

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Niles, Ohio

Personal Experience

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MARGARET KROK

Interviewed

by

Marcelle Wilson

on

October 24, 1994

MARGARET KROK

Margaret Krok was born on July 29, 1919 in Niles, Ohio, to John Sr and Minnie Shinkman Pirigyi. Her parents were both born in Hungary and came to the United States of America to find work. Mrs. Krok attended St. Stephen's school and graduated from Niles McKinley High School in 1937. Mrs. Krok worked for General Electric up until her marriage to G. Gay Krok on March 30, 1940.

Mrs. Krok has two children, Richard, age 43 and Judee, age 37. She is very active in St. Stephen's church and enjoys reading, traveling, flower arrangement, and cooking. She has served as President of the Niles Catholic Women's Club, President of the Catholic Action Guild, Secretary of the Home and School Association, held various offices in the Knights of Columbus Ladies Club and served six years on the Catholic Social Service Board. She has devoted countless hours of volunteer work for the Red Cross, the Niles Community Service, and other civic organizations.

W: This is an interview with Margaret Krok for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Niles Project, by Marcelle Wilson, on October 24, 1994, at 805 Robbins Avenue at 7 30 p.m.

Where did you grow up?

K In Niles, Ohio

W What was your childhood like?

K It was a happy childhood. It was a happy childhood because my mother and father really loved us and we knew it. We did not have any money. I grew up in depression times. My father did not have much work, but he always saw to it that we had something to eat. He worked in the steel mills at the Mahoning Valley Steel Company when there was work. But there was very little work at the steel mills during the depression years in the 1930s.

Some of the people in our neighborhood had to go to welfare agencies to ask for help because they had no food, no work, and no money. My father would not do that. He was a very proud man. As long as he was strong and healthy and was able to work, he would not accept charity. I can remember he would get up early in the morning and go to the mill, hoping there would be work for that day.

When there was no work at the mill, he would then go out to the farm and help the farmers pick potatoes, apples, beans, or whatever kind of work the farmer had for him to do. The farmer had no cash money either to pay his workers, so he paid Dad in vegetables and fruits. That way we always had enough to eat. Whenever he was not working, I can remember my father always played with us. That was my father.

Now to my mother. She always found things for us to do. Of course we all had our little chores we had to do every day, but she made things fun. Even in doing the dishes, which we kids had to do every day. My brothers would have to empty the trash and garbage, and sweep up the kitchen floor. That was their daily chore. All the while we worked doing these chores, Mom would ask us our multiplication tables, or spelling, or geography. And we would all yell out the answers, trying to be the first with the correct answer. After we were through with our little jobs, Mom would give us a treat. She would make up games and always found exciting things for us to do. We were never lonely or bored. The kids all loved coming to our house. It was the gathering place for the neighborhood.

W How and when did the first members of your family come to Niles? What year was that and who came here?

K I think my grandfather came here in the early 1900s -- my Grandpa Shiikman. He came from Hungary. He came at that time because there was work in this area. He did not work in the steel mills, but at the foundries, the Niles Fire Brick, and other factory work.

in Niles. I do not know who sponsored him, but I know that is why he came to this area. He came first and got a job. Then he sent for my grandmother.

W Did she have any children over in Hungary?

K Oh, yes. My mother was born there and her older brother was born in Hungary. There were only two children when they came to America, but after that there were three more children born when they lived here in Niles.

W What street did you grow up on?

K The street was called Ann Street.

W What was your neighborhood like as you were growing up?

K It was the same. It was an ethnic neighborhood.

W All Hungarian?

K Not really. We had a Croatian neighbor on one side and an Italian neighbor on the other side. A Romanian family lived across the street. Everyone was very friendly and neighborly. They always helped one another especially when there was a sickness. Then everyone would band together, like on a big happy family, and they would share whatever they had.

W You got along with your neighbors?

K Oh yes.

W Kids in the neighborhood?

