INTRODUCTION

In October of 1919 Frank Kobylarz bought a farm in Newark Valley, a small community in upstate New York about half way between Binghamton and Ithaca. He wrote to his wife in Wisconsin and told her to pack up the belongings, the eight children and move back east.

It was a move which left quite an impression on Frank's oldest son, Victor. At the tender age of 12, Vic (as he is usually called) was the man of the house. He supervised the building of crates for the belongings, which included chickens and jars of blueberries, for the train trip to New York.

They arrived in November to a run-down farm similar to many of the farms which Slavic immigrants were buying in that period of time and in that part of the country. In spite of the adversities the farm prospered and the family grew. Mrs. Kobylarz eventually had 18 children (a 19th was adopted). There were too many in the family to have any of their meals together, but there were enough brothers to have their own baseball team.

Vic got married in 1933 and did custom farm work, such as threshing, silo filling and logging, through the 1920's and 1930's. He worked for Endicott Forging for 31 years and now spends his time reading about Polish history and culture and doing woodworking.

Vic shared the experiences of his life to myself, his niece, Kay McGraw, and Kay's husband, Ross McGraw, on January 30, 1986. I conducted another interview with Vic on April 27, 1986, as well. Most of the following transcription is from the interview of January 30th, although parts of the April 27th interview have been included. Certain portions of the interview were not transcribed at the request of Mr. Kobylarz.

Vic began by talking about a trip which he and several members of the family took to Poland where they visited the village of Stany. This had been the village of their parents from which they had left for America around the turn of the century. Stany is in southeastern Poland and had been part of Galicia. It is presently located 30 to 40 miles from the Ukrainian border.

Ed Nizalowski

The initials represent the following people:

VK: Vic Kobylarz

EN: Ed Nizalowski

KM: Kay McGraw

RM: Ross McGraw

EN: You were there (in Poland) about six years ago?

VK: 1980

EN: And what time of the year were you out there?

VK: It was about the last week of August, first week of September.

EN: Those farms are about 10 acres a piece?

VK: See, that land has been divided hundreds and hundreds of years ago. You might have an acre here on one side of the village . . . over the years . . . if your daughter was going to get married you had to give her a dowry. So you give her an acre of land, maybe two acres; maybe if you own 50, 60 acres of land you give her five acres.

Well, when she had kids, she started giving acres away. So you might have four, five parcels . . acre . . acre . . if you had six, seven acres you had a lot of land in that area where my people come from.

Well then, most of the younger people . . . they tried to industrialize Poland. Then the older people, they do the farming. They'll have one horse, maybe they'll have two, three cows, coupla pigs, maybe 15, 20 chickens, some ducks and geese.

You'll see them out there with the old . . . ya know what a cradle is? Well, you see the old fella cuttin' with the cradle and then you'll see her makin' sheaves.

They pick up . . . there's a knack to it, see. You pick up, bundle size . . . then you take . . . my mother taught us how to do that 'cause we use to do that here. You pick up a handful like this and you half it and then twist it. You stick it around there and you just give it a twist. Then when you get six or eight of them made, you shock it. And that dries and cures it, see.

EN: So you put six or eight into a whole . . .

VK: So it'll dry. You set 'em up two, two, two . . . and then on the end two to brace it. And let it dry. When it gets dry, years ago they used to use a flail. You know what a flail is? They'd have a place in the barn where

they could do this in the winter.

They'd stack this up, see, when they were harvesting it, then in the wintertime . . . but now they do it different, see, they'll stack this up . . . then the community will hire a little combine and they throw these bundles in there and then you pitch the straw away from the back end of the combine.

When they get ready to bring this . . . like I say . . . they might have an acre of oats here, on the other side of the village an acre of wheat and some rye and the same way with hay.

You'll see these old couples in the evening comin' back with whatever it was they were harvesting whether it was hay . . . and they would both be sittin' on the wagon. Now how they both got on that wagon after it was loaded, I don't know. Crude wagons, but they did all have rubber tires on 'em, because they were on pavement, see.

Now like when they was makin' hay, they would make hay in the primitive way. They cut it by hand and they had wooden rakes, homemade rakes . . . some man set up a little shop. In fact, one of my cousins made homemade rakes.

EN: No kidding? In that village? Stany?

VK: Yeah, in Stany. They'd rake the hay and make shocks . . . oh, maybe hold 4 . . 500 pounds. Even though the hay was partly dried, they'd make these shocks. It was September when we were there and they were . . . in the morning as you was goin' out, they'd tear these shocks all apart and shake it up. And then . . .

EN: Let it cure?

VK: Let it finish dryin' out. Well then at night, when they got ready to go home, they'd load it on that wagon and then they'd take it home and stack it, see. Then in the wintertime . . . that's the way they do it in the small villages, see.

EN: They took some of these shocks apart to let them cure more, then they'd put them back together?

VK: No, they a . . . they didn't put the shocks back together. We call 'em haycocks. When they got ready to draw it home, they tore it all apart . . . oh, maybe a spot twice as big as this kitchen.

Then during the day when the sun was nice they'd shake it and turn it and get it good and dry. And then they time themselves so when they got it loaded they had enough time to get home before it got dark.

EN: And the dew set into it.

VK: They'd be sittin' up there just like two crows on top of that wagon. (laughter) Same way with the . . . we saw an old couple . . . I think they were cuttin' rye and he had the old cradle. They might have an acre in that field. So when we come back that night they were gone, but there was maybe a quarter of that all in shocks.

Now they told us that 80% of the food produced in Poland was still done by private farms. Then they have there big collective farms where they use great big combines and big blowers. Their hay balers are somethin' like you see in the funny papers . . . the pick-up balers, ya know.

Now you remember Barbara? (Polish student who worked for Vic's borther, George, in a greenhouse) Now her father . . . they had a very wet year . . 1980. He'd been out there and he shook that hay so many times and he was gonna have a man come and bale it. Get it dry and then the rain comes. Took two . . three days . . again.

Barbara said she didn't know how many times he'd dry that hay. Then finally, when he got it dry . . . They don't make bales like ours, they only make them about half as big and they're not tight like ours.

And he had a little field of oats. Somebody come in and combined them like I said, ya know. He had the guy bale it so it wouldn't take so much storage space.

EN: Were they gettin' their potatoes and cabbage then?

VK: Well, cabbage . . . it was a little early, but potatoes is their main crop . . . potatoes and cabbage.

EN: This is one of their cash crops?

VK: Well, yeah . . . see the small farmers use it up themselves, see. If you lived in a big city like Warsaw or Cracow, it took two, three hours to buy . . . see everything is done backwards there. That's the way communists do things.

Instead of having a big market, you got to go and buy a loaf of bread . . . two, three hours. Then a quart of milk . . . two, three hours. And then if you're lucky and you see a long line there, they might have some oranges. When you get up there they put a sign: they're gone already.

My sister-in-law's cousin, who was Polish, got out of work at 12 midnight. Ya know sometimes it would be 6 o'clock in the morning before she could come home with a quart of milk and a loaf of bread. Six hours she'd stand in line to get a quart of milk.

But if you lived in a small village, see, you just go over to the farmer and he'd give you a quart of raw milk and a dozen eggs. Maybe you buy a chicken now and then, you know.

EN: Now is this similar to the way your mother had described village life?

VK: Yeah, but a little bit more primitive in my mother's day. The kids all summer had to pasture cows, there was no fences. And boy, you wanted to be sure you brought their cow home at night.

EN: You wanted to be sure you didn't stray into somebody else's pasture, either.

VK: They'd take 'em to the woods and find a patch of grass and they'd stay with 'em all day. And then at night they'd bring 'em home, but you still see that today.

In 1980 you'll see a man goin' along with a bicycle, maybe pushin' it and two cows behind him on a chain. And then when he gets to his little patch of ground, he'll tie it or maybe during a noon hour you'll see a woman sittin' there and she'll be milkin' her cow during the noon hour.

Or along the road . . . ya know how grass grows along the road? Well, they get a chain long enough so they can't get in the road and they'll pasture the cow off the grass that grows along the road.

EN: They don't let very much go to waste, do they?

VK: Oh, no. They can't. Ya know . . . like a . . . I don't know what the population is per square mile there, but . . . see there isn't enough land to go around.

EN: That's the way it's been for quite a while, I guess it's still that way over there.

VK: It's comical, you go about noon and you'll see that . . mostly women, see . . sittin' on a pail, milkin' a cow.

EN: When did your mother come to America?

VK: I think my mother came here when she was 16 and then she went back and got married.

EN: She went back to Poland?

VK: Yes. She got a job right off the bat in a silk factory in Passaic, New Jersey, at 8¢ an hour. And then she went back and got married and then my father came here. Now I don't know how long they lived in Passaic.

EN: Do you think your parents planned on getting married before she came to America?

VK: Well, I think so. They came from the same village. At the time it wasn't even part of Poland. It was Galicia, part of Austria. On my fathers citizenship papers he was a citizen of Austria.

EN: Where else did you go on your visit?

VK: Chestochowa was real interesting. Our guide, ---, right off the bat said he could lose his job (for saying anything against Communism or the Russians). He was a teacher, but the Communists hated an educated man. If you were a teacher, a lawyer or a doctor your name was mud.

RM: Unless you were a member of the party.

