

Narrator: Eleanor Todoroff

Interviewer: Lindsay Schmitz

Date, Time, Place: December 5, 2001 1:00pm, Granite City, IL

**Lindsay Schmitz:** When did you live in Lincoln Place?

**Eleanor Todoroff:** From the time I was born until we left in 1961. We moved here in 1961.

**Schmitz:** So your parents were immigrants then?

**Todoroff:** Yes.

**Schmitz:** From?

**Todoroff:** From Macedonia-Yugoslavia at that time. Now Macedonia is a country of its own.

**Schmitz:** Right. When did they immigrate?

**Todoroff:** Well my Dad came here when he was 17 and then he was in the first World War and was injured approximately a week before the armistice was signed. And, he was single then, naturally. And since he was injured, he was paralyzed for 18 months, he spent 18 months in the hospital. And then after that time his recovery was slow but he was just not allowed to work heavy jobs. So he asked if he could go back home to visit

his parents and the government said, "Sure" as long as we have an address. And he went to Europe and at that time because he was here they saw to it that his sister was married before him and his brother and then he married my mother there and then brought her here in, the end of 1926 or in 1927. And I was born in 1928.

**Schmitz:** So how did he end up in Granite City?

**Todoroff:** Because of the immigrants, he was in St. Louis first.

**Schmitz:** Uh-huh.

**Todoroff:** And then he worked with, before he went into the service, and then since there were quite a few immigrants in Lincoln Place he wound up there because he knew some of the people. And at that time he lived with a couple of the men that were immigrants in the Alback (unsure of spelling) Building. That was in Lincoln Place, it is no longer there. There's a lot of changes in Lincoln Place but we had a building for boarders and they had boarders upstairs and businesses down.

**Schmitz:** Okay. And what kind of jobs did he perform in Granite City before he...?

**Todoroff:** He was a shoe repairman.

**Schmitz:** Oh really? At a ...?

**Todoroff:** At his own shop.

**Schmitz:** He had his own?

**Todoroff:** Yes, he couldn't go to the factory like many of the immigrants had to. A lot of them worked at Commonwealth [Commonwealth Steel Industries] some of them worked at different areas. Because of his injury he bought this shoe repair shop and the gentleman he bought it from taught him how to repair shoes and he became a shoe repairman. And our home was right next to the shoe shop.

**Schmitz:** So he did that even after he married your mother and they came back? That's what he did?

**Todoroff:** Yes, he did that when he came back, not before, not when he was in Europe.

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** When he came back here with her then he purchased the shop and the home that was ours next to the shoe repair shop.

**Schmitz:** How important would you say the Church was to people in Lincoln Place and, I guess, in particular to the Macedonians?

**Todoroff:** Very important. The church in Lincoln Place at that time was St. Cyril and Methody Orthodox Church and my mother was very active and so was my dad. In fact, my mother was president of the board of St. Cyril and Methody. But she died at an early age, she was only 31 when she passed away. She had hip problems, probably today, if she were here, they would possible be able to give her a replacement, a hip replacement. But at that time, she died in 1938. She had surgery and then, well my dad raised me. I was an only child.

**Schmitz:** Oh, wow.

**Todoroff:** No brothers, no sisters. But it was very helpful that I never came home to an empty house. My dad's shop was right there and he was always there.

**Schmitz:** Did he remarry?

**Todoroff:** Never. And in fact, he lived, he was older than my mother but lived 30 years longer. She died in 38 and he died in 68. But he moved here with us, when he retired.

**Schmitz:** Oh, okay.

**Todoroff:** So in other words, when Nick married me we lived in the same house in Lincoln Place and then he married me and my dad, actually. [Laughter.] Because, oh, and then we had two daughters and we moved here in 61.

**Schmitz:** So your mother was president of the board at the Church?

**Todoroff:** At St. Cyril and Methody.

**Schmitz:** And what kind of activities was the board responsible for?

**Todoroff:** Well we have a board also now, we belong to St. Cyril and Methody on Maryville Road.

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** And the Church just has a board, they have a president and a vice-president and a regular board that helps with the expenses of the Church and all.

**Schmitz:** So was it pretty common for women to be active in that aspect of the Church?

**Todoroff:** It was common for both men and women.

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** And back then that's unusual, I guess.

**Schmitz:** Yes.

**Todoroff:** Very unusual.

**Schmitz:** So is it still that way now?

**Todoroff:** Yes it is. Yes, we have a sisterhood in our church now and I happen to be president of the sisterhood at St. Cyril and Methody.

**Schmitz:** So that is a specific women's organization within the Church?

**Todoroff:** Yes.

**Schmitz:** And what kinds of activities do they do?

**Todoroff:** Well you help the Church, in fact, we bake. We have the Macedonian Bakerettes, we call them, and we have a couple of articles in the *Granite City Press Journal*. In fact, one was printed, I think on November the 25<sup>th</sup> about our bake sale. It's an annual bake sale to help with our church's expenses, etceteras. It's our largest money making project and we have a monthly fish fry.

**Schmitz:** Oh, okay.

**Todoroff:** The second Friday of every month we have a fish fry and quite a few of the Bakerettes, the ladies that bake now, originally lived in Lincoln Place, too.

**Schmitz:** Oh, okay.

**Todoroff:** Venka Ambuel, Helen Christich, Dena Lovatcheff. So and there's other, (inaudible), she lives in St. Louis but she was originally from Lincoln Place. The Church played a big role.

**Schmitz:** Okay. I interviewed another woman who was a member of the Macedonian Bulgarian Ladies Aid Society. Were you or your mother ever active in that?

**Todoroff:** Yes we were. St. Cyril and Methody, the original one, then quite a few went to the Holy Trinity Church in Madison and they are the ones that had the Macedonian Bulgarian Ladies Aid Society and I belonged to that for...

**Schmitz:** Oh that was affiliated through that Church?

**Todoroff:** Well actually, no, they used that Church and a lot of the members were members of that Church. They used the Church hall in the basement as their meeting area. And we'd meet there but most of the ladies did belong to the Orthodox Church.

**Schmitz:** Did your family continue to cook traditional Macedonian food?

**Todoroff:** Yes.

**Schmitz:** And do they still?

**Todoroff:** Yes we still do.

**Schmitz:** And what kind?

**Todoroff:** Well, we roast lamb, stuff peppers, pig in the blankets.

**Schmitz:** What is that?

**Todoroff:** That's cabbage rolls, actually, and they call them pig in the blankets.

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** It consists of your brown meat with spices and rice and they're wrapped up in cabbage and then cooked. And then some people use grape leaves.

**Schmitz:** Okay.



**Todoroff:** And we make the zelnick or pita which is like a cheese or spinach. It's like a quiche. It's not sweet. And we still bake that at our church and we sell it. And the original recipes came from our parents.

**Schmitz:** So at your Christmas bake sale you also bake Macedonian...?

**Todoroff:** We bake cookies, we bake the Macedonian cheese and spinach pita, zelnick and some of them call it (inaudible). That's another name for it, it depends on the area that you came from in Macedonia.

**Schmitz:** Oh, okay.

**Todoroff:** And what are some of the other dishes? Well we made a lot of yogurt, homemade yogurt. And stews, different types of stews, soups.

**Schmitz:** Many of the other people we have interviewed talked a lot about the Community Center. Would you say that was a really important aspect of Lincoln Place?

**Todoroff:** Yes it was, yes it was.

**Schmitz:** So what kind of events were held there?

**Todoroff:** They had basketball for the boys and then for the girls when Miss Prather was there, she would teach you how to sew. And they had different types of crafts and it was just a place that you went and played on the playground. They had books you could read and you could do various things and it was just a place where they children liked to go?

**Schmitz:** So children from all of the...?

**Todoroff:** Oh yes. Oh yes.

**Schmitz:** And was there ever a problem with the different groups not getting along?

**Todoroff:** Not to my knowledge. In fact, we never used to lock our doors in Lincoln Place. We could go play anytime after school as long as your schoolwork was finished. And then you could play in the evening and when the 9:00 whistle, when Commonwealth blew their whistle at 9:00 every night. As long as you were home by the time the whistle blew.

**Schmitz:** Do you remember any kind of games you played as a child?

**Todoroff:** Well we used to play kick the can.

**Schmitz:** And what is that?

**Todoroff:** Well, gee I even forgot now, and marbles. We played a lot of marbles and hopscotch and played ball at the Clubhouse. We called it the Clubhouse.

[Now Mrs. Todoroff is looking at pictures.]

**Todoroff:** This is one of our original pictures when we started baking.

**Schmitz:** Oh, okay.

**Todoroff:** And this is one, we have an annual Orthodox Parish Picnic, too. And this is the article that was just a week or so in the *Granite City Press*.

**Schmitz:** Oh just recently.

**Todoroff:** Yes.

**Schmitz:** Oh, okay.

**Todoroff:** It talks about our bake sale that is on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December. And then this one was last year's, so...Okay here's an old picture and I don't think I am in here but it is from the *Commonwealth* and it's pictures of children that went to the Clubhouse.

**Schmitz:** Was this a newsletter put out by the...?

**Todoroff:** I think it was a newsletter put out by...

**Schmitz:** Commonwealth?

**Todoroff:** Yes.

**Schmitz:** And they were the ones that funded the Community Center – is that right?

**Todoroff:** I am not sure who funded it. They could have but I am really not sure of that.

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** And this is a picture of the basketball players. They had a reunion here, in fact they just recently honored them and put them in the Hall of Fame.

**Schmitz:** So you were living there then, when they won the championship?

**Todoroff:** Oh, yes. That was in the 40's.

**Schmitz:** So, that was a big deal for the community then?

**Todoroff:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. [She is now looking at a newspaper article that shows the pictures of the basketball players from Lincoln Place who won the state championship.]

You had Danny Eftimoff who was Macedonian and then you had a couple of Armenian boys and Andy Phillips who is Hungarian and, of course, I think Mr. Davis is in there too. I don't know...

**Schmitz:** Oh, okay.

**Todoroff:** Harold Brown and the Coach was Leonard Davis. And Leonard Davis was at the Washington School.

**Schmitz:** He didn't live in Lincoln Place?

**Todoroff:** No he didn't live in Lincoln Place, he taught at Washington School. The Lincoln Place boys were this one, [pointing at the photograph] this one, he's from Lincoln Place, he was, he was. All but these two, actually.

**Schmitz:** Wow.

**Todoroff:** That's Harold Brown and Mr. Davis.

**Schmitz:** And they would practice in the Community Center?

**Todoroff:** Yes.

**Schmitz:** Okay, how about do you remember your parents ever talking about having difficulties learning English?

**Todoroff:** My dad didn't. He spoke very well, English and wrote it pretty much. Now my mother didn't speak as well as he did but, you know, she was only here 10 years.

**Schmitz:** And how did they learn English? Did they take classes or did they...?

**Todoroff:** Evidently my Dad must have. All I remember is he always spoke English.

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** He spoke Macedonian, too because we used to talk Macedonian even when I was little, a child. We'd speak in Macedonian and in English.

**Schmitz:** So you were there when the Army Depot was built?

**Todoroff:** Yes.

**Schmitz:** And how would you say that that changed the community?

**Todoroff:** Well it changed it because more people were involved and it did help people get jobs there. Quite a few people worked there and it helped my dad's business because they would bring in their shoes or their family's shoes to be repaired.

Nick Todoroff [Eleanor's husband enters the room.]: There were a lot of soldiers.

**Todoroff:** Yes, there were a lot of soldiers.

**Schmitz:** So the people who worked there would then come in and go to those businesses.

**Todoroff:** I would say on occasion, but not all the time. But there were a lot of people that lived in Lincoln Place that also worked at the Depot.

