your family?

A: Eleven.

Q: Eleven?

A: I'm the only one living.

Q: Is that right. Were you the youngest?

A: No. I was the fourth youngest.

Q: Did you marry? Did you have children?

A: Yes, I was married, and I have two children.

Q: What type of German traditions did you try to pass on? Did you teach your children German?

A: Yes.

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Q: They spoke German in the house?

A: Yes. Now they don't talk German anymore since they got married.

Q: So, they did speak German?

A: Yes.

Q: When did you learn English? Did you speak German in your house?

A: Yes.

Q: When did you learn German?

A: German?

Q: No, English.

A: When I went to school.

Q: First Grade?

A: Yes. I went to a public school the first year.

Q: You went to a public school?

A: First, and then I went to a Catholic school.

Q: Second Grade. Why did you go to a public school the first year?

A: It was closest.

Q: Did they teach everything in English at St. Joe or not?

A: No. Everything was in German.

Q: Everything was in German when you first went?

A: Yes.

Q: When did they switch then? When did you start picking up more English?

A: I'll say after I entered the Fourth Grade.

Q: Why did they switch then? Did the teachers teach English then?

A: No. Well, we learned English, but they were teaching German, too.

Q: So, it was half and half? Was it morning and afternoons?

A: Well, certain classes, you know.

Q: Did your kids go to school here at St. Joe?

A: Both of them.

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Q: Were they still teaching German then or not?

A: No, I don't think they did anymore.

Q: But your kids did learn German. Did they speak it very much after they learned it?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Around the house?

A: Yes. They spoke German until they got married.

Q: Until they got married?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they lose it then or did they marry German girls?

A: Both of them married German.

Q: Well, why did they not use it anymore?

A: I don't know why they quit. We moved to town. That 's when the oldest one started speaking English.

Q: They moved to town?

A: No, we did. After we left our home place over there, we lived in town about three years. That was when the English started.

Q: So, where did you go, to Evansville?

A: Yes.

Q: You went there for three years?

A: Yes.

Q: Were your kids married then? Did they just get married?

A: No. The oldest one is sixty-three.

Q: Your oldest one is sixty- three?

A: Sixty-three and the youngest one is fifty-three.

Q: You moved into town?

A: Yes. Then we moved back here again.

Q: When you moved into town is that when they started losing their German?

A: Yes.

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Q: Where did you move? What part of town, the Westside?

A: On the West side down here. On Columbia Street.

Q: How old were your children then?

A: The oldest one was about eight years old. He went to St. Boniface.

Q: So that was when they started to lose their language?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they teach German at all at St. Boniface?

A: I don't know whether they did or not.

Q: After they got married, they lost ... ?

A: They started talking English.

Q: They started talking English, too. Even though they both married German girls, you say.

A: Yes. The youngest daughter lives right up here in the one home with the picket fences. It's right up here.

Q: Are there any particular German foods that your wife or you would fix? Or that you fix now that you would consider German food?

A: Oh yes. Sauerkraut. We always cured our own meat when we lived on the farm.

Q: Did you do butchering in the Fall, then?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you help with other families too who needed help?

A: Yes. That was always the fun thing.

Q: How many people would help you then? How many families would come out?

A: There was about six of us.

Q: Did you go to them and help them?

A: Yes.

Q: You always went around. Did they have more houses than some of these other places?

A: Yes. In that one place we always butchered about nine-head of hogs.

Q: So that was a whole day that you spent doing that?

A: Yes.

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Q: Were there any traditions around that on how you butchered them? Did you get some liver sausage of some sort?

A: Oh yes. We made liver sausage, blood sausage, pork sausage-three different kinds. Sometimes head cheese but not very often.

Q: Do you like head cheese?

A: Yes. That wasn't very often. We rendered our own lard.

Q: You rendered the lard? Does anybody around here still butcher at all?

A: No.

Q: Do they make any of these sausages anymore?

A: No. There is one guy who lives in Haubstadt. He butchers and we always get our sausage there.

Q: Is that pretty good sausage there?

A: Yes, darn good. Fred Martin is his name.

