

Pete Gianekura

Interviewer: Unknown

Location: Sault St. Marie

2.1.80

### Start of interview

(P) Ok if I remember now we had found ourselves in the midst of the depression that my father has both those little shops. The alt said it rains it pours, well my dad said and my mother had brought five of us into this world and we were pretty young and they had to of course feed us and cloth us like any beautiful parents should do. Mean time my father's brother who was very beloved, the two brothers got together beautifully my uncle Sam, he discovered he had cancer, and in back in those days it was a very secret word. They did all they could to find a cure for this thing, back in those days it was almost impossible. They went to Mayo Clinic they went out east to various hospitals whatever they could make in this little place to support the family always went to try and support my uncle's medical bills. Needless to say as the months went by my dad was just reached almost the end of the rope as far as financially all of this. He was even behind on his rent! Several several months. Fortunately the man who was in charge, the agent for the Hunt family confronted my father with the fact that Chris you are so far behind we are going to have to do something, that maybe we should just what evict you? Well the two got their heads together and they realized and my father had really had two weights on his shoulders instead of one. He was paying a double rent here. So they decide between the two of them well why don't we confine ourselves into a smaller place and cut the rent in half consequently the overhead would be lessened, which they did they just got some concert blocks and walled in store, he lost the seating capacity that he had and he also lost the counter space that displayed his homemade candies. Of course my father had lost his brother in the process, the man who made the homemade candies, made the homemade ice cream and consequently ever thing came to what you see. And that's the way it's been ever since.

(I) And that was in the 1930's?

(P) Yeah. And in 1940 when the war broke out the city was indicated with thousands of soldiers came over and took over Fort Brady then it became eventuality Camp Luka's but it was in the 30's when just about everyone was effected by the Depression. The illness as it is today can be a very very parasitical thing.

(I) Was it the sorta thing that you have now where you know people really and lose their homes and everything paying for illness, this tremendous expense?

(P) In those days they didn't have insurance policies such as we have today that help cushion some of it. And medical expenses, well they are tremendous today too, in those days if you didn't have the income I don't know what exactly happen back in those days I know my dad just about lost everything because of the illness and trying to support a family of five. But fortunately this gentlemen, my father saw eye to eye shrinking himself and consequently eliminating half of

the overheard. And little by little through the face of God he came through it and was able to catch up with his bills and here we are.

(I) So you have some notes on some things too?

(P) Oh we were speaking about the immigrants coming in and establishing themselves in the community and I wrote these little notes because I couldn't help it, I tried to put myself in their place and imagine you'd have to read their side of immigrates to really appreciate this. When you figure these people came to this country whether they settled in Sault St. Marie or Peru, not Peru, Paducah or wherever, Los Angeles.

(I) Massachusetts both the Finns and the Greeks seemed to have gone to Massachusetts.

(P) Well it depends on the Greeks see if they gone to Massachusetts.

(P) Yes there is a tremendous amount of Greeks over there in Massachusetts especially in Boston area and in Long Island, New York too. Astoria...

(I) And Kansas City of course.

(P) When you consider they come to this country, totally naked in this sense they didn't have the language so there was a language barrier and their means of communication would be practically nill. The social adjustments they had to make, the acceptance by the society as such of the immigrant, and the immigrant trying to adjust to the demands of the new society. That must have been one tremendous piece of adjusting. I stop and think of it and I just shrivel. If somebody transplanted me in some other foreign country I don't know how I would cope. But they did it.

(I) Especially those who didn't speak the language like the Finns and the Greeks that was one of the... the Finns were very much discriminated against in the mining communities because they, the other immigrates were Welsh and Scotts and Irish and of course they all spoke the English language..

(P) It was a common thing there. A common denominator where in these other instances there was no common denominator.

[Turns off tape]

(P) Now I remember reading the article The Venuses which was a very nice article Frances and George.

(I) There is another one going in probably this week about them too.

