

Interview with Marianna Crans

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[00:00:00] **Quang:** We could start. I'm going to start a recording. My name is Quang Pham and I will be interviewing.

Marianna: Marianna Crans.

Quang: Nice to meet you.

[00:00:14] **Marianna:** Nice to meet you as well.

[00:00:16] **Quang:** Okay. Perhaps you could tell me a bit about yourself.

[00:00:20] **Marianna:** Okay. I am Ukrainian. I was not born here. I came here in 1956. I was two years old.

I've been in the United States for 65 years and a citizen for 60 years. And I came with my parents and I stayed in Kingston all my life, grew up here, went to school here, went to the local colleges here. I have a degree in liberal arts and photography. But realized I wasn't going to get a job in that here.

So, I ended up working for IBM for 33 years, and now I'm retired. I still living in Kinston with my [00:01:00] former IBM-er husband, and we're enjoying life right now. And just worried about what's going on back home in Ukraine.

[00:01:07] **Quang:** That's very understandable. Was the United States your first destination?

[00:01:12] **Marianna:** For me, it was. My parents are both from Ukraine.

During World War II, they were part of the forced labor in the farms in Germany to feed Hitler's armies. And that's where they met. And after the war, all the people who were displaced people who were in Germany working on the farms were divided up between England, the United States, and Russia.

My parents knew they were in the Russian zone and they already knew what Stalin was capable of. So, they made their way to the English zone. And they got into the English DP camp and they stayed there for two years. They tried to get to the United States, but their visas ran out. So, they were allowed to settle in England and their dream was still to come here, but they just got delayed [00:02:00] nine years.

And I was born in England in the meantime. And then we were eventually able to come to the United States.

[00:02:10] **Quang:** Perhaps you could tell me a bit about your first time living in Kingston.

[00:02:17] **Marianna:** We originally ended up in Saugerties, but my father was able to get a job here in Kingston. And that's how we came to settle in Kingston.

My father was writing letters back and forth to his aunt who lived in Saugerties and she got out long before the Soviet Union started. So, she encouraged us to come here and he was able to get a job. And the man he worked for had a house here in Kingston that he was willing to rent to him. And that's how we ended up here. My father ended up working for the A&P in Kingston - he was a butcher.

[00:02:53] **Quang:** Was that the same person that helped your father with paperworks?

[00:02:58] **Marianna:** No, they helped in a different [00:03:00] way. The people who got us - my father was writing to his aunt and she was just a simple farmer, but she was encouraging us to get him to come here.

And I think she's the one who started it. And after the war, we tried to get here by ourselves, but we weren't able to. And she couldn't help us much, but her daughter worked for the government. So, when her daughter - after her

daughter had been working for several years - she encouraged her to meet my parents.

And she did. She traveled to London and she's the one who sponsored us. And once she met my parents, she realized my father was just as honest and decent as her mother. And so was my mother and she sponsored us and they were the ones who brought us here. But even in England and once we got here we always had somebody who kind of became a guardian angel for us.

And that happened to be my father's boss, Mr. Maxwell. And when [00:04:00] Mr. Maxwell - who took immediate like to my father - he said, "Well, I'll rent you the house here in Kingston." And my father said, "Well, unfortunately I can't do it on my salary alone. And we have a toddler." And he said, "My wife is a housewife. She'll be happy to babysit."

So, she babysat me, allowing my mother to work. And we were all within a five-block radius here in Kingston. My mother could walk to her job. My father could walk to his job and he could always walk me to the Maxwell's house. And the Maxwell's later on became my uncle Herb and aunt Meliss.

They became my surrogate grandparents, since I never knew my grandparents. And they helped us acclimate to the United States. They were our guardian angels. They introduced us to all their friends. And they made us feel welcome. They made us feel part of the family. And we're still friends with many of these families still.

[00:04:53] **Quang:** That's wonderful.

[00:05:55] **Marianna:** Yeah, it was.

[00:04:56] **Quang:** I am a bit curious about, [00:05:00] if there's any things that surprised you in any way whatsoever when you came here or when your parents came here as well.

[00:05:10] **Marianna:** Well, it was more of my parents' journey than mine because I was a young child. I didn't get too much of that experience.

