

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ukrainian Culture

Perspective of a Younger Ukrainian

O.H. 1803

PETER PROCH

Interviewed

by

Frances Martin

on

December 10, 1975

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INTERVIEWEE: PETER PROCH

INTERVIEWER: Francis Martin

SUBJECT: Perspective of a Younger Ukrainian American

DATE: December 10, 1975

M: This is an interview with Peter Proch by Francis Martin. It is December 10, 1975.

M: How old are you now?

P: I'm twenty-six.

M: I understand that you came from Germany to this country and that your parents are Ukrainian.

P: Both of my parents are Ukrainian and I asked them once a long time ago, all four of my grandparents are Ukrainian also. They were born and raised in the Ukraine in the Soviet Union and by father migrated to Germany. My mother was taken by force. I believe she was taken just before the war by force to Germany to work in a factory. It wasn't until they eventually met each other in Germany that they fell in love and so forth and so forth. They married and eventually desired to come to America for better opportunities. My sister was born in Germany in 47 and I was born in 49. About ten months after I was born we came to America.

M: Where did they go after they came across?

P: Most people that came to the US from Europe, the port of entry was New York. From there depending on how much money they had and where there relatives were, they would either stay in New York or would continue through Pennsylvania, New Jersey, where ever there were alot of Ukrainian people around.

M: Did your family move to the West side of Youngstown?

P: Originally I don't know, but I grew up on the Westside.

M: Did you graduate from a public high school?

- P: Yes. I went to all public schools and graduated from Chaney in 67.
- M: Now when you were growing up were you active in Ukrainian youth affairs and were you an active church goer?
- P: As a child -- yes. The difference is because I have a choice now. When you are younger your parents have a greater influence over you. So then I did and was very nationalistic. I'm not against it now, but since I have a choice, I don't participate too much at all in nationalistic events but do things more on a personal level. I feel that I'm inwardly religious, but I'm really not a Church goer.
- M: What Church did your family attend?
- P: Originally we had Holy Trinity Ukrainian Catholic Church. Then they built a second Church, St. Ann's in Austintown. So right now, people go to both Churches and it's a matter of convenience what church they go to. Either that or a lot of people like to go to the original Church. Most of the people who go to St. Ann's are the younger people, the Americanized Ukrainians you might say, the kids that were born here of Ukrainian parents, but they don't speak the language at all. They are not really familiar with the culture. They have just been getting a little information as to what the culture is like. So depending on how nationalistic they are, the older people, the people who are more strongly Ukrainian, go to the old Church.
- M: When you say nationalistic, do you mean they like to speak the Ukrainian language or they wish to retain the culture?
- P: I mean they wish to retain their culture, and heritage and so forth in this country. They carried it over and they would like to retain it. They want to maintain the language for communication between Ukrainian people which I can understand. They would like my children, for example, to carry on Ukrainian traditions and all about Ukrainian culture and so forth.
- M: Do you speak Ukrainian?
- P: Yes. I grew up with it. My parents speak some English, so it was necessary for me to speak Ukrainian. My sister and I were both raised on Ukrainian. I was reminded by someone several years ago that I spoke Ukrainian before I ever spoke English. It wasn't until I went out in the neighborhood and met some friends that I learned English because I learned it from them. A woman once told me that when I walked into her house when I was four or five that I started speaking to her in Ukrainian.

M: Did you have any problems with language?

P: No. Since I came over when I was about a year old, I had no problems with language. In fact, it's just the opposite, I love languages. I'm an English major and I have a great respect for language. As an English major I find that I criticize people that don't know the language that well. They were born here and raised by American-type parents.

M: I'm trying to get some idea of Ukrainians in Youngstown. Could you tell me something about them?

P: Honestly, I don't know that much about them, because I don't relate a lot anymore to Ukrainian people. So I couldn't delineate things exactly for you. But what I could tell you -- a lot of parents between let's say 40 and 60 years old. Those are the ones that came over in 1950 right around that time and raised their children here. These people taught their children to speak Ukrainian fluently. They want to maintain the Ukrainian culture and my children to speak Ukrainian. People older than that I don't know that much about. If there are younger, say 30 to 40 I don't know that much about them. I should say I don't know many of them. The younger people like me I don't know where we split. The ones that grew up with the language and so forth, the way I did. Some of those have still maintained the culture. Like I know friends of mine that participate in Ukrainian events where on a certain day, they will celebrate a hero and there's a uniform that they wear. They also maintain various organizations that for example have their own insurance programs, their own savings and credit unions and things like that.