K Well they all had children too. All the neighbors had children. We grew up with them and it was a nice affair. We and another neighbor went to St. Stephen's school when we were kids. Of course, we were a little closer to that family than we were to the other families in our neighborhood. They were always very friendly and very nice. I remember my mother was sick one time and the neighbors all got together. One day, one neighbor brought the meal in. The next day somebody else brought the meal. It seemed like everybody was away from all their relatives and they just made friends with whoever was in the neighborhood. They were good neighbors.

W How many people were in your family when you were growing up on Ann Street?

K I had three brothers and myself.

- W You did not have any extended family living with you? Any aunts or cousins?
- K No We had a lot of aunts and uncles visiting, but they did not come to stay They would come for maybe a week or so, but that was it They did not stay There were only four children in our family.
- W. Where did you go to school?
- K My early childhood?
- W Early and later
- K I went to St. Stephen's School for eight years Then from there I went to Niles McKinley High School for four years. That was as far as I went because as I said, we grew up in the Depression Era and as much as my parents wanted to send me, there was no money for college
- W Did your brothers go to college?
- K No, none of us went My father even wanted to go, but there was no work where we could learn tuition. Like I said, he would go out to the farm and help the farmer out so we would have something to eat He was a proud man, and very bright He would have gone far, if he had the education He did not want to be on the relief At that time they called it relief Now they call it welfare
- W I can remember my grandpa telling us Going to work all day and load up your car with vegetables and that was your pay What did you do for fun as you were growing up?
- K For fun?
- W Yes
- K We played lots of games My mother would think up of all kinds of exciting things for us to do, even card games We had scavenger hunts, and play statue, and musical chairs We had no radio for music, so Mom would sing or hum. When she stopped, we all dashed for chairs Sometimes we played gossip -- one person would whisper a sentence to you, then you have to whisper what you heard to the person next to you -- until everyone received the message. What a fun time it was hearing what the last person heard and comparing it with the original sentence
- W. What kind of card games?

K We played fun games. One game I remember was clothes pins. The dealer would deal the cards around. It did not matter how many kids played you could have a kitchen table full for the matter. Whoever was in charge would holler "Pass". Then you would have to take one of your cards and pass it to your neighbor. The game was fast and furious. This passing went on until someone got four of a kind. When this happened, you were supposed to grab a clothes pin. When the others saw you grab for a clothes pin, they would grab too. Someone would always end up without a clothes pin because my mom would always put one less clothes pin in the pot than the number of kids playing. Whoever was without a clothes pin would be given the letter "M". The game went on until someone got enough letters to spell out the word MONKEY. He was then the loser. It was really fun.

Another game we played was called Catty. It was an outdoor game. You played with a small stick about six inches long and a long stick like a broom handle. The object of the game was to try and hit the smaller stick with the broom handle and when it went into the air, you would hit it again like a ball. The others would try to catch the smaller stick while it was still in the air.

I can remember going camping sometimes. Since there was no work anywhere, our parents would take us out to the lake. We would go with aunts and uncles and their families. In the evenings we would sit around the campfire and sing or play blind man's bluff. Adults and all. Our family always included the kids in their activities. That is why I said, it was a happy growing up time for me.

W Where would you go camping at?

K Out to Lake Milton.

W Did you take a tent?

K Yes, we have a tent. My dad would go to the farmer and buy some hay or straw. Then they would put that down on the floor of the tent. That is what we used for a mattress when we were camping. She would bring blankets and pillows from home. We all slept together in the tent, all six of us in our family. When it was time for sleep, we would all go to bed together and sometimes tell jokes or ghost stories. It was scary, but fun.

W What were your favorite subjects in school when you were growing up in grade school?

K In grade school I had so many interesting ones. History was one of my favorites. I loved history. I liked spelling and math and reading. I just liked all the subjects. I really did.

W Do you remember any of your favorite teachers?

