

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ukrainian Project

Life in the Ukraine

O. H. 307

CLEMENTINE ZMURKEWYCH

Interviewed

by

Randall Dicks

on

August 17, 1974

CLEMENTINE ZMURKEWYCH

Clementine Zmurkewych was born in Duniow, a small village near Lwow, Austria on November 2, 1909. This is the area of Europe known as the Ukraine.

She attended high school and then obtained her master's degree in law from the university in Lwow. Later she received her bachelors degree in education from Kent State University.

Mrs. Zmurkewych is married to Myron and retired in 1972. She attended Holy Trinity Church in Youngstown. She presently resides in Miami, Florida, at 940 NW 134th Street.

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INTERVIEWEE: CLEMENTINE ZMURKEWYCH

INTERVIEWER: Randall Dicks

SUBJECT: Ukraine, Law school, Early life

DATE: August 17, 1974

D: This is an interview with Mrs. Clementine Zmurkewych by Randall Dicks. It is August 17, 1974, at 4:00 p.m.

First of all, Mrs. Zmurkewych, when and where were you born?

Z: I was born in Duniow, a little village near Lwow. It belonged to Austria then.

D: Who were your parents and what did your father do?

Z: Well, my parents owned a factory and a farm near Lwow.

D: Did they always live there?

Z: Yes.

D: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Z: Oh, yes. We were a big family. I am the tenth child, the youngest in the family.

D: Where did you go to school?

Z: I went to high school, then to the University of Lwow where I obtained a master's degree in law.

D: When did you obtain your degree in law?

Z: In 1934 I graduated with a master's degree.

D: What do you remember about the period when that part of the Ukraine belonged to Austria?

Z: Oh, not much, really not much. Well, I remember when Austria fell and I was still a young girl. Money lost all value. I would cut out the pictures of the kings and queens that were on the Austrian one thousand Kronen bank notes and play with them. Austrian money lost all value.

D: What about after the war?

Z: After the war I remember sometimes it was hard, because everything was destroyed. As you know, Lwow and the vicinity was the place of many battles. My father died when I was three years old and I don't remember him. In the house of my mother, all furniture was destroyed and the windows and doors were broken. I remember exactly how they refurnished and rebuilt it after the war. Then came Poland and Polish money, the mark, which also lost its value so much that we paid in millions for bread. However, everything improved in time and we had a prosperous life.

D: What were the changes when that part of the Ukraine became part of Poland?

Z: Well, you see, I still didn't participate very much in this event, but my older brothers and sisters did. Some fought. The Ukrainian people wanted independence and autonomy and so on. There were lots of fights between Polish and Ukrainian people.

D: Was it difficult for the Ukrainians under Polish rule?

Z: Well, maybe the people had too many demands and at this time didn't understand each other very well, and they didn't know what was coming, that a real problem was coming for all of us, for the Ukrainian people as well as the Polish people. The Soviet government, as you know, is very fanatical. Although they call themselves Democrats, they are the greatest imperialists that you can imagine. They can't tolerate anybody who doesn't agree with them. It is exactly as Mayakovsky, a famous Communist poet who committed suicide in 1930, wrote in his poems, "Who is not with us is against us." So he believed in the early 1920's, but later became so disappointed that he took his own life. So there were expectations, there were disappointments. Perhaps, as I say, the people wanted too much and this

is why it happened. It would have been so much better for both nations, Polish and Ukrainian, if they understood each other better from the beginning. Then, maybe they would be in a better position today and we, also. We have the Ukraine and they have Poland, but so many Polish people are here and so many Ukrainians also . . .

D: What was it like to go to the University at this time?

Z: It was wonderful.

D: Were many people going? Was it possible to go?

Z: Well, we had to pay. The fee was relatively high, but there were always subsidies for the talented students who could pay back the fees after they had finished the University and gotten some position. The fees were paid for them.

I think the degree of learning was very high. We had very good teachers at the University that wrote various books that were translated into several languages. For example, Professor Balcer, one of the law professors at the Jan Kazimierz University of Lwow, had his books translated into all European languages. As well, we had Professor Ludwig Ehrlich of International Law. He was known all over Western Europe. I would say our teachers were very good and very learned people with a high degree of experience. It was not enough, for example, to have only a degree; you had to have a good scientific or literary work behind you to become a real professor at the University in Lwow, or any other university in Poland.