Q: Does he have a store there? Or how do you get it? How do you buy it from his? Does he just butcher every once in a while, and let you know?

A: No. He is going to start butchering again this Saturday. Once a month as long as the weather is cool, you know. He will butcher from November on up until March.

Q: He doesn't sell it to a lot of people, does he?

A: Yes. Anybody can get it there.

Q: Well, how do you buy it then? Do you just contact him?

A: He will call us about Wednesday. He will want to know about how much sausage we want, and we will give him the order. He'll save it for us. If not, you won't get it. He always butchers about seven head of hogs to weigh about three hundred apiece.

Q: Well, he must have a lot of people buying sausage.

A: I wish you would go there on a Sunday morning. He doesn't sell it until Sunday morning at ten o'clock and then they will come.

Q: Should I call him up and ask him if he would sell me some?

A: I can get you some.

Q: Oh, you could?

A: Oh, Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Liver sausage or pork sausage?

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Q: Pork sausage.

A: He has some darn good liver sausage.

Q: His liver sausage is pretty good?

A: Whoever likes liver sausage, he's got it.

Q: Okay, why don't you get me about five pounds. Is that reasonable? And about ten pounds of pork sausage.

A: Put your order down.

Q: So, you can call me, and I will come back out here. Do you have to go and get this thing? Or do you have someone go get it for you or what?

A: I have somebody that takes me out there.

Q: Okay. Well, you just give me a phone call and I will bring you some of those peas. So, you can try some of those. They grow four to six feet high.

A: You have to give them sticks, huh?

Q: Yes, you will have to give them some sort of sticks.

A: Well, that's what I have to do. Put your phone number down.

Q: Yes, I have my phone number down. Do you want my address, too?

A: No, I just need your phone number?

Q: Five pounds of liver, five pounds of liver sausage, ten pounds of pork sausage. My name is Chuck Petranek, 426-1617. That will be great, thanks. So, he butchers every once in a while?

A: Yes. He could butcher all year round because he has ice boxes and everything there, but he works in the brewery, you know? And farms on top of that.

Q: Now, how many heads is he going to butcher the n?

A: Seven.

Q: That's a lot of sausage and stuff, isn't it?

A: Yes. I wish you could see all of that sausage. Some people buy fifty and sixty dollars' worth. It doesn't take long. If you don't put your order in, you won't get it. He said he would call Wednesday. If he don't butcher this week, he will butcher next week.

Q: Whenever you can get it will be fine. I would like to try some of it. Is he the only one around here that really has German-type sausage of the way it was done when you were growing up? There are not many other guys who butcher now are there?

A: Around here there isn't a sole. They all quit. The old ones are all gone, and the young ones all have a job in town somewhere.

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Q: Yes. Are there any German traditions around Christmas that you follow? St. Nicholas Day? Is there anything you would do that was special on those days? St. Nicholas Day, Christmas, Thanksgiving?

A: Yes, we always celebrated them days.

Q: You did celebrate St. Nicholas Day.

A: No, but Christmas and Thanksgiving.

Q: You didn't hang up stockings on St. Nicholas Day?

A: No.

Q: On Christmas what did you do that was special there?

A: I go to my daughters for dinner and then we have a Christmas party.

Q: So, the whole family gets together pretty often with your daughter.

A: Yes, especially the one up here. I would say about once a month. The one at St. James lives too far, you know.

Q: Does she come down here pretty often?

A: Yes, she takes care of me.

Q: Does she call you pretty often or not?

A: Yes, every day. I lost my wife eleven years ago, the 5th of April. She died on Easter Sunday.

Q: My wife lost her grandmother last year on Easter Sunday.

A: Where was that?

Q: She was from Michigan.

A: You know, my sister lived until she was one-hundred and three years and three months old.

Q: Is that right? That is really something.

A: I hope I don't get that old. (laughter) I used to go to the nursing home to see her. Its pitiful. They just sit there and don't know what's going on.

Q: Well you seem to be pretty spry and able to move around pretty good, aren't you?

A: Oh yes, so far. All my buddies around here have cancer or are sick, I don't know.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yes. One that lives down here has cancer and one over here. They took him to the hospital Friday. The other one was operated on about three weeks ago.

