

**INTERVIEW WITH AGNES REDLENSKY MUCKER**  
**Conducted by Mildred Allen Beik**

**March 14, 1984**  
**Mine 42, Windber, PA**

MB = Millie Beik

AM = Agnes Redlensky Mucker (January 11, 1897-March 1987)

**Beginning of Tape 1 Side A (March 14, 1984)**

AM: Explain to me what do you want to know?

MB: First of all, tell me what your full name is.

AM: Agnes Mucker.

MB: What was your maiden name?

AM: Redlensky

MB: Can you tell me how old you are?

AM: 87

MB: 87? You don't look 87.

AM: [laughs] I'm 87.

MB: What's your birthday?

AM: January 11, 1897

MB: Were you born in Europe or here?

AM: In Carnegie, by Pittsburgh.

MB: Were your parents from Europe?

AM: Yes, my parents were from Europe.

MB: Where was your father from?

AM: Joseph Redlensky. He was born in Europe.

MB: Do you remember what country, what town?

AM: Austria-Poland. That's where my mother said they came from. But I don't know exactly what part. She never talked about it. When they came here, they didn't have any relatives.

They lived close to a city, and my Dad worked in a brick yard. A friend of his sent him a fair to come to this country, and that's how they got here.

MB: Did he marry your mother in Europe then?

AM: Yes. Then my mother came here.

MB: He came first by himself.

AM: He came first, earned enough money for ship fair, and then he sent money for her, and then I had two sisters and brother that was born there. But my grandmother was raising them while they were here. Then my brother came, they had to earn enough money for ship fair, they brought my brother here when he was 13. Then my sister came here. My younger sister fell into a spring and drowned. It was just the two of them that came back. My grandmother had them.

MB: Did your father work in a brickyard before he came to America?

AM: He worked in a brick yard in Europe. They had their own piece of land and their own house, but it wasn't enough to make a living on it. So this friend of his, he worked in a brick yard, sent him a ship ticket, and he came here. It was tough days.

MB: Did they hope to come back and buy more land or was he planning to stay in America?

AM: They never planned to because they bought property here. We lived here. It's by Meyersdale, about 7 miles from Meyersdale, where my home was. The mines he worked in were owned by the Merchant's Consolidated Company. That's where he was killed in 1905. I was only little, I was about 7 years old, when my Dad was killed.

MB: That must have been hard.

AM: That's why we had no education because I was just a little kid and had to go on a farm to work for food. When I was 13, I left home and went on my own. I went to work.

MB: Where did you go to work?

AM: In those days, they didn't worry about you have an education. Because our mother had no income, she had to take borders in to keep us living. I was old enough to go on a farm to work for a living.

MB: I guess your mother wasn't paid anything when your father died. The companies didn't pay in those days.

AM: No, there was no income at all. They didn't even pay for the funeral. I was little, but I remember how they brought my Dad in, and they chased us out of the room. They didn't take people to the funeral home like they do now. They just brought him in the house and chased us out of the kitchen. But I snuck in under the table, and I wanted to see my Dad. I pulled the

blanket up and I could see his face was all crushed where the rock had fallen on him and killed him.

MB: When he came to America, did he go directly to Meyersdale?

AM: No, in those days, they traveled from one place to another because when I was born we lived in Carnegie. He worked in a mine over there. It used to be, these mining towns, they would open up a mine, and they didn't have miners, no one with experience. Then if you had a little bit of experience, they would send you from here to another mine. They were all over, and that was where they settled.

MB: In Carnegie?

AM: By Meyersdale. We went to church to West Salisbury because that's like different sections. Meyersdale was our bigger city that was where the train station used to be. Then Salisbury was a smaller town like Windber used to be. That was where we would go to do our shopping and go to church there. It was closer, only about 3 miles, and you had to walk it. We did not have cars then. Just horse and buggy, we didn't even have a horse and buggy because we couldn't afford it.

MB: So which church did you go to?

AM: I'm Polish.

MB: So, Roman Catholic?

AM: Yes.

MB: So your parents spoke Polish at home with you?

AM: Yes.

MB: Did they know any English when they came to America?

AM: Nothing. They did have education, they could read and write.

MB: So your parents went to school?

AM: Yes, in Europe. Where they lived, it was close to the city. There were horse tracks. My mother's family had one pair of shoes. When she would come home, her brother would put her shoes on, and he would go to school. They had to go to school.

MB: Do you know the name of the town that was near them?

AM: No, in those days, mothers were so occupied with work that they didn't have time to sit down and give you any information about anything.

MB: Tell me more about your mother.

AM: My mother lived here and kept boarders. As soon as one of us was big enough, we would go to work on a farm.

MB: How many of you were there?

AM: I was the oldest born in America. Then my sister, and then I had twin brothers, but the one twin died. There were four of us here, and then the two, so there were six.

MB: So your mother must have had a hard time.

AM: Oh yes.

MB: Did she remarry?

AM: Yes, she remarried, and her second husband died.

MB: In the mines too?

AM: Yes, he got hurt in the mine. He passed away, and then she lived by herself. Just like me now, only she had her own piece of land and her own house, and that's where she lived. She would not go to stay with any of the children.

MB: Did she ever come to live in Windber?

AM: No. In those days, she had cows, chickens, and pigs. She couldn't leave the house and go anywhere. She was occupied at home all the time.

MB: Did she live in Meyersdale then?

AM: No, they just went shopping in Meyersdale. They lived in a mining town, like 42 used to be, only the houses were more scattered, and it was just a little mining town that was where we lived. Then I left home to work.

MB: Where did you work?

AM: I worked in Jerome for a family that had a store. I worked there for about three years. Then I came home because we were supposed to go to Michigan, me and my brother John through friends of mine. Then my sister got married, and she called for me to come home. I came home for her wedding. I stayed at home, and then I got married. After I got married, we came to Goodtown, the post office was Pine Hill, but we called it Goodtown.

MB: How old were you when you got married?

AM: I was 16. I was born in January, and I was married in July.

MB: So, 16 and a half.

AM: 1913. 17<sup>th</sup> of July

MB: How old was your sister when she got married?

AM: 14, I think.

MB: Women married young back then, didn't they?

AM: Yes, they did.

MB: Did you ever get to go to school at all?

