

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ethnic Groups - Youngstown, Ohio

Personal Experience

O H 1182

IRENE HORVATH

Interviewed

by

Molly McNamara

on

August 16, 1988

M This is an interview with Irene Horvath and Mrs Gianfransico for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Ethnic Groups in Youngstown, by Molly McNamara, at 4110 Rush Blvd , on August 16, 1988, at 11:00 a m

Can you tell me a little about where you were born and what year?

H. I was born in Hungary

G She was born in a little village called Kisbobrec My grandmother and her sister lived in Budapest When it was time for my mother to be born, she brought her to her village where she was born She left her there because my grandfather came to America This left her there with this little girl and of course, the baby. So my mother stayed there until she was school age, till around five Then she went back to the village and brought her back to Budapest and then enrolled her in this nuns convent, St Theresa. Then she went to school there until I think .

H Until the forth grade My mother could not afford to pay anymore

G. Then she enrolled her in a school to become a dressmaker.

M Was that a fairly common occupation to be a seamstress? Did a lot of girls do that?

H Oh yes, lots and lots.

M At this time your father was already in America?

H. My father

G Yes, yes he had come to America Well, it was shortly after. He was not there when she was born So, he had left and it made it kind of hard for my grandmother because she was stuck with these two kids.

M Yes, and she was trying to work at the same time?

G Yes, right That is why she left my mother there because she could not work and watch the baby too I think that there was two or three years difference between my mother and her sister.

M When did you decide to come to this country Mrs. Horvath?

H I was

G Nineteen, twenty-one.

H Something like that I learned to sew

G Well, she came to Pittsburgh

H Yes

G While she was on the boat, I will have to explain this to you, she met this family

M Okay

G. Okay, and being that she was herself, she was really glad because they had a daughter that was about two years younger than her

M This was a Hungarian family?

G. Yes, Shirella was their name So they were going to Pittsburgh

H We made friends

G They became fast friends, well, until the day that Mrs Liptac dies So then when she came to Pittsburgh she got a job at the Size Specialist by the name of Dr Heckle and she worked with him. How long?

H Oh, I do not remember.

G Well, no wait About four years because he got married in 1925 and that is when my father brought her to Youngstown

M Did you go through Ellis Island when you came into this country?

H No

G. Yes, you did

H No

G Yes you did, you told me that they examined you, mama

H Well, yes, they examined me Everybody was examined

G She forgot

M Okay, well that was along time ago

H Yes, several years ago

G That was in 1921 Yes, she did go through Ellis Island

M Not everybody went through Ellis Island That is supposed to be the principal port but I know that there were other entries into this country That is why I usually ask.

G Yes

H. They do not bring some kind of sickness or something

M Right

G See that is why they had to be examined.

M Right So what year did you move to Youngstown?

G Well, it would have been 1925 when she got married

M So right after you got married you moved here?

G Yes.

M What did your husband do for a living?

H. He was in the steel industry

G. He worked at Fitzsimon Steel

M That is in Youngstown?

G Yes, on Madison Avenue [actually on Wilson Avenue] Well, it is not there anymore

M. No

G But my father worked there for 42 or 43 years

H. A long, long time

G. Actually it is the first street in Campbell, it is called Morley Avenue, and they lived in an apartment there. My mother got pregnant with me and then I was born at St Elizabeth's. Did you live there when Freddie was born, mama, or did you move already? Did you live there?

