

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ukranian People of Youngstown

Personal Experiences

O. H. 406

MICHAEL YAROSH

Interviewed

by

Frances Martin

on

November 30, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MICHAEL YAROSH
INTERVIEWER: Frances Martin
SUBJECT: Family Background, Founding of Holy Trinity Church,
The Church during the Depression, Father Zabawa,
Displaced Persons in Youngstown
DATE: November 30, 1975

M: This is Frances Martin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program interviewing Michael Yarosh at the Youngstown State University Library on November 30, 1975, on the Ukrainians of Youngstown.

Were both of your parents Ukrainian?

Y: Yes. They were both born in the Ukraine.

M: They didn't come to Youngstown at the same time, did they?

Y: No. My mother came to Perth Amboy, New Jersey, to her uncle's. My father came directly to Campbell, Ohio, in the year of 1912.

M: Did he have relatives there?

Y: My father was sixteen years old and my mother was twelve when she left Perth Amboy to come to Campbell to her relatives.

M: Did your mother come over with someone from her village who was a nonrelative?

Y: Yes. She came to this country with a neighbor who was in Europe then. The neighbor's house was approximately a half of a mile from her house. She came to this country to Ellis Island with a man named Max Keychak. At Ellis Island in 1912, they were separated in customs and from that time on my mother hadn't seen him until twenty-five years later.

M: Your mother came to an uncle in Perth Amboy?

Y: Yes. Later she came to an uncle who was already established, and who was one of the few early immigrants of the Ukranian set in Youngstown. He had a saloon. She lived with him for a year, and then moved to Campbell, Ohio, where some of the early Ukranians had settled. Amongst some of the earlier settlers who came here with my mother's uncle, John Thurik, were fellows by the name of George Glazzy, Eli Esvetsa, John Fik, and Joseph Cristash. These were the first men who had arrived in the Youngstown area. While in Campbell, Ohio, my mother met my father, Stanley Yarosh, who had come to this country in the year of 1912. In 1914 my mother and my father were married.

M: Were they married at St. Mary's?

Y: They were married in St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church on Salt Springs Road in Youngstown, Ohio. At that time Holy Trinity church was not built and most of the immigrants of that time had belonged to St. Mary's Church. They had participated in their functions until such time that Holy Trinity Church was built. All of the Ukranian people then went to their own church, Holy Trinity, at 526 West Rayen Avenue.

M: How did they get the money to build the church?

Y: There were people who were established for at least ten years prior to the newly arrived immigrants and who had saved some of their earnings. Those people contributed, and several of the families mortgaged who had owned their own homes. They had put a second mortgage on their home and contributed towards the building of the church. This is how Holy Trinity Church got its financial start.

Of course, as years went by they had gotten up on their feet a little bit, until such a time that things got bad in 1929 when the Depression hit the entire country. They had no means of support because the parishioners had not been working, a big majority of them had not been working, and they couldn't support the church. In fact, it is well to note that there were at least four or five families who had lost their homes, because they couldn't keep up payments. They mortgaged their homes to help support the church. Also at this same period of time there was a social hall built across the street. It is now the Ukranian Holy Trinity Home. They couldn't keep both buildings or both mortgages going. They had to give up one or the other so they gave up the hall. A lodge by the name of Narodna Pomich had taken over the hall. They bought the hall to save it, to keep it in the Ukranian

hands. They had struggled with payments on the church mortgage until such time where they could pay no more. At the same time our bishop, Bishop Ortynsky, at the Philadelphia diocese, had passed away. We, the Ukranians of Youngstown, the Catholics, had no one to sign a second mortgage on the church. With the passing of Bishop Ortynsky, Bishop Schrimms, who was the bishop of the diocese of Cleveland, became the bishop for the entire area, including Youngstown. Our committee, with the priest, had gone to Bishop Schrimms through the advice of the apostolic delegate, who was in Washington at the time. They advised Bishop Schrimms to sign our second mortgage and through that our committee had gone to the Leetonia Bank and had acquired a second mortgage. From that time on they had been able to pay off the mortgage.

M: Did someone live down in Leetonia?

Y: No, we had nobody living in Leetonia. But through the investigation of the committee and our priest, Reverend Zabawa, we were able to get the second mortgage. Reverend Zabawa was a go-getter. He had actually come in and picked this church up off of the ground after the coming crisis. He had taken the committee to Leetonia. They had found out through information that Leetonia would loan them the money, so they went down there to get the second mortgage. They had to have a bishop to sign the papers. As I mentioned, our bishop had been deceased and Bishop Schrimms then at that time had signed the second mortgage to save our Ukranian church.

