

NPS-84

WALTER DUTKA

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THE UKRAINE VIA GERMANY, 1949

AGE 36

NASH: Today is February 20, 1975. I am speaking with Mr. Walter Dutka, who came to the united States from the Ukraine in the year 1949 at the age of thirty-six. Mr. Dutka, what town were you born in and what was it like?

DUTKA: (?) in the Ukrainian by (?) and (?). I left home August 27, 1939 as sergeant to the Polish Army is war with Germany. I was (?) war in 1939 and I was in war prison camp, Stalag 13A, Nuremburg, Germany, fourteen months, then released to Germany working (?) and I was working, I think, until 1942 where I was arrested by the Gestapo and (?) until

30 months.

NASH: Why did the Gestapo arrest you?

DUTKA: A political agent. The reason is I was sick that time day before they arrest me and I didn't come into work and the meister was asking me why I don't come to work. I told them I was sick and he slapped me. I was very angry that he slapped me and I screamed for the Hitler and I told Hitler is so and so, and he called Gestapo four o'clock afternoon on November 2nd, 1942, coming Gestapo and I (?) put in jail. I was in jail I think for five months until March, 1943 when they send me to (?) and I was sent to (?) until May, 1945.

NASH: Surviving must have been very difficult.

DUTKA: And really difficult making freedom, to save freedom for everybody. Nothing is dearest than freedom.

NASH: How do you think you survived? How do you think you were able to come out alive?

DUTKA: I think of God. No, I don't think so, I am sure. God to save, yes.

NASH: Do you remember the day that you were liberated?

DUTKA: Mat 5, 1945 and the United States Army coming (?), yes.  
Well, we were free, we were free.

NASH: Where did they take you, where did you go?

DUTKA: Nowhere, we were free. They wouldn't take nowhere because we were free. I was start working for the United States Army as civilian working. That was I think the 24th Infantry Division in Mauthausen, Austria. There was a concentration camp in Mauthausen, Austria, and I start working in the United States Army until April 28, 1946.

NASH: What did you do for the Army?

DUTKA: Just working, you know, helping, yes.

NASH: And what happened in 1946?

DUTKA: I went working to Germany in the railroad station in Munich.  
Yes, I no want to stay by (?) camp that I want to

work for myself and I went to Germany and work in the railroad station.

NASH: How did it happen that you eventually came to the United States?

DUTKA: I have an uncle in Boston, Massachusetts and he make for me paper, all the paper, I did coming into the United States.

NASH: Why did you decide that you wanted to come to the United States?

DUTKA: Well, like I mentioned before, nothing is dearest than freedom in the world, and I found freedom in the United States. I think (?) keep and safe.

NASH: What did you hear about the United States before you came that made you want to come?

DUTKA: Many people talking, many people say about the United States how powerful and beautiful it is in this country. And I think I did (?).

NASH: So you wrote your uncle. How long has your uncle been here?

DUTKA: Oh, I think he was from 1900 or 1900-something like this in Boston, Mass.

NASH: How long did it take you until you were actually able to complete all the arrangements for the visa?

DUTKA: Not too long. I think so, he know some people, you know, and they help him do that.

NASH: How did you come here?

DUTKA: By boat.

NASH: What were your feelings when you left Europe?

DUTKA: Well, there was nothing to feel since I left. You know, I was glad (?) concentration camp.

NASH: What was the name of the boat?

DUTKA: The General Atinger, Army boat.

NASH: Do you remember anything about the trip?

DUTKA: Not too much, just I was alright. I never was seasick. I never was.

NASH: Did you speak any English?

DUTKA: At the time (?) no much.

NASH: How did you learn?

DUTKA: I was by the United States Army working over a year.

NASH: What were your impressions of the Americans that you worked for at the time?

DUTKA: Well, I was--I will tell you all the story about the United States Army coming to camp to liberate me at that time, and I went outside the door in that camp, concentration camp, and sit under steps. I was 72 pounds, 36 kilo, at that time, and some American soldier asked me if I am hungry. I said I think I am. He brought me in the

kitchen. He put so much food on the table.

NASH: You got sick?

DUTKA: No, I didn't eat. I just drank chocolate milk and two slices of white bread. That's all. And he said, "Why don't you eat?" I said, "You want me to drop dead."

NASH: What?

DUTKA: He said, "Why don't you eat?" I said, "You want me to drop dead. I don't want to eat too much."

NASH: You knew that if you ate too much that you would get sick.

DUTKA: Oh sure, oh yes.

NASH: I understand that a lot of people got sick because they ate, I don't know.

DUTKA: And lots of people get dead from that. And I slowly, you know, I get to that point and kept to myself, yes.