(P) Well it mentioned the church and that came to my mind the other day when you left. One thing those handful of Greeks found in this community was the fact they didn't have a unifying element, and that to them was the church. That was very crucial part of their life back in the old country. They would bring in priest from Chicago or Detroit for baptisms or marriage or even a funeral but that didn't satisfy them. They felt they had to have a priest for all the time. Frances and John, George Venus may have they had awful lot more information detail information regarding that but I do know the church was their main aim because it not only entailed the

religious aspect but it also entailed their social life too. This maybe one thing to keep in mind in the old country birthdays don't mean too much as they do here, here in our country.

(I) Oh it's a Saint's day

(P) Saints day right!

(I) Birthday of the Saint that you were named after.

(P) Right for instances Jim Lampos, Jim Pitell, they would celebrate St. John's day that would be there day. Of course they wouldn't overlook their birthdays but Saint's Day was the thing. If I'm not mistake Saint James day falls on September, October my father's name was Chris named after Christ the big Name Day would be Christmas day. Now these housewives would prepare for weeks before that Name Day, their husbands or their sons' name day came.

(I) How about the daughters or themselves where they less important?

(P) I guess they were. Oh it was acknowledged in church they would go to Marry or Leva or they had Anglin or some, of this, oh is your Name Day, happy Name Day and they would be a hug and a kiss and there would be relishing for the forth coming year, but they wouldn't go through hoopla the preparations that they would do for the male members. It doesn't seem fair does it?

(I)[Laughs]We won't go into that.

(P) Open up a whole new can of worms. However the preparations were fantastic and it was small it was in small community. For instances Mrs. Gianekura was having a Name Day for Mr. Chris, so Christmas day around two or three in the afternoon that house of ours would be inundated with every Greek within the area and my mother would have pastry she would have roast lamb and all the Greek goodies.

(I) When was this now? Are you taking about the 30's or the 20's?

(P) Um the 20s and the 30s and...

(I) How many Greek families were there in the area at that time?

(P) Gosh Between 30 and 50 families!

(I) Ok and then the war...

(P) The James's would have their Name Day the Johns and the Georges and the Georges would be a big thing because the church was named after Saint George and they would have a big thing down in the church basement in honor of the patron Saint of the Saint the church.

(I) You were going to saw something about the war.

(P) I'm trying to remember now just what how this thing ever diminish to the point now that it's none existence. And it think the war did that.

(I) With the men going away...

(P) Everyone going away and the old timers passing away so a lot of these customs and traditions have kind of vanished as far as this area is concerned. Probably in some of the bigger cities they still have big thing for Name Day. Back to establishing the church so much effort many of the people would barrow money under their name from the banks to help found the church. They would take notes or mortgages or whatever little they owned just to get a church going. We had some very talented men here from the old country. Mr. Carious very fine singing voice, chanting which is a very part of our church service. And he was very knowable about the ology. I don't want to miss anybody's name but I'm fearful that I might. Another man that stands out to me is George Deotropolious that man was very knowledgeable in the conduct of the church. The form of the church and he too would chant on top of that he would --- the priests would teach us Greek whenever the priest was not available. On top of that the man had a fantastic and innate ability to paint icons. Our church is noted for icons. There is a special form and special way of doing them using oils to portray a Saint that's what icons are of course. There is certain qualifications certain things demanded by the church that these figures should lead. And he would do that with oils he would spend hours at his home I guess or down in the church basement and he had a church the walls were loaded with these beautiful portrayals of all of these different Saints and he did it on his own. Unfortunately the church burned in 46' and all those beautiful paintings went except one, we have one left and that remains in the church.

(I) How did church burn down did the cause of it, was it ever discovered?

(P) Not exactly. We had a big wedding at the church and the reception was at the Ojibwa hotel I remember.

(I) During the reception the church burned down?

(P) Yes! We were all having a blast over at the Ojibwa hotel dancing drinking, and having typically wedding fun. And all of a sudden around 10 or 11 o'clock at night we were informed the church is on fire. It was great for candles the Greek Church was on candles as like a piece of apple pie without cheese. A kiss without a squeeze or whatever. I don't know maybe somehow someway we got careless I don't know thank god it hasn't happened since.

(I) Thank god there wasn't anyone there at that time.

