

**Kalliopi Logothetis,  
Seton Hall University  
ORCID ID 0000-0003-1805-3613**

### **Interview with Mrs. Heliya Slinko, the parishioner of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Holy Ascension of Maplewood town, New Jersey, USA**

The life of Helia and her story started with an explanation of her parents' immigration to the United States in 1950. Her family originated from a village in Eastern Ukraine in a time where Bolsheviks had taken over during which her father and other family members (including her mother and her aunt and uncle) were exiled to a small town close to Siberia. Soon after their arrival, her father was arrested and put in prison. Based on her explanation of the experience, there seems to be no indication for the arrest.

Helia's family had a terrifying experience in the seeming tundra. Not only was her father arrested but Helia's aunt ( her mother's younger sister) died in the year they spent there. During her interview, she explained how when people passed away in this freezing climate, there was no way to bury them. As a result, there were mounds of bodies that accumulated during that time. Eventually, when spring came and the snow melted, they were able to bury those bodies in one mass grave.

Life under the Bolsheviks was hard from the start. Helia's grandfather had passed away when her father was only 13 years of age which meant that he was forced to be the head of household. But, because of the harsh conditions and starvation that existed during this time, to get to his mother, he would have to wait until midnight to avoid being attacked. This tactic was used by her father to avoid the threat of cannibalism that existed due to lack of food supplies. To survive, people were forced to eat "anything moving" which could include anything from rats to cats.

Her father's escape from this area was essentially through a back window at the age of nineteen. From the start of their journey here, their many focus continued to be a sustained source of food especially in regards to bread. Helia emphasizes that her parents, as well as other Ukrainians, were and continue to be "very conscientious of bread." This sentiment of holding on to even the smallest crumb of bread they had may be, as Helia explains, a result of their fear of starvation from the trauma they experienced back in Ukraine.

She recalled other stories that her father explained to her about the realities of living in Ukraine including how weapons were taken away from people in order to make attacking these communities easier to accomplish. Additionally, under Bolshevik rule, teachers would be asked to attend meetings at night and in those meetings they were all shot and killed. In the aftermath of those shootings, Helia stressed that "nobody made any questions of what happened to them and moved on." According to Helia, she explained that these scare tactics were used in order to ensure that people were in a state of fear at all times.

Thankfully, Helia's experience did not mimic nearly any of those experienced by her father. In fact she explains that her life was very different growing up since she was born in the United States. In her time growing up, most of her childhood experiences can be described as sheltered.

She notes that being an only child, she picked up many traditions from her mother. She recollected how in one of her visits to Ukraine, those traditions she held on to from her childhood is what connected her to her homeland.

The last segment of her interview was a discussion of the modern day struggles between Ukraine and Russia, Helia described her feelings about the relationship by indicating how most Russian people may believe that he is a great leader for his people but in the eyes of Ukrainians,

they just want a leader who can let them live in peace. Overall, her expressions and reaction to the question about the relationship between Ukraine and Russia made it clear that she worries about the state of Ukraine and how it will come to be in the near future.

## References

*Slinko, Heliya* (2018, May). Interview with Heliya Slinko [Interview]. Kalliopi Logothetis, Seton Hall University.

Interview 3 (27:40). May 1, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC-SVHSAfPc&t=7s>