K In high school I had a teacher who was called Miss Galster. She was very strict and from the "old school". Everyone behaved in her class. She wore old timers clothes and big

laced up shoes, like they are wearing and are in style today She was a real old maid, but she was a good and fair teacher She taught Algebra She saw to that everyone learned in her class. In the primary grades, I had many good teachers -- nuns I can vividly remember Sister Grace Marie and Sister Mary Alice They were wonderful, kind and loving people. Sometimes on the weekends, when they did not have much to do, the nuns would invite some of the girls to go to the Villa I do not know if you are familiar with that school.

W No

K It was a Boarding School for Girls in Pennsylvania My parents did not have the money to send to send me to live there so we envied the girls that were privileged to go to that school On Saturday, the nuns would invite us girls to spend the day there We would go early in the morning and return around supper time We met the other girls who boarded and went to school there. They always had different things set up for us to do We always enjoyed the day at the Villa

W Where did your family go to church?

K St Stephen's

W Who was your minister, or the couple that you remember?

K We were married by Father Daniel Gallagher. I can remember him as a tall, stern, regal type of man When I was a kid and went to St Stephen's School, we had Father Roach as an assistant pastor He loved all of the kids and would take us all, boys and girls, on all kinds of one day tours. We had girls and boys ball teams I was on the girls baseball and also basketball teams

W Sounds like it was a lot of fun How long did your family attend St Steven's?

K We have always been there My parents before me went there, too In fact, we now have five generations of our family that have attended St Stephen School in Niles

W What were some of the favorite things you liked to do when you were young?

K I was always a reader

W What did you read?

K I liked novels

W Mysteries, romances?

K Yes, that sort of thing

W Did you go to the theater much?

K Occasionally At that time, a group of five people could go to the theater for 25 cents to pay the admission.

W So did you go in groups sometimes?

K When I was growing up, they had what they called Free Movie Night These were always on Thursday nights and were held at Woodland Park in McDonald We looked forward to these movies and the entire family would go They had a big movie screen set up, just like drive-in movie theaters today As soon as it would get dark enough, the movie would begin Everybody took blankets, spread them out on the grass, and we sat and watched the show As I said before, people did not have money to go to the movie theater, and since McDonald Village had this for the families in the surrounding area, everyone took advantage of it and would gather there to meet their friends and see the show

W What kind of movies did you see? Do you remember some of them?

K No, I do not remember any of them The only thing that comes to mind is Gone With the Wind, and that was playing at the regular movie theaters when I graduated from high school in 1937. Margaret Mitchell won the Pulitzer Prize for that story

W Did she?

K 1937 That's the year I graduated from high school

W What did you like the least when you were growing up? Were there certain chores that you did not care for doing?

K I did not care about ironing I always had to iron the napkins and the handkerchiefs and that sort of thing. I guess every girl has to learn how to do things, but that I did not like I did like to know how to cook I always loved to cook

W Are you a good cook?

K I like to cook It is one of my hobbies.

W I do not like doing it, but I am not very good at it

- K. It will come to you. If you can read and follow direction -- you can be a good cook.
- W. What was your house like, the house you grew up in?
- K. I grew up in a small house. We only had four rooms in our house at that time, when I was growing up. Then, later on we moved to another house which was larger as we were growing older. As I told you, I had three brothers. When I was growing up enough to realize, and my parents too evidently realized, they felt that I should have a room for myself. My brothers had their room. So then we moved over to Bond Street. We lived there when I was in high school.
- W. What was that house like?
- K. It was nice. There were three bedrooms and a kitchen and a living room and a dining room. It was home. I do not know what else to say about it.
- W. Did it have indoor plumbing?
- K. Yes.
- W. Running water?
- K. Yes.
- W. I interviewed one lady. She lived in company housing over at the Niles Fire Brick. They did not have indoor plumbing.
- K. I know they did not. When we lived on Ann Street, we did not have indoor plumbing.
- K. We did not have central heating or a hot water tank to heat our water. When we took a bath, my mother would have to heat all of the water. She would fill five or six huge kettles and place them on the stove to heat the water. We had an oversize wash tub and we took our bath in that, when I was growing up. In the wintertime, it was really funny because we had a potbelly stove at the end of the room. You did not linger in the bath because there was very little heat in the room, only that which came from the potbelly stove. In fact, if you faced the stove, the front of you was roasted and the back of you froze.
- W. Did you have a basement?
- K. Oh yes. A basement in the other house, too.
- W. What chores did you and your siblings do besides ironing and cooking?