(P) Yes. So the those icons went but Mr. Deotropolious was a very talented man.

[Tape cuts off]

(P) Wonderful people here that contributed to the church in many many ways consequently I don't want to eliminated anybody and created any hard feeling but for some strange reason these people stand out in mind because as a tot seeing Mr. Carious up there, on that little platform they have chanting, Mr. Deotropolious chanting.

(I) I don't think anybody expects anybody to have perfect recall article are only like 750 to 1500 words usually so you aren't expected to do it.

[Tape is turned off]

(P) I know this isn't, we aren't talking about religion as such but if you should enter the Orthodox Church here we have you see all these icons we've had high school kids come visit us through the teachers of the humanities courses that they teach and inevitably some youngster will say jee do you worship those, no they don't worship them they are merely symbolize to remind us that these people existed. Saint Mark existed, St. John existed so we have their portraits there that's what icons are to remind us that they existed and remind us of their trials and tribulations what they went through and everything in relation to their religious basically what it is. Mr. Deotropolious had this rare talent. I don't know if he had any formal training, I doubt it the man had a natural talent for that. And they were beautiful very very nicely done.

(I) The second commandment says you can't worship them.

(P) I wrote this note here so I wouldn't forget these are the things that were impressionable on my mind as a youngsters. We still have three or four accusations down in the church basement.

(I) Three or four what?

(P) Three or four dinners with a little bit of dancing.

(I) Yeah Jon Lambers told me a little bit about those tell me which ones those are now. The big ones.

(P) Well we have Saint George's day which is in the spring of the year.

(I) What months do you know?

(P) I wish I know more specific. We also have a dinner which is the beginning of Lent just about a week before lent season starts.

(I) That is not one... Monday Tuesday... Mondytuesday is that what it's called?

(P) Ash Wednesday?

(I) It's not Marti Gras is but it's not the same as the Tuesday before. Its not the day before Ash Wednesday.

(P) Not I don't believe so we always do it on a Sunday for some reason. It's a Sunday before rainy season starts.

(I) So it's the same sorta thing actually. Sort of let's live it up before we start sacrificing.

(P) Right right it's what they call an Apokreas which means preparation period before Lent it mean that's literally what it means

(I) Spell it.

(P) Oh boy Apokreas I think.

(I) You can use the Greek alphabet and I can translate it [Spells in Greek]

(P) You picked it up nicely

(I) yes your sister magically got through six terms of Latin in five terms. And said jee we have six weeks left over let's learn a little Greek. [Laughs]

(P) She might have been German surprised she didn't through that in there.

(I) Ok now the Apokreas that's the one before Lent and that beats the day...

(P) Well we refer --- from that point on...

(I) Oh from that point on... no meat is eaten

(P) No dairy products either that's forbidden. For 40 days.

(I) Really?? No meat or dairy products? Well...

(P) So dry peanut butter and dry toast...

(I) And that's not just on Wednesday on Friday?

(P) Well strictly my mother follows this as best as she can.

(I) Still? And that hasn't been waived like the Catholic Church did with...

(P) That's one thing about the our church they haven't done any wavering or adjustments to what 20<sup>th</sup> century they are still going the way the church Fathers established the church.

(I) Even more than the Catholic Church?

(P) Very much so. They don't deviate from that.

(I) Where do they stand on birth control? Do they have the same position as the Catholic Church?

(P) I don't think they do.

(I) Do they really? That's interesting.

(P) You don't hear too much about.

(I) What about divorce?

(P) Oh they are against that too. They acknowledge the fact that may have to take place.

(I) Can divorced people be remarried in the Orthodox Church for instances?

(P) It's done.

(I) It's done so is there an annulment procedure or...

(P) I don't know. Ill tell you why because there has been no...

(I) No body does it. [Laughs]

(P) I don't know if that typical for the Greek community or what. There just isn't that I'm aware of. So consequently I'm kind of ignorant about that because simply I have never experienced that or known any.

(I) Yes I can answer these questions about the Presbyterian Church because I know a number of people who...

(P) Through it so to speak.

