

Interview with Marjorie Roth

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Interview # 1: September 27, 2012

Interviewer: Carol Esarey

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Esarey: This is Carol Esarey, volunteer interviewer with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. The date today is September 27th, 2012. The name of the person being interviewed today is Marjorie Roth. We are seated in her kitchen in Springfield, Illinois. This interview is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's Immigrant Stories. So, what we're going to be doing this morning now, is we're really just start at the beginning and I'm going to ask you to go through some of the information that we have already been through when we did the preparation for our first interview. I would like you to please go through again if you wouldn't mind, the name of your mother, your father, siblings as best you can and when they're born, just a few of those basic questions. If you could tell me that, your mother's name.

Roth: My mother's name was Marija Orazem.

Esarey: Go ahead.

Roth: She was born in 1900, August the 5th. My father's name was Blass Strukel and he was born in 1902.

Esarey: And where were they born?

Roth: In Kranjska, Yugoslavia.

- Esarey: And what happened when they were young? I mean how did they live, what was going on at that time in Yugoslavia?
- Roth: My mother: of course they didn't work there at that time. She grew up in—she graduated from eighth grade and then after that her mother farmed her out to help on the farms around there. But my dad came from a small farm and that was it.
- Esarey: It sounds like from some of the information I was reading that many, many of the people were farmers; that many of the people in Yugoslavia were farmers. Is that correct?
- Roth: Yes.
- Esarey: Tell me about your father's family and the siblings in their family and how did that structure work.
- Roth: The best I can recall or have heard from my parents is there were actually about eight or nine boys in that family. Most of them died; there was five left when my father was growing up. They had one girl, the very last, but she died at birth and in them days it was common for that type of living.
- Esarey: Yeah, children were born at home.
- Roth: Yes.
- Esarey: Your mother had siblings?
- Roth: She had two brothers and two sisters. She was the middle child and they were a very close knit family, unusually close knit family.
- Esarey: Describe what that meant.
- Roth: Well, they all had voices and sang beautifully together and had that special care about each other.
- Esarey: How did that affect you? Did you get to know some of your...
- Roth: Yes.
- Esarey: ...relatives would be?
- Roth: Yes, yes we lived in the little cottage that we lived in; my uncle was on one side of the cottage; that was his part and he was a tailor. He was just like a father image to us because my father came to this country already at that time.
- Esarey: Which we will go into a little bit more because I know you were a very young child when your father left and moved. Tell me a little about your mother. Describe her to me as best you can. She sounds like an interesting person.

- Roth: She was a very timid, sweet girl, woman, that was shy but I don't know just exactly how to describe her. She was very warm.
- Esarey: How did everyone learn to be musicians and where did that come from, being musical, how did that evolve?
- Roth: My grandmother was very good, she had a beautiful voice and she really believed in that singing; they all just got together and sang, at church mostly. No matter where they went they were singing.
- Esarey: What were they singing?
- Roth: They were just singing like common songs that most of the people in that country knew. Over there they sang mostly about birds and the love of mother and flowers and nature. Their songs are real common in that category.
- Esarey: Did you use instruments?
- Roth: No, they didn't have any instruments.
- Esarey: Mother's education?
- Roth: My mother went eight years to grade school. My father only went through four. They didn't make them go in them days, I guess.
- Esarey: How did they move from Yugoslavia? Did they actually move from one country to another?
- Roth: No, they didn't.
- Esarey: Okay. I have a map somewhere that I'll get out that I want to show that.
- Was education of any importance or significance at that time in your family? Do you remember going to school and being educated?
- Roth: Well, we didn't go to school because we came to this country before we started.
- Esarey: You hadn't started school.
- Roth: Although Josephine would have, but being we traveled so far they never did start her.
- Esarey: Well, let me go back then. When did your mother marry? When she was very young?
- Roth: She married in 1925.

Esarey: Okay. Other than music, how else would you describe some of your mother's interests?

Roth: She crocheted and a...

Esarey: Knit?

Roth: Yes, and knitted and handy work, embroidered

Esarey: How many other family members do you have? How many other siblings?

Roth: Who me?

Esarey: Yes.

Roth: I have three.

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: A son and two daughters.

Esarey: Okay. Let's just go right on to your father and discuss a little bit about what was going on in the 1920s and '30s when he was on the farm and had to leave.

Roth: He had to serve in the army for about two years.

Esarey: Describe that, what was that like when you had to serve in the army then?

Roth: He was in the cavalry I know, he said. I don't know anything more about that part but he was in the army.

Esarey: You don't have history on that?

Roth: It was a time of when King Peter was reigned over the country.

Esarey: Okay, and he was born, again tell me what's...

Roth: February 3rd, 1902.

Esarey: Okay, and he was born in what country? I mean in what...

Roth: Kranjska.

Esarey: Yeah...what city, what city?

Roth: Oh, I mean Kranjska.

Esarey: I have that down.

Roth: Un huh, yeah.

Esarey: I have that one. Okay, and lived in the country on a farm?

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: Okay. Where did he fall in the whole sibling hierarchy then? Where your father had all these siblings; where did he fall in that?

Roth: Of the five that were living he was also the middle child.

Esarey: Okay, and what happened because of that?

Roth: Well, he had to find another kind of work because his older brother lost his eye when he was twelve years old. They just felt like he should have the farm and got to stay there. The rest of the boys had to find other means.

Esarey: Was that common in families?

Roth: I imagine, sometimes the oldest took over anyway.

Esarey: Um hum.

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: What would have been his other option, other than immigration do you think?

Roth: He could have been a blacksmith. He had blacksmith training in the army. Somewhat or other, he was good with horses.

Esarey: Father's education?

Roth: He just had four years of grade school.

Esarey: Four years of grade school, okay.

Roth: But was unusually talented in other types of work.

