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James and Angela Gantose interview, 22 February 2003

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Gantose02222003A-B
Tremont Oral History Project

Interview with James and Angela Gantose
Interviewed by Christine Cleary
February 22nd, 2003
11:00 am
Lakewood Library Madison Branch

Categories:
Early childhood, Neighborhood

Cleary:
What is your name?

Gantose:
James Gantose

Cleary:
How do you spell your last name?

Gantose:
Gantose

Cleary:
Where were you born and in what year?

Gantose:
I was born in 1922, on the Southside.

Cleary:
Do you remember what hospital you were born in? Were you born in a hospital?

Gantose:
No, not really. I remember the address of the house I was born in. It was 2267 W14th Street.

Cleary:
Was that a single family home?

Gantose:
No, it was a multifamily home. We had borders upstairs and a separate room in the back for my aunt and uncle. We didn't charge them any rent back in those days. That's how it

was back in those times with large homes on W14th Street and they used them as multiple homes.

Mrs. Gantose:
Wasn't Grace Hospital on one side?

Gantose:
Grace Hospital on one side and Ukrainian National Home on the other side. The Craftsman's Hall on the other side of us.

Cleary:
When did your parents move into the Tremont area?

Gantose:
Back in 1920.

Cleary:
Did they own this home?

Gantose:
Yes.

Cleary:
How big was your family? How many siblings did you have?

Gantose:
I had two sisters and a brother. A sister was deceased.

Cleary:
What nationality is your family?

Gantose:
We are Lebanese. There were all different denominations on W14th Street. That was something about W14th Street, you always knew it was Sunday because you would hear the church bells ringing. If I remember, there were 14 different denomination churches on W14th Street and the adjacent streets. That's primarily what I remember the most.

Cleary:
What church did your family belong to?

Gantose:
That's a complex story. St. George Syrian Orthodox Church. It was right across the street from Pilgrim Church.

Mrs. Gantose:

Can I add a little bit for him? His mother, grandmother and grandfather, who lived with him, were Catholic. His mother married his father who was Orthodox so they went to St. George. There wasn't really a church nearby, so they also attended St. Elias Catholic Church. That will come into our history a little later.

Gantose:

That was across the Central Viaduct Bridge. My grandmother took me to church every Sunday. It was a combination of things. There was no thought if it was Catholic or Orthodox. They were primary the same.

Mrs. Gantose:

The family's religion though was always according to the man's side. That would be the Orthodox Church.

Cleary:

When you were growing up as a child what did you do to entertain yourself?

Gantose:

We played baseball. As a matter of fact in our backyard there was the Ukrainian National Home and then our home. We had adjoining driveways. So we had a sort of diamond in the backyard. We played ball back there and I remember breaking a few windows. Then on Fairfield St. we had several Italian families there and we played ball. We went to Lincoln Park to play ball. That was it mostly.

Cleary:

Was there a movie theater?

Gantose:

Yes. There was a theater right across the street from where we lived. We used to go to the Sunday matinee for five cents a movie. We used to sneak in. In the back there used to be an area and we used to sneak in to save the five cents. That was something. I still remember the Paper/rags man in the streets with a horse drawn cart. Yelling out "Paper rags, paper rags". I never knew what that meant. I thought it was a foreign language of some sort.

Mrs. Gantose:

That was rubbish collection in those days.

Gantose:

They use to collect materials. If you had lead of materials that they thought was useful; they would pay you for it. We used to save lead items and things that we thought were of some value and we would exchange it. He would give us a price for it. There was a water trough for the horses, not on every corner but there was one in Lincoln Park. There was one in Fairfield.

Cleary:

Since we are talking about the horse and buggies, what type of transportation did your family use?

Gantose:

We always had a car back in those days. My dad was in the construction business. We had a three-car garage in the backyard where we stored our equipment.

Cleary:

Did he own his own construction business?

Gantose:

He was in it with his brother.

Cleary:

Is that how they made it through the depression?

Gantose:

Yes. They didn't make much but they weren't on welfare. They were making about fifty cents a day, which was quite a bit. They hired a lot of people and paid them well. They didn't make much money but kept working. They were hand-digging ditches for water and sewer lines mainly. They did that all by hand.

Cleary:

Your mom was a homemaker then?

Gantose:

Yes, she was a homemaker.

Cleary:

What other nationalities were in your neighborhood? You had mentioned Italians.

Gantose:

There were Greeks and Polish, Ukrainians, Russians and Germans.

Cleary:

On your street there was different nationalities. Was there anywhere in the neighborhood where there was a little corner of Polish or Greek or was all the streets pretty mixed.

