

## **FHS Oral History Project – Vasyl Boichook**

### **Description:**

Vasyl Boichook was born in Ukraine in 1966. Vasyl recounted his adolescent experience in the former Soviet Union throughout the 1980s, particularly as the empire opened and eroded. He explained his inspiration for studying artistic woodworking and how he developed his versatility in a school he attended in Ukraine. In December 1991, Vasyl emigrated to the United States, approximately a few days after Ukrainians ratified their independence. He emphasized how his decision to leave his home country stemmed from a larger desire to fulfill his artistic and individual potential. In 1993, he moved to Florida after spending two years in New York working different jobs, acclimating to life in a different world. In Florida, Vasyl worked in the field he specialized in—woodworking—and created his own business once he understood certain entrepreneurial practices from his first cabinet-making job in the state. In 2021, Vasyl founded the Ukrainian Project Incorporation and extensively discussed its inspiration, significance, and evolution over the past four years. He shared his thoughts about the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War and how his organization and the Annual Festival he hosts have responded to the conflict. Lastly, Vasyl described his broader observations living in Central Florida for the past three decades.

### **Transcription:**

00;00;00 - 00;00;18

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Vasyl Boichook on February 16th, 2025, at the Fourth Annual Ukrainian Festival Vatra Orlando for the Florida Historical Society Oral History Project. Before we begin, please state your name, date of birth, and where you were born.

00;00;18 - 00;00;28

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** My name is Vasyl Boichook. I was born on July 4th, 1966, in Ukraine.

00;00;28 - 00;00;36

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Tell me about your experiences growing up in Ukraine as a teenager during the 80s.

00;00;36 - 00;02;50

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Those are very interesting and turbulent times in former Soviet Union, as it was kind of coming to the end of its existence. It was breaking down. It was the empire of such, making that a little bit of democracy, a little bit of openness that was introduced make it fall apart very quickly because that kind of empire can only exist in a very tight control. As soon as they loosen the grab, it all fell apart. And I was kind of watching all that kind of happening. First things started happening, then the press started talking about all the forbidden topics, and it became so much more interesting. Only then we realize how gray and boring our lives were because you were kept away from all the things in the world and all the things we heard, all the things we saw were very filtered. We only had a certain portion of things from the world behind that what they call the Iron Curtain and all that started breaking down and you started seeing more and more new stuff in the press and TV and stuff. And those are interesting times. And many people started looking for more democratic ways of life. And it started breaking on to pieces. And Ukraine is one of those large pieces of Soviet Union that broke off

in 1991. So in all the 80s, especially at the end of the 80s, there was a lot of different social groups organized, people that tried to bring back Ukrainian language as one of the main languages in that area, and a lot of a cultural things, a lot of religious things. The churches that were closed [in] the Soviet Union, they started opening back up and all that stuff. So it was a spring of Ukraine again.

00;02;50 - 00;02;59

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely. And what were your reactions once the Soviet Union dissolved in '91?

00;02;59 - 00;03;19

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Well, we were very happy, joyous, but also a little bit reserved because people kept saying that really freedom never comes for free. And now we are living in the times when we got to pay for it.

00;03;19 - 00;03;28

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely. What inspired you to study artistic wood treatments during college?

00;03;28 - 00;03;28

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Say it again.

00;03;29 - 00;03;33

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** What inspired you to study artistic wood treatments during college?

00;03;33 - 00;05;41

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Oh, a series of things. I was a little bit of an artistic trade from my young years. I used to draw things at school like even [when] I'm not supposed to do things. In school instead of doing things that I didn't like, I would kind of open a clean page and start drawing something. But, also, my grandfather used to make furniture, and I still have some of his old hand tools back in Ukraine to this day that he used. And when I go there I kind of go find them, look at them, touch them. It's kind of interesting, you know, feel the connection. And so he was a very good woodworker as well. And I would like to think of myself as one too. But I like working with wood and I like being an artist. I like to create. So that school [his college] combined that. That school has people learning woodworking, working with metal, with leather, with ceramics and stuff. But, has all of those portions of it have like artistic part of it. They all learn how to draw, paint, [and] sculpture. And so it was a very interesting school. It's a very complex school. Like here you might have a carpenter that went to vocational school for two months, or he might have an interior design and learn to design, or you might have an artist that learn how to paint and draw. But that in that school [his college] it was all together. We did drawing, painting, designing, sculpturing. We learned art history, architecture and all that stuff. And we copied works of different masters in woodworking, making jewelry boxes of something. We would copy some old works of masters to learn their techniques and stuff. So it was all from drawing and painting all the way to making things out of wood.

