

Marry and Anna Rodmen

Hermansville, Michigan

6.2.88

Start of Interview

(I) Good afternoon what I'd like you to do before we really get in to the interview is introduce yourself and give your names so we get a sound of your voice and then we will be able to connect the two as we listen to the interview.

(M) I'm Marry Rodmen.

(A) And I'm Anna Rodman.

(I) What we want to do today is to talk about your ethnic background which is Croatian, and what I'd like you to do is start out by telling me a little about your family if you could include names of your mother and father and where they were from Yugoslavia and sort of why they came to this area.

(M) Is that unknown?

(A) Well my parents Joseph and Anna became from Austria they came here in let's see well they were born in 1893 and we were 18 years old... and became my dad from a little town with the name of Zamka.

(I) Can you spell that?

(A) Zamka and my mother came from Melika she came from the town the bishop of --- was born

(I) And how do you spell that?

(A) Metlika. She came over in July and in November they were married and they lived in Hermansville ever since and they never went back home.

(I) Was there any reason why they left? Did they ever talk about why they left?

(A) Well they had friends over here and kept writing back and forth and somehow they got the money enough to buy their passport to come to America. Otherwise they wouldn't even be here.

(I) Now what did the family do in the old country? Do you know?

(A) Farm. All they did for a living was farm. A little piece of land and that was it. They grow their own wheat and take it to the mills and have it ground. They got their flour like that, it was hard. When they came here they thought they had everything.

(I) Now how did they... do you want to add anything Mary to that?

(M) No just that she just that she had how many girls were there Ann?

(A) In our house.

(M) In her family in her family.

(A) I cant remember. That was a big family too. My mother's family was a big family my father's had only had the one brother. Just two boys in the family.

(I) Now how did your father spell his name originally?

(A) Rodman.

(I) Not rad?

(A) Well you asked John, they spell his Radmen but my dad said it was Rodmen.

(I) What was your mother's maiden name?

(A) Nazay. My mother's maiden name Nazay.

(I) Now how did they get to Hermansville? What attracted them to Hermansville?

(A) Well it was all these friends that they had here you know.

(I) So they were getting letters from people in Hermansville telling them to come over?

(A) Yeah my mother always said that when she came over she came over with another lady. This women went on to Iron Mountain but when they got to New York she said that they were so glad when they saw the Statue of Liberty that they knew they were in America.

(I) Now were there, was there, what did they think of Hermansville when they arrived? Did they ever talk, your mother?

(A) Well sure it was wonderful compared to being in Austria! And then one after another one person send for another one then another one, it was just like home again you know?

(I) Did most people who were from this, who settled in Hermansville were they from the same area of Croatia?

(A) Um no. Majority yes but some of the no.

(I) And did they, once they were settled here did the Croatians live in a particular part of Hermansville?

(A) Mmhm.

(I)Where was that?

(A) Not too far from here.

(M) They were can I?

(I) Oh sure.

(M) Well there were three sections of people, of Croatians that lived in Hermansville. There was one section and they used to call them the Testhouse. Then there was another section that they

used to call Number Three. Then there was another section that they called Number Two. And we grew up, we were born and raised in the section that they call Number Three. Then there we moved to another section that they call Number Two. But never Testhouse was all Croatians and Number Two was all Croatians and Number Three and that's where we settled. And that was right around where the factory was remember Rose?

(A) Yup.

(I) Sort of to the south of Hermansville?

(M) That's right. And the Italians were up on the hill. So they were more or less lived there. By themselves and they sort of intermarried. Which is like the Italians years ago you have to marry an Italian or. So...

(A) If you weren't an Italian they wanted you to marry an Italian if you were Croatian well they prefer you marry a Croatian.

(I) Now was the, so what your saying was the Croatians all lived in these three communities. And the communities would they... I don't want to put words in your mouth but were they like, in terms of everybody knowing each other were they similar then to what they had in the old country? I mean they were living in a Croatian village. So even though they were in American and they didn't speak the language they...

(A) Got along anyway.

(M) Yes.

