

INTERVIEW OF VILMA TARYAN

March 6, 1984

By Mildred Beik

Windber, PA

MB: Millie Beik

VT: Vilma Taryan (1902-1989)

Beginning of Tape 1 (March 6, 1984)

MB: So if you don't mind I'll just ask you some questions and then you can tell me about your family and things. What's your full name?

VT: Vilma, I was baptized and I didn't have any birth certificates. But I do have records of myself being baptized at a Presbyterian church. I was baptized in 1902 and then.

MB: Where in Windber?

VT: Yes

MB: In the Presbyterian Church?

VT: Yes I was born up here in 35.

MB: Really can you tell me your birth date?

VT: Mine is September 12th 1902

MB: So you really here, Windber was only founded in 1897, so you were here for some of the first years since you were born here early.

VT: I was born like I said in one of these houses. But way down in 5, I know its 535 house, and then I was baptized in the area at the first Presbyterian Church.

MB: So can you tell a little bit about your parents where they were from?

VT: They were from Hungary, my dad was there, he was here for a bit and then he went back to Europe and married my mother.

MB: Oh, he came to the United States first and then he went back to Europe, do you know where they were from in Europe?

VT: Where's my dad from, Hungarian town.

MB: That's a grape growing region I guess.

VT: I don't know, more likely, there is a big river flowing over their property. My Dad always had property. My grandma had property, and I remember I was just a little one, and she would have cattle and I forgot how many, and I would just, she roped my so much I was always at her place, my grandma when I go there, she had a fire place and enter the kennel and she sit me on top of that shelf, and I remember the door opening my mother screaming and grabbing me she says "My god this kid this child could fall anywhere.

MB: This is Windber you're talking about?

VT: No I was about 3 or 4 years old, and she had a lot of cattle, and she milked them and whatever and they would come out into the middle, she had a lot of property and she always, you know I would tag along she would always take me and give me a little stick and that's yours, and I remember so vividly that my mother I was sitting up there and the door opened and my mother screamed and grabbed me. I can see her still, and she's like what are you doing , put this child up there, and there was a river running right in front of the homes, maybe out further and a lot of times they would scream when it overflowed. I told my mother that it had a porch all around the house I remember how it would flood way into the yard. And there was a basement.

MB: Did both of your parents grow up in the same village then?

VT: Yes

MB: And your father owned some property?

VT: Yeah a lot of property, you know some homes and the farm, there was more, and it was like a street where my mother and grandmother lived probably at least down but I don't know if there were other homes along the side of it, but I remember the river and my sister sue was the oldest, about a year in a half, and I remember we always went out into the river when it overflowed, a lot of times it overflowed when the yard was flooding. One of us would come out and get the soap and some buckets.

MB: Did you dad work on the farming property before he came to America?

VT: Well they just worked there land, a lot of land that was owned by my grandma, and that's about it, because there no other occupation, and he came out to you know the United States and then later my mother came, I remember on that ship boarding what kind of cubby hole we had where we sat and my mother would drag us on the deck, and I would be screaming and she hurt me I remember looking over board and seeing big fish follow the boat

MB: Was this when you went to go visit the first time?

VT: No I was going to American, and this is when I was just a little girl.

MB: Do you remember your dad going to school in Hungary?

VT: Oh yeah

MB: Did he, did he know how to read and write in Hungary?

VT: Yeah

MB: Your mother too?

VT: Yeah

MB: And they got married in Hungary?

VT: Yeah

MB: Do you know what year they got married?

VT: Well my sister she was born 19, I was born in 1902, so my sister was born in 1900, so I guess around 1900.

MB: And how did he first come to America?

VT: Well he came just like all the others. My mother was telling me about where he lives, she was hesitating, they told her oh he's a catch he's got a lot of money he comes from the United States. He was catholic.

MB: So he proposed to her after he had already been here once?

VT: Yes he come back, she used to say to the whole town that he was a good catch, he must have had money, he was just a short little guy trying to please her. I have a picture of him right here If I could reach it

MB: Oh that's a nice picture of him.

VT: That was taken when I was married and then we had a group picture made.

MB: So did your mother come from a family that owned a lot of property?