Ummm [pause—thinking] - I think my father was surprised that it was easy to get a job, as long as you were sincere. They had their trials and tribulations,

being immigrants and not speaking English properly. So, they had some instances with that. But for the most part, the Maxwell's guided them and they stood up for them. But there was, you know, the language is - the connotation of old dumb foreigner, and especially my father, he spoke mostly pigeon English.

My mother was a little bit more intelligent. She could speak a little bit more fluent, but he was more, you know, the country bumpkin. And they got snookered once, but then with the guidance from the Maxwells, [00:06:00] they looked out for them and they were very cautious from that point on. And then they didn't have any problems.

For me as a kid—I had a funny last name. I ended up in a Catholic school and the only thing that we had were Eastern Catholics, which is different from the Roman Catholics, but they're both recognized by Rome. So, dealing with the nuns in the sixties there—my parents put me in a Catholic school. They wanted me to continue their religious values.

And the only thing we had with that was the differences in religion. Like in our church, I was confirmed and baptized at the same time. Whereas in the Roman Catholic church, you did it later. So, we had to argue with the nuns and they had to go check with the Bishop, “Yeah, she's confirmed. You don't have to go through it again.”

They liked that, but I didn't, I really didn't have that much of a problem. I ended up in a Catholic high school and, but my parents were blue collar workers and most of the kids in the school where, you know, doctors' and lawyers' sons. I was [00:07:00] one of the geeks—so to speak—in high school, but then once I got out of high school... It's like [pause]—I don't care [laughs].

I'm proud of my parents. They did well in my eyes and they taught me the value of honest work. No matter how menial—if you do it with pride and honesty, it's honest work, then to take pride and doing a job well done.

[00:07:21] **Quang:** That's lovely. That's wonderful. I kind of shared your experience growing up in not really in Vietnam—not in the United States.

Sorry. But I [pause—trail off]. I certainly share that sentiment when I go to college.

[00:07:42] **Marianna:** Really, you got a lot of it? Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that. I didn't get any of that—pretty much because I kind of stuck by myself. I didn't have too many friends in college. I was busy focusing on my schooling because my parents were very much on [tap-tap-tap on the table] keep your grades up.

So, I kept my nose to the grindstone, but umm [00:08:00] I'm sorry to hear that.

[00:08:02] **Quang:** No, it's fine. I [pause—trails off] Have you embraced any new cultural traditions?

[00:08:12] **Marianna:** Oh yeah. That was the other thing. Being Eastern Catholic, our Easter, our Christmas or New Year's were always off because we're on the old Julian calendar, but that was no problem. We didn't have problems: two Christmases, two Easters, two New Years—we could dig it.

We did keep some of our traditions, like our Easter traditions. Ukraine is a very religious country and they have a lot of religious traditions. Easter is a big one. So, once a year, we would go to the Ukrainian church and we went to the one my father's aunt went to in Hudson. And we'd make our Easter obligation, which is—you know, going to confession, going to mass. [00:09:00] And then we'd go a week later to get our Easter baskets because we had traditional foods that were ready for Easter, but they had to be blessed. And that's the food that you ate for the whole day. So, we would make those traditions. But once she died, we went to Kerhonkson and we got involved with that community down there.

We kept that tradition. I loved 4th of July as a kid. That was my favorite tradition. And a Christmas tradition - we kind of let that go a little bit because everybody else seemed like they had a big feast at Christmas time and ours was a feast, but it was like, no dairy, no meat. It was just fish, grain and potatoes.

And it's like—I said to my mother, “Why does it seem like we're, we're still in lent?” [Laughs] And she said, “That's just the tradition.” And I said, “Ehhh.” So, we kind of disbanded that one, but we still kept Ukrainian Christmas. We celebrated it by getting Ukrainian foods, we do some Ukrainian foods in that, but we didn't have any problem acclimating to [00:10:00] American holidays.

[00:10:02] **Quang:** I guess it goes with food as well.

[00:10:05] **Marianna:** Oh yeah!

[00:10:06] **Quang:** We have Tet holiday, which is our New Year - our version of a New Year's celebration. And it's just seven days of eating—that's it. And by the time you're, I don't know—seven—you should be sick of it. [Both laugh.] That's really love.

[00:10:24] **Marianna:** Well, my mother made it only once. It's like twelve dishes and it's fish, grains, potatoes. And she said, “Well, you know, in the middle of winter, that's what you had in your...”

