

Sacred Heart University

presents
a
Film by

STEVEN JOHN ROSS

SEARCHING
For
WORDIN
AVENUE

a film about
the Hungarian Community
in Bridgeport and Fairfield

Searching For
Wordin Avenue

Film by STEVEN JOHN
ROSS

"Searching for Wordin Avenue"

"Searching for Wordin Avenue" is a film created by a faculty group at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. It is the story of the generation of Hungarian immigrants on whose shoulders we not stand. It is the story of our family and others like ours.

Part of the film dramatized the trying nature of leaving one's wife and children behind in Hungary, to migrate to America. A second part of the film focuses on life in the West End ("Hunkytown") of Bridgeport, Connecticut, a place to which many of our ancestors gravitated from Ellis Island, or after a brief period spent in the coal mines of Pennsylvania or the factories of New Jersey. A later segment of the film re-enacts the movement of the family from "Hunkytown" to a small plot of land in Fairfield. This was a common occurrence. As soon as an immigrant family could save enough money, they purchased a plot of land in Fairfield, where they could have a garden, and eventually build a house.

The personalities interviewed in the film were all people whom I knew in real life. Mary Katona was a family friend and became a beloved Town Clerk in Fairfield. Her families farm was directly on the site where Shaw's Supermarket on Black Rock Turnpike is now located. It was complete with an old Hungarian well. The driver of the wagon with the team of horses, when the father is leaving behind his family in Hungary for America, was also an old family friend, Joseph Sipocz. He and his family ran the Spioocz Arrowhead Farm on Stillson Road just behind Penny's Diner (on Blackrock Turnpike). The site where I picked strawberries for five cents a basket, is now the location of an upscale condominium development. In later years I would meet Joe along Black Rock Turnpike, driving his station wagon with its sign, 'Sipocz Arrowhead Farm'. I called him the quintessential Hungarian, and he always chuckled about that.

Please note the credits at the end of the film. They include Mjchael and Margaret Kranyik, my aunt and uncle, and James Kranyik, my father. I was with them when they were interviewed concerning their memories of the first generation. This film is a memorial to them as well as to that first generation of brave and resourceful people.

Robert D. Kranyik
December 2002



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During the first half of this century, Bridgeport served as the home of one of the largest Hungarian communities in America. Today, scarcely a trace of the physical community remains. We have attempted to make a film that will commemorate this community and help a new generation of Connecticut citizens re-discover this rich and vital part of their heritage.

SEARCHING FOR WORDIN AVENUE is not meant to be a definitive history of the Hungarian community. Nor is this film the story of prominent individuals or community leaders. Instead we have tried to focus on the universal immigrant experience, particularly the extraordinary qualities of the ordinary people of Hungary and many other countries who made America their new home. Those qualities, of courage and strength, of hope despite many disappointments, and of humor in the face of adversity, were the inspiration for this film. Above all, this is a story of community, of a place where people worked together, and cared for and nurtured each other in the midst of a new, imposing, and at times hostile environment.

Hopefully we've created a different kind of educational film - one that abandons the usual didactic, illustrated-lecture approach in favor of a tapestry-like structure that interweaves the dramatic with the documentary, the old with the new. We hope you find the film a compelling and involving experience.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Steve Rose". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "R".

Searching For Wordin Avenue

written, produced
and directed

by
STEVEN JOHN ROSS

co-producer and
sound recordist:
DONALD COONLEY

cinematographer:
LARRY McCONKEY

associate producers
BERNADETTE BALDINO HELENE SZABO
and
DENNIS KEARNS VERONICA BELEZNAY JOHN QUINN

featuring interviews with
LOUIS E. BABYCOS
HELEN KLEIN BREINER
MARY KATONA
JULES AND GRACE MATUS

WITH

JOZSEF PECSSENKE	as	Jozsef Harsanyi
GLENNA ROSS	as	Anna Harsanyi
JONATHAN LUONGO	as	Miska, age 5
LISA GAL	as	Marika, age 10

narrated by
RALPH CORRIGAN

Produced in the Media Studies Department
of Sacred Heart University

Searching for Wordin Avenue has been funded by the United States Office of Education, the Connecticut Humanities Council, the Sacred Heart University Research & Creativity Council and Connecticut Public Television/WEDW.

The Sacred Heart University Library is currently presenting a photographic display depicting life during the early part of the century in Bridgeport's Hungarian community. There are also displays devoted to the immigrant experience and a display of production stills taken during the filming of SEARCHING FOR WORDIN AVENUE.

The premiere of SEARCHING FOR WORDIN AVENUE has been sponsored by the Sacred Heart University Center for Ethnic Studies.

SEARCHING FOR WORDIN AVENUE will have its television premiere next Sunday night, May 4 at 10:00 p.m. on Connecticut Public Television - Channel 49.

Program cover designed by Judy Corrigan