VT: Yes, my grandmother had a lot of property and a lot of hands.

MB: Did she work in the field at all?

VT: Oh yeah they go hours out there, they had property and then they had to go and work on it.

MB: Did your mother get to go to school at all?

VT: Oh yeah they were well read both of them, my mother my uncle and I don't know how many others but that's was quite a big family.

MB: Did your father have some relatives here in America? How did he get to come to America? Did he ever talk about it?

VT: They was coming because they knew they could earn money here. And then he came and saved a lot of money and then he came back to Europe and my mom was telling everyone that he would make a good catch. My mother came out, because he was here already when he came back to Europe and when he married my mother. I stayed with him where I was born and my sister was born, but he came back to the United States to make more money. And then send it and of course they had all this property and then they sold it. And when my mother came out then they bought a home down on 17th street it had no basement but it had about 6 rooms or so. And she took in borders.

MB: When did you come to America?

VT: Well it was about, not even a year before my dad came back, because my dad left her there and she come back and had to take care of the property.

VT: My eldest brother went into the mines but he went to school and then became a foreman. But he lived here, but he died quite a while ago.

MB: How old was he when he went into the mines?

VT: He was only about 16

MB: What about your husband did he go into the mines?

VT: He was only 14 or 13 he lied about his age.

MB: Did he go in with his father?

VT: Yes, somebody take you in and he work from the time his old man would wake him up to 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. He go in and he said he was dragging the bucket, because they had to walk I don't know how many miles to get to where they was working.

MB: What mine did they work?

VT: In Scener

MB: It must have been a hard time to go

VT: And of course before he got buried he started going into the city. He started going to the city

MB: Oh he did, to Cleveland?

VT: He lived there for a while, and later on he went to Detroit when we were married because my sister was there and she said to come to the city. Of course the mines weren't working

MB: So you got married in 1920?

VT: Yes

MB: But you got married here in Windber?

VT: Oh yeah.

MB: Can you tell me about your wedding?

VT: I have a picture

MB: What kind of ceremony did you have?

VT: It was just a dinner and I was dressed as a bride. I had a head piece and a beautiful gown I had it just the other day

MB: SO you left school in the eighth grade and did you go to school right after that?

VT: Yeah

MB: How did you work between then when you got married?

VT: Oh, before I was working at a restaurant, I was only 16 years old and I was cooking.

MB: Where was this at in Windber?

VT: The motel right in town, when I first got in there my sister sue was working right in there already and she was a waitress, and I got a job at [Sharkyss] Hotel as a maid and I worked there, and one day after I had my work done I went down the street to buy something from the store and it wasn't far. And this guy the owner of the restaurant knocked on the window and he says come in. And I says no I going down here, so he offered me a job if I would and work for him cooking and I was working on the hotel there, of course you had your room because you slept there. Your other girl you know they shared beds and I liked it there, because I was there cause there was no parents.

MB: You weren't at home with your family.

VT: All I don't know if I should tell you this or not. But I slept with a girls and you know she was a dining room girl her sister was the cook and they was about 4 of us girls working in the hotel, and Ms. Sharkly she would come to check on the kitchen and to see that we was doing work. Yeah, I slept there with this girl, the other girls I guess there was three and they were three big girls. One time as I was on the third floor finishing something I was cooking, I was reaching for my specula and when I reached there was a bug. I didn't know what it was, but what else could it be, and Ms. Sharkly, she said that all girls are having problems with Dr. Benshaw he was a doctor. And they had a room upstairs, she says she found a bug on her and she says any of you girls? And we say "not that we know of" You see the fire department the fire hall there, and then the Sharkly Hotel that wall made our big room dark you know, so here I was upstairs, but already Ms. Sharkly says "girls there's something I got to tell you. She says "Dr. Benshaw's wife found lice, so here I was upstairs working, I was waiting on the tile for the floor, then I feel an itch and I was crawling, and I said oh my god don't tell me, I and I ran downstairs, I just fix the bed and I hurried down stairs I went to into that big room where I slept already Ms. Sharkly was worried about the lice, and Ms. Sharkly says "No", But when I found that I got so weak I don't know how I came back to the third floor which was unfinished, I ran down and went into the bedroom there, and whether you believe it or not there bedrooms were dark and I went in there I went to that dresser to get something and there was this girl I slept with , she was a dining room girl and I had a lot of fun with her, and here where she put her coat down was a big thing like, and that was all lice, "Oh my god I'm sweeping, and when I saw that I ran down the street to get one of the fine brooms. And oh my God, she had all these those lice on her

MB: Must have been awful to get rid of them.