“You didn't have any sausage?” You know, at Easter we had the ham, we had the kielbasa, we had the bread, we had the eggs, we had the cheese, we had all these - and we had breads for every feast day or something like that.

But why at Christmas time... Is like everybody else—the Italians have twelve fishes and, you know, everybody has the big, big meal with the roast beef or ham or something like that. And we've got grain? [Laughs] It's like c'mon! [Both laugh.] [00:11:00] So I hear you.

[00:11:02] **Quang:** Yes, certainly. What about your neighbors—the people... Did you keep in touch with people back from where you're from?

[00:11:10] **Marianna:** My father kept in touch with his family up until the Soviet Union fell. And then my father got ill and he wasn't able to keep in touch. My mother, unfortunately, lost touch with her family when she went to Germany, because she was an only child.

She only had cousins and she lost touch with them and she was never able to regain touch. But... Our family and friends here, my father's family—his aunt—she embraced us as part of her family. And she had a big extended family. So, every holiday we would collect at her house, which was a big farm.

And my father would take care of the meat. My mother would make desserts and everybody else... So, I have a lot of happy memories with my second cousins because they were all my age. We all grew up together and playing on the [00:12:00] farm because she had a real live farm. She had cows, she had chickens, she had an apple orchard in the back that she rented out to people for their horses.

We were all over that farm. We had more fun on that farm than anybody, you know, going out and playing with the cows and feeding the chickens and all that other stuff. So, it was a real old fashioned... She even had the old water pump out in the backyard. It was fun. We enjoyed it.

[00:12:24] **Quang:** That's great to hear. I'm glad you find a sense of family and community.

[00:12:29] **Marianna:** Yes. Well, that's what his aunt was saying to us, "You know, you're alone in England. See if you can make your way here." And when my father said, "Well, can you help us in any way?" She said, "I'm going to send Matta (Mary) and she'll come and talk to you." And she was able to. My aunt Mary was able to support us.

So yeah, they saved our lives literally, well... Literally they saved our lives.

[00:12:52] **Quang:** I guess this question is a bit more, I would say abstract, but [00:13:00] how has being here changed how you see yourself and your own people?

[00:13:08] **Marianna:** Coming here [long pause] was the driving force behind my father. My father—from the letters that he heard from his aunt, [knew] that it was good here. That was his obsession and his driving force. And I didn't realize how much it was a part of me. Our proudest day here was becoming citizens. And my parents went the first day with a bunch of other people in the courthouse. And the next day my mother took me because I was only seven and she had to swear for me.

And instead of going to the courtroom, the judge said, "We'll just meet in my chambers. I'll bring my recorder—you know, my—the court clerk and whatever." And I remember meeting the judge in the hallway [00:14:00] and he was very nice, tall, dark hair. I can't remember his name. And he said, "Well, young lady," he said, "Do you know why you're here today?"

I said, "Yes, sir." I said, "I'm here to be a citizen." He said, "Do you know what that means?" And I smiled at him and I said, [voice quivering] "Yeah, we're free." [Pause] And he just—kind of looked back and he looked at my mother and my mother just smiled. He said, "Well, let's go do that." I never realized how much my parents [voice quivering, tears] dream to be free was in me.

I was born free in England. They weren't, they weren't free until they got that citizenship, even though they lived free in England, they didn't become English citizens because their goal was to come here. But until they got that citizenship [holding back tears], that was their confirmation that they made it. And I still have.... [pause—tearing] I'm sorry.

I have the photograph from my father's citizenship paper [voice quivering], and he has the most incredible Cheshire cat smile. And my mother and I laughed at that. That's the, "I [00:15:00] made it" smile. And it was on his citizenship paper, which I still have. And it's just that—I hate to say it, that shit eating grin [Quang laughs]. Like "I made it, I made it." And I never realized how much that was part of my life [sniffle].

So. Yeah, [gasp—tears] it means a lot. My father every day.... Their dream was to build a brand new home, which they finally got a chance to do. My mother designed the house with engineer cause she wanted it just [taps table] so. And one of the first thing he did was to put a flagpole out on the front porch and every day he would put the flag out there and he didn't know how to fold the flag, the traditional way it's supposed to be, but he knew it couldn't touch the ground.

