*A New Life in America: The Story of Ana Melnyk*

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Ana Melnyk arrived at Ellis Island on a cold day in October of 1920. The sun was shining through the clouds as she stepped forward in the immigration line with a tiny piece of paper pinned to her chest that read her name and the ship name that she came over on.[[1]](#footnote-2) Ana ran her fingers through her short, brown hair while looking at her tiny bag filled with all her essential belongings. The boat trip from Ukraine felt unbelievably long to her and she could not wait to get to her grandparent’s apartment where she could finally take a decent nap. On the boat trip, Ana sat alone and practiced her English. When she arrived in America, she wanted to be able to ask questions and understand what people were saying to her or even about her. She grew up in Galicia, Ukraine. Ana was one of 258 Ruthenian immigrants who came to America in 1920.[[2]](#footnote-3) She left amidst the beginning of the nationalist movement in Ukraine.[[3]](#footnote-4) Ana walked past the physician as he scanned her for any illnesses briefly. She heard the man yell, “Ma’am, please wait”. She stopped in her tracks and in that moment she felt all the blood drain out of her face. Ana felt her heart drop even lower into her stomach, but when she turned around she found the physician marking the woman behind her with chalk, suggesting that she was the ill one.[[4]](#footnote-5) Ana boarded the New York Central Railroad and took a train from New York City to Detroit. On the ride, she anxiously awaited to finally see her grandparents. Ana’s grandparents came to the United States from Ukraine as political refugees.[[5]](#footnote-6) They arrived in America just a few years before World War I began in 1914.[[6]](#footnote-7) Ana was more than excited to start a new life here in America, and experience the place she has longed to live in. Ana hoped to be viewed as equal in America, rather than an immigrant, she hoped to gain a job that she could be proud of, and she hoped to assimilate to American culture.

Ana thought of herself as a strong individual, but this journey would really test her strength. She had been on this journey for less than a month, and she already missed her family. Ana promised her parents that she would never fully lose their Ukrainian culture. She almost promised that she would only do things that she and God could be proud of. Ana’s family was very religious, and her entire family looked to God to lead her on this journey. Ana ran off the train and into her grandmother’s arms. She had been waiting for this feeling and missed her grandmother so much. She looked among the crowd and saw her grandfather standing toward the back. Ana ran through the crowd and into her grandfather’s arms dropping her bag at his feet. She could not believe how long she had been waiting for this moment. They walked along Woodward heading to her grandparent’s apartment. Ana stepped into the one bedroom apartment and was in awe at how comfortable the place looked compared to the boat she had spent over two weeks on.[[7]](#footnote-8) She unpacked all her belongings into one nightstand drawer, and hung up her coat on the back of the door. She laid down on the bed and tried to take a nap. America did not seem much different from Ukraine, but she did miss her family a lot. She thought about her mother and father and how they worked so hard to support her and her siblings. She worried about her little brother and sister. Ana took care of her little siblings while her parents worked all day to support all three of them. She felt terrible for leaving her family behind, but she just could not sit back and let her parents take care of her anymore for the rest of her life. Ana dreamt about coming to America and starting her own life, and now she was.

Instead of taking a little nap, she ended up sleeping through the entire night. The next morning when Ana awoke, she showered, dressed, and then left in search of work. Ana walked the streets of downtown Detroit and stopped in everywhere with a help-wanted sign taped in the front window. Each time she would walk in and ask about the position, Ana was turned away. Ana was discouraged, but she remained in utter amazement of the buildings that lined the streets. The city seemed to be filled with skyscrapers and the beauty captured her mind. She went back to her grandparent’s apartment exhausted. She stood in the bathroom staring at herself in the mirror and wondered why she was not good enough for a job. “Is it because I’m an immigrant? Is it because I am a woman?” All these thoughts were running through her head, and she just could not understand why. Ana was determined to fit into America as a person, rather than another immigrant.

The next day Ana decided to explore the city of Detroit. She put on her coat and walked down Woodward. She stopped at an antique shop when a tiny pearl ring caught her eye. The price for the ring was much more than she could afford, but she promised herself that one day she would be able to buy it for herself. Her grandfather drove her over to the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) located on East Jefferson Avenue at Hastings Street.[[8]](#footnote-9) Ana was absolutely amazed by all the artwork, and it was there that she found a love for the city of Detroit. While she walked around, a few passing citizens gave her judgmental glances because she was mesmerized by all the art. The patrons thought of her as different since she was intrigued by the artwork that they have seen over a dozen times. Ana’s grandfather took her for a drive around the city when she found a steel mill factory in the Ford River Rouge complex in Dearborn just outside of Detroit and begged to have a job there.[[9]](#footnote-10) The man at the front seemed uninterested, but a secretary had just lost her job that morning and Ana finally began work. She was a secretary at the front desk, and assisted the men with clocking in and out. Ana also handed out the pay checks and assisted with any other problems that happened in the mill. At the end of the day, all the men were impressed at how hard Ana could work and she was officially hired. She learned this hard work from growing up on her parents’ farm and she was now thankful for the early mornings and late evenings because she finally was a woman with a job in America.

Ana and her grandparents celebrated that night by telling stories about life in Ukraine. They reminisced about what it was like to be one big family back in Galicia, but she missed her parents now more than ever. Ana could only hope that she was making them proud. She was not ready to forget about her past back home, but she was taking steps forward to assimilate into the American way of life. Ana wanted to be apart of America as an actual person rather than always getting looked at as an immigrant. She was determined to be viewed as equal, even if it meant

slowly giving up her culture.