VK: You had to be 100% communist. To join the Communist party you had to give up your faith. You can't believe in God and be a good communist. And a lot of people will not give up their faith. They put you right on the bottom of the list for promotions and everything.

Now this --- said he could make more money as a guide than he could teaching school. "I've got to show you the good part," he said, "but I'll show you the real Poland, too."

KM: Uncle Vic, wasn't Grandma a lot younger than Grandpa?

VK: Ten years. My mother was 16 and my father was 26 when they got married.

RM: Do you think the marraige was arranged by the families?

VK: More or less, I think it was arranged, but that type of thing went around here. The Polish people wanted their children to marry Polish people.

I learned a lot of the history of Poland through my mother. When we got here (in Newark Valley) and I was 11 or 12 years old my mother got an Elementasz, a primary reader. She taught me to read a little bit of Polish, but I never got so that I could write.

Polish is tricky, you can be disrespectful the way you address a person. It makes it difficult when you talk to an older person. If you don't use the right form it shows you're not very well educated.

EN: Did your mother say much about her life in Poland?

VK: Oh, yeah. Her customs and everything went right up till she was 80, 85 years old. When Ed (Vic' brother) would go up to the woods and come in with a basket of mushrooms, she'd take her cane and go right across that swamp. She couldn't give up her mushrooms.

Her part of Poland was swampy, clay soil, lots of woods. They depended a lot on mushrooms and blueberries and those people still do. Oh, when my mother knew there was mushrooms. (laughter)

EN: So she knew her mushrooms real well.

VK: Yeah. Now Ed, myself and Lou, we inherited that love of mushrooms from my mother. Ed and Wally will be the first ones in the family to find mushrooms.

EN: Now where did your father learn to be a glass blower?

VK: He worked in a glass factory in Poland. He blew glass; they didn't have machinery; you blew it. You blew it with your mouth.

EN: Was that done in the village or did he travel to a nearby city?

VK: No, it was in the village. See in them days . . . now my mother was born in 1882 and my father was born in 1872. There wasn't too many railroads then, see. If you lived in a small village there had to be a small factory there or you had to make your money picking mushrooms or growing cabbage. That area was good potato and cabbage country.

To this day, when we were there around the first of September, we could see people coming out of the woods with pails full of mushrooms. And would Lou get excited. (laughter)

EN: Were they able to sell their potatoes and cabbage as a cash crop?

VK: They would sell some. Like with your pigs, they're great potato eaters. Like my mother, she'd pick up a couple pails of clover hulls (clover leaves). Then she'd peel a whole pail full of potatoes and she'd peel 'em thick.

Then she'd cook them potatoes, the small potatoes, the potato peelings and everything. Then she'd take her two pails of clover hulls and pour in her boiling potatoes and everything and then she'd mash it. And what pigs we used to raise.

We used to raise 20, 25 pigs for our own use. We used clover because there wasn't too much alfalfa around. Now every barn had a thrash floor and she would go in there. I don't know how she could do it . . . I couldn't get a pail of clover leaves.

She would come out there with two whole pails of that clover leaves and when she would mash that . . . oh, how the pigs would grow on that.

KM: I never knew Grandpa was a glass blower.

RM: You never knew that Grandma came back over to get married either, did you?

KM: No. I thought Grandpa came over here first and then Grandma came.

VK: They both came over about the same time, but for some reason Mom went back and got married in Poland.

KM: You wouldn't think they would have enough money to travel back and forth.

EN: They both came to America and then they went back to get married.

VK: Yep. Like I can always remember . . . like when we lived in Michigan. Even though my mother had a houseful of kids, she always had boarders. One of them was my Uncle Frank and I can remember the other guy, Sam Gauka. There was usually two or three boarders.

KM: With all those kids?

VK: With all those kids. She had to.

EN: What did she say about the process of leaving Austria-Hungary to come to America?

VK: One of the reasons my Dad come here was to avoid being taken into the army. And a lot of them would scrape and beg and borrow and even steal. Then they would sneak out of the country so they wouldn't be in the army.

Then they'd come over here. Just as soon as a few of your relatives come here, they would scrape, scrape and scrape and what little money you had plus what they sent you . . . that's how a lot of them got over here.

Well, even now in my time. I worked with a guy by the name of Louie Mastrianni. He told me it cost about $700 in fare to get a family over here (from Italy): a man, his wife and a couple kids. And how many $700 Louie sent to get his people here from Italy.

EN: Now your parents were the first ones to come. They didn't have any help . . .

VK: They must of. They must of had somebody here. I think maybe my uncle was here ahead of them, my Uncle Frank. He was sort of a happy-go-lucky guy. He learned to play a fiddle; they'd have dances and he would saw away on that fiddle by the hour. (laughter)

RM: Where would you have dances, at the farm?

VK: Yeah. Wherever we got together. That's another thing I can remember. In them days, it's horse and buggy days, see. And every horse and buggy always had a whip. Now Uncle Frank would play Santa Claus and when he'd come he'd say, "Oh, time to get a whippin'". And they would really whip you with that whip.

And we would all crawl under the bed and try to hide under the bed. They would go ahead and splurge and have a nice custom and everything, but they would always have that whip. (much laughter)

Afterwards, when we got older, he used to laugh how we would all sneak under that bed.

EN: Did your parents have any problems leaving the old country?

VK: Oh, yeah. It was hard to get out of Poland. Lotta time you had to sneak away at night. You only got a few pennies a month in the army; it was tough.

EN: They didn't want to lose their recruits. I know with my Grandfather, he came in 1913, a bit later. The Serbian War was going on then.

So he was able to get to Germany on a work permit. He couldn't leave directly from Austria-Hungary. He was in Germany for a year and then from there he left for America.

But it was basically for the same reason. There was some maneuvers going on near his village and he overheard one of the officers talking to his father that there was a war coming on. And my Grandfather decided he didn't want any part of it.

VK: That's how a lot of them came here. You didn't know whether you were going to fight the Austrians, the Russians, the Prussians, the Germans . . .

EN: But didn't you have to have a passport of some sort?

VK: Well . . . money can buy you a passport.

EN: Now with my White Russian Grandfather, he got a passport so he could move within the Russian Empire, but he had to sneek across so he could get into Prussia. Once he got across, somehow he was OK, but I guess a lot of the immigrants had to do something like that.

VK: This day and age, they still do it, Eddie.

EN: Did your parents talk about any of the experiences they had going from Austria-Hungary into Germany?

VK: Oh, yeah. In fact, my father had to run away in the middle of the night; he had to sneak out of that little village.

EN: Now how did he manage to sneak out without somebody catching him?

VK: Well, a lot of them got caught and had to go back and maybe put their two or three years in the army. In the meantime, uncles or brothers-in-law or different parts of the family would be here in America. When you got out of the army you were penniless, so you had a relative here that would send you enough money.

It took almost a month to get here on a ship. You see, working with these people down at church (from Ireland) . . . it was interesting because you got a lot of the history of the Irish coming. A lot of them never made it; they died under motion. They died on the old ships, small ships, they'd get sea sick . . .

EN: This was even into the 20th century people were dying?

VK: Oh, yeah. They would just wrap you in a burlap and throw you overboard.

RM: It seems if it was so hard for Pa to get out he wouldn't go back to get married.

VK: Well, by that time he had a little money.

EN: I think it was pretty common for one person to go across, make some money, go back and get married and then return. Now you said when your mother first got here she worked in a handkerchief factory?

VK: Yep; 8¢ an hour in Passaic. Here about a year ago all them factories burned up. They had a great big fire; hundreds and hundreds of people lost their jobs. This was the same place where mother used to work.

I've been through that area. My in-laws lived on Fourth Street and then, over here on Eighth Street was Holy Rosary Church. Great, big, probably 12, 1500 family parish. Years ago we used to go down with Mom and Dad to Passaic and visit their relatives. What times we used to have.

EN: What year did your parents first come in?

VK: I'd say it was pretty close to 1898 or 1900.

EN: Did they get married around 1900?

VK: Yeah. Just about 1900.

EN: What kind of work did your father get when he was able to get a job?

VK: My mother was pretty much the sole support with the boarders. If you had a couple of rooms, you had to get boarders right off the bat to pay expenses.

KM: Where did the kids sleep if there was rooms saved for the boarders?

VK: Two, three kids to a bed. Some of them slept on the floor.

EN: What year did they go to Stroudsburg? (PA)

VK: I'm not really sure. I'd say between 1902 and 1904. I was born in 1907 in Ironwood, Michigan. So I don't know how long they lived in Stroudsburg.

EN: You said they weren't in Stroudsburg very long because the glass factory where your father was going to work burned up?

VK: Yeah. Then he got a job in the lumber camps up near Duluth. That was about the bottom of your pay scale, the lumber camps.

Then we moved to Wisconsin from Michigan. I was about eight years old. I used to have to go into the woods with my Dad with a crosscut saw on Saturdays and Sundays and help him cut pulpwood.

EN: Now you were near the Wisconsin border anyway, right?

VK: We had to move about 100 miles south; we lived in Michigan, Upper Peninsula. Here was Ironwood and on the other side of the river was Hurley. Then we went southeast, right in the middle of the virgin timberland. When we moved here in 1919 they had just started to bring in the railroads to log that area off.

KM: So when did you come here, Uncle Vic?

VK: We come here in New York State in November, 1919.

EN: So your father had bought a small farm down there in Wisconsin?

