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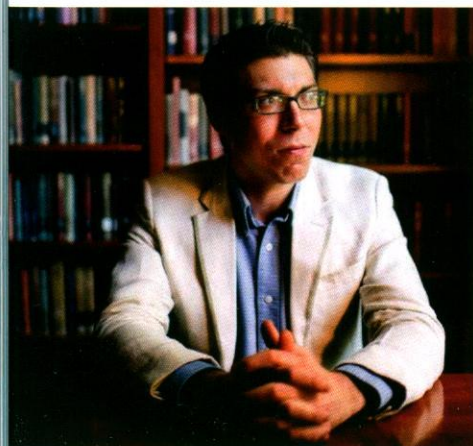
A CARPATHO-RUSYN RENAISSANCE

BRINGING THE RUSYNS (BACK) TO LIFE

"No! We Won't Die!":

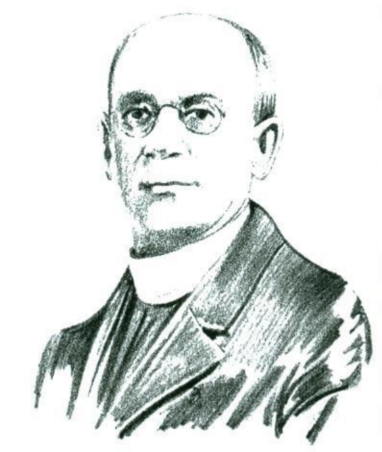
REDISCOVERING EMIL KUBEK

By Nick Kupensky



Author Nick Kupensky

Emil Kubek



As you travel east on Pennsylvania Route 54, it is impossible to ignore the sublime ruins of the abandoned St. Nicholas Coal Breaker, once the largest of its kind when it opened in 1931. Located just outside the town of Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania, St. Nicholas had been the home to anthracite mines since the 1860s, and a large contingent of its miners were Slavic immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was also the home of the Carpatho-Rusyn priest Emil Kubek, who arrived in Mahanoy City to serve as the pastor of St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church in the early 1900s. For nearly 40 years, Kubek would work tirelessly to represent the lives of his working-class parishioners in poetry and prose and arguably became the most significant Rusyn-American writer of his generation.

Despite his considerable literary output, the residents of Kubek's adoptive hometown remember him primarily as the priest of St. Mary's rather than as a writer, largely because the vast majority of his work, written in Carpatho-Rusyn, has yet to be translated into English. In the summer of 2015, I spent three months in the Coal Region researching Kubek's career in order to reconnect Mahanoy City with its most accomplished writer. With the help of Erin Frey, an undergraduate student at Bucknell University, and Paul Coombe and Peg Grigalonis from the Mahanoy Area Historical Society, I launched the Emil Kubek Project, which includes a digital archive of his work in my translation and a virtual tour of the areas of Mahanoy City that inspired his poetry and prose.

What makes Kubek's story worth telling is that he was someone who made significant contributions to the Carpatho-Rusyn literary canon and is a unique example of an American writer who represented the hopes and dreams of Slavic miners during the first half of the 20th century.

Emilii Anton Kubek was born on November 23, 1857 in the village of Štefurov, Kingdom of Hungary (now Slovakia), where his father, Anton, served as a Greek Catholic priest. The young Emil began reading the works of the great Carpatho-Rusyn poet Aleksander Dukhnovych at the age of five, and by the age of six he was able to recite the entire Greek Catholic liturgy by heart.

View of Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania (c. 1930). Photo courtesy of the Mahanoy Area Historical Society.

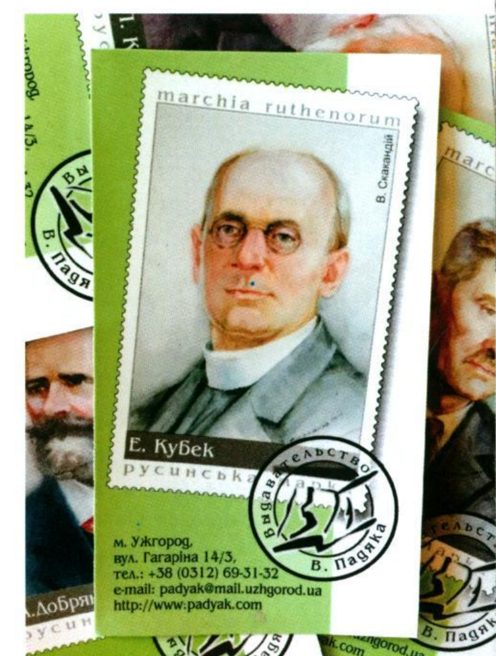
He was ordained a Greek Catholic priest in 1881. Before his ordination, he married Maria Shirilla, the daughter of a Greek Catholic priest from Ruzsóly, Kingdom of Hungary (now Kružlová, Slovakia), and the young couple would go on to have four children: Maria, Anton (Anthony), Anna, and Alžbeta.

After serving in a number of villages in the Prešov Region, Kubek and his family ultimately settled in the village of Snakov, where he established himself as a Carpatho-Rusyn Renaissance man. He developed the village infrastructure by leading the renovation of the old chapel, building a new parish building, opening a school, and prompting the construction of a new road into town. He became an amateur agronomist, introduced fruit trees and beekeeping, and taught the impoverished villagers about new farming methods.[1] Finally, he began to develop his talents as a writer and scholar and published an extensive comparative dictionary, *Church Slavonic-Hungarian-Russian-German Dictionary for Holy Writing*, which was published in 1906. His considerable talents caught the attention of the Greek Catholic Church, which gave him a new challenge and reassigned him to St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church in Mahanoy City in 1904.

