

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Greek Culture Project

Impact on Campbell, Ohio

O. H. 644

MARIA PAPPAS

Interviewed

by

Wilfredo Rivera

on

November 20, 1980

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MARIA PAPPAS

INTERVIEWER: Wilfredo Rivera

SUBJECT: teaching experiences, family structure,  
industrial painting, alienation

DATE: November 20, 1980

R: This is an interview with Maria Pappas for the Youngstown State University Greek Impact on the Community of Campbell Project, by Wilfredo Rivera, at 593 Twelfth Street, Campbell, Ohio, on November 20, 1980, at approximately 7:30 p.m.

Maria, can you tell me something about your background starting with your childhood and working up to your present status?

P: I was born a first child to my parents on January 3, 1959. My parents are Tony and Doris Cougras. I lived in Campbell all of my life. I started kindergarten at the age of four and went to Campbell Elementary School until I was in seventh grade, and then to the high school. I graduated from there in 1976 and went on to college. I majored in education. My degree certifies me to teach kindergarten, elementary grades, and I'm also certified as a reading teacher in grades kindergarten through twelve. I'll tell you a little bit about my family. I have a sister Kathy who's now a freshman at YSU. She is also a graduate of Campbell Memorial. I have a brother Ted who is a freshman and a sister Christine who is a sophomore at Campbell Memorial. I also have a little brother Tony who is in third grade at St. Joseph's in Campbell. My family lives on Creed Circle.

R: Can you touch on how cohesive your family was as you were going through these phases?

P: We had a really close and formal family structure. My mom and dad were a little overprotective and strict, yet their

discipline was always done with love and consistency. We had a close family relationship and we still do.

R: In regards to the language spoken in the household, was Greek emphasized?

P: No, strictly English. The only time my dad spoke Greek was when he talked to my grandmother. My mom is only half Greek, so they speak English to each other. I went to Greek school for five years. I got all 100's. I learned how to read it, write it; I know the language inside out, but when it comes to speaking I don't speak it because I never did.

R: Do you feel you missed out on something of a pure Greek culture?

P: No, not really, because I think I got it in other ways. I can understand a lot from the language, although I'm still hesitant to speak because of my sentence structure. We were in Greece this past summer and I learned a lot about the language, but I'm still not sure of myself speaking because I just don't do it enough.

R: Did you see a difference between the people of Campbell compared to the people in Greece?

P: We're a lot more Americanized. It's hard to categorize the people in Greece because they're all different depending on where they're from. Surprisingly, the people here in the United States carry on traditions more than they do in Greece. When it comes to religion, there are not too many Greek families on Sunday morning that are not in church here. Whereas there, some go to church and some do not. On a whole it's hard to categorize the people in Greece.

R: Are you Kalymnian?

P: Yes.

R: Can you tell me something about your people? I understand that the majority of the people in Campbell are Kalymnians. Why are they so dominant?

P: I don't know; it's just where they all settled. Kalymnos is a really small island. You see people in Kalymnos from Campbell every corner you turn. The mills attracted a lot of immigrants and word-of-mouth just spread, mostly on this one island. Everyone hopped the boat and came. To this day the majority of Greeks in Campbell are from that island.

R: Didn't the painting industry attract them at all?

P: I think when they originally came they came for the mills. The painting is more recent.

R: So you can say the Greek people were being business oriented?

P: I don't know.

R: Isn't your father involved in a business of his own?

P: Yes, my dad has a painting company. It's just a small painting company; he doesn't do bridges and stuff like that. He just started it a few years ago.

R: That is something very common among the Greeks, painting. Why did they choose that profession over anything else?

P: I don't know.

R: Obviously painting doesn't involve too much skill.

P: My dad always taught school and coached football. A man couldn't do just that alone and make ends meet with a family of five kids. My dad used to paint during the summers. He became interested in it and he enjoyed it.

R: What are Greek people noted for in regards to profession?

P: Painting.

R: How about something that requires some kind of skill?

P: I think there are a lot of Greek professors. I think there are a lot of Greek people that have college degrees. More and more kids in our community go to college every year. I don't think there are too many of the younger generation going into painting and stuff like that.