H. I am trying to think, it was such along time ago

G. We understand, ma

H. I do not know for sure. I do not want to lie

G. Or did you? Did you live on Jackson Street in Youngstown already? See, my mother stayed on the East side of Youngstown, because my father worked on Madison Avenue. So he walked, yes. So this was one reason why we were born and raised on the East side

M. Now what did your father do in the steel mills?

G. He was a dye maker. Dye maker, mama?

H. Yes

G. He worked on the throttle?

H. Fitzsimon Steel on Madison Avenue

M. Do you remember growing up on the East side?

G. Yes, I went to Sacred Heart School, the Catholic school until I was six and then my mother moved to another part of the East side a little further. It was kind of far for me to walk so then I attended Lincoln School for a year and then I went to East High

M. Do you remember the neighborhood itself? What was it like when you were growing up?

G. Oh, it was a good neighborhood

M. Was it?

G. It was all ethnic you know. Across the street it was all Italians. Next door

were Slovaks I mean it was just . .

H Real nice

G: Yes, it was really nice

M: There were not a lot of Hungarians on the same street?

G. No, there were not too many There were a few families, but mostly Italians They dominated

M Yes, well was this within walking distance to the church too?

G: Yes

M Because I know a lot of people settle for two reasons It was either the church was in the same vicinity and also work

G. Right

M: So that was the case here

G: Yes, because we belonged to St Stevens all of the time Well, when I went to Sacred Heart though I had to go to Sacred Heart School and Church because that was the rule at that time But, my mother and father always went to St Stevens Then when I left in sixth grade, I went six years to Sacred Heart, naturally I went to St. Stevens and we used to walk to church every Sunday, every holiday, every Holy Day

M Do you remember anything at all about the Depression?

G Well, my mother probably does

M You were pretty young

G I do not remember too much, but I mean if you had a nickel and went to the store, that was a big thing

H Oh, it was bad

M It was a bad time Now did your husband always work during the Depression? Did he always have a job?

- G. About two days a week
- H Sometimes
- G. Sometimes, but he never did bring her big money It was kind of hard. Then she went out and did day work
- M And what did you do
- H Cleaning
- G She went out and did day work That kind of helped.
- H Nobody worked, and the bills came It was pretty hard.
- M What about downtown Youngstown? Can you describe a little bit of what Youngstown looked like? Perhaps when you were growing up Do you remember anything in particular? I know it is different than it is today
- G Oh yes Well I mean it went from the west end to the east end of course. I remember like my mother used to go to the store called Totes Deluxe. Well he used to carry a lot o f
- H. Groceries and meats
- G Groceries and meats and stuff and then there was a poultry store I remember that we used to go across the street to this poultry store They had live chickens.
- M Live chickens?
- G Live chickens and they would kill them They killed them because we would not eat chicken unless it was alive It had to be alive and then you would kill it It was fresh then. But I remember going down to that place that Johnson's Poultry
- M Everybody has told me about that. They remember that
- G Oh gosh yes You would see these big vats and they would take the chicken and dump it in there and feather it
- M But they were fresh

- G: They were fresh yes. Of course the town was a good town. They gave nice stores like Strauss, McKelvies, and Livingstons.
- H: Well, everybody used to go downtown. Especially on Saturday afternoon. That was the big thing. You had your lunch and shopping.
- M: So it is a lot different than it is today?
- G: Yes. Today it is nothing.
- M: Do you remember the... I guess they were trolleys or some kind of buses that they had?
- G: Yes, they had trolleys. There were streetcars.
- M: Streetcars, that is what they called them?
- G: Yes.
- M: They ran through the city?
- G: I think fare, I remember was \$ 10 for the bus. They used to but a pass where you could ride all week on it. That cost \$1 I think.
- M: Now that is all gone?
- G: That is gone. I mean really who takes the bus? Most people drive.
- M: That is true.
- H: It was nice though.
- G: Well, see that is one reason why I brought over here is because it was close to the bus line. My mother used to go downtown a lot because we were brought here in 1969 and my father died in 1968. So in 1969 we were brought here because it was close to the bus line for her. She used to hop on the bus to go downtown and she could not go anywhere, of course. Well, of course there is nothing down there.
- M: That is true too. When did you move here then?
- G: 1969.



