

John Rodman

Powers, Michigan

6.8.88

Start of Interview

(I) Ok good morning.

(J) Good morning.

(I) Do you mind if I call you John is that alright?

(J) Its ok.

(I) Ok could you tell us John a little about your background to start out? When were you born?

(J) When was I born? I was born December 26, 1894 day after Christmas.

(I) What town were you born in Yugoslavia?

(J) What town? Zaluka that's the name of the town Zaluka, December, Mary mother lived there too.

(I) How do you spell that?

(M) Zaluka.

(I) What's that closed to what larger city?

(M) Karlovac, Karlovac is the county seat.

(J) Or Zagreb. Zagreb be the capital of Yugoslavia.

(M) That be a couple hours drive.

(I) What was it like, do you remember growing up in the village?

(J) Poor life.

(I) What did your family do for a living?

(J) I lived on a farm, that's what they do. My dad was back and forth it was three times here in the United States last time he went back 1918.

(M) 1918 was when the war started.

(I) Where did he, what did he do or where did he go when he came to the United States?

(J) Well it was with the reform.

(M) Here he worked in the lumber factory.

(J) Who me?

(M) No no your dad. Your dad worked here.

(J) Ohh he was lumber yard.

(I) In Hermansville?

(M) Hermansville or Escanaba?

(J) Escanaba I went to when I come from Europe, I went to Escanaba because that's where my dad was I was there only there, not too long. Oh I'd say eleven months then I didn't, I was old enough to hold a job. Then he quit his job and come to Hermansville.

(I) Hermansville?

(J) He got a job but not me I was still waiting for one to get. When I got it I didn't make much money. 10 cents an hour!

(M) And ten hours a day.

(J) Yes ten hours a day.

(M) That was what my dad too.

(J) Literally a different job payer, I got a little bit more money.

(I) What did you do at Hermansville?

(J) That was a flooring manufactory. And I work in the flooring mill.

(M) In the shipping department.

(J) Yeah shipping department later. Three four different jobs. Then shipping department company went up, belly up, no more job. I got a job working for somebody else there was a Flint Anderson.

(M) That would have --- after he was too Wisconsin Line Lumber Company then this man came from Chicago and he manufactory uh piece that goes into the shower. They called it a donut. It was a plywood donut. And he worked there and did very well working for that man.

(I) What did you think of life in the United States when you came over?

(J) Well I was kind of lonesome at first you know? But as stay here along I got used to it. I wouldn't want to go back. My dad went back to Europe he wanted me to go along with him. I was only maybe about six, seven years and that's what I promised my mother that in the short time I come back home is see her but I never did. That's one mistake.

(M) And you are you were a musician you played in...

(J) Oh yeah I was playing.

(M) For weddings and stuff. Croatia what they call it tambura.

(J) I learned how to play something else.

(M) Violin.

(J) Guitar and violin a little bit. And big Bass but everybody I was playing with, they all dead. Im alone.

(M) You're alone yeah. But you were kept busy going to weddings and doing this. Every weekend they'd go to Escanaba and play.

(I) How did you find coming here and finding a group of Croatians?

(J) My dad was in Escanaba there was a whole bunch of Croatians there.

(M) That you'd play with...

(J) I come there and like I say no more job we move to Hermansville.

(I) What did you do in Escanaba? What kind of work did you do?

(J) Flooring factory too. Just like in Hermansville.

(M) And then when you went to Youngstown you worked in the steel mill.

(J) Oh yeah I went to Youngstown, Ohio but I didn't like it, I come back. God that was a rough town I'll tell you that. Lot of killings that's what I say no place for me.

(I) So you enjoyed the life in Hermansville?

(J) Oh yeah have to. That's where I got married and went up and meet my wife.

(M) I sent him that picture.

(J) It's a picture that 1963. We were married 63 years when she died. If she was only living only died in May and we got married in July 28, July 28th 1926 and that's her. She's a French nationality.

