

**Yvonne Tuchalski**

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**Yvonne Tuchalski**

Yvonne Tuchalski was born in Steubenville, OH in 1958 and moved to Weirton, West Virginia in 1965. She is a member of the Weirton Polish and Slavic communities and is a palm weaver and Polish dancer.

EH: Emily Hilliard

YT: Yvonne Tuchalski

PM: Pam Makricosta

00:00

EH: ...Hold it to the side. Okay. So could you, introduce yourself and tell me where you're from and when you were born?

YT: My name's Yvonne Tuchalski, my first—it's spelled Y-V-O-N-N-E, T-U-C-H-A-L-S-K-I. I was born in Steubenville, Ohio in 1958 but moved to Weirton in 1965. I grew up on Polish Hill in Steubenville, came here to Weirton, and lived here most of my life 'til I joined the military and went elsewhere and then came back after 17 years absence. The whole time I was in Polish history, Polish Hill in Steubenville, and I went to a Polish church, Polish catholic church, Polish school, I belonged to organizations called the Polish National Alliance, which is a fraternal organization similar to Mooses or Elks. I became a member, my parents were members, my grandparents were members (laughs). Through that organization, they developed, they wanted to promote the Polish culture, so they had dance groups. So I was a dancer from 1965 all the way up to 1978 at the local organizations. When we came to Weirton, there was also a Polish church here... whenever there's a Polish picnic or we do that stuff, we would dance at ethnic groups like that--picnics. We would go to other organizations I became... I went from being a dancer, I went to a Polish college, became a professional college dancer, I learned more college stuff, and I have a background, I have a network of all of it. I'm now on the board of directors for the college, then I went in the Army and I spent some time in Germany, was gone from this area for about 20 years. Came back, just being a regular member in the Polish National Alliance, I became an officer. I got more involved. The... Weirton in the 30s had the Festival of Nations which is a parade of all ethnic groups. It got disbanded because that was... back then was melting pot.

EH: Mmhm.

2:23

YT: Back, after I came back in 2006 in the town, they reincorporated it, so I've been involved with the Festival of Nations and stuff, so now I teach... I have a booth there all the time and I started getting more stuff, so every time I turn around, somebody wants to know this or that. Growing up, I was, I went also to the Slavic Byzantine church so I learned some ethnics crossed over.

EH: Hmm. So why did you go to both churches?

YT: My mother was Slavic, my dad was Polish. And then you go to the father's church, but she wanted us to grow up with the heritage because during the holidays we still celebrated the customary different things of the Polish... Christmas time and Easter time things. And they, I met my parents, my grandparents, my great-grandparents immigrated from Europe, they were glad to see the heritage come down. And then, 2007... a cousin from Poland that was a parallel to my grandmother's family, sister, he came here found out we're more Polish than he is there—they want to be more American. (laughs) So, we have a family picture, we're the ones in the Polish costumes, he's the one in jeans. (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

3:45

And were in Poland is your family from?

YT: Out of Warsaw and I couldn't go over when I was in the military—I was stationed in Germany, but 1998, our family went back to visit and we found the house that my grandmother immigrated in 1912 there and the family, the village and everything, and we talked to relatives. At the time we went there in 1998, communism had fallen, so these teenagers, instead of learning German in schools, they learned English. So they were our translators, but now we communicate with them a little bit on the internet. (laughs)

EH: (laughs) Why did your family end up in Steubenville or Weirton area?

YT: Um, it was coal mining, but it was also the steel mills. So, my... okay, no it was my dad's father was... worked on the trains but my dad and his brothers and some of his cousins all worked in the steel mills. My mother's side, the Slavic side, they stay, they got here in 1929. My great-grandfather, my grandmother, my uncles, all worked in the steel mills.

EH: Okay. And what was their trade in Poland—do you know?

YT: They were farmers. They... most of them survived the WWII because of being just farmers, but the one cousin that came in 2007, he in '98 he was going to school and he got to go off the farm and get to go learn computers and he's a web designer. So they're starting to learn more sophisticated jobs and everything. But they came here mainly because of the steel mills and opportunity.

EH: Yeah. What was it like growing up here in the Polish community?

YT: I thought everyone was Polish—the whole neighborhood. Um, it was unity. It was... you had the customs. Everybody looked out for each other. Now they, back then...you can go outside and play and your doors could be open. Nobody needed a cellphone because if you did something bad at the neighborhood, that neighbor that was the closest called your mother and before you got home, they knew what happened!

EH: Uh-huh.

YT: And when I was growing up, you learned... well I had Catholic school. So the nuns taught you the customs, the Christmas songs. I... during Easter we had a tradition to weave palms, so I learned in first grade how to weave palms. And we made stuff, so I eventually turned it into. I do that and now I picture... some of that. They tried teaching the older kids some other products but I couldn't get to it. My grandmother and the nuns all taught me how to color the Easter eggs, which was with wax. It's called Pysanka. Then you had your Polish... grammar school and your lessons and stuff. And then you taught some of them... my grandmother never spoke with broken English. So they were... it was a liaison and everything. Because my organization, the Polish National Alliance, which was out of Chicago, they had a college that I would go, summer courses, I learned cultures, I went to a youth jamboree up there, dance groups, they gave you free scholarships to go. It was located outside of Erie, Pennsylvania. Up there, they had a Polish library, an English library, um, there was people from all over the expertise. Some of

the teachers have now passed away, but they taught me a lot of things. One of the dance... we also had the dance group up there. I belonged to that group for a while and it was interesting to see it. Unfortunately, because of the... it was the only ethnic college in the whole state of the United States. Population was small so they closed down in 1987. It turned into a prison. But we still have, the alumni started growing up and we started getting together. So just Sunday I talked to the president of the alumni association—she lives in Florida. We're having another reunion coming up and we get together and we like to promote saying what we did was the only ethnic... there was, O [*unintelligible*] Roberts has a religious college, but there was no ethnic.