AM: The two of us never went, but the other two did. They built a school and they were able to go. Then they had to go to school. They had to walk in wagon tracks. But that was closer, only about a mile and a half. Then the kids could walk it.

MB: Did someone teach you to read and write?

AM: You just learned what you could on your own. I had a family of 11. I raised 10 living children. Of course, two of them are dead already. My oldest son is dead and my oldest daughter died during open heart surgery.

MB: Tell me how you met your husband.

AM: Back home. When I came home for my sister's wedding. He knew my parents' next door neighbors. They were friends and neighbors from Europe. He would go over there to see his friend, and he had to pass our place to go there. My mother knew him, but I didn't know him. That's how I met him.

MB: Did you know him long before you got married?

AM: I didn't know him. I only met him three times. I was away.

MB: What kind of wedding did you have and ceremony did you have?

AM: We just had a little house wedding. We were married in West Salisbury in St. Michael's Church. The church is still there, that's where my mother, my parents are buried. I was Catholic and my husband was Orthodox. In those days, when you were married to someone of a different religion, the children are raised in the father's religion.

MB: He is supposed to set the rules for the family?

AM: Yes. In those days, you go to your church, and he goes to his church. But I never converted.

MB: Did you go to the Catholic Church?

AM: No, I went to the Ukrainian Church. I could talk Ukrainian, and I understood everything like my own.

MB: Did your parents know those languages too besides Polish? Did they know Ukrainian?

AM: They couldn't talk Ukrainian.

MB: How did you learn?

AM: When I got married. It was a little town like 42. There was only one Polack there, and he was the only man who knew how to read and write. So he was a writer, to write for people to Europe, and read letters. He was a barber. He was an all-around man.

MB: Do you know when your parents came to America? Do you know what year your mother came?

AM: She never said, I couldn't tell you.

MB: You were born in 1897, so it would be before that.

AM: Yes. She must have come two years before, because she said I was born two years after they came here. But she never said exactly when.

MB: Did people have a hard time if they couldn't read and write in those days?

AM: It was hard. They didn't have time for history. They were occupied with work so much. They didn't have time for anything. Like me, I worked practically all day and night. We had practically no income. When we got married in 1913, my husband made \$2.45 a shift. He worked 10 hours. Sometimes the mine would run 3 days. So he would make about \$7.00 a week, and he had to repair his own motor. He was a motorman.

MB: Did your husband work in the mines all his life?

AM: Yes, all the time. He was more like a company man. He was a rock driller, a motorman, and first aid man. There were so many people coming from Europe, and they couldn't even talk. He used to pal around with the American boys, and he learned to talk so when he went to the mine he would always get head jobs. He got picked up quick.

MB: Was that usual, someone who was American born had better jobs?

AM: Yes. In those days, if you understand a job, you got a job. There were a lot of them that could not catch onto the work quickly. Just take some kid nowadays, some learn quicker than others.

MB: Tell me about your husband's family. Did they come from Europe?

AM: They didn't have anybody in this country. It was just him, but he had cousins. He was born here. Then his mother took him back to Europe when he was just an infant. He didn't remember anything, but he always wanted to come back here. It's like I always said, once a bird has changed, it always wants to go back to its own nest [laughs]. Pete's mother and my husband, they were first cousins. He had a lot of cousins in this country. He had cousins on both his mother's and father's sides, but he was the only here without a family.

MB: Where was his family from in Europe?

AM: They came from Austria-Poland. The country was under Polish rule. The wars, they occupied certain places.

MB: When did he come back to America? How old was he?

AM: 13. Maybe he was younger.

MB: Did he come back by himself?

AM: His godfather had to bring him. Because his father died, and he wanted to come, and his mother let him come. But he couldn't come by himself. He had to come with someone who was responsible for him. So his godfather brought him here.

MB: What year would that have been?

AM: I don't know.

MB: You were married in 1913.

AM: Yes.

MB: Did you live with your parents?

AM: No, I got married, and we went housekeeping. We got a house.

MB: Where?

AM: We lived in Goodtown.

MB: Did you live there a long time?

AM: We lived there for so long, then he went to Michigan with my brother, and he didn't like it there, then he came back. He got his job back in the mines, on the motor, like he had before. Then we went back to Goodtown again. We lived there, and then we moved out of Goodtown. We moved to Cambrook, it was No. 2 [Lockery] Mines, where he was running the motor. That was when the flu was going around, 1918, then he got a job in Cambrook, but when he worked for this company, then he had to live in their houses. This was just across the river. Then he got a job with Loyalhanna. Then he had to move from No. 2 to Loyalhanna houses. It was the same town, you could see the houses, but it was two different companies.

MB: Was Lockery mine with the Berwind mines?

AM: No, they called it [Lockery] mines. Berwind owned it, but [Lockery] was running it. Like you have a business, but I run it. That's how this was. Then we moved to Cambrook. In 1922, they went on strike for five months.

MB: Tell me about what that was like.

AM: Before he went to back to work in the mine. He said, we nearly starved during the strike, and now we only work half of the time. Then he came back here to Windber. It was the only place with empty houses. So we moved here in '22. That's 61 years last fall.

MB: Did you move into a company house in '22?

AM: Yes. We lived up there in 1280. Then when my family got bigger, then we moved down here in a bigger house.

MB: So did he go work in one of the mines then?

AM: The mine was over there.

MB: In 42?

AM: Yes. Everybody would go out of the house and straight to the mine. They worked for so long, and then the company should the mine down.

MB: Had he been to Windber before 1922?

AM: His came here because of his cousins, and he visited them when they lived here. They were hiring over here. Berwind was working every day. That's why we came here because there was work every day.

MB: Was there a strike here at that time?

AM: The strike was over. It was over in September.

MB: What do you remember about the strike in 1922?



AM: At that time, when you went on strike, a lot of people had to move out. The company had outsiders come in. When we came, the strike was over already. There were still camps in the woods up there, where the strikers would stay because the company would make you move. If you were out on strike, they [the company] would load your furniture up and set it along the road, [and say] “Go wherever you’re going to go.” They wanted people to go back to work, and they wouldn’t go. Just like now, they fight for different things. That was what they were fighting for then.

MB: They were fighting for union.

AM: Yes. But the union was poor, they couldn’t give you anything.

