

Interview with Ernest Kalnoky & Ilona Kozmon at Hungarian Cultural Museum (Euclid Square Mall).

Mark Tebeau interviewing, David Levin recording.

Mark Tebeau: (faintly) so, just for the record, what's your name?

Ernest Kalnoky(?): My name is Earnest Kalnoky(?) You know, I'm a retired mechanical engineer. I used to work for Trans American Corporation for years. Since my retirement, I've just been spending time... I had a very unfortunate summer vacation trip in Europe, and I got a heart attack. Now this one have an after affect, you know- my brain doesn't work the way it's supposed to (laughs).

MT: Well, we're here at the Hungarian Cultural Museum at the Euclid Mall, and you're reading a Hungarian newspaper. Do you come hear often to read Hungarian Newspapers?

EK: Hungarian newspapers? Yeah. There is one—by the way, they call these things “sabachag?”—you know, that's one newspaper—I used to read those things, of course... so you get information in Hungarian. Usually the subject is from the old country, so you know, they are mainly interested in those things. What's happening over here, I can see that being in our papers, you know, and the radio and television and so forth. But what's happening abroad, in the old country, these Hungarian papers are very good. They give you a general idea, you know, what's going on.

MT: You're from Cleveland originally...?

EK: Yeah, I live here.

MT: Were you born here?

EK: No, I was born in Hungary.

MT: When did you come to Cleveland?

EK: Oh, 1950.

MT: What brought you here?

EK: Well, I'll tell you one thing—(laughs), its history—central Europe was dominated by the Russians, you know, the Communists. And that forced me out, you know... so put it this way; it forced me to get out from this... atmosphere. I used to live in Austria for a while, and I migrated from Austria to over here in 1950. ...So I spent my time over here until my retirement.

MT: When you arrived, where did you live? Did you come right to Cleveland?

EK: Yeah, I came right to Cleveland.

MT: Why Cleveland?

EK: Well, Cleveland, by the way, is one city with a large Hungarian population. That thing, you know, it was a base... so you feel a little more comfortable. You know, you are not that kind of a stranger. And that's...

MT: Do you remember where you first settled when you moved to Cleveland?

EK: My first home was in the Buckeye area. That was, by the way, the famous Hungarian settlement. I used to live on Buckingham Ave. Now I live over here, up on the hill.

MT: Where is the hill?

EK: Over here; Euclid.

MT: Why did you move out to Euclid?

EK: Well, I tell you one thing, that area – by the way, you know that special Buckeye area – it was a mixture. This one is very nice... we call the area where we live (asks wife, what is the name?) Indian Hills. Like I told you, it's very depressing to me. [referring to memory?] ... I'm ancient, and so after that heart attack these are those kind of symptoms....

MT: So now you live out in Indian Hills?

EK: Indian Hills. Oh, yeah- there are Hungarian people over there.

Ilona Kozmon: (quietly) Hungarians are scattered now. They left Lorain, they left also Buckeye area, so they are scattered all over. You won't have now a point where you can say, "I will go to live there because there are many Hungarians"

EK: Well, the buckeye area, one thing I can tell you is that is a Hungarian populated area over there. They used to have churches, schools, things like that. But when the black people moved in, so this thing automatically started to dissolve and things like that, you know. That was one of the reasons we moved out and I find this place. I don't know if you're familiar with the area over here where we live—it's a very nice neighborhood. It's very, very nice. It's up on the hill.

MT: Is it very far from this mall?

EK: Oh, no- it's about 10 minutes.

MT: So it's an easy trip for you to go over to the museum,.

EK: Yeah, this one is not that far.

MT: (to W) Do you live nearby too?

Elana: May I tell you also, there is a book , probably we could find it here, that one lady who was going to Cleveland State... she wrote the book all about the Hungarians; how they came here, and where they were located and so forth. And I came here in 1951, it was quite a long time ago (laughs)...

MT: Now, why did you come?

Ilona: Why I came... I tell you why I came; because we came out of Hungary, and we did not want to go back to the Communist rule, so we had no other choice; we were living in a DP? Camp, and we have a chance to go maybe to Australia, or to South America, or anywhere, and we were asking our agencies through agencies how we could get and where... And I came, for instance, with my husband, with a Catholic agency. They were looking for people who gave assurances [insurances?], and so this is how I got an assurance... the Hungarian lady who wrote up the papers I have here everything; Job, and also a house where I can live in, but naturally this was very much only a formality... not quite so, because I have arrived and there wasn't anything like that. She said, "well, my house is full with other people", and couldn't give even a place for us anymore. But you know how... one is helping with the others, and so the people, the Hungarian people who were here for a long time, they started to help—they were calling telephone; "where is a job, where could you find a job?" And they were helping us. This is how we got along.

MT: Now, do you remember what your first job was?

Ilona: Oh, yes, yes; I remember my first job... I started in an office. Because the head of the office, who owned the office, he was originally from Hungary... But he came maybe 30, 40 years ago... and when he heard about these people who were coming out of Europe and they were looking for existence; so I was able to get in, I talked to him and he said, "all right, I'll give you a chance" because he told me, "don't forget, in America, everybody-is-have-a-chance" [emphasis on each word]. And this is how I got there... I was working in the office and naturally, I had to learn a lot... (laughs), I had to learn the language; I was not able to tell what is a freight bill and what is the other bill, and this and that... but you know how is that... I had to pick it up. And this was my first job. Unfortunately, this was during the Korean War, and they were working for the Army... when the war was over, also the job. No more job. So then after I had to look all around, but at that time I spoke better English already, and I used to work for Hadley Brothers [?] retail, and I was working there for years and years in the traffic office.