- M Do you think that this neighborhood is much different than where you grew up, for instance, on the East side?
- G Oh well yes I would say so
- H The people were more friendly
- G The people on the East side were like brothers and sisters I mean everybody knew everybody
- M Everybody I have talked to has said that Do you have any idea why it was like this?
- G I do not know, I think maybe because everybody was in the same class
- M Yes, that makes sense
- G I mean everybody was poor
- M Yes
- G Do you get what I mean? I think nobody understands unless you were born and raised there, you know. How really friendly the East side was I mean everybody knew everybody is business Everybody helped each other you know If the neighbor made . Say the Italian woman down the street made pizza, everybody ate pizza.
- H Would take my wash when I was sick Who was that?
- G. The neighbor lady would come and do her washing for her It was this kind of neighborhood It was very close
- M Even though there was such a difference I mean, I am sure that these people were a lot of first generation immigrants and they did not all speak English Do you still think that they got along when they could not even speak to each other? How did they communicate?
- G Well, the majority, of course, had children and the children naturally talked English to their parents
- H Like me the teacher I do not know for sure if she was a teacher. Anyway, she came every week I think twice a week

G: She tutored her and so my mother was lucky.

H: I picked it up very fast

M: So someone taught you English?

G: Yes

H: Yes I picked it up very fast

G: Well, when she lived in Pittsburgh . . . She was probably Hungarian too  
She could understand

M: But of course she had to learn You had to learn English in order to work  
right?

G: Well, this is why that Mrs Heckle, this doctor's wife, wanted her to learn  
because she was the . . . Her job was the dining room

H: He was an eye specialist

G: She served They were very rich and you had to heat the dishes. I mean  
it was one of those things that all she did was the dining room. My mother  
was in charge of the dining room

M: So it must have been a very wealthy family

H: Yes

G: Very wealthy, yes

H: Take care of silverware

G: Yes, that was her job. The china and the silverware.

H: No, the dining room was more

G: Yes, she had to wear a uniform and the whole bit

M: That is interesting. Now did you ever work as a seamstress again when  
you moved to Youngstown?

H: I worked as a seamstress because I got near T B from it You know how

H Because I learned to sew

M Now you said that your husband also worked in the mills?

G. Yes, he also worked at Truscon

M: What did he do?

G. He was a welder

M. When were you married?

G I got married in 1953.

M. And your husband is not Hungarian, right?

G No, my husband is Italian

M Now if I can ask this, was there any problems marrying somebody that was not Hungarian within say your family or your church yourself?

G No, I would not say that there was a problem. Sometime food you know

M. Really?

G Yes, he is the type that he does not like anything made with sour cream Well, if you know anything about Hungarian food, a lot of it is made with sour cream So what we do now . Like I will make this chicken paprikash, my mother and I love it. Well, I will make him, you know, like he will only eat the breast of the chicken So before I put the sour cream in I have to take that breast out He will eat it that way but if I put that sour cream in, forget it He will not eat it So I would say that food wise is the biggest thing

M That is cultural though There is just something there. I know though I have found this with, for instance, a lot of Greek people that there was a lot of problems with them marrying outside of the church, and their own culture, the Greeks I was just wondering if that held true for a lot of the Hungarians I noticed a lot of the Hungarians did marry Slovaks which was acceptable

G Yes, because it is the same Food wise it was the same. I can say that would be the only trouble because now when he comes to St Stevens

church too, he participates

M Plus, St Stevens, I am sure most Italians are Catholic and it seems that would be natural There were not any Orthodox There was not any changing of religions

G: It is all Roman Catholic So there was not problem with religion, but we still go

H We got married in Pittsburgh, St Stevens Church

G: No, St Anna She gets it mixed up

H: Yes, I got married and then I came to Youngstown because he was working six months and that is it

G No, we keep the Hungarian culture I mean you can see that dollar and know that it is Hungarian This pillow is Hungarian

M Now have you ever been to Hungary?

G Yes

M Oh, have you?