VK: Yeah; 80 acres but there was only 28 acres of farmland. You see all the land there was homesteaded at one time. You know what that is? The railroad would come through there and then they would own all the land on each side of it.

The government would give them all that land. They would log off some land and then you could homestead 40 acres, 80 acres, up to 160 acres; would be 440 . . . we called them 40.

At that time there was no Czechoslovakia, see. We was into a Bohemian settlement . . Bohemian homesteaders. Then here was a German settlement. There was a little store, a big saw mill and a saloon . . . Bavaria.

Then over here was Finnish. There was a whole group of Finnish, see.

RM: This was in Gleason? (WI)

VK: Then when these guys got old and were ready to retire, my Dad bought this 80 acres from this old homesteader. There was a log cabin, there was a horse barn made out of logs and a cow barn made out of logs. Then they had a hay barn separate; that was a frame building.

When we moved there, right away, we built a pig barn out of logs and we built a chicken coop out of logs. You would cut these logs about this big around and hew 'em. Nobody had a chain saw in them days, they weren't invented yet. Everything by hand.

EN: You had about eight brothers and sisters by then?

VK: Well, something like that. On top of that my Dad adopted his nephew. His mother died when he was only five, six years old or seven. There was John and Josie and Ann, myself and Lee and Lou and Sam and Bow. There was eight of us born by then.

RM: But you didn't stay in Wisconsin very long?

VK: Four years from 1915 to 1919.

EN: Now you said your father decided to sell the farm and that's when he decided to look for another place to go?

VK: Sold the farm. Now land was . . . well here we paid $8,000 for 175 acres ; out there it would be $20,000. Now out there all the roads went north, south, east and west. Every square mile had a road all the way around it and there was 640 acres in each section.

So it was a mile this way and a mile this way. Now to get to this little town of Bavaria . . . there wasn't even a post office. There was a store . . .

EN: Is this where all the Bohemians were?

VK: No. It was right on the edge of the Bohemian area and the German area. And over here was Finns. They must have come over right after the Civil War or something because in 1915 the same thing there was here in New York. A lot of these farmers wanted to retire, they were old. My Dad bought from Mead, see.

EN: Did your parents say what their reactions were to America when they first came ashore?

VK: At that time Ellis Island was where you had to land. My mother used to tell us about getting to Ellis Island and all that. Now you can get on a plane in Warsaw and you can go to Chicago or Kennedy and you don't have to go through Ellis Island.

Course in them days my Dad couldn't do anything without my mother. He couldn't do any chores, he couldn't dig potatoes or nothing; my mother had to be there all the time. If there were potatoes to dig, she had to help him dig potatoes. If there were potatoes to plant, my mother had to be right out there to help plant potatoes.

So it was always Mom and me especially and Josie and Ann, we were always conversing. She was always telling us about picking blueberries and mushrooms . . .

EN: In Poland?

VK: And how hard it was. Now their main thing was to earn enough pennies in Poland to buy their salt. They could raise their eggs and meat, but they had to have that salt and they had to have a few pennies to buy that salt.

EN: Did they ever say how they were treated by the English people here when they first came?

VK: Well, I saw alot of that, Eddie. We came here in 1919 and we were third class citizens.

EN: Well, that was in Newark Valley, but was it like that when they first came here?

VK: Well, no. I think they kind of grouped together, Ed.

EN: That's the impression I get.

VK: They right away formed their own parishes and they had their parochial schools and everything. And they kind of isolated themselves from the rest of the people. No matter where you went, whether it was Chicago or Buffalo or Rochester or Passaic . . . you had so many there . . .

Now, not that I want to brag, but the Polish people have a very strong faith. I'd say it was as strong as the Irish faith.

EN: At least as strong, I would think.

RM: Maybe stronger.

VK: Maybe stronger. I don't know how it is in Ireland because I never was in Ireland, but I saw a very strong

faith in Poland.

What have they got to be thankful for. For 700 years it was the battleground of Europe; now they're under that Russian thumb. When the Russians say, "Jump", you gotta say, "How high?"

Now old people don't build houses, but when you go through Poland and you see new houses go up, most of the time in the gable end they'll be a shrine either to the Blessed Virgin or Jesus. The young people haven't lost their faith in Poland, yet.

EN: I've read that even a lot of the communist party officials will get their children baptized in secret. They won't give it up entirely, but they can't profess it openly.

VK: Did you ever read any of Father Ciesek's books, God in Russia? He was from a Polish family in Wilkes-Barre (PA). Now the diocese doesn't educate the priest, the family has got to put up most of the money. If there is a priest in the family, the family has to make a big sacrifice.

The diocese sent Father Ciesek to Rome to learn the Russian language and they wanted to set him up in the northeast corner of Poland, near the Russian border. So he went there. They put him in Siberia right off the bat because they said he was a Vatican spy.

EN: Now what time was this? When did this happen? 1950's perhaps?

VK: Well, in our lifetime. He spent 20 years in Siberia. The family finally got after our government and we traded him off for two Russian spies. I got two of his books, but he wrote three.

When he was in Siberia, they moved a whole area into Siberia. Either the coal mines or the lumber camps or the salt mines and nights, they found out he was a priest. He'd baptize their babies, he'd marry these people on the quiet because if they found out, he would have been hung.

EN: Now back when you were in Wisconsin, your father read an ad that there were farms for sale in Tioga County in one of the Polish newspapers?

VK: Right after the war when this land boom started and everybody wanted to get out of the cities, he (Vic's father) thought he got a good price for that little 80 acre farm. So he sold it and then he started looking for one. So then he saw this ad in the Kourier Polski.

EN: That guy (a real estate agent from Tioga County) must have advertized all over the country.

VK: Yeah. Then a lot of it spread by word of mouth, too, ya know. If one man came out and bought a farm, he'd write right back . . . see a lot of these retirees, ya know, like Mead . . . his son got married and bought a farm over there, so this farm was practically idle.

EN: Now another thing my Grandfather had said was that a lot of the immigrants lost their jobs right after the First World War. You always have a recession after a war.

VK: There was a bad recession. So the next thing, ya know, lets get on a farm. Like with us, ya know, my Dad . . . all these kids . . . lets get on a farm where we can use all this help, see. I imagine it was that way with most of 'em. There was always a recession and then be self-employed.

EN: Well, you could at least grow your own food.

VK: Especially us people from Europe, ya know. We were used to that, see.

EN: You took the train from Wisconsin to Chicago? Did you carry many of your belonging with you?

VK: Lets see, we moved in November, so he must have come here in September. He wrote back long about October; he bought a farm. He told my mother to pack up everything. So I was at that time 11 or 12; this was 1919.

When we were in Wisconsin in the fall of the year, we used to pick ferns. We would go to the woods for these ferns. There was a place about 40 miles (away) that would buy them.

So they would bring us a load of lumber and we would make these boxes. So this John, my adopted brother, actually he was a cousin, he was the head carpenter. So when Dad sold the farm John got a job in the lumber camps

so I was the head man even though I was only 12 years old. We didn't go to school at all that year, see. We didn't even start school,

When my Dad wrote that we gotta move, well my mother had jars and jars and jars of blueberries that she'd canned . . . well I had to make crates for the blueberries. She wanted to bring her chickens here; so I had to make chicken crates.

Well, I was the head carpenter. Lee and Lou was my helpers. You do this; you do that. We make this crate and we packed our blueberries and we packed our chickens. She probably had some chickens, Ed, that was probably 15 years old. (much laughter) She wouldn't part with them.

We come here the 19th of November, so we was on the road . . . it seems like we was on the road a week, but I don't think we was on the train more than three days.

EN: Did you take a train from Chicago to Binghamton?

VK: No, the county seat was Antigo. It was 20 miles from us. That morning my mother says, "We gotta move." So she went over and got two of the neighbors and it was already snowing. The nearest railroad was six miles opposite the way we were goin'.

So she hired these two farmers to take all of our stuff on two sleighs and to go to Gleason . . . the canned stuff, the chickens and all and everything. Then she hired two people with Model T Ford Touring cars and we went the other way. And we was bucking snowdrifts.

Ann was Mom's business manager. Ann was about 13 or 14 at that time. She had to see we got the right tickets and everything and that we got on the right train and everything.

Well then right off the bat, the twins, see, was about two years old. So Mom says to me . . . I had to watch Wally and I think Lee had to watch Walt.

EN: Now could you and your sister speak English pretty well?

VK: Oh, yeah. In fact I didn't learn how to speak Polish until I was about 17 or 18.

EN: So your mother spoke to you in . . .

VK: My mother spoke to us in English.

KM: Why was that?

VK: I don't know. After a while when we moved here, she saw that I was interested so she concentrated mostly on me. Josie and Ann could already read and write in Polish and I couldn't out of the boys.

So she had to go a couple miles this way and over here in this Bavaria there was a guy by the name of Eddie Jurek, he was Bohemian and there was Val Mosenberger, he was a German. And my Mom hired both of them to take us to Antigo.

So we got there and it was dark already and Ann bought the tickets. So when we got to Chicago, Ann had to chase around and chase around . . . instead of Newark Valley, New York, they sold the tickets to Newark, New York.

Well, I can still remember, there was a little colored guy, an usher and he took Ann all over and got her tickets straightened out. We were eight hours in that station and from one station to another we had horse drawn taxi cabs. They didn't have cars yet.

