

Interview with Joe Bazo

Hungarians in Valley Grove, Triadelphia

Joe Bazo: We got the name Bazo because they couldn't pronounce Bajo or they didn't know how to write it or something. I think when, when he said, dad said, "My name is Steven Bajo," they wrote, they wrote it down B-A-Z-O. So you're stuck with it. I mean Governor's Island, I think, was the, was the official credentials.

Carrie Nobel Kline: But how did it get Wheeling?

(005) JB: He came to Wheeling from, I think -- Oh, gee, I don't, I really don't know. Round about way, I think, through some Pennsylvania towns and then -- Much as I know is he came from New Castle, Pennsylvania.

CNK: But was he a coal miner?

JB: Oh yes, coal miner. Of course New Castle, Pennsylvania, was famous for coal.

CNK: Coal.

JB: Yeah. And how he got down into Triadelphia, I think, was probably through the Hungarian grapevine, you know, that maybe the wages were better down there, the working conditions or something or other.

CNK: So you were talking about Valley Camp Coal.

JB: Uh huh.

CNK: How everybody in Triadelphia worked --

(013) JB: Ninety-nine percent, yeah. They owed their soul to the Valley Camp Coal Company, yeah.

CNK: Was, was Valley --

Michael Nobel Kline: What do, what do you mean by that?

JB: Well, they lived in the Valley Camp Coal Company's houses, and you had to buy all their food et cetera from Valley Camp Coal Company. And they were paid in script money, the ... So in other words, you couldn't use it anywhere except the Valley Camp Coal

Company.

MNK: Script money?

(018) JB: Well, it would be like coins that would be different than our monetary coins. So for exchange at the company's, the stores, that's, that's what you used for money. But you couldn't use it anywhere else.

MNK: So it was money that was issued by the company?

JB: Yeah, yeah.

CNK: Was there a store then?

JB: Oh yes, there was store. As a matter of fact, the store is still there, the building and all. Right now, I think there's a, there's a appliance store in there now. I think it had many varieties of stores.

CNK: Well, tell us what the old company store was like.

(026) JB: Well, it was a general store, and I mean they sold everything from soup to nuts. Clothing, and all, all the coal miners' equipment that they needed in the mine had to come from there. And just things like that.

CNK: Would you go in there?

JB: Oh, yes. Oh yeah, oh yeah. I made many errands up to the store. And of course the famous Valley Camp Coal Company every Christmas would have, would give every, every child a bag of candy. And that was a bag of hardtack candy that -- In a way we kind of looked forward to it, you know. It was probably a nickel bag of candy that Valley Camp spent on Christmas. That was it.

MNK: What -- Tell me about the Hungarian community there in, in

(039) JB: Well, we weren't a community. I mean we were spread out over Triadelphia, Elm Grove, Valley Grove, but we weren't really a community. Other than that, I, I don't know too much.

MNK: Did these families know each other?

(042) JB: Oh, of course, of course yeah.

MNK: ... community.

JB: Well, yeah, they did, they did a lot of, of associating together, yeah. Oh, yeah, I can

remember that. Well, for an instance, when it came time to, say like wallpaper in your house, and then most of the, most of the gals, you know, would come and then make it a day. That's the way things got done. We looked forward to those because there was always bread, cakes, pies, you name it. It was kind of like a picnic.

MNK: A little music sometime?

(050) JB: No, no. It was -- All the gals would come, and I think it was more or less to catch up on local gossip. So they would gather.

CNK: So who would be hanging the paper?

JB: Well, all, every -- All the gals pitched in. And I, and I -- Sometimes I got the job of cutting the, trimming the edge. Back in those days you had to trim the edge. So that was usually, usually the children's end of it.

MNK: Where did your parents meet?

(057) JB: I have no idea, no idea. I, I think it, I think it was in New Castle. That's most -- That was really the only town that I associate with my parents outside of Triadelphia.

MNK: So -- But they were both immigrants then?

JB: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, they both got their citizen or, yeah their citizenship in, in Triadelphia, from Triadelphia, yeah.

MNK: Would you guess that they met in, in Europe?

(063) JB: I don't think so. I don't think so. Gee, I don't know. They never said. They never told me or we never asked. But I think it was probably New Castle.

MNK: So you -- They came to Wheeling as an established family?

JB: No, dad came alone. My mother, how she came here, I don't know. Whether she came with her parents or whether she came alone, I don't know.

MNK: But they got together here?

(070) JB: Yeah, here in the United States, yeah. I don't think it was at Governor's Island. So -- But I know dad came alone.

CNK: Were you living in a coal camp?

JB: No, we weren't, no. Dad had his own house so he sort of bought a one, I guess it was probably a two room house at the time. A few acres of ground, and then he kept

adding onto it until that's, you know, he got a couple of bedrooms and just kept adding to it. But no, we never lived in the company house. But a lot of the coal miners did.

CNK: What were those home like? Did you ever have friends live there, you go visit them?

(079) JB: Oh yes, yeah, yeah. They visit back and forth so -- The houses -- I think there's still a few standing out in Triadelphia. Yup, there is, by gosh, at Middle Creek. There's still a few standing. They were row houses, single, single story. Usually five rooms.

MNK: Board construction?

JB: Yeah, yeah, all board.

MNK: What was it like in the house you grew up in? What was the -- Was there anything distinctively Hungarian about your household?

