

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ethnic Groups - Youngstown, Ohio

Personal Experience

O.H. 1184

MARY KLIMKO

Interviewed

by

Molly McNamara

on

August 25, 1988

Oral
History
1184

Mary Klimko

Mrs. Mary Klimko is of Polish ancestry. She was born September 9, 1920 in Youngstown, Ohio. Both her parents immigrated from Poland to the Youngstown area in the early 1900's. Mrs. Klimko grew up on the south side of Youngstown in a predominately Polish neighborhood. She attended a Polish grade school - St. Stanislaw. Mrs. Klimko is heavily involved with the Polish Church and the Polish community. She describes Polish holidays and ethnic traditions concerning them. Mrs. Klimko also described some of the changes in the Youngstown area from the Depression, World War II, to the present day. Today, Mrs. Klimko resides at 863 Woodford Street in Youngstown.

M: This is an interview with Mary Klimko for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Ethnic Groups in Youngstown, by Molly McNamara, at 863 Woodford, in Youngstown, Ohio, on August 25, 1988, at 11:00 a.m.

Okay, Mrs. Klimko can you give me some background on your family, your brothers and sisters, and where your parents were from?

K: Well, my dad was from Biezc, Poland, and my mom was from what they called Raclawice, Poland. I have five brothers. My oldest brother is John, then Sammy, and myself Mary, Walter and Joseph, and Frank.

M: You are the only girl?

K: I am the only girl among the five boys. My dad came to the United States in 1907. Two years later my mother came, in 1909, and it was surprising because they both came to the families that they both knew. My dad was, at that time, they were all boarders. One person would have one big home and then the ones coming in from Europe would look for a place to stay and they must have had so many borders staying. So where my dad was stayed there was room. My mother got in with a couple of her friends that came in. They got acquainted, and in 1910 is when they got married and moved over to the South side and started their own life and family.

M: Do you know why they came to this country?

K: Well, my dad came first to look for, hoping to find employment or a better way of living because in Poland things were so bad. They had no way to keep going on and everybody was saying, "Well, go to America, it is a fruitful land and a land of opportunity." They said, "Well, we are going to go to what they used to call in Polish, a place where golden pears are growing." So, they all wanted to go see the tree with the golden pears that would make them be able to make a living. So, my dad came and naturally had a hard struggle here of finding employment. I think that he started at Republic Steel and he worked there until his dying days.

M: Really?

K: He was at the one place all of his life.

M: Do you know what he did in the steel mill?

K: Well, he started off as what they called the lowest on the totem pole. He was a laborer because he was new and, of course, not knowing the language and being able to speak and all. He was just happy to do

anything as long as he was paid for it. Then later on he was, I think, he was promoted later on in life after he was there for several years. He got into the pipe mill. That is where my brother Stanley used to work, and his friends, and he just stayed with the mill all of his life. That was the only place he knew of getting the support that he was satisfied with. Where else was there to go and work and then, naturally, as they raised a family things were so hard. So, there were odd jobs. If anybody needed some help he would help. His friends would help one another and make a few extra dollars to keep the family going. Then came the Depression, which I remember later on, was in the 1930's where nobody was working. At the time where you are raising a family of six children and you are having a dream, hoping you are going to buy a home for the children and all. You feel left out and you wonder what is going to happen, but they had strong faith.

M: Was he laid off then, your father?

K: Well, the mills were shut down, most of them. I mean people were not working. I think they called it the stock market crashed.

M: Yes.

K: Everybody was unemployed, no matter where you went. It is just like I remember. He had a few dollars in the bank at that time. Well, in order to pay the rent, you went to the bank and you could not even get your own money. You had a pass book. So in order to pay your bills, like I remember our landlord would go with my dad to the bank and they would just transfer the money for the rent in order to keep going. The same thing with the grocery bill. You would just transfer it from your name to their name. You could not even get, I think that they allowed you \$15 a month if I am correct, to live on as far as cash. For medical expenses or something, somehow they made it through.

They always had this strong faith and they said, "No matter how bad things are, they cannot be as bad as they were. We had a hard life when we grew up in Poland, we always prayed our way through there." They always felt their faith was so strong, that through prayer everything is going to be solved and through that we were brought up the same way. No matter when things went wrong, we always knew. Well, I will make a novena, or I will say a prayer and everything will be fine. To me it was that way all my life. No matter what ever came. Any kind of cross to bear or any kind of problems I would always make a novena and say a prayer and it seemed like it all turned out.

And in school we were brought up the same way. You go to school and you would learn your Polish, but the first thing in the morning was your prayer and your Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag because you were in America and you honored your flag. We sang "My Country Tis of Thee"

everyday without fail. Then, we would have our regular prayers and we attended mass every day before school, and there was time for everything yet. We had all of our subjects. Besides that, we had the Polish grammar that we had to learn; speaking Polish, performing, dancing like I told you before. Nowadays, I sit and think and I said, "How did we do all that?" Yet there was time, everybody was so close. It seemed the more we studied, the more that we prayed, the more we were together. There was such unity which you do not find now. The family life was so different.