Gantose:

It was fairly well mixed. There was the Greek Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and St. George and the Russian (Orthodox Church), and we would

have a parade around the neighborhood every Easter. We would have a parade with three or four churches.

Cleary:

Speaking of churches, what other activities did the churches provide, like dances? This was also during the depression, did they help provide meals to families?

Gantose:

St. George didn't have too much going on back in those days. We had a dance occasionally. St. Elias Church on Scranton Ave they would have dances every holiday. We ate ethnic foods. There was a Merrick House there.

Mrs. Gantose:

It was a community center. My class at Lincoln High School used it for meetings. It was at the edge of Lincoln Park.

Cleary:

So you would go there for certain events?

Gantose:

I remember basketball. We would stay within our own groups. We didn't mingle too much.

Cleary:

Where did you go to school?

Gantose:

I went to Tremont elementary school. That was near St. John Cantius Church-Polish. There was a store around the corner where we would buy candy for a penny. At that time a penny was quite a bit.

Cleary:

Did you go to high school?

Gantose:

Yes, I went to WestTech. My sisters went to Lincoln High School. That was in the area. I went to WestTech because of the technical courses that they had there. I wanted to get away from my sister at the time. We were in the same class at the time because I had missed a whole year of school. She sat behind me. I was sick and had missed most of the year. She was a genius and I didn't know it at the time but I was normal. She would do her homework and I would go off with the boys and play baseball at Lincoln Park. In the center of Lincoln Park there was a round pool. It was only about a foot deep but it was always crowded with kids. There were a lot of ethnic groups in that area. I used to get in fights with the Pollocks because they had light hair and at the time I had dark hair. I used to belong to a couple of Polish gangs. They were just a bunch of boys getting together. We played baseball mostly. I used to walk to school, about three blocks. I used to cut

through the backyards because we all did that. We just cut through the backyards to go to school. When the bell rang I could hear it and I would get there in time for the first class.

Cleary:

Did you go outside the city for different entertainment or for other things? Did you go to downtown Cleveland?

Gantose:

I used to go to the YMCA downtown. My grandmother and I would walk across the Central Viaduct Bridge. It was a wooden bridge and as you walked across it you could look down and see the Cuyahoga River between the boards. Occasionally you had to be careful because some of the planks were starting to rot. Around the corner there was a gas station and gas was ten cents a gallon. There were trolley cars and brick roads. There were car tracks in the center. The trolley went down W14th and branched off onto Fairfield Ave. We used to hop on the back of the trolley cars for shortcuts. I would hop on the back of the trolley and go over the Central Viaduct Bridge. We would go without paying. At the time we hadn't felt the depression too much. I used to associate with people who were affected. I used to stand in line for the handouts just keep them company.

Mrs. Gantose:

My dad would just have us take the cheese and the milk. He didn't want help from anybody. There was so much surplus that there was this church that we would go to once a month with our little wagons. We would pick up cheese primarily not so much milk.

Gantose:

There were wagons that sold vegetables. There were bakery trucks that would come up and down the streets. There were ice trucks too.

Cleary:

Were there grocery stores in Tremont or did you have to travel outside of Tremont?

Gantose:

On W11th St. there was a Greek store. It was a dairy type of a store. We used to go downtown to the Central Market. We were fortunate. We had a car. We wouldn't take anymore than ten dollars. Ten dollars bought us all the food we needed. I always went shopping with my mother. I used to watch the money. If something were five cents, like a dozen oranges, I would make sure she got the correct change. We did a lot of ethnic cooking. I used to watch my mother cook the ethnic foods.

Cleary:

Did you speak a foreign language in your home?

Gantose:

We spoke Arabic but I didn't pick it up too well. When my grandmother was living I had to speak Arabic with her.

Cleary:

Did your grandmother speak English?

Gantose:

Yes, she picked it up. My mother and father concentrated so much on English that she forgot about the Arabic. My sister spoke Arabic. I spoke it a little. Now, I can understand it but I can't speak it.

Cleary:

Were your parents immigrants or were they born here?

Gantose:

Yes, they were immigrants. My mother came over here when she was 14 and my dad was 25. My mother's sister homesteaded her land in Canada and that was how she acquired her land in Canada. We are planning a family reunion with the four sisters and their offspring's. My wife is the secretary for that. My mother and her sister are 20 years apart in their ages, which is unusual now days.

Mrs. Gantose:

The Greek coffee shops are where the Greek men would meet to talk. Mr. Gantose's uncle was Greek. There were several funeral homes on W14th Street and each one would take care of a certain ethnic group. There was a funeral home almost right next door to St. George's Church. So all the Lebanese people, who died, the families would have the wake right next door. So even, funeral homes would attract certain ethnic groups to that particular funeral home. I think around the churches there was a group of that ethnic group that lived in that neighborhood. A lot of them came in quite a ways. Most of the people that lived in Tremont worked in steel mills, which were right down in the Industrial Valley.