The next day at work, Ana sat down in a class about teaching the new employees about the Ford Manual. She had heard her co-workers talk about the manual, but she had no idea what it was. In the class, Ana learned that The Ford Motor Company wanted all of their employees to live in sanitary places and live a healthy life style. She learned that as a woman of the company she could not participate in the sharing of profits unless she had relatives dependent only on her. Since she was hired after October of 1914, she would also have to wait until she was employed for six months before also being able to participate in profit sharing. She was informed that there would be investigators to check in on the conditions of their home as well as the conditions of dependency for the profit sharing plan. Ana learned the difference between unhealthy and healthy rooms in the house as well as sanitation information. She was also informed about banking and investments as well as how to use the profits wisely. Ana also was instructed that she would have to take out a life insurance policy as well as a fire policy. The company would advise her on what plans and policies she should take part in. Ana would also have to become a citizen of the United States since she was born in Ukraine, but gaining her citizenship was a plan she already had set in her mind. [[10]](#footnote-11) Ana thought the whole manual was ridiculous, but since she was unable to get hired anywhere else, she obliged.

On Sunday’s, Ana and her grandparents would drive over to St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church that was located on the West side of the city.[[11]](#footnote-12) The amount of people in the church shocked Ana since there was less than she expected. She knew the number of immigrants from when her grandparents came over had decreased, but she did not expect so many to forget about their Ukrainian culture and assimilate so quickly into American culture. Ana wanted to become more of an American rather than Ukrainian, but she did not want to be viewed as a traitor, especially in church. Ana decided that it was overall not worth it to forget about her past life to start this new life. She did not want to not only upset her family, but also God. Ana decided that she should try her best to fit into American life, but she promised herself and God right there in that church, that no matter what happened, she would never lose her original faith or culture.

Ana felt it was easier to assimilate into American culture without changing her faith. Since she was not the first of the Ruthenians over to America, most of her ethnic group had already assimilated into the American way of life. Ana worked hard to perfect her English and she even tried to mask her thick accent. She spent a few days on Belle Isle watching the Americans and took mental notes on the clothes she saw most women wearing. After working for a few weeks as a secretary in the Ford Steel Mill, Ana finally saved up enough money to afford some dresses that would make her look like a normal American woman rather than an outsider.

Instead of taking English classes that the Ford plant offered, one of the men at the plant agreed to meet with Ana to help her with her English. She would stay after work with a young man her age named Aleksander Kozlowski. Aleks’ family came to America in 1900 and had been living in Hamtramck ever since. Aleks had almost mastered the English language completely since he moved here at a young age. After a few weeks of help, Ana had no troubles speaking fluent English. Her grandparents invited Aleks over to thank him for helping their granddaughter and the evening could not have gone better. Ana’s grandmother had a feeling she was falling in love with Aleks, but seeing the way they looked at each other proved the fact that they had fallen in love.

Within the next year and a half, Ana and Aleks were married. They agreed to be married

in a normal, American Catholic Church rather than one of their ethnic group. Ana had joined the Ukrainian National Chorus and was scheduled for her first performance at Orchestral Hall.[[12]](#footnote-13) She was more than ecstatic. Ever since being a young girl, Ana always had a passion for singing. The change in her living situation, resulted in Ana singing more to express her feelings. Aleks heard Ana singing one day while doing dishes and he was absolutely amazed. Aleks encouraged Ana to join the Ukrainian National Chorus so she could still live out her passion. Ana talked it over with the leaders of the group, and they agreed to only let her sing on Detroit stops. She did not want to go on the entire national tour since Detroit is where her family lives and she still maintained the steady job as a secretary at the steel mill. After having her secretarial job for two years, Ana was finally able to buy herself the pearl ring she saw in the window of the antique shop on Woodward.

Ana was reading in the paper a month later about two Ukrainian girls getting lost on their journey to America.[[13]](#footnote-14) The article brought back some harsh memories from the trip over. She remembered how crowded and confusing everything was and she was utterly thankful for not having any of those problems herself. There was a passenger agent who misread their ticket which costed the girls $25. Ana was shocked that people were not more willing to help out the immigrants. It seemed to her that everyone solely cared about themselves, rather than welcoming in the outsiders. Ana had thought she fit in will with American society and that she was being treated as an equal, but she came to the realization that it would be quite some time before immigrants would be treated equal, because they would always be viewed as less when coming into the American culture. Even though she would not be viewed as equal for a bit longer, she loved her life in America. Ana heard others talk about how great life was here, and in truth, she had loved the country ever since she docked at Ellis Island.

Ana assimilated into American culture, but she still held on to her Ukrainian past. Aleks and Ana would attend the Ukrainian Church with her grandparents every Sunday. On Friday nights, Aleks and Ana would eat a traditional Polish dinner with Aleks family. By this time, they had been married for a year. They discussed when having children, they would raise them with equal insight and activities for each of their ethnicities. Ana’s assimilation into American culture did not really change her. Ana still remained a person who loved America, but she also loved her birthplace, Ukraine. Although people from America viewed her as an outsider, an outcast, and, less than equal, she still loved the country. While immigrating to America Ana did have to leave her family, but through the immigration to America she gained a close relationship with her grandparents and met her husband. The journey to America was influential on Ana’s life. It taught her how to be independent and how different life is. Her choice to live in the city allowed her to gain a job and experience an abundance of culture, including American culture which she was interested in.

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