

The Zabiks and Medrex Ltd

Alexander and Fumiko Zabik purchased 13 acres at the southeast sector of the Payne land west of route 9W. They lived there and installed Medrex Ltd in the original chicken farm buildings. Many Marist Brothers are familiar with Irish and Italian immigration patterns and success stories. Alex Zabik's story reminds us that immigrants came from all countries. We are all cut from the same cloth.

Alex Zabik was born August 1928 in Dearborn, Michigan, the son of two Hungarian immigrants. He has one younger brother who was active in real estate and now lives in Florida.

Both Alex' parents were from Hungary, but they emigrated separately. His father grew up in a small village. As a going away present, the people gave him a new pair of shoes. Not wanting to wear them out before he arrived at the New World, his father walked barefoot from Hungary to Lisbon, Portugal! The Portugese fished commercially on the Grand Banks just east of Boston, and there is a large Portugese community in Beantown, but we are not sure if Alex' father arrived in the USA or Canada. He soon moved to Canada, working on farms. Eventually he arrived at Windsor, Ontario, near Detroit, where he got work as a fireman for Ford Motor Company. He worked in the Ford Railroad roundhouse and also learned welding. His welding skills obtained him a position in Henry Ford's experimental laboratory, (where Alex met [Henry Ford](#) in 1938).

Alex' mother was the daughter of a Hungarian man who operated a business in Dearborn. The couple met in Michigan and were married there.

Like his father, Alex loved to tinker with things. He attended Eastern Michigan University for two years so he could apply for Aviation Cadet school, but funding was very limited after World War II. A recruiter suggested he enlist, as those selected from among enlisted men received priority for Aviation Cadet training. After enlisting, he was selected for cadet training. Of 130 in his class, only 28 were graduated, and of those only 19 actually got pilots' wings.

Alex moved on to navigator class at Elgin AFB, after which he spent twelve years in active duty with the Military Air Transport, flying in B29s and C124s. His major responsibility was maintenance of the radio equipment on these planes. Much of this time was spent in Japan, where he met his future wife, Fumiko.

In all he spent 22 years in the service, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In 1963 Alex was assigned to Stewart Airbase in Newburgh, New York to the block house building which was the east coast center for air defense. This was a four-story concrete building with no windows; it directed scrambles to check out any unidentified movements. The blockhouse directed fighter planes until the planes' own radar could track the object. In some cases the object appeared on Stewart and then the plane's radar, then disappeared. Were these UFOs??

Alex also did tours in Vietnam in 1965-1966 and again in 1968-1969. He was assigned to a base near 3rd Marine Division headquarters along the DMZ, where Marine base and Alex' group were subject to long range shelling by North Vietnamese from behind the DMZ.

Later he was assigned to the Netherlands for work for NATO. The headquarters for his operations there were in a coal mine!

He mustered out of the service in 1970.

Since 1963 his family lived in Vails Gate, near Newburgh. Alex started a company called FairFix, which was very successful in doing jobs too small for most contractors. He spent six months making additions to his Vails Gate house and bought the acreage and farm superintendents' house on the Payne property west of route 9-W from Heilriegel, intending to make this his retirement home.

One FairFix client was Steve Fisher, who worked for a microfilming company in Central Valley. The company had been acquired and was being relocated to Westerly, Rhode Island. Steve rightly judged that many of the microfilming company's hospital clients would be unhappy to store their medical records outside New York State. Besides, Steve did not want to relocate to Rhode Island.

So Steve and Alex began a business called Medrex Ltd. Steve handled the sales end, Alex the manufacturing and financial matters. Alex' wife Fumiko suggested they use the chicken coop area behind the Zabik house as the first plant. The coop had been built in the Payne era, and was constructed of steel and poured concrete. One could drive a Sherman tank over the floor! Alex made the required renovations, and Medrex operated out of Payne's chicken coop. It employed an average of 55 people, with a maximum of 106. The partners started a second operation in Gloversville, New York in 1990 which employed 42 persons. They closed the second operation in 1994 when labor got scarce in that part of the state.

The Medrex operation has gradually converted from microfilming to digitizing. This meant that Alex had to bring himself up to speed in the dot.com world. The operation outgrew the chicken coop, and is now located in a much larger facility in Port Ewen, New York (near Kingston). Alex retired from the operations phase of Medrex, although he remains a part owner.

The Zabik marriage ended in divorce in 1985. To effect a fair settlement, the couple sold the house and grounds to Andre Dionne, an executive for ELCO, an electric boat company located in Highland, New York. The Dionne family continues to live there.

Fumiko Zabik lives in Ulster County, and Alex lives on River Road. He is active in the group working to preserve the Esopus Meadows Lighthouse, which is situated mid-river opposite his present house.

The Zabiks had two daughters and one son. Florence is a graphics designer and graduate of Parsons. She won the Overland Design Award for her work for the New York City Ballet.

Ruby Theresa lives in Cedar Grove, New Jersey. Her first child is the second violinist for the Hartford symphony and writes theater reviews for a Hartford paper. Her second child was born disabled, and Ruby takes devoted care of him at home.

Their son, Alexander Zabik, is with Black Rock Equities, lives in Cos Cob CT, and deals with real estate investment firms and banks.

Zabik meets Henry Ford.

The following is an excerpt from an e-mail dated February 9, 2002 from Alex Zabik to his niece, who was doing a piece on Henry Ford.

"My big, unforgettable "Ford" adventure was in 1938 (I was 10) when I stayed out of school one morning and walked the 3 miles with my Dad from Gregory St. to the Ford Experimental Labs where Dad worked. He wanted me to meet Henry Ford and I remember it was fall and I wore a tie and knickers. The Labs were located directly north of and adjacent to the Greenfield Village Museum. Years later I found out that they were Henry Ford's private shops where he had gathered several hundred of the best skilled men in every trade and craft from his empire. Dad was an Experimental Welder for the remainder of his 43 years with the company. Henry Ford never stopped being a tinkerer and inventor -and it was in the Labs that his personal "projects" were brought to reality...or scrap.

"He knew most of the men there by name and it was his practice to come around every once in a while to chat with them and see how his ideas were working out. Don't ask me how Dad knew he was coming that day. .

" I sat quietly in a corner while Dad went about his job. Men would wander in, wonder who I was, and Dad would simply glance my way and acknowledge me as his son. No fancy introductions and I was glad. I remember loud, jolting noises and acrid smells. Just before lunch, Mr. Ford came in with a couple other "suit types" , shook Dad's hand and asked who the young man was. Dad motioned for me to come over and , as he shook my hand, asked if I helped my Dad at home. I don't remember the details except saying, "Yes sir." Then they all talked with Dad for a minute or two, looked at something on his bench and left. Dad took me to the door, and told me to go home. I guess Mom called the school because next day the teacher knew where I had been and I had to tell the class about it. Remember, Ford lived in Dearborn and it was a Ford town through and through. Your Mom must have been about 14 then. I didn't think much about that day for years. But, as time went on, it has come to mean a lot to me. Dad and I never talked about it -which probably means I didn't screw up. Maybe it meant a lot to him, too."

Sources: Interview with Alex Zabik March 13, 2002
Information from deeds on file
Photos courtesy Alex Zabik

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