

STANE ULČAR 1919 -1997

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Under unfortunate circumstances, Stanislav (Stane) Ulcar was born in the Village of Dob, in the region referred to as Gorenska on May 4, 1919. He was raised by his single mother, Angela Ulčar, who, along with her siblings, built a house in the Village of Homec. His father was Jakob Hočevar and his family was in a higher social class, whereby Jakob's parents would not allow a marriage with Angela. Unfortunately, his father took his own life when Stane was barely two years old. These tragic events and circumstances had a lifelong impact on Stane.

Times were tough in Europe. It was hard making ends meet even more so living in the country. Often he would go to bed hungry. Even at Christmas there were not many gifts. An orange and a piece of bread were well accepted. He did not have many good memories of his childhood, however his mother did a good job raising him. He learned the value of respect at a young age and was always ready to help others.

As a youngster, Stane was an altar boy, attended school up to grade 5, enjoyed being in the gymnastics club, Orel, and competing against local villages. He was especially proud of their participation in the Eucharistic Congress of 1935 in Ljubljana. Angela worked in a woodworking factory. Most of the people that lived in the country could not afford to send their children to high school. Therefore, he started working in the same factory as his mother. Stane was a quick study and learned a great deal about carpentry, which would be very beneficial to him later.

One of the more unusual occurrences that happened was that his appendix ruptured when he was a teenager. He took a train from Homec to Ljubljana and walked to the hospital from the train station. He was told that only about one in a thousand survived a ruptured appendix.

As was the case in those days, Stane served his military obligation in the Yugoslav army. That was in 1937, before WWII started. He was surprised that most of the officers were Serbian. Many of the officers were illiterate and the Slovenian soldiers had to read the correspondence for the officer. The discipline was strict and they were kept occupied most of the time with various drills and exercises.



Stane serves his duty in the Yugoslav army

Before he went to serve time in the army, he was particularly fond of this one girl. Stane asked her to wait for him until he returned. Unfortunately, when he returned, she had already committed her life to the nuns. At one point, Stane had designs on becoming a priest, but due to his illegitimate birth, the Catholic Church would not accept him. He was happy for his best friend, Joško, who was accepted by the missionaries and was stationed in Papua, New Guinea.

When he came out of the army he worked as a courier for a tailor. He enjoyed meeting many of the clients and talked about this stage of his life with enthusiasm and pleasure.

His next employment was in Ljubljana as a security guard. As he was very faith filled his whole life, he continued to participate in religious groups and organizations during his time in Ljubljana. In these organizations, Stane always enjoyed the camaraderie and “thrill” of acting in plays. This was before television.

Once WWII started, the Italians annexed part of Slovenia as the Yugoslav army did not pose much opposition. The Italian takeover meant that businesses and schools had to be conducted in the Italian language. It was also forbidden for men to congregate in small groups. Once Italy capitulated, the communists started taking over the country, Stane joined the Domobranci, in an effort to stop the communist takeover. However,



Francka and Stane get married in Spittal on Sept 12, 1946



Francka and Stane in Steinfeld with their two children: Majda and Marjan

in the end the communists prevailed and Stane was one of the many who had to flee Slovenija to Austria. He and many of his compatriots had to trek through Austria to reach the refugee camps. The refugees were responsible for running the camps while the British soldiers were there to keep order. Stane volunteered to work in the kitchen and became the head cook at the camp in Stienfeld near Spittal, Austria. Food supplies were intermittent and he was exceptionally proud that one and all were fed equally, often up to 1000 people. There was no favoritism and even the kitchen staff were never given more than anyone else. Their stay in the camps lasted close to five years.

Romance flourished during this period, and Stane found favour with Francka Zlate – they wed on September 12, 1946. While still in the camp, they had two children, Majda and Marjan. After almost four years in the camp, immigration opened up Stane and Francka applied to go to Argentina and Canada. At first it looked like they were bound for Argentina, but they were accepted by Canada first. However, since Marjan was less than 2 years old, he could not

travel on a ship. Therefore, Francka stayed behind with the children and Stane travelled to Canada and arrived on July 1st. As it was a statutory holiday, they had to wait another day before they could step on Canadian soil. The port of entry was Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. From there, Stane travelled by train to Spalding, Saskatchewan, where he was to carry out his work contract.