MB: It must have been hard times for some people.

AM: Yes. It was tough.

MB: Did they throw people out of houses in Cambrook too?

### **End of Tape 1 Side A**

### **Beginning Tape 1 Side B (March 14, 1984)**

AM: They talk about the old days. How cheap everything was, but if you don’t have that income, where are you going to go? Now you have government support. In those days you had nothing, but when you worked for the company, they gave you 50 cents credit on the store book that you could live on. I lived in this house. I had a garage, the house, the lights, and the water, everything for \$11.00 a month. If you didn’t work, you lived here, and they gave you credit until the mines started up. When the work started, then they would take off the credit, maybe \$2.00 a pay until you had your back rent paid. You had hospitalization, for a whole family, I paid a dollar.

MB: Have you lived in the same house since 1922?

AM: I have lived in the same house now for 52 years, because we lived for nine years in 1280.

MB: But that was Mine 42 also?

AM: Yes. We lived up there then we moved down here.

MB: But you have been in Mine 42 since 1922?

AM: Yes. That was 61 years last September.

MB: How long did your husband work in Mine 42?

AM: He worked until he got arthritis. Then he didn't work for 29 years. He passed away when he was 79.

MB: When did he pass away Mrs. Mucker?

AM: It will be 18 years this July. I've been living by myself. He died in '66. My daughter passed away in '61 when she went for heart surgery. My sister passed away in '67. I can't remember what year my son died.

MB: You had 11 children, and 10 living ones?

AM: Yes, one died as an infant, when she was delivered.

MB: Did you have your children at home or did you go to the hospital?

AM: If I had her in a hospital, she would have been living. I had them at home. I was pregnant with her when we were moving from up there, and I papered this whole house. She was due in August, and we moved here in May. We carried furniture and that was how I hurt myself. When I was to deliver her, I couldn't deliver her myself, and we had to get the doctor. But I guess it was too late because he couldn't bring her to anymore.

MB: Did you have mid-wives that came and helped with your children?

AM: I did for four of them. We had someone come in after they were born.

MB: But they didn't come in to help you have the baby?

AM: No.

MB: You did it yourself?

AM: Yes. Over here, there was a lady living up the street, and my husband was working that night, I helped deliver. A neighbor came over and said, "Do you want a doctor?" I said, "Why, what for?" I had her lying on her side, all you have to do is cut the cord, but I was afraid to cut the cord because I had never done it. I knew what to do, but I was afraid. So she got her mother, and her mother came over and cut the cord, and bathed the baby. My husband didn't come home until 7 that morning from work. There was a cave-in at the mine, and he had to work a double shift. I drove home myself. I had no trouble delivering the babies. I had boarders, and I was packing lunch. I felt a delivery pain, and we only had two rooms so the boarders would dress in the kitchen, and I went to the room. I only had it across the floor. The baby was born on the floor. The mid-wife lived across the street. One of the boarders ran over to get Mrs. [Peconski] so Mrs. [Peconski] came over, cut the cord, and put me in bed. The next day I was up. One day.

MB: Did you keep a lot of boarders?

AM: When you only have four rooms, you can only have so many. We had two bedrooms, and there were five men in one room, two double beds and a single bed. Then we had the other room, and I had a bed downstairs for myself. We had the bed in this corner and a table in that corner where they would eat because they had to dress and bath in the kitchen. See, there were only four rooms. We didn't have conveniences like there is today. I had to wash up all the time and a big wash boiler on the stove with hot water because you had to carry your water.

MB: From the outside.

AM: Yes, from the outside, and you filled the wash boiler all the time to cook and bath and whatever you needed the hot water for because you had a coal stove to have the wash boiler hot for lots of hot water.

MB: So your water was outside and the toilet was outside.

AM: Oh yes, we had toilets up there.

MB: You had cows, chickens, and pigs?

AM: Yes, we had cows and chickens and pigs. Everything, my daughter-in-law said, "That goose, I'll never forget." We were scared of it. It would go through our yard and the neighbor's yard to protect its babies. If I wanted my cow, I would go out in the alley and call, "Soup Daisy," and Daisy would come for me to milk her. Chickens, all I would have to do is go out into the alley, and they knew, I'd call, "peep, peep, peep." On their wings, they would be flying for supper.

MB: So your husband worked in the mines until 1937, and then he didn't work anymore?

AM: His hand hurt and poison set in. Then he was in the hospital, and they took his index finger off. After that he worked for a while, and he couldn't work, then he went back. They had to haul him out of the mines, and then he wouldn't allow him to go into the mine anymore.

MB: Did he get some compensation or something?

AM: No.

MB: There wasn't any in those days.

AM: He couldn't get anything. That was when Social Security came out. I could never get Social Security. To this day, I don't get Social Security because he didn't work when Social Security came out. See, to get anything, I had seven boys, I couldn't even get Welfare. It was up to my children to support me and my husband. As soon as my boys were 18, they went into the mine, and they took the family over. So my boys raised half of my family. My Stan was working until he got married, and then Frank was working, then John was working, then Nick, and then the girls. But the labor was so cheap that they weren't making enough to keep themselves going. Because after my son got married, I tried to get Welfare, so then they gave it

to me until my George was 18. They passed a law when Stan was 17, he could go in the mine. George and Frank had to go to school until they were 18. Then you couldn't get a job until you were 18 years old. It was just like steps, from one boy to another one, and they would raise the family. Then after Paul got married, then my Janie was working and then Janie kept the family going.

MB: What did she do?

AM: Office work. She went to high school until she graduated. She worked in Johnstown for people named [Enoski] doing office work, so she worked for them. She worked there until she got married. After they got married, they lived here, so they still kept me and their father. When they left it was up to all my boys, each one had to send me so much a month, because I couldn't get Welfare. Because I had boys, now the girl didn't have to support you, but a boy does.

MB: Why is that?

AM: Because a girl ... her husband had to support his family. See? Now like my boys, they had to support their parents, but the girl's husband had to support their parents, they were disabled. Like my Janie, she stayed home so she took over the house because she wasn't married. See, if you are not married, when you are working, you have income, so you have keep the family going. But when she got married, she didn't have to keep the family anymore because of his side. After that it was the children keeping me. Like now, after my husband passed away, I don't get Social Security, I don't get a pension. I had an autopsy of my husband taken, and his lungs were all gone, oh, he had so many miners' complications. He had arthritis. So I get Black Lung and Blind pension. It isn't much, but it's a great help. They send me a slip, and I get all my medication through Blind pension paid for. Like \$50.00 a month.