After Kubek arrived in Mahanoy City, St. Mary's grew rapidly under his leadership. Like in Snakov, he immediately opened a reading room and parish school, which taught first through eighth grades six days a week. The opening of the school drew praise from the newspaper *Svoboda*, which called for all Carpatho-Rusyn priests "to follow the example of Father Kubek" in tending to the spiritual and cultural enlightenment of their parishioners.[2] The arts also flourished during Kubek's tenure at the church, as St. Mary's produced numerous concerts, dances, and plays. Amidst all of his commitments as a priest, community leader, husband, and father, he nonetheless found time to establish himself as one of the most powerful literary voices in the Carpatho-Rusyn diaspora.

What distinguishes Kubek's literary production is its generic, tonal, and thematic diversity. Kubek is at once a 19th-century epigone and a 20th-century modernist, and his work straddles the border between being traditional and experimental, nostalgic and forward-looking, romantic and realistic, rural and urban, serious and satirical, highbrow and lowbrow, European and American.

First of all, Kubek viewed himself as a Rusyn writer, one who was strongly influenced by the titans of the 19th-century Carpatho-Rusyn Renaissance. The Rusyn Kubek strove to make his fellow countrymen proud of their heritage, and we can feel his nationalist orientation most strongly in his lyric poetry, such as his "On the Anniversary of the Death of Dukhnovych" (1915), a tribute to the great Rusyn awakener, or his nostalgic farewell poem to the Carpathians "My Native Land" (1916). Kubek the nationalist also turned to large, ceremonial forms as well, such as his wide-ranging novel, *Marko Šoltys* (1915) about Rusyn village life at the end of the 19th century, his New Year's



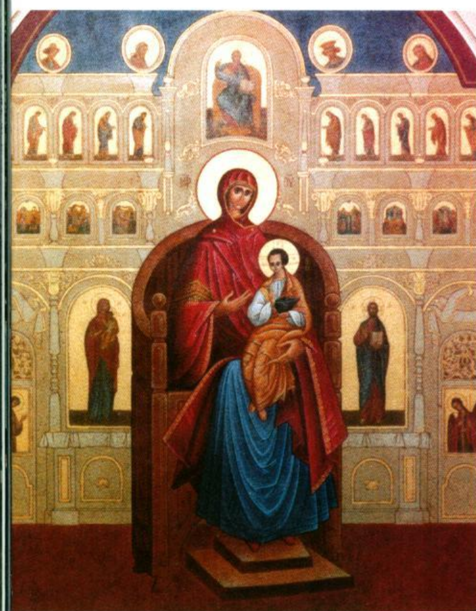
Emil Kubek trading cards published by the V. Padiak Publishing House.

Left: Kubek served as the priest in Snakov, Slovakia from 1885 to 1904 before emigrating to the United States.

Below: Oldest known photograph of St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church, Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania, constructed in 1891.

Kubek died on July 17, 1940, and was buried alongside his wife, Maria, in St. Mary's Cemetery on July 20.

A shrine to Our Lady of Mahanoy City is located in the back of St. Mary's. The icon was enthroned in 1991 to commemorate the parish's 100th anniversary. The icon depicts Mary seated on her heavenly throne in front of the iconostasis of St. Mary's church. On her lap, Christ holds a bucket of anthracite coal as "a sign of the principle industry of the area and the great sacrifices of its inhabitants to unearth the coal for the benefit of others," and he blesses the people "to indicate his continued loving concern and his presence among his people."



ode "Last Year's Night" (1916) about those suffering during the First World War, or his "March of the Sokols" (1930), the theme song of the Rusyn youth organization.

At the same time, as a Greek Catholic priest, Kubek did not shy away from addressing religious issues, and the Catholic Kubek revealed himself in different genres. While he did write religious poetry about the Eastern Rite ("Three-Bar Cross!", 1922) and miraculous power of prayer ("A Mother's Love," 1930), Kubek the moralist most frequently appeared in didactic non-fiction, such as children's literature, editorials, and epistles. Perhaps the most interesting of his religious texts is a long exegesis of the Lord's Prayer, *Our Father* (1917), which he wrote as a commentary to a painting produced by his son Anthony.

Finally, his immigration to Mahanoy City forced Kubek to grapple with the realities of life in a mining town. This third identity — the American Kubek — was primarily a realist and gravitated towards the short story. He parodied the discourse of local newspapers, incorporated Rusyn-American speech patterns, and drew upon the individuals and institutions of Mahanoy City to dramatize the difficulties of assimilating into American life.

Although Kubek invested a great deal of energy into his writing, he encountered a number of difficulties in bringing his literary output to a general public. A large portion of the Rusyn-American community was illiterate, and many of those who could read had difficulty with the Cyrillic alphabet, which forced him, much to his chagrin, to write in Latin script. Furthermore, the readership that did exist generally lacked an appreciation (and the time) for literature. Since money was hard to come by for the publication of his longer works, he often had to resort to publishing them for free as detachable sections within Rusyn-American newspapers, which were easily damaged and quickly decayed. As a result, Kubek speculated that one third of his works ended up in the fireplace, another third existed only in manuscript form, and the rest were published but almost immediately lost.[3] Nonetheless, those who knew his work immediately acknowledged its quality, and by the end of his life, his reputation as an author was well enough established that the sentiments expressed in his poetry and prose, he wryly joked, even "were endorsed by many who had never read my writings."[4]

The best known corpus of Kubek's writing appeared in his four-volume collected works, *People's Tales and Verses (Narodny povisti i stichi, 1922-1923)*. The first volume features a selection of his lyric poetry and short stories, and the final three volumes are dedicated to his most significant literary accomplishment, the first novel written in Carpatho-Rusyn, *Marko Šoltys*. Set in Subcarpathian Rus', *Marko Šoltys* tells the story of the trials and tribulations of Marko Furman against the backdrop of Central European history from the 1860s until World War I. Orphaned at a young age, Marko is forced to serve in the Austro-Hungarian army and make his own way in life as a farmer. Through hard work and perseverance, he manages to become a successful landowner and by the end of the novel comes to "believe firmly that this poor nation of mine will come to life, will be raised by their national spirit towards a happy future!"[5]

While *Marko Šoltys* occupies a central place in the canon of Carpatho-Rusyn literature, its publication took a significant emotional and financial toll on Kubek. Although he had completed the novel in 1915, he had trouble finding a publishing house that was willing to incur the substantial cost of producing a lengthy saga for a Carpatho-Rusyn community that was not at all inclined to read — let alone purchase — *belles lettres*. The literary committee of the Greek Catholic Union, the largest Carpatho-Rusyn fraternal organization, accepted the novel in 1916, but only prepared 100 pages before they pulled out of the project. A few years later, Kubek gave the manuscript to Peter J. Maczkov, the head of the GCU youth organization "Sokol" (The Falcon), who distributed parts of the novel to its members. The Rusyn-American youth responded so positively to *Marko Šoltys* that they pleaded with Kubek to publish it in its entirety, so he decided to finance its publication himself.