(M) He got away from tradition, you have to marry within your nationality but he broke the tradition.

(J) I got married in Hermansville.

(I) How did you find learning the English language?

(J) Hhaha I don't know.

(M) Didn't you go to night school a little bit?

(J) Yeah but not too long.

(M) They had night classes for the foreigners.

(J) Night school, a bunch of us. I didn't learn too much.

(M) At the high school...

(J) Most I learned after I got married. She could talk Croatian or the other way but after while she was talking Croatian like Mary.

(M) Yeah she learned very good. Thankfully she learned Croatian. She learned Croatian and he learned English.

(J) She was a wonderful cook.

(M) Yeah yeah.

(J) Had Croatian dish.

(I) What kind of foods did you eat? What kind of Croatian foods did you eat?

(J) Oh I don't know. All kinds.

(M) The feast that feast we got Croatian mud bread. [Croatian word] is popular...

(J) She used to make her Rolly Poll they call it.

(M) In English you call it Rolly Polly yeah.

(J) You roll it on the table and whatever you put in.

(M) Walnuts you can make it out of apples.

(J) They call it in Croatia, they call it Polly Pizza.

(I) Any, how about was there Sarma?

(J) Sarma mmhmm.

(M) See he knows a lot Serbian girls so he knows about Sarma.

(J) Gosh she made it many time. It was good too.

(I) How about did you eat lamb? A lot of lamb?

(M) Roast lamb out on the spit.

(J) Roast lamb? I got it when I got married! I bought the lamb and a special man do that. Roasted chicken, the lamb and what you call it?

(M) You made sausage they raised their own pork. They made the smoked sausage from the pork.

(J) Smoked sausage I used to raise couple pigs you know and all that before you kill them I have somebody put the smoke house in and I make sausages and he smoke it for me. That was real never long.

(I) Do you remember what you put in the sausage? What ingredients?

(J) You cut it her up and leave it soak for about a week or so in a little vinegar.

(M) And garlic.

(J) Yeah.

(I) And then what spices would you put in it?

(M) Salt and pepper.

(J) Yeah that's all.

(I) That's it? Oh.

(M) And then they heat up a potato or cheese dumpling.

(J) Oh yeah!

(I) What was that called

(M) In Croatian? Knedles? I think this I got the Croatian cook book so I know the full foreign ways but I don't know the term in my head, then they make similar to Italians the Polenta we called them [Croatian word]

(J) Polenta that's Italian.

(M) But we made it anyway yeah but not as common.

(J) We used to have them when we I was a kid if nothing else you get a heated up Polenta

(I) This was in Croatia?

(M) His mother

(J) Yeah.

(M) Then you made the bulls of wine.

(J) Oh yeah. Barrel wine.

(I) How much wine did you make for any?

(J) Oh about one barrel that's 50 gallon.

(I) 50 gallons?

(J) Yeah. At that time when the grape the California grape was cheap you know, they used to somebody ordered a whole car load you go and I go and the people who got to the carload come buy so much. After while the grape went up we didn't make anymore.

(I) When was the last time you made it do you remember?

(J) Oh 1942 I think. 1942 43' something else.

(I) Where would you make the wine?

(J) Oh where I was living.

(I) Down in the basement?

(M) Shed...

(J) I didn't have no basement I wood house made off of the ground, that's where I had a lot of food stored there in a... I had a big hard barrels all kinds of things I grow cabbage, rutabaga, even pumpkin. Pumpkin you will use for cook the pigs. I used to buy couple pigs you know in the spring and I feed them all summer long and later in the fall you got to work for all wimp hang it in our shed. No frigerator.

(I) Now did you smoke all the meat or?

(J) Some of it some of it

(I) How would you store the pork then?

(J) Pork?

(M) In the barrel.

(J) No I hang them up!

(M) Oh you hung it up.

(J) In a shed cold room with froze. But that's it.

(I) Did you speak, did you continue to speak Croatian?