VT: I don't know how funny life is, you know fate, as I was gone Mr. Sharkly at the restaurant you know there were restrooms and my sister she was working there already. You know, he looked around the door, as I come back someone asks me: Where I was working? I said Sharkly and then they asked me "What are you making"? I said three dollars an hour, and they said "How about you come work for me as a cook? And that point I think he was paying around 6 dollars a week.

MB: You weren't paid 3 dollars?

VT: A week, and he says I'll pay and you know his pay was dollars. I was a short order cook, and then dishwasher there.

MB: So did you continue to live at the hotel?

VT: No I gave that up.

MB: Did you move back home with your parents?

VT: When I was at Sharkly's, I slept there, but yeah I went back home. I didn't want to tell my mother, but I think that mother didn't want me there, because the moment I should up she would try to clean everything out of my hair. I guess I wanted to catch it. Because I had awfully bushy hair, but I never told Mr. Sharkly or nobody, so I went home and my mother pulled all things you see, I was taken care, you can get rid of me a couple of days later.

MB: Were you a cook before you got married?

VT: Yeah, short order cook. I had to make all the soups and salads and everything and they had a steam table.

MB: That sounds like a big job.

VT: Well yeah they were giving me six dollars a week, even better I could eat some of the food, even better on the weekend the baker would bring all the pies in and I would try to take a piece, but the baker she was a tough one, but I go and get a piece of custard pie, or whatever I wanted. She says "What the hell are you doing"? "You're not supposed to get that pie", I said "So what". But it was nice there, it was said they wanted me to work after I was married, but he paid good money a lot of times I go in the morning especially Sunday and the dinning girl was there and all the dishes would be up, and the bus would be filled with guys coming from Windber a lot of them came to have a good time and they used all the dishes, I had to scrub them all, he said "Why don't you work after your married, you can work"

End of Tape 1

Beginning of Tape 2 (March 6, 1984)

MB: Do you remember the flu epidemic?

VT: Oh Yeah

MB: Can you tell me something about it?

VT: Well I wasn't working then, but I go and there was a lawyer who lived down in Scalp, so I went down there to work I was a house upstairs girl, I had to walk all the way down there to work.

MB: Oh from 35?

VT: No my parents' home.

MB: Oh on 17th street?

VT: Yes, let's see I worked there, and then after that they paid me well, he was a lawyer, and I worked there cleaning house for then, and of courses that's when I got back into the restroom, but I had to walk down there, everything was closed, the epidemic was on, and no one was sick in our family.

MB: Really, you were lucky because a lot of people got sick.

VT: There were 8 of us at home, 8 children.

MB: Do you remember anyone getting sick?

VT: Oh yeah I remember a lot of them dying, that picture I showed you they died there was quite a few of them that pasted away.

MB: I guess they didn't know how to treat it at all, did they quarantine the houses?

VT: No they didn't do much of anything. But from my parents' home, I would be going to work, from there you can look up on that other side of the mountain there, and it was just part of the mountain it wasn't too steep, but you see all these coffins on top ready for burial. And I go down this hill down to Scalp to clean this house there, I don't think I worked in the rest room at the time.

MB: You mentioned some Jewish man loaded your father money, was there a Jewish community in Windber that you knew of?

