

Collector: Marina Lachecki Herman
June 10, 1979
Informant: Peter Dzubay
Others Present: Nick Celinsky
 Bill Celinsky
Time: 10:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.

Peter Dzubay, the choir director at St. Mary's Orthodox Church in Cornucopia, called me last night at home and asked whether I was still interested in the Russian hymns he wrote me about during the winter. I said I was quite interested. He suggested I meet him for their 10:30 service the next day, a Sunday. As I hung up the phone, I felt excited and said to my husband Grant that I really looked forward to it. I had always admired the church in Cornucopia.

I left for Corny about 9:45 this morning, as Corny is about 20 miles up County C from where I live and I didn't want to be late. I got to Corny about 10:15 and parked by the church. I waited for 10 minutes and began to get worried as no one had arrived yet. I walked to the church and found the door was locked. As I walked around the church, I noted the shades were down part way, only open enough to see the chandelier hanging in the center of the room. Soon, I got back in my car and decided there may be another church they held their services. I then drove around the block and saw a sign for St. Ann's Catholic Church. I went inside that church and worshiped there. About one-half hour later, their service ended with no sign of Peter Dzubay. I was pretty sad at that point as I was really looking forward to our discussion.

As I walked toward my car, I noticed 7 or 8 cars parked alongside the Orthodox Church. I drove on up and went into the church. There was about 16 people inside the church, with the choir singing a few hymns as I came in. With their minor sounding harmony in the background, I let my eyes and ears wander to take in the magnificence of this country church.

It was as if I stepped into another world. The gold paint and candelabras reminded me of the old Polish church in Duluth where my parents and their parents went to church. But, there was also an air of East European/Russian art. The ceiling of the church was painted sky-blue with gold stars scattered across the background. Three walls of the church (the sides and back) were off-white.

A large chandelier hung down from the ceiling. It was electric, fully lighted, but also held candles around the edge of the circle. The front of the church held the focus of my attention, though. Two painted silk banners stood on either side of the room - they were pictures of saints and were trimmed with gold fringe. Two gold circular candelabras with 8 or 9 lit candles were placed on either side of a vestment-trimmed podium. The podium itself held a plaque which I found out to be an icon from Russia depicting the life of Christ in a dozen or so scenes. Another, smaller candelabra stood next to the

podium. It, too, was circular and held 8-9 lighted candles. My eyes then gazed on the altar, which was behind an elaborate panel of doors, each intricately painted with pictures of Christ, Mary, or the Saints. Again, the use of gold paint was extensive. The pictures were two-dimensional and reminded me a lot of medieval church art, or paintings I had seen when I studied Russian history. The whole church was breath-taking.

As my eyes drifted back to the service, I heard the choir chanting a cappella. After a few lines of music in unision, the choir repeated a line in 4-part harmony. At every repeated line, they crossed themselves, right to left. Despite the small number, the choir was strong in voice. I took the hymn to be a litany. The reader, Peter Dzubay, then read for 4-5 minutes. It was in Russian and quite fast. After he read, the choir sang two more hymns, one in English and one in Russian. I was taken by the minor tone in their harmony. As the service ended, each person walked up to the icon and kissed it before leaving church, placing a small offering in a pouch in the back of the church.

Peter Dzubay then came to shake my hand and thanked me for coming. He introduced me to his two brothers-in-law, Nick and Bill Celinsky and their families. I asked Peter a few questions about the icons, banners and altar. He said the icon on the podium is from Russia, as well as their silver chalice. The panel of doors to the altar was given to the church by St. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church in Chicago, where Peter and the Celinsky's had been members. The panels themselves were painted in Cornucopia. We all chatted outside church for awhile, talking about my family, theirs, where I was from and why I was there that Sunday. I then drove over to Peter's house (about 4-5 blocks away) to talk more about the music.

We got to Peter's house and went inside. Both Nick Celinsky (who lives up the hill from Peter) and Bill Celinsky said they'd be over later. His house was quite small, but efficient in size. We walked in through the kitchen, on into the living room. He said to sit down and be comfortable. We'd talk here for awhile and then go down to Poncho's (a bar and restaurant) for lunch. He got us both a glass of homemade liquor/wine. Soon, he was pulling out pictures and articles on the church, written by Dorothy Glovsky 6 years ago. He showed me the wedding pictures of his niece, Cindy, who got married last year or two years ago in the Church. It was an orthodox wedding. The betrothal ceremony of the rings, the wrapping of their hands together, sipping the wine from a common cup, lighted tapers, and their crowning, which Peter explained signified their joy and martyrdom. He also showed me pictures of his wedding and both the Celinsky brothers.* Peter's wife was a sister to Nick and Bill.

Soon Nick and Bill stopped by to chat. Bill was a little more reserved than Nick; more like Peter. I took a liking to Nick right away. He was full of life and joy, quite curious about me and my Polish heritage and expressed similar emotions and mannerisms that I hold

* - I had met Bill while working on the South Shore Charrette in Cornucopia and Herbster two years ago. I vaguely remembered Nick.

dear. We all chatted about music, family, their weddings and their church. Nick said I should become a member of their church. I smiled and inwardly felt it wasn't such a bad idea. They were my kind of people, which Nick kept stressing. That people of Slavic origin were really alike in so many ways. The noon hour soon came and Peter got up to end the conversation and transport it down to Poncho's. Nick asked if Peter was going to play some Russian church music records after lunch. Peter said yet, so Nick said he'd stop by later.