Q: That is pretty sad, isn't it?

A: Oh, yes.

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Q: How old are they?

A: Charlie is seventy-eight and Johnnie Kissel over there is seventy-three.

Q: Well, they are a lot younger than you?

A: Yes. You know, I am the oldest one in our parish?

Q: Is that right?

A: Yes, we have four hundred families.

Q: You seem to be doing pretty well here. My gosh, you have things in order.

A: Why shouldn't I'm not doing anything else. Some people just don't clean up. It is just pitiful to see their places.

Q: Yes.

A: Dirty, gosh!

Q: Well, I can't see you being in a nursing home. It just seems that you do real well right here.

A: Doctor says, "I believe you'll live to two-hundred years old. I say, "get away from here!"

Q: Well, why do you think you've lived so long? Any particular thing?

A: I don't know.

Q: I noticed that you have some whiskey back there.

A: That's wine.

Q: Wine.

A: I live on wine?

Q: You live on wine?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you make quite a bit of wine?

A: Oh, yes , two barrels.

Q: Two barrels? Fifty-five-gallon barrels.

A: Fifty.

Q: Fifty-gallon barrels.

A: I'll say about forty-five gallons after settling.

Q: You make that much wine?

A: Yes.

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Q: Do you drink it mostly yourself or do you give it away?

A: Give it away. No, I couldn't drink two barrels of wine.

Q: Yes, that would be something else. Do you make wine every Fall then?

A: Every Fall.

Q: Is it an old German recipe.

A: No.

Q: Where did you get the recipe?

A: I could say since I was nine years old. My dad always made wine. That is where I picked it up. I use about one hundred and eighty pounds of grapes and one hundred pounds of sugar.

Q: You mean the recipe. Give me the recipe again. One hundred and eighty pounds of what'?

A: One hundred and eighty pounds of grapes.

Q: Okay.

A: And a hundred pounds of sugar, then fill the barrel with water.

Q: Okay, what do you do with the grapes? Do you wash the grapes first?

A: No. You mash the grapes and let them set for about three days. And then you press them out.

Q: Okay, so you mash them and let them set for about three days. Do you put them in a big crock or in the barrels?

A: I take the head out of the barrel and put them in there.

Q: So, you leave them in that barrel, then you press them out. What did you press them out with?

A: Three days in that barrel and then press them out. I have a regular press.

Q: Okay, then what do you do with the juice? Do you put it back into the barrel?

A: Yes. But that has to be a closed barrel though.

Q: Closed barrel. So, you have to have another barrel and it has to be closed.

A: I get a new whiskey barrel every year .

Q: Where can you get a new whiskey barrel? Do you get somebody to get one for you? Why do you get a new one every year?

A: It makes better wine. You can use it more, but I generally buy a new one.

Q: No kidding?

A: I have two kinds of wine here. One has set three years and the other one four. It makes a big difference.

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Q: Where do you buy the new one's? I would like to get a barrel some place.

A: At... down there. I don't know how many.

Q: So, people go down there and buy them?

A: Yes. Some people go down there and buy a truck load. Last year we went down there and only got ten.

Q: That is really something.

A: Some use steel and that makes good wine, too. Father Dilger made some in a steel barrel. Almost two hundred gallons. Boy, that was good wine.

Q: Yes. He used to be the pastor, didn't he?

A: Yes, when he was the assistant priest at Haubstadt, I went down to see him. He asked if I would like a glass of wine. I said, "Yes, why not" and he gave some. I told him, "you ain't got no wine. Come over and I'll give you some wine." He said, "Will you make me a barrel of wine?"

Q: Yes, see I talked to him about three weeks or so. He is a nice guy. I enjoyed it.

A: Oh, yes, he is a good guy. He always shovels my snow and everything. He is going to come out here this coming Thursday.

Q: Well, you tell him that I interviewed you because I talked to him about three weeks ago, I think.

A: We were together yesterday.

Q: Is that right?

A: We went to Holy Redeemer. The Senior Citizens at St. Joe met the Senior Citizens at Holy Redeemer.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Yes, when he came to St. Joe, he didn't know how to play cards and didn't know how to make wine or nothing like that.