VT: That was Mr. Fullinger, you know he was a Jewish , and he helped all these people you know gave them money that they could send to their wives they had a little grocery store down there, he loaned money to my dad that way he could build a house. My Dad had you know all these people had good credit because they were all, most of them Hungarians, and Hungarians

don't try to get away with anything. Mr. Fullinger, anytime my dad needed help, see my dad only had a two room cottage, it was a family house, he got a loan and he got 4 room house. And after that, they bought borders in. Big living room that doubled as a dining room. Because we have tables that they put in the hall and I don't know how my mother fit 10 people, she had assigned 10 boarders, she done all that cooking and there wasn't much to house cleaning because it wasn't nothing but bare floors, and you swept it, a lot of times she had chickens and she had pigs and cows, and so the chickens were all loose, she had a couple of cows. I remember a lot of times I would go in the kitchen and there was a window that was a two house, you know kitchen and they had a door put there and over there when they had the rest built you walk in and the cow would stick its head in through the kitchen door. My sister was in there, and the cow sticks its head through, they were like pets you know, they had a great big garden.

MB: Did your father mine, or did he garden?

VT: Mining, it was in the mines where he got cancer, must of been sick a lot of times, I remember every time he eat a meal my mother always had a big meal, soup, we had everything. And he jump from the dining room table and ran out, he just got to the corner of the house and threw up.

MB: So were there many Jewish families in Windber or just the Fullinger family?

VT: I remember that Fullinger, you know he would lead them money but you know the Hungarian people they always paid their bills.

MB: Were there many Swedish people?

VT: No not a lot.

MB: I guess there were a few of them.

VT: They lived mostly down in town, down of a side street.

MB: Was the town laid out that way? Like did most ethnic groups live in certain areas?

VT: More likely, the Hungarian, the Slovak, and the Italians didn't live up here. They had lived on the east end and you see this is west end, the public school was on the east end so I had to run up the hill.

MB: Would a Hungarian marry an Italian in those days?

VT: Oh yeah a lot did.

MB: Did you ever feel that the company favored some nationalities over the others?

VT: No never, you could go into these Eureka stores, these company stores and if you work you had good credit, and this Mr. Fullinger he was a businessman and anytime someone was in trouble or someone wanted somebody out of here, just went there and talked to them, he would give them a couple of hundred.

MB: Was he a [Steepship] agent?

VT: No he was just Mrs. Fullinger, his family they still have building and stores, but it looks like they have junk, I don't know why it isn't clean they have old chairs in the windows but the windows aren't clean.

MB: Were your parent concerned about Unions and getting them in the mines?

VT: There wasn't any, there's nothing about Unions.

MB: But when they had the strike was your father sympathizing with them?

VT: Yes, they had a strike but they didn't stay out long, in fact he went with a gang and started working as a scab, he joined the company let him have it. The company didn't lose anything.

MB: Yeah I guess they didn't get it until 1930 with President Roosevelt. But you don't remember anything else?

VT: Oh there was no trouble at all, there was no fighting or whatever you call it these meetings.

MB: So you don't recall, where were you in 1922, were you here or Cleveland?

VT: I moved here in then.

MB: Right and then you moved to Cleveland okay.

VT: I married in 1920 and in 21 my son was born and then they, he was about 5 I think ready for school when we came back, because we went there and came back after a while. So always changing, and at 8 he started school, well let's see I guess he started school here and after that my mother says "What's wrong with him?" She says you were married so many years of your life, what have you got to show for it. She pointed out that that is not proper to move back and forth.

MB: I just had read that in some places that the people who lived in company houses during the 1922 strike were thrown out and they had to move someplace else, is that true?

VT: I don't remember much about that, they weren't thrown out they just stayed, the strike was in other parts but not around here.

MB: Were you living on 17th street then?

VT: Well the strike was on and I was married then, so I don't know if we lived in Cleveland or PA.

MB: Well I had read that a lot of people were thrown out of company housing because they would not work.

VT: Well yes in some parts but not the Berwind coal company, they just didn't give a darn, you got tired then you go back to work. And you got all the credit you wanted, you could get down and do a bill. If you wanted 5 dollars, 10 or 20 you can go and buy a piece of furniture anytime and he would take it out of your statement. If you had good credit you would go and pay it back and everybody would pay. There wasn't anybody that tried to get away with anything.

MB: Did people worry about the layoffs in the mines?

VT: They didn't mind too much because they had cows and chickens, and then there was food distributed like bread surplus.

MB: Did the women worry about accidents, did you worry about accidents when your husband was working in the mine?