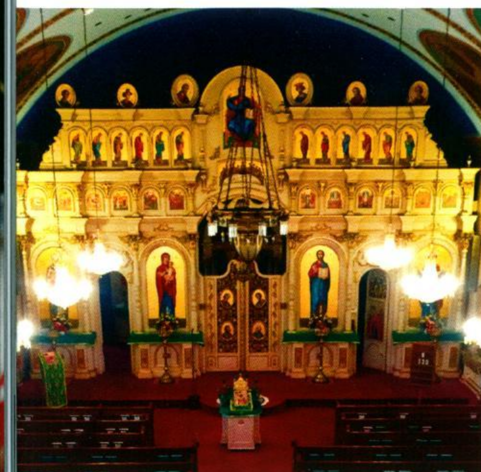
Kubek spent $4,000 of his own money to print 3,000 copies of the four-volume *People's Tales and Verses*, which would turn out to be the only commercial print run of his work during his lifetime. The publication turned out to be a family affair, for all four volumes were illustrated by his son Anthony, who was a classically trained painter, and edited by his son-in-law, Nikolai E. Petrik. In the preface, Kubek proudly announces that *Marko Šoltys* is "the first long tale (novel) of a writer from Subcarpathia in the Rusyn language," but the fact that Kubek felt the need to explain that a "novel" was "a long tale" *(povist' dol'ša)* reveals that the Carpatho-Rusyn readership was largely unprepared for this pioneering work. Indeed, *People's Tales and Verses* did not sell nearly as well as Kubek had hoped, and the poor sales were exacerbated by his principled refusal to pay for advertising in Rusyn-American newspapers after he had worked as a contributor for free for nearly twenty years. To add injury to insult, Kubek soon developed respiratory problems, which left him broken in body as well as in spirit. In December 1925, his daughter Mary urged him to take some time off from his duties as a priest and writer and spend a few months with her in Florida. After some initial resistance, Kubek decided that he deserved a vacation, his first after forty-five years in the priesthood.

Kubek's trip to Florida was a transformative one, and he published an account of his adventures called "My Journey to Florida" (1926). Kubek's travelogue is a fascinating look at America in the 1920s through the eyes of a man who feels liberated from the burden of his familial, literary, and pastoral duties, if but for a few weeks. He drinks wine on the side of the road in Pennsylvania during Prohibition, investigates Southern Baptist churches, talks with the homeless, smokes in line at the post office in Fort Meyers, is deeply moved by the terrible living conditions of Southern blacks, and reaches a level of profound joy and deep sadness at the thought that he could have bought a plot of fertile land in the south — if only he hadn't just spent his life's savings on the publication of *Marko Šoltys*! As a result, Kubek's "My Journey to Florida" begins with a scathing critique of the Rusyn-American reading public, which he excoriates for wasting the money and time of Rusyn artists. "We have writers, poets, composers, actors, on the level of the most educated, magnificent peoples," Kubek writes: "And their work is in vain — there's nobody to write for, to compose for, to paint for, to work for."[6] With great frustration and bitterness, he revealed that "My Journey to Florida" will be his "last appeal to the Rusyns" and announced his retirement from writing.

As the years went by, Kubek's silence in the Carpatho-Rusyn press was noticed by a number of readers who missed seeing his articles, poems, and stories. The most effusive testimonial to Kubek's career may be that of Michael Yuhasz, the president of the GCU, who in 1929 called Kubek "the lamp" of the Rusyn people. Yuhasz urged Rusyn-Americans to appreciate the unique gift of having an author of Kubek's caliber and to acknowledge the regrettable consequences this has had on his fame and fortune. "If he wasn't born a Rusyn, if he would have been the son of a different people, then he

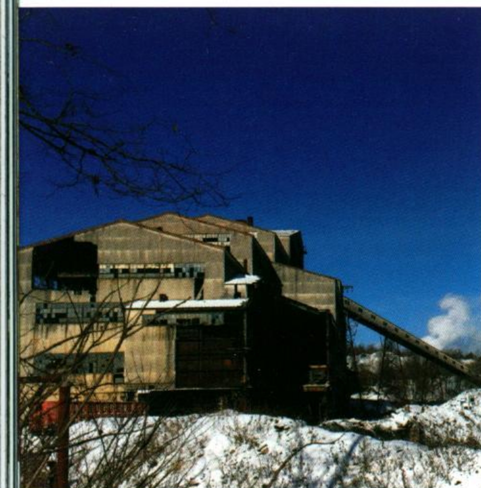
Author and scholar Nick Kupensky and his colleague Erin Frey (Bucknell University) who contributed to the Emil Kubek Project.

A large group gathered on November 22, 2015 for Kupensky's West End Walking Tour. The group photograph here replicates the group photo taken in November 1931 (*bottom*) when St. Mary's was renovated and Kubek celebrated his birthday and 50th anniversary as a priest.



The beautiful interior of St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church, which underwent a major reconstruction under Kubek in 1931.