EH: Right.

YT: And because of the ethnic, we did a lot of stuff. The Polish library had donated to the University of Pennsylvania—Pittsburgh... Pennsylvania... the one in Pittsburgh. It's at Hillman Library, so I go and do research up there.

EH: Ah!

YT: While I was at the school, I learned more about the concentration camps and stuff like that. Some of the books we had were unpublished, they smuggled out. So there's books up there that's just manuscripts. Um, my dance director from the group, he's really big in the Pittsburgh area, he does folklore. He helped me learn more expertise in how to palm weave, how to do the eggs, and do other stuff. He's published books. I'm in contact with him, I'm in contact with a girl in Youngstown, I have friends in Cleveland. So anytime they need anything, I'm there.

EH: Are most, is most of the college Midwestern, sort of Appalachian, Mid-Atlantic?

YT: Um, it was in Erie, Pennsylvania which is sort of up, it was... the one thing unique about the school—we had Polish language and English language, was the people off the boat could stay teaching and everything, when the school got founded, one of the teachers brought seeds from Poland and planted pine trees, which, there's pictures of the town—no trees. Those trees now are still there and they're twice as big as telephone poles.

EH: Wow.

YT: So every time we go up there, I go up in the woods and steal pinecones and we use them for favors and different stuff.

EH: Ah, cool!

YT: A lot of people knew about the school and everything.

10:36

EH: I would imagine it would make you even more curious to learn from your mother—well so your mother was Slavic, but learn more about your personal traditions, going away to college and having that experience.

YT: That's why we were up there, but my parents are passed away. They knew we caught... did some stuff, but they were proud. I brought some original stuff—this is what a dance costume looks like. But it's just ethnic groups. This is more of less that.

11:08

When we started the dance group, I was like 8 or 10, we would start off with just a white shirt, a scarf on our head and a flower dress and we would dance, try the dance step. Well, because the costume's so expensive, we were told to make our own costumes. So this is the original vest,

EH: Wow.

YT: They were into vests. This is in one region. But the girl would usually have the seeded vest. My mother made that when I was like 10 years old.

EH: Wow.

YT: So it's a simple one and we would wear it with skirts.

EH: And is this—would it be a specific style from the area outside of Warsaw?

YT: The region... this is more like Krakowiak. Um, this is the national dress. Each region has its own outfits.

EH: Okay.

YT: Um... this is all the dance costumes.

EH: Oh wow.

YT: And stuff, they're all different colors. So you can see each... these are the shepherd ones. And you'll see, they're similar to these. As we got older, this dress... vest got too small for me, I made one. This is what I wore in the last years. That's the Polish Eagle. It took us forever. When we got tired of making our own, my grandmother made it to Poland. This... when the last years, I'm wearing this vest. No, another one. That's me in 1978 (points at photograph).

EH: Wow.

YT: That was the last group that we had dancing. That's the Polish trees back there.

EH: Okay.

YT: So when you're small, they're too expensive to wear these, cause in 1998, well, this is the simple skirt. We just took drawstrings and this is the skirt... so this is like what you would recognize with. If it had red on the bottom, that meant you were single.

EH: (laughs)

YT: And each ribbon meant how rich you were.

EH: Wow. So is 4 ribbons—you're rich or you're not quite rich?

YT: Somewhat.

EH: (laughs)

YT: This is another vest my grandmother got in the 70s from Poland. This was actually made in Poland.

EH: That is beautiful.

YT: This was, about 20... 20 dollars back then in the 70s. So I outgrew that one. (laughs)

13:37

EH: Wow, that's beautiful.

YT: Our costumes in the college were actually from Poland. So we had 19... my great-grandmother, we would wear aprons. She crocheted that, my Slavish grandmother. So I put these on display. But when we went to Poland, this grandmother got this skirt got replaced... this is actually from Poland. This is the skirt.

EH: I love that fabric.

YT: And it's... you can't even... it struck me, so this is a married person, cause they don't have a red ribbon. So this is the apron that goes with it. Their lace, they're very good in lace. So in 1998 we bought this one, this is another... I still, we bought it to fit my mother or me. So this is more elaborate. The outfit cost like 200 dollars.

EH: Mm.

YT: What it is is these ribbons mean how rich you are on the lady. The boys, they have coins on their vest that tell how rich. This... is original... we used to wear ribbons in our hair. So I made this in the 70s so plastic wreath made. Sometimes we took live (ribbons?). It's falling apart. So this year, this is what an authentic one looks like. This cost like 25 bucks. This is an authentic one so it's similar, but we have the ribbons.

EH: Oh yeah. And those are also an example of a rich, or wealth.

YT: What we do is, if you wore a flower headdress, that meant you were single. If you were married, you wore a scarf or babushka, which is like a big scarf. These were sometimes real flowers.

EH: Wow.

YT: So if you were married, you wore a scarf like this.

EH: (laughs) And was in the Weirton area, was most of the Polish community from that same region?

YT: We were from all over here. But you grouped together because you all had the ethnic traditions. Different regions had different dances, so when we went to college, we could do the different dances.

This is... they made this in the 60s, I'm not in that picture. But these are the different region dances. These were all authentic ones. With the song on the background. So these were all the major song dances.