M: Now did your mother work outside the home?

K: Well, she did when things got bad, like during the Depression. She went out and did day work in order just to make a few dollars to help out, to get groceries and things like that. That is what everybody would do; they would help one another. She never had a regular job like in a factory, or doing sewing, because she had the six children and there was enough to do at home. They did their own cooking, canning, baking, and they knew how to stretch their dollars. You would have a small amount of money but it was amazing what you could do. A lot of times, when I think of it, when I first got out of school, I could not get a job because I graduated rather young. I went through school okay, but then if you were not 18, you could not get a position anywhere because you were too young and nobody would hire you. So the woman my mother used to work for, I even went out and did day work a couple days a week. I would make \$2.50 a day. I would go downtown on a bus for \$.10 and buy six loaves of bread for \$.25 and some meat and I would bring that home and I felt like I was a rich girl because I had \$.50 or a \$1.00 left over. It was amazing what we could do in those days. You think you were poor and it was such poverty, but in the long run we had a lot more than you have now. You bring the paycheck home and you cannot do anything with it really.

M: Yes. Now where did your parents live when they first came here?

K: On the south side of Youngstown.

M: Do you know what street? Is that where you were raised, too?

K: That is where we were all born. We were all born on the south side of Youngstown.

M: On what street was it?

K: Well, at that time they called it Oklahoma Street. That was near the Pyatt Street, where the Pyatt Street Market to this day exists yet. That is where we used to go and buy all of our different produce for canning and other things. The church was on South Avenue near the South Avenue Bridge, which was walking

distance from where we lived. When I went to school, I really went to the one on Williamson Avenue, but my two older brothers went to the St. Stanislaw School which was down by the bridge. The first church and school was built in 1909, I believe, they started that church. Or was it 1902? In 1909 my dad came to America and my mother came here. In 1902, I believe, they started the church. Then in 1924, they built a church on Williamson Avenue, which is the one that we still belong to.

M: Now why did they build two different churches like this?

K: Well, that one got too small as the people kept immigrating and coming into it more and more and they did not have enough room. As the people contributed to the church, they had enough money where they could build a bigger church and a bigger school, because they needed to. They had, I do not know how many hundreds of children, because everybody had big families. My mother had six children. All of our friends had five or six children. As they grew, the school got too small on South Avenue and so they built the one on Williamson Avenue in 1924, and that is where I started in that school. My three younger brothers, we all went to the grade school, and graduated from the eighth grade and then we went to high school.

M: Now do you remember the neighborhood where you grew up? Do you remember, were there a lot of Polish people that lived in that area?

K: Oh yes, almost every block, every street. When you walk home from church or from school you would walk down every block and there would be three or four people breaking up. A group going to stand on each corner visit and talk. One would go down Franklin Avenue, Gibson Street, Hyde Street, and it was just like one happy family. We would come out of church and everybody had time to visit each other and walk down the street and everybody went to their own arteries. They just went different ways and it was all close neighborhood. Close knit. There were Italian people, and Slovak, and a few Hungarians and all the street next to us and Pyatt Street. I could just point out like three or four Polish families, one or two Slovak families, then one Italian family. In fact, there was a little Italian store I used to go to and across the street was their son that lived there and it was just everybody was like one happy group.

M: Why do you think that they were like that though? Why do you think that they were so close knit, even though these people were all different nationalities and came from all different areas?

K: They all came from different areas, but I think what kept them close really to this day I still say that the poverty they were brought up in, and they grew up in. They felt rich just knowing somebody and being able to talk to somebody and share their problems, because whoever they would talk to,

they would compare, like you say, compare notes. How bad this one had it, how bad that one had it, and if somebody got something new, this person would run over, "Oh how wonderful." Everybody would be happy. Or if somebody bought a home, oh my goodness that was the greatest thing. Then, you would try to accomplish what that person did and strive for that. It gave you something to look forward to. By hard work, look what they got, maybe we can do the same, and you skimmed and saved trying to get ahead. Nobody was envious or jealous like people are now.

I do not know whether it is because there was more of a closeness in church and religion, but people were more alert to what you call sin. This is wrong, that is wrong. Where now, I have my rights. Everybody has rights now. Whether they are right or wrong, everybody has rights. They do not have that feeling of well, this is wrong and it is proper to help my fellow man. I know that when anyone in the neighborhood got sick, say if a woman got sick and she had five or six children. My mom got sick, the next door neighbor would come over and take all of the laundry to her house, wash the clothes, do the cooking, without even questioning. They just did that for each other. There was so much love and help to help one another, and the neighbors, they just were together all of the time like one big happy family. Children, the same thing in school. My goodness we went to school, we knew everything about everybody. My mother and father did this today, we will do that tomorrow, what did we eat, that is all that you would talk about, and everybody was proud. Then if you heard of something new you would share it. If somebody got something new or went somewhere, they would always talk about it.