EN: Do you know what happened to Fidurski's? (another immigrant Polish family) They moved up here from Philadelphia and all their furniture went to Oswego (instead of Owego). I guess that still happens once in a while.

RM: So where did you go from Chicago . . . to Cleveland?

VK: To Buffalo. Then from Buffalo at that time they had the Black Diamond and we went to Sayre. It was Lehigh Valley. Then in Sayre they had this branch line to Newark Valley.

We got here about 7:00 in the evening. My Dad walked downtown after he done the chores and he met us at the station at 7:00. He hired a guy by the name of Bill Daggers; he had a great big Buick touring car. And he hired him to take us from Newark Valley to the farm that night.

EN: Now what about the chickens and the blueberries and all that stuff?

VK: They didn't come till about three weeks later.

KM: Were the chickens still alive?

VK: The chickens were alive, but about half of the blueberries froze and they were leaking all over the edges of the crates and everything. She lost about half her blueberries, but I don't thnk any of the chickens died.

EN: Somebody must have kept feeding them.

VK: They must have fed them on the railroad, see.

RM: Tough, old birds.

VK: Ya know, it was funny, Eddie. The first priest that we had here in 1919 was a Father Kelly. He come up one day. We'd been here about a year.

So the priest come up; we didn't have any money. Ma went and give him a couple of them chickens. They were probably 15, 17 years old already. And ya know when my mother killed a chicken you can bet there wasn't one egg left in that chicken anymore. (laughter)

EN: What was the condition of the farm (in Newark Valley)?

VK: It was 175 acres and it was run down. Old rail fences . . . they wouldn't hold, so right off the bat . . . they made good cookin' wood, ya know. Not too good for heat.

Most of it was chestnut and pine, see. Hemlock didn't split too good. Pine and chestnut split good, see. Oh, we'd haul 'em on a hay wagon. We had a huge wood shed. Then we'd cut a lot of hard wood for the heating stoves, then we'd cut this for the cookin' stove, see.

EN: Did you have a pretty good forest?

VK: Yeah, we had a lot of woods on our farm.

EN: 'Cause I know with my grandfather, somebody had logged it off just before they got there. So all the stuff was . . .

VK: The Nett farm was the same way. They logged it off. There wasn't enough there to cut any firewood, Nett especially. See after a while, I was practically the only one that had a tractor in the area and I did the whole . . . fillin' their silo, thrashing, buzzing of the wood.

Well, Nett would pick up pine stumps, ya know, and we'd buzz them all day. They were hard to buzz and there was a lot of rocks in 'em. No matter how you thought you got 'em cleaned out, every once in a while you hit a rock, ya know. Dulls your saw.

EN: You were usin' that for firewood, the stumps?

VK: Oh, that . . . ya know, a pine stump, there's a lot of pitch in it, see. It's like burnin' oil. Lot of heat in pine stumps.

EN: You were able to eliminate the creosote problem?

VK: Yeah, you had the old . . . you see in them days, there was no air tight stoves. You did have chimney fires, but not like it is now when you try to burn a air tight stove. Your creosote will build up in one night with an air tight stove with green wood, ya know.

EN: You just kept your fire really goin' hot?

VK: Well, your houses weren't too well built. A lot of them had just . . . we called it clapboard, ya know. You didn't even have any sheathing. If the plaster come loose, you could look right through the outside, so you had to run your fires pretty hot, see.

EN: You said that the livestock that were here were pretty poor?

VK: Yeah, the stock that we had was in poor shape. We a . . . well, in Wisconsin my Dad was a progressive farmer. He was one of the first farmers in that area to buy a pure bred bull. He got his pictures in the paper and everything when they delivered the bull to him . . . so he started in with a bull, see. And he did the same thing here.

We used to buy all our bulls from George McPherson. He had pure bred stock. That way you can build up your herd. It takes years to do it. See now you can buy three, four thoroughbred cows and have them artificially bred . . . it don't cost too much to build up a herd, see.

EN: Yeah, it's a lot simpler. And you said your mother wrote a letter complaining about . . .

VK: She wrote a letter to that Kourier Polski . . . Course I don't believe it was ---'s fault (the real estate agent). The demand was so big for these farms. They were all tryin' to get on the farm and demand was what set the price.

Naturally these farmers tried to get all they could and --- helped 'em, but he should of used a little better judgement in tryin' to discourage some of these farmers from goin' in over their heads, ya know, in debt, see. Not too many of 'em lost their property.

EN: Yeah, I know. That's what I was wondering about. I think most of them managed to hang in there, even through the Depression years, too.

So the first priest that came up to visit you was the Irish priest?

VK: Yeah; that was 1920. Then we had missionaries like from Owego. There was Father Spara, Father Kotkiewicz, Father Remy . . . Father Klejna was a retired priest. He must have been about 75 when he came to Newark Valley. In fact he married Stasia and I.

EN: You got married here in Newark Valley?

VK: That was 1933.

EN: Oh, I see. That was quite a bit later.

How many other Polish, Russian and Ukrainian farmers were up here when you came up? You were one of the first weren't you?

VK: Well, Fidurski's were here. Nett's (Nitupski) were here . . . down in Owego there was a lot of them. Like Lipka's were already here.

The Catatonk bunch (Catatonk is in the Town of Candor) came a little bit later. Zdonowicz, Bish's . . . they seem to come from Massachusetts. Mrs. Zdonowicz and Mrs. Bish were sisters. I knew them pretty good.

EN: I can't remember whether my grandparents came in '20 or '21. They came up from New Jersey.

VK: Did they come from anywhere near Kwiatkowski's? Do you remember where your grandparents come from?

EN: Seems like it was Newark.

VK: Kwiatkowski's come from Red Bank, the Oranges, right in that area.

EN: Now you were saying that a lot of the Yankees up here didn't treat the Poles too well?

VK: For a long time, ya know, we were second class citizens.

KM: Mrs. Bushnell was always nice to you, right?

VK: Yes, but one thing, not that I want to brag, when George Mix went broke . . . he went bankrupt. He was a blacksmith and then he went into the machinery business and he sold a lot of machinery. He used to say that if he only dealt with the foreign-born people he woulda never went broke.

He says you could take their word. If they didn't have any money they come down and say, "You got to wait until my check comes next month." Most of these people, they wouldn't even acknowledge that they owed you any money and they wouldn't pay any money on their bills.

But he said the rest of these people (the foreign-born), they'd come down with a few dollars every month. He said he never would of went bankrupt if he had dealt with only the foreign-born people.

EN: Did he have a fire or something or did he lose some of his bills?

VK: I don't think so.

EN: Maybe he was just a sloppy bookkeeper.

VK: He didn't keep his books close enough, see. Actually he wasn't a businessman, he was a blacksmith.

RM: As a businessman he was a good blacksmith.

EN: Did you keep going to school when you got here?

VK: Uh-huh. I quit when I was 15. Josie and Annie musta quit when they was 13 or 14 'cause there wasn't a law you had to go to school.

EN: Back then you could quit earlier?

VK: But I quit when I was 15.

RM: Who was the first one to graduate? Lou?

VK: Lets see. Lee and Sam both went a year or two. I think Lou was the first one to graduate from high school.

KM: And then all of them after that did.

VK: Yeah. Everybody else after that did, see.

KM: What did you do at 15?

VK: Worked on the farm.

KM: Stayed right on the farm.

VK: You ain'ta kiddin'. I was 15 years old and Pa went to Detroit! And I had to run the farm myself. That was tough business.

EN: That must have been 1925 . . 1926?

VK: 1925 . . 1926, somewhere in there.

EN: Now what did he go to Detroit for?

VK: Couldn't make no living, couldn't make ends meet and that was tough. We used to have to fill the ice house and it wasn't so bad if the ice was only about that thick (8" to 12"), but when it got that thick (20" to 24") and maybe the cakes weighed 150, 200 pounds and here a 15 year old . . .

You take the milk down; bring a load of ice up; come home. Finish cleaning the barn. Unload the ice and come back after dinner and get another load. Then when you got your ice house filled you had to start drawing lime all winter and you had to get your wood up.

EN: Where did you get your ice?

VK: Down here by Paul Smith's bridge (about 1½ miles from the farm). Lyman Ames and Seymour McCready used to cut it by hand.

EN: Then you had to buy it from them.

VK: Yeah; 3¢ a cake. (laughter)

EN: You still had some of the dams on the creek from the mills back in the 20's, didn't you?

VK: Well, they had this great big pond here in Newark Valley, Moses. He had a great, big, huge . . . but, you couldn't buy no ice off of him until he finished filling his own icehouse.

About 1919 . . 1920 . . that was about the last year that Borden's filled their icehouse. They had huge icehouses; they used to get the ice offa Moses' pond, see.

RM: Why did Moses fill his icehouse, what did he do with his ice?

VK: Well, he peddled ice all summer. At first he used to peddle with horses and then after a while he had a little pickup truck. He had a scale on the back end and he sold it by the pound, ya know. Everybody had refrigerators (ice boxes) then, nobody had electric refrigerators.

RM: They would dust it down and cover it with sawdust.

VK: Well, like we did . . . you'd leave about six inches around the outside. See, your icehouse . . . I think they use 2 X 6 studdin' and double walls and they fill that with sawdust. Then when you put your ice in there you left about six inches all the way around. And you just kept packin' it in.