K I did not do any cooking. My mother did all the cooking. She always had me stand by and watch her. We had to run the sweeper and dust up. My brothers had to clean up the yard and outside work. I cannot remember anything special.

W Did you have a big garden?

K Not that much. We did not have that big of a garden. What we did have, my mother and dad would work. We did not work the garden at all.

W What did your father do for a living?

K As I said, he was a steel mill worker. When things were really bad, you could not get work of any kind. There was no work in the steel mills. In the 1940s, he got a job as a roofer. He worked for this man who was a roofer and a furnace installer. He worked there a long time until he finally decided he wanted to get out on his own. He then started the Niles Roofing and heating business. It is still going. My brother is running it now.

W That is nice.

K My brother and his son are running it now because my older brother, who is 77, is just too old. My younger brother next to me is not well. He has a heart problem. He lives in Florida. My youngest brother Bill, is the one that is running the business.

W What year did they start the business?

K I cannot remember that. I can remember a lot of things. If I stop and think, I could remember. It must have been about 1940 that my father started the business. As I said, in the meantime he worked for Mr. Kramer. He worked there for a long time before he decided to start his own business.

W Did your parents have a business when your dad was in the steel mill other than his steel mill job like a grocer or anything?

K No, they did not have anything.

W What kind of jobs did you do when you were growing up? Did you work at all before you graduated from high school?

K As I said, there was no work anywhere. You could not get a job so I did house work for a while.

W For your neighbors?

K No, there was a nice lady in town and she asked me if I would come and do housework for her and I did. Then, several months later, another woman needed more help and she was able to give me more money (\$4.00 for a week's wages), so I went to work for Mrs. Haley. When I graduated from high school, I was able to get a job at the Lamp Works in Warren. That was interesting work because I worked with coils that light up the light bulb. I worked over the Bunsen burner and had to straighten out the ends so they could be connected to the rest of the filament in the bulb. My desk and Bunsen burner were directly in front of the boss, so I never goofed off. In those days, when you were married, you could not work at the plants any longer. Married women were no-no's. Mr. Jaynes was my boss. When I told him I was getting married, he asked if I had any sisters at home that could take my place and I said "No, I do not." I was sorry to leave and he was sorry to have me go.

W What kind of wage were you getting?

K I do not remember the exact amount, but I made more money doing that, working at G. E., than my father did working in the steel mills. We were on what they called piece work. You got paid for whatever you did. Evidently I was able to work with my fingers. I have always worked with my hands. It just came naturally. I could work fast. My fingers were very nimble.

W Were you working 40 hours a week?

K Forty hours.

W What year did you get married?

K 1940.

W Right before the war?

K Well, the war was on in 1941, but we were married in March of 1940 and the war did not start until December 7 of 1941.

W Did anyone in your family belong to a local social club or fraternity like the Eagles, the Elks, any Hungarian social clubs?

K They had a Hungarian social group. It was a part of the church. The Hungarian people in our area just banded together I guess and they formed this little club. It was a social group. They would meet for picnics and occasionally they would have a fund raising thing. They would have Bingo and everybody would come. I forget what the cost was,

but it was not that expensive. That was when I was already growing up in high school when they did that

W Did they have dances?