**Schmitz:** Oh, really?

**Todoroff:** Yes.

**Schmitz:** The immigrants, then?

**Todoroff:** Well, the children of the immigrants, the offsprings. The immigrants, well you had, some of them were in business of their own. Like you had grocery stores and you had restaurants and the shoe shop. You had some taverns, naturally. [Laughter] And a beauty shop, they had beauty shops. And a bakery, there was a bakery there. They

baked bread, two of them. But the original one was next to our home. It's no longer there, Chris's Bakery, and then it moved over to, moved onto Chestnut. Not Chestnut, I forgot. Spruce Street, I think it is Spruce Street.

**Schmitz:** Some of the people have talked about coffeehouses. Were there...?

**Todoroff:** Oh, yes. I forgot about them.

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** Yes, there were coffeehouses, a couple of them.

**Schmitz:** Now was that something primarily men went to or ..?

**Todoroff:** Yes.

**Schmitz:** Just as kind of a social place?

**Todoroff:** Yes, they would go there for coffee, Turkish coffee and talk, sometimes they played cards.

**Schmitz:** And that was men from all ethnic background?



**Todoroff:** Oh, yes.

**Schmitz:** So you moved out in 1961, is that what you said?

**Todoroff:** Right.

**Schmitz:** And why did you leave.

**Todoroff:** Well we wanted to have a different home. In Lincoln Place our house was, we had fixed it up, but we just wanted to upgrade. We talked about moving to Edwardsville but we changed our minds. So when they started building in this area, we liked the area and so we had the house built.

**Schmitz:** Okay, I was going to ask you about, we talked about women's organizations in the Macedonian Church – were there other women's organizations in the community or maybe with other ethnic groups that you know of?

**Todoroff:** Well, I think later they used to have an organization at the Clubhouse. I don't know if it was a mother's group that they called it. But with us I belonged to the Macedonian Bulgarian Ladies Aid Society and then the sisterhood of the Church which was separate.

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** And other than that, you mean organizations in Lincoln Place or?

**Schmitz:** You mentioned the Mother's Club, what was that?

**Todoroff:** The ladies in Lincoln Place formed like a Mother's Club and they used to meet at the Clubhouse.

**Schmitz:** Oh, okay.

**Todoroff:** And then later they had the Senior Club and they would meet there also.

**Schmitz:** And that was a women's club?

**Todoroff:** Women's, yes.

**Schmitz:** Did any of these women's organizations or the Macedonian Bulgarian Ladies Aid Society did any of their activities change during World War II? Did they do anything for the war effort?

**Todoroff:** You know I don't remember, they may have. I am sure they did. Maybe they made like cancer type things. That I don't remember. I was in high school during the war and just don't remember that much.

**Schmitz:** A lot of the people we have talked to have talked about that there's kind of a sense of a loss of community in Lincoln Place now that everyone has moved out and the neighborhood has obviously changed quite a bit. Would you say that you think that has occurred?

**Todoroff:** Yes because a lot of the original building like our home, my dad's shoe repair shop, the baker next door that's all gone. A lot of the grocery stores are not there, Vartan's Market across the street and Lovetcheff's and Kirchoff's and, you know, a lot of them are gone. But it seems like they are trying to keep it going. I know there's some new businesses now there so. But I would say it has definitely changed since we were there...

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** In the 40's and 50's.

**Schmitz:** But many of the people who used to live there still socialize at Church?

**Todoroff:** Oh, in fact, some of them still live there.

**Schmitz:** Okay.

**Todoroff:** Like Venka and Leland [Venka and Leland Ambuehl] still live in Lincoln Place. And, and, there's quite a few people that still live in Lincoln Place.

[At this point, I turned the tape recorder off as Mrs. Todoroff got up to find her photo album to show me more pictures. We talked for approximately one more hour after I turned off the tape recorder.]