(I) Also sort of insulated from the outside culture.

(A) Even when we started school we couldn't speak English. We had a teacher that, knew just about our language. Mrs. Stiller?

(M) She said kids would pull her skirt when they had to go to the bathroom and she knew we had to go to the bathroom.

(A) We didn't know English.

(A) And now Mary is. Number two or number three that particularly mean these big boarding house is that what they call Two and Three?

(M) Boarding house that. They almost bought that condominium because it was right along that section. We all lived in sections.

(A) Now they speak of the condominium. I used to live in one! [Laughs]

(M) They were huge gorgeous by the lake. Where this other section was on 388 over that way. This Two and Three were on this side of the mill.

(I) So were these, you said these were like large buildings... partitioned up into apartments.

(A) Four and five apartments, four and five in this big building and we lived in the presidents building. It was the one upstairs and...

(M) we got pictures of it?

(I) Now originally were there like boarding houses for the single men?

(A) No the boarding with the relatives. The single men who came from the old country they lived with their relatives or someone that they knew. They lived with them.

(M) These houses were built by a –lumber company and the housings all the same and they were just I was going to say two by four with no insulation in the winter time you had to remember you could feel the frost coming in. That's how cruel they were made!

(I) Now were these similar to the houses that are around here now, the little houses?

(A) No I think these are better than the ones we were raised in. we lived out there and it was real poor. Real poor.

(I) So they named these various locations after the big boarding houses that were there.

(M) Yes.

(A) Mhm.

(I) Ok so this is kind of typical these other houses.

(M) Everybody there that lived in those houses they had raised chickens. Almost everybody had a cow there and they had pigs they raised. They had large gardens.

(A) Big families.

(M) Big families that besides the all had workers that worked in the factory at that time that came over. So worked hard.

(A) It was hard but everybody helped each other.

(M) And we were all happy

(A) One family had all the same.

(M) Like the Mckitinas [Spelled Phonically] the Machas [Spelled Phonically] the Bodeens [Spelled Phonically] the timaskis [Spelled Phonically] we were all the same. You know came from large families.

(A) Nobody had more than what you did they all helped each other.

(M) Yes.

(A) They worked...

(M) When we all lived with other we would have been about 13.

(I) Now the Croatians worked in the mill right? Did they work outside, inside did they have any specific jobs?

(M) Oh they did a number were outside mostly.

(I) And how many Croatians were finally in this community.

(M) Well at one time there – was over 300 Croatians more than the Italians!

(I) Now how did the two the Croatians and the Italians get along?

(M) I guess they got along more or less.

(A) Mhm. Didn't intermarry or anything.

(M) Yeah no but they got along.

(I) They tended to stay in their separate sections?

(A) More or less

(M) Yess mmhm

(I) Now did they, what did the Croatians people do for amusement and entertainment through the year like in the winter and summer and so on?

(M) They probably just what they did with their families to do anything else.

(A) Well they had a little band.

(M) John Rodmen belonged to and Mr. Blonde

(A) Yeah yeah. And they amuse themselves by playing you know, getting together and playing their instruments. I remember a little of that.

(I) Now you say instruments did they have any special instruments that they played?

(A) The violin.

(M) Yeah John played the violin. Ivan plays the bass is that bass?

(A) Yeah. His father played the bass.

(I) Now did they have one of the books there and other places they had a tamburitza?

(A) Yes.

(I) Did they have that here?

(A) Well while they were forming the older people they had a little orchestra like that. And the mandolin whatever that was I remember that.

(I) So did the people bring these instruments with them from the old country?

(A) Mmhm I think they did.

(I) And then they all get together in somebody's home and have a party?

(A) On a weekend.

(M) Mostly they perform at weddings.

(A) And weddings.

(I) And did they maintain the old Croatian dances?

(M) I think they did at the weddings and the wake you know. There was a bass at the wedding paid a dollar to the bride then you can dance with her father [Laughs] that was one of the traditions.

(A) How the ladies would cook, a couple days before the wedding right? Oh gosh.