R: Is that because it's the Americanized way?

P: It might be; I think a lot more kids go to college now too.

R: How about in Greece, isn't education emphasized at all?

P: When we were there I did talk to one college professor and he explained to me that the schools in Greece were run by the government. I think in our educational system elementary teachers have a bigger role to play; they've got to teach kids how to read; whereas in Greece it's looked down upon if you're an elementary teacher. The

big guys are the high school teachers that teach physics and stuff like this. A lot of educational system in the elementary schools is just strictly memorization. That's how it was in Greek school too; you memorized the alphabet; you memorized the grammar rules. I think our educational system is a little bit beyond that, and more advanced.

R: Are there any other customs that originally came from Greece that are still practiced in Campbell?

P: A lot of things like weddings. There are a couple differences though.

R: Can you touch on the topic of marriage? I understand that marriages in Greece are prearranged. Can you give me some feedback on that please?

P: A lot of them still are. It's pretty weird; people don't even know each other and they get married. I think that is not as prominent now as it was long ago. In the villages you see it a lot. In Athens, in the bigger cities, even in Kalymnos, not all marriages are arranged. But in a lot of them the woman must have something to show for herself, a dowry. Some of it is still going on today in Campbell, Ohio, in the United States.

R: How about interracial marriages, how do the Greek people react to that?

P: Out of the Greek culture?

R: Yes.

P: I think it's becoming more widely accepted now, but Greeks were a nationality that managed to stick together. It still is that way. Greeks marry Greeks in most cases.

R: How do you feel about that topic?

P: When I have children I would love for them to be married to Greeks. I guess it is something inborn with you. Myself, my dad never told us--You have to marry a Greek. A lot of families are more strict.

R: How do the people in Campbell react to it in general?

P: Among the older people marriages to non-Greeks are looked at closely.

R: You mentioned the church; what kind of impact does the church have among your people?

P: I think it has a lot to do with the people because it's

another way that we all stick together. Our church population grows and grows more and more every year. It has fund raising and social things too. I teach Sunday school and when I started I had eleven or twelve kids in my class; now I'm up to eighteen, twenty-three. Families just really stress the religion.

R: From birth onward, right?

P: Yes, and I think the godparents have a lot to do with that. When I was baptized I can remember as a little girl my godmother picking me up and taking me to church. Since I was a little girl I've just grown to love and understand the customs of the Greek-Orthodox Church.

R: What other kinds of customs or traditional role does that church play that was handed down from Greece? For example, Greek Easter, could you elaborate on that?

P: In some of the older parts of Greece they use a different calendar than we do. Greek Easter is sometimes later than everyone else's. In the Bible it says that Christ was crucified the week following the Jewish Passover. Our religion believes that depending on when the Jewish Passover falls, it can't be the same week. If Passover is Friday the American public celebrates Easter that Sunday, and it can't be because that was the week before Easter. We follow the lunar calendar. The Russian Orthodox still do it with Christmas, I believe. I'm not sure, maybe they don't. Sometimes our Easter falls on the same day, sometimes it doesn't.

R: How is it celebrated in the church then?

P: There is church every day during Holy Week. It's very similar to what goes on in the Catholic church. I see a lot more symbolism though, a lot of reenacting of what happened, taking Christ off of the cross. They decorate his tomb; they decorate it with flowers. There are processions around the church and candles are lit. It's a very moving ceremony. Saturday night at midnight the lights all go off in the church and they sing certain hymns. You really have to understand it to appreciate it. We all go outside and the gospel is read of how Christ was resurrected. We used to have fireworks, but those were done away with.

R: In regard to the name days, what kind of significant value do they place upon Greek people?

P: Everyone has a patron saint and the day that is commemorated for that saint is your name day. It's comparable to our birthdays. If you're in Greece and it's your name day you are showered with gifts.

R: How about the Greek Independence Day?

P: Greek Independence Day commemorates when Greece got its freedom from Turkey. That is every March. The Greek school has a program on it. I can remember learning little poems about it.

R: Do you have any political aspirations?

P: No.

R: How about the people in Campbell in general, how do they react to politics?

P: Some people are into it, some people aren't. It's just like any other people. I think on the whole most Greek people are Democrats.