Father Zabawa then started a movement of raising funds to pay off the mortgage of Holy Trinity Church. One of the projects that had been inspired by Father Zabawa was the Easter banquet. He would go out to many of the Ukranian farmers that we had in the area and through donations of chickens, eggs, ham, and sausage, he, with his organization of men and women, then proceeded to have the banquet the Sunday after Easter of each year. Being that all of the food was donated, this was one means of making money to pay off the mortgage of the church.

He then had created a Ukranian Citizen's Club that was attached to the Holy Trinity Church. This was to encourage the parishioners who had come from Europe and who were here for at least five or ten years to become American citizens. He was a great believer in this country. He was a go-getter.

He then had encouraged the younger people of our parish to take jobs in various professions. He had been the priest who saw to it that one of the Ukranian boys from Holy Trinity Church had gotten on the police force. Today we can boast of about 25 to 27 policemen on the force.

He encouraged the young people of the parish to go to college and become professionals in some field or another. We have today doctors, lawyers, girls in the nursing profession, and chemists. We have many of the younger people who have gotten into these professions and it is, I feel, through the encouragement of Father Zabawa. He was a great man for an education, for the younger person to go into college.

M: When he first became the pastor here he didn't even speak English?

Y: He didn't speak a word of English.

In many cases if there was a member of his parish who had been laid off from work, he went directly to the president of the company with the man who was out of work. He made arrangements to see the president to get his parishioner back on the job or get a job of some kind. He was the type of fellow who felt that he had a job to do, and as the pastor of Holy Trinity Church he wanted to get the best out of the people. He didn't want them to lag behind. He wanted to make something of them; he wanted them to become somebody; he wanted them to get into a profession, because at that time he thought that if you just worked for somebody in a small job you were not going to make anything of yourself. If you got to college you were going to become a professional of some kind.

M: Your great uncle, then, that would be Mr. Thurick, he was a saloonkeeper by profession?

Y: Yes. He had had a saloon in the old days, and then he had catered to most of the Slavic people living in the Hazelton, Campbell, and Youngstown areas. He had then built another saloon and had two at the same time. He had helped many of the new immigrants arriving at that time. He had a family consisting of two boys and four daughters. There was Joe Thurik, Andy Thurik, Sister Methodia, who was a nun in the diocese of Youngstown and later taught at St. Cyril & Methodius Church, Ann Yavorisky and Mary Repasky. Most of the family until the present day reside in the Youngstown area.

M: Did they stay in the saloon business?

Y: No. He stayed in the business up until the time he reached sixty when he retired. He was very active in both churches St. Methious, over in Lansingville, and also Holy Trinity. I forgot to mention that he had married in his early day a young lady by the name of Starren. The family still resides in Lansingville. He retired at the age of sixty and was very active in both churches until

the age of 94 when he passed away.

M: Did any of the early people go back?

Y: No, it wasn't the early people who went back. The early people eventually had passed on. The early people who had gone back were some who had come in later than Thurick or Glazzy. There were those five who I have mentioned. They're the ones who came in later and then they're the ones who went back. It wasn't all the five that I had mentioned. The early men of our church had passed away. They had stayed in the Youngstown area.

M: On your personal connection with the church you mentioned that you became chairman of the trustees of the church. When was that?

Y: This was in 1945. Then I became chairman of the board of trustees at the church. Then, of course, World War II had broke out and many of our parishioners had gone to the service to serve time overseas with the armed forces.

Shortly after that, when I became active chairman of the board, there was a movement on by the Catholic Charities committee and from our diocese in Philadelphia to sponsor families, displaced persons who were affected by World War II. The rule then by the United States government was that they must have a sponsor. We did have a Catholic Charities organization who spearheaded the drive from the chancellery in Philadelphia. I became involved as a chairman and a member of the committee of the council at the Holy Trinity Church. On a local level, as things progressed, there were more and more people wanting to bring relatives over from Europe. We had to get affidavits signed by individual people who had relatives in Europe who were not in concentration camps, but in the displaced persons camps that were scattered throughout West Germany. These people were the people who had left, who were forced to leave their homelands. Many of them were professionals in various fields who had fled to the West German sector. It was our duty then at the committee to arrange for transportation to Youngstown for the families who had sponsored these displaced persons. Amongst those who came, we had many professional people and many people who worked as farmers in Europe. A few of them who worked for any private concern had some experience in some field or another.