G: My mother and I went back in 1976 and we stayed there three weeks I was very lucky because my godfather, which was still living at the time, since then he has died Where my father was born now, it is Austria Well, my mother did not know this of course She knew where she was born and we went to visit her section She showed me where she went to school and where she grew up and all of this My godfather and I went to Austria because my father's village is now Austria. So I got to see that too, which I was very grateful Of course, my mother could never help me with that because she knew she had to stay here

M Right

G So I enjoyed it very much. We spent a week in Austria, a week in Czechoslovakia, and a week in Hungary

M What was your impression of that? Would you ever want to live there?

G No, I do not think that I would want to live there but I really enjoyed the

visit I have the memories when I visited my father's school.

M Right

G I said, "Gee I remember " Then when I visited, she showed me where she went to church and everything I enjoyed that But, to live there, no Well the closest thing I thought to America was in Vienna I stayed at the Hilton I did not want to stay at the other place I would say that is the closest thing They had the tile bathrooms and the beautiful rooms

M Of course Vienna is, I guess, it is a little bit different than probably Czechoslovakia or Hungary being that they are under communist influence now There is probably a difference

G Yes When we went in Hungary, I had to spend \$8 a day That is a must In Czechoslovakia, we spent \$10 a day Like when my mother and I went to Budapest we took a tour for, I think it was four days or something like that So naturally you spent your quota because you have paid for this tour in advance So we had that amount paid It was close to \$200 this tour, but it included your hotels and everything They went to some pretty nice hotels and everything was included We spent a large amount there

M I did not know they made you do that They make you spend money?

G Oh yes Then when we left on a train from Budapest into Czechoslovakia, she asked how many days we were staying They asked how many days we were staying

M I see

G Yes, that is a must. It is really funny I mean you are going along right on this train, and out of nowhere comes these officers They stopped the train boy and they go through that train and they ask all kinds of questions

M Really?

G Yes They did not give my mother and I too much of a hard time, but they asked

M. Crossing borders and everything huh?

G. Yes, crossing borders

M Now do you think your parents may have left? I do not know, maybe not so much your mother, but for political reasons or I mean was there a lot of political oppression?

G Well, yes because the communists were starting to come in and there was a lot of . My mother said that they were always fighting, they were always at war

M But that makes sense Their countries seemed to have overlapped so much

G Yes.

H I loved Budapest I went to a nun school

G Yes, we told her that

H. I loved Budapest

M Budapest, was it a beautiful city?

G Yes, it really was We enjoyed that very much My mother said that it was prettier then

M: Really?

H Oh yes, they took better care

G Well mama, it was not too shabby I mean it was pretty nice The parks were nice and stuff Luckily she has a cousin that lives right there so she kind of took us around on the bus and everything Where as it was more like . It was easier to get around with her because she knew where to take us and stuff We enjoyed the trip very much and my mother got to see her sisters which she had not seen for 54 years

M Oh my

G And two years later her sister died

M That was nice

G And she really got to see her Of course her mother had died It was just her sister that was living. I think she was about 84 and when she was 86

she dies So she enjoyed that I liked the food, and everything, and all the hotels We had the best.

M Do you find that you have a lot of the same traditions as what they have over there?

G I think so

M How about the language Are you able to speak Hungarian?

G Yes.

M Do you speak it fluently?

G Yes.

M And your brother?

G I had no problem Now my brother No my brother understands it all, but he cannot speak it He knows a few words, but to hold a conversation, no

M There was not any problem then with you going over there?

G No, I had no problem.

H She speaks good Hungarian

G Yes, and I can read it

M You learned this from your parents?

G Yes In fact, I think I did not speak English until I went to school.

M Yes, that is not uncommon though I know most people I have talked to that have had parents, that is perfectly normal They just did not know enough English to pass that on and they taught their children the language they knew, their own ethnic language

H That is right

G I think that I was probably five or six by the time I learned English

M Did you have a problem starting school?