M: How close is the Ukrainian community? For example, do Ukrainians do business with other Ukrainians?

P: That's promoted very much. They go to Ukrainian dentists or doctors or something like that. Police things are kind of touchy. They would vote for a person because he's Ukrainian. The reason is hopefully he would do something for Ukrainians. Personally I don't, but vote how I personally think.

M: As far as the education and the carriers for the younger people depending on background, how does the older generation influence you? What are their goals for you?

P: In general, the older Ukrainians who first migrated here, who first came here, since they didn't have a good solid American education, a lot of them tended to have labor type jobs. In general, they worked very hard to work their

way up in this country to middle class for example, and they worked very hard for this. They see the great opportunity in this country and that's why they have advanced. They have come a very long way which I think is commendable and in general I think what they want is for their children to have something better since their children are raised here in the land of great opportunity. They want their kids to use this to be professional people. They want their children to go on to college. They don't want them to work in mills like a lot of other people did. Since they grew up where education was more restricted and confined and so forth, the opportunity that people have here, they could see that almost any American could go to college if he really wants to and they feel if nothing stands in your way it only follows that you should better yourself as much as possible in the academic sense and go to college.

M: This is probably true because in the Soviet Union you couldn't go to school just because you wanted to.

P: Right. Even today only certain people in the Soviet Union go to college. It's even true in the Soviet Union that some people bribe certain officials so they can get into college because it's so difficult to get in. And while they do claim an 80% literacy which is higher than it is here there is still the political machine behind a lot of things. So the education there is still restricted. So many years ago, let's say in 20's and 30's -- when our parents were going to school it was even more confined.

M: So it's not whether they have the ability?

P: Right. Whether they have the opportunity and since a lot of them were from rural areas that even today it's still a problem. Today the worst problem in Soviet education is that they can't reach some people in the rural areas. So back then it had to be even worse.

M: Do you believe the more recent immigrants, the people who have come to this area after World War II, have a commitment to inform the area about the Soviet Union and to be militantly anti-Communist? Do you feel they also support the Ukrainian nationalism?

P: What I find in general was that the way I was raised, for example, was to distinguish what was Ukrainian and what was Russian. I feel a lot of Americans don't distinguish between the two. They don't realize that the Ukran by itself is a very important country in itself within the Soviet Union. I feel that a lot of people there don't want to see the Ukran in the USSR. They feel that it is their right to be their own country and so forth and that it's the opp-

osition of Russian that hovers over countries. So when I was younger, I went to Ukrainian school every Saturday. Educated people, not necessarily teachers, taught us Ukrainian history, reading and writing, and so forth and religion was taught by the priest from the church. This is the only subject that the priest taught us. This was all in the Ukrainian language, of course. Since we grew up with it we were aware of the differences which showed us that were not Russian but of Ukrainian background, specifically. As far as today, Ukrainian still make that distinction. This is to say it is still important that we should not be considered nationalities or people of the Soviet Union, but specifically we are Ukrainian. That it is a matter of identity, in fact, I would like to make that distinction too. I'm not a big nationalist because of the fact that I am Ukrainian. I won't ever deny that. I'm not really Russian, I'm Ukrainian.

M: Do you know much of pro Ukrainian nationalism? To your knowledge is there that much existing, as far as people wanting the Ukrainians to be disassociated with the Soviet Union. Can you think of a incident?

P: Oh (differently). It seems there is constantly someone who is being held as a political prisoner in the Soviet Union, an Ukrainian for example. We will follow his plight. There was a man named Moroz who was on a hunger strike for so many months and so forth. He was a political prisoner. There's always something going on like this. So we are exposed to it. There is an Ukrainian newspaper, out of New York, I believe a daily, that a lot of Ukrainian people get. It's called ? and translated it means freedom. It keeps people informed on current affairs and events as far as Ukrainian communities go. I guess throughout the world there is always news of what is going on in Canada because there is a lot of Ukrainians in Canada, specifically. It also tells of happenings in the states, like a certain event or holiday of Ukrainian sorts, so that people who want to can remain informed of all sorts of Ukrainian activities that go on everyday. There is always things about the Soviet Union relating to opposition and political prisoners--kind of what you were asking. But personally I don't keep up with current events.