(J) Oh yeah I did yeah until I pick up a little bit English.

(I) But I mean afterwards after you learned English? Did you continue to speak it? Did the people speak it in Hermansvill?

(J) Not much. The old people went back to Europe they used to speak Croatian. The young people born here they didn't know how to speak. Very little. Like her.

(M) I learned.

(J) She learned from her mother because her mother never speak English and she had to go with her mother.

(I) I see.

(M) And your board by my mother for a while too.

(J) People used to have boarder ten days you know? Everybody wasn't married so you come from Europe and your board there and you pay so much a month.

(I) Do you remember how much you pay?

(J) Ten, eleven dollars a months. That was the most.

(I) And what would you get for that? Would you get food?

(J) You get food? You had a board ladies who wash your clothes. I didn't know that.

(M) And your room.

(J) I only pay so much the ladies used to charge a dollar and a quarter to wash your clothes a month. I mean yeah a month.

(I) Now are you still a member of the Croatian?

(M) Yeah he is a 76 year member.

(I) Oh my lord!

(J) Member of the Croatian what?

(M) Lodge are you still a member. 1912 you joined.

(J) Yeah I joined the lodge 1912 I still in it but I don't pay no more.

(M) For free.

(I) Sort a an honorary member?

(M) Held office up until last year.

(J) She can tell you because she is a secretary at the lodge today.

(M) And you used to go to meetings one Sunday a month at the Legion Hall.

(I) What were, did you the Croatians in the community maintain certain special holidays?

(J) Oh yeah.

(I) During the year. Could you name some of them?

(J) [laughs] I don't know.

(M) Well like your Easter.

(J) Her dad was a president. I was a president of the lodge.

(M) And you had the social there at the hall.

(J) Once in a while social just like any other lodge.

(I) How long did they keep playing at these socials? How long did they keep playing, how long did they have their tambura orchestra?

(M) Up until the younger generation learned to play. He played with the original Kobasic Orchestra the grand...

(J) They got the Kobasic they a big story in Escanaba. These nephews to play his uncle used to play. And me and two more. But they all dead. Its only youngsters there. They'er all out. I own Kobasic. He still go out and play but he used to have a big old orchestra no more.

(I) How long did that last?

(J) Oh I don't know.

(M) Up until the war. Now he resumes...

(J) He got a small because they didn't know very well. Somebody tell me he plays someplace from here I guess, the guys who were dancing they tell me that I will play there, and I don't know five piece six piece orchestra and his wife used to sing for him you know? When she was single. I mean with his orchestra. He still does now. Nice man, nice man, really.

(I) Did you ever do any hunting?

(J) Never.

(I) And go out in?

(J) Never never gone in the house with my wife. No never.

(I) Did any of the Croatian people go out and hunt for food?

(M) Mr. Kobasic did, but for sport. He was a hunter.

(J) Who john? I don't know.

(M) Yeah yes and Ivan went with him remember?

(I) So it wasn't a lot people who...

(M) No very very rare. Yeah it was very rare. No he didn't.

(J) I never hunted I don't care for it. Deer meat. Never. I can't see it. It's also here.

(M) We had one board that used to go partridge hunting I remember.

(J) Oh yeah. Just to kill the time.

(M) Yeah to pass the time yeah.

(I) See, were there any special religious holidays you said you celebrated Easter as a special day?

(J) Celebrate Easter, celebrate Christmas,

(M) And your Name Day. You...

(J) A Name Day used to be big thing for Croatians.

(M) St. John just as important as Christmas was in our house too.

(J) Name come from certain day. You celebrate it.

(M) You Name Day.

(I) So which...

(M) You celebrate it more than your birthday.

(I) So which day would you celebrate?

(M) St. Johns day.

(J) Yeah.

(M) That's two days after Christmas.

(J) Yeah right.

(M) Day after Christmas was St. Steven that was a holiday at our house my dad was Steven

(I) Oh I see. What kind of, what would you do in terms of celebrating? Would you have special food or what?