M: You mentioned that one was a lawyer?

Y: Yes. One was a lawyer in Europe by the name of Roman Stahura. Because of the practice of the old English law in Europe, he couldn't practice law here in the United States, because of the difference in laws. It would be that he either went back to school and learned the American law to pass the bar, or discard it and go into another field. He felt that he was a little too old to go into law school so he did get a job at Youngstown University as a caretaker, which paid he way through for a science degree. He later passed away. His wife, by the way, was an actress, a stage star. She did help our community by putting on skits at our church. Most of the displaced persons were very helpful to our people in their own way--in Ukranian language for one, in Ukranian customs for another, in embroidery, and in the Easter eggs that the Ukranian people are well-known for.

The design on the Easter egg is an early, ancient method of coloring. It's not an ordinary thing. If one knows much about the history of the Easter egg and the making of it, it is one that is of various colors and tedious designs. It is dipped maybe five or six different times according to how many colors are on the egg. It had been a secret for a long time until now, until the past ten or fifteen years. They have now let it be known and they give instructions. They have books of instructions as to how to make these eggs and color them.

M: Did they keep it a secret just to Ukranian people?

Y: They didn't actually keep it a secret. They gave it to the Ukranian people. They didn't think of it in terms of a secret. It was just a common thing with them that they didn't take time to explain to their children, daughters. When they came to this country many of our younger people wanted to learn how to do this, and finally, they had two or three women who started some of the younger girls into decorating. Today, we have fifteen between the Orthodox church and the Catholic church. There must be fifteen young women who design these eggs. This is not only happening here in Youngstown, but throughout the United States wherever there is a Ukranian community.

M: For these displaced persons, who paid their way here? Did the church or the people who sponsored them pay?

Y: Catholic Charities, through the collection of churches throughout the United States, was one mean of monies coming in. The other mean was the individuals who came here and who had some relatives living here would also contribute. They put in a bigger portion of the funds. Those who had relatives living in the Youngstown area, Mahoning County area, had paid their way over. There

were some people who didn't have any relatives and Catholic Charities took care of them. They saw to it that they had gotten jobs and a place to live. In cases like I mentioned, those who had relatives here sponsored them, of course, and later on they got jobs and paid them back.

There was one time when they came by the B&O station, and I had gotten a limousine from one of the local undertakers. There were supposed to be seven families coming in to the station. There were other automobiles that were there, but the one I got was in case there was any excess. At the time we didn't know how many children would be there, so I brought this limousine. As we got to the station there was one more family who got off; they had made a mistake. They were supposed to get off at Baltimore and they made a mistake and got off in Youngstown. It was a family by the name of Notti, Emil and Nina Notti. They had a daughter by the name of Lisa. They had gotten off at the wrong place. Brining these people over to the rectory, we named off names of those people already spoken for by somebody who had sponsored them. I asked Emil Notti who had sponsored him and if he had any papers and he said no. His wife spoke up and said that she had papers, and she gave me the papers which said Baltimore on them. This poor fellow was so scared that he was going to be arrested. This is the fear that they had because of the communist actions and treatment that they got. He was so afraid that he was going to be arrested that he knelt down on the floor. This was a very sorrowful sight for me because I had never been treated this way. I just felt bad. He knelt down on the floor and he took both of my hands and kissed them and said, "Mr. Yarosh, please take me home. Please take me to your house. I won't be any bother. I will live in the cellar. I'm a hard worker, please take me." I did take him home with me. There was no other place. My wife at the time was pregnant with my son, Michael. She had just gone to the hospital. In fact, she had just given delivery to Michael that night. I had just enough room for us, but he shared our house for three months. I got him a job and today he is established. His daughter is very successful. They have another child also, a son by the name of Myron. I became his godfather. They had bought a home. Just to show you how some of these displaced persons are, as far as work is concerned, it is very important to note that this Emil Notti had later, after he got himself established with a job, had bought a home over on Clyde Street on the north side. It was an older home. He and his wife both worked. She got a job with Thornton Laundry, and he had a job at Youngstown Sheet & Tube at the Briar Hill plant. Both of them had scrubbed and scraped all of the paint off all of the woodwork and walls until they were bare. They revarnished all of the woodwork and

repapered the whole house. They made a beautiful home out of it.