M: It is so different than today.

K: It is like what they say, "Real togetherness," which we do not seem to have now. Whether it was family or neighbors.

M: Tell me a little bit about Polish school. You said that is where you learned the language? Did you learn any from your parents?

K: We learned it at home as we grew up because the parents would speak it. The majority of it was Polish. They were learning from us. Once we went to school, we learned the English language and we would be talking to them, and they would learn from us. But we automatically had it instilled in us from them because that is how we grew up. When you went to Polish School, naturally, it was always your learning the Polish language and had everything to go with it. But we were Americans first because we were born here, but we always keep our Polish traditions and our heritage no matter what. That was always linked together. You do this and this. They go hand and hand, just like your fingers on your hand. Your Polish would stay with your own American patronage. So our parents would learn from us and we would learn from them. But in school everything was Polish.

In first grade I remember -- I was just telling my kids the other day about when I was in a play. It was a Polish play, and I remember the song I used to sing. I am going to be 68 years old and I still know what I sang in the first grade. And it was each classroom, the children, we would have a time where we would even learn to speak to each other, to learn the Polish language. Then the teacher, which would be a sister at that time, she would listen to us. She would say, "This is wrong, that is wrong." Or "This is right," and we just learned to converse with children between each other. Even about our playing and doing things, where we would not do it with our parents, but with the children it was a different way. Then we would start learning to write Polish. I always said that was the best thing I ever did in my life because then, when I got older, I wrote letters to Poland to my grandparents.

M: Oh. I see.

K: And to me, I was not going to brag or anything, but my brothers would say, "I cannot write some of these words, I cannot talk." And they would say, "Let Mary do it." So it got to the point where I was just the regular Polish secretary for all of them. So, I would do most of the writing. My older brothers did a little, but the younger ones said, "Mary does it good. Let her do it." And that was the nicest thing. I used to write there and then when my uncles and aunts and my grandparents at the time, when they were all still living, would write back. I just felt closer to them because I would write like I was talking to them and I knew what to say and what to do. To this day, I feel so great that I was able to communicate with them.

M: That is wonderful, being able to communicate with them. What about your high school? You went to South High School?

K: South High.

M: It was a mixture of all different people. Did you lose because I know that you were not taught Polish in high school as well?

K: That ended in the eighth grade.

M: Now, did you feel lost in a way?

K: Well, that was bad in my case. When I went, we used to have a junior high school. From grade school we had to go for one year to junior high, and then we went to tenth grade to South High. Well, I kind of lost contact. The area we lived in, it seemed like most of the Polish friends that I had lived by. At that time, they had boundary lines. If you lived on one side of the street, you went to Wilson High School, and if you lived on this side, you went to Grant School. So, I was in the category where I did not have as many of my friends from the Polish

School going to that school. The majority of them went to Wilson and then to South.

When I got to South, I met all of my Polish friends again and I was in seventh heaven. But in the mean time, while I was in high school, I belonged to the Polish Choir, which kept me with my Polish friends. We used to have rehearsals every Tuesday. So, we would all get together from different areas and whatever school you went to, you would still meet on Tuesday. We would have choir rehearsal, which was a majority of Polish, Latin at that time was very common, so we used a lot of Latin in our churches. So, we learned the Latin, but my knowing Polish, the Latin came to us like a child. When you know Polish, you can pick up Latin easier than any other language they say, so I stayed with the Polish parish.

Naturally, from South High School, we had all of our friends there from grade school that we knew and we kind of kept in contact. Then the church, we would have different organizations. When we were young girls, we belonged to what they called, "The Young Ladies Fidelity," all single girls. We had a club. Well, we had different things. The majority of everything was English, but still every so often we would do something Polish and somebody would say, "Well, whose bringing this dish or that dish?" Or, "Do you have something special that we had in the Polish home that we would bring to the party or whatever it was."

M: So these groups, or these like a society that you were talking about, Polish Society kept you all together, kept the traditions and everything together.

K: Oh, yes. The young men had a Holy Name Club. My brothers belonged to that. They would have there own programs and everything. We used to have shows, let us say stage shows, down at the auditorium where the people would come, and these different clubs and organizations would perform. The Holy Name Club would be all young men and women and they would have an English play, but they would always have something in Polish. Later on, when they grew to be in there late teens and 20's, they would join in with the adult group, which were the men and women and the older people of the parish. Then they got the little children and they made a big organization of what they were called a "Polish artists." They would perform in different plays and that would be Polish. They would have Polish costumes sent in from Poland and everything. In fact one year they performed at Idora Park.