16:26

The biggest one, Krakow, Krakowiak which is Warsaw was the capitol Krakow was the original capitol back in the Middle Ages. So Krakow was the culture center. Warsaw was more educational and stuff. I bought this outfit actually in Krakow when we went there.

EH: Okay. So here, you would do all kinds of different styles?

YT: Well we did... because we only were a local group, we wore one costume. But when we went to college, we would dance in the region's dance costumes, so we might have 5 minutes to change, less than 5 minutes to change costumes from one of these costumes to the shepherd's one or you'll notice all these girls having braids. Well some dances you didn't have braids. Some didn't. These are all fake braids.

EH: And is it usually a co-ed... (Yvonne shows her fake braids) (Emily laughs)

YT: And this is how we did it.

EH: Oh yeah! Just put it around your neck.

YT: We pinned it up and we would dance with it, next dance, we didn't have braids. But this is 70 years old.

EH: Wow.

YT: I mean from the 70s. So we would all have braids and we could have any hairstyle—I had short hair. We just pinned it up and put it in. But this is the braids. During the festival, I'll go into the bathroom, I'm wearing a dress, well petticoats and all that, I'll drop my pants, put my skirt on, come out with braids. They'll go—you braided your hair?

EH: (laughs)

YT: But we learned... usually the dance groups had black boots and some had short ones. So we learned, but this is...

EH: Is that real hair?

YT: It's a wig. It's a fall. But dyed... it was dyed to match my hair in the 70s, so every time I have it I'm 100% grey... I have to match.

EH: Just take it to the hairdresser and say...

YT: My hairdresser actually matches it.

EH: (laughs)

YT: So that's more of the dancing days, I know... Polka is not a dance in Poland. Polka is American Polish music, so the dances are the Krakowiak, which is the national dance, it's more the guys wore the



red jackets and peacock feathers in their hats and they would dance, it's like a 10 minute dance. It's a lively dance. You know, the different steps. The Mazurka was a slower dance, like a schottische. The Polonaise was more like pomp and circumstance, it was for the rich, you know, the ballroom dance, in their gowns. Whenever we have a ball, we would come out with the Polonaise. Krakowiak was a more, another regional one and it was more dancing and high stepping. And the Oberek was really fast twirlings. Those are 5 main dances of the Poland. There's 2, we're... this one is disbanded, but there's a group, Duquesne University has Tamburitzans, but they don't do Polish, they do all the Eastern Europe. But there's two national dance groups from Poland that come here on tours and they do dances.

EH: Oh wow.

YT: So there's some of that going on.

EH: So is there still an active dance group here in the area?

YT: No, not... we disbanded in '78, '79, the lodge is still here... I'm the youngest member. (laughs)

EH: Really? Wow.

YT: One of the youngest members. We had no dance, no young children, we have meetings but we have no building anymore. The group in Steubenville which I belong to, they're the same way—there's no... hardly any young kids. The mission was to be the liaison between like someone having a letter from Poland, trying to decipher it, trying to find work, when someone would come, they could go with somebody else or sponsor... that's they're gearing away from that. But where the Polish National Alliance starts in Chicago, they still do language classes, dance classes and stuff.

EH: So are there no young people because they moved away or are they just not involved?

YT: There's young people but a lot of them want to be Americanized and there's not that many. I'm 50% Polish. Too many melting pots. So they don't want to go back to their tradition.

EH: Mmhm.

YT: But I thought it was just instilled into you.

EH: Yeah. Well, I'm not even maybe an 1/8<sup>th</sup> Belgian, but that was what my grandmother knew so that's... I held on to that, you know, even though I was so watered down.

YT: I was in Germany. I had 3 kids in Germany. But they were born on an American hospital Army base so they're American. My daughter picks up on the Polish side a little bit—she had to for the Christmas and Easter. And um, she picks up on German stuff. So whenever we came home for Christmas at dinner, she's learned to make Easter eggs.

EH: And does she still live in the area?

YT: She lives here. My parents are passed away. My daughter who's 30 lives here and she knows some of these traditions. This is the palms.

EH: Oh wow.

YT: This is just the simple palm.

EH: And so would that hang in homes?

YT: They would hang it behind... they're green when they start off with. They hang it behind the last supper scenes or religious things. They're blessed palms for Palm Sunday. I make them into crosses...

EH: Oh yah.

YT: And then I make big ones for the church. This is the eggs with onion skin.

EH: Those are cool.

YT: I made those this year. This is eggs that we can make. These are wooden eggs. And the color from the onion skins when you boil them, turn that color. It's natural color.

EH: So... so wait... these are...?

YT: They were raw eggs. You put 'em in the water with the onion skins there, when... and some vinegar. When the eggs are done, they color the dye from the onions, onion skins go on there, depending on how long you keep the water and how many you put in with color. Sometimes we scratch on them. These are...

EH: And so what's the... it's still the egg in there?

YT: The egg's in there because it's like a... it's dried out. It's gonna look like a rubber ball like from jacks.

EH: Wow! I didn't know you... I didn't know you could...

YT: So these...

EH: We would always blow...

YT: We would blow 'em out. But those I didn't. These are wooden eggs, these are like souvenirs from Poland. But I have eggs that we blew out and some we didn't and they are so many years, 40 years old. And 2 cracked.

EH: Yeah.

YT: And when my parents passed away, I inherited the eggs because they couldn't be shipped anyplace.

EH: And so the wax egg decorating...

YT: Those are the wax ones. They look like... (rummages in bag) I think I did....

EH: And that's in both Slavic and Polish tradition, right?

