

André Semenchuk (Paul's Grandson)
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Interview with Dedushka

My Dedushka, which is the Russian word for grandfather, is an interesting person with 78 years of life experience. I picked him to interview because he is a fascinating person who has been all over the world and has seen and done lots of different things. There were three things that were important for me to learn about my Dedushka, whose name is Paul Semenchuk: I wanted to know what his life was like at a young age, where he has traveled and lived, and what jobs he has had and his work philosophy.

Dedushka's childhood

His first memories of growing up were when he was living in Canada, in the Province of Saskatchewan. He lived on a farm that was made up of two sections. Each section was 640 acres (a square mile). In one section they grew grain like wheat, oats, and barley. The other section was pastureland for the horses and cows.

Early on, life was pretty good for them. They had good rainfall and things grew. But in the mid-1930s, there was a drought for several years and everything dried up. He said he even forgot what rain was. They didn't have any food, so they got government help. If they had one piece of bread each day, that was great.

They lost everything because of the drought, so they just left everything behind and moved to Toronto. His dad got a job as the manager of a farm for a gentleman near Niagara Falls. He saved money and then they bought 10 acres of land of their own. But it was all forest, so they had to clear out all of the trees before they could prepare fields and plant crops. Then they bought another farm of 17 acres. Eventually they sold those two farms and bought a farm of 100 acres. What they did on the new farm was called "mixed farming": livestock, fruit, and grain.

Dedushka had an older sister Mary, and an older brother Andrew. He was the middle child and had a younger sister Helen, and a younger brother Anatole, but he went by the name "Ken". They all worked together on the farm. They all had chores. They picked the crops, planted grain, and plowed the fields. It was good.

When he was a kid, Dedushka's father bought a used station wagon. When he was 13 years old, Dedushka started driving a tractor and a truck on the farm. They were allowed to drive on the farm because it was wartime and the government let them do it. When he was 15, his dad got a brand new Chevrolet. That was their first new car ever. When he was 17, Dedushka got his driver's license. He went into town and took the test, and the driving instructor said: "You did fine, but you were going a little fast." But he didn't speed. The guy was just surprised that he drove so well. But he had been driving for four years, so it was normal.

He had one funny memory about when they got their first tractor. His dad (my great-grandfather) was used to plowing the fields with horses. So he would give them voice commands. For instance, to stop the horses, he would shout: "Whoa!" Well, soon after he got the tractor, he was plowing and came to the end of a field where there was a fence. He panicked, forgot he was driving a tractor, and started shouting: "Whoa! Whoa!"

And of course the tractor didn't stop. He plowed right through the fence. They laughed together about that.

In Canada during the wintertime, all the guys played hockey, so Dedushka grew up playing a lot of hockey. In the summertime, they played soccer and baseball. Inside, they played board games and listened to the radio. They didn't have a TV, so they listened to radio shows like Dick Tracy, The Green Hornet, The Lone Ranger, Jack Armstrong, and comedians like Jack Benny.

Dedushka enjoyed school. He liked to study and enjoyed most of his classes. His favorite subjects in school were History, Literature, Social Studies, and recess. He had a hard time in math, but generally school was good. They had a Victory Garden at school where they grew vegetables to help feed families during the war.

When he was in the 8th Grade, they got a new Principal and he was mean. For instance, he hit kids on the head with a ruler. After awhile, Dedushka and his friend went to the old Principal and told him. They said they were going to boycott school until they got rid of the new Principal. And so they did. The old Principal worked with other people in the town to have the new Principal removed. Then Dedushka and his friend went back to school.

He didn't have many electronic devices at home, just his radio. His family didn't have a record player or a Victrola. They did have an electric washing machine.

I asked Dedushka who the President was when he was growing up, but he said they didn't have a President, because Canada has a Prime Minister.

His favorite childhood memories were after working on the farm in the summer, they would go swimming in the Niagara River. They would cool off and play.

Dedushka's travel and where he has lived

My Dedushka has lived in and been to many different countries all over the world. He was born in the Ukraine (it was Poland at the time) and when he was two, his family moved to Canada because his father had a vision that something bad was going to happen, and that was Stalin's invasion of Ukraine before World War II.

Since growing up in Canada, Dedushka has been to many countries including the U.S., Mexico, United Kingdom, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Holland, Germany, France, Spain, Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Morocco, and Monaco. He also went to ten of the fifteen republics in the former Soviet Union. Some of these countries he lived in.

His favorite place he ever spent time in was Switzerland. He liked it because it is beautiful, clean, refreshing and relaxing. He has a lot of happy memories there, since he and Babushka (my grandmother) would go there for rest and relaxation in the mountains and the meadows. They especially liked the cheese there, and he enjoyed listening to the cowbells on the farm where they would often stay. Dedushka also felt that the people of Switzerland were very interesting. They are very well educated and most of them speak four languages plus English.

Jobs and work philosophy

My Dedushka has had many jobs in his life and he has a good work ethic. His very first job was picking strawberries. He enjoyed it because he got to eat as many as he wanted and got paid a few cents for every quart he picked. On his first day, he earned 73 cents, but he said that was a lot of money back then.

He has had many different jobs in his life, more than 12. Once he worked at a toy factory where his job was to repair the little motors in toys. He also worked for Hallmark cards, counting cards. He worked at a mill where they mixed lime and coke to make carbide. He thinks that he has had breathing problems because of this job, and he only worked there 6 months.

My Dedushka also worked at a dairy farm delivering bottled milk to homes in North Carolina during college. Then he worked at a plastics factory in Chicago.

After my Babushka and Dedushka got married, he had even more jobs. For many years he worked for a missionary organization doing radio work. He also wrote commercials for TV and radio, and scripts for Documentaries.

My Dedushka has a great work philosophy. He said that he has never felt that his work was drudgery or a pain or dull. He has always enjoyed what he has done and he still does. He says that when people say their jobs are boring, he can't relate to that. His philosophy is that since he has to work, he might as well enjoy it.

It was interesting and not very hard to interview Dcdushka. I learned a lot of things I didn't know about him. We are different because he lived during the war and so he didn't have as many things as I do. He also enjoys work, which is different from me. One way that we are kind of the same is that we both like to think about things.

My Dedushka was a fascinating person to learn about, and I hope that in my lifetime I can do as many things as he did. ◇◇◇