K Yes, they had dances Hungarian music that made you feel good I do not know if you know anything about Hungarian music. It is really catchy and peppy

W Lots of dances That sounds like fun

K Let me tell you about one of the dances we had We were trying to make a lot of money Whatever money we made was always donated to the church. The group decided they were going to have this big dance To make extra money, we thought we would try to sell carnations or flowers for boys to buy girls We had no money to buy the carnations, but there was a real kind, old Hungarian lady who had a beautiful flower garden She asked if we would like to have her dahlias So she gave us at least a hundred of these flowers Since we had no fern to go with the dahlias, she gave us enough parsley that we used for the greenery We made corsages out of these flowers and parsley They turned out beautifully and we were able to sell them for a nickel or a dime a piece Then for the orchestra, the orchestra would play a little while and then they would have a rest Somebody came up with the idea that we should have two orchestras So that is what we did We had the Hungarian band play Hungarian tunes, and we had a black orchestra play jive tunes. While one orchestra was resting, the other one was playing It was a real fun night

W It sounds like it Danced all night

K There was no intermission

W Is that where you met your husband, going to the dances?

K No, I guess our families knew one another We got more acquainted in what we call the Hungarian Catholic Club He was a member and I was a member The young people would always go on picnics and swimming parties and that sort of thing and that's where I really met him, and his whole family

W What was a typical family meal like for you as you were growing up?

K Let me think how could I even tell you. Meat and potatoes and a vegetable

W Was everyone present?

K We always had to be home at 5:00 My father came from work, and everybody had to be

home We all sat down to the table together That's when we discussed whatever we did during the day That's when my parents always asked us questions we really did not want to answer [laughter]. My parents were young. I think when my mother married she was seventeen and my dad was eighteen In those days they married very young In fact, that's my mother's and dad's engagement picture That must be about 85 years old The one below it, that's Scott's grandparents The one below that, that would be all of grandma and grandpa Krok's family.

W You can tell the Krok family. They all look alike

K Yes, they all look alike

W It is nice though, you can pick them out. Did you have many Hungarian dishes?

K Yes, my mother cooked all kind of Hungarian recipes -- Chicken Paprikas, Stuffed Cabbage Rolls, Crepe-Suzettes, Hungarian Goulash, and all kinds of mouth-watering Hungarian pastries

W What did your family do to celebrate a birthday or a special holiday? Do you remember anything specific?

K I remember we always had a cake at our birthdays. My mother always made us a cake She would always try to make the evening meal a little party-like. Occasionally, we were allowed to invite a special friend since it was a birthday celebration

W Did you have any special holiday traditions, special meals for Christmas or Easter?

K We always had different Hungarian traditional meals on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day During the Easter season, we were not to eat meat on Wednesdays or Fridays of Lent On Easter Saturday, we would have to fast until noon. In the afternoon, my mother would always make up a basket of food to have blessed for our Easter Dinner She always made a sweet bread called Paska It was a round hearth bread with raisins in it She had a special large fancy basket that she only used for Easter time We would take the food to be blessed In it would be the Paska, hard boiled eggs (some colored and some white), ham, Easter Cheese (she made this from milk and eggs), beets with horse radish, and all kinds of Hungarian pastries We would take the basket of food to the church and the priest would bless the food. This is what we ate for our Easter Dinner.

W Did you dye eggs like the kids do nowadays?

K Oh yes, we always did Like I said, in those days we did not have the money to buy dye My mother would save up, like if we wanted yellow eggs she would use the onion skins If we wanted pink or red she would use the beet juice I cannot remember what she used

for green. Sometimes she even used tea for a brownish color

W My grandmother always had brown eggs She used onion skins

K I remember she would do that. You have to make due with what you had I do remember those colors, but I cannot remember too many. Blue, I cannot remember anything about blue or whether we even had blue eggs.

W That would come later with the egg dye [laughter] What were some of the gifts that your brothers and sisters received at Christmas time and on birthdays?

K Most of the time we got clothes. We maybe got one small toy Like I said, there was not enough money to go around. We were really happy to get a new sweater or a new pair of shoes That was a big deal for us

W Were your presents wrapped?