His initial experience in Canada was very disappointing. First of all, no one on the train travelled as far from Toronto, and then the farmer to whom he was assigned was quite unpleasant. Stane would mention on many occasions that he was never so hungry in his life, as during this time. He was very discouraged and along with the poor treatment, it made



Stane arrives at Pier 21 waiting for a train to Saskatchewan

time pass even slower. His faith sustained him through this ordeal. Once released from his contract, he came to Toronto where many Slovenian refugees were already starting to settle. After arriving in Toronto, Stane worked on the Yonge subway line for a short period of time. He already had the wheels in motion for Francka and the two young children to immigrate to Canada. The IRO, a division of UN, paid for the transportation by ship for one person to Canada. The money saved from working at the farm was used to pay for the rest of the family

to come to Canada. They arrived in May of 1950. After arriving in Toronto, Stane worked on the Yonge subway line for a short period of time.



Family picture in Toronto in 1952

Being an immigrant was very difficult, and the predominantly Anglo-Saxon residents were not a very welcoming bunch, especially if you were married and had a family. Many individuals, as well as families, would live under one roof until enough money had been earned to get a place of their own. Many people have mentioned how giving Stane was to newcomers, be it, accommodations, furniture, whatever he could do to help, never forgetting what he went through.

He was happy to land a job at Alcan where they manufactured sandcast chamber covers for Ford of Canada. The managers were impressed with the quality of his workmanship and the pace he kept. Since it was piecework he tried to make as many sandcasts as possible. As a result of his productivity, they asked him if he had any other friends that might also want to come to work there.

The Slovenian community in Toronto was expanding and many organizations materialized. As his deep faith was such a big part of his life, Stane joined the Holy Name Society, and was quite involved in many church activities at Marija Pomagaj. At this point, there were many plays, and other functions which Stane participated in with enthusiasm, despite the fact that the church was 15 km from his home.

He saved as much money as he could. He wanted to be independent of others as soon as possible. He bought his first house in southern Etobicoke in 1951. Soon after, he



On the right is Stane working at Alcan - 1951

bought another property on which stood a small cottage-like house. He applied to subdivide this lot and it was granted. While the family lived in the little cottage, Stane proceeded with building his own house. It was a monumental task to dig out the foundation by hand – especially with a full time job. He contracted out some of the trades. As it happened, he had to find another plumber because the original plumber became a casualty of Hurricane Hazel. Stane was able to do most of the finishing work as a result of his earlier experience in the woodworking factory. Stane enjoyed his “castle” as he referred to his home until he died. Many were the evenings where he would regale the family with work stories.



Picking peaches on a farm in Beamsville

As other families were making their way to Toronto and needed housing, Stane would accommodate them in the little cottage-like house. With time he sold the second lot where the little house stood.

By this time, he was working at Christie's Biscuits and was particularly proud of the fact that he could figure out formulae for the cookie icing in his head quicker than managers could on paper, for which he was respected. He really knew how to make ends meet as he was able to buy a new car in 1956.



Stane, Francka, Majda, Marjan and Janez
in front of their new 1956 Ford Fairlane

Canada was a very good country to live in. In 1956, as soon as they were eligible, Stane and Francka got their Canadian citizenship. When they came to Canada, they did not know the language, they had no money and very little education. They were fortunate to make something out of their life and they instilled in their children a love of country and appreciation of freedom. They were very happy to have been accepted by Canada. Of course, there were some struggles, but the rewards exceeded any expectations.

Every summer there was a trip to Beamsville where the family picked fruit from the trees. Marjan and Majda really enjoyed the barn, the ride on the tractor, and climbing the trees to pick the fruit, usually Bing cherries and peaches. Most of the fruit that was picked was preserved in Mason jars.

The family expanded with the addition of three more boys born in Toronto, resulting in Majda having four brothers. Stane remembered the struggles when he was a child and the hunger he encountered as a child. He vowed that his children would not be exposed to hunger, and they never were. Times were still tough and Stane would walk great distances to save a few pennies, either for groceries or other needs of the family.

In 1957, the Slovenian Summer Camp opened its doors. It had been farm property and was referred to as "the farm". Work quickly got under way to dig out a swimming pool, the "Iopa", and a bocce court. Many families started putting up tents and trailers, and later



Stane selling hamburgers at the Slovenian Summer Camp in the 1960s

mini cottages. The family enjoyed going to the farm on Sundays. Stane came up with the idea of holding a Corpus Christi procession (as was the tradition in Slovenia) throughout the grounds. He was very happy to see the large numbers that would attend and participate annually. He was responsible for ensuring all the Church vestments and other items needed for the procession were available and on location. Another contribution was his "hamburger stand". He would prepare the meat and necessary condiments the night before. On Sunday afternoon he would sell the hamburgers, with the proceeds going to the farm.



Stane and Francka's 25th Wedding Anniversary

As many families were living in the west end of Toronto, namely Alderwood, Stane was instrumental in getting plans under way to build a second Slovenian Church, Brezmadežna s Čudodelno Svetinjo. Many of the meetings with Fr. John Kopač took place at his home. As the church committee was being formed and the planning of the church continued in earnest, many of the meetings took place in the basement of his home, as did other things, such as practices for the annual Miklavževanje (St. Nicholas). During this time, the congregation used the church hall of Christ the King Catholic Church on Lake Shore Boulevard West, at the foot of Brown's Line, for Sunday mass as well as Slovenska Šola and other cultural activities. Father Skumavec celebrated his "First Mass" at Christ The King, and our ever resourceful dad, baked a walnut torta, iced it with white icing as well as yellow icing for the chalice.

Stane was the inaugural president of the Church Committee for the the Church on Brown's Line. The hall at 739 Brown's Line was built first. There were

many fund raising events throughout this whole period, such as dances, garden parties, including games of chance, pony rides and a fishing pond. Since funds were low, Stane volunteered to be the caretaker for the hall and then later for the church as well. Although he worked 40 full time hours at Christie Biscuits, he spent more time at the church cleaning and managing the facilities.

Maintaining the church facilities was very demanding because there was a lot of activity around the church and church hall. Since the property was not paved, there was always a lot of dust adding more work. The duties included cleaning the church and preparing for major events, as well as upkeep of the hall. There were all kinds of meetings, lectures, theatrical performances, weekly scouting meetings, Saturday Slovenian school, banquets, weddings and being available for the youth when they came to play ping-pong or floor hockey. Additionally, he was responsible for ordering all items needed for the maintenance of the hall and the church.

Not only did he have to prepare for these events, he had to clean up after the banquets, weddings, weekly meetings and sporting activities. (Presently, everyone has to clean up after their own event). Often the cleanup was a family affair. Many Monday evenings were spent cleaning up from the Saturday banquet or wedding. This included clearing tables, restoring the kitchen and bar to a clean state, as well as getting on our hands and knees on the hall floor with a can of Comet to clean the stains from cigarette butts.

After some years, when the church bills were not as extensive, Fr. Kopač decided to financially pay for Stane's work at the church and the hall. This was a token amount each month, not even a week's wages for the month. He was not in it for the money, but for the collective good of the Slovenian community. The pastor, g. Janez Kopač, did not have a driver's licence, and therefore, relied on Stane to get him to many of his appointments and functions.

A traumatic time in his life took place when he crushed his ankle at the hall. He was hanging curtains when he lost his footing and fell off the ladder. He was hospitalized and was off work for many months. Stane was very concerned, since the accident happened at the church hall, that he would lose his job. Thankfully, his benefits from Christie's paid him a small amount from the medical benefits. His doctor told him he would probably never be able to have movement in the ankle again. Stane followed instructions well and performed the exercises that were prescribed. As a result he did regain movement in his ankle. Once he got back on his feet, he continued to take care of the church and hall.

Stane was always thankful to the companies that employed him. His attitude was to always do his best and be loyal to the company. He did not want his wife to work so that she could be there for the children. Most of the time he did not use his vacations for himself. During his vacation he would go work on construction to earn some extra cash.



Francka Ulčar

Eulogies are presented at the beginning of the funeral mass; however, they used to be done at the cemetery and would be very difficult to hear. He took it upon himself to provide a P.A. system which he devised by purchasing an amplifier which operated from a car battery. Along with a microphone and a speaker, the mourners were able to hear and participate in the funeral proceedings, which he continued to provide until he died.

In 1972 his wife, Francka, was diagnosed with kidney cancer and did not have much time to live. She was only 52 years old. After she died, Stane left the caretaking duties and devoted his time to the three remaining children at home. John was 18, Stan was 10 and Frank was 8 years old when she died. g. Kopač verbalized that only he knew how much Stane did for this parish, i.e. Brezmadežna. He continued to be an usher and hand out bulletins at the front of the church. From the

start, he kept statistics on the church attendance and continued with that as well. During the week, he would always go to mass every morning and then enjoyed the socializing and debates after mass with other parishioners.

Stane expanded the garden that Francka had kept. He was recycling food waste many years before it was more commonplace. His tomatoes and home grown salad were legendary. Taking care of the garden was therapeutic for him. Another activity which he enjoyed immensely was making egg noodles. He would purchase 12 dozen eggs and work for two or three days in making vast quantities of noodles, which he would distribute to his children and others.

In 1978 Stane's mother died. Unfortunately, he never saw his mother after he fled Slovenia; however, he was uncertain and definitely uneasy to go Slovenia for the funeral due to his anti-communist views. His daughter and family attended the funeral in his place. Stane was very proud of his family. He prepared Christmas Eve and Thanksgiving dinners for the ever growing numbers of family members. With time his children grew up, started working, were married and grandchildren were a happy addition.



Stane's mother, Angela Ulčar

Stane enjoyed his retirement. His close association with g .Kopač continued and they were able to celebrate their faith by going on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, not once, but twice.

In 1990 Stane needed triple heart by-pass surgery. This practice was still in its infancy, and therefore quite invasive, which required a long recovery period. As this happened just before Christmas, Stane would be unable to host the traditional Christmas Eve festivities due to his convalescence. Trying to decide how to celebrate Christmas Eve, one of the grandchildren exclaimed that it wouldn't be the same if it wasn't at Star Ata's house. The family members each contributed various dishes and decorated the house which enabled the Christmas Eve tradition to be celebrated as usual. He spoke about that memorable event for years – his joy in the fact that the family traditions meant so much to the kids,



After Slovenia became an independent country, Stane felt he'd like to visit his homeland, which he did. This enabled him to revisit the village where he grew up, and catch up with his remaining relatives. The homestead was bequeathed to the cousin who cared for his mother when she was sick in her later years.

Stane continued to enjoy his years in health until 1997. He was diagnosed with leukemia in September and died five weeks later on October 5, 1997, leaving a wonderful legacy to his family, as well as to the Slovenian community in Toronto.

He was a conscientious and proud Slovenian. He was always considerate and willing to help when there was a need. He spent much of his time tending to the church hall and his Slovenian community. He has left a proud legacy of the value of family and community service.

As a testament of his commitment to the Slovenian community, the following is a translation of an article written by Fr. Kopač in the Bozja Beseda (Word of God) as a tribute to Stane's accomplishments.



There is not a more deserving parishioner, a strong pillar that stands out as much as Stanko Ulčar at our church Brezmadežna in Etobicoke.