R: Who would you consider your political mouthpiece in Campbell?

P: The mayor.

R: The mayor isn't Greek.

P: Just a Greek, that would be the priest.

R: What kind of role does he take?

P: He is the leader of the pack.

R: Could you look up to him?

P: Yes. He is up on current events. If anyone has a problem, that is who they go to.

R: How about politics in regard to Greece?

P: They do have a king and a queen. I'm not sure how things are now.

R: With the present crisis situation how do the people in Campbell perceive that?

P: What crisis are you speaking of?

R: The economy overall, laying off of people.

P: Some of the families moved back to Greece, but not too many. Most of the families are still here and looking for other employment. When the mills closed I guess our Greek community was one of the hardest hit. The church really hasn't let it bother us too much.

R: Has it affected the church at all?

P: I think financially.

R: What is the church planning to do in order to retaliate that blow?

P: What can it do? They just encourage people to give what they can. The people that can give usually give a little bit more to accommodate for the people that don't.

R: What kind of future do you see for the Greek people?

P: According to the church it is still growing. We have folding chairs in the aisle way. We've had some discussions on enlarging the church, knocking a wall down. I think the future of the Greek people will remain the same.

R: Do you see Americanized parents promoting the idea of their kids getting involved with the educational experience?

P: Did you mean college or Greek school?

R: Both.

P: The Greek language is a very difficult language considering. We do have a Greek school and there are still many families that insist on their kids going to Greek school. My parents saw that after five years I couldn't speak it, and that wasn't because of the Greek school; it was because we didn't speak it at home. My younger brothers and sisters chose not to go and my parents agreed. I see a lot more younger Greek children becoming more involved in education, going to college. Before the same year you got out of high school you got married. It's not like that anymore. I guess the older community understands how things are changing. I do see some growth, although it seems so retarded some-times. On a whole I see the community to stay the same, grow, and prosper.

R: In my past interviews I see a change where education is going to take away from the Greek culture. What are your views on that?

P: I think the culture will always remain, but maybe not as strong.

R: What's keeping the Greek people together today?

P: It's just an innate thing. It's great, but I can't explain it. I think the church plays a big role in that. . .

R: Does the extended family exist among the Greek people?



- P: Yes. I think the family has a lot to do with the extension of the culture.
- R: Do you think that was one of the factors why the Greeks integrated to Campbell?
- P: Definitely. That might explain why they all came from Kalymnos.
- R: What do the Greek people in Campbell do in regards to social life? Is there anything else besides the church?
- P: A lot of the men go to coffeehouses; they have these in Greece. Older Greek women just stay home and take care of their babies. The only socializing they do is if the church has a dance or something like that. In relation to us and my family, any time that we ever went out and we were with all Greeks was a church going.
- R: How do you view the Greek male?
- P: I don't know because they're all so different. I can't say unless I tell you about stereotypes.
- R: What is one of the stereotypes?
- P: That Greek men are tough guys, loverboys.
- R: Is that the way most Greek women view Greek men?
- P: I think it's the way other women view Greek men.
- R: How were the years 1970-1980 like, in your eyes, for the Greek people overall? We went through drastic changes; how did the people react to them?
- P: Some people went back to Greece and it was easier for them because they had family back there. On the whole I guess the Greek people just prevailed and overlooked everything.
- R: What were some of your reactions?
- P: I was in high school at the time. With the steel mills closing and everything I thought it was okay because my dad didn't work at the mill. Then I thought, he teaches school; if there is no enrollment because everybody leaves, he won't have a job. He just started the painting business and I thought people weren't going to be able to afford to have their houses painted. It was like a vicious circle; everyone was affected sooner or later.
- R: Did you see the structure of the family getting weaker?

P: No.

R: Did you see the prejudice level going up or down?

P: No. I think the education was stressed because it was hard to get a job without a degree. In the Greek community as a whole the people stuck together and tried to overcome it all.

R: Coming back to the church again, what special services are rendered to the Greek people to expose them to their culture?

