

7-7-2017

Oral History: Irene Rojcewicz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/polish>

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), [Demography, Population, and Ecology Commons](#), [Ethnic Studies Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Slavic Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), [Sociology of Culture Commons](#), [Sociology of Religion Commons](#), [United States History Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

"Oral History: Irene Rojcewicz" (2017). *Zycie w Ameryce: A Collection of Polish-American Oral Histories*. 5.
<https://crossworks.holycross.edu/polish/5>

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral Histories at CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Zycie w Ameryce: A Collection of Polish-American Oral Histories* by an authorized administrator of CrossWorks.

Interview with Irene Rojcewicz

BRETT: Today is Friday, July 7, 2017. My name is Brett Cotter and I'm here with Irene Rojcewicz, and I consent to having my voice on this recording. Do you consent to having your voice on this recording?

IRENE R: Yes.

BRETT: Okay, so, if we could start by sharing some of the most basic details of your early life. When did you first come to Worcester—things like that...?

IRENE R: Well, I first came to Worcester... Well, I was married in 1950 and I came to Worcester in that year. I'd been at Boston, in the Liberal Arts at Boston University, in the law school. That's where I met my husband. We were seated alphabetically. Rojcewicz, R-O-S, Rostock, so that's how I met him here. I don't know, what else from there?

BRETT: 01:11 What did your parents do for a living?

IRENE R: My parents were born here, and my grandparents came from Warsaw on my mother's side. I don't quite remember what my father's parents were, but my father was part Polish, part German, and I think there's a big university at Rostock, ...my maiden name... Germany... I'm not positive but I think I remember... So I've been in Worcester since the 50s.

BRETT: 02:07 Okay. When you came to Worcester, what kind of Polish festivals or celebrations do you remember? Do you have any specific memories...

IRENE R: Yes, the church had a fair every year right at the church and school. And of course, I didn't go to school there, my husband did. The high school too. And everybody donates for the festivals and used to do volunteer with work down below the church. And actually, the church had a little club almost next to it where we used to meet to play ping-pong and had lobster every Friday night. It was kind of a communal gathering. And like I told you, my father-in-law was a stowaway when he came to the United States to Ellis Island. But I haven't been there, but most of the relatives had seen the names in the archives of who went there. But all the Polish things at the church... My husband... we used to attend all the Booster clubs, and all the clubs, because he was primarily the speaker at them. Actually, he got an award for always volunteering and stuff with the Polish community in which he spoke very well. I myself went to, in Meriden, Connecticut, to a Polish school run by Polish nuns, St. Joseph's, so that the only language then for Catechism was Polish in school. So we did that. But as I said now, I only speak it if I meet someone at church that—actually some of the immigrants don't speak English yet fluently, but will speak to you in Polish, so I can manage pretty well. But to my grandparents, they would be attempting to learn English, so that growing up where we didn't speak that much Polish to them because they wanted to learn English, and my folks were born, you know, here, so...

BRETT: 05:46 When you came to Worcester, was there much of a division that you could tell between people who were from Poland and moved to America,

and people who had been born here who had Polish decent? Could you sense any tensions between those groups?

IRENE R: Could I what?

BRETT: Could you sense any tension between Polish-Americans and Polish immigrants while you lived here?

IRENE R: No, not really. They were a close-knit community, actually. People ask me what kind of furniture I have, I tell them it's ruined Polish-American. [both laugh].

BRETT: 06:40 Had there been any challenges that the Polish community has faced over the years that you can remember?

IRENE R: I think the parish has in itself, because the diocese hasn't really helped the parish to begin with. They were on their own and so there was a little friction there. Now I think it's better, but they were still independent of the diocese, so we have to get after the bishop. We need a Polish bishop!

BRETT: 07:30 I've heard in other interviews with other people who have lived here that sometime in the 70s there was a movement in the diocese to split Our Lady of Czestochowa into two different parishes. Do you remember any sort of political thing in the diocese about that?

IRENE R: In the 70s?