M: You then feel you are more of an American type person than an Ukrainian.

P: Right. What I should say to clarify this is as a young child I was very nationalistic and this was truthfully because I was influenced by my parents and they instilled this into

me. Now I'm freer and in no way ashamed of being Ukrainian or being anything that is concerned with it. I just don't participate that much. What some people feel, that being of Ukrainian descent is very important to them, and this has been true for a long time, but more recently there has been a big ethical awareness in this country. A small example would be Bobby Vinton and his Polish background. Television has also brought ethics groups to the screens. I personally think it's related to the bicentennial and that's because this country has been built up on a lot of different people and so part of the promoting of the bicentennial is to show that America is made up of several factions, these being politically and ethically, etc. I think it's being promoted and pushed. Ukrainian people, since I grew up with it, have always been proud to be Ukrainians and have always promoted this idea. Personally I feel I would never deny that I was Ukrainian and I just don't affiliate that much with Ukrainian events, it's not that I'm against it, but I'm me first and I just happen to be Ukrainian. What I care about is doing something in general that is productive and that is good for everyone in America or in the community where I might work. Whatever it is that I might do, being Ukrainian is just part of me and it is an integral part, but not a part that I would necessarily promote in itself. I want to be a good person and a good worker and help people out here and there in whatever job I may do. But the fact I'm Ukrainian doesn't mean I'm a better person or promote a certain type. I just happen to be Ukrainian. I don't feel like some people who feel this is the most important part (being Ukrainian).

M: Do you feel that it might be possible for more people to recognize their ethnic background because of this new interest in ethnic groups? I am speaking of Ukrainian people.

P: I mentioned in some areas that this might be prevalent. But in general, as I grew up all my life, the people that I have known have always been proud to be Ukrainian. They have always made that distinction and in a way I think that's kind of nice. The people admit their Ukrainian not because it's the "in" thing and that it's popular, but because they have always felt that way.

P: What I wanted to specify was that compared to some other people that you might interview my opinions would be slightly biased in that I am an introverted person. I feel that my not participating in certain Ukrainian events has nothing to do with my being against the Ukrainian culture or anything that's part of my background. I just happen to be more introverted and that is why I don't participate that

much in Ukrainian events. I consider being a person primarily important for me and being Ukrainian just happen to be part of that. It's an intergral part but I don't consider it an important part that I have to promote.

M: When you were raised by your parents did they fell it was important to raise you as a good and responsible citizen?

P: Yes. When I was younger I wasn't aware of it that much. As I grew older I found that because my parents wanted to be citizens they raised me aa a good citizen of this country. In general, Ukrainian people especially the ones who came over, fell that this land offers much more opportunity. They would like to take advantage of every opportunity and freedom and so forth. So what happened was that eventually my parents wanted to become citizens. They wanted to become more active, let's say, in the American political voice. They would want to vote for a certain man so eventually they became citizens of this country. I was only fifteen. They went to a school which I think was an international institute. They went to school for many months to brush up on who was the sixteenth president; the three branches of the government and this type of thing. Then they obtained their citizenship. Since I was under age, I was sixteen, I believe what it is that I automatically become a citizen with them. Just as my parents, my sister had to have witnesses to become a citizen but since she was educated here she had no problem. They were required to learn certain facts about our government and history and so forth and to have witnesses.

M: So they thought it was very important to be able to vote.

P: Right. Because Ukrainian people, the older people always have the perspective of what the Soviet Union was and is like even though they have been out of there for a long time. I am referring to the oppession that goes on over there. They like to utilize what beautiful things there are in this country. So we always, people that were raised by parents that were raised in Ukrainian and came over, were raised with the perspective of the life in the Soviet Union.

P: In general, the Ukrainian people have come a very, very long way and it's commendable because they came over with just may be three things of clothing and a couple of items and kids to regulate the family and everything. They came here with absolutely nothing. Where someone in this country at that age, 22, is probally not married. Even if this same person has nothing--no job-- he might be on welfare and he

be surviving on what they consider to be comfortable. They came over with a ready made family, the responsibility and all that, no job and not knowing the language very well. They did not have the education the other American of their age had. Yet, because of the opportunity they have come a long way so that they are solid, good citizens in any community. They have always instilled in us that we should go a long way and that we should have a good prespective. Therefore, I believe that we have a better prespective than some of the people who were born in this country.

END OF TAPE