The ruins of the St. Nicholas Coal Breaker. Henry Cake and Henry Geist began to mine coal on this site, known as the St. Nicholas Colliery, which was active from 1860 to 1928. In 1905, at the height of its production, it employed 863 men and produced 345,106 tons of coal. As the anthracite industry developed more efficient — and less hazardous — methods for producing coal, the St. Nicholas Colliery was dismantled to make way for a coal breaker capable of processing large chunks of anthracite into smaller pieces better suited for home heating. The St. Nicholas Coal Breaker was built in 1930 on the site of the former colliery. When it became operational in 1932, it was the largest of its kind in the world and seemed to signify the promise of a better, safer future for an industry that exacted extraordinary human costs. In 1972, the St. Nicholas breaker ceased operations and was left abandoned. The company that owns the site transformed a defunct mining operation into a successful shopping center (May 28, 2015).



would have had great worldly glory, his name would have been written in golden letters in the book of hymns, our dear poet-writer would have had worldly riches," Yuhasz writes: "But God gave him to us, the poor Subcarpathian-Rusyn people, and although we value him higher than anything else, although with sweet and bitter tears we read the work of this creative genius of ours, nevertheless we're not in the position to honor or materially compensate Father Kubek for the work he has done for us."[7]

A year later in 1930, the Rusyn-American literary magazine, *Vozhd'* (*The Leader*), also ran a tribute to Kubek. Josif Perovič, who wrote the preface to the issue, paints a sweeping and heartfelt portrait of the writer. He calls Kubek "a joyful" man "full of amusing jokes and stories," a "highly educated" priest who "passionately loves his flock", and a writer who is "a rigorous expert on the soul of his people, a sharp critic of all sorts of sins and vices that are prevalent among the populace, and abundantly reveals his noble qualities and thoughts for the sake of praising and cultivating virtue to raise up his poor, downtrodden people."[8] For these reasons, Perovič calls on the Rusyn-American community to collect and publish all of Kubek's works in time for his golden jubilee, which would be held the following year. While this particular appeal wasn't answered, Kubek did celebrate his 50th year as a priest in style.

In 1931, Kubek launched a wide-reaching expansion of St. Mary's, which included a complete reconstruction of both the exterior and interior of the church and the building of a new rectory. On Thanksgiving Day, the parish held an extravagant day of festivities to give thanks for the completion of the new church and its dedicated priest. The day began with a street parade led by two local marching bands, and the procession led into the church for the first liturgy in the new building. The crowd proved to be so large that an amplification system had to be installed to broadcast the service to those left standing in the street.

After the liturgy, the party continued into the evening, where a dinner was held at the Mahanoy City Elks Club to celebrate Kubek's 50th year as a priest and his 74th birthday. It was Kubek, naturally, who stole the show. The Mahanoy City *Record American* describes the culmination of the banquet:

> The most amazing address of the afternoon was given by the beloved Fr. Kubek himself, who addressed the assemblage fluently in six languages, namely, Latin, Rusyn, English, German, Slovak, and Magyar. In Latin he addressed the reverend clergy, in Rusyn his beloved parish, in English the guests, in German and Magyar several distinguished guests. As Father Kubek rose to speak he was given a rising ovation, the approximately four hundred guests joining as one in according tumultuous acclaim to the veteran of Christ and the church.[9]

While the broader Rusyn-American community did not always appreciate his poetry and prose in the way that he felt he deserved, it was overwhelmingly evident that, after twenty-seven years in Mahanoy City, Kubek had earned the respect, admiration, and love of his friends and neighbors.

In 1938, Kubek wrote his final work, a brief autobiography, in which he reflected on his life and career. In his characteristic playfulness, he summarizes his current state of affairs as consisting of "swatting flies" and "reading on the porch" with breaks to "feed the sparrows," "cough" and "play solitaire." "Now I live like the field lilies," he concludes: "I like homemade chicken soup with noodles and Florida. That's all I remember about myself. Signed E. A. Kubek, Great Grandfather."[10]

Two years later, on July 17, 1940, Emil Kubek died at the age of 82. In lieu of an obituary, *The American Rusyn Messenger* announced his death by republishing one of his poems, "No! We Won't Die!" (1922), a lyric which reprises all of the qualities Kubek valued most: an unwavering belief in Christ, a robust dedication to the Carpatho-Rusyn people, and a powerful call for the preservation and development of their cultural heritage. In "No! We Won't Die!", Kubek sees the triumph of life over death in the changing of the seasons, as winter's "blizzards and storms" give way to "spring showers." In Kubek's lifetime, Carpatho-Rusyn culture came back from near death twice — during the first Rusyn Renaissance of the mid-19th century and again during the second interwar period in the First Czechoslovak Republic. Kubek was acutely aware that the fight for political freedom is a hard one and calls upon future generations of Carpatho-Rusyns "to ensure that this freedom survives." What Kubek could not have predicted, however, was the resurrection of his own legacy fifty years after his death.

Today, courses are taught about *Marko Šoltys* in the Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture at the University of Prešov, the city where he was ordained a priest. The school he helped found in Snakov, Slovakia, was named in his honor in 2008. The Slovak government funded the production of a documentary film about his life, and dozens of books and articles about his work have begun to appear in Europe and the United States. And on November 22, 2015, the Kubek Project, in conjunction with a dozen partners from Bucknell University and the local community, organized a day-long celebration of his career in the town where he made his name. Over 100 guests from throughout the country — including Kubek's great-grandson — descended upon Mahanoy City to tour the places connected to Kubek's life. Guests heard a musical performance of "My Native Land!" by Drew Skitko of Opera Philadelphia, took shots of moonshine while reading "The Good Dad" in Mahanoy City's oldest barroom, explored the sights that inspired Kubek's short stories, and recited "No! We Won't Die!" at his grave in St. Mary's Cemetery.