Esarey: Like what?

Roth: Mechanical or blacksmithing.

Esarey: How did he learn to be a good mechanic?

Roth: That was kind of natural. I think his army and blacksmith training helped a lot.

Esarey: Tell me what you can remember a little bit about your father and his personality, the kind of person he was.

- Roth: He was a very stern, strict person, extremely honest and I would say, a hard worker.
- Esarey: Very hard worker.
- Roth: Very hard worker.
- Esarey: Moving on to someone else in your life: You asked me the first time we met to ask you about your grandmother.
- Roth: Well, my grandmother was very dear to us because we lived with her until my father sent for us. She taught us a lot of songs and prayers. Where we lived where the kitchen was, she would set us on the counter and while she was baking and cooking she taught us poems and songs and whatever.
- Esarey: How old were you?
- Roth: I was about five then, about five, yeah.
- Esarey: Your father left when you were how old?
- Roth: A year and a half.
- Esarey: Okay. Would you write your grandmother's name down.
- Roth: Terezija Orazem, T-E, it's just like this. Here it is.
- Esarey: Is it this one here?
- Roth: Un huh. Terezija.
- Esarey: She was your mother's mother or father's?
- Roth: Yeah, my mother's mother.
- Esarey: Your mother was there too? Did your grandmother live with you?
- Roth: We lived with her.
- Esarey: You lived with **her**, okay. What else did she do, you'd do together?
- Roth: Our grandmother?
- Esarey: Um hum, with your family.
- Roth: Well, I have pictures of her when she was out in the fields baling the straws and she was kind of like a village—what would you say—a person that they depended on for when maybe women had babies.

Esarey: Midwife?

Roth: No, she wasn't quite that but she was so handy for it. They would need something extra, she would be able to do it. She was very capable of even butchering hogs and things that a lot of women don't do.

Esarey: She did.

Roth: Yes and took good care of us.

Esarey: You smile when you talk of her.

Roth: Oh, I loved her so much.

Esarey: Describe some other memories of her.

Roth: Well, I knew that when we came to this country, I missed her so much for several years, because she was just as close to us as anyone could be and was with us more than our mother. So she was pretty special.

Esarey: Um, hum, well I mean you're describing a very special person in your life.

Roth: Yes, yes.

Esarey: Were there any other members of your family that were very close to you at that time?

Roth: On my mother's side they were all close to us. Of course my uncle lived on the other side of the little cottage. The others lived in the village. One of them lived in the big town, our aunt, and we knew of her and we loved her from mom's talking about her. But my other aunt lived with us too. She was never married. So there was that many of us. We just got close with a close knit family.

Esarey: What was your uncle's name?

Roth: One of them was Peter.

Esarey: Peter?

Roth: And Frank.

Esarey: Their last name?

Roth: Peter Orazem, well you know my...

Esarey: You will spell that won't you?

Roth: Oh, yeah, O-r-a-z-e-m and it was a hyphen over the z.

Esarey: Over the z?

Roth: Like that, yeah,

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: Orazem.

Esarey: Orazem.

Roth: That makes it a heavier Z.

Esarey: Say that name again?

Roth: Orazem (they say the name together)

Esarey: Orazem. Okay.

Roth: Pretty odd.

Esarey: So I'm getting a picture of a very close-knit family. Your father was a mechanic. This was a young family. He knew he wasn't going to inherit the farm and then what happened? How did that decision get made to leave this close knit family? How did that happen?

Roth: Well, the oldest was Uncle Frank. My father's oldest brother was in this country already. It happened he was here.

Esarey: Where was he?

Roth: Well, he was there in Kranjska at the time but he left for this country about three years before my dad did.

Esarey: And where did he settle?

Roth: Where did he....

Esarey: Where did Frank live?

Roth: You mean then or now?

Esarey: No, when he came to this country.

Roth: He lived here in Springfield.

Esarey: In Springfield, okay.

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: Okay. So he came early and then your father followed?

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: Okay. There's a very poignant story in some of the materials that you gave me about your father's crossing. Could you describe that in your own words, what it was like for him to come over here on a ship, to leave everything?

Roth: Well, I was so young, I really couldn't tell you much about it.

Esarey: But you can describe, or you could even read some of it if you wanted to.

Roth: But he knew that we would be well taken care of. We lived with my grandmother and so it was easier for him to leave. But anything, leave a family has to be hard.

Esarey: How did your mom feel about that?

Roth: How she felt—I can't really describe how she felt. I think it was probably scared because she was not a real brave person. She was shy.

Esarey: Okay, that's where your grandmother stepped in.

Roth: But it was a hard decision, yes.

Esarey: He describes his journey to the United States; did he ever talk to you about that, what it was like?

Roth: Not really, just kind of associated with our trip coming here but there was nothing particular that he pointed out.

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: Not that I know of.

Esarey: He described it as a fairly arduous journey, difficult to leave.

Roth: He was more of a stern natured type.

Esarey: Didn't talk.

Roth: No, he was not a person to do too much talking. Not as sentimental as my mother (laughs).

Esarey: Really?

Roth: Yeah.

- Esarey: You started to talk a little bit about your grandmother. I'm trying to get a sense of what a normal day was like for you when you were a child or your siblings were children. What did you do?
- Roth: We played around the yard. I don't know of anything particularly; of course, we went to church.
- Esarey: What church did you attend?
- Roth: It was Catholic.
- Esarey: Okay.
- Roth: Just did what children do: play and...
- Esarey: When did you first learn to sing?
- Roth: Probably at a very early age, because we were singing when we came to this country. When I was five and a half we were already singing on a stage at the Slovenian Dome.
- Esarey: Oh really, describe that.
- Roth: Well, Slovenia Dome means Slovenia Home. It's a lodge. And we joined that and they had us singing on the stage soon after we got here. It was pretty amusing to a lot of the Slovenian people because, you know, to have little children sing. My mother took a lot of time with us on the singing, like I said it was just part of us.
- Esarey: It's part of your life.
- Roth: Um hum, yes.
- Esarey: Did you have special clothes, special clothes to wear?
- Roth: Well, they had a seamstress in the village that made our clothes.
- Esarey: Oh...
- Roth: Um, huh. That's where we got most of our clothes.
- Esarey: Were you ever shy about that?
- Roth: About clothes?
- Esarey: Singing?
- Roth: Oh, I wasn't too shy, no.