YT: Ukrainian. Ukrainian.

EH: Yeah.

24:10

YT: Now this is the teacher from Poland, and this is how to do it all.

EH: Wow.

YT: And what it all means and everything. I thought I brought the book on how to color but I didn't.

Then the other thing they do which I haven't started yet, when the... in the wintertime when they're slow, I call them Polish snowflakes. They make these... this is a Polish cut-out. It's all cutout with scissors.

EH: Whoa.

YT: That's, they make displays and they decorate their house with it.

EH: That's beautiful.

YT: So you could actually see that there's layers on it.

EH: Oh, wow.

YT: So I haven't mastered that, but I have pictures of that.

EH: So did you do this one?

YT: No. I bought it.

EH: That's really neat.

Does your daughter have any children?

YT: No, my daughter is unmarried, doesn't have any children but she knows how to do the eggs. She hates when I do the palms because (laughs) you only have a time span of 3 days to do the weaving. So I get them like Wednesday before Palm Sunday and to keep them fresh, I have to put them in the bathtub. (laughs)

EH: Wow.

YT: "You've got your palms everywhere!"

EH: (laughs)

YT: So and I work... I have big ones too. I make 'em for the church and they're amazing some of them. It's just time consuming.

EH: MH. Um, so do the neighborhood you grew up in, is it still full of Polish...people of Polish heritage?

YT: We don't have...we live in a multi-cultural neighborhood now, but we do go to the Polish church which is still with the ethnics.

26:14

This is a larger version of it that I made.

EH: Oh wow.

YT: That's all one palm.

EH: That's cool.

YT: That's 7 hours' work.

EH: Yeah. You can tell.

YT: And then... that's, that's some of the eggs from the 70s but you can't... those were... some of these my kids made. And when my great-grandmother died in the 70s, we didn't save any of hers, we didn't know to. We ate 'em. And then this is a hatchet from the shepherds. We dance with that.

EH: Okay.

YT: It's similar... that's some of the stuff from that... to the other one. But...they put it at the church on display with a prof...with the cross. But not that many knew how to do it that way. That's my old phone. So this is what happened, how they did it there...

EH: Oh yeah. Oooh that's beautiful.

YT: That I did like 4 years ago. It just stays. It's green when it starts out, and then they turn colors, so that's the church. Now I don't have a picture but the church, the stained glass window, has highlights of America and Poland in it. So there's like the Polish pope, the American pope. There's the Polish eagle, the American eagle. So you can learn this history on all that.

EH: Oh that's cool. Do you know when that church was built?

YT: This church was built in 1911. It just served 100 years to 19... 2011. They have history there. The church in Steubenville where I grew up, it was built 1906 or something like that. It went over 100 years, only had 3 priests living there, but it closed down from the diocese of Steubenville.

EH: Ah.

YT: The diocese of Charleston, West Virginia, Sacred Heart of Mary Church here in Weirton is the only... last Polish church in the state of West Virginia. The Polish National Alliance lodge is the last Polish National lodge in the state of West Virginia.

EH: So do you think that heritage will persist here?

YT: Ye... I keep it alive with the Festival of Nations... I know I've got a picture of it. With the Festival of Nations, they're bringing back more of the tradition. Um, every time I come in, I teach them more and more stuff. Um...

EH: And when does that happen?

YT: That happens the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in March. So I weave palms and everything now. So these are the latest books from the organization I have. So I threw it in here real fast. But we have the customs, like the Polish food. That's the eggs too.

EH: Wow.

YT: So our kids grew up... my daughter knows how to make cabbage rolls, the kielbasa, pierogis.

EH: Are there places around here that serve them—like restaurants?

YT: There's no restaurant around here, the closest one's in Pittsburgh—S & D Deli in the Strip. Um, the local grocery stores sell paczki, the Polish donut.

EH: Yeah, I grew up in Indiana, right by Chicago, so every Dingus Day we'd get those.

YT: Well some of the stuff, Dingus Day, as a tradition. Easter Monday—they have it in Cleveland, they have it in Pittsburgh, but nothing here. Traditional is like my mother—the Slavish did it too. They would come home from church and their grand... she said grandpa was sitting there with the garden hose, hitting them. (laughs)

30:20

EH: (laughs) So, um, did she or someone in your family make paczki?

YT: My grandmother did. They made the ethnic um, cookies, they made the ethnic foods. My dad helped with the church making homemade kielbasa. I go up every year to the Byzantine church and help them make the Easter bread. Paska, which is similar to like the sweet breads in Poland. Christmas, Easter time, we have a tradition where you take your Easter food to the church and get blessed.

EH: Okay.

YT: They still do that. I still... everything you put in your basket, there's a reason.

EH: So what are they—what do you put in your basket?

YT: Um, this is traditions—what goes in the basket and everything. That's the Dingus Day stuff. The meats, the bitters, the horseradish...the butter. This is more about the eggs. That's fun facts, and that's a map of Poland. These are all yours too.

EH: Thank you! And the...

YT: And you can have this one too.

EH: The breads, are they braided like...?

YT: They're braided on top—I have a picture. Let me see if I can find it. We go up... it goes up... it's braided with a cross, and you learn, it's sweet like the braids. You make it in a circle like a cross and it's brushed with um, egg whites and it's crusted and the only time you eat it is actually... I'll have to go way back and try to find it (looking in phone photos). These are my two aunts who have passed—this one's 90

years old, they're Slavic. She just passed away. She kept their traditions up. We'd go to this one's house every Christmas Eve, have 3 or 4 generations. Her mother taught herself why we have certain soups and everything and she'd have to do the family blessing. And we would pass out things. Everybody got blessed with honey. You had this Christmas wafer. We still keep the tradition, whoever's around. And at Easter time we come around, we always go to their house but I don't know if I have time.