You probably do not remember, you were too young, but they used to have an auditorium at Idora Park where Polish Day was a great thing. You would start off in the morning with an outdoor Polish mass, then we would have a dinner up on the hill where they would bring all of traditional Polish foods and serve it there: parage, halushki, and all of these things. In the afternoon they would have this Polish play where all of these Polish people and artists would perform. That took about an hour to, maybe, two hours. After that you could go out and if you wanted to go on rides or have a little picnic, fine. Then, you would go into the ballroom, and they would have the community singing all of the Polish

songs. Beautiful. Then at 7:00 or 7:30, the orchestra would come in, and then the Polish band came in. Polish Day was like Christmas to me.

M: Now, do they still do this? I know the Hungarians have a Hungarian Day.

K: We still have Polish Day. In fact they had one, was it last Sunday? They had it at the Polish Hall on South Avenue.

M: I see.

K: They used to have it at Shady Run. We always used to have it, for years and years, at Idora, but it went by the way side. So, they still keep the tradition where they have the little kids dressed in Polish costumes. They dance and they have certain speakers coming in, and they talk about different customs of Poland and try to keep the tradition going. They had a roast lamb, and I think that they had a pig that they roasted and all. They brought a Polish band from Akron that played for the dancing and the people still keep that going. August is the Assumption Day, like I told you, with the Apple and Polish Day.

M: Tell me a little bit about that.

K: Each one has something to remind you of what I was telling you before.

M: Describe that for me a little bit on that.

K: August 15 is the Feast of the Assumption. Well, the Polish tradition is that you bring flowers and herbs in a little bouquet tied with ribbon, and bring it to church to get it blessed. You take those flowers and then you dry them out and keep them in the home, and that is suppose to protect you from harm and send blessings upon the house. In my mother's village of Poland, they have the tradition where upon this day, besides taking flowers, they always put an apple on a stick and put it in the center of the bouquet of flowers and took that to church and had that blessed, and brought it home and shared the apple with the family. You cut it in little pieces and everybody shared that as a Thanksgiving to God because it was harvest time. The apples are on the trees and they are ready to be picked, and the flowers and all, and it makes you thankful the harvest is here. You were always thankful and grateful for whatever you had. That was one of the traditions that the Polish people had, and to this day we still talk about it with my children and we think that it is something great that grandma used to do.

So, that would be August and it was following the Assumption it was the closest holiday to the Polish Day. Polish Day, you looked forward to that. It would be the second, or third Sunday in August. At that time, when I grew up of course, like when I told you we used to have doings out at Idora Park with the outdoor mass and everything. Most of all, everybody that was Polish would try to

wear red and white on that day. To this day we still do it. My daughters and I last Sunday we were all dressed in red and white and everybody said, "What is today?" We said, "Do you not know? It is Polish Day." We did that. In fact, I think that I did that all of my life from when I remembered to wear the traditional Polish colors of red and white. So that was for August.

M: Now you were telling me about Easter and blessing the baskets as another tradition.

K: Oh, Easter time was another great thing. Okay, Holy week came, of course. More or less, you would stay fasting and you would give up a lot of things during Lent. We would never think of going to the movies, and you would always give up, say, your favorite candy or ice cream, and that and you would say, "Oh, not until Easter." You would always give up something because it was Lent. Then Holy week came well, Holy Thursday, to me, was always something special because I knew I was going to wear my little white dress for communion and my veil and carry a lily and be in the procession. To me that was Holy Thursday. Of course, at that time I just looked forward to that and not know what it meant, you know, the institution of the sacrament and all.

Then on Good Friday, we would have services three times, once in the morning, Stations of the Cross in the afternoon and the burial, and then in the evening we would have the service at 7:30 where we sang. We meditated on the Passion of Christ. That would take like an hour and a half. Continuous singing, meditating, reading the whole Passion, only it was in the singing part. But in between that Good Friday, my dad -- I do not know how he managed, but he usually had off on Good Friday, or maybe it was that he worked 7:00-3:00 -- but after the Stations of the Cross, he would always take us downtown and we would visit three churches. It would be St. Columbus, St. Seral, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and at that time we used to have St. Joseph's, which is now The Newman Center. So we would visit each church and it was a tradition of visiting three churches on Good Friday. We would go to each church.

M: Those are not Polish churches. Why those three?

