

Three Slovak Women: Telling the Story of One Slovak-American Family Using Oral and Social History

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While conducting genealogical research, it is important not to overlook the stories of how our ancestors' lives were influenced by local, national, or world historical events and conditions. *Three Slovak Women* chronicles the lives of three generations of Slovak women living in the steel town of Duquesne, Pennsylvania as they lived through the dislocation of immigration, two world wars, and the Great Depression. It demonstrates how oral and social history was used to build the story of how lives changed from one generation to the next.

Overview

The Book's Themes

- Chronicles the lives of three Slovak women in the steel-producing town of Duquesne, Pennsylvania
- Reflects generational differences
- Reveals the significance of family values/traditions of the Slovak culture
- *Three Slovak Women* (First published in 2001 by Gateway Press)
- *Three Slovak Women, Second Edition* (CreateSpace, 2014); Available for purchase from <http://www.amazon.com>

The Book's Conception

- Project began for M.F.A. thesis in nonfiction writing: Univ. of Pittsburgh
 - Class: *"The Literature of Pittsburgh"*
 - Read: *Out of This Furnace* by Thomas Bell (Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1941)
 - Story about three generations of Slovak men working in the steel mills in Braddock, PA
 - Focused on the lives of the men; "What about the women?"
- Started my interest in genealogy and learning about my Slovak heritage
- I discovered the trials and tribulations of my grandmother's life
- Learned details of my grandmother's immigration to the United States:
 - Detained at Ellis Island (almost did not make it through)
 - (Arranged) marriage to my grandfather
 - Raised seven children (six during the Great Depression)

Family History

- Family trees and genealogy charts provide a framework:
 - Names, dates, places
 - Family histories provide the "stories" to bring facts to life

Why I Wrote *Three Slovak Women*

- More than just “genealogy” or a family story
- Universal experience of the immigrant woman
- Brings to the forefront the plight of the Slavic immigrant woman

Slovak Immigration: United States

- Some 600,000+ Slovaks came to North America between 1875 and 1914
- However, there is a definite lack of Slovak identity in early American literature
- Although their stories are both compelling and engaging, few have been told
 - Certain negative stereotypes were assigned to Slovaks at the turn of the century
 - General prejudice toward immigrants of Eastern European descent

The Journey

- Literal (my grandmother travels to the United States)
- Metaphorical (my journey to learn about her and her life)

Research Process

- Old Photographs
- Family Documents
 - *Baptismal certificate*
 - *Passport*
- Passenger records (ship manifests)
- Church records
- Oral history interviews
- Trips to Barton, OH and Wilkes-Barre, PA
- Trips to Slovakia (2010, 2012)

Oral History

- Interviewed family members: my mother, my aunts and uncles; others
- Audio tapes of interviews
- Prepared transcripts
- Family stories revealed

Historical Research

- Push/Pull factors of immigration; historical events and their influence
- Immigration wave: Why were Slovaks going to America?
- Prepared a timeline to trace my grandmother’s life

“But there is a difficulty in trying to recreate the past. There are so many details that have been lost. The weaving together of details known and unknown is like trying to build a puzzle, with some of the pieces missing. This too, is part of the story.” - Lisa A. Alzo, Preface, *Three Slovak Women*