D: When you graduated from the University, did you practice law?

Z: Yes, I started a practice in court. You see, we had to complete three years court practice, the so-called "Judicial Preparatory Training" where we went through all departments of the court and afterwards, we were submitted to a judicial exam. After we had taken this judicial exam, we could get a nomination as a judge, or we could leave the court and still take two additional years of practice at an attorney-of-law office and then take the attorneys' board exam and then be admitted to the Bar and practice law.

I started my practice at court, then the war broke out in 1939 and my practice was interrupted when the Germans occupied this territory. They suspended all

board exams and so I just couldn't become what I wanted. I had to finish with the practice at Court.

D: What do you remember about the beginning of the war?

Z: Well, at the beginning of the war, I was in Radom. My husband was a judge then in Radom. This territory was occupied by the Germans. The Russians didn't get that far. It is close to Warsaw and I didn't see the Russians at all.

My husband was drafted into the Polish Army when he was taken as a German prisoner of war and returned home after a year. The Germans occupied this territory; they reorganized the courts. They created so-called "Sondergerichts", special courts for Germans, the Polish courts for the Polish people, where I worked. In the Polish courts the activity was restricted only to some common crimes and misdemeanors. Also, all people who declared themselves to be "Volksdeutsche", of German nationality, belonged to the "Sondergerichts", the German special courts. Special crimes like treason were all restricted only to the German courts. Naturally, the Polish courts were under the strict supervision of the German courts all of the time, during the occupation.

Well, then I finished my practice and I started working in the special department for the translation of all court cases. We had to read all the court cases, prepare a summary of them in German, and submit the summary to a German judge who decided which court should try this particular case. I started working as an interpreter, translating the complaints and so on into German and the German courts decided which came to the Polish courts and which came to the German courts.

D: What were the changes in everyday life?

Z: Well, there wasn't so much change in the beginning, but later on, everybody felt the lack of food and of course, there were some political arrests. The battles or the fighting itself wasn't so remarkable because Radom wasn't located where the battles were going on. In Warsaw there was much fighting. Warsaw was very much destroyed. I, for example, was in Warsaw in the first week after the Polish Army fell. I had gotten a letter through a soldier from my husband saying that he was being taken prisoner and that he would

be in Czenstochowa. He wrote me, "If you could come and ask them, perhaps they will let me go." But I was too late. It wouldn't have helped anyhow, because they just wouldn't free anybody. They just took all of the prisoners to Germany and kept them in the so-called "stalags" and "offlags", depending on whether the person was an officer or a common soldier.

There was a remarkable difference in the life . . . sure. We felt the lack for everything, for food and so on.

D: Were there many arrests?

Z: There were some arrests, of course, mostly Jews. Even those who accepted Christianity and were baptized were removed the first week or so from court, dismissed, and later, they were arrested and sent to the camps. You know what happened to them most of the time.

D: How long were the Germans there?

Z: Well, the Germans were there from September until the fall of 1944. They divided the whole territory into so-called gubernatorial districts. When the war broke out between Germany and Russia, they moved forward to the east, so this territory belonged all the time to Germans and was under German occupation.

D: What happened in 1945?

Z: Well, frankly speaking, I had just escaped to Vienna in time. My husband had to stay. I had a family in Vienna and escaped a little bit sooner. I started working in Vienna, you see, then my husband joined me. So I also didn't see what it was like during the last days.

D: How did you get to Vienna?

Z: Well, I had a family in Vienna. One day they provided me with employment in Vienna, and on this ground I received a passport. I knew German and I took a course in German shorthand and typing and I received a job in Vienna as a stenotypist. So I really didn't see very much of the last part of the war.

I could tell you more about how it looked when the Americans were occupying Germany. Then I was in the middle of this fighting.

D: What was it like then?

Z: Well, it wasn't too rosy because there was so much bombing and we civilians were right in the middle of the front lines. We could have been shot equally by Americans as by Germans. The civilian population suffered very much. The Army and the military could, at least, defend themselves, but the civilians, if they were lucky, stayed alive, if not, they were killed.