P: There is an organization called Mormon Daughters . . . There is an organization for the men that is comparable to the Masons. It is a secretive organization where Greek men and women work on projects. It is a charity organization. A lot of the Greek people are in Lion's Club and other things like that that aren't solely church related. Our church has a chorus. We have a Sunday school teacher organization. We have an altar boys guild. We have GOYA, which is Greek Orthodox Youth Association. We have a JOY Group which is the Junior Orthodox Youth Group. The kids work together for fund raising things and car washes. I think things like this encourage cohesiveness.

R: Would food be another factor why people in Campbell remain so cohesive?

P: I think that is one of the assets of its culture, the Greek food. It has special foods. When we have our Greek festival people from Pennsylvania call on the phone, all over; they just want to come for this Greek food.

R: How about special drinks, liquors?

P: The two big drinks are ouzo and . . . They are both imported from Greece. They drink that stuff like its water. It's really strong. That is the Greek's drink; they don't drink anything else. At Greek weddings that is what they have there, or they have Greek wine.

R: Can you tell me some of the reasons the Greek dances are so unique? The men dance side by side and I understand there is some type of significant value behind it.

P: Every island has its own dance. The different islands and villages are very different; one way you can tell where people are from is the way they dance. I don't know too much about what the dances signify. The traditional Greek bridal dance where the bride and groom dance first, and then parents come and lead them, that signifies that everyone is rejoicing in the wedding.

R: How many different groups of Greek people are in Campbell?

P: I would say about five.

R: Would you say the Kalymnian culture is similar to that of the Symian culture?

P: I don't know; they have their own dance and foods that they specialize in.

R: Can you give me an overview of the Greek culture, some of the weak points that you see and some of the strong points?

P: I think the strongest things that the Greek culture has is the way the people stick together. They encourage their children to do the same. The church plays a part in that. They're baptized and are active in the church choir and all of these groups. I think the encouragement of Greek children to marry other Greeks is both a weakness and a strongpoint. I think a weakness of the people is that they don't understand they're not in Greece anymore, and things are different.

R: Are there any factors that we haven't touched on that you feel are important to this interview?

P: A lot of the greek culture involves its music. It has music from different islands and different instruments. The language has many different dialects. A lot of the Greek people have superstitions and little qualms like you shouldn't cross your legs in church. They have things like this that they brought from Greece and they still expect you to carry on. I think even those superstitions and things will be around for ages because the people who do believe it pass it on to their young, and so on. My mother-in-law won't sit at a table if there is an odd number of people sitting there because it means bad luck. If I hand someone scissors I have to put them down first before they pick them up because the Greeks say if you hand someone scissors that means that you're going to talk about them or you're going to stab them in the back when they leave. Some people say that when you enter a home you must leave through the same door. These are little superstitions that some people really believe in.

R: What about Greek myths, do they still teach those in Greek school to the kids?

P: Yes, it's history. Like the island of Ikaria, that got its name from the myth of Ikaria wanting to be a bird and fly so he made wings, but the sun melted the wax on them

and he fell off. Right where he fell that became the island of Ikaria.

R: Can you tell me something that has happened in your own life that has changed your own outlook about your culture?

P: I have to say getting married to someone that is Greek. When I was young I was embarrassed when my dad would speak to my grandmother in Greek. As I got older I learned to appreciate it and understand that Greeks aren't the only ones who have their own language. I think as I got older and when I married a Greek I learned to appreciate the Greek culture a lot more.

R: What are your reactions to a multi-cultural environment? Multi-cultural meaning that from late statistics there are fifty identifiable ethnic groups in Youngstown. One day you plan to have a child, and he will be exposed to that. What are you going to do to prepare your son or daughter to that culture shock? Will you deprive your child and go strictly with the Greek culture or do you want him to expose himself?

P: I would never do that because that is what America is about; it is a melting pot of people from all over the place.

R: What are the reactions of the Greek people to a multi-cultural environment?

P: Most of the Greek people in Campbell do stick together with themselves. A lot of Greek families do hang around with other Greeks only, especially if they are from Greece. Their only friends are Greek that they meet through the church. I think as time goes on it dwindles and breaks apart. You don't see too much of that anymore unless the people have just come from Greece.

R: On behalf of the Oral History Program and myself, I want to share my appreciation for your time. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW