

Interview transcript

M: So today I'm here with my teacher Ms. Patten for my ethnic studies interview, would you like to tell us about yourself Ms. Patten?

P: Sure, my name is Patten, I teach science here at Franklin Pierce. I have a family, two daughters a husband I live on a little farm in Eatonville.

M: How long did you live here for?

P: In Eatonville? So I've been in Eatonville about 24 years.

M: Uhm, like what do you, uhm, ethnically like,. Yeah what do you like, what, what do you what do you like ethically identify as?

P: So, my mom is Russian and my dad is oh, a bit of and Irish, a bit of Scottish and a bit of British.

M: Would you like to like elaborate on stuff like that?

P: Sure, so we kind of connected with the Russian side of my family when I was growing up because my mom's parents were both obviously Russian, and my grandparents on her side were both Russian. So, that was just one of the some of the cultural and ethnic traditions and foods we tended to celebrate at certain holidays, all came from the Russian side of my family.

M: How, how were like, how did those traditions and like celebrations play into your life?

P: So, they're really important when I was younger, when we would visit my grandparents, who lived in the New York area, it was really important to my grandparents to go to church and they were Russian Orthodox, and so

we would always attend the Russian Orthodox Church with them, I was actually Chrismated, which is kind of like a baptism, I was Chrismated, Russian Orthodox. And so that was always just a really strong connection that I always felt with my grandparents because that was like important to them, and it had a really different um and you know different traditions in the Russian Orthodox Church things that I wasn't familiar with going to a different, - a non-Orthodox Church it's very beautiful, it's very ornate, it's very ritualistic so it was easy to follow along with the- with that. And also then for the holidays like Easter we would do all of the Easter foods that would traditionally served at Easter, and then that was a tradition we carried over even when we weren't visiting my grandparents.

M: Very nice, uhm so, the like, how does this culture, like play into your life today?

P: So, I, I raised both of my daughters celebrating Russian Orthodox Easter, so when we think about Easter, we - the Russian calendar is different than the calendar that's observed here in the United States, and so we usually have Easter a week or two before or after the US Easter holiday and so we just celebrated the Russian Easter holiday and we would just make it special with a lot of the traditional kind of habits like dying eggs using onion skins instead of commercial dyes, and making a lot of the cakes and then we'd sometimes tried to fast but that didn't go well before the holiday, but so I brought that into my family's life and so now that Russian-Easter holiday is really important to my daughters.

M: So like, umm do you wanna like, talk about a tradition that you did when you were like, in childhood with your family?

P: I guess mostly the well some, I mean the traditions was really centered around that Easter holiday. And then, some of the other things though when I was visiting my grandparents, we would-, when we visited my great grandparents, which we called them Baba, Baba grandma. Baba means grandma in Russian, so we I think we're calling her grandma grandma, momma grandma, but she only spoke Russian so it was always a challenge to you know, kind of understand what she was saying, but we would always go visit my Baba grandma, and a funny story about visiting, it's not necessarily a tradition but a funny story is that in her- um, habit is to drink buttermilk, and buttermilk taste like sour milk and so my brother and I when she would put that onto our cereal we always thought that she was giving us milk that was bad, and so it's kind of a funny story about my grandmother, but, but, the biggest tradition was just Easter.

M: So like, what was your childhood like? Like did- um, you like said significant like events happen because of the culture you were like invested in-?

P: Uhm, well, I mean one thing that did happen is that very early on I was interested in speaking Russian. So I've always kind of, when I was in high school I kind of tried to teach myself Russian but then when I got into college I took Russian language and then even now I still like to practice and I like to play around with people who speak Russian and talk Russian, and when I was in New York visiting my grandparents they would always argue in Russian so it was nice to be able to try to figure out what they were arguing about, and, and, they would take us to a lot of orthodox events so we would be you know go to dinners where there was a lot of Russian Orthodox priests and so most of the interact or most of the interaction with that culture that I had was through my grandparents and we only visited them maybe once a year.