(087) JB: No, nothing there other than perhaps the cooking would be the only thing.

CNK: What kind of cooking?

JB: Hungarian.

CNK: What does that mean?

JB: Well, our, our chicken is different, and our cabbage is different. And, I mean the method of cooking. Or not the method of cooking, but the way it's cooked.

CNK: You long for that?

JB: Yes, sometimes I -- Yeah, yeah I wished I had this, and I wished I had that. If I can just get my sister -- She still knows the recipes. If I can just get her on the ball, she give up cooking a long time ago, but I can't get her. But she still -- My sister still makes the, for Christmas and gives everyone the, the nut rolls. She -- Well, she don't gather, but she used to. But gets walnuts and then grinds them and makes the nut rolls, which, with a lot of poppy seed. That, that was a feature in Hungarian cooking, was poppy seed.

CNK: I was trying to imagine those, those wide noodles and stews, is that --

(102) JB: Wide noodles, stews -- Yeah, there's, there's a dish, it turns out to be like a noodle, but actually it's made out of ground potatoes. And it's, it's -- I don't know what she added to it, but to cook that was to make little pieces and drop it in hot water and then that would cook. And then with that was added to, was sour cabbage. Very, very good. I, I can't describe the taste, but --

CNK: Sour cabbage. Sort of like sauerkraut?

(110)

JB: Well, yeah, but it was, it was more or less sweet and sour. It was fresh cabbage not sauerkraut. It was cut up in little pieces and of course, I think, blanched and mixed with her own special marinate, and then put on top of that. It was very good. I have an idea very economical made dish back in those days.

MNK: Did the Hungarians have their own church?

JB: No, no. No, there weren't that many in, in their community. Far as I know, I don't know -- Of course I think 90 percent Hungarians are Catholic. I'm sure of that.

MNK: So they would have attended other, other Catholic churches?

(120)

JB: Oh, yeah, yeah.

CNK: I wonder how many families there would have been when it was sort of in its prime?

JB: Probably 20, 30, yeah. At least that many. Of what's left, I, I think very few left in Triadelphia area.

MNK: Were there any other social functions that drew them together? Did they ever do dancing or --

JB: Well, at, at their annual picnic. That's the only thing I remember the dancing. Of course weddings, you know, naturally dancing at the weddings. And then of course the Hungarian music, which was primarily a fiddle. And --

MNK: Were there local people who played?

(130)

JB: Oh, yes, yeah, yeah. I -- As far as I -- I don't know of any -- Back in those days, I don't know of any roving Hungarian band or orchestra that would -- This was all local people.

CNK: ...

MNK: ... remember --

JB: My dad played the fiddle, you know. What's that?

(134)

MNK: Were there others?

JB: You mean that played instruments? Oh, yeah, usually there's -- It was enough in the Hungarian community that made up an orchestra.

MNK: Tell me who some of them were.

JB: Oh, gee, I wouldn't remember names. No, no way.

CNK: What do you remember about your dad's playing, though?

(137) JB: Oh, yes, yeah, yeah.

CNK: Would he play at home?

JB: Oh, yes. I mean he practiced at home, didn't do a whole lot of playing. And then -- Of course he just played by ear. I tried to pick it up. I just couldn't get the fiddle.

MNK: Were there any recordings ever made of him?

(142) JB: Oh, no, no. No, we're talking back in the '40s. I mean very early '40s, '30s. We're talking like between '35 and '40, that's what we're talking between. That's my -- Anything earlier than that, I was too young. Anything over '40, I was -- I kind of separated from the family, didn't separate from them but went to, went to the war. And then by the time you got back, you know, then we went on our own ways. But the years were when I was like from five until ten, let's put it that way. Anything over that -

MNK: Tell us about the annual picnic. Where was it and who came?

(151) JB: Well, yeah. I just like -- Say names, I don't know. If they were -- Only names I do remember would be first names. I don't know last names. And it was, it was a big picnic. And not only the Hungarians would come, I'm sure some Polish people and, and Ukrainians and the Slovaks and --

CNK: Where would they have it?

(156) JB: It was up in, up in -- I guess it would be Valley Grove, yeah. You know where the utility store is up there? They sell pipe and water supplies and all that kind of stuff.

MNK: Kind of.

JB: Yeah. It was called National Road, National Road Utility. Used to be a vacant area there. There was picnic benches, and there was a shelter. And so that's where they have it every year.

CNK: Would you --

MNK: It's right along the National Road?

JB: Yeah, right along National Road.

CNK: Would you look forward ... as a kid? What kind of preparations would be made?

(164) JB: Gee, I don't know. It's just all of a sudden 'come on kids, we're going to the picnic,' and that, you know. I don't even remember what time of the summer it was. 'Going to the picnic.'

CNK: But there was a lot of good food and music and dancing?

JB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yeah.

CNK: Did you speak Hungarian?

(170) JB: I did, yeah, when I was a kid. I think I spoke more Hungarian than I did American, but, you know, you get away from it. I could just understand 50, about 50 percent maybe I can understand.

MNK: But it was spoken at home?

JB: Oh, yeah, all the time.

CNK: What about with your, outside the home with your other friends?

JB: We never spoke Hungarian. Only time we spoke Hungarian was in, in the home.

CNK: ...

(178) MNK: Let's take a break.