(I) That's why didn't marry in the Presbyterian Church myself the second time around as it turned out Father Bill wouldn't marry us so I didn't know that and I didn't want to go through ring.

(P) So where did you get married at?

[Turns off tape]

(P) Let's see we have two of those holidays...

(I) Yes we have Saint George's day and the Apokreas. That's like a --- isn't it, I mean it sounds like besides like a...

(P) It does doesn't it?

(I) It sounds like a ---. I'm usually way off base with those connections so not go into that either.

(P) Oh yes a week or two... are we on now?

(I) Let me check.

[Tape turns off]

(P) George and Frances at the --- I've mentioned all of this.

(I) No no they gave me a number of books and things which I've looking through but go ahead.

(P) One or two Sundays after the New Year we have something called a [Basilopiba] and that is...

(I) Spell that.

(P) Do you want that in the Greek phonetic or...

[Tape turns off]

(I) Asilopitba?

(P) Basilpiba. Now the word basils but pita is bread. Combine those two words you wind up with Basilopita whatever it amounts to every family does this on New Year 's Day. The mother of the house or the housewife of the house will bake beautiful bread, nice and round tall and crusty and flavored nanas or orange juice and embedded in that bread is coin. Quarter, dime, fifty cents. The father or the head of the house at the New Year's dinner will do the son of the cross with the knife and say a prayer and then he will cut a piece of that bread and dedicated it to the church,

then dedicate it to his home, then to the father, the mother and to each child. As he he proceeds to cut this bread inevitably somebody is going to wind up with that coin. Whoever is to get that coin is to be blessed with good fortune for the rest of the year. This is done in individual's houses. This is also done at the church. They usually have a pot luck and everybody brings their goodies and then the priest will be given this huge bread that some housewife had made much larger than the bread they would make at home. Usually Mrs. Ganziles or Mrs. Bill Ganziles wife does that but we wouldn't mention names because there might be some other folk who does it. Anywise so the priest will dedicate a piece to the archbishop, one to the patriarch and right down the line. And there are two recipients to that the coin is blessed with.

(I) And is this also on New Year's Day?

(P) No not on New Year's Day because everybody is involved with their own doings but it's usually a Sunday or two after. And in the meantime the housewives will donate some of their favorite pastries more pitas without the coins, some with the coin, somebody might donate a bottle of wine. This is raffled off it starts off with a dollar or two and my lord I have seen bread go for 35 to 40 dollars. This money is given to the orphanage which is in Garison, New York it is an orphanage of Greek children of Greek partridge it is called Saint Basil's Academy. Named after famous Saint Basil. So that's one the third big hoopdeedos we have in the church basement. The other one is has a duel thing it has to do with the church that but basically it has political connotation this is off the record...

[Turns off tape]

(P) Messenger to the government house in Athens. And they said we are ready to invade Greece will you surrender? And --- who was the not the dictator but the president of that country at time. Had one word [Ochi] meaning no. we will not surrender will fight.

(I) How do you spell that?

(P) Ochi...He didn't go to any great globalization he merely said no we will surrender. And they really fought very gallantly and in the memorization of that [Ochi] they have a big dinner down in the church basement.

(I) And when is that?

(P)That's in October sometime.

(I) I missed the first part because you said part of that was off the record and I turned it off. It was during world war two is that right?

(P) Yes world war two Mussolini was dictator...

(I) And the Italians?

(P) Had invaded Albina and they were on the border of Greece. Albina and Greece are pretty parallel there. They were ready to go through Greece rather than shedding any blood or have any battle. They wanted Greece to surrender and Greece said no we will not surrender. So it's in commemorative of that they have a big dinner for that.

(I) You said that is political?

(P) Well don't you think it has?

(I) Yes!

(P) But our church recognizes that...

(I) Seemed to be...

(P) Another great event maybe not much now as it used to be because as a youngster all of us even Lambos and Zerbas kids and Democrious kids and I and my sisters were given little pomes to memorize having to do with independence, freedom, democracy. And this was based, this was on March 25<sup>th</sup>. Greece was conquered by the Ottoman empire, Turkey took over and Greece was enslaved for almost 500 years. So one fine day I think it was 1827 I'm not too sure of that date but...

(I) I can look that up.

(P) But the 25<sup>th</sup> of March was the day they revolted this was sort of steaming and brewing these heroes came into their own and said we can't stand this, we are losing our children to the Turks we are losing our language we are losing our customs traditions 500 years of enslavement we got to do something so they revolted, it was their declaration of independent and they threw the Turkish off and that is commemorated the 25<sup>th</sup> of March.

(I) How do you spell Zeribis?

(P) Zerbas. The Zerba's kids, the Venuses, the George and his brother Paul, and the Lambo boys, John and Nick, all of them, my sisters and myself. Here I go again for fear of leaving someone out.

(I) No that ok I just wanted to get you mentioned.

(P) The priest would make a big effort have all of assigned a little poem or would have a little skit and some of us parents would make us a little Greek customs the boys would wear the [Greek word] outfit the little [Greek word] they call it like a kilt. And I remember my uncle got me a bb gun and I go prancing up and down with a bb gun in my arm I would recite some crazy thing having to do with democracy and freedom. You know basically without the youngsters to put on these little things it sort of faded, I guess it didn't fade it just doesn't have the impact it would have had if we had a lot of youngsters.

(I) There aren't a lot of youngsters in the church then?

(P) Not too many anyways.

(I) How do you spell those two words you used to spell your costumes?

(P) Well to look at it the average person would say it looks like kilt.

(I) But you used two Greek words.

(P) [Spells in Greek]

(I) And the other one was?

(P) Well this is a custom that the Evzones would wear, the Evzones are the pick of the crop of the Greek army they usually they have certain physical, they have to be over six feet tall...

(I) What?! Are there a lot of Greeks that are six feet tall!?

(P) It be a little hard to find them but my daughter Joy was in Greece this past summer on tour through the church and she said there were a lot of tall Greeks. Well they don't belong to the Gianekura's.

(I) Jon Lamabos is tall but he is the only Lambos who is really tall.

(P) The rest of them aren't tall? He is taller than Nick isn't he?

(I) Oh yeah I don't think Nick is as tall as him.

(P) But they are the best physical specimen that that army has, and they would put them in these Evzones and they would march up and down the royal grounds, much like the Scottish at the Buckingham Palace.

(I) Like the ...

(P) Anyways our parents would dress us up in these [Greek word] on this special day and we would recite our poetry and it was like a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration.

(I) When did you get your first priest?

(P) Here in the Soo?

(I) Yeah, when you built your first church? I suppose that's in the other stuff...

(P) Yeah I think you'll catch it there. I know one priest that I learned all Greek that, other than learning from my father. Father Kavallero. He put in a Greek school here three times a week.

(I) Oh you you do?

(P) From 4-6 all my buddies would be up playing marbles or having a ball and I'd be down there learning Greek.

(I) And that would be the priest that conducting the Greek ceremony?

[Tape turns off]

(P) I don't want to forget him. Old Roy was a great chanter until his --- he devoted a lot of his time to singing along with the priest. We used to have a choir many many many years ago. Helen and my sister and all these other youngsters 15,25 kids now there are now. So the choir was more or less the replacement for the chanter although we had a chanter back in those days too. Its pretty difficult to conduct a literature without a chanter, it has been done but it's pretty difficult.

(I) How does?

(P) The priest has to.

(I) How do you do it now?

(P) We have a chanter.

(I) Who is the chanter?

(P) We have a young man from Canada, he is a man of Grub through the holiday inn...

(I) What's...

(P) Then we have Betty Deogiannis from Canada she also chants she goes by the name Pappia sometimes.

(I) Deogiannis? Pappia?

(P) Yes.

(I) Im trying to think who has young kids, it be yourself, Sam and Nick Lambos I can't think of any other.

(P) Ganziles has two boys. They are the altar boys, Frank and Stanly. And then there are two or three from Canada that act as altar boys also.

(I) Altar girls yet or no?