Q: You taught him? What kind of cards do you play?

A: Clabber. He was a very good guy, but he brought it on himself just on account of that darn school that time.

Q: Is that right? I don 't know what the story is.

A: I believe he could keep that school going.

Q: Is it pretty rough now to keep it going?

A: Well, they can't raise enough money, you know.

Q: How many teachers do you have?

A: Eight and one hundred and sixty-two children. That's too darn many teachers.

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Q: Well, that is not too bad. Did he want to keep the school going or not?

A: No, he wanted to close it.

Q: Oh, he wanted to close it.

A: Yes, and they said it had to stay open. He said, "Well, I will leave it up to you. " If you can raise the money you can have it.

Q: Has he been raising the money or not?

A: No. They're going in the hole every Sunday.

Q: How come? Because I talked to some people up here at St. Wendel and they seemed to be doing pretty well.

A: They aren't. They ain't got nothing. Now you know, our pastor wants all these parents who have children go to school and give ten dollars a Sunday. Now they can't do it. The ones that are here are all building new homes. Ten dollars a Sunday is quite a bit.

Q: Yes.

A: But still we have people that donate twenty dollars a Sunday. Of course, they have kindergarten and everything down there. You know, I think we can do without that.

Q: Yes. On this wine here we have it pressed out and we have the juice back into the barrel. Then you add one hundred pounds of sugar to that.

A: Fill it with water and put a sandbag on top. If you leave that on until Christmas, you won't have to cork it.

Q: Okay. put a sandbag on top of that bowl on the top?

A: Yes, that is right.

Q: And that is pretty good wine?

A: Yes, I will give you some.

Q: Okay. You don't have to put any yeast or anything in this?

A: No. There is this guy who comes from Illinois. He always says that you have to put yeast in it. I told him I have been making wine and helping my dad make wine since I was nine years old. We never put yeast in there. He said you have. I told him, "Caleb, by God, you can't tell me that." I am afraid to put yeast in there. It makes everything sour, don't it?

Q: I don't know, that is one of the things I have heard about yeast.

A: Yes, some people do.

Q: Well, see there is kind of yeast culture around the grapes. You don't wash your grapes, right?

A: No.

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Q: So that is important, I bet.

A: Yes.

Q: If you wash all of that stuff off then you need something to make it work. Do you put any sugar with that first batch?

A: No.

Q: You just let it work by itself.

A: Put hot water on there whenever you set it right after you mash your grapes.

Q: How much water do you pour on them?

A: So, they are fully covered. Otherwise, they would get molded. You have to keep enough water on them.

Q: Okay. Then that sounds pretty good then. How far did you go in school? How much education do you have?

A: Sixth grade. That was the farthest we could go out here.

Q: Is that right?

A: When you were thirteen years old you were out of school.

Q: What did you do? did you work on a farm then?

A: Yes.

Q: How far did your children go to school? What grade?

A: They went through the Eighth Grade.

Q: Why didn't they go farther? Was that all that was offered out here, the Eighth Grade?

A: Yes.

Q: They did not go to high school? Was there any way of busing them or getting them into town?

A: No. My youngest daughter has worked at Franklin Drugs seventeen or eighteen years. Maybe you've seen here. Or don't you go to Franklin Drugs?

Q: I go to Franklin Drugs, yes.

A: Ask for Betty. That's my daughter.

Q: Well, high school would be too far. You had to go all the way into the city to go to high school. That probably wasn't necessary anyway, was it?

A: No. I don't know nobody around here that went to high school. At that time, they didn't have no buses or automobiles and didn't have any transfer to get in.

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Q: Are there any German services over here at St. Joe? Are there any German Masses, sermons or songs?

A: Not now but we use to have them. I would say for the last twenty- five years we didn't have no German talking. Of course, Father Dilger could.

Q: He could? Well, which Dilger is this? There are two of them, aren't there?

A: There are two of them. He makes toys now and sells them. He makes dogs and trains and all that stuff like that. His name is Donald and Father Dilger's name is LeRoy.

Q: Okay.