G No, I really did not have a problem I picked it up very fast

M Yes, I guess you really had no choice

G Sure But our customs I mean we still keep the traditions like, Sunday is Hungarian Day down on Shady Run We went down there Then we had dinner there They have the Hungarian orchestra Oh no. We keep it You cannot take that out of me Of course I am an old woman

M That is great Now do you pass this on? You have children of your own?

G I have no children

M Have you passed this onto other members of your family?

G Well, my brother . He has four children and they keep it pretty well They married different nationalities Whether or not it will continue, I do not know.

M I see I guess that kind of dilutes it a little

G Yes

M It dilutes some of your ethnicity

G Right, that is the truth Me and my mother have the Hungarian records and we play them

M Oh really. That is wonderful

G We enjoy it So I hope to go back I would really like to go back to Hungary You know it is communistic, but I will tell you that they really do not bother you I will tell you another thing, if you go from city to city, you have to go to the police station and report it They have to know at all times where you are

M Is that for everyone you think?

G Yes, it is for everyone. I mean for us, we had to do it So I assume everybody else does too.



H. How long did you stay?

M. Yes, they want to know.

G. They want to know. I do not know if that would be because the American Embassy wants to know or if that is just because of the communist?

M. I really do not know. I have a feeling though it is more the communist. I do not think it would be the American Embassy. Although I am sure they do keep tabs on that too.

G. I am sure they do.

H. The Embassy, they watch the other people in different sections and they come from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, I think.

G. I think that they are harder on the Europeans. You know what I am saying? Say some of the Germans come into Hungary. I think that they are probably tougher than Americans.

M. Americans are tourists, big tourists. They are looking for the American money as well, that is what the quota is.

G. Yes. Right.

M. A whole different world.

G. Yes, it sure is. You are free, of course, you do not talk about the communist.

H. You are scared.

G. No you are not scared. You just do not do it.

M. Right, what is there?

G. What is there, that is how they do that I guess.

M. Just a few more questions. Going back to Youngstown itself, did you work at all in this area?

G. Yes, I worked at General Electric for 42 years. I retired in 1964.

M I talked to another lady that lives on this street She said when they moved into this neighborhood, which it was in the 1940's, I know you came much later than that, she said there were a lot of problems being that she was a different nationality than what the majority of the people on Rush Boulevard were

G: Is that right?

M: Right

G I did not know that

M Did you experience any of that?

G No because my neighborhood here is Jewish and they are Italians We had no problems

M I guess by then the ice was sort of broken?

G Probably

M I was just curious, I know that this is a very nice neighborhood, and I thought that maybe if they experienced that Of course, that was 20 years earlier

G: Yes, they probably did

M. She said it was mostly one ethnic background at that time

G I see. No it is sort of all mixed up I had no problems Of course I worked My husband worked and my mother, well she just stayed here I mean still today, I do visit my neighbors

H We do not have the time

M: So it was not the same like it was on the East side?

G Oh no, you just did not go over and say, "Well, I am going to have a cup of coffee," or whatever I noticed that about the South side, that it was all together different When I married, I moved to the South side

M I see

- G Yes, and none was like the East side That was friendly over there
- M It sounds like a great place to grow up though.
- G. It was, it really was
- M Everyone that I have talked to said that and has had nice comments about it
- H Helping each other if somebody was sick Or if they got run over, but over here you can die
- G My mother says that you can die here and they would never come and help, but that is not true they sort of look out Your close neighbors
- M. Is there anything else that you would like to mention that I have not talked about that might be important?
- G Well, what do you think ma?
- H I do not know I do not have anything else to say I have been living for years with her because my husband died It is a good thing that I had somebody, and my son He is married
- G. Yes, he lives in Struthers.
- M. Oh, so he is close by too.
- G Yes, he visits.
- M Well, I want to thank you for the interview

End of Interview