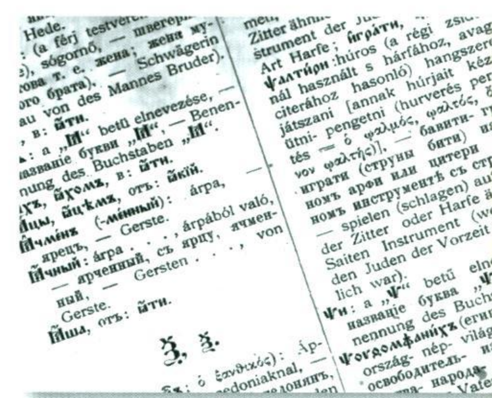
Indeed, while he was born during the first Rusyn Renaissance in the 19th century and flourished during the 20th, Kubek's work, after being forgotten for decades, is now finding new life in the third rebirth of Rusyn culture taking place today. ■

Interested in reading more?

For the complete, unedited version of *"No We Won't Die!": Rediscovering Emil Kubek* by Nick Kupensky please log onto *http://www.ncsml.org/publications/*.

Notes

1. František Dancák, *Emil Kubek, 1857-1940* (Prešov: Vydavatel'stvo Petra v Prešove, 2004), 4-7.
2. *Svoboda* (December 22, 1904): 1.
3. Josif Perovič, "Predislovie," *Vozhd' | The Leader* (February 1930): 4.
4. Emil Kubek, "Autobiography," *The Emil Kubek Project* (2015), www.kubekproject.wordpress.com.
5. Emilij A. Kubek, "Marko Šoltys," *Narodny povísti i stichi, tom 4* (Scranton: Obrana, 1923), 177.
6. Emil Kubek, "My Journey to Florida," trans. Nick Kupensky, *The Emil Kubek Project* (2015), www.kubekproject.wordpress.com.
7. Michail Yuhasz, "Holos odnoho iz najl'ipšich narodotružennikov našich," *Amerikansky russky viestnik* (January 17, 1929): 4.
8. Josif Perovič, "Predislovie," *Vozhd' | The Leader* (February 1930): 4.
9. "Dual Celebration Was Held by Members of St. Mary's Greek Catholic Church," *Record American* (November 27, 1931): 1. The original newspaper article says "Russian" — not "Rusyn" — but Kubek would have obviously spoken to his parish in their native language.
10. Emil Kubek, "Autobiography," *The Emil Kubek Project* (2015), www.kubekproject.wordpress.com.

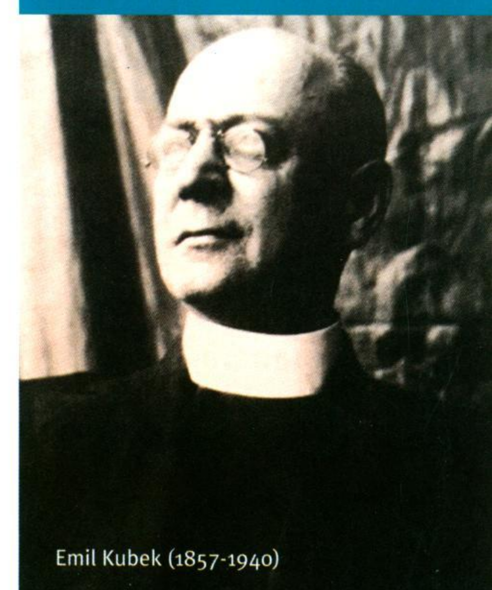


Page from Kubek's Church Slavonic-Hungarian-Russian-German Dictionary for Holy Writing (1906).

An excerpt from

"NO! WE WON'T DIE!"

By Emil Kubek



Emil Kubek (1857-1940)

No! We won't die!
As a free people, in the land of the free,
We cherish our freedom on this side of the sea.
And so that our children will honor our lives,
We have to ensure that this freedom survives.
Together, in chorus, again we express:
Christos voskres!
Christos voskres!

You can read more of Kupensky's traslations of Kubek's poetry and prose at *www.kubekproject.wordpress.com*.

The Woman Behind the Artist:

ANDY WARHOL'S MOTHER

By Elaine Rusinko

Author Elaine Rusinko

Top: Andy Warhol's portrait of his mother, 1974.

Andy Warhol, *Julia Warhola*, 1974
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

Andy Warhol reportedly said, "I come from nowhere," and for decades, that seemed to be true. Carpatho-Rusyns, who never had their own state and had been denied their identity by unfriendly governments, were the quintessential "people from nowhere." Like Andy, almost no one in the first generation of Rusyn-Americans had a name for their ethnic background, referring to themselves as "our people" or identifying with their religion or the country from which their parents emigrated. So when Andy was asked about his ethnicity, he said he was Czechoslovakian or Czech. He even referred to his mother's "thick Czechoslovakian accent" and the "Czech ghetto" where he lived.[1] However, in time Warhol came to question his life-long ethnic identification. In 1986, Andy met the Czech model Pavlína Pořízková and her mother. He commented in his diary, "I guess maybe I'm not really Czech, because I didn't understand it when they were talking." [2]

Since the Warholas' village is located in present-day Slovakia, Warhol's Rusyn ethnicity is often confused with Slovak nationality. In 2007, president of Slovakia Ivan Gašparovič opened an exhibit of Warhol's works in Ireland under the ambiguous title "Andy Warhol — His Slovak Roots." [3] The same year, the Slovak National Theater staged a ballet promoting the "Slovak cultural heritage" inspired by Warhol's life and work.[4] Advertisements and reviews referred to Warhol's "Slovak origins" and "Slovak grandparents." While Carpatho-Rusyns were still fighting to assert their identity, other Slavic groups were glad to claim the "king of pop-art."

The fall of communism in east-central Europe followed shortly upon the unexpected death of Andy Warhol in 1987 at age 58 after routine gallbladder surgery. Under communism, which viewed avant-garde Western art as decadent rubbish, Warhol was largely unknown. Given the limited access to information and restrictions on communication across borders, the existence of an international superstar who had connections to a small village in northeastern Slovakia easily went unnoticed. Therefore, it was only after Andy's death that he was discovered by the Carpatho-Rusyns, who were then just embarking on their own quest for identity and self-determination.