K: Well, it was three Catholic churches because, I do not know why it was three that we would always believe that the three days that Christ dies, and arose on the third day and he died on Good Friday and it was supposed to at that time; that it was at 3:00. Everything was at three. So you should visit at least three churches. We would go and admire the Cross at three different churches, three times. When we were all through with that, then we would go downtown and they would say, "Okay, now you could pick out your little candy for your Easter baskets," which we would take to church on Saturday. So on Friday we would pick out our candy, and that was the biggest thrill because we could go and pick our

own things for our baskets. In fact, to tell you the truth, I still have mine from when I was a little girl. It is faded away, but I still have my basket because it meant so much to me. We would put our little candy in it and our colored Easter egg and take that to church with the big basket, get it blessed, bring it home, as much as you just wanted candy your tongue was just hanging for it. You did not dare eat it until Easter morning after the Resurrection mass. You could not eat anything before that.

So Easter morning came. I would be in procession, and my brothers were altar boys at the time. We would get up and go to 5:00 mass, 5:00 in the morning. Then later on, they had it at 6:00. But when I first started, it was at 5:00. We just could not wait for that day because that is when the sun would be coming up in the morning and Jesus would be coming out of the grave. We would march in procession three times around the church completely for the memory of Christ who rose from the dead the third day; three times procession went around the church. Then we came home. Of course, on Easter morning everything was happy and gay because in church years ago they used to cover the statues during Passion Sunday and Holy week. Everything was draped in cloths. I do not know if you remember that or not?

M: No.

K: On Easter morning, all of the statues would be uncovered and everything. So happy you have lilies in church. It just gave you the greatest feeling to go to that early mass and hear everybody sing "Hallelujah, Christ is Risen." That was all Polish, too. So then we came home and Mom would set the table with all the blessed food from the Easter baskets and we were able to get into the candy. Easter Day was just something. Then, you waited for the afternoon when the relatives and friends came over to wish each other Happy Easter and it was family togetherness, spending holidays. It started off in church, then you came home, family gatherings, and it was just continuous, no matter what it was.

M: What about for Christmas. Describe to me some of the traditional foods that you eat either for Christmas or Easter, or any other holidays.

K: Well, for Easter, like I said, our tradition was that you always had your ham and you had your kielbasa, your eggs, horseradish because you had to have something bitter knowing that the bitterness is over and Christ suffered bitter pain. Well, that was our traditional Easter food. On Christmas, it was almost the same, but then you would extra food. You would have stuffed cabbage besides your ham, kielbasa and all of your baked goodies. For Christmas Eve, that was the one where we had the meatless meal, what they call the. We would start off and we would have what they call the beet soup, and then fish and Pierogi. We used to have barley and prunes and sauerkraut. There was 12 different meatless dishes for the 12th month of the year.

M: I see.

K: When Christ was born, and the 12 apostles, the 12 had a meaning there just like with the three, which meant three days that he rose from the dead, on the third day. Ad he dies at 3:00 on Friday, and the three's were there and this was 12. On Christmas Eve, we could not wait because all day nobody would eat anything much other than, "Let me take something to drink." You would not eat anything solid, or anything cooked. Maybe a little piece of bread or cracker. You fasted until when you saw the first star up in the sky; that is when the supper would begin. Everybody would get dressed up in their best and we would put the Polish wafer. I do not know if anybody told you about that. It was a Polish wafer you put on the clean linen cloth and under the linen cloth you have a little bit of hay for the memory of Christ being born in a manger on the hay. You lay this wafer on the hay, then every member of the family, starting with the oldest member, at that time when my dad lived he was the one that started. It started out with a prayer and everybody would get a piece like from you and break off a piece and you would break off a piece for mine and we would extend each other's wishes of health, happiness, good luck, or a lot of times they would kid around with young people, "I hope you get married by next year at this time." Different things like that, but all good wishes.

Then, after we had our good wishes sent around to each other, everybody kissed in a grace and sat down and we started our meal and had all of the traditional food. Then, we had our dessert, which was mostly kolachi, and the nuts and candy. After the dinner was over we would go in the living room, and everybody would start singing the Polish Christmas Carols. The young children would go to bed, the adults and the older ones would go to midnight mass, and that would be Christmas. That was just like one special thing in life that would happen. Then the younger ones would get up in the morning and then we would go to church, and for their mass because everybody could not go to midnight mass and then when they came home we had our Christmas breakfast and then they would get into their gifts.

M: Now do you still practice this today? Are these traditions you still keep?

K: Oh yes, the Christmas Eve. If not, we would not have Christmas Eve. I remember when my youngest one was growing up she said, "Oh mommy, are we going to have all the yucky food?" I said, "Yucky food?" because there were things there when she was little growing up. You have peas and everything and there was no meat or anything and I said, "Yes, do you not want to have some?" "Oh no, no. It would not be Christmas Eve. That is the day that we know that we have that." And to this day, they still want it. Even my grandchildren come over now to Grandmas's house , it is no meat that day, and this is what we eat.

M: They look forward to it?