EH: And some of the Easter breads I've seen have eggs. Does yours?

YT: That's the Greek bread.

EH: Okay.

YT: The Greeks have that. We had... sometimes there's raisins or other fruits like that and it was called *baka*, which is sweet breads.

EH: Okay. And when you make them now, you make them at home or...

Oh wow! Those are so neat. (sees photo of breads)

YT: And they're all... so there's like 20 or 30 of us go over there and we just bake it and we sell it.

EH: So all the lodge members go?

YT: This is the church that does this. Just the church ladies.

EH: Okay. Well I would love to come and watch and learn when you do that.

YT: They do it at the Byzantine. Then we have like a... this is Eastertime in March. Say the month before Easter so they can sell it. Ash Wednesday all the ladies get together and we all make pierogi at the Slavish, the Byzantine church. At the Polish church, 2 weeks before Ash Wednesday, they make the pierogis too. And they have Lenten dinners with it all. Now in August the Polish church here is having a picnic. They're starting to cook for it. And all the ladies get together so it's a tradition. They've been having this picnic since the 50s and 60s.

EH: Wow. So 20-30 women from the church?

YT: I'm one of the youngest ones that go for that. And the people will sit there with their walkers and do different things and I'm usually the one that can walk things back and forth and now when we did this, you've got grandparents there with their grandchildren.

EH: That's great. That's great.

YT: Learning it. And it's a big family thing and they go, "Oh I can remember when your dad was here" or "your mother was here doing this." It's traditions. You can see it at the Greek church too doing that.

EH: Well I would love to come up for one of those community baking or cooking.

YT: Yeah this is, that's me in the outfit at the festival.

EH: (laughs)

YT: That's some of the displays. I put up things and everything. They do, at the Festival of Nations, this museum puts it up, we don't have a dance group, but they're trying to get dance groups, with, but it's hard to get them here, but they bring other ethnic groups in, like they had German dancers, they had other dancers. And it's...

EH: That's cool!

35:20

YT: So we just keep it going... I've picked up this book tells you all the holiday traditions, I've picked up um, what I mainly do is I put the PNA—this is the Polish flag with the eagle. This, without the eagle was the communist flag of Poland. With the eagle, with the crown on the eagle is new Poland, uncommunist. They were told to make stuff. If the crown was floating above the eagle, that meant it was communist. So this, every year they put something. This is all your American famous Poles. Like, this is the president of Poland that passed away in that plane crash. Pulaski was a general in the Revolutionary War, Kosciusko was his friend—he was friends with George Washington. He was the first, when he passed, in his will, he willed all the slaves from his area to be freed.

EH: Wow. Where I'm from we have a county named after him. Kosi-os-ko is how we say it.

YT: Kosciusko.

EH: Yeah.

YT: Our lodge is Kosciusko Lodge here.

EH: Okay.

YT: This is Mical Kozal he's a bishop who took the place of a soldier and was in concentration camps. He's a saint now.

EH: Oh.

YT: So they bring out stuff like that to the pope. Everywhere you go you see pictures of the pope and the black Madonna everywhere. Some of the traditions like with the eggs—we would start the eggs, coloring—it takes a long time to wax 'em. My great-grandmother would start on Ash Wednesday.

EH: Wow.

YT: And color, and it's tedious so you would say your prayers or your rosary while the eggs were dying. And on Easter Sunday you'd have to give an egg to all your relatives.

EH: So you'd do it all through Lent, basically?

YT: All during Lent.

EH: Wow. And so, I assume there were a lot of Polish steel mill workers?

YT: A lot of Polish steel workers here. Um, there was um, the church was real big. It was actually-- The original church in Weirton was built outside the mill gate. And it was big in population. Um, a lot of the Poles were steel workers, coal miners, and technicians, uh and glass blowers. So they immigrated here from James Town. They were the ones that could survive here, so they were able to stay.

EH: Wow.

YT: So because of the concentration of being close to Pittsburgh, and this and Youngstown, and Cleveland, this is where a lot of, a lot of the Poles stayed.

EH: Mmhm. Mmhm.... Are they trying to kick us out of here? (At the Weirton Museum)

YT: No.

38:18

EH: (laughs)

YT: But there's... because of the Polish, um, steel workers, like my grandmother came here, then other relatives started coming here. Like, "come here, it's a nice area." And it's reasonable and everything.

EH: Mmhm. Yep. Yeah... same with, you know Belgians at the Studebaker factory where I grew up.

YT: And then my Slavish uncle had a bakery here in town.

EH: Really?

YT: Took... at Christmas time they would have the different *kolaches*, he would do the different... the nut rolls, the poppy seed rolls, we all did that.

EH: Wow. So is there much of a Slavic community here still?

YT: Yeah. There's still a Slavic...

EH: And, is that bakery still around?

YT: No, they closed down in the 70s. My uncle passed away and they closed the bakery down, so it's hard to find the ethnic, ethnic.

EH: Mmhm. Yeah, I wondered if there's any place that's still upholding any of it?

YT: Nothing here.

EH: Okay.

YT: Nothing in this area. The Strip or Wheeling has some stuff. Wheeling lost their Polish church about 10 years ago.

EH: Do you know why that folded?



YT: It was small, it was St. Thaddeus, it was a small parish. A lot of like, well the church in Steubenville for example, everybody lived around a church. Everybody walked to the church. People went to nursing homes. They didn't have cars and stuff. The church got married and they had dwindling population. The priest had died 10 years before the church closed—they had visiting priests come in. They wanted that church. So a lot of the ethnics—the Italian churches are all closing and stuff. Um, the Byzantine church lost some members but they're bringing more in from people that are going to the university in Steubenville. Francis University are coming over here. People are looking and going back to their roots so they're getting people from not just Weirton coming here. That um, other areas like Caddiz and stuff. This Polish church, people like to listen to the music—they come out. They've got a CD out. This is the black Madonna and so we have an accordion player—these are all Polish songs.

EH: Oh, I was trying to get in touch with him!

YT: Tom Zielinsky?

EH: Yeah, yeah. I don't know if he...

YT: I know him.

EH: I don't know if I called or emailed, but I haven't heard back yet.

YT: They make those and those are all the songs and stuff. The story behind the black Madonna was... it was supposed to be a Virgin Mary and it's jeweled. It's actually in Czestochowa, Poland, in a monastery. Dorms, kind of war—back then they used to have city walls. They were in the monastery trying to save the place that was being bombarded by whoever attacked them, I forget who, went in and trying stealing this picture. Tried burning it, it wouldn't burn. They slashed it, it bled... so the black Madonna, cause that's the part that burned.

EH: Wow. So it's a miraculous painting.

YT: People go there like Lourdes and that.

EH: Wow.

YT: So this painting came from Poland, that's from the original church, and these are two from the altar.

EH: Yeah, I think I had read something about a polka mass?

YT: And this is the polka mass there.

EH: Okay, okay. Do you think I could get a copy of that—buy a copy or burn a copy? Do you think Tom would have one?

YT: He might have it but you can have this one.

EH: I don't want to take yours.

YT: He has more up there. I have his phone number, I think it's in this book too. His phone.

EH: Okay. I'll try him after.

YT: Cause this, this first song is St. Mary... Virgin Mary and I don't know how to say some of these because he and I lost like all everybody that knew the ethnic group, Slavic language or Polish language have all passed away.

EH: Yeah.

YT: So I just hearsay stuff, so I can say some of the Christmas carols and how to say some of the mass in Polish. And 'cause I was in different languages, I know like "jak sie masz" means "how are you" in Polish. Like... other languages like "dzien dobry" means "good morning" or "dziekuj ci" means "thank you." But I don't know other languages.

EH: Yeah, yeah, right. Do you think... it seems like you gravitated more towards Polish. Is that just because of the college or was that more of an influence in...

YT: We had more resources in the... because we were more with the dance group and everything. But my Slavish grandmother and my Polish grandmother were able to talk to each other. (laughs) For some reason, they did the eggs, they did the stuff. But we kept more of how my dad was so involved with the Polish National Alliance, that he wanted us to stay Polish.

EH: I see. Hmm.

YT: But...

Yeah I think that's... well, I've got other books I've picked up too that, that's how... this "sto lat" means "100 years." So these are...

EH: It's... my friend sings that for "Happy Birthday"

YT: That means like, "sto lat sto lat, niech zyje zyje nam" That means for you to live 100 years like we say, um, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow"

EH: Yeah.

YT: So I mean, this is just the life there and everything and... but this is the 70s to 80s style kids.

EH: Do you think... oh yeah. Do you think your parents—were they glad that they...

YT: They instilled in us a lot of stuff and they wanted us to keep it going, but it's um... "you have to go to grandma's house, you have to do this, you have to eat this food—that means good luck," and everything. We'd get into a competition, like when we spray each other with water now, we do it with squirt guns. (laughs)

EH: Ah yeah.

YT: Or we avoid each other on those days and stuff.

EH: Yeah, traditions evolve in different ways.

YT: But my Christmas and Easter is always going to church.

EH: Yeah.

44:46

YT: And learning that stuff.

EH: Do you think they were glad they came to the U.S.?

YT: They were glad for a better opportunity and everything and a better education. We talked to my grandmother—she spoke broken Polish (English?), but we talked to those people how when we went to visit the parallel family, how much we matured and stuff, and how they were still living the simple life. They didn't get... they were farmers. They didn't have cars, they didn't have phones 'til later... they didn't have an outhouse—they had an outhouse. They had to work the cattle, and coming here you got more opportunities.

EH: Yeah, yeah. Well, I definitely want to come back sometime when you are making food and I'd love to learn the breads and maybe I could film and write recipes down.

YT: Yeah. I've got some of these, but... I know they're gonna, like you said, the last—the first week of August, we're gonna be cooking at the church, and that will be the cabbage rolls, pierogis.

EH: (laughs) Pierogis have to be labor intensive, because you're essentially making a dumpling, right?

YT: The dumpling.

EH: The dough...

YT: You sit there, and then when we make the sauerkraut it smells always in the church basement, and we have church upstairs and you smell the stuff. (laughs)

EH: Is there a place, when you want to eat that kind of food, that you go in Pittsburgh?

YT: Yeah, it's called S&D Deli and it's... you can google what they have. They have a Polish lunch and they have Polish food there.

EH: Okay.

YT: Giant Eagle has a little bit of a Polish section now. Stanley's Market in Toledo, Ohio will send sausages to the local grocery stores here for the holidays.

EH: Wow!

YT: Um, Cleveland, I know places up there. There's this Polish market up there, a section. Um, I go up there, whenever I go for my meetings up there, I hang out and pick up stuff there.

EH: Okay. So there's still some...

YT: And then, I just found it in an Italian restaurant... an Italian market over in Steubenville, They're called *chrusciki* which is flour, angel wings, bowties, they're real light and airy and powdered sugared?

EH: Oh! I know. It's like a fried...

YT: Fried dough, looks like funnel cakes, but it's bowties?

EH: Yep.

YT: I... they're like rosettes, I knew rosettes, my neighbor used to make those.

EH: Oh! So where was your neighbor from?

YT: Poland.

EH: So that's interesting because I, I'm actually doing some writing and research about rosettes and I learned them from Helvetia, the Swiss community in West Virginia, and they say they're Swiss, but then someone said no, they're Scandinavian.

YT: They're Scandinavian, but the dough, the fried, the ones that look like bowties, they call 'em angel wings, they weren't with the rosettes, the iron, but you put it in the fryer too like that. I found that at an Italian market where I have to buy Italian sausage for the restaurant I work at. (laughs)

EH: I.. I had had... I made the Italian version, and then when I was researching it more, I discovered that every, basically every European country has a version of that.

YT: If you look, pierogis are... Chinese wonton, ravioli... so everybody had their version.

48:20

EH: Yep. The buns, pork buns, Korean pork buns.

YT: Yep. Um, wait, there are so much...

EH: Gnocchi...

YT: I mean there's so much the same stuff we have... yeah. That's why I nicknamed some of the stuff, and I just tell them... pierogis Polish, we grew up with a lot of... the cabbage rolls and during the war in Poland they didn't have that much meat, but they were rationed ducks and stuff, and I've learned how to, when you cut the duck, you ate the duck, roasted duck, and you ate the soup, it was the blood soup. Growing up they called it—it's called *czernina*, black soup, and my mother said, "it's chocolate soup, eat it." (laughs)

EH: Like blood pudding?

YT: It's blood pudding.

EH: Wow. Hmm. Yeah it's interesting how there's so much sharing.

YT: I mean like noodles.

EH: Oh yeah.

YT: Dumplings and stuff, so every, every um, nationality has its own thing.

EH: And especially, you know it's peasant food everywhere, it's, you're making do with what you have and it's cheap...

YT: The potatoes...soups...

EH: Cabbage... yeah.

YT: Yeah. So they farmed everything and then they cooked it.

EH: Yeah. A lot of cabbage in Belgian recipes in my family. (laughs)

YT: Belgian waffles.

EH: Yeah. Well, yeah.

YT: But I mean it's traditional-wise, they were happy when we learned the dance steps more, and they want us to save some of this. There wasn't so much Slavish dancing, there wasn't a Slavic organization to belong to, so that's why we dealt more with the Polish stuff. Um, and then to see more research enabled a network with other ones. I went on to the college, I almost tried getting to be a translator in the Army, which, I didn't qualify. My brother was able. He was able to be a translator and go on some trips to be a translator with the Army.

EH: Wow, that's great. For Poland—in Poland?

YT: Mmhm.

EH: Wow. And your said your neighbor who made rosettes—they were Polish?

YT: They were... she made the angel wing ones but not the rosettes with the cast iron.

EH: Okay. Uh-huh.

YT: But I knew how to make it with those.

EH: Yeah. I need to try to get my hands on one of the irons. Rosette irons.

YT: I found the irons and was like, "okay, it's almost like that," but it was easier because I couldn't tie it.

EH: Yeah, the other ones you have to cut, you like cut a slit (in the middle) and you pull it through?

YT: You pull it through.

EH: Yeah, okay. Um, yeah, that's funny because I had, you know I wrote a story about them and I said they were Italian and everyone said, "No they're this, they're this, they're this," and basically every, every country has their version of that. It's fried dough!

YT: Yeah, you can't find pizza in Italy. It's here or spaghetti.

EH: Yeah, yeah.

YT: But, it's interesting to you know, grow up and learn all this stuff and we do carry it on but it's more and more it's being immersed in a melting pot, that no one knows all this stuff.

EH: Yeah. Um, and I don't know, even though, you know, you're the youngest member of the church, it seems like there are ways that it's being transmitted to young people at special events.

YT: Yeah, there's a lot of people. Some have grandchildren, some are 3 or 4 generations in the church. There's...but they, they're gearing away from the Polish, they want to go to regular Christian churches, so we have a lot of people falling—they don't want to go with tradition.

EH: Do you think that kind of goes in waves?

YT: Because there's not that much immigrants coming now from Poland. And everything. So they don't want tradition. They're tired of tradition sometimes. Until they find out like—when the Blacks wanted Kwanzaa, or whatever it was, they wanted to learn all this stuff and learn the traditions. And I met a Native American Navajo who was... was a (Coast Guard for a month or two?) a [*unintelligible*] got a medal of honor secretly. His grandchild—"I don't want to speak... I want to be American, I don't want to know Native American," until he found out his grandfather was a medal... "tell me more, tell me more."

EH: Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes it takes going away or a moment that helps you realize this is unique and special and important.

YT: That's why when I spent 6 years in Germany, I learned European stuff. And then when I came back here, you appreciate America more.

EH: Mmhm. Yeah, totally. Yeah, I had that experience when I was in France. Before I went I was a big Francophile and now I still am but I thought, oh there's something to my own country.

YT: And I like going there and learning more. Learning different things, where everything is. And they keep everything well. They built Poland back from WWII.

EH: Right.

YT: Here we're knocking down buildings. There we're keeping them.

EH: Mmhm.

YT: And it's hard to see stuff go.

EH: Mmhm. Yeah. Definitely. Well I don't want to take up much more of the time. We're almost at an hour, but we could talk forever.

YT: Yeah. I mean, there's so much stuff, but that is, every year the Polish National Alliance gives out a coloring book to kids to promote stuff and they pick up different things and they want kids to teach it, but I give it more for educational stuff.

EH: Yeah, that's neat.

YT: And they have a website if you want more, but...

EH: Yeah I just... I got some of that just growing up...

YT: But each region has a different dance, costume and a dance to it.

EH: Mmhm.

YT: Um, but more or less, the ribbons, the beads were another thing that told you how rich you were.

EH: Um, well is there anything else you'd like to add?

YT: No. It's nice to be Polish and proud!

EH: Yeah! Yeah, well I'm glad that...

YT: They brought this out more since there were Polish folks in the 70s but it was hard to promote communism. A lot of stuff—they were hindered to do their Christianity and now it's getting more and more modernized so when you go to Poland, when I was there in '98, Greek restaurant downtown, Chinese people walking around... (laughs) so you see more Americanized, but people want these different things.

EH: Yeah. Yeah, and there was probably a moment here when it was not in fashion to be Polish, especially with communism and the war. But I'm really glad you're carrying it on. It's important.

YT: That's what the legacy was that they carried it on. It will get carried more.

EH: Yeah, I know, we need those people.

YT: Yeah. So when our national lodge disbanded maybe about 10 years ago, we're donating the stuff to the museum. We have one original member, he's 90, in his 90s.

EH: Wow. Is he still—does he have a lot of memories?

YT: Oh yeah, he'll talk.

56:01

EH: He'd be a good interview?

YT: Not much, his—he stayed in town here. His parents were the first couple to be married in the Polish church. He could tell you the whole history of Weirton, but he didn't venture out too much. His kids know a little bit of the culture. His children were not in the dance group.

EH: Mmhm. Well maybe if I come back for one of the events, I could sit with him for a little bit.

YT: Yeah, you'll find some more of those. One just passed away who was 95, but I had another one in Youngstown who just passed away. He was a POW and he was in the Polish Army.

56:43

EH: Wow. Well yeah, if you can think of any others who might be still willing to be interviewed and be able to give a good interview, let me know 'cause I'll talk to them. And I'll be here through Friday too, so...

YT: Yeah, about 2 blocks down there's an art gallery and they showing more shows. This is the first year they actually put ethnic displays up.

EH: Oh!

YT: So they had the Polish pysanky up and the palms. They had Indian stuff up, they had Greek stuff up, wood carvings. We just took the display down last week.

EH: Oh, that's cool. So is that like a rotating exhibit they're doing?

YT: They're gonna do it every year maybe.

EH: That's great. I should try to get in touch with them.

YT: Top of West Virginia.

EH: Top of West Virginia? Okay. I'll look it up.

YT: They have part of that, but they called, "Oh yeah, just tell me what you want."

EH: (laughs) That's awesome! Well thank you very much!

YT: I hope it's helpful, I mean...

EH: Oh yeah, it's really great and also we're trying to build programming so in future years, you know, we could do an exhibit or maybe we'll have a festival, or I was telling Andrea (who works at the Weirton Museum) we're trying to start a master/apprentice program that would be a master artist so someone like you who does palm and eggs and dancing could have you know, a younger apprentice, or even someone your age, to teach them and make sure it passes on and all the pairs will get a stipend for a year-long apprenticeship.

YT: Yeah. I thought I brought the one out with the costume but I didn't.

EH: Can I keep this?

YT: Yeah, that's the display...

EH: Oh great.

YT: See this is my old phone and it goes out so fast. I took pictures of the other stuff there. Let me see if I can get back to it. (shuffling of papers)

Yeah, this is the Easter basket this year. The different stuff on it.

EH: Oh cool.



YT: That was some of the stuff I did.

EH: Cool.

YT: Easter, Easter, Easter... after that. Okay, that was the first of Easter. Easter was at the end. (pages turning)

59:23

Actually well I didn't teach the kids. I babysit kids. (pages turning) Yeah this is the Festival of Nations advertisement, but they do it the 3<sup>rd</sup> week.

EH: 3<sup>rd</sup> week of March?

YT: Yep. This is the Guadeloupe paintings they did. And then this is the Japanese and this is India... and this is the Greek carvings.

EH: Is that from local people?

YT: Yeah, local people.

EH: Okay. Even Indian and Japanese?

YT: I got a picture of Ted's, Ted's wood carvings. He took 'em down.

EH: Sorry are we... we're getting ready to go (to Pam Makricosta/museum worker).

PM: We're getting locked up.

EH: Okay, sorry. I have a release form so we can use the interview, and...

YT: This is from the college record. It's '65, but I have the record at home.

EH: What time is it anyway?

YT: It's like 4:30. Does she want to interview you too? (to Pam)

EH: I do, but maybe we can... yeah... we should maybe schedule another time. I'm supposed to meet some folks at 6 in Wheeling.

PM: I have a writer's meeting at 5:30.

EH: Oh, that's right.

YT: I have... somebody called me from The Northern. They have somebody from Philly who wants to talk to people.

PM: Well that's great.

YT: So I gotta do that Wednesday.

PM: But when would you be back?

EH: Well, I will be here through Friday and right now my Thursday—I could do, let's see...

PM: Who do you have?

EH: I could do Wednesday afternoon?

PM: Okay.

EH: Anytime between 3 and 6?

PM: On Wednesday 3-6? I'll be working at the library.

YT: Yeah, I thought I was gonna do it down at the library too.

EH: So would that interfere with your library work or...?

PM: Probably not.

EH: Okay!

1:01:27

END OF TAPE