MB: That must be hard.

AM: I have a roof, I have to buy my oil, gas, and I pay my water bill and sewage. I pay my Medicare and that runs me \$61 and some cents every three months. So out of what I get I have to manage these bills. But I don't want to go live with anybody as long as I can take care of myself. I manage on what I get.

MB: It must be hard though these days.

AM: Yes. My children are all retired, but two. Frank is retired already, John, and George had a heart attack so he's on disability so he's not working. So I only have Paul and Lou working anymore.

MB: Do they work in the mines still?

AM: No, he works at the gravel plant. My Nick is still working, but he's 65. He says as long as his health keeps him going he's going to work.

MB: All your sons worked in the mines though at one time.

AM: Well, Nick has always worked in Michigan. He went when he was 18. He has always worked there. Frank has been in Michigan because during the Depression you couldn't get work, you could only get what they gave you on surplus, and they all left home and wherever they settled is where they lived.

MB: It must have been hard in the Depression too.

AM: It was tough. Because at that time I said people that had bonds and money in the bank, they froze the money and froze the bonds, you could look at your book, but you couldn't get your money.

MB: Did you lose any money that way?

AM: No, we didn't have anything because we had the family.

MB: In 1922, when you first lived in Mine 42, it was pretty far from Windber. Did you have to walk to Windber?

AM: Yes. The other day Pete said to me, "Why don't you do what you used to? Walk over the hill." I wished to God those days were here. I used to put one of children on my back and walk over the hill to the old man's first cousin's place. His Dad was my poor kids' godfather.

MB: Did you go to the same church then? Did you go to Saints Peter & Paul?

AM: Yes. I still belong to Orthodox. I pay my dues there because that's where my husband is buried, and we have a lot bought right next to him, and I have a tombstone. The children bought it, but it's his and my name on it. So I still keep up the dues at the Orthodox Church.

MB: So you were active in the church?

AM: Well, I don't go to church because I can't get around, I can't see, I can't hear. I can't hear anything going on, I don't recognize people. There is nothing I can do for my vision. I am completely blind in this eye. My daughter insists that I get glasses, and my grandson is in college to be an eye specialist. He's going to be a doctor when he graduates. So my Helen said, "Why don't you take her to a different eye specialist. I can't see why she can't get glasses so she can see." The specialist told me there are no glasses, no surgery, nothing they can do for me. Behind my pupil, there is some difficulty that's cutting off my vision. So as long as I can see to get around, until that blurs over, then I'll be completely blind. I have a pacemaker, I have a bad heart. I say that I have everything wrong. I have sugar [diabetes], a bad heart, I'm deaf, I can't see, I have every complication. But I still try to live with myself.

MB: You do very well. What did you do for fun with your husband and your family?

AM: Nothing. Sew, crotchet ... I gave my grandson a little quilt, they call it crazy patch, but it was feather stitch. So I gave it to him. I said, "Becky, you are the only one who makes quilts.

I'll give you this for Nicky." She says, "Grandma, I'm going to frame it." So when my daughter-in-law came back, she said, "Larry made a frame, he has that little comforter in a frame," because they don't work like that. I used to sit and crochet or knit or embroider.

MB: Did you ever go to any dances in Windber?

AM: No. We didn't go anywhere. We didn't have transportation. How do you leave a bunch of kids in the house and go anyplace? The only place we would ever go to is a wedding after the kids grew up so they could take care of one another. Whenever the relatives at weddings, maybe I would go and help out, but then my husband wasn't working. He would stay home, and I would go.

MB: Who lived in Mine 42 in the '20s and '30s? Was it, your husband was Ukrainian by descent and you are Polish. Was it mostly Poles and Ukrainians living in Mine 42?

AM: It was a mixture of all kinds, Hungarian, Italian... The lady next door to me was Polish. She moved out, an Italian family moved in. Then there was a Ukrainian family across the street. There was a Spanish family next to her. There was every type of people. A farmer would come around, and this Polish lady would come to the farmer who was English, and he doesn't understand what she was saying. She was talking to him in Polish. I spoke in English so I translated. Then a Spanish lady, from Spain, came to my house, opened my cupboards and pointed at this can, and I said, "Peas." She had a good memory, at the store, she would remember. She remembered that she wanted peas or beans or whatever. One day she came with a crumb of bread, they don't have anything to eat, and I said, "Bread." She would come to my house, open the cupboard, and she would point at whatever she wanted, and I would tell her what it was so she could go and buy it.

MB: People helped one another a lot.

AM: Yes, that is what I said. In those days, you live for love and friendship. One neighbor would help another one. When I lived in 1280, my daughter was in the hospital, my husband was in the hospital, and my George was a baby. We didn't have a high chair or a crib. We had a box. Mrs. [Kooney] had a boy the same age as I did, my George. So I put him in a box, took him over to my neighbor. She would feed her baby and she would feed my baby. I would walk from here to Windber, but the train used to come up for the miners, to pick miners up. It would pick them up in the morning and bring them home in the evening because there was a train that came up twice a day. When the train would be coming to pick miners up at 3:30, then I left the hospital to catch the train, so I would be home in time to make supper for the family. I had a cow to take care of and the kids. But people were healthy. All those babies I had, they never seen a doctor until they were about two years old when they caught a cold. They never had colic, they were never sick, they didn't have a cold. I didn't feed them all this different junk. I cooked, and I fed them from the table from the time they were little. I took their fork and mashed their food, and fed them with a spoon. Now my granddaughter had a baby boy, and he had staph infection as soon as he was born. Now how did that baby get staph infection when he was in the hospital isolated? They brought him home and they had to isolate him, and there were nurses and doctors taking care of it. I said, "I didn't have a special bathtub, I washed clothes in

that tub, my family bathed in that tub. A baby was born you wash the tub out and bathed a baby in that same tub, and never had any kind of germs. They grew up without a germ.

MB: How did you manage baths in a family that size? Did you have a Saturday night bath?

