

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church Project

Parishioner Experience

O. H. 546

JOHN BOSAK

Interviewed

by

Mary Lou Shirilla

on

November 20, 1986

JOHN BOSAK

John Bosak was born February 4, 1902 in Farrell, Pennsylvania, a son of Stephen and Mary (Hardy) Bosak.

He attended Gordon School in Campbell, Ohio and Adams School in Youngstown, Ohio.

He married Ida Mary Molchany on September 15, 1925. They had five children: Mrs. Mary Macala; Thomas; Mrs. Dorothy Vuksta; John E.; and George D. Bosak. They were married almost 60 years.

In the 1920's, Mr. Bosak was employed by the Youngstown Chandelier Company and Beil Electric as a chandelier hanger and an apprentice electrician. Due to a prolonged strike, he moved to Detroit and worked for Briggs Manufacturing Co., and then to Akron and was employed by the Akron Motor Car Co. He returned to Youngstown and was employed by the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company from 1934 until his retirement in 1967.

Mr. Bosak has served St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in various capacities: an usher, a trustee, festival committee member, pirohy house volunteer, cemetery and picnic grounds worker.

Today, his special interests are praying and singing, and also watching football and baseball.

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN BOSAK

INTERVIEWER: Mary Lou Shirilla

SUBJECT: Wakes and Funerals, Family Life, Early
decades of church, Early decor

DATE: November 20, 1986

S: This is an interview with Mr. John Bosak for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the history of St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Parish, by Mary Lou Shirilla, at Mr. Bosak's home, on November 20, 1986, at 11:00 a.m.

Mr. Bosak, before we begin talking about your own self, can you give me a little bit of information about your parents or your grandparents?

B: My parents are both dead. I can't recall the year that they died. I have it somewhere marked in books and on pictures an all, but I don't recall the time of death except for my mother. She died on January 14, 1928. Then my dad died maybe fifty years later or something like that. I don't recall now. He lived for quite a while.

S: What do you recall about your mother when she was alive?

B: All I can say was that she was very good to us. It has been a good many years. We were little kids at the time that she did die. She was good to us. She taught us to pray all the time. My dad was always after her to get us to pray more, so I prayed as much as I could. I am still praying even today. She was very sick. I can't recall what the doctor said she died from, but she was sick in bed for several weeks and probably even months. I don't recall. I was a youngster, and I was having my good time, so I didn't pay any attention to those things. I didn't think they were serious at that time until after she died.

S: Were your parents born in Europe?

- B: They were born in Europe, yes. They moved from Europe to somewhere in Pennsylvania--Greensburg or wherever it was. Later on my dad couldn't get a job, and she didn't like it here, so she went back to Europe with me and my sister Ann. They had two children at that time. She went back to Europe with the children, but dad stayed here and he finally got a job. The people scolded her in Europe and said that she should go back with her husband and not to bother coming back there, so she came back again shortly. I don't recall how I got to Europe because I must have been about only two or three years old at that time from what they tell me. My sister Ann remembers more. I don't recall much about Europe and where we were. I don't recall any of the trip or anything.
- S: You just remember them telling you about it.
- B: Yes, I just remember them telling me about it.
- S: So you said you had a sister Ann and yourself. Then were there other children after that?
- B: Yes, there were other children. There were ten all together. One died in Farrell, Pennsylvania. That made it nine of us who were still living. We were still living until not too long ago when Laverne died. Her name was Veronica, and she changed it to Laverne. Steve died. I can't recall now who . . .
- S: That is okay. So you did come back to the United States?
- B: Yes.
- S: What are your earliest memories of your own childhood? Where did you live when you were a child?
- B: I lived in Struthers. Well, in Farrell was where I was born, in Farrell, Pennsylvania. We had no church there, so they brought me down to St. Mary's Church in Youngstown.
- S: All the way from Farrell?
- B: All the way from Farrell. That was in the middle of winter in February. They planned to have me baptized. I don't recall the name of the priest there. I do recall one time when my dad brought me back a couple of years later. Maybe I was about four years old then. They were blessing the bells at St. Mary's Church.
- S: The bells, yes.
- B: I remember how I cried because the bells rang too loud for

- me. I couldn't stand the sound.
- S: You were a very sensitive child I bet.
- B: Yes. We went back, and I lived in Farrell for a while. We came to Struthers. We lived in Struthers for about six months. Then from Struthers we moved to Campbell. In Campbell we moved to another section in Campbell, and I went to school there at the old Italian hall before the Gordon School was built. Gordon School was not built yet. When the Gordon School was built, I remember I had a principal there who was Longstreet by his name. Mr. Longstreet was our principal. Then from Campbell I moved to Lansingville here. I have lived in Lansingville since then until now. I built this home. I had it built rather. It was about 1927 when it was built.
- S: So you have been here all that time since 1927?
- B: I have been here all that time still in the same home. I got married with Ida Mary Molchany. That was in 1925 when we got married. I think it was in September or something like that. I can't recall.
- S: How about if we backtrack a little bit more back to your childhood? Were you a member of St. Nicholas Church when it first began?
- B: Yes.
- S: What can you tell me about that?
- B: At first we started in Campbell, and we were holding masses in different homes. It used to be at Mr. Lisko's home, and sometimes it would be at Fox's or whatever they called themselves. That was the same as a Lisko because it means fox.
- S: I didn't know that.
- B: Sibula Shon was another where we would hold mass there. Then we moved to Lansingville here, and we had to go to Hazelton. We had an old church that we bought, and then that church burnt down. I can't recall when, but we had a school in the basement. It was an all wooden church. We had the church and the school there together. The church caught on fire one time, and the altar section burnt down. Then they had to rebuild that section of the church and make it bigger too because we were getting bigger and bigger. It was growing a little bit more.
- S: A lot of families.
- B: More families were being brought in. So we had the church

there after that fire. Then after we were in that church for a time along in about 1917, I think, they got together and said they were going to build a new church, the one we are in now. I think it was built about 1918, finished or something like that.

S: I think it was started around 1918, yes.

B: I was in choir, and I was in school. We had Father Papp for our first pastor. We had Cantor Ratsen. He used to teach us, and I was in choir then too. Later on we had Cantor Horvath. He taught in our choir too.

S: Could you describe what that first church looked like on the inside to me? I have seen pictures of the outside of the church but nothing from the inside.

B: It was just pews on one side and pews on the other; men on one side and ladies on the other in those days. In front there was the altar and the iconostas.

S: There was an iconostas?

B: Yes, just painted pictures there. I don't recall too much anymore.

S: That is okay. Were you ever an altar boy in that church?

B: No.

S: No?

B: No, I was never an altar boy.

S: Do you recall how that fire got started?

B: Well, they said some candle caught on fire around the altar somewhere in the front of the church, but the back end was okay. We had a choir upstairs, and we had a church bell up there. The floor was slanted a little bit forward for the choir. I was always afraid when I was young that I would take a run and fall out.

S: That is cute.

B: I can't recall too much about that anymore.

S: That is okay. I just wondered if you remembered any of the first communions or weddings that might have been in that church?

B: Yes, I had my first communion in that church.

- S: Did you?
- B: I thought that was in about 1909, but they told me that the church wasn't open until after 1912, so I don't know.
- S: 1912 is what I heard, yes.
- B: It must have been 1912. I have a picture here of myself and maybe fifteen other people at first communion.
- S: You mentioned at that time that the parish house was located up the street.
- B: Yes.
- S: Could you tell me a little bit about that?
- B: Well, we had our picture taken on the steps of the front porch of that parish house. I was never inside it though.
- S: Do you mean the first communion picture was taken there?
- B: The first communion picture was taken there. I was never inside the house until we built this new church. I did a lot of electrical work and chandelier work in that parish house and in the church. I think Father Rommack-- but I'm not sure, it could have been another priest-- had some chandeliers donated from the courthouse. They must have weighed around 600 pounds.
- S: Really?
- B: I was scared. I was young then. I didn't know too much. I was scared that those chandeliers wouldn't stay up there, so I asked Nick Haladay to get some railroad ties. He got me some railroad ties about fourteen feet or maybe sixteen feet long. We hauled them upstairs over the top of the church, and we put them across the whole ceiling.
- S: Really?
- B: Then I drilled holes in there, and I put a one-inch iron pipe in there and fastened the fixtures up. I was always worried all my life that those chandeliers might come down some day or the ceiling might come down or something because they were too busy. I had to wire up to them because there was never any wiring to those chandeliers in the center there where the two centerpieces are on each side where they had those round windows.
- S: Now this is in the church or in the rectory?
- B: In the church. They had the big, round windows, one on each

side.