00;05;41 - 00;05;52

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Interesting. Talk to me about your self-employed experience as a designer artist, craftsman after college in Ukraine.

00;05;52 - 00;07;15

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** In Ukraine, at first I tried to held simpler job being like a worker in an architectural museum or something. But I didn't really see myself as a person sitting at the desk and doing things. So what was next? I did a lot of work on church restorations, fixing old icon frames. In Ukraine, all the churches, have this divider between the Holy Place and the rest of the room in the church, and that divider it's a beautiful wooden frame with a lot of icons in it and all the carvings, gilded golden carvings and really the most beautiful part of the church normally. And many of those churches that were closed in Soviet Union in all that got either destroyed or partially destroyed, damaged and rotten because they were not kept right. So when all that opened up again there was a lot of work to restore all that. And I've done some of it, all of those years, like at the end of 80s, several years, I did a lot of work on that.

00;07;15 - 00;07;35

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** I read several news articles featuring you and your work here about the festival when you first started in February '22, and a lot of those articles said that it was your lifelong dream to immigrate to the United States and to own a business. Why was that the case? Why was that a dream of yours?

00;07;35 - 00;10;23

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Probably from my even school years, I wanted to be not just an artist, but like, entrepreneur that I can work and do what I like, not like what people tell me what to do. I wanted to be more of a self-motivated, do what I like to do and do things that I can do best. And I saw United States as a chance to develop that properly. [The] Soviet Union didn't really give people many chances, they were mostly all government businesses, they kind of took all that under their umbrella. And it was hard to do anything on your own. Like if you were an artist, you had to make art that reflected their propaganda, and you could not escape that. So I wanted to be free. I wanted to be free to create what I liked, not what I had to do under somebody's supervision all the time. So from my young years, I wanted to break away from there and then go somewhere. So as soon as Soviet Union fell apart, I found a way to come here first as, just as a tourist. I didn't know what I was going to see here, because I've never been anywhere outside Soviet Union until I was 25. And that's when I came here. I liked it. I spent two years in New York, learned my English because when I came here I didn't speak a word of English, so I had to do that. [I] did some night school, worked some construction, washed dishes in some restaurants at night to earn a little more and to get some food for it. So I did a couple of years of that, and then I came here to Florida to see some friends that worked here. And I found my first job here as a Woodworker for one of the companies building cabinets. [I] worked there for a little over a year and a half. I learned a few things. I saw how things work over here—how you can get organized with new business. Because very soon there, I understood that they would not need all the knowledge and all the expertise that I had in woodworking because they were just building simple kitchen cabinets, simple, you know, stuff that I could do, but it was boring, and I wasn't going to use all my potential there for sure. So I started looking and then I could find a big enough job with somebody that would set me up to open a business—so I did.

00;10;23 - 00;10;36

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And you mentioned that you were 25 when you first came here and it was New York, what year was that, exactly?

00;10;36 - 00;12;11

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** 1991, at the end. When Ukraine became independent in August of 1991, the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada—it's like a Congress—they voted for it. But after that, to make it really official that they had this referendum, when the whole country votes for their future, and so they overwhelmingly voted for independence of Ukraine on, I believe, it was December 1st, 1991. So I voted for that. And then on December 11th, I flew. I had to fly out of Moscow—see how it was centralized and controlled. When I decided to leave to get an American visa to come here, I had to go to Moscow and go to the American Embassy there because the American Embassy in Soviet Union existed only in Moscow, not in any other state. And then to buy tickets for the plane and to fly out, all had to be out of Moscow as well. There was nothing in Kiev, in Ukrainian capital, to go outside the country. They controlled everything in Moscow, all the exterior, the connections, go through Moscow only. But anyway, I did all that. I went a couple times to Moscow. I got all that set up, and I left on December 11th and first I flew into New York. So I spent a couple of years in there.