BRETT: 07:56 Yeah, people who say that that stuff happened, say it happened in the 70s. Do you remember anything like that?

IRENE R: Not really, except for what I was just saying about the diocese not being there cooperating with the school itself and St. Peter's Marian and Holy Name and actually St. Mary's was lower on the totem pole, so...

BRETT: 08:34 So I-290 the Worcester expressway was built in 1960, and that kind of cut right through the Polish-American community, and it's always kind of been pointed to as a cause for why a lot of Poles moved out and things like that. In your personal experience, did you notice any sort of decaying in the Polish-American community after...

IRENE R: Any what?

BRETT: Any sort of decay in the community after 290 was built?

IRENE R: Not that I can really say that I observed, or felt. Not really.

BRETT: 09:22 Did you know anybody who lived on the other side of 290 at any point?

IRENE R: You mean Polish people?

BRETT: Yeah, Polish people, sorry.

IRENE R: I'm trying to think... No acquaintances really, they were all here, around the hill and...

BRETT: 09:52 So you mentioned that your husband was part of the Booster's Club, St. Mary's Booster's Club.

IRENE R: Oh, yes.

BRETT: 09:57 If we could maybe talk a little about that... What kind of events did the Booster's Club hold?

IRENE R: It was primarily to help the youths at the school and for the athletics and stuff. They did a lot of ball playing at Crompton Park and he was a volunteer for a lot of the affairs. That's about all I can remember.

BRETT: 10:43 Were there any other organizations like the Polish Nationalization and Independence Club, for example, that you knew much about, or the White Eagle Club, things like that?

IRENE R: Well there was the White Eagles and the other Polish club...I'm trying to think... They were all pretty corporative at the time. One didn't lord it over the other then, whatever events they were having or planning. They included the Polish-American veterans on...was it Green Street?I forget the streets now... And they were pretty united, but like I want to show you, in a church paper—this is last week's, June 25th. You can see how he goes English-Polish too. So it's very easy to go to church and know your school and community, really, because... Actually, the old Pastor Stachura who is now pastor emeritus, I don't know what mass he has now... I used to go to his masses too, but... And everything is still half and half with the new pastor. He has one Polish mass, and he has one English mass, one Polish mass, so that really is a change. And, of course, there was something else I wanted to tell you—he's the new Pastor, Father Polek, he organizes hundreds of trips back to Poland, and he's always getting a group, the choir, the children's choir -- and they teach Polish once a week for anybody, anyone that wants to go. So that's new in that sense. Primarily still keeps up the processions for Mother's Day in the month of May. We still have all of the festivities that we normally had. But he has really expanded on it and he has engaged a lot of young Polish immigrants who worked their butts off really off for him because he gets things done. I swear that Our Lady of Czestochowa is going to be a Basilica one day. Really, I really do. Because he's got that pushiness, but it pays off. That's my idea, I really think so. But to say that... [laughs] I think the Polish parish in Webster, that happened too. That Polish priest that left here for Webster, he's got a Basilica now for about ten years. I think we're in store for that. But anyway...

BRETT: 15:29 I just wanted to also ask about John Paul II. When he was elected there was a huge uproar in the Polish-American community—a *good* one. I really enjoyed his reaction...

IRENE R: You mean when Trump was elected?

BRETT: 15:52 John Paul II.

IRENE R: What?

BRETT: Pope John Paul...

IRENE R: Oh! John Paul II, [laughs]. I thought you were talking about Trump! [laughs] That was the best thing that ever happened, Pope John Paul II. I think everybody felt like they had a part in getting him that position. But, oh yeah, it was really an exalting time. Very proud.

BRETT: 16:32 I don't think I actually have any more questions. Are there any final reflections that you might have about the Polish-American community in Worcester? Just any general comments that you may have?

IRENE R: No, not really, just what in said. But, I am still connected as much as I can. I still drive to church but that's because I know the direction and I go

to the mall. [laughs] If there are any detours, forget it, I panic! And I sit there wondering what I'm going to do next. But no...

BRETT: Thank you very much.

IRENE R: Oh, you're welcome!