Cleary:

So you went to Lincoln High School?

Mrs. Gantose:

I went to school at Lincoln, which was on the fringe of Tremont. It was on Scranton Rd and Clark. Clark and W25th Street were the major shopping areas and the area that I lived in. I got to know Tremont because all my friends lived in Tremont. At the time at school there was a great deal of bonding with all the ethnic students that you were in school with. My class was comprised of mostly Tremont people. We had a group that met at the Merrick House, which was a community center. It was for our meetings. People got together in their churches not in a big way but as families for their social life. Pilgrim Church has a main sanctuary with a door that opens up when they were doing things. It had a room with a balcony above it that would open up to the sanctuary itself. There were classrooms around it where they would teach Sunday school. It had a theater, a bowling alley and a gymnasium. That whole building consisted of everything that they would need for religion, recreation, and athletic and theatrical stuff. Even though they may have

not lived right there and many of them did not, they came in from the outer Cleveland area to go there. Most of the churches had a way of providing religion, recreation and other things for their own groups. For social purposes, the ethnic groups pretty much stayed within their own group. When I was going to school I was part of a National Heart to Students group. I went to Tremont school as a teacher's aide. This was a part of my schooling for a business education in high school. I was paid six dollars a month by the U.S Government.

There was a bathhouse on the corner of Starkweather Ave. right behind St. George's Church. It overlooked Lincoln Park. There was a church too on the edge of the park, Our Lady of Mercy. The churches were all over. The bells would ring and everyone would be summoned to their own church.

Cleary:

Was there a lot of crime in the neighborhood at that time?

Gantose:

There were gangs but it was petty stuff. Not like the gangs now. I belonged to a couple of gangs.

Mrs. Gantose:

I believe there was gambling but there wasn't crime though.

Cleary:

Were there a lot of bars?

Gantose:

I remember about three bars. There was Dempsey's right on Starkweather. There was Holt's (Hotz's) Place.

Cleary:

Did your father frequent these bars?

Gantose:

Oh no! He would stay within his own group. They would have their massa. They would sit down to eat and drink arahk.

Mrs. Gantose:

Massa was a word for appetizers and arahk was a clear liquid that you would add water to it and it would have an anise taste to it. It was very powerful.

Cleary:

What did your mother do? Did she get together with friends?

Mrs. Gantose:

Mom's favorite past time was shopping downtown at the May Co. and Higbee's with her friend Devy. They would over buy and after a few days, return some of the things. They would go downtown on the trolley.

Gantose:

She mostly did social family gatherings. She would get together with her sisters. She was quite a shopper. She would occasionally go to the movies.

Cleary:

When did you go into the war?

Gantose:

In 1943 I was drafted. I stayed three years. I got out in April of 1946. When I got out they had sold the home on W14th Street and they moved to the Old Brooklyn area.

Cleary:

Why did they move out of the Tremont area?

Gantose:

It was an old house and my dad was always repairing one thing or another. He had had enough and he was just on the verge of retiring. He still did odd jobs but it was an old beat up house. It was 100 years old at that time. It was an old mansion. There were a lot of large homes on W14th Street.

Mrs. Gantose:

The streets in Tremont had names that were college connected. At one time, they were going to build a college in that area. There is College Ave., University Street, Literary, and Professor.

Cleary:

So your parents moved out because of the home and retirement. It was a convenience factor for them and not the neighborhood.

Gantose:

The Ukrainian National Home wanted to buy it. We sold it to them because they were such good neighbors. We had that common drive and they would take care of the drive and the backyard.

Mrs. Gantose:

Grace Hospital was right on W14th Street. People had medical help close by. It was a big plus to the neighborhood.

Cleary:

Were there dentists and doctors offices near by?

Gantose:

I went to the doctor's when I burned my leg Good thing Grace Hospital was near by. I sort of jumped into a bon fire. I was eight years old. That's why I missed school.

Mrs. Gantose:

In Jim's case they actually went to a Lebanese doctor. So people use to go to a doctor that was of their own ethnic background.

Cleary:

Was the office in the neighborhood or did you have to travel.

Gantose:

We had to travel. It was a language barrier. My wife's family always went to an Italian doctor and we always went to a Lebanese doctor or an Arabic doctor.

Mrs. Gantose:

The main place where people went to the doctors was on the corner of Clark and W25th Street. There was a bank on the first floor. The building had several floors to it. We went to the dentist or eye doctor. It was right outside the Tremont area. Clark was the next major street where this office building was located.