00;12;11 - 00;12;16

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** What were some of your initial impressions when you landed in New York?

00;12;16 - 00;14;17

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Oh, it was very much different than what I was used to. When you first get on the American streets—now is a little different because things changing even over there, even before the war, it was already a very nice country as well—but in Soviet Union it was kind of everything very gray, it's like colorless. Because when you come here, I came late in the day in the evening, was dark, and I got picked up in a car and I saw these markings on the road, you know, these shiny markings that reflect the light. And it felt like a landing strip for the airplane or something, it's not a street. You know that thing didn't exist in Soviet Union. And they drew that on the streets. Most of them maybe had this, like, white lines in the middle and intermittent lines, nothing else. You could hardly drive on those roads, and [I] always was scared to get off of it because you couldn't see the edges. They didn't care too much about all that. And so when you come here, it's a huge difference—it is all these billboards all over the place and all these businesses with a lot of lights and a lot of different things, like, you see McDonald's, Burger King, this and that. Over there we had like maybe one or two restaurants and just apartment buildings and not much to it, like I said, was very gray. If you see something on the side of the building, it mostly be some communist face or a big communist flag with their propaganda and that's all you would see because there was no private businesses, nothing. So huge difference. When you come here, it's like you're in a different world.

00;14;17 - 00;14;23

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And to that point, did you have any difficulties adjusting to life in the US?

00;14;23 - 00;16;16

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Some. First, it was monetary. Even when I started making money, I was still trying translating in my head like you look at a bottle of chocolate, and it's \$3. I said, "But wow, in Ukrainian *hryvnia*, it is a lot of money. No, I wouldn't buy it. It's still too much." For a while it took me to adjust, well, you make \$3 in half an hour, it's not that much money. But for me, changing it to Ukrainian money, "Oh, that's a lot of money." And it took a while to adjust. And also like in New York, they call it a city that never sleeps, right? That was very weird. When you kind of come out at 3 a.m. and everything is lit up and everybody's walking out on the streets and talking. It is like really? Is my watch—is that 3 a.m.? You know, everything's open and all these corner stores with all these mountains of fresh fruit and stuff. You know, in Ukraine you could see something maybe in, like, a farmer's market when they brought it from, like, Georgia or something. You know, the Soviet Union very rarely brought anything from outside the Soviet Union. So if you got some, like, exotic fruits it would be from some parts of Soviet Union, anyway. And so it didn't happen very often, and it didn't happen that, that you would have like constantly. It's only like periodically things and stuff. So that was a big adjustment. So you walk out on the street every day and you see all this abundance of all the food around you...that is very, very weird.

00;16;16 - 00;16;21

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** What year did you come to Central Florida?

00;16;21 - 00;16;24;

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** 1993. At the end of 1993.

00;16;24 - 00;16;37

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** At the end of 93. You mentioned it was a job that brought you down here, but was there anything else, at least when you got here, were there anything else that attracted you about Central Florida?

00;16;37 - 00;17;11

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Weather. Very nice weather. And compared to New York City, it was nice, clean, green, you know, these nice manicured lawns and neighborhoods and everything. It was much different than New York City. So I kind of liked it. And then I found a job. In my first month being here, I found a Ukrainian church. So I went there, and they found some friends. So I quickly kind of got plugged in.

00;17;11 - 00;17;25

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Nice. Once you came to Central Florida, you created the European Wood Art Corporation. What is the purpose of this company and how has it evolved in the past almost 30 years?

00;17;25 - 00;19;07

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Well, after being here for about a year and a half or so, like I said, I work for somebody else. I learned the specifics of cabinet-making and woodworking here. So I started European Corporation as a company that would build the cabinets or any furniture for

homes, there was more of an art involved to it. I introduced a lot of carvings, a lot of nice details to whatever I do. I am an artist and a woodcarver and all that. So instead of building just a box, I try to embellish it with some nice things to make it look more like a jewelry box instead of just a cabinet. Okay. So that's what I'm trying to do is everything I do give it a nice detail, a nice design. I think from what it evolved—I did the simpler stuff in the beginning because I needed to get to know people to create a little bit of a customer base, because most of my work comes from just word of mouth, like, you do a good job, they brag about it to their friends, their neighbors, and you get more and more. Right now I have jobs coming from my former customers. I go in and remodel the kitchen that I built 20 years ago. I build kitchens for the kids of my former customers and things like that, like they were little kids when I build a kitchen for their parents, and now they're all grown and they have their families. They building homes for themselves, and I go and build kitchens for them. That's kind of how it goes now.

