

The following interview was conducted with Teresa Stevens, for the Star City Treasurer's Oral History Project. The interviewer is Cathy Reinhardt.

CATHY: 'kayTeresa, would you like to just start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

TERESA: Um, yes, uh, my name is Teresa Stevens. I live in Lincoln. I have been living here since uh, 1988 and um, prior to living in Lincoln, I lived in Minneapolis and, before that, in Poland. Um, I since uh, 1988, I worked in Bryan Hospital. Um, and then St. Elizabeth Hospital as a cardiac medical stenographer which consisted of doing ultrasound testing on patients with heart disease. Um, both adults and pediatric patients in St. Elizabeth Hospital. Um, my career as a medical stenographer unfortunately ended last year. I developed um, problem with my shoulder. Um...impingement, uh, left impingement shoulder syndrome. And I was told that I will have to think about doing a different type of work, unfortunately. Uh, and that's why I'm at uh, in Doane College doing Master degree in Counseling program right now.

CATHY: 'kay...Um...Can you tell me what it was like living in Poland?

TERESA: Um, I lived uh, in Poland uh, during times when it was um, socialistic country, before um, the system has changed. I don't know if you're familiar with the history of central Europe. Um...When I left the situation-- political situation--was rather turbulent and uh, shortly after my coming here, the country um, experienced martial law for a couple years and this is what actually kept me here. I didn't intend on staying. My plan was to come here for perhaps several months, a year, learn the language and go back and finish medical school because that's what I was doing over there. And when--excuse me--when uh, martial law was called, I just didn't know what to do and older more experienced people told me that just I should stay on and keep staying here and wait and see what happens. So that's what I was doing. Uh, my brother did the same. This martial law called him in Germany on the skiing trip and he also did not return. So we both were kind of hanging...[laughs] for a couple years. So it was a huge change from my schedule in Poland as a medical student--very, um, with my exact routine and plans and the situation that I pretty much didn't know what am I going to do--how I am going to support myself. Kind of...hanging and...

CATHY: So, what was that time period like when the martial law was...ho--how did you survive here and what was it like for the people back home?

TERESA: Um, Poland uh, during my childhood Poland was pretty gray, sad country, like um, like most of countries um, in this system with shortages of food, of uh, furniture--name it--we were just standing in lines to get supplies and--and whatever was needed. And the traveling was forbidden. For several years after um, I think Stalin's death in fifty--fifty-six--er--or--fifth--whe-- whenever he died, uh, the country was--that's why--that's why we were called behind iron curtain--we couldn't travel. People were not allowed passports; they were not allowed to get out. Well, of course if you cannot get out, what do you want to do? First of all, you want to do-- [laughs]--you want to get out. So, uh, we were growing up with this idea that we are locked in there and the rest of the world is so interested and free and opened and everybody wanted to--to get out. Um, when I was teenager, the travel became less restricted. Um, financially, it was still a burden to go somewhere because Poland did not belong to international money market so our

money could not be exchanged to anything. So, in order to get some foreign currency, you have to buy it on the black market so they cannot make you criminal [laughs] without you wanting to be one, but in order to do anything, you had to maneuver around the rules. And, uh, um, I always liked languages. I like to travel, I like to read and I wanted to see the world and I always knew that, so I took every opportunity I could and traveled mainly to the countries that I learned languages of and I was taking some German and French and Russian and--and English as--in high school...So...I managed to travel a little bit in--in--when I was a teenager. I love hitchhiking around Europe. The train passes were inexpensive--for a hundred dollars you could buy a train ticket for three months and kind of circulate around and--and we did it in groups of young people. It was fun. Um, this here caught me by surprise because uh, they were reports that Russian army is gathering on--on the borders--eastern borders--of Poland and--and--political situation was getting tenser and we did have experience from Czechoslovakia in 68. They actually--the Russians--actually--or Hungary earlier--they would go in and occupy these countries who tried to get a little bit more sovereignty. So, um, it was I think early 80s when it happened and, like I told you, I kept staying on here and time was passing and eventually I kind of established myself here so to speak [laughing]--I never could, of course, go to medical school. I was on my own for a couple years. My papers, you know, were just tourist VISA and there's little you can do about it. They were extending it and extending it but--but--it was difficult to, um, to do something. To go to school officially--to work, and uh, um, eventually I figured out what I should do. I found a program in medical stenography. It was a growing field, very interesting, um, something along with my education was in and something that I thought I can do and would be fun and I could support myself. So that's how I got in field of medical ultrasound--and also in Poland, when I was a medical student, I'd never seen an ultrasound machine. You know, technology advanced so much during these years--last twenty-five years--that it was--it was just interesting field of work for me to--to be in.