The facts demonstrate that Warhol unquestionably had Rusyn roots. Born Andrew Warhola in Pittsburgh in 1928, Andy was the third son of Andrii Warhola (1888-1942) and Julia Zavacka Warhola (1892-1972), emigrants from the small village of Miková. Andrii left in 1912 to escape being drafted into the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of which he was then a citizen. Detained by World War I, Julia joined her husband in Pittsburgh nine years later, by which time Miková was part of the newly formed state of Czechoslovakia. In fact, however, Miková was first mentioned in historical records in 1390 and it has been the site of a Greek Catholic church since 1752. Its people, their language, and their culture have always been unmistakably and indisputably Rusyn.

A few years ago, I began to study the influence of Warhol's Carpatho-Rusyn background on his art and persona in the jealously guarded archive at The Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, where the 610 boxes that Warhol called Time Capsules are stored. In these boxes, Andy deposited much of his mail, along with receipts, invitations, scribbled notes, and the ephemera of daily life. The correspondence, videos, and documents I found in the archives revealed that the window into the Rusyn side of Warhol is his mother. But even more important, I found that Julia Warhola is an object of study in her own right, as a representative of the many able and talented Slavic immigrant women who endured pain and hardship through a lifetime of sacrifice for their children. The American Andy Warhol owes much of his success to his Rusyn mother.

Julia was born in 1892 to Andrii Zavacky and Justina Mročko, the sixth of fourteen children, five of whom died in childhood. The Zavacky family belonged to the upper middle class of the village, working 12 to 14 acres of land and supplementing their income with seasonal work in lower Hungary. The older villagers remember Julia for her musical and artistic talent. Friends recall her creative painting of household utensils and the walls of the family cottage. She had a lovely singing voice and knew the entire Greek Catholic liturgy. In the 1960s, Andy made records of his mother singing the Rusyn folk songs and religious hymns that he and his brothers grew up with.

Julia Warhola's passport(Ulya Varhola), for departure between Oct. 12, 1920, and Oct. 12, 1921.

Passport (Julia Warhola), 1920
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

Julia Warhola with sons John (left), and Andrew (right), 1931.

dear Andy Januar 13 – 19
Pozdravijem tebe lyubij andy zbohom
sezoleosno ja cort dosto from Ju
nich nave her lem ti mos
nos telefon namer navey
M U. 1. 6671. – Johny
robit Paul robit taki Kep
to zbohom zdravey bit By mum

A note from Julia to Andy, written in a mix of Rusyn and English.

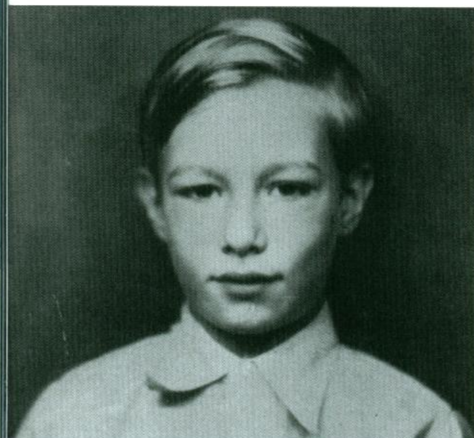
In 1909, Julia met Andrii Warhola, who returned to Miková after some time in America. For an article on the mothers of famous men in *Esquire* magazine, Julia told a reporter:

> He was good-looking. Blonde. … He came back to village and every girl want him. Fathers would give him lots of money, lots of land, to marry daughter. He no want. He want me. … I was seventeen. I know nothing. … I no think of no man. … The priest — oh, a nice priest — come. "This Andy," he says, "a very nice boy. Marry him." … Andy visit again. He brings me candy, wonderful candy. And for this candy, I marry him.[5]

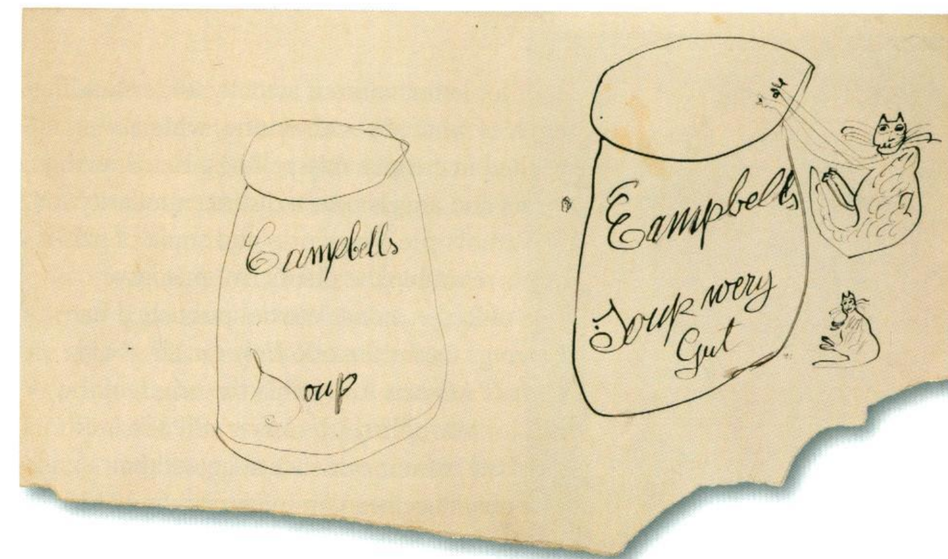
They had a three-day wedding celebration with "eating, drinking, barrels of whiskey," "wonderful food," and "seven gypsies playing music." As Julia describes the details, one can feel the pleasure she felt indulging in happy memories: "I had hair like gold. Hair down shoulder, oh, beautiful hair." Unfortunately, the wedding photos were lost in the war.