S: Yes.

B: There was never any wiring there, so I wired that. There was no wiring at that time. It was just the chandelier hanging. I was scared to death that some day those fixtures would come down. Believe me when they did take them down, was I happy; I was tickled to death that nobody ever got killed. It was a good job, but I called it a poor job.

S: You worried about that all the time.

B: I worried about that all the time that somebody might get killed, but they stayed up. Those fixtures were awfully heavy. I had my three brothers help me. I had Nick Haladay and his two sons help me, and there was somebody else who I don't recall now. There were seven or eight of us who were hauling those fixtures up. They wanted me to haul them up on clothesline rope, but I told them no. I told them that I wanted steel cables. I told them that I wouldn't trust any clothesline ropes. I said that I wanted steel cables because it was too heavy. So I hauled them up. I got everything ready. I brought the steel cables through the railroad ties and fastened everything up and wired them up. Boy, was I happy after I got them up, but I was always worried. I never had peace.

S: I see. Now you do.

B: I had peace when I saw those fixtures come down and somebody put up the lanterns. Those lanterns are up today yet. I was glad after that.

S: What were the funerals like when you were a young child? You told me a little bit about it already. Could you tell me more?

B: People used to come to funerals, and they would stay for hours and hours. There would always be crowds in the house coming and going, coming and going. There was praying all the time. All night and all day we would have to give them coffee every once in a while to drink and something to eat once in a while. It was too much.

S: This is the book here, right?

B: Yes, that is the book there.

S: You said that the people were actually laid out in their home, right?

B: Yes.

S: Not in any funeral home then?

B: No, they were laid out in their home all the time.

S: When did they take them to church, just for the funeral liturgy itself?

B: Yes, they took them from the home right to the church. Then from church they took them and buried them. It would be about three days, sometimes maybe more and sometimes even less. It was about three days average in the homes. The priest used to come and say parastas [prayers for the dead] and then the cantor used to say the salkial all the time, day and night.

S: Did he stay there in the home, the cantor?

B: He stayed there, the cantor or whoever happened to be with him because sometimes he would have one or two helpers. I was too young. I didn't know how to read those books or anything. In those days he had helpers of his own maybe one or two cantors from either some other church, or sometimes he had his buddy help him.

S: And they took turns with the prayers?

B: They took turns, yes. They would switch off and on, off and on.

S: Did we have a cemetery at that time of our own?

B: Yes, that was in Campbell that one we have now.

S: What was it like back then? I'm sure it was nothing like it is now.

B: It was very small and very old. It was dilapidated, very poor.

S: Was it originally a farmland? Do you know? Was it a farm land that was used for the cemetery?

B: Yes, country land, farmland, yes.

S: You told me that you married your wife Ida in 1925.

B: Yes.

S: I know that her father was a Byzantine priest also.

B: Yes.

S: What can you tell me about him?

B: I never met him.

S: Oh, you never met her father?

B: I never met her father. He was dead. Her mother died on Montgomery.

S: She lived on Montgomery?

B: She lived on Montgomery.

S: And your wife's maiden name was Molchany, correct?

B: Yes, her name was Molchany.

S: I just recently learned that her brother was also a priest.

B: Yes.

S: Peter Molchany.

B: Peter Molchany.

S: You had a Holy Card here about when he was ordained.

B: Yes, I have several in there.

S: Were they members of St. Nicholas Parish at that time?

B: Yes, at that time.

S: So that was why he was ordained?

B: Father Krusko married us. He wasn't ordained yet until later after he was married.

S: That was the same year, though, 1925 that you were married and then later in that year he was ordained?

B: No, no. He was ordained later because he wasn't a priest yet at that time.

S: Later in that year, right? The card says he was ordained on July 19, 1925.

B: Yes.

S: And his first solemn high mass was celebrated at our church, St. Nicholas.

B: Yes, St. Nicholas.

S: And that was July 26, 1925.

B: Very few people know about that.

S: I just found that out because Anne Planey had a card like this too, and she showed it to me. I found that was very, very interesting. Do you remember going to that ordination, that first mass?

B: Yes, I was at the first mass. I was happy then. I felt good about that.

S: What was it like for the family?

B: For the family we had choiring. I can't recall everything because that is too far back.

S: That is okay. Yes, I know, but I'm sure it was a beautiful occasion for the church.

B: When he was ordained, of course, he was priest in the east somewhere and in Pittsburgh somewhere. I can't recall where.

S: He was at St. John's . . .

B: Then he got into trouble with the Holy Pope of Rome. He had a case, and then he was taken out. He joined the Orthodox. They called it katsup church.

S: Katsup?

B: That is what they called it. They said that it was a katsup church. I don't know too much about it.

S: What does that mean?

B: Who knows? A nickname, I guess, for the Orthodox or something like that. They used to call them katsups. They had a name for that generation of people or whatever you want to call it.

S: Was that a difficult time for your family? Did you still stay in contact with him or not at that time?

B: For a time I did until something went wrong. It happened to be a family affair.

S: That was the last contact you had with him?

B: That was the last contact I had with him. After that I couldn't make any more contact with him and didn't talk to him or anything.

S: Now you said that the new church was started around in 1918?

B: Yes.

S: Do you remember when the church was being built and what it was like then?

B: Yes, it took a long time, but they got it put together. We were all in church. I enjoyed it; it was nice. It looked fancy and everything around the altar and everything. Of course, after that they kept improving and everything.

S: Can you describe what the church looked like to me when it was first built in what the inside was like? I know it was a little bit different than it is now.

B: It is almost the same. There were hardly any changes made except for the painting. For a long time it was unpainted. They didn't have the money for the painting. The chandeliers that they had were crystal fixtures. Little by little those crystal fixtures fell apart because the janitor who was cleaning them used to take buckets of water on the ladder and just pour it over them. It would go all over the floor and all over the seats and everything. They used to tie it up with rags and ropes and strings and safety pins and wires, all kind of stuff until I got disgusted with it. I said, "That looks horrible." Strings were hanging, ropes and rags, pieces of rags, they would tie up the crystals from the top to the bottom. So I brought the chandelier home one time. Father Krusko looked at it in my home. I thought that man took everything apart and he took it home. They thought I would never put it together. I had to rebuild all of these crystals because some of the long ones came down.

S: That is the same one we have now?

B: Yes, I had to rebuild all of those crystals up instead of having all of those rags and ropes and everything tying it up. It looked terrible. I thought it was sickening. I got busy. I fixed it up. It took me a couple of days to do it because I had to wash all of those crystals in hot water, and I used alcohol on them trying to polish them and shine them up. I had to make them all the same length and hang them up. I put new wires in them to hook them up. I made the whole thing so that it would look just like new again. I think it did look like new.

S: It looks beautiful now. I would have never known that you had to do that.

B: I brought a lot of parts from the store that I used to work in. I brought a lot of parts that would never be used anyways, so I fixed it all up. I put in all kinds of bulbs and everything. He broke the crystals; he wrecked every-

thing; he broke the bulbs in some of these crystals. He just took the bucket of water and splashed it on there, and then with a rag he just tried to wipe them. With a rag you can't wipe it because it would hook on to all of the wires. It looked terrible, so I finally fixed it up. I got disgusted, and I fixed it up. It took me some time. They said that I would never do it and that I would never put it together. When I got it together and he looked at it he said, "I never believed it." I made a good job out of it.

S: Where did you work at the time?

B: Youngstown Chandelier Company on Phelps Street. It used to be next to the Hood Electric. I worked there at the Youngstown Chandelier Company until it went bankrupt. Then I got out of there and went to work. I was sorry I never went to the Hood Electric, so after that I went to work for the Beil Electric.

S: Beil?

B: Beil Electric. They are still in business, but I haven't been there for many years.

S: Did you become an electrician with them?

B: I was becoming an electrician, but I still didn't learn the trade. I never got far along enough to learn the trade. We went on strike. I think we were on strike for two whole years.

S: At Beil, yes.