- K: We have to taster a little bit of everything for good luck. When you set the table on Christmas Eve, you always put in an extra place setting in case, they said at that time, they have strangers walking around and they did not have a home and nobody to go to. Where ever they would see a light in a window, they knew that they were welcome. So they would join in. You would always have one extra seat for a stranger, which they said would be like serving or having God with you at the table.
- M: That is interesting. Now do your children speak Polish?
- K: Oh, yes.
- M: Oh do they? That is wonderful.
- K: She is a Polish organist at St. Stanislaw, yes. My youngest one, she sings Polish. She is a soloist and she sings Polish. She does all of the Polish funerals and weddings, or whatever. Anytime they have some Polish doing, they call Mary Ann. We have Mr. & Mrs. Hummer. Mrs. Hummer is the organist, and she is the choir director for the regular masses and all, and she does when we have a Polish mass at 9:00 and she is the director and organist for that. I belonged to the choir ever since I was in grade school. I never went other than when I had children.
- M: Now did you teach your children Polish? Or how did they learn the language?
- K: Well, they learned. When they went to school, they had a little bit of it, but not as much. On Saturdays they had what you call Polish School. Certain children that wanted to, if you wanted to, it was voluntary you could go on Saturdays and learn the Polish language. Well, she went and my youngest one, "Can Johnny go for a while too?" I think that Johnny went. In fact, my husband was Slovak, of Slovak decent, bu they did not use much of the Slovak language in their home. He used to drive them down to Polish School and there were a few adults that were going in to get tips on different things and he got so interested that he joined. For a couple of months there he was going there, too, because he was a school teacher.
- M: I see.
- K: And he was so interested and he said, "Oh, it will not do me good." He said, "I think that is the hardest language to learn.
- M: That is what I have heard.
- K: He said, "Boy your language is the toughest." He said, "I have heard

many," because he studied different languages and all. And he did great, he really did. He loved Polish songs. He did not know the words but he loved the melodies. He said, "There are no melodies like the Polish melodies when they sing it." He was a commentator at the Polish mass later on, too.

M: That is interesting. I was just curious, before when we were talking about the Depression and whatever, during World War II. Do you remember much of World War II?

K: Oh, yes.

M: Do you remember how it affected your family in Poland? Your grandparents at that time.

K: Well, it was bad because I remember in when we used to write letters to each other how things changed. We were not allowed to write certain things in the letters. They could not write to us. They could not tell us anything that was going on, more or less other than this one is all right. You could just feel the ache and pain in between the lines of the letters. My mother's parents could not communicate because my dad's parents could not communicate with my dad's parents died when I was little. I do not remember them, but I used to communicate with my mom's family. In fact, she still has a niece that is living that I communicate with now. It was so different. You could just tell how we could not say things to them because you were not permitted, and we could not send money at the time or different things. It was just like you were in a different world.

M: Yes.

K: The same things when the World War was over here. In fact, I will never forget when they attacked Poland. It was in September. I was a bridesmaid for the first time at a wedding and they said, "Oh, they attacked Poland," and it just put a damper on it. I did not tell them. To this day, I remember when George got married, remember at the wedding we got the news and then it was already so different. Then when my brothers went to war, my one brother Stanley was in Germany and he wanted so badly to get a pass to Poland to see our relatives there.

M: Yes.

K: He never had the opportunity or chance to go with different things that happened during the war. It was sad.

M: That was a hard time then?

K: It sure was.

M: Well, coming back up to date, to the 1980's again, when did you move into this community here where you live now today? Was this after you were married?

K: After I was married. Three, no 33 years it was when my son was a baby. That is how I remember he is 33. Okay, it will be 33 years on October 29 that I moved to this house.

M: Well, how was this neighborhood different then from the one where you grew up on the south side?

K: Well, it seemed like we were further away from what you would call the church group, but at that time everybody was already moving out. It was still more or less the south side from our parish, that is. They would move out but it would still be like we were branching out like a little tree grows and the branches get wider and wider. They were further out, but we were all close to each other that we could still see each other during the week, or even during the week. Like when you said during the war, how did the war effect people? People would go to church during the month of October. The Polish people have a special devotion to the mother of God, which is Queen of Poland and the Black Madonna. We have services in church every single night of October. We said the rosary. The church was packed. People were standing. That is how people turn to God for no matter what.

All the boys went to the service and we had special songs made where we prayed and sang for Marines, Navy, for this one and that one. They had all these different songs composed in Polish so they would be protected. People prayed, and we all had this strong faith that no matter what is happening, we will come through just like Poland. They were persecuted and fought through so many years and it was odd; the more they struggled the stronger their faith was. Even to this day I think that they are the only country that I know of that have so many priests, and nuns, and people that are such devote Catholics. No matter what happens to them they do not give up, they just get stronger in faith and all. It seems like that all rubbed off on the people that were here and on there children and everything. Because no matter what happened we would always say, "Oh it will be all right. She will take care of us, and she will take care of them." I was fortunate because all of my brothers were in the service and they all came back, thank God. There was a lot that we went through. During the war, it was an experience. At the same time I think that we grew stronger and better in character and understanding that no matter what you go through you do not give up. You just keep going.

M: Right.

K: And that it will always work out.

M: Now this neighborhood, is this a Polish neighborhood?

K: No.

M: I did not think so.

K: It is mixed. It is a lot different than it used to be, but it is a mixed neighborhood. We moved close enough, far enough away that we got, at that time, they called here we have Idora Park. We have a great school. We are close to South High School where my husband was a school teacher, and they had a playground here for the children and different things: Idora Park, Mill Creek Park, Canfield Road. It was close to go to the Canfield Fair. It seemed like we were in the center of all things that were easy to get to, and yet we wanted to have a nice home for our children. As far as being away from the Polish church and the Polish group of people, it was not because we would always keep in contact by being in the different organizations and clubs. We would meet a couple times a week, and every Sunday we would get to see the friends and everybody.

M: Right.

K: Once you got to church, it was like now everybody runs out of church, gets in the car, and goes home.

M: Yes, that is right.

K: People would more or less walk if it was within walking distance, or if they did have cars everybody would stand around and visit, more or less reminisce. "Well, how are things with you?" We would stand until it was time for the next mass to come on. People would be coming and the ones from the first mass would just be leaving. It was just that closeness that we had that we never lost track of each other.

M: So you do not feel that by moving out of your old neighborhood and into this one that you lost anything as far as contacts?

K: Oh no, not at all.

M: That is interesting.

K: The contact was still there and like, my children went to the same school that I did because they were bussed. Later on they had the bus coming

here to take them to the same school, which was a Polish School, St. Stanislaw. We just felt like we never left anywhere.

M: Yes.

K: We were still in that same little circle.

M: That is interesting. Now, have you ever been to Poland?

K: No.

M: Any desire to?

K: I would love to go if I did not have to cross the ocean. I have never really been in an airplane, and I am afraid mostly going over the water. Maybe someday I might still get a chance. I hear so many people going now, especially in our choir. We have a lot of these displaced persons that were brought in, in the 1950's.

M: Yes.

K: They belong to our choir, and they travel a lot because they still have their families and they talk about all of these beautiful things. I would give anything to go to Warsaw and see the Polish Madonna, and the religious places and all the different historical places that I heard of from my parents.

M: Yes.

K: Like I said, if someone could hypnotize me and put me to sleep and get me there and say, "Here you are." It would be great.

M: I hope you go someday.

K: I hope that my children get to go because I do not think that I ever will. I do hope that they will because my mom even said all of the time she said, "Oh, if you do not go maybe Mary Ann or Johnny and some of them, maybe they will still go and see where I was born."

M: Yes.

K: Yes, it would be nice. My mother died about four years ago and she was in her 90's. Her lady friends went to Poland, I think, in 1980, the same village and church that my mother came from. When she came back, the two of them just could not talk about it enough. I think that they reviewed

every statue, every place, every little village. They even talked about the animals and the sheds that they had when they were little girls in Poland, because they were from the same village. When they were reminiscing, it was like my mother was right there with her. It was so great, and I just thought to myself, "Gee, would it not be nice if I could see all of that?"

M: Someday.

K: It really would be.

M: Well I hope that you get to go someday.

K: No. I doubt it I ever will, but I do hope that my children will go. I mean they still know the Polish. A lot of them would not know when they go. They said, "It is so hard if you do not know the Polish language." My younger daughter, she understands everything but she has a harder time speaking. She says, "Maybe I would not be able to." They said, "Oh, do not worry Annette. You know so much that you could not pull the wool over your eyes." They love to travel, so I am hoping and praying that someday they will go to the land where their grandma and grandpa came from.

M: Is there anything else that I have not mentioned that you would like to talk about? Or anything else that you could think of?

K: I am trying to think. I made a list to remind me of certain traditions. Oh well, this is going backwards to Christmas time. The day after Christmas, St. Stevens Day, the Polish people would always, as usual -- like I said, everything started off church in the morning. You would go during St. Stevens Day, and it would still be Christmas Day. You always celebrated Christmas at least two or three days. It was a Holy Day and you did not do anything but celebrate the day. So after we came from church, we looked forward to the late afternoon and evening after the men came home from work and wives would get the children together. I used to have my poncho and to this day, I remember who wore the little hat, like in Williamsburg. The little lace trim hats with the elastic. She would always get that hat and have it ready and I could not understand why.

Well, our tradition was you would always say in Polish, "Praise me Jesus Christ" whenever you entered a home no matter yours or whose or anybody's; that was always the first thing that you said when you walked into their home. Then he would reach into a bag, and they would start throwing these walnuts and Filbert nuts, they call them -- the little ones -- and throw them. And my aunt Julia would just hide and scream and the kids would have a ball. They are all running and picking these nuts up because you did not have things as plentiful like you do now. Everybody is seeing what they can gather and that was for the

memory of St. Steven, who was stoned to death.