M: So how did your grandparents play into your life?

P: My grandparents? Yeah, they were just important from afar they, were very, because, they live so far away I guess I never had a chance I really enjoyed visiting them because they were like a treat, and their and their culture was a little bit different, so then there was just a lot of differentness in visiting because they, um, you know they did eat a little more of the traditional foods and they, they, definitely argued in Russian, and I don't know I just think that it made it seem more mysterious and special because I only got to interact really strong with it every once, once a year.

M: So, you like adapts the cultures that like they gave you from like, back then and did like today, and if So what like did you adapt?

P: So, I like I said, I really love the Russian language, and I like learning the rush studying the Russian language, like right now on in my from the library I have two magazines that are written in Russian, I just like to do that as a hobby and and then my daughters if I tell them that I'm having Russian Easter, they get very excited, they wanna come over for dinner or they wanna know you know everything about it, there's one tradition that happens in the Orthodox Church will you take your food to the church and the priest bless your food before Easter so you put your food into a basket and you take it to church and then it's blessed, and then the next day you're eating blessed food, so that's, just, a yeah I don't do that all the time but it is I don't know something that connects me to my grandparents.

M: So like, uhm, how is your like relationship with like, Russian are you like very good at it or and like, other stuff like, do you-, I know this question is like going somewhere, I don't get- can't find the words for it.

P: Ok, well I mean like I said, it's just like a really, I'm-, I have a high affinity for it, like I really love like I said, finding I-, I don't read or speak Russian very well, but I love trying and I love studying it, and I like I said pick up books now, it's nice because there's a larger Ukrainian and Russian population in our area, when you go to the library there's a lot more books that are in Russian, so and obviously I can only read children's books I can't read novels, so I like to get you know children's books and just kind of go through and read the language, I like to listen to podcasts that are in Russian just to kind of hear the language, but I'm mostly right now really enjoying studying the language.

M: So like, how are you interacting with like modern day Russian like, culture and language?

P: Well I'm actually looking for someone that will tolerate me enough to chat with me, cause I speak like a third grader or three-year old, I don't know so I do really-really enjoy, uhm, like finding students Russian speaking students that would be willing to talk with me or write notes with me, cause I can write in Russian and so I like to write notes, and then see if they can understand what I'm saying and then get an answer back, so that's that brings me a lot of joy.

M: So, like, does any of your like family, like, your daughters any of them know Russian?

P: No, it's a little bit sad, because my daughters really identify with my husband's culture. He's from the South, and so he just has this big, huge southern kind of culture with his parents, etcetera. So, they've kind of more identified more with that a little bit. They, they enjoy the Russian the things because it connects them to me, and to you know their grandparents on that side, but, but in their everyday life they identify a little bit more with their dad.

M: So, like, who is an experience or like, memory you remember from your childhood that like, involved this culture?

P: Hmm, well like I said I shared the story about going to my grandma, my Baba grandma's house, and uhm, and the buttermilk experience which was shocking to us. Not being able to speak Russian when I was little, that language barrier was interesting although it wasn't much of a barrier. My grandmother, I remember there was you know things before church that my grandparents would really kind of practice, like you know you were not supposed to eat or put anything into your mouth before you went to church, because you took communion and you were that was supposed to be the first thing that you did in the day, and so, I just remember that my brother and I were like always starving we couldn't even brush our teeth and so we thought that was a little weird, um, but, I just remember mostly just the beauty of the church, and kind of like, the serenity of the-, the rituals, and the church the tradition of the church when I was visiting my grandparents, and I just really remember feeling very connected to it because it felt exotic and different, and I liked being able to learn the language so that I could speak a little bit with my parents. I remember, this is kind of an embarrassing story but, I knew a little bit of Russian, and I went to visit my-, my grandparents, and we were at a big dinner where there were all these Russian priests, from Russia and there was one priest in particular that was telling jokes, and I was like understanding like every other word but, I was smiling and nodding, and he came over and started just talking to me because he thought that I understood Russian, and one thing that they do in the Russian tradition is give you these painted eggs, uhm, they're very decorative and-, and ornate and you give them to people as a as a gift, like a connection, you know, like "oh thank you so much nice to meet you here's this egg" and so he was like super excited and he was chatting with me and he gave me this egg, and I literally had no idea what he was saying, and so that was awkward.

M: Do you still have the egg like, today?

P: Yes, I still have that egg, and there's actually a special tool that you use to paint those eggs, and I have that tool and my daughters and I have painted those eggs in the past, so it is kind of a-, that's kind of-, yeah, but I still have that egg.

M: How have your like feelings towards Russia-, Russian like, Russian culture developed like, overtime?

P: Well so it is difficult now, because you know there's a lot there's in the area there's a strong Ukrainian population, and they're here as refugees because of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and so there's like there's a little bit of oddness, because now it's hard to say that you love things Russian, when they've been so unkind to the Ukrainians and- ,.. So, I tried to broaden that horizon now, and-, and, I've-, I've been

trying to learn a little bit of Ukrainian, so that I could kind of, you know speak with Ukrainian students, but, but they, I mean in the modern world maybe, it's not so popular to be Russian.

M: So like, uhm, do you have like, a hero in this culture, like an inspiration? ...that was like, you know, um, who was like very involved with Russian culture?

P: Somebody that's alive now, or somebody historical? Maybe? Either one?
So, well I studied Russian literature, and Russian history also in college, and a historical figure that I thought was amazing was Catherine the Great. She was a leader back in the day of Russia, so, historically that was really fascinating, I loved the old culture of learning about-, the old culture of Russia, but I don't really have a particular hero, I just was really interested in that more folk art, and, and, some of the, the.., you know the tsars and tsarinas, that was kind of fascinating to me.

M: So like, folk art, like folk tales and like, paintings and stuff..
Do you-, do you have any, like favorite folk tales or like folk art drawings or something?

P: I have a lot of Russian art at home, like uhm, you know hand painted Russian items, but, a Russian fairy tale that I always loved was there's a story about a, uhm, a snow Princess because, everything in Russia is frozen I guess, I don't know but, but the story is just about a snow Princess that turns into a swan, and I don't know it's a really lovely story, I had that-, I had that book when I was a child, so that's something, I just really always love the idea of this snow Princess.

M: uhm, so..., ok, so um what types of like, Russian art do you have at home?

P: So, something that's really popular is to, uhm, there's a form of art where they paint on wood, but then it's like enameled over, and it's has a lot of black and red, so some like really rich dark colors in the artwork. And so, I have several pieces of art, that have that you know they're like some boxes, I guess you could think of them as being like little trinket boxes, there are some containers, that you, know they look like you would store something inside of them, but they're all made out of wood. And then I have the matryoshka dolls, the those little dolls that, they're made of wood and you-, you take them apart, and there's a smaller doll inside, and then you take that apart, and there's a smaller

one, and it keeps getting smaller, and smaller, and smaller, until you get to the very inside, which is a tiny little doll, hand painted doll. So, I have a couple of those hand painted matryoshka dolls, I have.., there's some, uhm.., another form of art is., is jade. They carve in jade, the stone, So. I have some jade figures. Another thing that's very iconically Russian, is a samovar which is a way of heating tea, so you would put coals into the bottom of this big brass container, and then it would heat the water, you put your teacup on top and it would heat the water, so a samovar, so I have a samovar. Uhm, yeah, I have these little Russian wooden toys, they're made to move with strings. And so, they basically, just you know clack around, like you pull the strings, and the wood just clacks on the wood clack, clack, clack... But it looks like little dancing people, or little bird that a-, chicken that's eating seeds off the ground you know, and so they're just kind of whimsical.