MT: Now your husband- Did you live in the Buckeye area as well?

Ilona: No, I did not. I was living in the west side. But there was also many Hungarian people in the west side, in the Lorain area, up from west 25th street... for instance, there were lots of Hungarian books in the library there, and lots of people. For instance, in that street where I used to live, there were maybe 4 or 5 families who were living there too.

MT: Now, your husband took a job in a factory?

Ilona: Yes, he came out... it was hard for him, too, but he started to work in a factory. He was really doing some draftsmanship over there in Europe, so he started to get a job as a draftsman. This is how he was taken as a draftsman. Later on he went in the evening to Fenner (?) College, which is your school now, and he became an electrical engineer. And he had to go to the Army also because he was that age, and you can imagine, he was not even a citizen... but had to go to the army to serve two years. But, during that time, he has received his citizenship, so he became a citizen sooner than I did.

MT: ...do you work here at the Heritage museum?

Ilona: We are volunteers... nobody gets any pay here.

MT: Do you recall when the museum moved out here to the Euclid Square mall?

Ilona: Yes, yes...was that about two years ago, when we moved?

MT: Where did you move from?

Ilona: Richmond (?) Mall. We moved here because they wanted to have space for... I don't know who, really... so we had to move out. We were quite upset; where will we go, what shall we do? And Mr. Friedrich, who was very much the soul of this whole thing... we came here.

MT: How many people visit the museum when it's open? Do you have many visitors?

EK: Oh, yeah- we have always visitors. It's not a crowd, you know, but always they are... from all over the city, and from abroad. From these neighboring, I don't know, Youngstown, Akron, things like that... not nearly Hungarians, but even American born people- they are interested, and you know, it's an ethnic place... they are interested. They are many visitors.

Ilona: Some people are browsing on the internet... and so they say "there is a Hungarian museum. We didn't even know", and so when they come to visit somebody here, they

come to the museum. And lots of American people too, are having Hungarian ancestry. They are coming... they have brought maybe a birth certificate from grandma or great grandma, and if they could show it on the map, maybe where this place is where she was born... or something like that. People are interested.

EK: I made myself a translation, you know- they used to have old papers, Hungarian, and I translated them... "this is the place where you came from". We were doing these kind of free... we weren't getting paid. It was this kind of public relationship... you meet many interesting people.

MT: It's my first visit here, and what prompted our visit... (explains project)... do you remember the last time you went to the cultural gardens?

Ilona: When did we go? It was...

EK: Being over there? No. not recently.

Ilona: Not recently, but we were reading in the paper about damages over there, and maybe one is afraid to go, I don't know.

MT: Did you ever go when you first arrived?

Ilona: Yes, oh, yes! Yes... at that time we were really surprised because we thought that this cultural garden... that each nationality was having its own garden, that was something different, and we were very enthusiastic. And also, we were quite satisfied how the Hungarian garden was managed, and so...

MT: Do you remember the occasion of your first visit to the cultural garden?

Ilona: We just went... we heard from the other people that there was a cultural garden and we should see. This is actually how we got there first.

EK: This whole area is, by the way, different nationalities. Each one has his own proportion of the garden. But it was very impressive, I think it's a very... I don't know, these guys who created the cultural garden, it was a very good idea. Very very nice.

DL: On your first visit to the garden, do you remember what you were doing there? What brought you there?

Ilona: Yes, we walked through, and also we were surprised that also the nationalities; each one was having a garden... I don't know how you remember, or maybe you are very

young... ??? Mincente(?) was here visiting the Hungarians, and that was... in what year? Also, he went out, and there was a little commemoration...

MT: Do you recall the iron work at the gardens?

Ilona: Oh, yes. The gate, yes.

MT: What does that call to your memory, or what does that make you feel?

EK: I tell you one thing, if you are going around a little bit, here, you can see that thing, the decoration what the Hungarians they are using. This one is made in Iron, it reflects the style, what the Hungarian decoration... and that one over there [at the museum], looks very good. Unfortunately, there are always barbaric intruders, they do lots of damage and things like that, but so far, it's still over there [at the gardens]. They can not drag it away. This one is the entrance over here [wooden gate at museum]... that one over at the cultural garden is made out of iron, but this kind of a gate is something typical of rural Hungary. The rural area of Hungary.

MT: Did the iron gate remind you of anything (to W)

Ilona: Oh, I loved that iron gate, and there are in Hungary also from the old time, gates... and also maybe for richer aristocrats, they were having iron gates before they were castles, and so... it's very impressive.

MT: One final question, do you remember when you moved to the suburbs?

Ilona: Yes, I tell you when we moved to the suburbs... first we were living in the west side, and then after... let's see... 1966. Why did we move? Because my husband used to work for Reliance electric, which is on the east side, and so it was too much. He used to come to them in the car, and by the time he got home in the evening, especially if there was a sporting event there... and we had the children, and they didn't see much of daddy. So we decided to move over here... to Cleveland heights.