K I cannot remember that I do not think they were

W My grandparents never wrapped my mom and her sisters gifts and I just wondered if that was a tradition My grandfather always said, "It is the gift that counts, not the wrapping "

K That's right, it is I can remember several times at Christmas time my dad would take us out for a "ride" he called it He would keep us out for two or three hours Evidently, that gave my mother enough time to put up the Christmas tree and put up the different things underneath the tree We did not get the real presents until Christmas morning We would always hang up our stockings. I can remember, we always got nuts and oranges and that sort of thing in them I was going to tell you, when we came home my mother would always have our evening meal waiting for us Dad would never bring us home until it was almost dark We knew something was going on. We would have our supper, then my mother would open the living room door and there we would see this beautiful Christmas tree she had decorated In those days they had candles, little bitty candles like my finger There must have been about twenty or 30 of these little candles all lit on the tree We were only allowed to have them on for about ten minutes because it was a "fire hazard" my mother said, which it was Then she would put them out

W She would not put the tree up until Christmas Eve?

K Christmas Eve

W How long would she leave it up?

K Until after the January tenth holiday, the Feast of the Three Kings. They called that the

little Christmas, January 10

W Is that a Catholic holiday or a Hungarian?

K Yes, it is both a Catholic and a Hungarian holiday. The tenth of January was the feast of the three kings. Our neighbors were Croatian and they celebrated their Christmas on the sixth of January. We always called it "Little Christmas." Following that holiday, my mother would take the Christmas decorations down.

W What type of transportation did you use as you were growing up? Did you walk to school? Did you use a bus?

K We walked.

W Everywhere? Did you come home for lunch when you were growing up?

K We did not come home from school for lunch while we were in grade school. My mother would always pack us a lunch, but in high school when the weather was nice we would come home. That would mean a half an hour coming one way and a half an hour going back. So you only had an hour and you had to eat on the run. Then when the weather got bad, my mother would always pack us a sandwich or something. That was our lunch for the day.

W What happened when a family member died, or a close relative or a neighbor?

K Everybody would band together. The funeral director would bring the casket to the house and the people would stop in anytime, day or night, to pay their respects to the family. The family would stay awake all night with the body, sometimes saying prayers and singing hymns. The body would be burned the next day.

W No funeral homes?

K The funeral homes were not as they are today. I can remember when there was a death in the family, a large flowered wreath would be placed on the front door. When anyone saw that, they immediately realized there had been a death in the family and all the neighbors would band together to support the family in grief. The neighbors would bring food. The next day another neighbor would do the same. I remember when my mother had just given birth to my youngest brother. I must have been six years old at the time. The women would come in and bathe the baby and also take care of my mother. They made sure she was bathed, changed the bed, and did whatever had to be done. I am sure my mother reciprocated, and did the same when our neighbors needed her for help. The neighbors would do this all voluntarily, just like a visiting nurse would do today.

- W The women?
- K The women, not the men The women would all come One day one would come and the next day someone else would come You never knew, but someone always came
- W That sounds so nice A lot different from today What did things cost as you were growing up?
- K Well, I cannot remember too much when I was little, but I can remember the time when I graduated from high school In fact, I wrote one of those things down for you. In our day, we five and ten cent stores They were Woolworth stores, but you could buy almost anything there for a nickel or a dime You really could For a nickel, you could buy an ice cream cone or you could ride the street car (We had street cars in those days) You could make a phone call for a nickel You could buy a new Chevy for \$600 00, but nobody could afford it When I graduated from high school in 1937, you could buy a new average size house for \$4000. The average weekly wage when we were married was \$30 Gas was eleven cents a gallon Milk was \$50 cents a gallon A loaf of bread was nine cents You could get three pounds of hamburger for a quarter and the butcher gave you the soup bones for free But, as I said, very few people had the money to buy these things From the thirty dollars that was your wage, you had to pay your rent, your utilities, and you had to buy your food and clothes If you had entertainment or wanted to go to the movies, you could not go because there was no money left It just did not stretch that far
- W Just like today [laughter] Did you listen to the radio a lot as you were growing up?
- K: We did not have a radio until high school when we first got our radio
- W Do you remember listening to old radio shows?
- K Gene and Glen I can remember They had mystery stories and things like that We used to like to listen to those
- W Do you remember who was the first person on your street to get a television?
- K No, but my brother who lived in Leetonia, Ohio, was the first one in our family that had a T V He was a T V repair man On Sunday evenings we would always go out there and watch the T V That was fun They had some good game shows then
- W Like what?
- K Ozzie and Harriet, but there was another game show called, "I got a secret" That was one of the shows that we watched We just loved Lucy Lucy was on at that time. It was