Because of living in the DP camps, in the displaced persons camps, they didn't know the value of money. Everything that they made while working, they saved the biggest portion of their salary. They only lived on what Nina Notti made at the laundry. They put everything that Emil Notti made in the bank. Of course, later they paid the house off in eight years and then they built a new home over on the west side, a brick home.

Both of them are still working and their daughter has graduated from high school. She has some university work, and holds a very key position with a pharmaceutical company selling supplies to the hospitals and to the doctors in the tri-county area. The son is a high school graduate and is going to college and is also working part-time in a supermarket. These people are very hard-working people, not only the Nottis, but most of the displaced persons because of their experience in Europe under communist rule. They took every advantage to learn and every advantage of attending masses for the church because they didn't have this opportunity in Europe. They were deprived of church services and school, mostly everything.

- M: I don't think you mentioned while the tape was on that the early settlers hadn't had that much opportunity for education before they came to the United States.
- Y: That's right. The early settlers didn't have any education. There were a few who had gone up to the third grade, but there were many of them that didn't have any education at all. They came to this big, beautiful country and they learned the difference between a penny, a nickel, a dime, a dollar, a five dollar bill, and so on; the money values, they learned this. It's also remarkable that many of them didn't know how to read, but when they traveled by bus, they knew the numbers. If there was a South Avenue bus it would be marked south and it had a number five in front of south. They women would go downtown shopping on the bus, and they would look for the number five. If they were going to take the Market Street bus and were going to church, it was number four. I say this because I was a bus driver for nine or ten years. They would look for the number four before north. they would go to church and wait for the North Avenue bus to go to church. This is the way they learned the value of money and learned to understand the inscription on the bus, the printing on the bus, as to what bus it was by the number. They were a very determined people. School was a must for them, even in the higher education.

M: For their children?

Y: For their children. The project lasted for about four years and then it carried on beyond that a little bit, because as time went on some of those that were established became involved in helping others to come in.

Getting back to some of the certain groups of people, I did want to mention the fact that Dr. Scarchurf who was one of the political science students, is now a professor in political science. That poor guy was a young man but still he looked very old from what he had gone through. He was telling us that the theoretical workings through communism can be explained in the writings of Marx and Lenin. He would say also that when he was going to school, it was only that they wanted him to know that he would be taught. Of course, being of the age that he was, he had his own mind and he knew what their theory was; it was a brainwashing. He even went ahead and explained where they would be in the lower grade school classes, and they would have a male instructor where they would have maybe fifty students in the age bracket of nine to ten. They would be telling them of talking against the church. They would be brainwashing them telling them that Joseph Stalin was God; there was no God. In the kindergarten classes, they would go through this routine and there would be a teacher and she would say, "Who brings you bread?" This would be in the Ukraine. The child would say, "God gives us bread," and the teacher would say, "No, God did not bring you bread. Stalin brings you bread," and she would clap her hands and then there would be a man who would come in from the back of the room with a loaf of bread and he would be dressed like Joe Stalin. He would come marching in and she would say, "See, Joe Stalin. Stalin brings you bread." This is the brainwashing that they would do.

M: Starting that young?

Y: That young. They wanted to brainwash all of the youngsters. This did not only go on among the Ukrainians, it also went on among all the Slavic people who were then later taken over by the Soviet Union and became a part of the Soviet Union. This was their theory. In fact, they were making little progress, but then, because of the underground army in Europe, they went along and gave them material explaining to these people what the communists were trying to do. Some of them were brainwashed and some of them weren't.

Dr. Gobbetts is an engineer and is residing in Cleveland. He also came in under the same thing. He came in and had to flee his country, his village where he was living. His

family left a beautiful home and all of their possessions. They only grabbed what they could put in their pockets or in suitcases, and they ran before the communists took over.

In this work there was also a local man who had helped me out. He was Attorney Gulick, Peter Gulick. He devoted much of his time in helping me with papers, affidavits that had to be signed, and getting some of the legal terminology. He was a member of our church and spent much time in drawing up papers, or these affidavits, not only for the committee, but also for the individuals who needed help. He had filled out papers and advised many of them on getting their citizenship papers and applications filled out. He was very instrumental in this. I asked Attorney Gulick if he would participate and he did. He did all of the legal work for the organization. In three-fourths of the cases there was no pay connected for him.

- M: It would be important too because a lot of those papers would be a person's permanent records.
- Y: Yes, they are permanent records. It is important that they get done right.

END OF INTERVIEW