B: I got disgusted, and I went to Detroit. I worked in the Briggs Manufacturing Company. Then from there I went to the Packard Motor Car Company. Then I came back to Youngstown, and I was finished as an electrician. Then I went to work for Sheet & Tube, and I stayed with Sheet & Tube from about 1921 or 1922 until about 1967 or something like that. Then after that I retired I think; I can't remember now. I can't recall the time when I retired.

S: That is okay. Did you belong to any parish groups like the Sokols or anything like that?

B: No, they were always after me. They said that I was too good. I used to practice with them doing this and that, but I never joined them. Even the Slovak people here wanted me.

S: Did they?

- B: They wanted me down at the old hall they had on Homewood Avenue. They wanted me, but I told them that I didn't want to join any athletic club or anything else. I said that I was just going to stay away from it and be a bum.
- S: You didn't want to get involved with that. What about any other church groups? Were you a member of the choir or anything like that in church?
- B: Well, I was just in the choir in the church, and that was all. Sometimes I would go back a little bit to sing with the gang and all, but I didn't want to go back anymore for practices or anything. I stayed away after I married.
- S: Were there a lot of practices involved with being in the choir?
- B: Oh, yes, yes, we had different cantors who had violins and different things too.
- S: Did they really?
- B: Oh, yes, they had violins. They used to give us the pitch. Sometimes they had these little pitch pipes, and sometimes they would use the violin to give us the pitch, and they would sing with us. My sisters were in the choir, and my brothers were in it, I think, too.
- S: Did they use the violin only for the pitch, or did they also play during those?
- B: Once in a while they played the song in the way it went but not too much. They gave us the pitch, and then we would sing along with them.
- S: What do you remember about some of the early pastors of the church? One thing that I have heard was that Father Kossy was our very first pastor. Is that right, Kossy?
- B: Kossy?
- S: Do you remember that name?
- B: No, I don't recall that one at all. Father Papp is the one who I can remember as our first one and Cantor Ratsen, and then later on we had Horvath for cantor. The priests who we had were so many that I can't recall all of them.
- S: Okay, some of the other ones were Father Krusko, right?
- B: Yes.
- S: Now do you remember a Father Lipecky at all? He was there for just a very short time I think.

B: Patrusky or something I think.

S: No, Lipecky is the name I have heard.

B: That was maybe the Cantor Patrusky. I can't remember now to tell the truth.

S: Father Sabow, do you remember him?

B: Father Sabow, yes. We had about seven priests all together. Maybe more, but I can't recall. Some of them died. I forget the ones who died. I did know them pretty good, a lot of them, but I can't recall anymore. My mind is always slipping anymore in my old age.

S: You are doing fine.

B: I can't remember a lot of the priests.

S: How many children did you and your wife have, Mr. Bosak?

B: Five.

S: There are five children?

B: Yes. We have seventeen grandchildren, and now we have two great-grandchildren.

S: That is wonderful. I understand there is a new one just about a month old now.

B: Yes, about a month old.

S: That is good. What was it like for you when your children were small and just as a young father of our parish? What are your memories from that time?

B: I was happy. I tried to help them. My wife and I used to stay with them and make them pray. We would make them get down on their knees, and we stayed with them on our knees too praying and tried to get them to learn the prayers. I was happy with them all of the time. I used to play football with them. Even Dorothy who married Dr. Vuksta used to play football out here all the time. The neighbors used to get a kick out of her because the boys in Farrell used to play football quite a bit. She really did good for the football because she married Pete Macala.

S: Pardon me?

B: Mary married Pete Macala.

S: And your other children?

- B: Dorothy married Dr. Vuksta, and Tommy married Helen Huizdos, and Johnny married a Hungarian girl named Violet Gamori.
- S: That is Tom, John, Mary, and Dorothy. Was there another son or daughter?
- B: Yes, another son David who married Rosemary Labonavick.
- S: Rosemary Labonavick.
- B: She was Croatian, Rosemary Labonavick. Now Johnny has six children altogether. David has two. Mary has two. Tommy has three, and Dorothy has four.
- S: My dad remembers a "Red" Bosak who played football for Wilson. Is that any relation?
- B: He is not in the family. Their name was Bozak.
- S: I see. That is confusing.
- B: It always is confusing. All the people always ask me that.
- S: Do you remember the mock weddings that the parish used to put on?
- B: Yes, they had old country dances. I can't remember what they named them. They were different.
- S: Harvest Moon Dance is one I have heard.
- B: Yes, Harvest Moon Dance was one of the old country dances. There were also the kind of dances where they used to use the whips and swords and everything and hit the floor and used to keep time and everything. That was Mike and Dorothy.
- Yes, Mike and Dorothy Vuksta were having that mock dance. Dorothy's daughter was doing the dance for the orchestra, and everybody stopped because she was just a little girl about three years old. She danced her head off just like the dancer in the motion pictures. She really was a good little dancer. Even the orchestra kept playing because they thought she was wonderful. She was in time with them and dancing and jumping and twisting and everything for the longest time. They kept playing for her.
- S: What was that you said? Dorothy's daughter?
- B: Yes.
- S: Do you mean your granddaughter?

B: My granddaughter.

S: Okay, Mr. Bosak, we had talked pretty much now up through maybe the 1930's. Now we are into the 1940's and 1950's. What activities were you involved with in the church in those years?

B: Well, I was an usher in those days. Then I used to work at the picnics and at the bazaars doing one thing and another. I used to run all kind of wheels. I even made wheels sometimes for the church instead of buying them or renting them. I worked even with the carnivals that we used to have here. They always wanted to take me along with them because they said I was too good of a guy to run the gambling stuff, so they trusted me enough. I did as much as I could for everything.

S: What was it like to be an usher then? Do you remember what your duties were?

B: You had to count the money as it came in, and we had to mark it all in the books in those days. We had to swear in before we got to be ushers. We had to swear in with the Bible at the front of the church. It was pleasant and good; I enjoyed it, but as time went on things were getting to be too much jealousy and favoritism and this and that, so I had enough and let somebody else have it.

S: You weren't in the service were you, during the war?

B: No, I was too old in one war and too young in another, so I never had the chance to be called upon although I thought I was going because I happened to be doing work that wasn't allowed to be disclosed to anybody. I was working on war efforts such as bomb shelters, gun barrels, and explosives and one thing and another. They said that I was too important to be taken off those jobs and put on elsewhere, so I just served the best I could in the war effort. I made cannon barrels, rifle barrels.

S: And that was all at Sheet & Tube that you did that?

B: Yes.

S: I didn't realized they did that there.

B: Yes, I was on a lot of that stuff.

S: What about the church during those days? Did they do anything to help the war effort or to help the family of the servicemen or that type of thing?

B: Not that I know of.

S: No?

B: No.

S: What about during the 1950's? Was there anything significant that stands out in your mind during that period of time? Father Rommack was still pastor then?

B: Yes.

S: Until then 1955 or so when he died.

B: I can't recall when he died. I worked with him, and he always wanted me to be with him to be working together. I always liked him; he was very good to me and very nice to me. I tried to do as much as I could for him and be as honest as I could.

S: That is good. I understand that he died of a heart attack on a trip to Donora, Pennsylvania.

B: I wouldn't know.

S: Do you remember a time that our church was struck by lightning one time? Do you recall that? No one has mentioned that to me, but I came across a newspaper article. I wondered if you might remember that.

B: No, I don't recall that at all.

S: There was another newspaper article that one time somebody stole about \$200 from the collection. Do you remember that?

B: No, but I did hear about them stealing the chalice and stuff like that in our church.

S: Really?

B: Yes, they broke in and stole the chalice and different things. I don't remember about the other thing.

S: The other thing?

B: Taking money.

S: Is there anything else important that you would like to talk about that we haven't talked about yet? Is there anything that stands out as major to you?

B: No, nothing that I can think of except that I try to be good to all of the people there, to the women, to the men, to everybody. I always try to be fair and square with everybody and talk nice to them. I have done my share of praying and

singing and all, but I always want to do more.

- S: Do you have any advice or some words of wisdom that you would like to pass on to the next generations of the church? What would you say to the children who are here today and who will be growing up in the next fifty years of the parish's life? Is there anything that you would like them to carry with them throughout their life or anything that you think is important for them not to forget about?
- B: They had better get together and do more for our church; our church needs more. I think that everybody should pitch in and help and do as much as you can. When you are tired of doing that much, do some more and get more tired. That is all I can say.
- S: Okay. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW