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## Oral History: Jayne Bausis Cotter

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## Interview with Jayne Bausis Cotter

- BRETT: Today is June 29, 2017. My name is Brett Cotter and I'm with Jayne Cotter and I consent to having my voice on this recording and...
- JAYNE: I also consent to having my voice on this recording.
- BRETT: 00:18 Okay, thank you. Why don't we start by you telling about some of the most basic details of your early life... When did you come to Worcester, around when were you born in Worcester?
- JAYNE: I was born in Worcester, actually, and my parents were also born in Worcester. My grandparents actually met in probably the 1900s as they came over from Poland. My grandmother and grandfather actually spoke broken English as I was growing up, and I guess it was a great experience to actually grow up, not really learning a second language but being familiar with a second language. It kind of gave a different perspective to everything. I grew up in the 60s and 70s and went... Actually as part of, I guess, my memories is that actually a lot of our activities and just experiences revolved around the Catholic Church, actually the Polish church. And everything was there, whether you went to mass or you took part in different festivities, different little parades or everything. It was definitely based on the church and the community surrounding the church.
- BRETT: 02:14 What did your parents do for a living?
- JAYNE: In those days, my mother actually had worked and then I think after marriage and when, I guess, we were born, she actually stayed home to raise the children. My father was a U.S. Steel worker and worked there for his whole life. He did serve in World War II and never talked about it. But he did work at U. S. Steel as did a lot of other members of our family.
- BRETT: 02:55 Was your father a member of the World War II Vets... Polish Veterans of World War II?
- JAYNE: No, he was more... he was kind of a quiet person and would do a lot more outdoor hiking and things like that. He didn't really... he was not involved in organizations like that.
- BRETT: 03:13 Okay. You mentioned that there was, you know, a lot of your life, your community life revolved around the church, the Polish church. Could you elaborate on perhaps any specific memories of festivities and celebrations?
- JAYNE: Well, first, my parents would always go to church, both my mother and father and of course, my brother and I would every Sunday. Church was a very important part of our week, and as was for the rest of the community. And a lot of times we would meet other students and sit with them and go with them. Other things that we did were different Polish picnics and one of the things that we also did was take part, as the girls did, and we were part of the Children of Mary and later St. Theresa Sodality and take part in different church ceremonies. And one of them was in the month of May, we honored the Blessed Mary and we would go to Devotions, or try to go to Devotions, every single evening. And we would wear our veils and go to church, and if you made it through the whole month that was a very special thing. Sometimes that was impossible. But then in the beginning of

May there was always a big May procession and we queened Mary, we'd put flowers on her and there was a May ... I guess it was a May queen who would actually be the leader and crown Mary actually in that procession. And the whole church showed up and it was done outside and it was quite a thing. Other things... we had that Polish picnics, and a lot of it was... Every year and every summer Monsignor Chwalek would invite everyone to his family's summer camp. I'm not really sure how that worked, I don't think it was really part of the church, but it was, I think it was in Brookfield and on, of course, the lake there-- Spencer or Brookfield, someplace out that way.... And everybody in that parish was there. It was the best day! A lot of fun, a lot of swimming, activities with everybody, it was great. So I think that mostly the picnics.... The bazaars, the church and school activities kind of blended a lot because the school was also supported entirely by the church and it was mostly, at that time, for families and children of Polish decent that changed, I think, later as it got larger. I'm not sure when that happened, maybe when we rebuilt the high school or something like that. But, so the church or the school, whether it was a basketball game or a cheerleading tournament, or some other sport, it seemed like the whole community was involved. There were Booster's clubs and Booster fairs and a lot of bazaars. Things all around the church and it was always great fun.

BRETT: 06:35 Did you ever sing Polish songs?

JAYNE: Oh, always! On all the holidays, actually, that was important. Those holidays, we always... going to St. Mary's from kindergarten all the way through high school... Actually, we all, I think, enjoyed the holidays whether it was Easter... Christmas, of course, was very, very big. I think those probably would be the biggest ones. But there were always processions, boys and girls in elementary school, not in high school. And you'd sign up there. I think Sister Remegina was very instrumental. You'd have the flowers, you'd go and be dressed and you'd, you know, have little corsages or carry flowers depending on what holiday. I can always remember the smell of the carnations, very nice. And so at the mass, the children would have a procession all around the church depending on what holiday it was. But, yes, singing songs... for all of those holidays—of course the Christmas carols in Polish was actually just something we always did. Even now I kind of miss not hearing them, and I think of them translated from the English. But those were really definitely memories that I guess will always be with me.

BRETT: 08:04 Do you remember much around John Paul II's election in 1972, I think?

JAYNE: Actually, I did. I was just graduated, I think... I don't know what year that was because it could have been later. I do remember that. I don't think I was in high school, I think I was maybe recently out. But anyway, yes, it was a very wonderful thing to hear, first, all about John Paul II, just about his upbringing, his growing up. He spoke different languages, he was quite an athlete. It was just interesting hearing that he was Pope. Very wonderful to hear because out of all the choices it's unusual to have had

someone who wasn't Italian and the Pope so I felt it was a special honor and had special meaning. I think the time that it was happening was kind of one that was also, I think... There was upheaval, I think, under the Communist rule, I believe. I think that there were a lot of things that were happening. And I'm not sure how that was fitting in with the Polish Solidarity Movement and things in Poland. I'm not really sure, but I think at some point things all kind of came together between John Paul and Lech Wałęsa all of the Poles fighting for their freedom and separating on their own. I think a lot of that was happening to me around that time.

BRETT: 09:59 Are there any memories of challenges that you yourself or as a community as a whole faced in Worcester?

JAYNE: I don't know if there were challenges. I think maybe there were some challenges in having our church, maybe at Czestochowa, support the school totally. I think that I remember, if I'm not mistaken, that we always were told that our church supported our school and it was solely on the support of our parish. So we didn't take any monies from the diocese. So I'm not sure the political things of the diocese and things that were going on. But I think that there were little things there that went on, and at one point I do remember that Monsignor Chwalek, I think he was asked to separate our parish as a community, it was a large parish and people would come, whether they were from Auburn or Millbury or Sutton or any of those towns, probably even the Greendale part of Worcester. All of the Polish people that were brought up and moved out all still came back to church and into activities. And I think knowing that, I think the diocese at one point did want to split the church into two as they did the Lithuanian churches. And Father Chwalek was adamant on keeping it as one whole church because there would be strength and there would be more support as being one church, and keeping it that way. So I think there was a little bit of turmoil over that, but we supported our school pretty much all the way up. Perhaps when we became an essential Catholic school, perhaps it changed a little bit, but I don't really know that.

BRETT: 11:58 So what was it like attending St. Mary's High School? Are there any specific memories or experiences?

JAYNE: It was the best! It was like a family and just starting from kindergarten all the way up you got to know, well, you already knew a lot of the families—like your mother, your grandmother, or grandfather...they knew everyone's family. Who was related to whom, who came from what part of Poland, everybody just seemed to be a happy family. And you just knew everyone; they were like your relatives. There were a lot of great memories. And just going up through the years, it was great. We also did learn a little bit of Polish in the younger years. We would definitely also learn civic, all those kinds of things along with the Polish lessons and a lot of religion all the way up through school. We learned about Our Lady of Czestochowa, of just the Polish faith in general. I know at one point when it was the millennium of a thousand years of Christianity in Poland, it was a big thing. That would be another celebration and ceremony that we would all do as a part of the school and the church. Religion, I guess, was

part of our education. It was very important. The other biggest thing, I think, especially as you grew and went into high school is pride, proud of being Polish. It was definitely a pride that was instilled in everyone. You just felt good about it. And I think part of it is being a part of this family and that you just automatically felt proud to be Polish. And, of course—this is changing subjects, but, part of the memories of elementary school especially was having that time of year before Lent had started and actually, in the cafeteria, or wherever, they would be baking the Polish donuts, the Paczki, and it would just spread through the school whether they baked them in the church hall or in the school cafeteria. Buying those Paczki and having those was definitely a treat, and I remind you that Lent was coming and that we would be starting that season and enjoying the Mardi Gras time and the Fat Tuesday even though we didn't call it that, we just knew Lent was coming because of the Paczki we were enjoying.

BRETT: 14:53 So you talk about St. Mary's as a family, but were there any tensions that you could sense, not in just St. Mary's, but in Worcester's Polish community in general?

JAYNE: No, not that I could feel at all...No, maybe there were such things, but no...

BRETT: 15:17 But you didn't notice anything...

JAYNE: No, I didn't notice anything.

BRETT: 15:20 Okay. Kind of switching topics, but the I-290...

JAYNE: I'm sorry, as I'm thinking more back into the high school years, actually even after high school, I don't know it was so much tension, but some of our activities did take part, like our sports—we did not have a lot of area. Father Chwalek did build a beautiful stadium that would take care of tennis and even basketball in summer; it was an outdoor stadium... He did do all that but I think built with the intention of keeping the students' activities at summertime staying around the church and the school by building this outdoor facility. But a lot of our sports, like the baseball and the softball, things like that were actually held at the town, Crompton Park, and, I mean, it was just a short walk down from the school and church so it wasn't that far. Then at one point there were a little bit of things that went on there, and I think when the Polish people perhaps were spreading out and becoming more Americanized, I guess, that you'd move out to the outskirts. There was a time where, whether there just not so much just your community, but since it's a city park, there might have been some things that they might do. I don't think that they were really gangs, I don't think they called them that, and I don't think they really were. But I do remember that park, not when it was daytime and school activities were going on, like baseball or anything like that, but in the evening the park was busy. They would have basketball games that were like town or city basketball games, like from high school and college students.

There were all these things that would go on or they would have bands, they would have bonfires, they would have all those things at that park, but that was also a part of, sort of part of our park too, we kind of

considered it. So if we would go there at night I knew there were things like stabbings and things like that that were not at all related to the Polish community, but if you were there as being a Polish person watching a game or the band, or what was going on in the evenings with the bonfire, things like that. And I know there was this one boy's brother that I knew that actually did get stabbed and... If you want to consider that a tension—I guess yes, perhaps that would be something like that then.

BRETT: 18:19 Thank you. So, I-290, the Worcester expressway, was finished in 1960, which of course is much before you graduated from St. Mary's, but it carved Worcester's Polish community into two, or at least that's what people say. Can you remember anything of Poles who lived or worked on the western side of I-290, around Kelley Square, on that side of the expressway? Can you remember if there was any sense of isolation? Were they isolated from the rest of the community because of 290?

JAYNE: I don't really know if they were isolated because even those that were on the other side would still be part of that church, and that might be why Monsignor Chwalek didn't want to separate, I don't really know. But no, I don't really think so. The road does go right through the church parking lot kind of, but I don't think that that ever separated my... I mean, my relatives would live along the other side of that actually, but more towards Auburn, and I mean they still participated and came, as a matter of fact, still went to the school. So I don't really know that, to my knowledge. I don't know that that really interfered with those things.

BRETT: 19:40 Good. So, kind of going back to just to the community in general, was there much of a division between Polish immigrants and Polish-Americans?

JAYNE: Eventually I don't think there really was. As a student in school though, I know that, I guess, we were aware, you know, being, I guess, maybe second generation, we were aware when students did come. A lot of student did come from Poland and as they came in they always were kind of quiet and, there may have been a handful of immigrants that would come, and they would come to classes, but they had to kind of learn English on their own, so they always seemed to sort of stay more together and I don't think we were unfriendly, but because there was a language barrier, and it did seem like several students, one was Elizabeth, then one was Theresa, Eugene... I guess they kind of stayed more to themselves. They were definitely quieter, and I think probably because they were... they did speak broken English and had to learn. I think it was difficult for them. They certainly participated in the church, in all those activities, but I think they weren't as involved in sports or things like that, or even the dance, the singing things. I think they weren't as involved. But as far as academics and things like that... But, looking back, I could have reached out more myself. You know, you'd say hi—everyone was polite, there was nothing, no kind of... But we didn't really interact as readily just I think because of the language barrier. And I think part of it was because they were quiet and they weren't, I guess, sure of their English as well, so they just drifted quietly and as a group they kind of stayed together. I don't

know if they came back...I wonder... I think Eugene, though, out of everyone I have seen within the last maybe several years, he was definitely more outgoing. Yes, he's done very well. Yes, I guess it's too bad that we didn't all kind of include us altogether.

BRETT: 22:46 Thank you. So now you mentioned that you father was a part of many organizations...

JAYNE: He was busy working, he worked a lot of overtime and rotated shifts. I mean I think that if he had a regular nine to five job I would think he'd have been just as involved, but I think just because of his work schedule...

BRETT: 23:09 Okay. Well, I mean, but there were many organizations as you know, there's the Polish Naturalization and Independent Club, there was the White Eagle Club, there was also a Polish women's club... Were you a part of any organizations like that either as a young woman or as growing up? Were you affected personally if you were not part of these organizations, were you affected personally be any of them?

JAYNE: I didn't really belong to those, but as far as the school organizations, I was involved in probably all of the school organizations, whether it was the CYC, the Sodality...I'm trying to think...I was sort of in all a lot of the athletic... I was involved in all the school activities growing up. And I know that my mother and my aunt and her siblings that were local also were very involved, perhaps not in the Booster's Club, but in the women's clubs, very involved in that, and the church choir. Yes, so we were always as a family involved in that.

BRETT: 24:24 Were there any events that these clubs organized that you can remember?

JAYNE: Not so much that the clubs were involved, but all the weddings of my parents' friends were held, whether it was at the PNI, or the White Eagle, or ... I don't know, the PNI was one that was common and the White Eagle. I'm not sure if the PNA did anything, I'm trying to think... Oh, the Polish American Vets as well. Right, yes, they would, and I think my uncles were a part of some of that. I don't know if they were really in it, but they were part of World War II but... I do remember going to parades where all that... we would still be supportive of that. But weddings were really mostly held in the halls of all of those clubs.