AM: I washed them. They would wash their feet and their hands in the wash basin. Then twice a week they took a bath.

### **End of Tape 1 Side B**

### **Start of Tape 2 Side A (March 14, 1984)**

MB: That must have been a big job though to bath all your family.

AM: You lived with it. So you did the best you could. You didn't run to the store and buy a dress. You took old pants, and you took the back parts of the pants, and you made your baby crawlers out of it. Today, you don't see a patch on children's pants. When my kids were growing up, I took one patch off and put another patch on. At night, I would sit up and patch clothes. I would make their clothes. Up the street there was a school teacher and her girls. She would give me her old clothes. I would take the coats, ripped them apart turned them inside out where they weren't bleached. I got a pattern and made girl coats out of it. Or if I had a skirt, I could make two skirts out of one. So I cut it in half, and I made those little sailor blouses out of flour sacks, and made them a skirt. So I had skirts and blouses for the kids to go to school. I made their dresses. I bought material. I did all that at night.

MB: Did you buy material at the company store or someplace else?

AM: What I could buy I bought. What I couldn't buy, people gave me their clothes that they had no use for. I cut them down and remodeled them. I always sewed. A lot of people didn't. When we moved here, there was no one who knew how to paper. The company would supply the paper, but they didn't know how to paper. So I would go and paper for a \$1.00 a room. Just to make a dollar. We never had any money, but when a huckster came, we always bought bananas and fruit and dip and stuff, and that was how I get it. Because my husband got \$2.00 on his statement, he worked two weeks for those two dollars so those two dollars were his. I didn't have two pennies for a stamp, if I didn't earn a dollar somewhere. Then, my next door neighbor couldn't buy clothes to fit her so she would come over, and say, "Agnes, if you make me a dress, I'll give you a dollar." So she would give me material and I make those tack dresses. You know what they are, you cut the up the side, split them, put a collar on them, put a belt on them, taper the sleeves. I'd make a dollar. I always had an extra dollar.

MB: The company store was down there, right?

AM: Yes, it is still here, they have it for a supply house now, but it's still here. 35 had a store, 40 had a store. It was a company store they sold you furniture, and the Eureka Store, that was a big store. You could go and get stuff there on a lease, you signed a lease, and each pay day they

would take off whatever you could afford because they divided it up, so much for your store book, so much allowance for whatever you needed.

MB: Did you go to the big store in Windber often, the Eureka Store?

AM: Yes, because you had the book. We went here, and when we were in Windber, we would go there. They had pink slips, if you didn't have the store book with you, like before payday, which let you put stuff on credit. You would put a pink slip in your book.

MB: I understand the company wouldn't like it if you bought from other company stores.

AM: If you didn't have money in those days, and you didn't work for the company, the company store didn't give you any either. Now, you don't have credit anywhere, you have credit cards, whoever has credit cards. But like before, they came out with them, and it's not too many years.

MB: This place is kind of isolated. There wouldn't have been any other place to go besides the company store.

AM: Like now, we have a little store up the street. She has milk, bread, different types of groceries. You go when you run out. It's George Frankel. They had the corner house, and she has a little store. I used to buy a lot up there, but now I can't walk. See, I'm out of luck.

MB: So how do you get your food then?

AM: My son Paul, he picks up my groceries. When I go to the doctors, I still manage to go shopping, but I have to have someone go with me because I can't see. I can't get around. I just walk with a cane.

MB: What did you think of Windber when you first came to the Windber area in 1922?

AM: When I came to Windber, it was like any other old town. Windber wasn't as big as it is now of course they had the store, the bank, and they had the employment office. That corner is still the same.

MB: I see, yes, that one big corner of Graham and Somerset. Did you feel you were a part of Windber, living out here in 42? Or did you feel isolated?

AM: In those days, where you worked was home.

MB: People lived near where they worked.

AM: Yes. When we moved to 42, I had never seen this town. I didn't know where 42 was, but the company gave you a truck. So the company loaded your furniture, but they wouldn't give you a truck to haul your cow, so my husband walked with the cow all the way here. And me and



the kids, the one truck was loaded with furniture, the other was partially loaded and I rode in the front with the driver and kids were in the back.

MB: So you're husband walked. How long did it take him to walk?

AM: All day. He didn't get here until 10 that night. He really walked. He didn't need any exercise. He got all the exercise he needed.

MB: Did you ever go to the swimming hole they talk about near 41?

AM: When there was a dam there, two boys drowned, and then they blew the dam up.

MB: I didn't know that.

AM: They went sled riding, and the ice broke, and the two boys drowned. Then they blew that dam up. They had a power house here and the water supply.

MB: Was 42 more lively compared to now?

AM: Now the houses are all remodeled. There are a couple houses that are not remodeled. But it's so different than what it used to be.

MB: The [Berwind White] Company sold the houses and people bought the houses.

AM: Whoever wanted to buy. Like this house went for \$1,500. What can you buy for \$1,500 today?

MB: When was that the 1960's?

AM: It must have been.

MB: The mines were working anymore they closed them down then, and that's when they sold the houses.

AM: Yes. Then they put a water line in, I have a meter, you paid for your power, pay for your water. Before that it was all company supplied. You had your water, your lights. Everything was included.

MB: Everything was one payment.

AM: Yes. Now you have to have income or you can't live. So they have Welfare. In those days, if you had nothing, you went begging from house to house. There was a fellow down at 35, he was blind, and he had a little girl. So his little girl would lead him from one house to another, wherever he could get a nickel. People didn't have money, so they would go begging for stuff. They would bring a basket. You would give them a can of milk or whatever you could

give them. A little bit of rice in a bag, rice, beans or barley and stuff, you would shovel it in a bag, sugar.

MB: Who were the people who ran things? Were there powerful people in the area, in Windber and 42.

AM: Over here there were no colored people.

MB: People from just Eastern Europe.

AM: The people of my generation, I'm the only one left. I am the oldest resident of 42. I'm the only one that was here in '22. All the other people are nearly all dead and all gone.

MB: Do you remember the Burgess of Windber? [Barefoot] was the Burgess for a long time, do you remember him or Mr. Newberry, any of those people?

AM: I didn't know people in Windber that well. I never used to go. I had a family, and I was always home. The only place we really used to go was if the [Gourulas] had something going on because that was the old man's cousin, and that's where we went to go mostly.