(P) No not yet. Because there are some tradition that the female doesn't permitted beyond the icon, that's the barrier where the altar lays behind the barrow, I call it a barrier, it's a wall loaded with icons.

(I) It's the icon?

(P) Ostasio? Lets see...

(I) And that's still true? No women, female beyond the...

(P) That's right.

[Tape turns off]

(P) Are we on? I think I'm repeating myself, the church did, the immigrates here in the Soo founded the church had to be mostly for the spiritual growth and maintaining their tradition but also as a social outlet. Well my dad was not belonger or a joiner. A lot of people go and join but to him his whole heart and soul was the church. Any of the social functions, any of the churches Sunday service I think a lot of the Greek immigrates felt that way.

(I) Did the Greeks live near the church or was there any geographical significance to where the church was?

(P) Not particularly. I find that not particularly in this small town. Cause no matter where you live you aren't far from the church. Maybe in Chicago or in Detroit the church was built where the Greeks conjugated like in Little Italy, Little Greece, Little China or whatever.

(I) Well I know that Francs mentioned that in Kansas City the church was right in the Greek section of town.

(P) Made it convenient for themselves.

(I) But of course then George said the Greeks started to move out Algonquin area in the 30s and the church was built in what 32' or 36' the first church so that wouldn't have been to put it anyways.

(P) The first church was built well it wasn't really built, I think they took over the building where the Bailey funeral home is now.

(I) I thought it was on the side of the Oakland. No the...

[Tape turns off]

(P) Easter plays a big part of the church. You can find this information to these...

(I) No go ahead.

(P) It plays a bigger part then Christmas does. For instance we have a midnight service which is very very colorful and very very impressive.

(I) And that is Easter eve?

(P) Easter midnight 12 o'clock midnight all the lights turn off and there's total darkness and the priest will open the altar doors and he has this large candle light, and his first words are Christ has risen. And his, you get goosebumps this is all symbolic but there you are in total darkness Christ has risen and there you are confronted with this huge candle with it all lite and the conjugation will go up with their own candles which they had purchased on the entry of the church and they would go up and get their lit candle from the priest. And after the service many of us attempt to take it home and light our candles in our own homes so carry on the light. Ok Sunday afternoon about 3 o'clock for about an hour maybe a little less than that it's all [Heape] service.

(I) Hey maybe you can look that up its one of the phones of loggers –

[Tape turns off]

(P) Remember years ago our priest would try to find, we were very blessed, a Catholic priest who could probably speak Italian or read Italian or French excuse me I remember we had a Presbyterian priest come over and he would read it in English it was a certain passage in the bible where the disciples are, I wish I were churchical knowledgeable of the literary. Where the disciples are sent to the various parts of the world they have the --- the power of tongue to speak to communicate to spread the word of god to spread the word of Christ that Christ has risen so in this little service the priest would read it in Greek, this particular Gospel then we would have

well have Father Murphy would come and speak it and read it in Latin. Somebody else would speak it French, or Italian, then in English. It was symbolic it was very symbolic the service was very symbolic the service was rather brief maybe half an hour to an hour and after the service everybody would hug each other. There would be hugging and kissing and everybody would say [Greek word] Christ has risen and you would respond and He has truly risen. And we would say this for 40 days after. I remember one time I was busy cooking in here one day and hearing but it was after Easter but it was still within that period and a young man came in here and looked at me, well first he asked the waitress something, probably asking if I was Greek he suspected I was I guess that I was Greek, so he greeted me [Greek] oh yea I am. And Christ has risen and I looked up at him and said yes He is truly risen. And then he introduced himself, he was a sailor off of one of these boats here. So instead of coming up and saying hi how are you today, that how he greeted me and I thought that was very nice. That day that particular day for only half hour, 45 minutes I said it's a beautiful part of the service cause the whole world is together unified he just exudes love and everybody is forgiven for everything they've done and they are starting off on a nice new page its Easter time its spring time everybody was fresh and green. That's about, the church plays that up a lot, to them it's very very important it a beginning of new things. I don't know what else I can tell you.

[Tape turns off]

(P) But for some reason the Easter is very very important.

End of tape.