(M) There was no refrigeration the only thing I remember years ago when we had the old ice house down by the pond I think on – on Friday morning this man would come through town with a chunk of ice they would buy a chunk of ice and they would put into a washtub and that's where we kept all our stuff along the washtub. To keep it cool.

(A) Yeah I remember that too.

(I) What kind of foods did the people eat?

(M) Well I think they ate a lot of picnic ham years ago that was usually a favorite with us picnic ham isn't because it was easy way to preserving it or it couldn't be kept longer. Of course we used to have sauerkraut. My folks raised the cabbage and then they made the sauerkraut used to have the barrels all winter long. Then they would make their, they had pork there in their homes and then they would make sausage they would smoke it, they had a smoke house, then they smoked their sausages then they would have that. But we always managed to have plenty of meat.

(A) Mmhm. Yeah we never worried. I can never see that we didn't have enough to eat, there was always enough to eat.

(M) Then we do have a sweet bread that we usually make at Christmas or over the holidays that they call Polly pizza. Its good too, we enjoy making it. Of course sweet breads, and then years ago around Easter time I remember, Ann we used to take the basket of sweet rolls and then ran over to the church and they used to bless it and we eat that on Easter Sunday. It was really simple because they had a lot of faiths. Roman Catholics

(I) Were there any other special foods that you ate? Did they have stuffed cabbage?

(M) You mean you are talking about Sarma?

(I) Yes.

(M) Yes we did.

(I) Were there any other foods like that? Traditional foods that the families ate?

(M) No we just ate a lot of sauerkraut cooked with ham and Kinney beans and the barley then we'd also make polenta like rolls. Remember making a lot of polenta?

(A) Cornmeal. When times were hard. Cornmeal to eat.

(M) But it was good.

(I) Now they eat with a kind of a stew or something?

(M) Well we could eat it that way or we kind of fried it. Browned it in butter eat it that way with syrup or whatever we had. Or with Polenta now we cook sauerkraut with it.

(I) Oh

(M) And lots of times when we used to have raise a pig then we would render our own fat. We would render our own fat years ago and the call it, what was left of that fat is what we called cracklings. And we used to make Rolly Polly out of cracklings we used to make cookie I remember. Remember when we used to make cookie and then she used to make cornmeal, the polenta, she even put crackles in the polenta anything to make a meal of it. It was good we enjoyed it. Wish we could have some right now. [Laughs]

(I) Now did the Croatians were there any special saints days or religious holidays that you celebrated?

(M) Oh my folks observed all the holidays. All the holidays

(A) And Names day too.

(M) Yeah they did.

(A) Like Saint Joseph or Saint Ann that was a big day.

(M) In those days you never, you were even allowed sometimes to sew anything on that day. What did my mother say Ann do you remember what she what she would say?

(A) No it was a holy day you were to...

(M) Yeah to do nothing that day.

(I) Now this was the whole family or just the persons whose name?

(A) When we were at home and my mother went to holidays we weren't allowed to do much of anything that day.

(I) This would be any holiday?

(A) Any Holy day. Holy day

(I) And including the Name Day the saints day

(M) Yes yes.

(I) Now is that celebrated?

(A) No this isn't celebrated you more or less of a quiet day I guess.

(I) But did you have a special meal?

(M) She would always remind us what day it would be. My folks even talked the day they died they always remember the days. What they was.

(I) What can you tell me about the Croatian lodge that was in Hermansville?

(M) Well I tell you I think you are going over to see Mary right? And Mary is and has been very active and she would tell you more about it as you go there.

(I) Ok ok.

(M) And there of course there aren't too many members left.

(I) How many, speaking of the community today, how many people of Croatian heritage are still living in Hermansville?

(M) How many are there Rose we tried to count them the other day? Not many. How many are there

(A) [Starts listing people]

(M) Harry and Barbra. Are there a dozen? Just above a dozen.

(I) Where did the people go? Were they any migrations out of here you know? Croatians were there a lot of people leave at a particular time or was it just the younger people leaving?