M: I see

K: He was a martyr. So the Polish people would always on St. Steven's Day, they would throw these nuts to remind them of St. Steven and how he was stoned to death and became a saint. So that was St. Steven's Day. It was the day after Christmas. Now, after Easter, we had the tradition where the day after Easter the boys or the men would get little pales of water and sprinkle the women or girls. Tuesday after Easter, the girls would go after men and they would sprinkle them with water. Now, I do not remember what that tradition was; all that I know is the day after Easter all you do when you see anybody coming that was a male you would hide because you were going to get showered. I said it is funny, but I remember those things from my childhood days.

M: Well, that all seems so symbolic. It is interesting to know that you remember all of these and you know what the story behind them means.

K: How they stand out?

M: Yes, that is real interesting.

K: Well, May 3rd is another great day, the Polish Constitution Day. We would always be in different programs. We would have different speakers coming from all over. The children would all have to learn different verses and songs and dances to perform. Everything was in Polish costume and Polish tradition. We would just learn everything about the Polish heritage, because that is what we would hear in all these different speeches. We would go to the Polish Hall, or even at St. Stanislaw Hall, and we performed at our school. So then later on when she was little she was growing up

M: Your daughter?

K: What was good for me was good for her. We got her a little Polish costume and she went with what they call the Polish dancing group.

M: I see.

K: So she belonged, and my other little one belonged to that, too, and they performed on the third of May. In different occasions they had Polish plays or something, but the third of May was an outstanding day because you would observe that just like all the first Sundays in May, which was closest to May 3rd. It was the day that you knew you were going to go to the Polish Hall and you were going to have a program, and that was for the month of May. Each

classroom at school, when we went to St. Stanislaw School, every classroom from the first to the eighth grade, every time the school year ended -- which was in June -- the eighth grade children would get diplomas that they are graduating from the eighth grade. Every classroom would have to prepare a program and a play. The majority of them were Polish, but some were English and some were half and half. So in every grade you would have a chance to be an actress, or an actor, or singer or whatever. But every classroom had to put on a play and that was what they called the June graduation. All the parents and the relatives would come and watch the children perform. That was just a tradition.

M: It seems like there was a lot of togetherness.

K: My goodness, yes. That is why I said the children were together, the families. It was just like it seemed like the whole city, and church was one happy family. Everybody was, it was beautiful. Then when they did away with that, naturally, later on the school did not have as many sisters teaching. Then they had lay teachers, and now it is getting where more people are moving out more and more.

M: Yes.

K: Our Polish School closed down and it is just like you lost your best friends. Even to this day it is so sad to walk and think of the things that used to go on there that do not anymore.

M: Yes.

K: We had so many rooms, and all of the classrooms were filled. We had eight grades of children and they were all big classrooms, nothing small. Besides having the different class and organizations for the young and middle aged group, and the adults. It is no longer there. Well, they still have the societies, but the people are growing older, and are not able to come down. A lot of them die, and the younger ones are not keeping up as much.

M: Yes, I see that happening in almost every ethnic community that I have talked to. You know that is what is going on.

K: When you are older you see this happening. That is why I keep thinking to myself, "I have so many memories, so many things to remember about growing up, what do my children have really?" And with the way things are happening in our society as a general, it is so different, and it is sad when you think about it. There is a lot of advantages and everything that can prove that change, but I always say what we call it, "The Good Old Days," it was poverty, Depression, or strike. I know when the strike was

on, when I graduated from high school, that is why I could not go to college. My parents were not able to get me through and buy me clothes to go to school because things were bad. They had a big family and they could not afford it.

M: Yes.

K: I never did have a chance to go to college or anything, but I was still as proud as could be because I graduated at Stambaugh Auditorium at the time. To me, that was the greatest thing in the world. Everybody was proud that their children could go that far. The ones that had money and could send them on, we called them the high class and the better people that had the more money and everything else that could do it. Everybody was not that category. That is why, when I got married, I married a school teacher and, naturally, I was fortunate that my children were able to go to college and do things that I could not do. I feel that they had a lot in life more than I did growing up and at the same time I think that I was richer in my childhood days than what they have memories of.

M: I see.

K: A lot of beautiful things. Although I am glad that he kept our traditions where what was dear to me in my heart, of what my parents brought me up to be and their traditions. I kept that and instilled it in their hearts and I am glad that they love it, and they want to keep it up.

M: Oh yes, definitely. I think that is what is more important.

K: A lot of the younger generation now say, "That is old fashion, who wants to do that?" They do not want this or that. They do not like that, but there are many that do. I am very happy, and I am proud that they are following in our footsteps more or less.

M: Thank you.

End of Interview