00;19;07 - 00;19;16

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Interesting. When did you launch the Ukrainian Project Incorporation and what inspired you to create it?

00;19;16 - 00;22;00

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** It was in the 2021. I always took big part in all the Ukrainian events, but most of it was through Ukrainian Catholic, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Apopka, because that's my church. And we created a lot of things around the church, a lot of events and stuff. But then we had this idea with my partners, we started talking and we had this idea that we need to create something that does not involve just one church, like yesterday here we had Baptist priest or pastor or whatever they call him. We had our Greek Catholic priest, and we had an Orthodox priest. All three of them were on the stage praying with us all at the same time. So we tried to make an event that is all Ukrainian that introduces our Ukrainian culture to local society, and that all Ukrainians can participate no matter of what their religion or upbringing or whatever. It is Ukrainians of all sorts and colors can join together. And this is a big holiday of culture and all the heritage of Ukraine, all together. So that that was to promote all that. So that was the idea, and it still is. We try to show to all the Americans here that Ukraine has a lot to offer. It has a very old heritage. Ukraine existed for thousands of years, like a lot of our religious traditions. Now, when you study them, you'll see that they came from before, Christian times when it was a pagan country, but they just took all the things they celebrated, and then they just kind of embedded it into Christian celebrations and stuff. And, you know, it's a very rich culture. It's a very colorful in the sense that there are a lot of regions, and they differ in the way they celebrate things, in the way they make their clothing, in the way they sing. Ukraine has many different regions from people living in Ukrainian mountains and living near Black Sea, living in big flat steps. And, you know, all of those people have different traditions, different clothing, different, you know, different, language, slightly different dialect.

00;22;01 - 00;22;07

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And how has the incorporation evolved in the past four years?

00;22;07 - 00;23;45

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Past four years. Well, I like to think that we've improved a lot. We're getting better. We're getting nicer performances on the stage. We're getting better artists to work

with us, because when we start getting to be known in the States and even outside, like a lot of Ukrainians have learned that we have this big annual festival. We actually had Florida Congress vote on it and the governor signed the I think it's called, I don't know, the proper I don't remember the proper name of it. But they passed this resolution or something, and it was signed by the governor that it's officially Ukrainian Festival Day in Florida, so we even tried to be really official that everybody would know that that's an actual holiday of Ukrainian Festival. A lot of things like that. It's a lot of work. We had the mayor yesterday and today in any city because we have done this in four different locations around Orlando. Every time we have a city mayor, we have some congresspeople, we have some senators. All the time we involved local authorities, and legislature trying to make it known, try to make our presence known and try to make a cultural impact here.

00;23;45 - 00;24;05

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely. Walk me through your and your team's thought process when you created the first Ukrainian Orlando Festival in February '22. I'm assuming it was as a response to the Russian invasion, or was that something you guys had already in mind?

00;24;05 - 00;25;08

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Well, originally it wasn't because in 2021 we didn't know yet it was going to be a war, and we already started working on it. Actually the war kind of canceled all our plans for that festival. We lost some of the performers that kind of turned around and went back home because, like, we had somebody driving down to Florida from Chicago, and they learned that the war just started. So they turned around. So we didn't get everybody to come down. And instead of being singing and dancing on the stage, we changed what the singers were singing to more patriotic and sad songs. And we were more like talking, you know, inspiring speeches and all that, and started right away collecting some money for Ukrainian refugees and all that. So from what we planned and what happened, it was very different.

00;25;08 - 00;25;18

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Okay. Yeah. Interesting. And what is the purpose of the Annual Ukrainian festival.