So I have a photo—I did my photo thesis on my father—and I have a picture of him cradling that flag while he's trying to tie it onto the flag pole. And you can tell he's caressing it [voice quivering]. That's how much it meant to him [tearing]. So [00:16:00] [emotional pause] yeah. I'm proud to be a citizen [voice quivering, tearing].

[00:16:04] **Quang:** Thank you. Yeah. That's [pause] that's wonderful. I...

[00:16:11] **Marianna:** [sniffle]

[00:16:14] **Quang:** I guess it would mean a lot if you could—if you could say something to people who [Marianna sniffle] probably are in the same position as your father and your mother, perhaps right now, or...?

[00:16:32] **Marianna:** Don't give up. You're seeing the fight in Ukraine right now. They're the underdog. And what did the president say? I don't want a ride, just give me ammunition. They will fight 'til the end because they've already been through this once.

And it's funny... Your generation [pause]—and Ukraine for a while there—was looking at the grandparents and saying, “What's so wrong with Russia? You know, they've turned a new leaf. It can't be that bad,” because I would [00:17:00] hear the parents and the grandparents talking how bad it was during the war.

Now they see. Now the grandparents and parents are saying, “See, I told you.” So, you know, to be able to have free speech [pause], to be able to live without being subjugated, to be able to think free.

[00:17:20] **Quang:** Certainly.

[00:17:21] **Marianna:** And hopefully to think within reason. I mean, we have a lot of liberties in this country, but some of this [pause] wokeism is just a little... [pause] Are you serious?

If we get into another world war, all that's going to go away because the priorities will change. I hope we never do. I hope we don't have to. But if the priorities change, they're going to see what it's - what it's really like. And it's like, oh God, here we go. Starting over again. You know? So, yeah...

Your country's been through so much.

[00:17:59] **Quang:** Yes.

[00:18:00] **Marianna:** My husband is a veteran from that era and he fought with honor for the good of your people, defending your people. And he was proud to do so. But he saw firsthand what went on in your country. And he's grateful that today there's hardly any evidence of that. And I mean, we've looked at Google earth.

He says, “My God, I would never recognize the place.” You know? So, we're all united. We're all united in one way or another.

[00:18:32] **Quang:** Yes. Part of the—there's something that my parents and my teachers would all say to me (when I was in school)—is that all that the soldiers have fought for is just simply for us to be here today.

And, um [sniffles], it is up to us to make your own future from that. [00:19:00]

[00:19:00] **Marianna:** But don't forget the past. A friend of mine came up to me when they were taking down all the Confederate statues. She said, "What do you think of that?" I said, "I don't think they should be taken down. Maybe put in a specific place."

[00:19:14] **Quang:** Certainly.

[00:19:15] **Marianna:** [imitating her friend angry] "How can you say that after what your mother went through?" I said, "If you go to Ukraine, they took down all the statues of Lenin and Stalin and all the rest of them, but they left all the Ukraine Soviet Statues or the Ukrainian armies and stuff like that - glorifying the armies - as a reminder how they were forced to be into it and to never let it happen again."

So, there are a lot of Soviet monuments over there, but they're Soviet Ukrainian monuments and it's to remind them that we're not going to go back to that. And now they're seeing it firsthand again. So, it's like... It seems like every other generation has to go through the same thing. If we keep history alive, maybe we won't repeat the same mistakes over and over again.

[00:20:00] We have a tendency to do that. [Uncomfortably laughs] You know, it's such a shame. And it seems like there was in any country in the world that hasn't been touched by something like this, you know, throughout history [sniffles].

[00:20:12] **Quang:** It's a brief history [Marianna coughs], but it's full of conflict.

[00:20:15] **Marianna:** Oh yeah, yours was a horrible one. I feel so sorry. I'm just so grateful that it's recovered [cough].

[00:20:23] **Quang:** Okay. Thank you so much for your time. Do you have any questions for me or about the...

[00:20:31] **Marianna:** Well, I wish you all the best in your schooling. It was a pleasure meeting you.

[00:20:34] **Quang:** It's a pleasure meeting you, too.

[00:20:36] **Marianna:** Keep your eyes and your ears wide open [heartily laughs].

[00:20:38] **Quang:** Thank you so much.

[00:20:39] **Marianna:** And embrace history—it does teacher us lessons. That's all I would say [laugh]. Pleasure.

[00:20:44] **Quang:** Thank you.

End: 20:46