BRETT: 25:22 So today it's pretty widely known that there are fewer Poles living around Our Lady of Czestochowa than there once were. When you lived there, can you recall anybody who moved into that neighborhood that was not of Polish heritage, and what was your impression of them, and what was the community's impression of them? How active were they in the community, things like that?

JAYNE: I actually cannot say that I do remember that because when I was growing up and even through high school, the whole area of Vernon Hill and Green Island that, at my time, it was really, really.... Not so much the Green Island, I think that's.... My grandmother actually did live down there and that far from the church, but as she got older she moved in that area to be closer to church, and I think that was a time that there was still a lot of Polish things, like Golemo's Market and everything was there. I

think that Newbury Street was still quite a Polish area. I think though, at some point, there did seem to be a change where other...I don't really know... As the Poles moved out, others did move in. And I think that part was there, but most of the other area that I was mostly, where we lived and were involved in, didn't really see any big change while I was there. I think it probably happened after, and even after my grandmother passed.

BRETT: 27:22 So one of the phenomena that was on the up and up basically, from the 50s through the 70s and 80s, was more people going to college, generally, out of St. Mary's particularly, which brought about suburbanization as well from a lot of people because people could afford to move out into the city, not only could afford but they needed to, to find work with their specialty from college. And you're someone who did that as well. Can you tell me about your experience just going to college? Was it hard for you to break ties, at least your geographical ties, with the Polish-American community that you had grown up in?

JAYNE: No, not at all. I think that as much as that was a part our community and everything, I think that... I'm sort of going to backtrack... When my mother was growing up and my grandparents, you know had come...I'm not sure when everything was formed... But that community was very important for them, and I think to move out would be a great thing, but I think they would feel more because that was just part of their life for so long because I know my mother would always say that my grandmother...and my grandfather was very quiet... but my grandmother would actually...and they would both were very interesting, they both worked...there was no like my mother staying home once the children were born... Both of my grandparents worked very hard, and the older...

BRETT: 29:17 What did he do, out of curiosity?

JAYNE: I'm not sure what my grandfather did, isn't that terrible? I know my grandmother worked in a laundry and I have to ask if... I should actually ask my relatives now what... But anyway, I don't actually remember what my grandfather did. But they would come home and then the oldest would watch the children and my grandparents would... Of course, with broken English it was very hard to learn the language so say even a three or four, maybe not three—my mother might have said three, but say a four or five year old, a five year old for sure, if someone came knocking on the door my grandmother would take whoever was the oldest one there to translate, and it would be that five year old that would be translating. So I think that they, to be in that community, in a Polish community, was very important to them because that's where they did speak broken English. But it was definitely perhaps a barrier to a lot of things so that by moving out of that community I think would be harder, not so much for my parents, my mother and all her siblings, that was fine because they obviously did move out of the area even. But for that first generation, the one coming over, as was probably for those immigrants that came, you know, in the 60s, 70s, whatever, who were my classes, it would be harder for them to leave the area just because at least they had a lot of common

things and language, of course being a lot of them, you know religion and other things. So I think for those it would be harder. But I actually started in a nursing school and I went with my friends, actually a lot of us went into nursing and a lot of us became teachers. And then from there I actually—it was college and nursing school at the same time, it was a dual program, and then actually went over to a four-year degree program right from the freshman year. Well, it was actually not very difficult, it was exciting, it was a positive thing, And being probably, most probably my cousins as well, the first to really go to and attend college. So it was a very positive and very exciting.

BRETT: 31:50 So when you moved out of Worcester, your parents stayed behind. Is that...?

JAYNE: They did, but they did move though after my grandmother passed. It was probably easier for them to move because it was important for them to actually stay close. And even though my grandmother lived by herself, my mother would bring her meals every day and things like that because they were close. It was a positive thing. It was a nice thing. And we got to know my grandmother, especially because my grandfather had passed away. She was always with us, was always right there, if not there, on the telephone. I think I saw my grandmother every day and out of all of my mother's siblings, my mother was probably the closest because my mother was home the longest and I think it was probably that reason that she was the one who felt she was to stay closer to my grandmother. But now uncles and everything also stay close even if they moved out toward western Mass. They would come weekly back just to spend time with my grandmother. My Uncle Ziggy back every week. He was even the one who planted flowers at the cemetery for my grandfather. He was the furthest away, actually not the furthest... I had one in Colorado, an uncle-- he only came on occasions. But yes, they all stayed close to here.

BRETT: 33:33 All right, well, thank you very much, that's all the questions I have. I appreciate you, thank you.

JAYNE: Well, now you've gotten back a lot of memories. And if I start kind of thinking more about them I'd be happy to add a little bit more.

BRETT: All right, thank you.

JAYNE: Thank you!