Esarey: Who was?

Roth: Josephine was more nervous when we used to sing when we were little.

(Someone in the background saying: "Oh, I made all my clothes after I was twelve.")

Esarey: How many of you were singing? Was it the whole family singing?

Roth: Well, the three of us children sang and then my mother and her brothers and sisters and her mother, Grandma, she sang.

Esarey: All together?

Roth: A lot of times if they were together, um huh.

Esarey: Church songs, church music?

Roth: Well, not particularly. They were just all kinds of songs like when we sing here, like *Springtime in the Rockies* and all that. That type of singing, I mean, you know where everyone knew the songs.

Esarey: And the audience was who?

Roth: They were **their own** audience (laughs).

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: (More laughter) They just liked singing.

Esarey: People from the village and town?

Roth: If they had a picnic or something they would sing, but they didn't make it a big...

Esarey: How often did you do that?

(in the background someone says "Holidays")

Roth: Yes, um hum holidays.

Esarey: On holidays.

Roth: Um, hum.

Esarey: Okay. That's really your introduction to a lot of your music was a...

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: ...holiday singing.

Roth: Um, huh, yes.

Esarey: Your father left while you were very young. So your father was not there when you were doing all of this singing?

Roth: No.

Esarey: He had already come to the United States.

Roth: Yes, uh huh.

Esarey: Okay. Did anyone travel with your father when he came over?

Roth: Not that I know of.

Esarey: Okay. Let's talk a bit because it sounds like you don't have a lot of memory of your father's coming over here.

Roth: No, I don't.

Esarey: Yeah and what we might do is read in some of his description...

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: ...at our next meeting and just read in some of his words. I thought perhaps you might have more of a memory of him.

Roth: He was a good family man, I know that...

Esarey: I believe all of it was just a very poignant description...

Roth: ...and couldn't wait till we got here.

Esarey: Well, let's talk a little bit about what happened to you. His story is perhaps something I should get. And I'm going to read a little bit of this into the history because it leads into and it says:

(Esarey is reading from printed material.)

"I decided that our future included immigration to America. My brother Frank and I would go first to lay the foundation for our new lives. I gathered necessities for the trip; of course, that included my button box accordion. I loved the music and I hoped the familiar sounds would keep me close in spirit to my homeland and absent loved ones. On the morning that I was to set sail to America, I carried a small trunk in one hand and my button box accordion in the other. Our families walked us to the docks. We set sail to America, a

distant land filled with promises, and waved good-bye to our wives and children.”

Do you remember that?

Roth: No, I don't remember; I was just a year and a half of age.

Esarey: You don't remember that.

(continues reading) “As the weeks went by my wife and I patiently waited for word from each other. We wrote monthly. We counted the weeks, the months and then the years. It had been four years since I'd seen my family.” And of course, you didn't know him at all?

Roth: I didn't. I was, like I said, a year and a half old when he left.

Esarey: Continues reading.

“I expect that it might be another two years before I can afford for them to join me here in America.”

Roth: Um hum.

Esarey: Continues reading.

Your father falters in his speech.

“He looked down and placed the photo in his inner breast pocket. He nodded, eyes averted and left the room. Another two years the foreman guessed, thinking of his own two growing little daughters at home. He had an idea. By that afternoon the idea was forming into a plan and he talked with the plant managers. And on it went and before we knew it, two months later Pillsbury Flour Mill had raised funds to sponsor this family to America.”

Roth: They didn't raise funds for it. That was a mistake.

Esarey: They did not raise funds.

Roth: Yeah. Un huh, no.

Esarey: Well, how did you get the funds?

Roth: Well my father worked.

Esarey: Your father worked for those funds?

Roth: Oh yeah, and at that time I remember he said he even worked double shifts. He walked three miles each way to work and he worked long hours.

(Person in the background talking—walked, walked) Un huh.

Esarey: He walked because he didn't have a car.

Roth: Un huh, yes. No, never did.

Esarey: So this is really not what happened, is that your father raised the money for...

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: ...to bring the rest of you...

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: ...over. That's interesting. I'm glad actually I read that...

Roth: Un huh.

Esarey: ...because that sets the story straight here.

Roth: Yes, it is, because that isn't.

Esarey: That wasn't how it was?

Roth: No.

Esarey: Continues reading.

“Recalling the morning over seventy years ago that they left their homeland, Marj, then the baby, says, ‘Though we were happy to join our father, it was a very sad day for us. We left all our relatives behind.’”

Roth: Um hum.

Esarey: Continues reading.

“In those days we never dreamed we would see any of them again.”

Roth: That's it.

Esarey: I'm wondering if I could read this or I could ask you to read this.

Roth: Sure you can.

Esarey: I think it's really important to describe your trip across...

Roth: Um huh, yes.

Esarey: ...if you would in your own words.

Roth: Oh, well the day that we left our village Kranjska, small as the village was, just about all of them, all the people in it lined up along the road and sent us off. My two uncles had used a wagon to put our trunk and whatever in. We was in horse and wagon. (Oh boy, I'm stuttering here.) We went by in the village and the people were crying. It was more like a funeral procession, I would say, because they too thought they'd never see us again. One cousin was twelve years old. She ran after the wagon and was hollering to my mother "Aunty, Aunty please don't go".

Esarey: Oh.

Roth: And so it was sad.

Esarey: Tell me about what it was like to leave your grandmother.

Roth: That was about the hardest thing that I could remember ever doing, and even to this day, my heart falls when I think about we didn't get to grow up to be with her. She was so dear to us. It was just hard to forget.

Esarey: Did you get to see her again?

Roth: No, she passed away during the war and we did not get to see her, but we missed one uncle by two months.

Esarey: What was it like on the ship?

Roth: Well, it was very wonderful. We've never seen a recreation room in our life. It was the first time I rode a tricycle and we ran around like little kids do and had fun. And my mother kept pretty close tabs on us. We slept in a little, like a berth, what do you call it? I can't remember what else I could say.

Esarey: Were you ill?

Roth: Josephine was ill. Josephine and my mother were seasick on the ocean.

Esarey: Which was not unusual.

Roth: No, huh un.

Esarey: Describe as a child what it was like to arrive in the United States?

Roth: Well of course, when you're that small you don't think as much as later on.

Esarey: Just the visual?

Roth: When we came close to New York Harbor and we had landed in Ellis Island and then after that everyone was so excited when they seen the tall buildings and the coming into the New York Harbor that they would just run around and

holler on the ship and just be so excited after five and a half days on the ocean. It was like heaven, I guess. (laughter).

Esarey: Do you remember anything about Ellis Island?

Roth: Yes, I remember being there when they were examining us for our health and all. They found out that Josephine had like a little pimple, or something they called it afterwards, in the back of her eye, and they was wondering if they should even keep her there. In them days they were so strict. So as it worked out that's all it was, was a freckle behind in her eye. But I remember being in a shower room and my mother had to take us three in and do all that. That's all I really remember except as we's standing in line and we was right behind my mother. They had long lines waiting to go through. That's where I got my name of Marjorie because when we went through those lines they have to tell their name and everything and my name is Amaljia and when you're Amaljia and you're like a little girl, it'd be like Patty for Patricia. Well, as my name was Malji, it sounds like Margi, so Marjorie, they gave me the name of Marjorie in Ellis Island.

Esarey: How did you feel about that?

Roth: I didn't know, didn't realize it, because my mother always called us that anyway until we went to first grade and then found out on the paper, on our immigrant papers, that they had named me Marjorie because Malji sounded like Margi.

Esarey: Um hum, um hum.

Roth: And I heard, I guess, I found out in them days they did write the name however it sounded. They shortened a lot of names too; they were foreign.

Esarey: Do you remember the date that you arrived?

Roth: I believe it was May 13, 1933—that seems to stick in my mind. It took us thirteen days from start to finish, my mother told us; five and a half days on just the ocean.

Esarey: How did you get from New York City to the next place you needed to go?

Roth: We took a train to Chicago. And my uncle and my father came to Chicago to meet us. My uncle had a car.

Esarey: Your uncle had a car?

Roth: Yes, he did.

Esarey: Okay. Can you describe meeting your father that day, what that was like?

Roth: Well, being I was that little I can't say I was too emotional, but I know I was a little disappointed. I thought my uncle looked, at that time, he looked more like, to me, like my father. It was... to me, I was too young to really comprehend all that. There was some feeling there that I just I guess I had to get used to everything, just like anybody else.

Esarey: It must have felt a little strange to meet him?

Roth: Yes, it was, um hum. I do remember a little bit about that feeling. It was strange.

Esarey: Well, I know I'm asking you to go back many years.

Roth: Oh, my, yeah.

Esarey: But it's important, those long ago memories, of arriving in a new country. Then what happened? You're here in Springfield.

Roth: Well, we came to Springfield and at that time my dad was working at Pillsbury, of course. We stayed with my uncle about a month maybe, in Deveraux Heights, that's north of Springfield here. Then my father rented a house in Springfield here for a year. And saving, as he was all those years, he had enough for a home of our own. I remember he paid \$1,200 for it.

Esarey: Where did you live, where was it?

Roth: On Ridgely Avenue, un huh. That's where we were raised.

Esarey: Is it still there?

Roth: Yeah, Ridgely Avenue is.

Esarey: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

(coughing in the background)

Roth: North end of town.

(background someone speaking – “well, the kids picked on us”)

Oh well, not especially.

(background someone speaking – “because we couldn't talk”)

Esarey: As you started to assimilate, to get used to being here in Springfield, what did your parents do to help you go to school, make friends, learn to meet people? Did you speak English at all?

Roth: None.

Esarey: Okay, what happened then?

Roth: We were lucky. There was a family that was Slovenian that lived about two blocks away from us and they had three daughters that went to grade school. Being we couldn't talk in American; they did, helped us and they interpreted and soon we start learning how to get around and do things and talk enough to get by. It didn't take long.

Esarey: You make it sound like it was fairly easy, and it must have been.

Roth: Well, because I don't remember it being that hard. You know, we didn't really go anywhere much or anything but it was kind of hard to say.

Esarey: You started school when?

Roth: Must have been 1934?

Esarey: First grade?

Roth: Yes. Now my brother was in fourth or fifth grade and he didn't know how to speak so they put him in first grade for a few weeks, and then second for a few weeks, and finally he got up to fourth grade. But that was because the school was harder then when you get up in the...

Esarey: Your brother's name?

Roth: Frank.

Esarey: Frank, this is Frank, okay.

Roth: He was the eldest.

Esarey: He progressed quickly?

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: (whispering—"Making a note"). This is another hard question and maybe you don't remember much about it but maybe you do. What did you expect to find when you came to the United States? What did you think was going to happen?

Roth: I think we were too young to realize anything. We just were there.

Esarey: Yeah.

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: Disappointment?