D: When did you come to the United States?

Z: Oh, I didn't come until 1950 because I got sick. My family could have come here sooner, but I got sick and until I recovered completely, they wouldn't let me come to the United States. The Allies formed the UNRA [United Nations Relief Agency] and the Displaced Persons Organization. They organized very good sanatoriums and hospitals for us and they really took very nice and very good care of us. You could get well, but it took time. This is why I came later. All my family came here in 1948.

D: What can you tell me about national feelings in the Ukraine? How did that change under the Austrians and the Poles and under Germany?

Z: Well, I'll tell you one thing: I can admire my people going through so many hardships and governments and so on. They still persist and they still exist and they aren't losing their identity. It is something that is really hard to believe.

D: It must be very difficult.

Z: I don't know what unites them, but they were there and they are there and always are showing that they are here. They did not perish as a nation.

D: What about Ukrainians who left the Ukraine to come to this country, do they still keep up the traditions?

Z: Those who came here, do keep them and to some extent, the children do keep them, but this strong American influence makes its influence among our people. I don't want to judge if it is good or bad. In my opinion, the second and the third generation will



hardly remember. Maybe they will still have some pictures or some embroidery and say, "My ancestors came from the Ukraine." The majority marry. There are intermarriages. They go to school, you see, so it is natural. In America this process of developing a strong and united American people is going on and it is inevitable and it is good for America because there are so many dangers for us. It would be dangerous if Americans wouldn't be united as Americans, as one people really united, having the same feelings, who don't get divided. When, for example, the fatherland of this group fights against the fatherland of that group, then there is a collision of interests. It is, to some extent, dangerous for a nation to exist like this.

D: When you were young, what was the feeling for you living under the Polish in the Ukraine?

Z: I went to the Ukrainian high school, "gymnasium" as we called it, in Lwow. We were always separated. We kept to ourselves, and the Polish kept to themselves.

D: So you felt as though you were Ukrainian and not a part of Poland?

Z: Yes, that's right. For example, in the school dances, everything was separated. The Polish didn't look for any approaches just to unite together with us and maybe they were more in the position to do so than we were. But as far as I remember in the gymnasium, we were always separated. We kept in our groups. They would keep separated from us. The Jews would keep separated from everybody. So it was.

D: Did people think or hope that someday the Ukraine would be independent?

Z: Yes, and you see, we already have the Ukraine, but the Ukrainian people hope that some day it will be a free country where all Ukrainians will be able to live, and not to have to seek refuge in other countries in order to survive. One thing I know is that they want their identity, and they are not losing their identity, in spite of such pressures as they are submitted to now. So many have been deported to Siberia. I can only tell you what I hear from others. In spite of this there is the feeling of being a Ukrainian nation and something different from the others. It is not as easy as somebody perhaps thinks it is, to say, "Now they [the Russians] are international." It is

not true, because there are these differences among the people and they feel it and they lived through it and no matter what some sociologist will write in his book, that nowadays all Soviet people feel like one, it is a lie. It will always be a lie for anyone who has been there and has seen with his own eyes how it is. It is just like different colors; this is red, this is white, this is yellow. You can't say that there are no differences, because something keeps the different groups together. They feel differently. They are somewhat different. You don't have to be black or white to be different. There is something more than that that is still different.

D: Do people in this country understand much about the Ukraine? Do you think they are aware that the Ukraine has passed from Austria and Russia to Poland and Germany and back to the Soviet Union? Are they aware of this?

Z: Maybe there are some specialists who understand. The majority are not interested in these discussions at all.

D: Do you think that for most people "Russia is Russia"?

Z: Most people think Russia is Russia and besides, it doesn't matter to them.

D: That makes it more difficult for the Ukrainians to preserve their identity.

Z: Oh, I don't know what makes it more difficult. The people are too busy to be interested in these problems. Maybe these problems are too far away. They are not immediately concerned with them and it is only natural that they believe everything that Time writes or some magazine or newspaper, although they have some good articles sometime.

D: Well, I don't want to take up any more of your time. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW