

Biography of World War II Ukrainian Immigrant by Don Urbansky

I Background of World War II years

My father was Director of a Ukrainian Theatrical Troupe. My mother was an actress. On September 1, 1939, war began between Nazis and the Russian Red Army. On June 27, 1941, my mother admitted herself to a maternity hospital for my world arrival. The Russian Red Communist Army was hunting down all males to join the fight. My father had a bad intuition of war rage and took my mother from the hospital. One hour after departing the hospital, the hospital was flatly bombed by the Nazis. My mother delivered me by midwife.

My half-sister and parents and myself, as an infant, were then on the run. My father regrouped the entire theatrical troupe and immediately all of us got captured by the Nazi army and placed on a westbound train. My father convinced the German officers that the theatrical troupe could entertain soldiers and build morale while on the westbound train. The German officers were pleased by performances and eased restrictions on us. By happenstance, my father found a discarded tin cup. At each train stop my father sought out dairy farmers and pleaded for milk for me. As fortune would have it, all of us escaped the train in Austria and ended up in West Germany via Switzerland.

II Growth years at German Camp

We lived in a German refugee camp, sharing a 20' by 30' room with two other strange families separated by bed sheets. Silence and cooperation were imperative or our family would get relocated. WWII ended on September 2, 1945,

My sister and I went to German schools and spoke Ukrainian at camp. While I was playing outside with a stray dog near the street in the U.S. military jeep ran over the dog. The soldier stopped and tried to console me but to no avail. I had tears, and, of course, I did not understand the English language. The soldier pulled out a Hershey chocolate bar and nodded his head several times repeating "Yes"??? At age 5 I learned my first American word, "Yes" and tasted my first chocolate. At age 6 I experienced another first - my first fruit in life - an orange. It took me a long time to eat it as I caressed it and admired it. What a joy!

III U.S. Immigration

On October 20, 1948, we emigrated to the USA. While experiencing three weeks of rough seas, cold stormy weather, illness was rampant. A US sponsor who was responsible for our immigration took us in for three months.

My mother found factory work and my father worked two menial jobs. None of us had English language skills. Our focus was survival for basic needs. My sister, who was six years older,

and I went to Ukrainian Catholic schools run by the nuns of Cleveland, Ohio near Lincoln Park. At the Lincoln Park playground, American kids called us immigrants “DP’s” (Displaced Persons). This was very hurtful name calling for us.

Thankfully the nuns were sensitive to our feelings and pain. Every Saturday we had English class. Not only did we learn English, but we had to learn how to speak clearly. The nuns provided us with marbles for our mouths and forced us to speak and enunciate properly to rid our foreign accents. It worked – Yeah!

In 1954, we obtained our US Citizenship and moved to the suburbs and became a typical Ukrainian/American family.,