00;25;18 - 00;26;32

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Is to promote Ukrainian culture, to show all the colors and all the sides of it is. There is a lot to show. We have all kinds of singing, dancing, many different things that we want to show, like all the vendors that they bring Ukrainian clothing, handmade, stitched. We had some ceramics even here and all kinds of art making jewelry making, you know, painting, drawing or whatever you want. We had yesterday, today weather kind of got a little in the way, but yesterday we had so many different things. We had on stage so many—and if the weather permits, we're still going to have this virtuoso violin player [*names him*]. He lives in Canada now. But he's originally from Ukraine—very good violin player. Just amazing. And this lady that will be singing at the end of the program today, she sang last night. She used to be Secretary of Culture in Ukraine a few years back.

00;26;32 - 00;26;32

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Wow.

00;26;32 - 00;27;11

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** She's a very renowned singer. She had her own class in Kyiv, in Ukrainian capital, teaching students how to sing, how to perform. She has two of her students here with her, and they join her on stage in the program for a while. So it's a very nice program. We want to show all of that out of all of that and all of you know what is Ukrainian culture and want to educate people a little bit on what really Ukraine is. Okay.

00;27;11 - 00;27;23

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** 2025 marks the fourth year that you have hosted the festival. I'm curious, how has it changed since the first one, especially since the first one was changed already?

00;27;23 - 00;28;48

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Yeah, the first one got changed outside of our plans. But all of them were always planned as two or three days. It was three days in the beginning, but it was a little too much sometimes, but two days at least of constant performances on stage because it's a festival. It's not a concert, you know? So we have to keep people occupied throughout the whole day. So we try to get enough performances to fill in the whole day for two days in a row. And some of those performances supposed to be whatever we can educational as well. Try to explain to people what instruments we like playing in Ukraine, what music is there and things like that. Just to explain a little bit about Ukrainian culture and teach people and another part of it, to show all the culture in like our vendors, what they bring, what they sell and what they make, all the handmade things. So all of the different art that people make and try to talk a little bit about Ukrainian heritage, Ukrainian history. So we try to introduce some of that and educate locals, people about Ukrainian heritage and history.

00;28;48 - 00;28;55

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** What examples from your four years running this event would make you consider this event successful?

00;28;55 - 00;29;49

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Well, first of all, it's the people that have been there encouraging replies to what we do. Like all the time. We've heard so many praises, like, guys, I know there might be some sad bags, there might be some things we'll have, like weather today and things, but most of it is still very positive. We help people that come to our festivals year after year, after a year, and they're just thanking us for making it happen. And it's very inspiring when you have a lot of positive compliments. So we'll keep going and we'll keep improving. We'll keep making some small, you know, adjustments. But for the most part, it stays the same.

00;29;49 - 00;29;56

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Well, to that point, that's my next question. What are your future plans for this festival?

00;29;56 - 00;32;10

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** To make it even bigger and more renowned, to bring more people, to bring more maybe performers from Ukraine. Because right now, we mostly use people living in the United States. It's, you know, logistically easier. But, like this, former Ukrainian secretary of culture, she was actually here up north already doing some concerts and raising some funds for Ukraine. So we just learned about her being there, actually, her students, those two ladies that with her, I have them as my friends on Facebook. They called me and say, hey, would you like to have her will come with her to, okay, let's do this. So, you know, we get the performers like that that are already here mostly, but we would like to be a bigger festival, more renown so we can bring—and for that also we need more sponsors. It's financially very taxing to bring somebody from Ukraine, plane tickets, where to house them. But we'd like to get to that level where we can bring, more renowned people from Ukraine. It would be very nice to show, like, up to date Ukrainian culture in Ukraine and bring it over here, and let people enjoy that. We have a lot of tradition and a lot of old culture, but there are many performers that are so up to date with what's going on even here, the world's gotten so kind of small and so tight that if you have some musical new styles or something here you have it next month in Ukraine already too. It gets transferred so fast nowadays. And we do have all the different cultural layers there, all the different sides of it. We'd like to bring as much of it here as possible and make it, you know, so it would be one of the biggest shows in the States. So that's the plan.

00;32;10 - 00;32;21

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely, absolutely. Even though you're obviously here in Central Florida, how has the war in Ukraine impacted you?