To find out more about him, I invited him for an interview. He was born May 4, 1919. Stanko participate in religious activities already as a child. First he was an altar boy at the church where he was baptized in Homec near Kamnik. Barely a teenager, he became a leader of a Catholic boys' youth group as well as a member of Marijina Druzba (an organization dedicated to Mary, Mother of God). When he was 21 years old, in 1940, he was drafted into the Yugoslav army. Once he served his time, he got a job in Ljubljana. When youth moves from the country to the big city, they usually lose their morals. Not with Stanko. He chose friends with good morals. He joined the Katolisko akcija, which was successfully lead by a Salesian priest, Dr. Franc Mihelčič. This organization continued to develop his leadership skills and reinforced his religious beliefs.



Rev. Janez Kopač

As a casualty of World Word II, he was among the refugees. Initially, in Vitrinje, he moved through various camps: St. Vid, the Kellerberg, Pegez, Spittal and ended up in Steinfeld. He became a good cook and made sure that the food was divided equally among all the refugees. On September 12, 1946 dr. Mihelčič married Stanko to Francka Zlate from a model Christian family from Mose near Smlednik. Francka and her sister were also refugees in Steinfeld. Two children were born to Stane and Francka in the camp. Stane was still young, strong, happy and full of hope. With this hope he immigrated to Canada in 1949 to earn enough money to pay for the transportation for his wife and children. He served his contract on a farm north of Saskatoon, and then moved to Toronto. His wife and children came in 1950. He bought a house on Foch Ave, in Etobicoke and by 1954 he built his own house on Brown's Line in Etobicoke. Soon afterwards a third child, John, was born. With all the responsibility of raising a family, he still found time to join various organizations at Marija Pomagaj and was even president of the Baraga Društvo for a year.

At a wedding reception, Fr. Kopač said to Stanko "We are going to do a lot more talking and working together". It was not long after these words were spoken that it came true. By 1959 establishing the groundwork for Brezmadežna church started. Cardinal McGuigan advised me to select a strong committee when establishing a new church. So I asked Stanko to be the first president. From that point on, Stane's house was used like a rectory with all the meetings. We had to buy some land, collect money for this undertaking and have architectural drawings prepared and approved. This was an enormous challenge as there were less than 80 families in this proposed parish. A lot of heart, courage, limitless hope and wisdom were needed to start this project. Stane was my right hand. He ran the meetings very well, avoiding confrontation and any friction, thereby harmoniously working with the committee through the years. Many people were surprised at the size of the church and hall shown on the architectural drawings, saying it was too ambitious and that the church would be half empty and they would eventually sink. Stane Ulcar was president of the committee for 5 years. Then in 1961, when the hall was built, he volunteered to be the caretaker. He was a committee board member for 13 years, 7 of which he has president. In addition, he was president of Holy Name Society and 10 years as a member of the Scouting Committee. You would have thought that God would have blessed him, but just the opposite. He invited him closer to the cross.

November 19, 1970, Stanko was preparing the stage for a theatrical performance, he fell from the ladder and crushed his ankle. By the time I got there I could see his foot dangling like a loose branch on a tree. Recovery was long and painful and he was on medical leave from Christie's Biscuits where he worked full time. Two more boys were added to the family, Stan and Frank and the two older ones had gotten married. However, Stanko's ordeal was not over because in July 1972 his wife died leaving behind two young boys and Janez who was still in high school. Stanko was forced to leave his work at the church to take care of three young boys. He overcame these setbacks; however, despite his strong faith, the death of his wife had a profound effect on him. He was not the Ulcar as I had known him. The parishioners still saw him on Sunday mornings handing out the bulletins and selling religious articles in the church vestibule.

What does he mean to the parishioners was best summed up by his friend, Tine Strah, who said he was the second associate pastor at Brezmadežna.

When I asked him, looking back at your involvement with the religious organizations, how do you feel about your accomplishments? He admitted that he was satisfied and comforted. He felt gratified with the work he did in Slovenia with the youth organizations. He was especially satisfied with the accomplishments with the church and hall at Brezmadežna seeing how they are fully utilized and are running out of space already. He is pleased that the church and hall is being used by the Slovenian youth.