M: If you could like make those, what would you like prefer, like-, to like incorporate them, like you can incorporate like anything, like pieces of Russian culture, / history or anything?

P: And would I make it,? Like for artwork?

M: so like, if you could like, make-, like if you could make the art or like, what would you like put in there, or would you rather just like, buy like, traditional ones or something?

P: I think that, uh.., I think I'm., I'm really more attached to the.., the traditional art a lot of their traditional art, is they depict the fairy tales of the time, so like, if you looked at a piece of art, you would see examples of a fairy tale that was being told. Uhm, and another really and they don't consider it art because it's sacred, but another thing that I find really beautiful, are the Russian Orthodox icons they're very intricate and made with gold, but they depict Jesus or the Virgin Mary, so they're very sacred, they don't really call those art, but it is very artistic to look at.

M: So, have you, like, had an experience with like, culturally in other stuff, like you know like those, uh, churches, like have you had any experience with like the culture today, like you know, public places like celebrations?

P: So, every year, there is a Russian bazaar that is held in Puyallup, well, there used to be before COVID, and so they would just have this big bazaar where there would be traditional Russian foods, and they would be, uhm, it was a fundraiser, so there'd be things to buy, people would make the eggs, the Russian eggs, and they would make the, um.., some of the

artwork, and they would put on little skits. But, so yeah, there was like-, a there used to be a-, a little community bazaar, that would happen that we would go to every year here. Um, there is a, a really nice Russian restaurant that is up in Seattle, so they-, you know, they serve the traditional foods, but, yeah, since COVID, I haven't really found anything in the community yet. There's also a lovely grocery store nearby that sells Russian foods here in Parkland, and so they have a lot, they also have a deli, and so that's probably the now, after COVID that's probably the-, the extent.

M: Speaking of foods, and like groceries, do you know any like, traditional dishes?

P: Yeah, we make a dish that's very traditional for Russians, is called borscht, and it's a soup that's made with beets, and we make that all the time. Kielbasa is also another food that's really commonly eaten, we make that. And, we also make pierogis, which are little-, they look like pot stickers, but they're made with potato and cheese.

M: So like, umm.. um, like the fairy tale stuff, where-, like did you know like any other fairy tales?

P: I can't think of 1 outside of the snippets, I'm sure I do but my brain is stuck.

M: so like did you learn like, any, like tradition or practices from your family?

P: Mostly the food from my family, and then I do remember in in grade school, I went to a little Russian folk-dance class, and so we learned how to dance some of the traditional Russian folk dances, um, so some of that but yeah pretty much about the food.

M: Like, did you, can you, like remember what they were and like if you, do can you like kind of explain them? it's OK for you like don't remember.

P: About the dance? I remember that everything was done in a circle, so everybody was in a circle, and you basically would just walk clockwise in the circle by crossing your leg over the top, so you'd like cross your legs and then walk around and then you would do a little kick and then you'd go the other direction where you just kind of crossed your legs to

go to side to side and then you'd kick again and then there was.. um yeah everything done in a circle, and it was pretty repetitive.

M: Do you know like why it was pretty repetitive, or was it just like that, like that was just the culture?

P: Well, one thing I know too about the Russian Orthodox Church, is that the people a lot of the people historically, especially where my family was from were peasants and so they didn't have a high education and so I know that there was a lot of things done because they couldn't read or you know they just didn't have a- a, the ability to read so like a lot of the church rituals are made so that people can follow along and understand what's happening without having being able to read, so like that's why there's a lot of the artwork that shows the fairy tales in pictures and why a lot of the things that you find in the Orthodox Church are going to be picture or like stained glass that show the Bible stories, so everything's done in pictures because the peasants didn't read so there's a lot of visual art because of that reason.

M: Like would you like to end this interview, or would you like to continue because I think, ..

P: Are we good?

M: Yeah, we can be good.