EN: What did your father do in Detroit, what kind of work did he do?

VK: He worked in a copper rollin' mill and then when I was 18 I went out and worked in the same mill. I worked there two winters.

KM: Who took over the farm then?

VK: Pa and Lee and them was there.

KM: Pa came back and you went out.

VK: Pa only stayed there during the winter and then in the spring of the year he come back and then I went out and in the spring I had to come back. I was only gone four months and then the next time I was out there six months. I come back and I bought a tractor and a thrashin' machine off of old man Howard.

RM: Where did you stay when you lived in Detroit, just in a rooming house?

VK: I stayed with Chester and Josie (his sister and brother-in-law).

KM: When Grandpa was gone, if he was such a disciplinarian, who kept charge of all you kids or were you just really . . . you? And you were only 15 and some of them were only a little bit younger than you?

VK: Well, yeah, everybody was just a little bit younger than me. Josie and Ann had already . . . Ann stayed here one or two years, she used to haul the milk.

RM: Then she got married.

VK: Then she moved to Detroit and got a job in a . . . That was an arrangement, see. Pa found this Tom Kwiatkowski and he talked Ann into marrying him, see.

KM: Oh, really.

VK: Yeah, that was an arranged wedding.

KM: Was Aunt Josie's an arranged wedding?

VK: No, no. Josie got married in Detroit all by herself; Pa never heard of Chester. Josie got married. In fact, nobody went to her . . . we couldn't afford . . . we didn't have the money to travel then.

EN: How many years did you go to school in Newark Valley?

VK: Four or five.

EN: Oh, you went that many years. Where was the school house located? You went to a one room schoolhouse, didn't you?

VK: Where Bucky lives now, right by Needham's (about a half mile from the farm). Walt Westfall bought that school. In fact I dug the cesspool for the school system there, with a pick and shovel. (laughter)

EN: How old were you when you did that?

VK: Oh, probably 16 or 17.

EN: Do you remember any of your teachers?

VK: My eighth grade teacher is still livin' at the Owego Nursing Home, Adalee Wright. That's the only teacher that's livin'. (Adalee passed away in the spring of 1986.)

KM: She had stories to tell about you guys.

VK: She had me and Lee and Lou . . Sam . . Bow went to school a little bit to Adalee. Ma used to dress her up and we used to take Bow to school once in a while.

EN: Now who is Bow?

VK: My sister, my mentally retarded sister. She's 74; she was born in 1912.

KM: And she can't talk; a missing voice box or something . . .

VK: Well . . . we don't know. When she was about two or three years old, somebody come home with some Christmas candy and she started to choke. I can still remember that. And Ma stuck her finger in there and she was almost unconscious when Ma stuck her finger in there and got that candy out.

But we don't know because she was so mischievious. She was climbing on chairs and on tables and up the steps; she was forever fallin'. Whether she suffered brain damage . . .

Gene thinks she actually suffered brain damage somewhere when she was born, but I still think that if someone had been able to send her to school when she was 7 or 8 years old I think she would have been able to learn to talk, see.

You take a kid and put 'em in the woods and live with animals and they never learn to talk, you'd say they was

mentally retarded, but they aren't, see.

EN: Now, did your mother have all the children at home?

VK: Yep. She never went to a hospital till she was . . . well, she had a fatty tumor removed . . . I think she was maybe 80 at that time.

EN: Oh, my goodness. (laughter)

VK: I remember . . . the first one that I a . . . in 1916, in February on a Saturday. Dad was already in the woods. My mother said, "Go get Dad." The midwife's name . . . we called these older ladies, babcia, ya know, which means grandmother. "Go get Dad and tell him he's got to go for babcia."

In went in the woods and I thought he was going to tell me to turn around and go home, ya know, and I said, "Mom says you gotta go get babcia." And course I didn't know what was goin' on.

And he unhooked the horse . . . he was skiddin' the pulp wood, see, and he had the sleigh and they hadn't started loadin' it yet. So he hooked the horse right up to the pulp sleigh and I thought when he got by the house he was gonna tell me to go into the house, but he let me go, see, and I went with him.

Comin' back Lee and Lou come around down the hill. "We gotta baby."

And I said, "Did the doctor come yet?" Because on the way over there I stopped at the nearest telephone and told her to call the doctor six miles away. Lets see . . . 1916 . . . I was almost 9 years old, right? And I didn't know where babies came from yet.

I said, "Did the doctor come?"

"No."

"Well, who's been over there?" Well, we had a neighbor, Mrs. Neufek, who lived across the street.

"She's been over there."

Then I said, "Well, she must have brought 'em." (much laughter)

And then . . . same thing . . . Walt and Wally. We had a little quarter horse that we used to draw milk with and we used to go three, four miles to get our mail, see. Get home from school . . . we were too poor to own a saddle, get right on it bareback. Well, I get on there . . . this family's name was Bates. "Call the doctor."

Well, 1919 again in March . . . course by that time I already knew what was goin' on, see. So back to Mrs. Bates I went again for a doctor, see. George was the last one born in Wisconsin. When we came here in 1919, November, he was born in March, see.

EN: Oh, he was an infant.

VK: He was a babe in arms.

EN: So all of her 18 children were born at home then?

VK: Born to home.

EN: Using a midwife.

VK: Well, sometimes a midwife. Now here it didn't take long to get word to Dr. Knapp. Dr. Knapp I think delivered Lester and Irene and Johnny and Jennie and Gene. He delivered five here, but the first thing they call for would be hot water. (laughter)

EN: When your mother was pregnant, did it change the routine any? Did she slow down?

VK: No. She washed clothes the day before she had the baby.

EN: And how long did it take her to get back on her feet?

VK: In those days they tried to make 'em stay in bed at least a week. Somehow she'd get the neighbors to come and help.

See Josie and Ann both left home when they were about 16 to go to work. Josie went to Detroit. Ann left when we were here about a year. So then there were four born when Ann wasn't home. Then there wasn't any girls born until Irene and Jen.

EN: Didn't your mother have to cook day and night for 12 to 14 kids?

VK: If you bake bread . . . every other day she would use 25 lbs. of flour. She baked bread every other day. Twenty five lbs. of flour every other day.

EN: What kind of an oven did she have to bake that much bread?

VK: Well, she had a great, big wood stove. She had pans; I think they would hold two on the bottom and two on top. So she could put 12 loaves of bread in the oven at one time.

EN: She did that winter and summer?

VK: Winter and summer; every other day. Then Saturday, we call them paczki, maybe a half a bushel of them. Sunday morning, six or eight pies.

KM: I remember going up there as a little girl after most of you were gone (had moved away from the farm); it would look like a bakery. She didn't know how not to bake that much.

VK: She could bake bread.

RM: Smelled like flour and dough throughout the kitchen?

VK: She never measured nothing, Ed.

EN: Oh, no?

VK: Never measured nothing. You ask her for a recipe . . . You know in Polish a handful is a gaszka. "Gaszka tego, gaszka tego . . ." "How much? Half a cup?" "Ah, I don't know . . . handful of this . . . handful of that." (laughter)

EN: Now you probably ate a lot of potatoes, lot of cabbage . . .

VK: Oh, hey. Potatoes and cabbage and then like I say . . . 15, 20, 25 pigs. And all winter long she was rendering lard . . . cannin' pork, cannin' beef. 'Cause we had no freezers, no refrigerators, we had to can all that stuff.

I'd say she put up a thousand jars of meat every winter.

KM: You couldn't even eat . . . you had to eat in shifts, didn't you?

VK: Her favorite was that old fashioned Polish potato soup. We always had our own bacon so she'd fry a great big pan . . . this was comical.

She'd cube her bacon in about half inch cubes, ya know, and then she'd cook a 12 quart kettle full of potatoes. She'd put a little milk or something; then she'd dump all that bacon and everything and everybody's fishin' around for them little chunks of bacon. (laughter)

KM: But didn't you have like . . . half of you would eat; when you left the table then the rest of you had room?

EN: And that was done breakfast, lunch and dinner that way?

VK: Yeah, we couldn't all fit. But ya know that some guys would come from the barn a little bit earlier, they'd get their breakfast. Then 15, 20 minutes later somebody else would come in. Then some of the kids would get up and get ready to go to school.

EN: Now what about washing all the clothes, how did she do that?

VK: She had 18 kids before we got electricity and she got a washing machine. Do you realize how many thousand diapers she scraped on them old fashioned washboards?

KM: She was a real workhorse, wasn't she?

VK: I was tellin' somebody the other day, she doesn't have to pray to enter heaven. She worked her way in heaven without prayin' and she prayed.

Sundays she'd be sittin' in that chair with her little prayer book and Stasia and I always saw to it that . . . she couldn't wait till we come with that Sunday news. At that time it was a tabloid, ya know.

It was only a nickel; course a nickel was just like 50, 60 cents today. Well, anyway she waited for that Sunday news. She'd read that from one end to the other. She could read English real well.

EN: Oh, could she? How did she learn how to read English?

VK: Well, I inherited that. Same thing; my Mom and Dad read continuously. When she wasn't sewin', ya know, she was readin'.

RM: So does Ed (Kobylarz, Kay's father). They're voracious readers; just everything. Ed reads all the time; so does Vic.