On November 12, 1912, a daughter was born, and four days later Andrii sailed from Bremen, arriving in New York on November 25. Julia says, "My husband leaves and then everything bad." The Warholas' first child, Maria, lived just 33 days. In tears, Julia told the interviewer, "She catch cold. … We need doctor, but no doctor in town. Oh, I cry. Oh, I go crazy when baby died. I open windows and yell, 'My baby dies.' … My baby dead. My little girl." Julia never completely recovered from this loss, which she had to endure without her husband, who was by then back in America. It was left to Julia to take care of the elderly, as well as her younger siblings: "I work like horse. … I carried sack of potatoes on my back. … I was very strong lady." Two years later the Rusyn homeland was crisscrossed by the Austro-Hungarian and Russian armies, and battles raged throughout the region. Andy's older brother John remembered his mother's expressive description: "Dead bodies were scattered in the forest and on meadows. Skulls of soldiers shined like large white mushrooms long after the war was over."[6] He attributes Andy's obsession with death, and specifically his Skull series, to Julia's stories of the war. Finally, in June 1921 Julia emigrated to America, with $25 and a ticket to Pittsburgh.

In the next seven years, three sons were born, and until he was six, Andy, the youngest, lived with his family in tenements with no indoor plumbing. In depression-era Pittsburgh, Julia cleaned houses and took in boarders, as did most Rusyn immigrant women. But unlike them, she also made flower sculptures out of paper and tin cans and sold them for a quarter. Her oldest son Paul remembers: "We'd walk a mile and a half into the better sections of town, and while she sold door to door, I'd hide behind the tree, embarrassed."[7] This was four-year-old Andy's introduction to what he later called "business art." Andy was a sickly child, and Julia kept him entertained with comics, coloring books, and paper dolls. She taught him to decorate Easter eggs in the Rusyn style, using wax, applying color, and then removing the wax to create a negative image — a method similar to the silkscreen technique that became Andy's trademark. Asked in 1981 if his mother understood art, Andy answered, "More than that. She did a lot for me. She was a really good artist, in the primitivist style."[8]



Andy Warhol as a young boy.



The primitive drawing style of Julia Warhola which had a large influence on Andy at an early age.

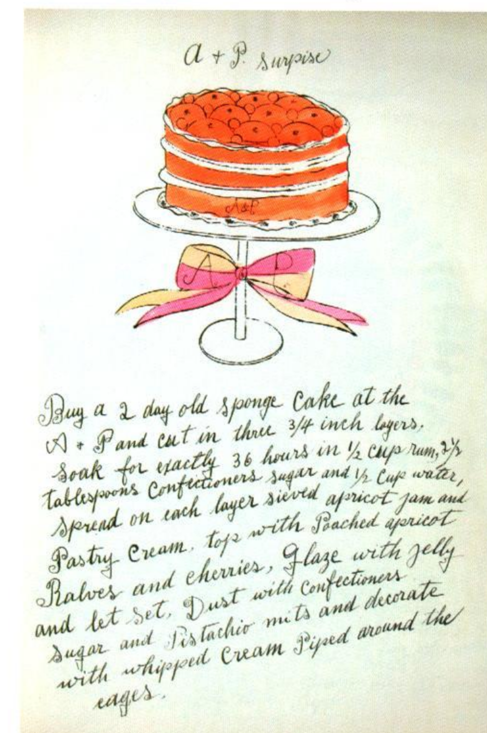
Julia Warhola, *Two Campbell's Soup Cans and Two Cats*, ca. 1953
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

Andy's father's influence is less often noted, but Andy inherited his industrious work ethic from Andrii Warhola, who did manual labor for a house-moving company. In 1942 at age 55, Andrii died from a gastrointestinal bacterial infection contracted from drinking tainted water on a job. He left his wife a death benefit of $600 from an insurance policy he had purchased through the Russian Brotherhood, and most importantly, he left enough savings in postal bonds to pay for Andy's first two years in college. John Warhola recalls his father's words, "You're going to be real proud of him, he's going to be highly educated, he's going to college."[9] But just two years after his father's death, sixteen-year old Andy suffered another trauma when his mother was diagnosed with colon cancer and underwent a colostomy. John remembers: "When she come home she had a hard time recuperating, but she come round. Andy did a lot of praying with my mother. … Everybody talks about how important his mother was to Andy but he was equally important to her. … Andy really kept her company. He spent most of the time with my mother. He was very close with her."[10]

With a degree in design from Carnegie Institute of Technology, Andy left Pittsburgh for New York in 1949. It's uncertain whether he invited her or whether she just showed up on his doorstep, but two years later, his mother came to live with him and stayed for twenty years. At first they shared a bedroom in a sparsely furnished apartment, which they cohabited with dozens of cats. Later, Julia had her own garden apartment in Andy's Lexington Avenue brownstone. When Andy worked as a commercial artist, Julia became his collaborator, copying text and coloring pictures. Warhol issued limited-edition portfolios that paralleled some of his own commercial work on shoes and cookbooks. The lettering in these books was done by Julia in her ornate, old-world calligraphy. Andy would write out the words and Julia copied them

This cake recipe is from a book published by Andy featuring Julia's hand lettering.

Wild Raspberries, 1959
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh



letter for letter, without actually understanding much of what she was writing, which often resulted in creative misspellings. Her drawings of cats and angels bear a distinct similarity to Warhol's pre-pop work, and some of her angels resemble the distinctive primitive style of Rusyn icons. Warhol published her drawings under the title *Holy Cats by Andy Warhols' Mother*. And while the origin of the idea for Warhol's soup cans is still a matter of debate, recent evidence suggests that Julia may have been an influence. In 2012, the Warhol Museum exhibited a sketch of a Campbell's soup can drawn by Julia in 1952, ten years before Warhol's ground-breaking show of thirty-two Campbell's soup cans.

Above: Another piece featuring Julia's hand lettering.

