Eva Fischer Keeps Baking (1984)

by Wayne Lubenow reporter, Fargo Forum newspaper

ASHLEY - When I got to her apartment at 8:30 on a Saturday morning, 89-year-old Eva Fischer was busy baking kucha.

She waved me in, a big blab of fresh dough in her hand, and said, "Come and sit in the kitchen. We can talk while I bake."

Eva Fischer is one of those remarkable people who just never grow old. She doesn't have time. There is too much to do. At 89, her mind and memory are exceptionally sharp, her health is perfect and she weighs in at 125 pounds.

I sit at the kitchen table and Eva molds the dough into a glass pan, puts on a prune topping and pops it into the hot oven.

She is constantly moving - and talking. Her accent is pure German-Russian because Eva was born in Russia in 1891. "I came here to Eureka, S.D., with my parents in 1901," she says as she grabs a rolling pin and begins rolling out more dough.

"I was raised here and went to a rural school and my father homesteaded here," she says. "This area is really my home, but I lived in Beulah for 41 years." (Eureka, S.D., is near Ashley, just across the state line.)

Eva's only concession to her age is a hearing aid and silver hair. She drives her own car, can out-walk women half her age, cooks and bakes, sews and alters dresses, goes to church regularly, is self-educated and entertains a lot.

Her two-bedroom apartment in a four-plex is spacious and spotless - except for the kitchen on this morning because of all the kucha-making.

Eva says, "When I was 13, my mother said to quit school and learn to cook. Papa said, `Ya, you don't have to go anymore.'"

So Eva reads and keeps abreast of what's happening in the world. She's right up to date on today's news.

In 1912, Eva married Henry Oster and they farmed near her parents' place. Henry died nine years after the marriage and Eva rented out the farm and "moved into town" to her sister's place. The town was Greenwood, S.D., which has since disappeared.

In Greenwood, she did sewing and "worked out" for others.

Eva stayed single for 16 years. Then, through friends, she met John Fischer of Beulah who worked for Montana-Dakota Utilities. "I guess I was getting a little lonely," Eva says.

They were married and moved to Beulah. John died in 1961, three years after he retired. Eva stayed in Beulah until 1978 until she was 83.

"We had a big house," she says, "and a big yard. Well, it was getting kind of hard for me to take care of everything alone (although she did it for 17 years) so I decided to come back home to Ashley."

Eva didn't have any trouble selling her house. Beulah was in a boom. Power plants were going up and a coal gasification plant was coming. Everybody needed housing.

Eva smiles, "There were a lot of buyers and they thought they could get the house cheap from a widow. They were wrong. I got $30,000 for it."

So Eva moved into this four-plex for which she pays $245 a month. "It's nice," she says, "I like it here."

Eva's energy is boundless and she's one of the most friendly ladies you'll ever see.

"I entertain a lot," she says. "I have to so I can make new friends. I grew up here and knew a lot of people, but they're all dead so I have to make new friends."

By this time Eva has made seven pans of kucha and shows no sign of stopping. "It's Easter tomorrow," she explains, "and I'm expecting a lot of company."

Her son, Arthur, is a retired farmer living in Ellendale and he, his wife and the grandchildren will be coming to Eva's. "I have to make some cream pies for the kids, too," Eva says.

Eva and her first husband- had three sons. One died in childhood. Besides Arthur, there is Ellis who used to be a doctor in Ellendale and is now a radiologist in Oklahoma.

Eva knows what's going on in Ashley and doesn't mind talking about it. She's just vitally interested in everything and everybody.

About one lady in town she says, "She's rich and she had her face lifted and she still doesn't look any better than me."

Her church is a big part of Eva's life. Her faith in the Lord is deep and abiding and she has her own prayer sessions at home.

She loves meeting new people. When newcomers to Ashley built a huge new house right down the street Eva told the people in her four-plex, "Let's, invite them over and make them welcome."

They're too rich for us, Eva was told. "'That's not the point," Eva says, "They're new in town and we should have had a welcoming party for them."

That's how she is, always offering her friendship. "I'm not self-conscious," she says. Indeed not. She is a warm, outgoing lady.

She gets me a cup of coffee and slices me a wedge of kucha right out of the oven. It is a little piece of heaven.

Eva looks and acts as if she will live forever, but she has prepared for the eventuality. Her first husband and her little boy are buried in an old country cemetery about 10 miles from here.

"I've bought my monument," she says, "and I have a place right beside them." But not now. Now she has to make those cream pies for the grandchildren.