VK: Ya see when my sister went to Poland . . . ya see my mother's life was makin' packages for her relatives in Poland. So when Josie was in Poland she went to this little post office and apparently the guy was a post master there for a good many years and he said,

"Our records show, he told Josie, "your mother has sent over 300 packages through this post office in her lifetime."

KM: And they still send things to Poland.

VK: Yeah, we still send things.

RM: Lou and Josie, right?

VK: Lou is the most Christian member of our family.

EN: Now how did you get involved with the church?

VK: My mother.

EN: What do you remember first about going to church?

VK: I remember . . . colder than heck . . . I don't remember who was being baptized that Sunday. Oh, it was a cold, windy day and we had a . . . when we bought that farm there was a two seated surrey buggy and it had side curtains on it and everything. These people used to keep it covered with a sheet. They had a special stall in that barn.

And I remember takin' my mother and Mrs. Nett to have one or two kids baptized here on a Sunday. Cold, wintry day . . .

EN: Who was being baptized?

VK: I don't remember who was bein' baptized that Sunday. And then it went along and went along and then I think my mother baptized four to once. I think Ed was in it and Walt and Wally and Lester . . .

EN: Well, they were older by then.

VK: Oh, yeah; they was already older. They was probably 10, 12, 14 years old. Fifteen years old maybe when he (Ed Kobylarz) was baptized. My mother saw . . . they respected her enough they went along with her wishes. She wanted them baptized.

Ann come over, ya know, she baked some pork chops and everything. Josie come from Detroit; Chester come from Detroit. My mother made a big deal out of it. I think she had four baptized that day.

KM: Now would Grandpa go when she did this?

VK: Not to church.

KM: Not even for the baptism?

VK: No.

EN: How were the Polish people treated in church?

VK: Well, at first, I shouldn't even mention it. There was some of the people, the --- especially . . . maybe all the churches were . . . they would not move one inch for you. So I don't know if it was because we were pollacks or what. They didn't want us to come to church. Didn't you hear that?

EN: Yeah, I heard something about they wanted the pollacks to sit up in the balcony . . .

VK: Yeah.

EN: They didn't want them to sit downstairs. I heard something to that effect.

KM: How long did that go on and what changed people's . . .

VK: Well, we didn't pay much attention to it. We just kept doin' our thing and after a while they begun to realize that we were not second class citizens. We began to accumulate and get outta debt and then we had . . . like I

told you . . . George Mix, the blacksmith, used to advertize that.

No matter if you was Russian, Ukrainian and everything, in his estimation you was Polish, see. He classed everybody as Polish. When George begins to brag, different ones would say, "They're Polish, Polish!"

George would say, "If everybody was Polish I never woulda went bankrupt." Like I say, he classed everybody (all the foreign-born) as Polish, see.

EN: But then at a certain point you had so many Polish people that they had to get a Polish priest.

VK: Well, there was a lot of them . . . like my mother couldn't really read too well and Mrs. Przkof. Mrs. Pastalan read pretty good, but then our little mission church over there (Catatonk). There was Zamoiski's and a lot of them . . .

EN: Now that was started in '33, was it?

VK: Yeah, I don't know when they built that, but I remember Ted Andrews father, old man Wnek, old man . . . We say old man . . . it was the older generation.

But like I say, the Catatonk bunch, especially, for some reason . . . it was just like a separate settlement there. (Mentions a number of intermarraiges that took place.)

I'd say it worked out very good. They say these arranged weddings . . . they're not happy, but to me these people prospered. (Mentions accomplishments of some specific families.)

EN: That's taken years.

VK: Us Polish people finally made these Yankees respect us for our efforts.

EN: What kind of relationship did you have with the Bushnell's? (a store owner in Newark Valley)

VK: Oh, they were different (from other store owners). They were altogether different. The were honest and they were awful good bookkeepers.

See, when you went there, everything was itemized on that slip. And I don't know how many years we dealt there and my mother never trusted anybody. At the end of the month when she had that . . . We used to go down there every morning to get something so that at the end of the month there would be maybe 25 slips.

And my mother would sit there and sit there and sit . . . All the years she could never find out where Ed and Lena (Bushnell) ever made a mistake. And we had some mistakes that looked awful fishy from some of these other guys, but my mother could never find a mistake that the Bushnell's made.

They was just like our old family. Like I say, they was honest, but they was awful good bookkeepers.

EN: Did you have this kind of treatment when you were in school, like from the teachers?

VK: Well . . . we had Harold Henderson was our first teacher and then we had a divorcee or a widow, a Miss Simmons. And then we had . . no before that . . . right after Harold we had Adalee Wright.

KM: And she was only three years older than you.

VK: She was 18. All you had to do when you graduated in June, you went to Cortland Normal and in September you was a teacher.

KM: Is that right?

EN: I think you had to get other courses after, but you could start teaching anyway.

VK: She was only 18 years old when she come started to teach and she used to have to walk. They were poor. Adalee's father died when they were quite young and the mother was a teacher here.

She finally married a Comstock, he was a widower, but Adalee used to have to walk. They lived down on Main Street. She used to try to catch a ride with somebody comin' back with the milk wagon, see, and sometimes she'd catch a ride and sometimes she didn't.

And she used to hire . . . like in the winter time we had a wood stove and she used to give me 50¢ a week to keep fires. And I thought I was makin' $500 a week. When she paid me that 50¢ every Friday night I thought I was the richest kid in Newark Valley.

KM: Did you have to give it to Grandma?

VK: No, that I used to keep, but the first time I went to Detroit and I come back with $350, he (Vic's father) was standin' there with a . . . I had to give him every penny I had.

RM: Did the Depression make much difference in the way you lived?

VK: Oh, did it. That was tough.

RM: Least you had food, though, right?

VK: Like I say, we had lots of potatoes and lots of sauerkraut. (laughter)

KM: Dad still likes potatoes and sauerkraut.

VK: Well, he used to make two 50 gallon barrels of sauerkraut and then we'd always have maybe a thousand bushels of potatoes in the cellar.

KM: A thousand bushels?

VK: That's all it would hold and we'd fill the cellar; then we'd sell the rest 'cause we always figured we'd get more for the potatoes after they was stored all winter, but it didn't work out that way. But we always filled the cellar full with a thousand bushels.

RM: And they still . . . I can remember since I've been here. You still planted way more potatoes than you used to need and filled Lee's cellar up until the last three or four years. I can remember puttin' potatoes down there a couple of times.

EN: But you weren't makin' much money to begin with. How could you draw your belt any tighter? How did you get by with any less?

VK: Well, it didn't take too much money to entertain us kids, you know. In them days . . . like I say . . . If you got 50¢ a week maybe I take one or two of my brothers to the movies . . . was only 10¢. So if you bought a bag of popcorn for a nickel it would cost you 15¢ so I could take two of my brothers to the movies on a Saturday night with my 50¢.

EN: Was that when you went to the movies at the school?

VK: No, no. We went to the opera house.* They had silent movies in there and Adalee Wright played the piano.

EN: That was your school teacher?

VK: Yeah. It was silent, ya know. And she'd be poundin' that piano and lookin' at that movie. (laughter) She was a good teacher. Ya know, like I say, she was just a little past 18 when she started teachin' up here.

EN: How many other Polish kids were there when you were going to school?

VK: Well, there was four of the Gwaras and then there was myself and Lee and Lou and Sam. Four of the Netts (Nitupski). So that's twelve Polish kids and then there was Adolf Rinnish. Remember him?

EN: I've heard his name.

VK: Yeah, Adolf. Actually he come from the Russian part of Poland. He didn't have too much trouble learnin' the English language because we helped him, see. There was 13.

KM: Were there any kids that weren't Polish?

VK: Oh, yeah. There was about 25 kids in our class.

KM: Holy cow!

VK: Well, wait a minute, there was a Bohatka. They were Bohemian.

EN: Now with the English speaking kids, what kind of interaction was there between the two groups?

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* The opera house had been the Methodist Church. It was located on Main Street in Newark Valley and was used from 1884 until 1931 as a community recreation center.

VK: In a small school like that you're a very close knit bunch. Maybe we'd all pitch in 10 or 15¢ and buy a baseball and a bat.

I remember Johnny Gwara and us we used to trap. Like in our family and in Gwara's family, we'd take turns. Two or three of us would go and do the chores and one of us would look at the traps. We'd catch a few skunks. We didn't get no muskrats up on the hill, but mostly skunks.

Then we'd all chip in our money and at that time the Reymer's owned a meat market in town and Frank Reymer had a baseball bat and a catcher's glove and a baseball. And we all chipped in our money and we went down there and we used to go back in that pasture next door to us. A guy by the name of Turk owned it and we used to play ball there, see.

But I say . . . it didn't take the money to . . . even afterwards when we got so we had a car and everything. They had a roller rink, a skating rink in Owego. I think it was 25¢ you could rent your skates.

Well, at first we had an old model T 1914 Ford my Dad bought. There was a guy by the name of Harold Bohatka that lived where Needham did; then on the farm where the boys live now there was a Marshall.

And then we'd get the whole load and each kid would take about two quarts of milk and a bag of my mother's donuts, them paczki, ya know. We didn't have no money to buy a hot dog or anything. And every once in a while we'd sneak out there and have a cup of milk and a couple paczki and, ya know, for a quarter.

EN: So there wasn't that much prejudice from the other kids?