Peter and I then drove down to Poncho's together. During the meal, I got to know Peter better, his family history and that of the church. He's quieter than Nick Celinsky, who loves to talk a lot and find out about other people. His parents came over from Russia (he identifies himself as a Czechoslovakian Russian). They originally settled in Minneapolis, than moved to Clayton, Wisconsin. We didn't talk at all about his early life. I asked a few questions about how he met his wife and what he did for a living. He met Kathryn in Cornucopia when she was 13 and he was 22. They saw each other in church but that was about it. Years later, they got married and moved to Clayton. The war years came (World War II) and he and Nick Celinsky (Kathryn's brother) tried to enlist. Peter was turned down (he was 35) but Nick was accepted. They both went to Chicago to work on war machines and war parts for awhile, then Nick went to fight in the Pacific. Details were sketchy because Peter spoke more of the church there and their choir. Evidently he was a carpenter and builder before and after the war. They moved to Cornucopia in 1961 because Kathryn wanted to be near her family. She loved the rural town. She died of leukemia when she was 59. He seems pretty bitter about it. Evidently the doctor in Marshfield said she would live for 5 more years, but she didn't respond to treatment and died in 5 weeks.

We finished our lunch and then went back to Peter's house. He pulled out an old phonograph and several Russian albums. While he was setting up the record player, he gave me the albums to look at. There were 3 Don Cossack chorus albums, 2 or 3 records from the choir of St. John Chrystogram in New York, and a couple albums on various services: Christmas, Easter, Lent and evening vespers. As the records played, he was quite enraptured with them. His eyes gazed off, then he would translate a little for me. All the music was in part harmony and acapella, which Peter says is the tradition. He told me a little about directing with fingers instead of broad arm movements. He then leaned back on the couch and said he came from quite a musical family. His two brothers and five sisters sang for a graduation one time and were billed as the "Dzubay Chorus". His father stayed away from singing, but directed them and arranged beautiful four-part harmonies according to Peter. His brother Nicholas directs the Russian choir in Clayton. They share music and practice together sometime.

At that point, we started talking about recording the choir. He asked if I had the equipment and when might be a good time. He asked how long of a tape we wanted, too. I said we had the equipment and would like as much music as they can sing. He said he'd sit down with the

choir and decide what to sing. He mentioned that perhaps the two choirs should get together, too. I said I'd like that. We left the time pretty much up in the air, but that we'd both be in touch.

About that time, Nick came over again to listen to some of the records with us. I must admit I looked forward to seeing him again. With Russian chorus and church music in the background, our conversation wandered from subject to subject. Peter showed me sheet music for a Christmas hymn. It was in the Russian language, but written in the English alphabet. Both Nick and Peter helped me with the pronunciation as I read the lyrics. We then talked about different eras in Russian history, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, traditions and ethnic foods. During this last hour, Peter gave me the church calendar, which is in Russian-English and Russian alphabet, and an article on Curil and Methodios, apostles of the Slavs. He also gave me an article to read on Ukranian Easter eggs. We had talked a bit about where in Russia the parishioners came from. He said they were Ukranian and Czechoslovakian Russians. I told him of my Ukranian friend and I guess that sparked his interest in giving me things to read. He seems to collect skads of articles, magazines and cards on Russian heritage. Whatever we talked about, he seemed to find something to show me.

While Peter began listening to the music again, Nick Celinsky began questioning me about where I came from and Grant's family. As we were trading information back and forth, we discovered a neat coincidence. Nick's sister-in-law and her husband are moving to Mt. Morris, Illinois, where Grant's parents still live. We both were shocked and happy. It was a neat thing to share. Nick then smiled at me and said something to Peter in Russian. He told me later that he said I was easy to talk to. He also said that too many people my age weren't interested in their heritage, so it made him happy to share those things with me.

Around 3 o'clock, Nick said he had to get back to his farm. I decided to go, too. I told Peter and Nick I'd be back for the July 1st Sunday service, since that was when Fr. Dimitri Cozby would be there from Clayton. He's there the 1st Sunday of every month. They said they were looking forward to meeting Grant. I also told them I'd like to bring my parents. They said we'd all be welcome and encouraged us to stay for the Cornucopia Men's Club Fish Fry that day, too.

Both Nick and I drove off. I waved goodbye to Peter and bid him to have a good afternoon. I thanked him and said I really enjoyed myself. My one emotion? Elation. These were my kind of people!

Additional Comments:

- Family names in the church include the Dzubay's, Celinsky's, Lazorik's (from Mellen), Casino's and the Sveda's (from Washburn). Peter says that on the first Sunday of every month, when the priest comes to Cornucopia, many more people come to the service. There are about 18 families today, as compared to 40-50 in the 1930's. The church was built in 1910 by

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Cornucopia lumbermen.

--Other area Russian Orthodox Churches are:

Holy Trinity in Clayton, Wisconsin 54004

St. John the Baptist in Stanley, Wisconsin 54768

Holy Assumption Church in Lublin, Wisconsin 54447

One in Minneapolis and one in Chisholm, Minnesota

--Areas with heavy Russian populations include:

New York

Pennsylvania

Alaska

and Chicago, Illinois

MLH/a

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