NASH: So you were coming to the United States. Do you remember  
the day that you arrived?

DUTKA: May 15, 1949.

NASH: What was it like?

DUTKA: That was Sunday afternoon, I think so.

NASH: Did you arrive in New York?

DUTKA: No, to Boston, Massachusetts, Boston, and I went to (?)  
Mass.

NASH: Was your brother waiting for you when you got off the boat?

DUTKA: Yes, they were waiting for me.

NASH: And what was that like. This was the first time you had  
ever seen your uncle, right?

DUTKA: No, no. First time I was with him. Yes, was first time.

NASH: And you could just go to his house? You didn't have to go to any immigration officials or anything like that?

DUTKA: Oh, yes i did, yes, I have to make (?) all the paper, you know, social security and like this.

NASH: So before you went to his home you actually were interviewed by immigration officials?

DUTKA: No, no, just immigration let me go to my uncle and yes.

NASH: So what was the first month like that you were here? What were your first impressions of the United States or Boston?

DUTKA: I just get job. I just get job in a few days, you know, and I go to work. That's all.

NASH: How did you find a job?

DUTKA: They found for me, my uncle.

NASH: What was your first job?

DUTKA: I think trunk factory, making suitcases.

NASH: Hah you had an occupation?

DUTKA: Electrician, chandelier, candelabras, (?), all the time electrician like this.

NASH: That was in Europe?

DUTKA: Yes.

NASH: Were you eventually able to use that in the United States?

DUTKA: Yes, I could. I could use anytime and beautiful lamps too.

NASH: What was the hardest thing about getting used to the United States?

DUTKA: I don't know. For me it was not too hard to come here to the United States. No, that was not too hard for me coming. I just coming, (?). is job to get.

NASH: There was nothing that you found hard to adjust to in the

way of life?

DUTKA: No, no.

NASH: Was there anything that was very familiar to you that reminded you of the places that you had been, the people?

DUTKA: No, no. I just was, naturally very frightening.

NASH: How did you eventually come to New York City?

DUTKA: That was big problem, no problem, natural problem. I have another uncle in (?) which had died already. I took job in (?) northern Connecticut in 1950, and I was (?), and manager of (?), he cut my pay off.

NASH: Your what?

DUTKA: Cut my pay.

NASH: Oh, your pay.

DUTKA: My pay. And I don't like that. I was working from six o'clock morning to three o'clock afternoon, and I don't like that. And he

said to me, "I am boss. You have nothing to say." And I say, "I leave you boss, I leave your job." And so I went to Elizabeth, New Jersey to industry of (?) to main office, which one took care of the (?), and I went over to the main office and they gave me a job. I went on Tuesday, I think, and one day I go to work in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

NASH: How did you know to go to Elizabeth, New Jersey?

DUTKA: Yes, I know, but they come many time over to (?) America and interview me and talk to me and like this and I was not, (?) in Elizabeth, New Jersey. And I get the job in a few days. And that job was too hard for me. I can't work and I have to leave. I think I have at the time already heart condition and I can't work picking up heavy, you know, suitcases and (?), and I went to (?) restaurant working, you know, on Elizabeth Avenue, it was Elizabeth, New Jersey. And they were satisfied with me. Then I went over to New York to pick out a job and found an apartment. I think that was 1954 or 1956. 1954, I think so.

NASH: Did you go to a Ukrainian neighborhood?

DUTKA: No. Oh, yes, I did. Oh, sure, I lived on 74th Street with

Czechoslovakia people, yes. They were very good people to me. I never have a trouble a day I come here to the United States, with nobody, except now I have a little bit with my landlord.

NASH: With who?

DUTKA: With my landlord. Yes, he overcharged me rent. That is all.

NASH: Did you ever get married?

DUTKA: No, no. I have no time to get married.

NASH: Well, what keeps you so busy now?

DUTKA: I just have my hobby, to make churches. Yes, many churches, which I like to do that.

NASH: Could you describe the hobby a little bit?

DUTKA: Yes, how can I describe it. I just like to have it. Oh, sure they are fine. On September, on 1971, when I coming

from convalescent home, (?), and I started making miniature church, which I like to do.

NASH: You make model churches in other words? Russian Orthodox?

DUTKA: Ukrainian. Ukrainian Catholic. Then I was dreaming at that time that I was (?) elevator the highest buildings I have ever seen in my eyes. Elevator stop it, I sit on the railroad car in the roof and the railroad car was just (?), just wrong. Railroad car stop, I get off, pick up small box like matches box, something like this, and hold it in my left hand, and from that box come a church with three domes. And I started making these churches.