VT: Oh yeah, when the ambulance came by you stood by gate and shivered. And then pardon me, people like this couple you know they only paid about 5 \$ a month, and you had electricity for a dollar a month. And then what more could you ask for, you had four rooms and you had a nice big porch in the back, this was a porch that I had converted because cement was there you know we just bought this 15 years ago this house. Bought it for 3,000 dollars, and of course I had all the walls put in because it had that plastered wall.

MB: So you came here in 69 then, do you like the Windber area?

VT: Oh I love it

MB: What do you like about it?

VT: It's a special little town and you had all the residents, you know it isn't quite city like. You always yearned home, like when I was in Cleveland my mother in Detroit my father in law got retired so I went to see her in Cleveland there and she's crying what we are going to do what we are going to do. I said what are you worried about I bought a house now you can come live with me. And she burst out crying, she had so many restless nights of what's going to happen, what's going to become of her, because no work, so I told her I have my own house you can come live with me and she says you don't know how many times I prayed to god that I would hear those words, so right when I told here this we went to visit her on a boat because you could get a boat over the lakes. So when I told here a couple of days later she says they let me put the house up for sale it's sold, she brought her furniture, and I believe Steve went to get them and he bought her back. And I had a tenet upstairs Dorothy she lived upstairs and Kimmy who was a roommate, I had a small porch that I would always sit on. And when Dad arrived bring grandpa and grandma she started crying. You know made her piece, you know how you feel two old people.

MB: So they lived with you?

VT: Oh yeah my mother in law finally had a stroke and she had years before that, I don't know how many years, 10 years before I lived here I think, she had a disease that she never took care of. She had cancer, they wrote me a letter and I went down there to nurse her, and they had all her back end cut off. And sowed it together and he had a hole of the side. And she had to wear diapers anytime she went into shock. I didn't hesitate taking her in, what's going to become of her? I said you can come live with me I bought a house.

MB: Do you think Families helped each other more than they do now?

VT: Well I don't know, she put her house up for sale, you know she had a two family of course you can use the upstairs they had a stairway coming in well any how she put it up for sale and right away she sold it. So she came to live with me she said " You don't know how many nights I did not sleep thinking of what will become of me. And when she was hospitalized well naturally she always had to be changed like a baby and the nurses were mean. The way they grabbed her she fell out of bed nobody pitied her. And she lived quite a long time with that operation. And she go down to see this doctor from time to time. And her letters show that they wanted to check on how her health has come along, but everything healed up, so when she got home and wrote me a letter from the hospital and asked me if I be kind enough to go. Because I was her buddy and I took care of her. And she regained all her strength she lived for quite a while after that. Before she passed away she had a stroke, so there I was by her bed. Sometimes I just bath her every morning, I would even push the dresser up to the bed was here, and the dresser I pushed that over so she could get out. And she lived quite a while, the Doctors and the Welfare workers would come in when she passed away and I had to put my father in law in a home because he became senile. After all he was a man and I was getting nervous and I would be crying because he would just wet himself. So finally when they came out from the welfare whatever you know when you applied and he went down because of him being senile and when he got in front of the judge they decide to put him in a home. They asked "Who was taking care of this sick man" and the he says " My wife". He says " what kind of a man are you, you left your wife and he couldn't get over it all the years I was taking care of him. From that I had no choice because he would just stand in a room and piss himself or just mess himself. I had a three car garage a fence you know we had a lady Dorothy the upstairs lady who lived upstairs. She says Wilma she says " Look what

has happened to Grandpa I think that he's in trouble", when I put my glider under the stairway he lounged, there was an area where he could lounge. He sleep there, and she say "There's something wrong with Grandpa, and I said how do you know and she said well I can smell it. So I go out and look and I said what are you doing? And there I saw his diarrhea all black.

MB: Yeah it was a hard life I bet.

VT: I had a bucket of rain water so I just stripped him and got a bucket of rain water and I had a broom and I had to wipe because I couldn't get in there, but I got most of it. And I went in a got the some gloves and I didn't scold him, because I say what if that was me. God blessed me with good health because I'm 82, up to now no problem.

MB: Does your Husband have black lung then?

VT: No, but he has a deterioration in his liver.

MB: I think he's sleeping well.

End of Tape 2

End of the Interview (March 6, 1984)