Roth: I would say we were disappointed, yes, because we left all our family there in Slovenia and it was pretty strange. Felt very insecure even as a child. I know when we went past Deveraux and they had that big pile where they used to dump stuff, had a fire going, and we drove passed there to my uncle's house. I felt so afraid. I had an afraid feeling.

Esarey: Because?

Roth: Well, it was just strange and everything. It was so different once we came here.

Esarey: Yeah.

(talking in the background—"well that coal mine was...")

Roth: Yeah, but it was just strange.

Esarey: Um hum.

Roth: I do remember that.

Esarey: Did you get to know your father as the years went by, a little more?

Roth: He was not a real warm person but very strict, but a good man. We always were taught that he was a good man and respected him. He was very strict with us.

Esarey: Describe what that means.

Roth: Oh, I could tell later.

Esarey: Being strict.

Roth: My dad was strict. Well he made us toe the line on stuff and he... just by nature, you know.

Esarey: Okay, because you've mentioned he was very strict several times.

Roth: I think more like when we got older and you know as we were growing up with friends and boyfriends or whatever (laugh).

Esarey: Yeah. May I ask, what institutions, groups, churches, community groups were of help to your family as you were growing in Springfield.

Roth: Well, the Slovenia National Benefit Society was a club that they belonged to. We belonged to that and they had picnics and stuff and people, the Slovenian's here in Springfield would get together, so we met that kind of people; made it good for us like your ethnic people kind of stick together. But

the church, they didn't drive and there was too far away so they didn't go to church.

Esarey: The Slovenian church or the Catholic Church?

Roth: Catholic Church, yeah. I mean just kind of got way from that. Because over there they were so faithful; that was the main thing every Sunday.

Esarey: Um hum. So a little bit estranged from the church because you physically couldn't get to the church. Who were your friends when you were here, when you were young, who were some?

Roth: Some of the Slovenian people, they were here already. My father got to know them before already and my uncle so, yes. That's how, there were some that lived close to us and the women would visit in them days. Come over, and I remember Mom and them, they were visiting.

Esarey: Would it be fair to say you had a Slovenian community within Springfield?

Roth: There were quite a few Slovenians here, yes. Yes, quite a few; they had a nice lodge here that they did a lot of picnics and socializing, I should say.

Esarey: Did that help you get used to being here a little bit?

Roth: Oh, I think so because we were on the stage, we got to sing and they had dance and wine festivals, they call them. They had dances and so my parents went to all those things.

Esarey: Tell me about singing here in Springfield. Tell me how you got going again with that.

Roth: Well, we just was **known** for that. My mother had a **beautiful** voice and she taught us to sing. No matter where we went, when Slovenians get together they sang songs; if I remember in them days, that was very common. So that just came to be part of us.

Esarey: Did your father participate?

Roth: He did a little bit, too, yes. But I know he was real proud of us because my mother had a beautiful voice and he was so proud of that. (whispering: "I don't think I'm very interesting" laughter).

Esarey: Did you sing when you were in school?

Roth: Oh yes, they had us on several times with different programs that they had. They had us to sing, I would say.

Esarey: Did you sing in English or did you sing in your native languages or both?

Roth: Mostly native language when we first came here. Then later it was more American.

Esarey: How long did it take before you became naturalized as a citizen. What was that process like?

Roth: Well, us children were naturalized through my father who got his citizenship papers, I think it was like 1938 or something, or 1936. We were here five years when my mother got her citizenship paper. She really worked hard at it. But we naturally became from my father.

Esarey: How did your mother learn English?

Roth: Mostly from us kids. Because her Slovenian friends would talk Slovenian but she learned it from us kids.

Esarey: Um hum, okay.

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: So tell me how long you've been an American citizen, then – since 1938?

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: Thirty-six I guess, when my dad was.

Esarey: How did you get used to the changes in the culture, you know, or did you have?

Roth: Well, being we were that young it wasn't hard for us, ... just like automatically any children would do.

Esarey: Did you maintain contact with your family in Slovenia?

Roth: Yes, my mother wrote regularly.

Esarey: Were you able to talk with them ever on the phone?

Roth: No, never, no.

Esarey: If you had to, could you make a comparison between living here in America and living in Slovenia at that time, or now, your own impressions what it was like?

Roth: Well, it was the first time we saw a bathtub when we got here, and also the stove, and all that was different here, and furnaces and stuff. Because over there they had an oven in the kitchen area that was built in the wall and extended to the next room. They covered the oven with a big square, about four by four—looked like a ceramic tile thing—and we used to lay on top of that for warmth in the winter.

Esarey: Oh, ho.

Roth: Un, huh. It was like in the corner, a big square thing and we had a little bench that we got on and then on top and it was warm on top. That's how we got the heat. It was different. We never saw like they have here, furnaces and whatever.

(background: "It nearly touched the ceiling.")

Well, it seemed like to us because we were little.

(background: "yeah")

But it wasn't that high.

(background: "little high up there")

Yeah. (laughter) (microphone noises) I thought I could answer better than I do, but I guess I'm not.

Esarey: You're doing fine. I'm asking you to remember things that happened a long time ago....

Roth: Yes, and I'm trying...

Esarey: Well, we'll come forward, don't worry.

Roth: (laughter)

Esarey: But it's okay to describe **anything** that just, you know, —sometimes it's these just ordinary things that are so interesting. That the **stoves** are different, that the **sidewalks** are different, that the way people shop.

Roth: Yes. (background laughter)

Esarey: Any other things that just, going to school, but I'm hearing you tell me you adjusted well, adjusted fairly quickly.

Roth: Yes, we did.

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: We adjusted well and very quickly.

Esarey: You adjusted well and quickly.

Go ahead. Go ahead.

(background voice: "We didn't eat fish over there. Well, they just wouldn't allow it. I don't know what the reason was")

Roth: The law, the law didn't...

(background voice: "It was the law that you didn't eat fish there.")