(M) What time was it Ann when the people went to Iron Mountain to work for Ford's?

(A) When Henry Ford came to Iron Mountain.

(M) 1918? Right after the war?

(A) 1924 was when he start.

(M) When Ford started. And then everybody knows that. And to move they moved. And those that couldn't afford to move stayed in town.

(I) So that was kind of the time of the big migration, a lot of Croatian people left?

(M) Yes that right.

(I) And how about the Croatians that live in north Escanaba? I guess Wells there's a community down there. Was that a different community or is that people from Hermansville that went down there?

(M) You know I bet they are different I think they settled over there in north Escanaba did they?

(A) Some did. They stayed they came to Escanaba, north Escanaba and they stayed there and they worked there in the mill for a while. Then they came to Hermansville and worked here a

while. And they went back to Escanaba. But somehow they always liked to come back to Hermansville to visit. You know? This is where their friends were.

(M) With the closing of the lumber company near 1943 then a lot of people had to go it was the end of the year for the.

(I) I see that be kind of the end of the community is pretty much 43' and then they scattered.

(A) Of course the war came on and the young people left. And never came back.

(M) They went to service and when they came back they went on to further their education and they never came back.

(I) Did this Croatian community did it maintain any connection with the people up in Tronic or the Croatians up in Calumet?

(M) Not that I know of. Ann do you know?

(I) Because you find as you look in the ethnic history of the Upper Peninsula quite a few Croatian communities around. Some of the some of them worked in...

(A) Some from here went to Ironwood.

(I) Ironwood?

(A) And then some from Ironwood came to Hermansville. When they knew more about Hermasville. They came back here.

(I) Now were these kind of people migrate back and forth given the economic situation when things were better in the lumber industry they would come here? When things got better in the mining industry they would go go to one of the mining communities?

(M) It seems that way doesn't it? It seems that way.

(A) That how they lost a lot in the mines and Ford.

(M) Ford took a lot of those yes.

(A) Then maybe have a few dollars and they were able to go when they first came here they had to stay.

(I) Ok that's interesting. Did have maybe one last thing. Are you aware of any Croatians for instants from this community or the area of ever moving out west to Montana, Colorado places out west?

(M) Yes we had a relative. My dad's brother. Uncle Peter he left Hermansville he went out to California and he worked at St. Vincent hospital out in California. He got a job.

(A) He was an orderly.

(M) Yes and orderly. And he never married but he sort of educated himself and that. He took a painting and this painting is right there.

(A) And that painting right up there too.

(M) Right there he did those painting. He did that. He was just a no education but he did well. He left Hermansville and he got to be orderly at St. Vincent hospital.

(I) And where was that?

(M) In California

(I) Yeah Los Angeles?

(M) Los Angeles, California yes.

(I) Were there any others that kind of did that, that went farther west?

(M) I think there were a lot of them who went out to Pennsylvania. Isn't that right Ann?

(A) Yeah from here they went to Pennsylvania

(M) Yeah in Pennsylvania and Youngstown, Ohio. Joe Blye [Spelled phonetically] he left there. Sure.

(A) Gary too.

(I) So there was a constant movement of people. Now not everybody went at the same time but there were people moving all around. Ok that's very interesting.

(M) Now we had, I had an older brother. Joseph. And he worked here for Mr. Perl. And later he managed the bowling alleys in Hermansville for years, in town before they got torn apart. He also started the first gold metal tournament in Hermansville it finished last year in March they celebrated 50 years and he had started it 50 years ago. He has passed on but it's been kept on by Frank which I think Frank you'll meet this afternoon. Yeah you'll meet Frank this afternoon. He was quite active in the town, and as Frank is today!. My brother Frank is really active. We are of the Catholic faith and we have a lot of faith in the Catholic faith.

(I) Now was there ever, there is never a Croatian Catholic church down?

(M) No.

(A) No.

(I) What did... did they have Croatian speaking priest?