fun watching them, but I do not remember many of the game shows

W How much was a cup of coffee when you were growing up?

K A nickel

W Were there many restaurants as you were growing up?

K Not that many Just a couple

W You do not remember going out for meals?

K We never went out for our meals I remember that We never ate at our relatives' house They did not have as much food as we did The Islay Dairy always served coffee and ice-cream, for a nickel We had a dining car in our town It was called Lor-A-Lee Dining Car We heard they served good food there, but we never had any money to try the food

W It was just a restaurant but put in a dining car?

K Yes It was like an old railroad car and that is what they called it, the Lor-A-Lee Dining Car

W What did a meal cost then?

K I cannot remember exactly what it was I know it must have been very cheap I cannot remember that at all Like I said, ice cream was a nickel so you knew that it wasn't very expensive

W What kind of groups or music did you listen to?

K We did not have music like they have today We had orchestra music like big band sounds, at our dances Of course we always had records We loved to play the Hungarian tunes. We played those whenever had a chance to play them on the Victrola. The Victrola was a big, tall piece of furniture It had a turntable on it and we play the records It only took one at a time, so we had to change the records often The Victrola was a forerunner for the record players today.

W Was it a crank?

K Yes, you had to crank it

W How would you keep it going so that it was always the same speed?

K I do not know, I really do not

W I always wondered how they did that. Did your family participate in any local politics?

K No They were very quiet people

W Was your dad involved with the union at the steel mill?

K No, they did not have the unions in the mills when my dad worked there. But when he got the job as a roofer and furnace installer, he joined at that time. It must have been the late 1930s or early 1940s. The union, in those days, were not as forceful as they are today.

W Do you know anybody else I should talk to about growing up in Niles?

K You can talk with Gay. He had a different life entirely from what I had. He grew up with a Hungarian background more so than I. His family spoke Hungarian at home. My family spoke English and the only time I spoke Hungarian was when I went to see my grandmother and grandfather who lived on the next street from us. My grandma would always talk to me in Hungarian, and I am sorry now that I did not keep it up because I would have liked to have had some Hungarian language understanding. Several years ago, it must have been the early 1980's or the late 1970's we traveled in Hungary. At that time, Gay understood what the guide and the tour master were saying. I had to have an interpreter. I felt bad because I could not understand what they were saying.

W: Do you have relatives that were in Hungary?

K I do not. I do not know whether Gay has any or not. I doubt very much if he has any either. Most of them are here. I know that Gay's mom had brothers and sisters that were here in the United States. I think all her brothers and sisters came from Hungary. I do not know about grandpa Krok. I know he had brothers, but I do not know about sisters. I know he had a brother in the Cleveland area, but they never visited us and he did not talk about his family. I do not know if he had brothers or sisters left in Hungary or not.

W What is the most significant change from back then to now?

K I have got so many. As I thought about them, I wrote them down because a lot of changes have taken place in our lifetime. We saw all this come to pass, television, penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, plastic, contact lenses, radar, credit cards.

W Oh yeah, you did not have any thing like that.

K Ball point pens, we had to dip our pens in ink. Pizza, we never had pizza, that's

something new Decaffeinated or instant coffee, freezers, clothes dryers, electric blankets, air conditioners, permanent press clothes, computers, vitamins, disposable diapers As I was thinking about these things, I wrote them all down I also wrote here, we lived before man walked on the moon, before Hawaii and Alaska became states We lived during the terms of office of fifteen of our presidents

W Who is the first president you voted for?