NASH: Let me ask you, when you did live in Ukraine, which you said was occupied by the Austrians when you lived there, were you religious?

DUTKA: Yes, always I am religious, yes.

NASH: How often--what is there about the service, the Ukrainian Orthodox service, what is the thing that you enjoy the most?

DUTKA: We have a very old history of our country. The reason is our country is very rich. It is (?) to support and supply bread and butter and oil and everything. After Austria left, then Russia occupied our country, and that part where I was born, yes. Like I mentioned before, I went to the Polish Army on August 27, 1939, and I was (?) Polish Army against (?) the German Army. Then I was war prison camp fourteen months and thirty months in concentration camp, (?).

NASH: Was it hard to practice your religion when you came to this country? Wherever you went were there always Ukrainian Orthodox churches?

DUTKA: Never is hard to nobody to practice religion if anybody or everybody loves to be with God. It is no hard time to practice any religion. Main thing, ten commandments. I respect highly Jewish people, yes I do, religion and power of their religion. Same power of our religion or any religion. Yes, I very respect and highly Oral Roberts, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Maybe you know about him, yes. He is powerful man with God.

NASH: Why do you think you got so interested in building these churches. these model churches?

DUTKA: Just happy. I just love, that's all. I did make before beautiful lamps, candelabras, (?), floor lamps, chandelier, crystal, glasses. Very expensive and very beautifully.

NASH: Have you ever actually built a house?

DUTKA: No, I don't want to build a house. I don't need a house, but I have in my apartment room to live. I am always (?) this way, poor and proud (?).

NASH: What happens to the models that you build? Where are they all now?

DUTKA: One is (?) in church, one is in Memorial Hospital on 68th Street and Dorta Avenue, one is in White Plains, New York, one is here in (?), and one is on Lexington Avenue by some people which they are moving someplace to New York State, young lady. She have one, yes. And I like to do that and my hobby.

NASH: I know that your church was exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. Did you have--

DUTKA: Four months.

NASH: Yes, four months. Did you have the responses? Did many Ukrainian people get a chance to see it there?

DUTKA: Oh, yes. They went always. Many people went always to see them and I was in Ukrainian newspaper too. That was in Times and News and many magazines too, yes.

NASH: And what are your plans? Are you going to build bigger models? Does it change your plans?

DUTKA: If anybody asks me to build a big church, cathedral, I could do, yes I could do.

NASH: You build strictly Ukrainian Orthodox churches, right? Would you build, for example, a Russian Orthodox church?

DUTKA: No, it is just I build the same kind that my father was architect and he build a church, yes. And I copy sometime (?) from his in my mind that I remember.

NASH: Tell me something about your father. He was an architect in

the Ukraine and he built many churches?

DUTKA: How many he built, I don't know. He went to Austrian Army on July 1914 and he was killed in first front, they told me. Like this, in first front in the war, First World War. I don't remember.

NASH: But before he went, was he well-known as an architect?

DUTKA: Yes, he was well-known. He was (?) I don't know him, but I was not born when he (?).

NASH: What was his name?

DUTKA: Hattie, yes.

NASH: So your family stayed in the Ukraine and then you were put  
in the Army?

DUTKA: In the Russian Army, (?) our country.

NASH: Do you still have relatives there? Were you ever in contact with them?

DUTKA: Before I would write to them and sometimes I did send them some gift from here. When I went sick with my heart condition, this was hard for me to help them.

NASH: Well, I guess you are glad you came to the United States.

DUTKA: I think I am too.

NASH: Is there anything you would like to say about being an immigrant in the United States/ What kind of an experience is that?

DUTKA: I don't think it takes an experience to immigrate. The main thing to me is (?) is to have somebody to sponsor for our (?) and to give them or her or him a job and to be in connection with the Immigration Office, of course. Legal, have to be legal.

NASH: Did you ever become a citizen?

DUTKA: Yes, I am.

NASH: What made you decide to become a citizen?

DUTKA: It is making to be a citizen I swear to the holy God and the  
Constitution obey the law and protect our country.  
I think so, I did. And I stayed (?). If possible could  
happen anything to me, my own personality, that I can help.

NASH: I wondered why you hadn't become, for example, a permanent  
resident, just stayed a permanent--you didn't have to become a citizen,  
right, but you chose to become a citizen.

DUTKA: Yes, I did.

NASH: I wondered what made you choose that?

DUTKA: It is hard to explain. To be a citizen in the United States  
is great and probably to be with (?) with that  
government and work for that government and to help. My  
idea, my power, my idea is study. Right?

NASH: Right. Okay, is there anything else that you would like to  
say?

DUTKA: Well, ask me. I always answer your question.