(M) Food and drink

(J) And drink [Laughs]

(I) Speaking of drinking did anybody make Schlivowitz?

(J) Schlivowitz? You know something I was in Europe not too long ago they bring me a Schlivowitz.

(I) Oh?

(J) A whole bottle

(M) We bought it there just a little lettuce. Just for a taste.

(J) Schlivowitz says on it. They bring me another here from come from Escanaba.

(M) There was only one or two in the neighborhood John that had the still to make the what you call moonshine.

(J) That was the moonshine business.

(M) I only saw one.

(J) I never drank it up.

(M) No no you never.

(I) Did during prohibition did people make moonshine and sell it?

(J) Oh yeah they did. They went to jail too. Some from Escanaba. Skroski? They went to Kansas City I guess. Jail for people like that, I don't know. The all dead now. Skroski old lady and Mary and Jonny was an undertaker. The son. He's dead. Croatian people. Pretty much cleaned up in Escanaba too just like Hermansvill there's no Croatian in Hermansvill. Me and her and how many more?

(3) And the other Rodnen family that's all. And aunt Marry and Frank.

(J) Steve Mashaw, Tony... Tony's sister...

(M) And Steven Mashaw and Marry and Frank.

(M) His brother Hansel.

(J) I don't know if I die they are going to find the bottle and they say he die from the whiskey.

[They all laugh]

(J) Schlivowitz. I used to see the people when I go by when I went to school in Europe you know, there was naked boy, boy who peed outside. Pig pig just like that Schlivowitz on top like this.

(I) So did a lot of people do that then?

(J) Oh I don't know not too many.

(I) Not too many.

(J) And they go to school I didn't have much clothes. Most of the time you were bare foot when the snow was down you take your shoe off and run home.

(M) And the ladies went to the river to wash the clothes.

(J) Oh yeah. Everybody didn't have no water by the house at that time. They went to river and wash clothes. Winter time I had to take the robe and... my mother does it.

(I) So life was very difficult in Croatia? That's the reason you why your father left?

(J) That's the reason why I didn't want to go with my father back home. Because you're lucky that he wrote a letter, sort of like a he didn't like it himself. I'm sorry I come home. I says I wrote back. I say you want to come back? I say, I send you 60 buck for tickets only. And my mother never moves here.

(I) Did she want to come her?

(J) Oh I don't know we didn't talk about that. Then like I say my father come home he like it himself. I saw want to come back, give -- money to her and him but he give me answer he say I'm too old to go back and work for company he was about 50 years old.

(M) But there when you were 40's or 50's you are old. You're very old.

(J) So that's the way it was, when he was living he had his own farm he was living until he was 83 years old I guess. My mother about 75. That old I. I have brother over here he died. He got married he died he from operation, he ulcer in stomach. But he was married, after he died I have to take over he in Iron Mountain he start to build a home the Ford come up to Iron Mountain everybody Russian. He died, he come to my place, I pay him I take to Menominee he was operated on for ulcer in his stomach. 15 days after he was operated on he died. He had a wife he had a little girl she's in Ohio now, just retire supposed to come here this summer, some day. That's my niece that all the relative I got. Ask a different fellow if there was if there was in

Youngstown, Pennsylvania cousin of mine his mother and my mother were sister. He was the only one left they all got old. They are all dead.

(I) Did a lot of people come from your village to the United States?

(J) Yes.

(I) And where did they go when they came here?

(J) Spread. You go here you go there. When you get to know all. You get off on a boat and then the place you go they give you package of food, figure that's supposed to last us along you got a passport, you got a shuttle, they know where you know where you go. The package cost me about one buck. I never even use it. New York, northwest Escanaba come fast. Yeah.

(I) How did you find when you came to the United States what did you think. Do you remember what it was like when you arrived in New York?

(J) I don't know that's pretty hard to answer.

(M) Were you scared did you feel scared? Or?