VK: No, no, no. Not in that bunch. Because, I think, the biggest half of us was Polish anyway. So we was a majority. (much laughter)

EN: What part did the church play as far as keeping the Polish people as a group? (here in Newark Valley)

VK: Like I say, we was considered second-class citizens.

EN: But once you got a majority in the church . . .

VK: Well, by that time we proved that we weren't beggars. We proved the kids studied and got just as good marks or maybe better. And we paid our bills, which is the main thing. Not that I want to brag, but you ask any of these business people that was here for 50, 60, 70 years . . . they very, very seldom got cheated out of bein' paid.

EN: I know when my father told me when he got his communion lessons, that the priest gave it to him in Polish and . . I think one of the Zimmer boys . . he would give it to him (the Zimmer boy) in English. I think there was just two of them that year so that the priest had to do it in two different languages.

One subject that I'm curious about . . it's one that you don't have to talk about if you don't want to . . is the Ku Klux Klan.

VK: At that time, it was back . . . I'd say in the '20's, early '20's when the Ku Klux Klan was trying to get in here and we wasn't able to get down town too much. You see about the only time would be on a Sunday and then we couldn't go to a ball game even on a Saturday until the hayin' and everything was all done.

RM: Unless you had a boxing match.

VK: Well at that time already I was 17 when we started boxin'. We used to hook up a horse and I think at that time we already had the model T Ford . . .

EN: Where were the boxing matches?

VK: Well at first they used to hold them down at the loading dock down to the ladder factory and there was always a bunch of freight cars there. They used to sit on top of the freight cars and they used to box on the loading dock.

EN: These were local people that boxed?

VK: Yeah, just local people.

KM: He did a lot of it.

VK: Then when it got a little colder . . . I guess the ladder factory made us quit down there. See at one time here in Borden's there was 75 workers workin' and there was a couple carloads, especially the Watkins boys. They was all . . . they was boxers . . . they was also rough and tumble fighters, they was street fighters, too.

Then we started boxin' down around George Mix's place. When it got a little colder we started boxin' inside the blacksmith shop.

EN: How did these things . . . was it just a bunch of people that got together?

VK: Yeah, just a bunch that got together and said, "Lets have a boxin' match," and at that time . . .

EN: Did you use gloves . . . was this bare knuckles?

VK: No, no; we had gloves, but you didn't have trunks or anything. You just took your shirt off and your regular work shoes and . . . we had boxin' gloves.

RM: Did they bet on them?

VK: Well, a little bit. Just like on the ball games; they're used to be a lot of bettin' on the ball games. They'd bet on the side on the fights.

RM: They'd throw money in the ring afterwards for ya?

VK: Yeah. They'd throw the money in . . . then after every fight the people would throw a quarter, maybe a half, some of them would throw a dollar bill.

EN: How long did these fights . . . did they wait until somebody got knocked out?

VK: No, one time Barney Goodfellow was a referee. The night that I fought down there in the blacksmith shop, Barney Goodfellow was the referee. Well, the next time we had the fight . . . I fought the Flying Dutchman . . . in the hotel barns.

EN: Who was the Flying Dutchman?

VK: Pete Balzer.* (When) I fought him there John Yaman was the referee, but the night that I fought Rudi . . . I didn't want to fight . . I

Ya know at that time I was 16 or 17, we used to send to Sears Roebuck for our work shoes, ya know. We had to buy . . . all us kids. From the time you was 10, 11 years old you could go out and make 10¢ an hour, you had to go out and start buyin' your own clothes, ya know. And send to Sears Roebuck and buy the heaviest shoe that they sold and then buy a coupla boxes of hobnail nails and fill the bottom full of hobnails. You ever see hobnails?

EN: I don't know if I ever have or not.

VK: There a show tack with a great big head on 'em. The miners used to use 'em in the mines where you're walkin' along a rock. Well, you could get about twice the wear if you pounded the sole full of hobnails, but you put almost a pound of nails in your sole. Well, that's what I was wearin', hobnail shoes. I couldn't afford to have two pair of shoes.

So I went down to this fight one night and Pete Balzer was fightin' and he was quite a rough and tough fighter and he challenged everybody in the bunch and nobody . . . I didn't . . . We used to box up home a lot, ya know . . . in the barn at night . . .

EN: Two of your brothers would get together?

VK: Well, sometimes the Watkins' boys would (unintelligible). Maybe I'd be boxin' with one of the Watkins boys, maybe two of the Watkins boys would be fightin' or Lou or somebody would be boxin' there.

Well, this night . . . Pete won his fight . . . well, then he challenged . . . nobody would fight him. Finally he got in the middle and said, "Mine brother Rudolf will challenge anybody here."

Well, just about that time, I don't know who it was, give me a hell of a shove, ya know, and pushed me right in.

"Here's the guy that'll challenge him." (laughter)

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* Pete was also from a local Polish family.

"I don't want to fight; I don't want to fight!!" (Had) big hobnail shoes, ya know.

Jeez, they took my shirt off . . . they didn't give me no choice, see. I had no choice, see. They practically wrastled me down and tied the gloves on. "I can't . . ."

EN: This is to fight Pete Balzer?

VK: No, I was gonna fight Rudi.

RM: His brother first.

VK: So we started in, ya know . . . course I wasn't a good boxer, ya know, and I got a roundhouse and instead of twistin' my hand like this, see. I don't know whether that was the blow that done it.

I hit him I think it was on the left eye . . . had gloves on, but I was desperate, ya know. And when he turned around that eye was shut already . . shut tight! I hit him so hard, ya know; it was a wonder he didn't go down. Well, then, ya know . . . just one eye . . .

RM: Then it was an even match or better.

VK: Then it was a massacre, see . . . and I broke my thumb.

KM: Oh, really.

VK: After that I went to Detroit; I was just 18, see. Well, then a year later . . . oh, everybody wanted me to fight the Flyin' Dutchman. So, they a . . . they got the hotel barn, see.

Well, we was supposed to fight two minute rounds, that's amateur fight, see. Well, the first round . . . he was gettin' the best of me, see. I was gonna try to slug it out with him, see.

Well, then I began to box, see . . . and the first round Yaman thought I was gonna get licked and he was supposed to be timin' it, too; see, he was the referee. He let it go over three minutes, see . . . thought he was gonna finish me in the first round, see.

Well, the second round I come out. I sez, "The heck with this." So I started to box, see. And, ya know, I was really desperate and I got him a solar plexus, here. I know he couldn't take it here, see. And he didn't go down, but he started coverin' up, see.

And everytime he look and see where I was, I'd be right on top of him. And I get in a couple of good ones . . . over hand and an upper cut and he'd look up and bang . . I'd nail 'im again, see.

Pretty soon . . . he threw his hands up. "I give up; I give up." It only went best of two rounds . . . and I broke my thumb again.

RM: And that's a story I've heard from other people other than Vic. I guess a lot of people remember that fight.

EN: I have heard about boxing going on. When did they finally quit boxing down there?

VK: Well, I had to quit and then Pete went amateur. He went to Auburn; he'd fight in Binghamton and everything. And to get . . . I used to be his second. 'Cause he'd pay for my gas . . . take him to Binghamton, Cortland and he'd get me in the ring. I'd see all the rest of the fights and I'd also be his second and that was interestin'. He got so he was fightin' some pretty good men . . .

RM: Didn't a couple of the brothers fight?

VK: Lou boxed in the CC camps. Wally did.

RM: Didn't a couple of the brothers box down here in Newark Valley?

VK: Yeah, down in Owego they used to box. Walt and Wally used to box. They wouldn't get paid, but sometimes they'd pick up $25 in the ring.

EN: Wow!

VK: That was a lot of money then. That was just like $250 today.

EN: Now when the Klan was active, were you ever afraid they would come up to the farm?

VK: No, we didn't . . . actually, we never heard too much of it back on the hill about this Klan business. They used to go up on Cook's hill and light crosses there, ya know. We called it Cook's hill at that time; now Smullen owns all that. (Cook's hill overlooks the village of Newark Valley.)

KM: Who was in that Klan? Did you know who was in it?

VK: Well . . .

KM: Was it like local people?

VK: Well, local people was tryin' to get it started. See, outside agitators would come in and get these people worked up and then some of the local guys would . . . and they was very anti-Catholic, the Klan was, see. See, down south they was anti-Negro, but here in the north they was anti-Catholic, see.

EN: Binghamton was one of the upstate centers for it.

VK: Was it?

EN: That was because you had so many Poles, Russians, Ukrainians and Catholics in Binghamton.

VK: See, the Klans were . . . in a way, ya know . . . now the same thing is happening in South Africa, see, with this apartheid, ya know.

EN: It's the same type of thing.

VK: It's the same thing that was here 50, 60, 70 years ago, see.

EN: Now one other thing I was kind of curious about, did a . . . the generation that your parents were in, did they worry about their children losing their heritage, the language . . .

VK: Well, some of them did. Now, my Dad didn't . . . but now my in-laws . . . See, they had a pretty big business there and they had one son that turned out to be a missionary priest and then they had another one . . . he graduated from Temple . . . doctor. Well, the priest especially . . .

EN: Now these were people down in Jersey, right?

VK: Yeah and the priest especially. Whenever he come home, he'd take all the kids and day after day after day he'd spend with them kids teachin' them . . . but they went to Polish school.

RM: Teaching them catechism?