Roth: (Whispering) Couldn't be fishing you mean, yeah I remember that too.

Esarey: Did you fish when you came here?

Roth: Not as much as most people. We never did have a lot of fish because they weren't used to it.

(background voice: "Oh no, un huh")

But that's trivial.

Esarey: What did you do in the afternoons and evenings when you were growing up here? Um hum, let's say after fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh grade, that you were getting a little older?

Roth: Play out in the street. We played out in the street a lot and neighborhood children.

Esarey: That would have been the 1940s, correct?

Roth: Yes, un huh.

Esarey: And 1950s?

Roth: Yeah, '40s.

(voice in background: "...so we wouldn't get on the street.")

Esarey: You had what on the street?

(background voice) My dad took and had a rope and he tied from one tree to the next tree so we couldn't get close to the street. so it'd be safe. That was in the yard.") (No it wasn't.)

Esarey: Did you take vacations?

Roth: No, we didn't. My parents just weren't that type, being my dad never drove, we never did take a vacation.

(background voice: "never do what?")

Take vacations anywhere.

(background voice: "oh")

Esarey: What was the name of the schools that you went to?

Roth: School?

Esarey: Yeah.

Roth: All I remember is a shola, that means school.

(background voice: "school, yeah")

Esarey: But what high school did you attend here?

Roth: Lanphier High School.

Esarey: Lanphier.

Roth: Yeah we went to Ridgely grade school and Converse, alternately.

Esarey: Do you have any family albums that we could look at some point? Roth: I have some family pictures, yes.

Esarey: Some family pictures that would tell us a little bit about some of your family and Slovenia. I would like to go through some of those.

(Background noises)

As you became a teenager, what were some of your activities then?

Roth: (background voice: "work")

School functions. And choir, and that's about it. We just didn't do too much.

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: We did go to church, Third Presbyterian Church. (turning pages) This is my father's family, that's my mother's family.

Esarey: We're looking at some of the family pictures in the album right now, and going to describe just a little bit about some of the family pictures here. If you could describe a little bit about this, like this uniform here?

- Roth: This is my Uncle Frank that was here before we came. The brothers that were still living of course, they grew up, and this is my grandma and grandpa.
- Esarey: Is this the grandmother?
- Roth: Yes, un huh.
- Esarey: Is this the Cavalry uniform?
- Roth: No that's my father, wasn't in uniform there. He was still too young. The two boys had to serve. Now he was killed in the war. Peppy, Peppy then.
- Esarey: Which war?
- Roth: WWI. Well, I'll tell you, he was AWOL I heard, and they shot him in the field when he was running away.
- Esarey: Describe what happened in WWI that you know about. What was the circumstances?
- Roth: Of course, I wasn't there then.
- Esarey: I know, but, but just from what...
- Roth: Well, my dad was too young to go but he went to the Army afterwards. But the two older brothers were in the war.
- Esarey: Were they drafted?
- Roth: Yes. I think it was compulsory that they go.
- Esarey: And they were fighting the Russians or the Germans?
- Roth: Germans.
- Now this was a village, aerial view of the village.
- Esarey: And this is a picture of your family?
- Roth: Yeah. They sent this after we were here, I believe.
- Esarey: Um hum.
- Roth: Soon after. I think this one here is when my father left for this country. My father was there and my mother was here.
- Esarey: Is this your father?

- Roth: No, no my father is back here standing. But they had an accordion player there. Now this is a wedding here. My uncle and aunt – my uncle’s wedding picture and that also is my mother’s side. That’s my father’s side.
- Esarey: And these are Slovenian?
- Roth: Yes, see where the button boxes come in?
- Esarey: Um hum.
- Roth: So many places, very popular. Yeah, this is like where they left for New York, I guess.
- Esarey: I think a good story that certainly before we leave each other. And these are some wonderful pictures here.
- Roth: This is my uncle; he is Godfather to my brother and that’s another, taken in our backyard. I remember that.
- Esarey: Which one is you?
- Roth: This one.
- Esarey: Holding the flowers.
- Roth: Look how cute I was (laugh).
- Esarey: You were so cute.
- Roth: And this—Jo, too, and my brother. Now that’s here in this country.
- Esarey: Um hum.
- Roth: We were singing there when we were young. Let’s see now—these are just pictures of, here’s another picture of the one we have...that’s another picture of them, my mom’s family, and this is, I think was sent to my mother afterwards.
- Esarey: Okay.
- Roth: My barn where my father’s home was...that’s part of that house.
- Esarey: When your parents came over here did they ever speak of the WWI and the effects it had on your family?
- Roth: Not too much, I don’t think.
- Esarey: No, so that wasn’t something that would have been a topic of conversation. Who is this?

- Roth: That's my daughter when she was younger, (laugh).
- Esarey: Beautiful picture.
- Roth: Quite a long time ago—school picture.
- Esarey: We'll come back to some of these, I think. Tell me about the button box. There's such a history with that.
- Roth: Un huh, well about mine you mean?
- Esarey: Well, I think we talk about maybe your father's button box and then let's talk about yours.
- Roth: Yeah, well my father bought his in Austria and brought it here on the boat because he always wanted one, so that's all I know. He didn't play any certain songs but he could make them up and they sounded pretty good to me.
- Esarey: So he composed things on the button box?
- Roth: Yes, un huh. He just by ear.
- Esarey: Well, let's just move right on to yours then.
- Roth: Well, my dad sold his when I was just about eight years old, eight or nine, and he sold it and I always pined for it. I thought "oh", because I loved that accordion. I always wished he didn't sell it. So when I got older and my husband found out how much I liked one and we went to dances and things and he would see them and I would just be so thrilled to see them, I thought "boy, I always wanted to play one." So he surprised me with a brand new one.
- Esarey: When you were sixty?
- Roth: Sixty years old.
(background laughter)
- Esarey: That's must have been a wonderful moment.
- Roth: Well it scared me because I don't know anything about how to do it, you know. If I had my father's is what I wished I had. If I had his I would have learned maybe and wouldn't feel so compelled to learn. This way I had to do it for Art because, you know, he paid a lot of money for it. So I learned to play it.
- Esarey: Well, we come back to this.
- Roth: Oh...