MB: Do you remember anything about elections? What's the earliest election you remember?

AM: In those days we didn't have television or radio, we didn't get a paper. You didn't have anything. Now my Dad, he got a Polish paper once a week. So when you went some place, you didn't know anything.

MB: Do you remember the name of the Polish paper?

AM: No, I was just a little kid. He was a great reader. He would come home from work, that's my stepfather; he would eat his supper, and he would go upstairs and read magazines and the paper.

MB: When did your mother remarry? Who did she remarry?

AM: I can't remember what year it was. His name was [Valentine Perratta], Polish name.

MB: Was your mother remarried before you went off to work?

AM: Yes. In those days, you didn't make anything. I worked on a farm, away from home, and made \$5.00 a month. That wasn't even \$1.25 a week. They didn't pay you by the week. They paid you by the month. Every month has extra days. If they paid you by the week, they wouldn't gain those couple days. So they paid you by the month, but I had my board and my room, and that's what I made to buy clothes with.

MB: Did you parents vote or did you and your husband vote in the elections?

AM: No.

MB: Do you remember when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected? What did you think of him?

AM: Yes. I thought he was wonderful. Just like Reagan, nobody liked him, but that man is doing wonders. This country was almost bankrupt when he got in, and now he's trying to get everything back on the feet again, now I don't know about [Mondale] he's running now. They all have it in for him [Reagan] that he's trying to cut everything down. Now I might be wrong, but what good are these high wages and everything is going up. The man that's on high point with big money, sure they can afford it, but what is the little guy supposed to live on that only has a little bit of income.

MB: What did you think of Roosevelt?

AM: Oh, I thought he was great.

MB: Why did you think that?

AM: I don't know, because everything was so down, and I just thought he put everything on feet. He made such progress.

MB: Did you vote for him?

AM: No, I didn't vote.

MB: I understand Windber, the company used to favor the Republicans.

AM: Yes. They used to take charge in the mine and you voted.

MB: Were the miners afraid they would lose their jobs if they didn't vote Republican in those days?

AM: Yes.

MB: Do you remember when the Union came in, did that change things much?

AM: They used to blame the presidents for stuff, but the president isn't head of everything. There is a Congress behind them. He might be a president, but he can't do everything he wants to do. He has backers, and if the group doesn't go with him what can he do? He is under everybody else.

MB: Do you remember when the United Mine Workers came in?

AM: When the first strike [1906], I was just a little kid then. People didn't have anything to eat. When the train was coming, they would go lay on the railroad tracks so they would get killed. Because of the strike for Union there was no work.

MB: Was this in Windber, Mrs. Mucker?

AM: No, this was back home. It must have been around '07, '08.

MB: In 1906 there was the big strike.

AM: '22 is the biggest strike that I remember they had.

MB: The United Mine Workers didn't come in until the 1930's. Your sons went into the mines at age 18. Did they become members of the Union then?

AM: Like my husband, they didn't have Social Security then. They were fighting for pensions, Social Security, hospitalization. When my husband was disabled, he didn't pay into Social Security, and he did couldn't get anything. That's why I don't get anything today. It's just like a bank, you put money in a bank, you take it out, but if they freeze it, it's not yours. You still don't get it. You can have bonds, but if they are going to freeze those bonds, you're going to look at them, but you're not going to cash them.

MB: Had you ever wanted to become something other than a mother and a housewife? Did you ever have the desire to be something else?

AM: I never had the chance to think of anything. Your mind is so occupied with work that all you can think of is that I have to do this, I have to do that. Everything was hand work. You didn't have, like when I got married, I didn't have a washing machine. You sewed by hand, like my mother, but I had boarders, and I made my babies' baby clothes on the sewing machine. Because I could get it on credit, when the boarders paid me board, I took that \$1.00 and paid on my sewing machine. I bought it in 1913. I still have my sewing machine.

MB: Do you remember much about World War One where ever you were living then? There were so many people from Europe, the must have been upset by that war then.

AM: I don't remember much about that.

MB: The flu epidemic, do you remember that?

AM: Oh, we lived in No. 2 then. Oh, that was terrible. I often say, I guess I have seen so much of it. How are all these sick people going to live, when they quarantine you in, and nobody goes to that house. You have to have fire in the stove. You have to have food. You have to have someone take care of you. They had a watchman. We lived in No. 2 then. If the saw you going to your neighbor's, they quarantined you then. So people were dying like cattle. The neighbor across the street from me, the boy died on Sunday, the father died next Sunday, mother died third Sunday. There was one little girl left. The house is empty. They don't have any relatives. The

next door neighbor took that little girl in. Don't know if they raised her or what I don't know because as soon as the flu was over we moved to the Cambrook side.

MB: Do you remember the Flood of 1936?

AM: Yes. There was one before that was worse. 1936 I remember because we lived here. That was out in Johnstown.

MB: Do you remember any other historical events, wars?

AM: It was so long ago.

MB: Do you remember when Saints Peter & Paul split off from St. Mary's, and became a Byzantine Rite Church?

AM: St. Mary's Church had so many that wanted to go to the Catholic side. The older people wanted to keep their side, the Orthodox side. That's when the split. It's like anything else, so like any war, there are more on your side you win. There were more on that side so it became Catholic. That's when the Orthodox split and built their own. But, Orthodox religion is the old religion. It's more like Christ's time. The first calendar that was made was 13 months in the year when you divide the year by 28 days each month that makes 13 months. Orthodox holidays are always later because they go by the old calendar, the first calendar. The Orthodox won't give up. They want to stick to the old religion. I say, what does religion have to do with your life, but you have to belong somewhere. When my nephew got killed in New York, and we had the funeral all arranged at 2 o'clock the priest is supposed to come for the corpse. He said, "We don't have identical death of him, and we cannot bury him." My brother-in-law belonged to that church all his life, when he had corpse they wouldn't bury him. You know who buried him, the Protestant cemetery. That's why I said, how can you be a member, have trouble, you don't belong there. Mr. [Slifka], his wife was my kids' godmother. Those people were so religion, Oh my God, I said, there is nobody in this earth that could be more religious than they were. This priest, Father [Pilusac], he was from Boswell, and they wouldn't bury him at the cemetery. I went to the funeral because she was my kids' godmother. He came to the house and he preached.