CATHY: 'kay...So, how did you end up in Nebraska?

TERESA: I graduated from ultrasound school in Minneapolis and started to interview for ultrasound jobs--cardiac ultrasounds--and Bryan happened to be large cardiac center and when I flew to Lincoln for interview, I just thought that Lincoln is pretty--pretty good size of town and--and I could live here and I like Bryan hospital. I kind of thought that it had a lot of energy. It was '88 and kind of--I--I had a good feel about it. And, I also interviewed in Appleton, Wisconsin and Appleton was wonderful and the lake, and I got a feeling when I visited there--everybody had a family, boat, and a dog, and I thought--no way, I will meet anybody there [laughs] cause was too small and too..uh...too small. So these were the places I had the chance to interview for the jobs and that's how I end up here.

CATHY: So, what do you like most about Lincoln?

TERESA: [pause] I like the layout of Lincoln. Uh, it has grown a lot. Actually, I like it even smaller when it's--how it was when--when I moved here. Um, I like that it has university. Um, I like that it's a laid back place. I like, basically everything about it.

CATHY: OK, how does it compare to your home country?

TERESA: Um, Lincoln it self has population about, um, the size of my town, Gryfice which is over 200,000. The cities in Europe--in Poland--are very congested because, um, you know, they are historical places, built around this medieval uh, centers and--and most of architecture are buildings or people living apartment rather than uh, family houses. So this town is the size that you can walk through it in forty-five minutes on foot--excluding suburbs. Um, so probably the size of everything in America was something that struck me the most--is the biggest difference. There was so much room here--so much room to breathe. Europe is more congested. Uh...people probably are--and these are just my--my own observations and, you know, I don't know if they are really objective, they are what--what I thought. People here even behave differently--they can do whatever they want to--you don't impact so much by your behavior, people who are next to you. In Europe you have to be more aware of--of it because everybody's just closer. I think this personal space is smaller over there. So, people watch more how they eat, how they dress, how they are seen. In here, nobody really cares. You don't get out of your car, nobody sees you, nobody knows you, you kind of-- [laughs]. More impersonal, more freedom. Great for young people, I thought. I had a wonderful time here as a--as a young person. There are, of course, drawbacks to it and you probably see it more as you get older...bigger distances between families...probably people are more isolated and lonely.

CATHY: Um...Getting back to family. Have you been home to see your family?

TERESA: Yes...yes. I been...uh, to Poland several times after I left um, my mother died in 99 so...seven years ago...yeah, it--it was seven years this year. Um, my father died when I was twenty years old so um, she was the only close family member I had and uh, uh, I went several times and my mom came over and it was uh, really good to see the changes in the country...um...there was something that they call Velvet Revolution when the Berlin wall collapsed and the whole system switched without a bloody war like we all thought, uh, pessimistically that that's how it would take place. It just resolved it self [laughs], which is great and basically there is not such a differences right now between Poland and--between any country in Europe and--and here besides, um, you know, historical architecture but monetary system, economics, it's pretty much similar...way of living...similar, or at least people's attempts to live like, pretty much--there are differences--

CATHY: Mmm Hmm.

TERESA: --probably people there are not so wealthy, there is not so much money but--but there aren't so many differences as from before to now and of course it depends whom you are talking to. You know, there are people, like here, with money and people who don't have money and there are social differences. Um, before in uh, socialistic times everybody had nothing so we were pretty equal...leaning towards um, [laughs] uh, the bottom line. [laughing]

CATHY: [laughs] Yep. So, thinking of your future...what's in your future?

TERESA: I don't know. Um...I don't know what's in the future. I hope to finish this program. I hope to be accepted by vocational rehabilitation program for retraining which didn't happen yet. Um, it will be difficult if it doesn't happen. I...hope for the best and uh, um...as this is work related injury, I hope to--to be able to--to pursue this degree and uh, be able to do the work that I

would enjoy--I like to work with people...um, and, like I told you, I don't have so much experience with psychology but I almost finished medical school so it is very much working with people. Perhaps in--in more thematic environment of--of thematic healing rather than--than psychology but--but it's--it's related. Um...I am very interested in doing something that would combine medicine and psychology and I saw the field of _____ tech as such and I would hope that I--I could something in this area--at least that's my plan for now.

CATHY: OK...Well, I appreciate you spending the time to tell me about your story and I wish you the best luck.

TERESA: Thank you, Cathy.