Esarey: Not now, but we will be, um hum.

Roth: So I learned to play it on my own, by ear. Just got pretty good at it at the time and of course, then Josephine and I got together and we was singing again. We knew a lot of Slovenian songs and I played a lot of Slovenian music and other sing-a-longs too from here. And it's just something that was natural.

Esarey: I think what I want to do is to end this for today, because I want to pick up next time. I'm going to stop.

(end of first interview – second continues)

Interview with Marjorie Roth

IM-A-L-2013-069

Interview # 2: July 9, 2013

Interviewer: Carol Esarey

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Esarey: This is Carol Esarey with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum Oral History Program. I'm with Marj Roth, in her kitchen in Springfield, Illinois and the date is July 9th, 2013. We are here to discuss a little more about Marj's life and all of the things that went into it that made her so unique.

So first of all I want to say that I asked Marj to bring some pictures for us today. We will be weaving some of these pictures into our discussion as we go along. The first picture we have here—we're going to go back to Slovenia when Marj was very small—and I'd like to ask you to describe this home and a little bit about what it was like to live there.

- Roth: Well, from what I remember it was just small. At that time when you're a child everything looks bigger but now look at it, now it had to be a very small cottage. It had two parts in the house, like a little duplex situation. My uncle lived on the one side and he had a little tailor shop there; he was the tailor for the town of Kranjska. And we lived on the other side with my grandma and there was three of us children, and my mother lived with my grandma because my father came over here in 1929, and that's where he had us live until we came to this country.
- Esarey: What did your uncle do as a tailor?
- Roth: He made clothes and sewed suits and clothes for men.
- Esarey: In the village?
- Roth: Yes.
- Esarey: I know you've said this before, but tell us where this is located.
- Roth: Where is what located? The house?
- Esarey: The house, yes.
- Roth: It was in Kranjska. It's a real small town about twenty miles from the capital, Ljubljank, of Yugoslavia. A little village, it's like in the Alps.
- Esarey: In the Alps. Okay.
- Roth: Beautiful. And I remember there was a garden in the front yard instead of in the back.
- Esarey: What did you have in it?
- Roth: I don't exactly remember everything, but I know there was vegetables there. They had cabbage and lettuce and I don't remember tomatoes in my days, but I was so small it didn't seem to register, I guess.
- Esarey: Who did the cooking?
- Roth: Mostly my grandmother, because my mother went on the farms and worked while we were living there with her.
- Esarey: What did she do on the farms; what did she do?
- Roth: She was out in the field. They were hoeing, weeding, and just usual work like that.
- Esarey: You have some good memories in this home. Any in particular?

- Roth: Well, I know my grandmother used to sit me on the little counter by the old-looking kitchen that she had. While she was cooking, she sat me on the counter to the side. Taught us to sing and maybe pray and little verses and just things like that which I remember so well.
- Esarey: Who were the singers in your family?
- Roth: Well, my mother had a beautiful voice, and on my mother's side they all sang: her brothers and her sister and her mother; and they all seemed like they could blend in. They had their own voices like soprano, alto.
- Esarey: They harmonized.
- Roth: Yes, they were good in harmony and they loved singing.
- Esarey: And they were singing folk songs or what?
- Roth: Yes, that and church songs.
- Esarey: And church songs.
- Roth: Yeah, church hymns.
- Esarey: Is that where you learned?
- Roth: That's where I learned from, yes. We still can do it once in a while (laughter).
- Esarey: Okay. Did you sing while you were in this home? Did you sing in your home?
- Roth: I would say we did because I remember them sitting on top of the—looks like a stove that they had there. It was a oven on one side of the room and through the wall there was a big hollow place where they baked bread in there, but at the same time it warmed the other room up. It was like a big square block, maybe four by four feet, I would say, square. And that's where we used to, and especially in the winter time, where it was warm for us. That's where we got our heat.
- Esarey: That was your heat.
- Roth: Yes, that was our heat.
- Esarey: You and your sisters.
- Roth: Yeah, my sister and brother.
- Esarey: Sister and brother. Did your sister and brother sing too?
- Roth: Yes, they did. In fact my sister still sings with me if she happens to be around me.

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: Yeah, we still sing.

Esarey: Your grandmother sing?

Roth: Oh, yes, and my aunts and uncles.

Esarey: That's wonderful...

Roth: On my mother's side they were all very talented that way.

Esarey: We'll put that picture, unless there's more that you'd like to say about.

Roth: Well, that's all I can remember, actually.

Esarey: Okay and these two areas designate the two—like duplex, like you say.

Roth: Right inside there was a little foyer with I remember a pebble step and it went up into little small rooms upstairs, one on each side. I remember they had a big round table up there and my aunt, my grandma would bake bread, probably once a week—from what I can understand—these big round loaves in that big oven that they had downstairs, and they would cover it for the week and that was a big major part of their meal. But of course, the flour was healthy then. Nothing was taken out; it had all the nutrients in it, so they depended a lot on the bread.

Esarey: How old were you and your siblings at this time?

Roth: I was almost six years old when we left so I do remember enough about it.

Esarey: Because I know all of a sudden you were moved and then you know there are new memories.

Roth: Yes, un huh.

Esarey: When you came over here—I'll stay on the kind of the food and the baking and the cooking—describe some of the things, the types of foods and cooking that you did that you brought with you, that your mom made.