00;32;21 - 00;35;38

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Oh, it has changed our lives a lot. For those who kind of care, because we still have our families there and it's still kind of my home in part, you know, I'm a American citizen, and I made my home here, but I grew up and went to school and everything there, still have a lot of family and friends there. So it's always going to be my first home as well. And also, I always like democracy and freedom. Ukraine has been fighting against Russian oppression for about 5 or 600 years constantly. There are two, three wars fought between those two countries every century. Okay. So it's not something that happened yesterday or the day before or like in '22. No, no, no. It happened every century. Ukraine would become independent for some part, and then the Russians would come over in some kind of way and take it over. So when that happened again, we would watch those news overnight, not sleep, not eat, and try to catch every news about it. You know, doing fundraising, sending everything. I was even accused by my family that I spent too much on it because sometimes I can't afford to pay my bills here because you know they need it. And if I can save someone's life by sending some medical supplies or doing something, then I do it. Regardless, I'll make it by here somehow. I'm not dying, and nobody is dying from not having food or something here and over there they do. You know, if you don't send those medical supplies somebody will die. So we have been watching it. We've been doing as much as we can. It's changed a lot of our lives. I have been standing in Lake Eola park every Sunday passing Ukrainian flags to bypassers and talking to them about the war in Ukraine. And I met a lot of people that are under the influence of Russian propaganda, which always was great for them and terrible for us because they put a lot of money into that. And it's very strong propaganda. And I still find a lot of people that they, why do you fight? They're basically same as you, your brothers. You just put you know, get

together as one country. No. They're totally different people. For what they do to Ukrainians, for how they treat Ukrainians, I can hardly call them people. And they say, oh, Putin will die. Yeah, there was Putin, there was Lenin, there was Stalin, there was Peter the Great and every century there were leaders, and they did all the same. So it's not a leader, it is the country. It's all of them. They get those leaders all the time and they come back and do the same things. And when the war started again, it kind of changed our lives. It became a daily routine to check Ukrainian news, to send some money to somebody, to talk to somebody about doing another fundraiser and all these things, so.

00;35;38 - 00;35;45

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely. And what do you hope to see in Ukraine's future?

00;35;45 - 00;37;06

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Well, I hope to see a completely safe, independent, country. I would love it to be in its original borders, like it was since '91, and whether they become a part of the European Union or NATO, not too important for me. It's only because there is that neighbor—Russia—that I'd like them to be part of NATO and the European Union in some, because it's very hard to see any other way for Ukraine to stay independent and to stop Russians from attacking them all the time. So I would like to see it a prosperous free country. There are many, many, many people that deserve to live in such country. And they do want to live in such country. Free with their businesses, with their opportunities, with their families. They deserve it. They're good people. All of them are—most are—like in any country there might be bad apples—but most of them are very deserving people for that. And that's what I would like to happen for all of them there.

00;37;06 - 00;37;15

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Tell me about your broader experience as a Ukrainian businessman in Central Florida and your impact on the area.

00;37;15 - 00;37;46

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Well, I don't know if I made a big impact on the whole big area, but, I'd like to create things that would be unique and loved by those who got them and enjoyed. And so I'd like to make our homes and our spaces around here, more beautiful, more enjoyable. And I think that beauty saves the world. So.

00;37;46 - 00;38;04

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Yeah. Don't be modest. You have—with the festival—you have made an impact on the area. Absolutely. How would you describe the Ukrainian community in Orlando, especially how it has changed since you arrived in '93?

00;38;04 - 00;39;40

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Well, when I arrived in 93, the very few young Ukrainians. Florida is known for a state for retired people, mostly. And when I came here first, I was like one of the two or three young Ukrainians in Ukrainian church. I actually met my wife, and we got married in that church. And when we did our wedding reception in the church—we were young and you didn't have much money for anything, the church offered to do everything in the church, and all

those Ukrainian ladies help to prepare everything and so on—but when we send the video to Ukraine, some family member said, well, did you do it in like retirement home or something? It is like three young people, the rest are of retirement age. Now, you see a lot of younger Ukrainians, especially after the war started. It is a lot of “You for you” newcomers. We see more young faces in the church, little kids running around. You know, it's bad what happened in Ukraine. But actually for Ukrainian society here in Central Florida, it's a lot of new blood. It's a lot of interesting new faces. And it's changed a lot in the last couple of years.