(J) No I wasn't scared. I didn't care. I was 50 years old

(M) You were brave. They were all brave to come here not knowing the language, not knowing where they were gonna..

(I) What time of the year did you arrive? What month did you arrive in the United States? Do you remember?

(M) What time of the year?

(J) May. May 17th when Escanaba.

(M) In the spring.

(J) 1910. That long time ago.

(I) What did you think of the winters here?

(J) Oh I didn't think very much about it.

(M) Similar. Weather is similar to it.

(I) Is it?

(J) In Europe it wasn't as cold like here.

(3) Not such a server cold, but snow some snow and the seasons.

(I) When you worked in the Mill, in the winter time did you have any special clothes? Heavy coats or anything?

(J) No well they had some heat in the area in flooring factory. But not too much.

(I) What did you think of, was the work good there? Was it hard work?

(J) Oh it wasn't hard work. But it was tough, it was tough for me because I couldn't speak English. The kids there are my size poking me. Hitting me all time. So I told one guy I told him you go see the boss with me and you will speak English. That was old man Serik [Spelled phonetically]. While he go tell him all about it yeah know kids hitting, me poking me. You tell the boys you going to do that again hear him same thing like you did before. For me to hit them back. But I couldn't you know before because I was afraid to get fired. Now.

(M) The foreigner was picked on. Him.

(I) Even by the other Croatians?

(M) No no by the other ethnic groups. The French, the German, the Italian.

(J) Mix.

(M) Mixture.

(J) All kinds of different nationality.

(I) So did you see was there a lot of prejudice towards you being there?

(J) Yeah! Yeah that's why wouldn't stand it no more. That's why I told the guy to explain to the boss. Boss say you tell those boys you hit him again.

(I) Did you hit them?

(J) I hit them so hard he was jumping on his leg. They call it crazy boy.

(M) He didn't do it no more.

(J) Everybody me do no more.

(I) So it was just the one person?

(J) There was more. Oh yeah! There was more. But only one was the worse one.

(I) So you took care of him then?

(M) But in your own nationality they helped each other, the ones that were here before taught the other one you know what you have to do here. To get along. They were very very united.

(I) When you left Escanaba and you got to Hermansville with the Croatians being there was it like being, almost like being in your village in the old country?

(J) It was something like that yeah I think.

(M) Felt a little bit like home.

(I) Yeah you were kind of insolated people spoke the language you had the culture and you can feel at ease in the community.

(M) And you had your own neighborhoods.

(J) Most of the Croatian people gathered together you know? Just like Italians all over in Hermansville.

(I) How did, no go on sorry.

(J) No go ahead.

(I) How did the Italians and the Croatians get along in Hermansville?

(J) Pretty well. Oh yeah. Italians boys married Croatian girls.

(M) Later on. Not in the beginning.

(J) You know something, I was the first man mix marriage with different nationality. Ask her.

(I) How did the Croatian, what did the Croatian people think of that?

(J) Oh some didn't like it! Think I should marry the Croatian girl. That's the way it mattered I didn't make no mistake.

(I) Did they cause any problems for you or anything?

(J) No.

(M) Not at that point. They just showed their disapproval but they...

(J) That's the way they were. Mary can tell you all about my life.

(I) Can you still speak Croatian today?

(J) Oh little bit. But not lots of it. She can speak Croatian more than I can.

(I) You just haven't spoken it in a long time?

(M) Doesn't mean...

(J) Well we talk together was English me and my wife.

(M) And when he don't want somebody to understand to what we talk about we talk we speak it. Sometimes to be funny.

(J) We used to go and visit different neighbors you know, more so when I got married we come home well they talk Croatian she could only understand French, we come home. How you say that? How you say that? You say something like that? What that mean? I have to explain. Little by little though she among Croatian people very well. how many was Marry? Number two we call it.

(M) Yeah about six families in apartment building.

(J) And she talk with them lots. Just come to her, she speak Croatian.