(M) Every once in a while they would have a priest come here yes. My folks at that time when they were married they lived over here at what they used to call Number Two and they were married in November, November the 24th and my mother said her and my father walked to church to get married. At that time. My folks lived here of course my folks died now three years ago and they were 91 years old.

(I) Ohh.

(M) And had they lived they would have been married 74 years.

(I) Oh my lord.

(M) Yes you can figure how many meals we serve at Christmas and Thanksgiving and Easter. How many gatherings we got together. Yes yes.

(A) Those were the days.

(M) And Rose was a youth minster of our church and she used to bring up communion every month. My dad, they waited for her, for Rose to come. We really enjoyed having Rose. And they were both alert. Weren't they Rose?

(A) Sure were.

(I) Now how many years now they have passed?

(M) They went just three years ago. Yes. I wish she was here to tell you more about Hermansville.

(I) I should have done that. I was down here years, when they were still alive, if it weren't for three years ago I wasn't doing interviews but...

(A) I told John Rodmen really...

(M) It be wonderful to go over there and see John.

(I) Ok I'll have to, because he is up there in years too.

(M) He's 90. He's going to 93.

(I) Now he how is he related to you?

(M) No relation at all. My dad just had one brother and that brother never married.

(I) He was the one who went to St. Vincent?

(M) California yes yes.

(I) Ok that pretty much does it.

(M) But according to that lodge Mary will tell you when they started and how many members they had because her father was an officer and then Mary lived at home with her folks she's the officer now. She's a treasurer or whatever. And I think everybody during that time belonged. I noticed last year I received a pin I was in there 50 years.

(A) Yeah she got a pin.

(M) Yes 50 years. And we do make Rolly Polly and we do a lot of cooking like we used to years ago. All seem to enjoy it. Some of the younger kids don't care for it but it's to be understood.

(I) Yeah that's good that you keep up your heritage.

(A) This is like Grand Central Station sometimes.

(M) Yes that's right. We have been helped our mothers worked so hard, made their own bread, scrubbed the floors. How hard they washed clothes and hanging them outdoors in the winter time. Bringing in that stiff underwear. Right hang over the chairs. There was no place. We lived in such close quarters right?

(A) Oh man.

(M) Tell that to the children today and they won't believe it.

(I) So you had 13 children the 13 children in this large family lived in one of these small houses?

(A) I think not all the time because we moved into this house.

(M) He said it was 45 years when it began.

(A) 45 years we have been in this house. And this is where lots of...

(M) This is one of those the first old house that was built in Hermansville right Rose?

(A) One of the early ones.

(M) One of the early homes.

(I) Now who originally lived in this?

(A) Did JH used to?

(I) Oh.

(A) I think Mr Radford did didn't he Rose? Was that in the book Mr. Radford?

(M) I believe too it was big houses for them.

(I) So this was not a home that an immigrant worker would live in?

(M) No.

(A) Not at all. No. we have been here now just 45 years we were in here after they start tearing down those places so came from Menominee remember Rose?

(M) They tore down all these villa and then everybody that lived in one of these places had to find a place to come to town till it... like the people across the street. They were over. Mary -- - who you will meet later on, she lived next door to our house then John lived down the street. All those that were left had to there weren't many left in Hermansville at that time.

(A) No.

(I) Now is the little Croatian settlement the three parts of it gone. There's nothing?

(M) Well there isn't that settlement Testhouse that's all a new settlement again now people, the younger generation came in and bought those home that were remodeled there are no Croatians living out there. And the other Number Two and Number Three are, there is nothing there either.

(I) Ok I think that does it.

(M) I'm sure as you go over to Mary you will enjoy listening to her because Mary has been to Europe and she has visited all these little countries.

(I) And sort of the hometown?

(M) Yes and she had slides too that we seen. I don't know if she has them now.

(I) Ok well thank you.

(M) She can more or less, she can really talk it she can write it, write the language she really is... you will enjoy talking to her.

(I) Do you still speak?

(M) Oh sure.

(A) We talk amongst yes. We can speak on foreign language [Laughs] we'd have to go to school for that.

(M) Oh dear.

(I) Ok good.

End of Interview