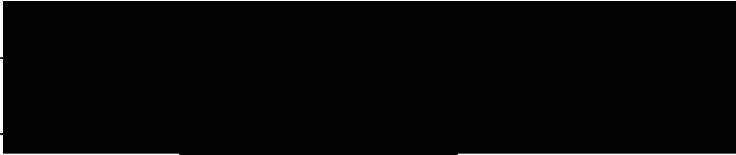


Interviewer: Leslie Bilodeau

### INTERVIEW AND TAPE SUMMARY

Name: Sandor (Alexander) Toth

Date and Place of Birth: 07/19/19 Granite City, IL

Address: 

Telephone Number: 

Interview Date, Time, and Place: 10/27/01, 9:30am, Mr. Toth's residence (above)

#### Interview Summary (attach additional sheets, as needed):

This interview includes information about Mr. Toth that is both personal and professional. We discussed topics that include: demographics, Lincoln Place Community Center history, 1940 State basketball championship, his birthplace history, Magyar-Haz, relatives, cultural diversity in the neighborhood, his current neighborhood, his education, job history, military career, building his own home, the steel companies, his management strategies, his wedding + reception, the birth of their son, his wife's (women's roles), his achievement of the American Dream

#### Note any special circumstances involving the interview:

The beginning of this tape (first 30 seconds) very hard to hear, but beyond that, it's very clear. During the course of our interview, we took a walking tour of the Lincoln Place neighborhood. We went to the community center, Magyar-Haz, his old homestead, and the first church. I took several pages of handwritten notes, which will be included in the biographical summary.

Biographical Summary of  
**Sandor Toth**

Written by Leslie Bilodeau

What is “The American Dream”? How do you measure it? Is the measure income, citizenship, neighborhood, career achievement, or notoriety? Or is The American Dream a place in the heart that knows that you have achieved your personal best and have accomplished what you’ve set out to do? Whatever the measure, Sandor (Alexander) Toth has achieved it.

Born of parents who immigrated to the United States at the turn of the century, Sandor was born at home in Hungary Hollow, a neighborhood in Granite City, Illinois. Education, career pursuit, marriage, family and finally retirement have all centered around the same few miles of Granite City, the Lincoln Place neighborhood. What brought the Toths to this area, and what has managed to keep them here for their entire lives? The steel industry, and the industries that supported those mills.

Sandor, now known as Alexander, was born to Hungarian immigrants Alec and Clara. Alex had one brother eleven years younger, Tibor (Ted), who was also born at home. Alec worked for Commonwealth Steel, and his wife, Clara, worked for NESCO. They grew many of their own foods – peppers, tomatoes, parsley, carrots, cucumbers, squash. Alex’s favorite was fried sweet and hot peppers. He still eats them today. He recalls Clara buying 100 pound bags of cabbage and putting a rock on the cabbage in a barrel until it became sauerkraut. He recalls running to the bakery for bread, and Chris sending him home with the loaf of bread he paid for, and a “little bread” to eat on the way home. Cream bread was always his favorite. For social visits his mother served trays with olives, feta cheese, fried peppers and cream bread.

In 1919 there weren’t daycare centers for the children of working mothers. Clara depended on family members and other members of the community. When Alex was a small boy, his mother left him at the community center. Although the community center was a social gathering place for all the residents of the neighborhood, Ms. Prather was a strict disciplinarian. She was well respected and known to all the mothers in the community. Alex also had relatives right across the street. He spoke fondly of his aunt, who owned the confectionery there. Any time he felt tired, lonely, or hungry, he went across the street to his aunt’s confectionery for a sweet treat and a hug from a lady, he claimed, “made a person feel like a million bucks.” Alex spent a great deal of time at “the club” growing up, and he has many stories to share about those experiences. The fondness and respect he developed for Ms. Prather and the members of his community are still displayed when he recounts those stories today.

When he was old enough to attend school, Alex went to Washington Grade School, which has since been torn down. Although his neighbors consisted of an international community consisting of Greeks, Hungarians, Armenians, Romanians, Mexicans, Macedonians, and Bulgarians the children attended school together. All spoke English as a second language, and got along remarkably well together in “Little Europe” as the insiders called the neighborhood. Lincoln Place residents, “hunkies,” were a tight knit group. Alex recalls playing ball in the streets, and being asked by neighbors to run

and pick something up from the store. There was nothing he wouldn't do, when asked by an elder. No matter who they were, respect for community elders was an unspoken expectation. He grew up with the help of his neighbors and by helping his neighbors.

Alex recalls an annual festival, which involved selling tickets for the raffling off of an automobile. The annual festival was held at the Verhovy Lodge (Magyar-Haz or Hungarian Home). The girl whose father sold the most raffle tickets would be crowned the "Hungarian May Queen." The queen would have her picture made, and a written announcement in the Hungarian newspaper. During this festival the Hungarian residents would dress in traditional dress. Alex remembers he and his cousin, John, dressing in pleated pants and red velvet vests with gold trim. It was a moment of pride and a tradition of honor for the Hungarian people of Lincoln Place.

Alex went to Brown Business College, and worked as a steelworker at Granite City Steel before entering the United States Army. He enlisted as an accountant, and through his resourcefulness, he eventually became the battalion supply sergeant. His Army career taught him invaluable trade skills, which contributed to his success as a valued leader in the steel industry during his post-war career.

Alex married Florence at St. Mary's Catholic Church in 1948. They had a grand reception in the Magyar-Haz (Hungarian Home), just down the street from his home.

There were about thirty families in attendance. The menu included cabbage rolls, fried chicken, Hungarian goulash, poppyseed rolls, and sweet pastries. They drank beer and bootleg whiskey made by family members. They danced late to the music of the gypsy orchestra. Alex and Florence are still married today, fifty-three years later. They have one son, Dr. Alexander Toth.

While living at their home on Spruce Street in Lincoln Place, Alex built a home for his family a short distance away. He attributes his success to the profit from the sale of their Lincoln Place properties, the excellent management of his wife, and the personality of the Hungarian people. Alex owned a lot at the corner of Poplar and Niedringhaus, which he sold for \$1100. He also owned the property at 1716 Spruce, which he sold for \$800. He then invested \$1000 in the lot and \$1000 in supplies, and began to build. Through a network of local Hungarian brick masons, electricians, plasterers, contractors and engineers, he designed and built the home he still lives in today.

Mr. Toth worked his way up in the NESCO plant, and eventually became the foreman overseeing approximately ninety people in the mill. When the plant closed in 1953 he was retired. When asked what he attributes to the success of managing ninety employees, he responded, "No other person could have done that job but me. The reason is not because of my great leadership, but because they were all my relatives! Almost all of them were aunts, uncles and people from the neighborhood who knew me!" This gentle man's modesty and joy convinced me there was more to it than that.

Two days after leaving the mill, Frank Hill and Charlie Horton recruited Alex as the timekeeper for Frank, an engineer for the construction superintendent in charge of building the local plant for A. O. Smith. Nearly twenty-three years later, through his tireless attention to detail, his skill and loyalty, he was promoted up through the ranks to foreman of the machine shop. Alex recalls the day he was taken into the machine shop for the very first time. With no experience he began the mastery of the equipment, and began to foster relationships that would eventually distinguish him as a leader in his field.

Mr. Toth now lives alone in his family home. Florence is no longer able to live with him, due to the progression of her Alzheimer's Disease. But his memory and his home are full of her, and he loves her dearly still.

Throughout my interview with Sandor (Alexander) Toth I heard only expressions of respect for the gifts of others. He never met a person he didn't like. I couldn't help but feel magnetized by his honesty, his reverence for life, and his admiration of others. I find him a distinguished gentle man. His life serves as an example of what it is like to achieve The American Dream.