### **End of Tape 2 Side A**

### **Beginning of Tape 2 Side B (March 14, 1984)**

AM: He's got to be buried, and he's worked all his life for his church. He says, "I will spend many nights, I'll make many suppers at this house, and today we are not allowed to bury him." So when they built the Orthodox Church in Cambrook, he was the first man that was buried there. They had one corner divided off for people that committed suicide, because he had cancer of the throat, and he couldn't stand it no anymore. They had no cure for it. So he went to the bathroom, and he cut his throat. Just because he cut his throat, he couldn't be buried in the cemetery.

MB: Where did this happen?

AM: In Berlin. They owned a place there. This Father [Pilusac], he used to come there, they would lend it to him for one night to give people communion and confession once a year.

MB: For the Orthodox?

AM: Yes. When we lived in Goodtown, this priest, he came from Europe, like I told you, there was only one Polack in that town that knew how to read and write. The priest came and they built a church there. So he came there just for what they would give him to eat to keep him. He started school. All these young boys, 25, 24 years old, everybody's blind, they can't read, they can't tell their check number. Because where they came from in Europe, they didn't have schools. So he started school there, and this priest used to come over and spend every night at my house. So there is nothing they can tell me, because I know about it.

MB: Did he teach you to read and write too?

AM: He taught Ukrainian.

MB: Can you write in Ukrainian?

AM: No.

MB: So when you had your children and your family, did you have any customs or traditions at holiday times? Was there a holiday that meant a lot to you?

AM: We used to only celebrate Easter and Christmas. On New Year's, we didn't keep that as a holiday because they had to work. We only kept the important days because you had to work for a living.

MB: How did you celebrate Christmas?

AM: We celebrate the Ukrainian. I kept my holidays. We always celebrated Ukrainian holidays. My daughter Helen, she was telling her friends, she said, "You know, I never got a Christmas present in all my life." The people just about called her a liar. They said, "That's not possible." She said, "I can prove it to you. I can take you to my mother's house. My mother would make us a big holiday night supper. We had a big supper, everything there was to eat, we had it, but we never got a Christmas present." The only Christmas present I got was in a hospital because she was in the hospital being operated on her ankle. They gave her a doll baby and a cradle as a Christmas present. That was the only Christmas present we ever got. You ask all my kids, they will all tell you, we still wish they had that holiday night supper. You had every kind of food, you had fish it was all like the old calendar. Jesus walked the earth like we do. It was like this priest used to say, "He was a miracle man. He knew what he was doing." We got to talking because I worked for Jewish people. I asked, "Why don't Jewish people eat Pork?" He laughed, and said, "You want to know why?" When Jesus walked the earth and he came to a Jewish family, and they took their aunt and turned the trough over on her, and they asked Jesus,

“If you are so smart, what’s under that trough?” He answered, “A pig,” and their aunt turned into a pig. Jewish people are the most religious people on this earth. They don’t eat Pork. I’ve worked for Jews, and if I was hungry for it, she didn’t keep me from eating it. She said, you go buy yourself a piece, we have a stove, and you can make it for yourself.

MB: When did you work for that family, when you were little?

AM: When I was 13, when I left home, because that was where I worked.

MB: How did you get that job?

AM: My sister lived in Jerome, and I had a girl friend, Nora [Gerdiski], she got me the job. That is how I got there. But those people, I’m telling you, they treated me so good that my own parents couldn’t treat me any better. That’s how good they were to me. Before we had the ice cream parlor, she used to go next door to buy something because we had a clothing store. She wouldn’t come home unless she got me an ice cream cone. Just like their own kid, except they didn’t have any kids.

MB: So what did you do for her?

AM: I did the housework. I worked in the store. Then we started an ice cream counter. Then she had me work behind this ice cream counter. She used to make a big jug of orangeade, mix it, chilled an empty glass, we had a table, and we have a dipper. You serve ice cream and sold candy, and cigars, and stuff like that. That side was a shoe store and this side was a clothing store. I worked behind the ice cream counter. I made \$5.00 a month, but if I stayed in Saturday nights, I made 50 cents. Just working behind the counter, now they say you’re a waitress.

MB: Did you have any other traditions? Where godparents important?

AM: My godparents, I don’t even know my godparents. We moved away when I was a baby. Wherever you lived, you had godparents. It hurts when you think of it. This lady, she was pregnant, I think she was Lithuanian, I’m not sure. She wanted this baby baptized, and nobody would stand for that baby, because her husband left her. So when the priest came to baptize the baby, she said, you baptize the baby in my hands and my son will stand for it. He was just little. So the priest took the baby off of her, gave it to that woman, the other godmother and godfather, and he said, “you are going to be this baby’s godparents.”

MB: I guess it was important to have godparents.

AM: Well, when Jesus was baptized, he had sponsors. Jesus was baptized on Jordan River. My daughter Janie, she went to Jerusalem, she went on a trip, and she went to see the Jordan River, and they went to see the grave of Jesus.

MB: Have you ever had the chance to travel much?

AM: No. See, my daughter and her husband, they belong to church. My daughter was teaching

one group of children and my son-in-law was teaching a bigger group. So there were five of them from the group that went on a tour to Jerusalem.

MB: Did she live in Windber then?

AM: No. They lived in Douglasville. Now they moved to New York. They bought their own place and they moved. He got laid off and didn't have work, but right now she's not working. She was just down to see her brother in Florida. She just got back a week ago Sunday.

MB: When you married your husband, a Ukrainian marrying a Polish woman, right? Was there any problem with that? What about other nationalities marrying one another?

AM: No, nationality didn't have anything to do with it because they associated.

MB: But many of these people from Eastern Europe didn't marry English people did they?

AM: No. They married Polish or Slavish. You know more of a Catholic.

MB: Did you ever go to any of the halls or dances?