K Roosevelt was the first one -- Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When I was born, Woodrow Wilson was in office We saw the social security system start in 1935 and the postal zone system started in 1943 I do not know if you can use this or not We lived before day care centers, group therapy, and nursing homes Seventy years ago, we never heard of FM radios, tape recorders, electric typewriters, computers, artificial hearts, yogurt, disco dancing and guys wearing earrings (Laughter) It was unheard of to see a male with an earring in his ear

Some of our language has changed too Grass was what we mowed, Coke was a cool drink, and Pot was something you cooked in If we were asked to explain CIA, NATO, UFO, VCR, NFL, or JFK, we would say "It is alphabet soup" The language has changed so much. In our day, bunnies were small rabbits, and rabbits were not Volkswagens It is confusing because when the youngsters, our grandkids especially, will talk about something Some of the terms they use are so strange and I will say, "You will have to explain that because I do not know what you are talking about." Things that you take for granted, it is an entire different language for us to learn. I do not know if you could use it or not, but when we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary, Judee made up a synopsis of our life for the fifty years we were married Our son, Richard printed the book for us Here is a copy of that if you would like to read it You maybe able to use some of the things that I have in here Some I have already told you about

W. What kind of refrigeration did you have?

K We had ice boxes where the ice man would come about twice a week and he would get a big block of ice and put in the top of this ice box Then, when the ice melted there was a drain that came down to the bottom and there was a pan on the bottom that would catch the water from the melting ice If you were away for the day and happened to forget that the ice pan did not get emptied out you would have water all over your kitchen floor [laughter] It was really something

W. How did they keep meat fresh all the time?

K: We bought it day by day

W. Local grocery around the corner or something?

K Wherever, but we did not have meat every day. Most of the times we had meat on Sunday. During the week we had vegetables and my mother always made soup. She was also a fine baker. She loved to bake and she would always have some kind of pastries or cookies for us. We grew up fine.

W Well that is the fashion now, to be a vegetarian [laughter]

K I can remember in those days when you had chicken, you had buy it alive. When we were ready to cook it, we would have to chop off the head and then drop the chicken into boiling water in order to remove the feathers. I hated removing the innards. It was a real messy job.

W Did your mom do that or did your dad?

K My mom did it all. My mom did all the cooking. My dad took care of the outside.

W At your local grocer, did you run a tab?

K Yes we did.

W Was that the first thing your dad paid off?

K Whenever he got paid he would pay that off. Every time it was pay day and he would go to pay the bill everybody wanted to go. So we had to take turns because when a person paid their bill for the two weeks, it was usually two weeks, the grocer always gave that kid that was with the father a bag of candy. We were always arguing about who was going to go with dad to pay the bill, but regardless of who went, we always had to share with our other siblings.

W It sounds like you had a nice life.

K Yes, I did. Since I have been married to Gay, I had a happy life with him, too. Fifty-five years it is going to be next March.

W Most people I talked to said, "We grew up poor, but we were happy," and I kind of think you did not know you are poor when you are a kid.

K You did not. That really is what we were too. We were happy and poor, and we did not know any better because everybody was the same.

W: Did you volunteer at all during the war?

K Yes I did. I did Red Cross work before Gay was drafted into the Service. We were

married a year and a half by that time. We would also roll bandages -- the bandages that were used by cancer patients. When Gay went to the Service, I worked at Lordstown Ordnance Depot. We shipped boxes of ammunition overseas. The department I worked in made the waterproof liners for these boxes. I did most of the paper work and when I was not busy with that, I would make the liners that would fit into the boxes.

W So it was like a war time job?

K Yes. I worked there all during the war. When Gay came home I quit.

W What branch of the service was he in?

K He was in the Navy. So much has happened in all that time that we just wonder

W I am always amazed that people just adjust

K You do

End of Interview