VK: Catechism and the Polish . . . to speak good Polish. Now, they all went through Polish grade school and they all sent through Catholic high school and they spoke very fluent Polish and their grammar was perfect in Polish.

But the priest saw to that because he taught English in St. John's College. He was an old fashioned a . . . use a stick, ya know. (laughter)

RM: But your Mom and Dad . . . well, your Mom taught you Polish when you were older, right?

VK: Yeah. Well, she started when I was about 12 years old, but then after a while it kind of died out. Well, then . . when I went to Detroit and I got a job with my uncle and he couldn't speak English and then I had to learn to speak it then.

Well, then my in-laws couldn't speak English at all. So between my uncle and my in-laws I can converse . . . my grammar isn't too good, ya know.

Like I say . . . it scares you a little bit because you're afraid you're going to offend somebody and show your ignorance, see . . . by usin' that "you, you."

You see you never address anybody "you" unless I'm talkin' to somebody younger, some kid. I can say "you . . . ty" to a kid, but you don't say that to an older person or to somebody . . .

EN: Or to a priest.

VK: Or a priest or a teacher or somethin'. I think they say the French language is a little like that. Well, my grammar isn't even too good in English, see. That was my poorest subject in school. . English.

Now they got everything different. Used to be physiology, geography . . . now ya don't hear anything about geography or physiology; that all comes under social sciences, doesn't it?

RM: Biology and social studies . . .

VK: Or social studies, but see years ago, when I was goin' to school, you couldn't stick me on history or geography or spellin', but English. I couldn't make head nor tail our of it. Analyzing a sentence or . . .

RM: Parsing?

VK: Yeah.

EN: When you were goin' to school did your teacher spend any time with Polish history or culture?

VK: No, no. They never . . . in fact, we had good teachers. Harold Henderson never mentioned about us being Polish and it seems though Adalee went out of her way to be good to us Polish kids.

To this day . . . she went down to Long Island to teach because the wage bracket was real high there. She said she never had such good students as she did in this little school in Newark Valley.

KM: But, ya know what we did, Ed? We had a family . . . not really a family reunion, but a get together at Mom's. A lot of my uncles were there and Adalee came and the stories she could tell about them. Remember that down in Mom's back yard?

VK: Ed Hollenbeck was there and Sadie. Well, I think she was very friendly with the Hollenbeck's. But in these little schools, Ed, it was much more personal then in the big schools . . . you got all one grade, where we had all eight grades in one room, see.

EN: We had a night (for the Newark Valley Historical Society) where we had people talk about the one room school and they said they preferred it . . . teachers and students. They thought it was better than when they went down to the (central school) . . .

VK: Well, ya know, not that I want to brag, Ed, but . . . see, everything is in one room. Well. when the eighth grade was up there the teacher would ask them some question . . . I'm wavin' my hand. "I got the answer." (laughter) I was probably in the fifth or sixth grade, but like I say, I knew my . . .

RM: Your history?

VK: We'd have history class, ya know . . . the teacher . . . how many times . . "OK, lets forget the small details . . " I'd start tellin' about a battle and I could tell it from A to Z all about that battle. "Lets forget about the little details."

RM: What was the guy's name? Harold . . .

VK: Harold Henderson.

RM: You liked him, didn't you? He had a club hand?

VK: Well, he was very much crippled. When he was . . . I don't know . . 10, 12, 13, 14 years old . . his Dad sent him for the cows one night.

And when he come back he got into a weed or somethin' and his hands and his legs started achin' and achin' and achin'. And something . . . they never . . . his hand was just like this. Then his fingers was drawed back like this and his corner here was so calloused, he could drive a tack with that.

EN: (From) getting into a plant of some sort?

VK: He got poisoned with something. They don't know what it was.

RM: He used to bop you guys on top of the head?

VK: Oh, man, when he . . . but, like I say, he must have been only 11 or 12 years old because his fingers was just like a little kids fingers.

EN: They never grew.

VK: They never . . . his bones was small and he . . . if he ever got a hold around your neck with this hook, the fight was over. But if you got a hold of his little finger and just twisted it like that, that was it for him.

RM: He used to play with you guys, right?

VK: Oh, he used to . . . and he'd cheat worse than any of us kids. (laughter) We use to play when the snow come, we used to play what they call fox and geese.

EN: Oh, yeah, yeah.

VK: You go out there and you make a lot of paths in the snow . . circles. And then you'd make . . . you could jump from one to the other, but if you left your track in the snow, you cheated, see, and you was caught, see.

How many times we'd catch his track in the snow and he would swear by the Bible that that wasn't his track. And maybe four or five of us would swear we saw him jump there.

When you saw a twinkle in his eye, you couldn't argue with him. He could make his eyes snap just like a whip.

EN: When did you put the baseball team together with your brothers?

VK: Oh, that was already after the war. I think we used American Legion uniforms. Bill Needham was kind a . . . he used to like to umpire. Oh, Ed used to drive up from Baltimore and Walt . . . no, it was during the war, come to think of it, 'cause they used to drive up from Baltimore.

EN: How many years did you have . . .

VK: Just the one summer.

EN: Oh, just one summer you did it, I see. Now, did you play different town teams in the area?

VK: No. We played Speedsville one time for a half a beer. (laughter) We won.

But we had our own team. We used to play in the cow pastures . . . Sundays . . . only time. Just as soon as we got our chores done, ya know. Like the same way, ya know. Grab a bag of donuts and a coupla quarts of milk and we . . . seems though we played for two . . three years in a row we played Catatonk pret near every Sunday. And they couldn't beat us.

EN: Now Father Stec said something about, ya know, he had to make it alright with the parents to have a lot of the Polish kids play baseball?

VK: At that time he was stationed in Owego and the Catatonk bunch played. I don't know, maybe the Zimmers played on it, too, but we wasn't in on it at that time.

We did have a St. John's volleyball team. See Fr. Bialyshewski is a Polish name, but you know what bialy means? White. Well, actually they called him Fr. Whitey. He was a good volleyball player.

Well, we had a volleyball league that was the Catholics, the Baptists, the Congregationalists, the firemen and the Grange and an independent team, a bunch of high school guys. And somehow they made me manager of the St. John's volleyball team. Most of the Kobylarzes were on the St. John's team, but I was the only one who went to church. (laughter)

But every time we had a tough game, like if we was gonna play the high school kids and the firemen was pretty tough . . . so I'd call Fr. Whitey up. And he was tall. He must of been six foot, maybe six foot two and he played volleyball in the seminary a lot.

I think Doc . . Who was the veterinary? Doc Milks wasn't it? He was the veterinary here. Anyway, he was on the Congregational team.

Well, every time we'd win a game . . . it didn't seem like anybody could beat us. On the poorer games we didn't call up Fr. Whitey, but on the better games I'd give him a call and sez a . . "We gotta tough game tonight." So he'd come down.

EN: So he'd play along with you?

VK: Yeah, oh yeah. He'd play with us. So every time we'd win a game, they'd want to change the rules . . . try to cripple the Catholics, see.

So . . . there was still that feelin' amongst us Polish people that we was still considered second class citizens. And it kind a . . . ya know, but didn't pay too much attention.

So one night, I think we was playin' the firemen and they call a meeting right after the game. They want to put in the rules. Well, was I ever surprised. Doc Milks got up and said,

"I think you guys better quit bein' childish. Every time the Catholics win a game . . . try to make some rules to cripple 'em. Lets forget the Catholics are leadin' the league. Let have some fun. Lets quit tryin' to cripple the Catholics."

I didn't suppose I had any support at that meeting at all. After that they never called any more meetings.

And we had a softball league the same way. That was in '35. When the flood come that ended that, see.* We also had a good team.

EN: That was through the church again?

VK: Yeah, all the churches. We called them the Congos, the Congregationalists was the Congos and the Methodists and St. John's and the Baptists and the firemen and most of . . . like different ones. Tony Kachuck played. They did have a lot of fun.

Mike Yescavage in high school was a . . oh, he had good . . he was a good pitcher, but he never come to church. But we got him on our team.

RM: He was baptized, right? (laughter)

VK: Do you remember Dick Hoover? the football coach? Well, he was coaching here then. Well, he was a little bit faster than Mike. Oh, he had a fast ball, but . . . we beat 'em. We beat 'em with Mike pitchin' for us.

EN: During the Depression were there many farms that went under?

VK: Well, at that time . . . taxes were way down. Like I was payin' . . I think my taxes was, I think my county tax was around $40 and my school taxes around $20. I paid about $60 a year taxes, where today I'm payin' almost $1200. So the Depression, actually it hurt.

* Newark Valley was hit with a devastating flood that year.

Then in 1932 when the banks was all foldin', then Roosevelt put a moratorium on that you couldn't close any more. They closed all the banks completely.

RM: You couldn't withdraw any money?

VK: Well, you couldn't even cash a check. You get paid by check or somethin' it was no good. You go down to the bank . . . they wouldn't cash it.

EN: Was there any danger of this bank down here going under?

VK: Well, we didn't know too much about that financial status. You never know about a bank goin' under until it actually goes under.

See a lot of these banks, you think they're in pretty good condition and first thing you know, bang, they're broke, see. There's some pretty big banks went broke.

EN: Yeah, I know.

VK: . . . in the last few years.

EN: Well, back then there was quite a number of them that went under.