AM: Yes, we used to go to dances. When I worked, that was before we got the ice cream counter. In Jerome, there was a hotel, and there were girls working at the hotel. They kept boarders, any of the outsiders that came in. You had to go to Boswell to a dance. That is five miles. When I had a night off, me, my brother, my friends, his friends, the whole group of us got together, and we walked five miles. Dance all evening, when the orchestra quit, we walked home, went to bed for an hour and worked all day. I say, this generation doesn't know what fun is. We used to go bobsled riding. We made a big bobsled and had a big hill. Go down the hill, sliding. We had hayrides in the summer. They had this wagon with all this straw and they would go out for a hayride. They jingle bells on the horses. The girls would be singing. It was a lot of fun. People used to love music. They didn't take lessons, they played by heart. The orchestra, you hummed them a song and they played it. My granddaughter got married, and they had an orchestra. Our family goes for Polka music, and they wanted polkas, but there were no polka players. You can't tell them what to play, they can't play it. All of this hippie music, the older generation doesn't go for hippie music. They go for the old time, of course, this generation doesn't know how to polka. They went for these colored dances.

MB: Did you ever hear of any dances at 42 itself?

AM: Once in a while.

MB: Which hall was that?

AM: It was just a little place. You go have a wedding or a party. They have a sewing club. Ladies go in there once a week if you want to sew or knit. But I don't go. I can't play bingo. I can't sew.



MB: When you were younger did they have something like that in 42 or did you have to go to Windber?

AM: When we were young, they didn't have anything that was a motor barn. But after they closed the mines down my George and his young friends got together, and they built a hall. But every time they opened it, people would break in, robbed the stuff. It was going under, so they closed it down. But now they started it again.

MB: Do you know any Polish songs? Can you sing any for me?

AM: A couple, but I don't remember them.

MB: Do Ukrainian songs? Do you know [*Orchi Chornia*]?

AM: No.

MB: You couldn't sing something for me?

AM: There was a song we sung at weddings. [Speaking Polish]

MB: Can you tell me what it means?

AM: It's a like a flower, the flowers are better than a widower. A widow would beat and slash them. A single fellow will hug you and kiss you. It rhymes in Polish, but it's hard to translate.

MB: Do you know any other songs like that?

AM: Then there is a short song. [Speaking Polish], "the gander is floating in front of my house, but I love you Johnny, but don't tell anybody."

MB: When your kids were growing up, what language did you speak to them?

AM: These [songs] I learned when I was a kid, but you forget. My sister Julia was here. She doesn't know her language, she forgot it. I said, "Don't tell me you forgot your own nationality." She said, "Agnes, I don't." I so sang this song to her, and she, "I don't know one thing you're saying to me. How can I remember them? You have a good memory and I don't."

MB: When you're children were growing up, did you speak Polish to them?

AM: No, Ukrainian. Not one of my kids can speak Ukrainian. I was married in that town, there was one Polack, and I learned to talk Ukrainian. I could talk Ukrainian better than any Ukrainian. When I went to my son-in-law's place, and his friends came there, and they called my son-in-law a liar, they said, "she's no Polack, she talks better Ukrainian than we do."

MB: Do you speak Ukrainian at home until they went to school or did you speak English?

AM: Very seldom because my husband talked English. He didn't want the kids to understand it, so we talked Ukrainian between ourselves, but we didn't talk too much at home. My son Nick came here one time, he said to me, "You know Mom, I can remember one word you used say, [speaks Ukrainian] what does that mean? I still say it, and I don't know what it means."

MB: What does that mean?

AM: The duck will kick you. You know the duck can't kick you. I told him, now when someone asks what that means you can tell them.

MB: I understand you received a marriage proposal from Pete's father.

AM: Yes. My parents didn't talk the other language. My mother talked very broken English. Because you live in the country, who comes?

MB: I understand you received a marriage proposal from Pete's father. Did he surprise you?

AM: Yes. It was so long since he was up here. With my vision being bad, I didn't recognize him.

MB: But his Dad proposed to you. You turned him down I guess?

AM: Yes. I lived a tough life. I have a big family, and I couldn't see it. He has a big family. He wants to come home to his family. My grandson was here yesterday. I said my house is like a central station. My Lou and Rose were here just two weeks ago. They come like a cloud from the sky. I never know when anybody's coming. They just come in. They were here just a short weekend. George's Helen was here last night. Everybody says you are by yourself, why do you want to buy so much of this and that. I can't have an empty cellar and refrigerator. My granddaughter told me that they are coming for the 4<sup>th</sup>, they are in Michigan. So they are coming for a week. One goes, another one comes. My Lou said you'll never see me on the holiday. He said, take my word, I am going to drop in like I did today. They came here one holiday, they cooked food, where are they. We had to buy paper plates, everybody ate outside. There was no place to eat inside. They had a station wagon, some slept out in the alley. The floors were full. This is going to be our fifth generation already. There are grandchildren, great grandchildren and great great grandchildren. And everyone wants to come to Grandma's. Now my baby daughter, there are four of them. We used to butcher. We were talking about how we used to do it in the old days. My son-in-law Ted, used to come here, and he couldn't get over the stuff I used to make. Michael said to me, we were talking about liver pudding and blood pudding, which now you are not allowed to make it. My son John said, since that Polish market went under I can't buy head cheese, liver pudding, I can't buy nothing.

MB: Do you still make Polish foods?

AM: Yes. We were just talking about it. You know what we wasted from the pig, what was in the stomach. We ate everything. The stomach, I flushed it out, took the liner out of it, and made head cheese out it. The intestines, we flushed it, I scrapped because there are three tissues on the

intestine. We took the first tissue out, we used it for sausage. The brains, scrambled with onions and eggs, and made a big meal out of it. Our neighbor, his wife wouldn't make it, because it would make her vomit. So every time I made, he'd call Frank over next door, come over for a picnic, so the two of them would eat the brains in a five pound bucket, cow's brains.

MB: When you slaughtered animals, would the neighbors come and help? It was social event.

AM: Yes. Back home, one time, they tried to kill a pig just by stabbing it. It was running around with the knife in it. I was just little, but I remember. My mother loved her animals so much. She couldn't stand to hear that shot. She would go in her room and stick her head under the feather bed because one of the neighbors would come over and shoot it, and stab it and catch all that blood. Then the blood separates, there's so much water and iron in your blood. So when it chills you have your water boiling, it's like a liver, and you cook it. Just like a piece of liver. Then you cook out the stuff from the head and you grind that.

**End of Tape 2 Side B (March 14, 1984)**

**End of the Interview with Agnes Mucker**