00;39;40 - 00;39;52

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** You have lived in Orlando and have been intimately involved in its business activities. So now this question just how more broadly has Orlando changed since you've been here?

00;39;52 - 00;42;02

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** I don't know if it has changed a lot, or I've learned about it more because you constantly learn some new things. I participated in Fusion Fest in Orlando. I was probably the first Ukrainian participating in it that I know. And you learn that it's a very multicultural place. There is a lot of different countries represented all over, and I've met a lot of people from all different cultures. We've been to Greek Church, we've been to some things that Vietnamese people organize, we've been to many different cultures. And we meet like even at our festival, we meet people from all sorts of different cultures. That's another thing. Just going back to something. I've had an idea, and I wasn't able to implement it, maybe next time we'd like to bring a few participants from other cultures into our festival. We'd like to be a more versatile and more inviting. So yeah, and that's what I've learned about Orlando a lot. That is so many different sides to it. And Orlando is probably—even though state is very Republican and very kind of all the time...I don't know how to word it even—but you understand that it's kind of a little one sided. But Orlando actually is more of a Democratic city. And you see more cultural differences there. It's more colorful than the rest of the state, I would say. And I like it about it. There's many different—it's a lot of acceptance in there, many different cultures, many different people, many different sides to everything. And I love it about it.

00;42;02 - 00;42;07

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** From your perspective, what challenges does Orlando face today?

00;42;07 - 00;42;52

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Today. I just hope that we can stay that way, that versatile, that accepting. I hope that—because as a fact I have some friends that left the country. I have friends here from Orlando that moved to Europe, that said they kind of wanted to stay away for at least four years or so and then see what happens. So I'd like to see Orlando to stay true to what it really is, what it has been for me and stay democratic, stay open, stay accepting for all cultures and all kinds of people.

00;42;52 - 00;43;00

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** In what ways do you think Orlando will change in the next 25 years?

00;43;00 - 00;43;35

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** I think it will get more beautiful. I think it will get even more culturally rich. I see more and more people from all sorts of countries moving into here. So from being one of the cities in Florida with all the retired people, I think it will change more and more to being a vibrant, multicultural city that we kind of enjoy more and more here. And I think it will go more that way.

00:43:35 - 00:43:50

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely. In what ways has your Ukrainian heritage influenced your perspective on life generally? But living in the United States/Orlando specifically.

00:43:50:21 - 00:43:51

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** Say it again.

00:43:51 - 00:44:00

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** In what ways has your Ukrainian heritage influenced your perspective on life in general, but also living here in Orlando?

00:44:00 - 00:45:06

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** I don't even know if my—I'd like to think that my Ukrainian heritage has influence on everything I do and shows in everything I do. I think it's, you know, the way we see the world, the way we see people around us, the way we act on things, it all has, it all comes from our upbringing, from our heritage, from what we were taught when we were young and so on. It all has its roots back in our heritage. And I'd like to think that my upbringing and all my life experiences and all that together makes some impact here on the life in Central Florida and in Orlando.

00:45:06 - 00:45:16

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Lastly, if someone is listening to this recording 50 or 100 years from now, what would you want them to know about your culture and the state of Florida?

00:45:16 - 00:46:26

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** I'd like them to know that the really enjoyed being here in this great state of Florida, and they enjoyed having this chance that, you know, openly expressed all our beliefs and all our cultural upbringings and everything that we brought with us here and having a chance to have all this cultural blossoms here and being open about it, not being prosecuted in any way whatsoever. It's a blessing. And I'd like people to know that and make it even more open and more pronounced as multicultural city and state. I'd like them to know that it's worse to fight for what we believe in and for freedom and for our future. And we do what we can to preserve all those values for those who will come after us.

00:46:26 - 00:46:35

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely. Thank you for taking some time out of your busy day Vasy!—so very busy day. I really appreciate this. Thank you.

00:46:35 - 00:46:38

**VASYL BOICHOOK:** I got called sitting here. I need to get moving.