(I) But then she would listen to and speak it when you went to visit but you wouldn't speak it at home or would you?

(J) No no.

(I) Were there a lot of people in Hermansville, Escanaba that were from your village?

(J) Oh quite a few.

(I) Were they? So at least some of the kind of stuck together then.

(J) Oh yeah.

(M) And when I went to Europe on my trip he asked me to look up his best man, his best man went back to Croatia and married and stayed in Yugoslavia and he never kept in touch with him but he told me to look him up so when I got there I went to the village and I asked my aunt about this man. Oh she said he passed away five years ago but she said that his wife is still living by herself and down the road comes this lady she was looking for veterinarian.

(J) Was that Jole Herdanord [Spelled phonically]

(M) Herdanord [Spelled phonically] was the name. So she called the lady over and said this girl is through the United States and she was looking for your husband was your best man for a man to come look you up. And this lady was dress in all in the black, five years later she was still mourning, so we took her picture it's on a slide. So John could see the lady he married he never knew who his best man ever married. He married in New York and never came back.

(J) There were forced to go back to Europe.

(M) He was, yes.

(J) That's all he had was the wife, home they couldn't get her over here and have a nice life. Compared...

(M) Compared to there. And this lady told me she has a son who lives in Kanas City never took his mother here. You know still by herself. With a piece of land and few animals and kind of a hard existence.

(I) Like in Hermainsvill Escanaba were there, did many of the Croatians return to the old country?

(J) Not so many it seems to me.

(I) A few just a few just like that?

(J) They figure they make better life over here.

(M) There was another lodge member that went from Escanaba and he had saved up a considerable amount of money for that day and he went over there and he bought a land, he owned a little land barring there. But along came the war and he ended up with nothing. So then he came back he sorry after all those years. But he too married there and had his family but he

thought he was gonna, when they were kids they worked for this land barring went out there in the vineyards and worked so he though I'm going to be one of those, yeah know that was his, goals in life whatever and hadn't the war come along then it would have worked all the way around. He kept money here in the bank and they would send it to him once in a while so he always had enough money which they don't have you know they just don't have money to go buy something like that but he did. So he was no relation but same name.

(J) So group no relation they say group of us Rodmen, he lost spot, there's a four or five difference, Rodmen --- but no nothing to me.

(M) No relation.

(J) No relation just the same name

(I) Was that your name in the old country was it changed when you came to the United States? Rodmen?

(M) Just two letters changed.

(J) That's my original name.

(M) He spelled in foreign when he spelled in in foreign he spelled Radmen. In the United States you spell it RO. That's the only change.

(I) So when you were growing up then you were the subject of the Austrian empire.

(J) What's that?

(I) When you were growing up when you were a little boy in Croatian you were under the Austrians.

(M) Austrian rule.

(J) Yeah. I don't know they call it Franz Joseph. I don't know I understand all it. I didn't pay attention very much to the business because I was only kid.

(I) But you remember Franz Joseph?

(J) Oh yeah. Remember people talk. What was it that he was a communist?

(M) Teto.

(J) That's all I hear his name I never seen him I don't know.

(I) Ok good. Anything else you want to something I forgot or mentioned?

(M) Like I said I just had a few notes I found on foods and...

(I) What I mean to ask John. Anything I forgot? Would the two of you like to say something in Croatian?

(J) [Laughs] I don't want to go back to that.

(M) He doesn't like to use it.

(I) He doesn't?

(M) No no.

(I) Ok.

(J) I read more paper in English than I do in Croatian. We call it Croatian paper only weekend.

(M) Once a week I gave him a copy with the address of that.

(J) I got over here too I got one over there. Sometime I will go forward maybe I thought maybe find somebody don't want it forget all together. Croatian language. Sometime I get mulipeople some tell you can you been looking at them what you say? [Laughs]

(I) Ok well thank you for this interview. It's been very good you are looking very very well for your age.

(M) I should have brought you the picture.

End of Interview