

## Andy Warhol Biography - Famous Slovak in America

Gabriela Murza

Slovak Garden Scholarship Contestant

Once in a while great people who pass through this lifetime abruptly change our life. These people make us evaluate our lives as well as the life we live. From Gandhi to Martin Luther King Jr., they have paved the way for others who have come later or who have yet to establish their presence. One such person is Andy Warhol. He did not touch the world with his words, but instead, with his paintbrush. His Slovakian background had influenced his work and at the same time he had touched the people that came into contact with him.

Andrew Warhola was born August 6, 1928 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Because he was born at home, the exact date of his birth is unknown. It wasn't on record until 1945, when his mother had to give a signed affidavit of the date so that he could attend college. During his interviews, he always changed the date; he said, "I prefer to remain a mystery."

His parents, Ondrej Warhola and Julia Zavacky, were Slovak immigrants. They came from farming families in Midova, which is in the Prešov region of Northeast Slovakia. They married in 1909, both at a young age. Three years later, Ondrej left Julia to pursue work in America. He met his older brother, Joseph, in Pennsylvania, where they worked in the coalmines. Ondrej sent for Julia, but the postwar confusion delayed the plans. In 1921, Julia finally arrived.

They had three children within six years - Paul, John, and Andrew. Andrew was the youngest and the smallest of the three. When Andy was six, he developed chorea, a nervous disorder with shaking of the feet and hands. Therefore, he was kept out of school for a while. His mother was always by his side, coloring, cutting pictures out of magazines, and listening to the radio with him. Every time he finished coloring a page in his book, his mom gave him a Hershey bar. At home, everybody spoke mostly Slovak. Andy was an American, but in his house, he was as Slovak as his parents.

Andy's father died when Andy was fourteen years old. On his deathbed, Ondrej told his oldest son, Paul, to look out for Andy. Ondrej left Andy enough money to attend Art College, and his

family made sure Andy went. He attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology, but was dropped his freshman year. He was admitted in his sophomore year due to demand from his teachers. During Andy's senior year, his painting was rejected at an art show because it was too controversial. Andy was taken in by the Glamour and the fame of the other artists, and so made that his goal - to become rich and famous.

Andy graduated from college in 1949 and soon moved to New York City. After trying many times to get his work published, he got his first break in "Glamour" magazine in August 1949. His latest name was misspelled in the magazine. But because he liked the impromptedness of accidents, he adopted the new spelling. From then on he became known as Andy Warhol. Now Andy was ready to take on the world.

In college, Andy developed his own style of painting. But now that he was a professional artist, he had to create a new style. In 1960 he painted comics for store displays. But every artist was doing this and Andy wanted to be original. He found the style that he would later be known for throughout his life. Andy liked to make his art mechanical and repetitive. His friend told him to paint things that people saw everyday. So in 1962, he developed his own style - silk-screening. Using this new technique, he painted Campbell Soup cans, celebrities such as Elvis, Lenin, Marilyn Monroe, and Wayne Gretsky, and self-portraits. In his later years, he painted Absolut Vodka, his mother, Julia, the Russian communist flag and animals such as turtles and cows. Silk screening was a delicate process and accidents occurred, but Andy liked the spontaneity of accidents, which he incorporated into his art.

Along with Andy's creative mind, his look was also very original. When Andy was young he made himself look old, and when he was old, he made himself look young. Andy kept up with the latest fashions, but would turn it into his own style by mixing clothes or making his tie crooked. He bought jewelry before it was seen everywhere. When the Rolex watch came out, he bought every style and wore it in public. He always tried to make a statement, usually about not looking perfect. His hairstyle was also original. In 1957, he started wearing wigs. His first wig was spray painted silver because his studio was also silver. Later, he wore blond wigs. They looked outrageous because the hair stuck out everywhere. Andy looked like he was turned upside down and his hair never recovered.

Andy's creative outlet was his studio. The studio used to be a factory, and thus was named The Factory. His life was in The Factory; it consisted of 24-hour parties with celebrities and sometimes personal art shows. When Andy didn't paint, he made silent films such as "Sleep," "Eat," and "Empire." Later, he made films which actually had actors in them.

Andy adopted the Eastern European work ethic; work all day, seven days a week. Painting was his job and he didn't waste time doing it. He would work through the whole day, sometimes on Christmas Eve. Andy respected anyone who did their job, whatever it was. He knew that he had a gift, he also knew that he could have been anything else if painting didn't work out for him. But it did. In fact, he became so busy at times that he needed assistants to help him. After a while, they too adopted his work ethic; it became contagious. In his free time (whatever free time he had) Andy went to art galleries. He liked other art, but not something that had been done a million times before. He didn't mind, as long as the artists incorporated their own ideas into their pieces.

Andy was recognized wherever he went. He made friends as he went along. Andy cared more about others than himself. This flaw landed him in the hospital, which led to his inevitable death.

People asked for his autograph or picture wherever he went. He didn't like signing so many autographs; but did it anyway because he felt he had a responsibility to his public. He liked to be around young people more than art collectors and serious grown-ups because they gave him energy and made him feel young. Andy especially liked kids, but whenever he met a dumb kid he would say "Oh God, not another one."

As much as Andy liked to be out in public, he also had a private life. Andy was a very religious person. As a child, he and his brothers were brought up in the Byzantine Catholic faith. When he was young, he went to church every Sunday, and throughout his life, he did the same. Church took a lot of pressure off of him. On the streets he was "Andy the Superstar," but in church he was Andrew Warhola.

Another aspect of his privacy was his declining health. Andy never talked about his own pain and suffering. He kept to himself when it came to those things.

Valerie Solanas, one of Andy's past actresses, shot him on June

3, 1968. He was shot three times. One of the bullets damaged virtually all his insides; it took him two months to heal. After the incident, he was a changed person. Andy became frightened and had bodyguards with him wherever he went. Also, he started painting just for money. In 1969 he founded Inter/VIEW magazine. Later the name was changed to Interview.

Andy feared hospitals and put off operations for as long as possible. But in February 1987 doctors warned him he could no longer postpone gallbladder surgery. He survived the operation, but passed away that same night.

Andrew Warhola died February 22, 1987 in the hospital. He suffered heart failure at 5:30 a.m. and was pronounced dead at 6:31 a.m.

When Andy was young, he wanted to be rich and famous. He finally got that chance. To commemorate his life's achievements, two museums were built. In Medzilaborce, Slovakia, where he is known as Andrijka Varcholu z Mikovej, the Múzeum Moderného Umenia Andy Warhola was built on June 30, 1991. The other was built in Pennsylvania, called The Andy Warhol Museum. Andy led a remarkable life. No one had touched the world as he had.