Andy Warhol, "*See a Shoe and Pick It Up and All Day Long You'll Have Good Luck*," ca. 1955
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

Below: Julia Warhola's book "Holy Cats," which was published by her son Andy in 1957.

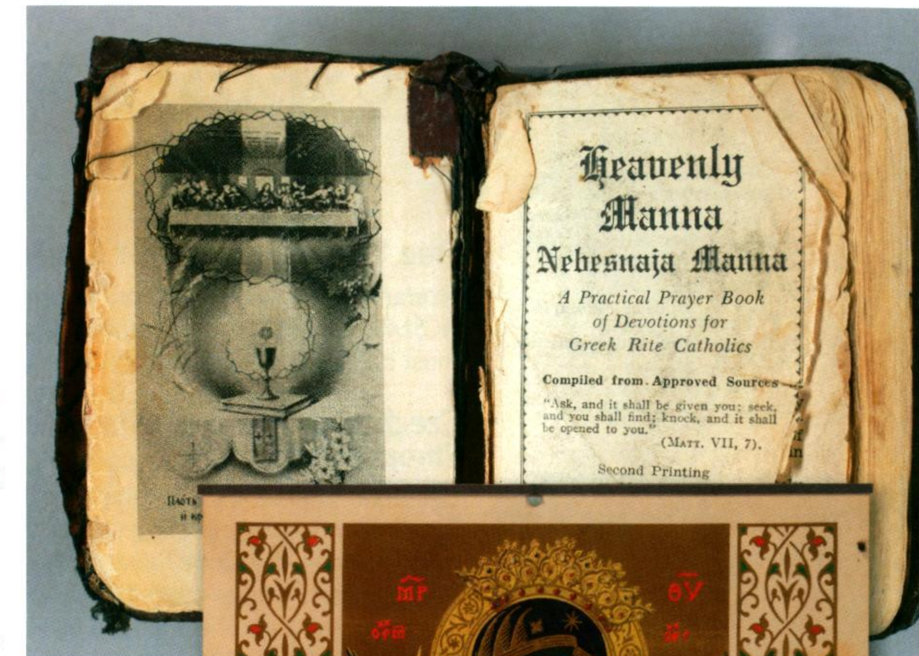
Holy Cats by Andy Warhol's Mother, 1960
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

The Warhola family worshipped regularly at St. John Chrysostom Byzantine Catholic Church, where the iconostasis was Andy's first exposure to art, and some scholars see the icon screen as the source of his characteristic serial imagery and icon-like prints of movie stars and Coke bottles. After his death it became known that Andy was exceedingly devout, regularly dropping into St. Vincent Ferrar Roman Catholic Church for a quick prayer. Julia described Andy as "a good religious boy," and Andy's nephews confirm that before going out for a night on the town, Andy would say a prayer in Slavonic with his mother and receive her blessing.[11] Warhol's diaries contain abundant references to prayer and church attendance, as well as evidence of down-to-earth practicality and peasant superstition reminiscent of Rusyn folkways. Beyond his explicitly religious works, such as the Last Supper series, numerous critics have found Warhol's spiritual sense expressed throughout his art — in the memento mori theme of his Death and Disaster paintings, the iconic features of his portraits, and his transfiguration of ordinary objects into transcendental relics. By elevating commonplace items to the level of artistic awareness, Warhol expressed his mother's view of the world that recognized the intrinsic value of even the most humble objects, as well as a democratic Rusyn view of art, created by and for the people and accessible to all.

By 1971, Julia had suffered a series of strokes and was placed in a nursing home in Pittsburgh, where she returned in her mind to Miková. According to relatives, Andy called her from New York and from his travels, but never visited. She died in 1972 at the age of eighty. Although Andy paid the expenses, he did not attend her funeral, telling his brothers that he wanted to remember her as she had been. While family accounts describe his extreme emotional distress, he hid it from friends and associates, deflecting questions about his mother, saying, "Oh, she's great. But she doesn't get out of bed much."[12]

Julia's last words to her son Paul were reportedly: "Promise me you'll take care of Andy. I want you to look after him because sometimes I wonder if he don't have a childish mind."[13] Unreleased videos in the museum archives shed light on the mother/son relationship. Julia speaks to Andy as to a child, in Rusyn, with diminutives and endearing terminology. Her comments and persistent questions are laced generously with Andik, Andriiko, synok and synochko. Andy answers her mostly in English, sometimes impatiently as he coaxes her to take her medicine. But we also hear him address her tenderly, mixing Rusyn with English: "You want something to eat, mom? eat? isty? What isty you want?"

Two years after her death, Andy did a series of portraits of his mother, which are among his most intimate works. Wearing glasses, an elderly Julia smiles kindly at the viewer out of a background of reds and blues, her face surrounded by a halo of brush strokes and finger-painted flourishes that give the impression of lace. A little known co-produced "portrait" of Julia is in Time Capsule 27, where Andy preserved her prayer books, correspondence, and articles of her clothing. The tremendous influence Julia had on Andy, both personally and professionally, is undisputed. Sympathetic American commentators agree that Julia was a source of tenacity, gentleness, resilience, devout faith, and peasant whimsicality, and that she was the "greatest passion of Andy's life."[14] Rusyn commentators dissolve whatever doubts they may have about Warhol's sexuality and lifestyle in a celebration of his bond with Julia which they credit for his personal and artistic success: "And so this American with European blood, with Rusyn genes from Slovakia combined with the New York world of hopes became the symbol of success, fame, wealth, and influence."[15] ■



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Above: Julia's prayer book, and a St. Mary's Catholic Church calendar, which were preserved in Time Capsule 27.

Heavenly Manna and scapular, a practical prayer book of devotions for Greek Rite Catholics, 1954
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

Calendar illustration (Mary and Jesus icon, courtesy St. Mary's Catholic Church of the Byzantine-Slavonic Rite)
Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

Andy Warhol, with his dog Archie, 1973. Photograph by Jack Mitchell

Notes

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