Roth: Well, this one potica was a real big thing there in that country. It's kind of a nut roll. It's kind of like a bread with a filling of walnuts, filling that was sweetened and rolled up into kind of like a—I can't quite describe it—roll, a bread roll, but it was rich and good. That's real typical what they baked there on holidays mostly.

Esarey: Could you spell that for me?

Roth: P-o-t-i-c-a. [pronounced po-tee-tza]

Esarey: Potica.

Roth: Potica. Sounds like pizza but it isn't.

Esarey: You still make them?

Roth: I have until I just kind of got down here in the last year or so. And then I baked strudel, apple strudel is big, and that was pretty typical over there. That's where you roll the dough out so thin and spread it out over the whole table and then you fill it with apples and some goodies and then roll it up. It is very, very good.

Esarey: Excellent.

Roth: Um hum.

Esarey: What did you make with the barley?

Roth: Well, it was a barley soup.

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: That was very common there and pork. And another is blood sausage. I hate to mention that but that...

Esarey: Go ahead!

Roth: That was very popular there. When they butchered a pig they made blood sausage. To me it was delicious but you know, when you mention it to our kids, they think it's yuck; naturally they would.

Esarey: (laughter)

Roth: But I really did like it and I've already ordered it from Chicago a few times, you know, some time ago, and it's good.

Esarey: So you can find ethnic in neighborhood stores.

Roth: It had barley and rice in it too.

Esarey: What else did it have in it?

Roth: Well, some of like, the lungs...

Esarey: Um hum.

Roth: ...and liver and ground up after the hog was butchered and they would save the blood and then they have this rice and of course the people were fairly poor there and they'd eat any, you know, they just made count of everything.

- Esarey: You wasted nothing.
- Roth: No. But that was a big thing there, was a blood sausage.
- Esarey: Yes.
- Roth: Yeah, um hum. Of course your meat, your smoked sausage was very much so too. And that kept well, pretty much of a staple.
- Esarey: As you were growing up you went to Lanphier, correct?
- Roth: Lanphier High School, yes.
- Esarey: And after that, unless there's things you want to talk about as a child, which we kind of didn't really focus on...
- Roth: After high school?
- Esarey: Well, before high school – we didn't talk a lot about what you did as a child. Are there things that stand out for you, is this when you became a citizen?
- Roth: No my sister and my brother and I became citizens through our father.
- Esarey: Okay, who was already here.
- Roth: We just automatically... My mother had to get her own. We were naturalized naturally.
- Esarey: How did she do that?
- Roth: Well she went to night school...
- Esarey: Okay.
- Roth: ...and I went with her. We used to drill her on answers and she did very well. I think she was here five years when she got her citizenship papers.
- Esarey: How did you meet your husband, your first husband.
- Roth: I met him at a Slovenian dance, which is typical.
- Esarey: Real Slovenian?
- Roth: Yeah, um hum.
- Esarey: Was he Slovenian?
- Roth: No, he was Lithuanian, but he came there with my brother and a bunch of boys. They were having a wine festival and I happened to...

Esarey: How old were you then?

Roth: I was only fifteen.

Esarey: Ah, you were a young woman.

Roth: Yeah, of course. Then he went to service, see, and that took a couple years or more, so then I got married when I was not quite twenty.

Esarey: Okay and you had how many children?

Roth: Three.

Esarey: Three children.

Roth: Um hum, a son and two daughters.

Esarey: A son and two daughters, okay, and we'll have some record of those, of the children; we'll talk about them a little more.

Roth: Um hmm.

Esarey: And later, you said you married again, how long ago was that?

Roth: I married again when I was forty-four.

Esarey: When you were forty-four.

Roth: Forty-four.

Esarey: Okay. Did you live on your own for a while?

Roth: I was a hair dresser.

Esarey: Okay. Tell me about that.

Roth: Yeah, I went to beauty school when I was—let's see about how old was I?—about thirty.

Esarey: Okay, you had young children?

Roth: Yes. So that's where I got a little independent, too. (laugh)

Esarey: How long were you married the first time?

Roth: Twenty-three years.

Esarey: A long time.

Roth: Oh yes, un huh.

Esarey: And so you went to beauty school and what did you do with that?

Roth: Well, I opened up a little shop in my front porch room; they made a little room out of it, and I did real well.

Esarey: People get to know their beauticians very well.

Roth: Um, yes. I see now how important they are too, because I can't get one here. (laugh)

Esarey: No? How long did you work as a beautician?

Roth: Fifty some years.

Esarey: Fifty, over fifty years.

Roth: Oh yes, over fifty years.

Esarey: No more?

Roth: Over fifty I know.

Esarey: Do you want to do any more of that?

Roth: No, I can't do it anymore. Well, I'm not even living at home anymore.

Esarey: At a place where you could?

Roth: I worked till I was eighty-two or three. So that's pretty long.

Esarey: That's a long time, Marj.

Roth: Um hum, yeah, and I had a slight stroke and that's what did it.

Esarey: One would never know.

Roth: No, it didn't bother me – the stroke didn't – but what bothered me was last September when I had this shoulder bother me, that retractor, that cuff there...

Esarey: Oh, rotator cuff?

Roth: Rotator cuff, yeah; I keep forgetting the name of it. It was torn and, oh, it hurt terrible. Seemed like from there on down I went kind of, was going downward and feeling my age and all.

Esarey: You decided to say I'm not going to do...

Roth: Yeah.

Esarey: Let go of that. Well, it would be hard to do.

Roth: Well, I'm old enough to quit anyway (laughter).

Esarey: I think we need to talk about music in your life. This has been even though, you know, you've raised children, you've been married, you've had a job, running through all of this has been the music. Tell me how you kept that alive.

Roth: Well, through my mother; she had a beautiful voice and she loved music herself, singing. So it just became an automatic thing with us kids. She taught us all these songs. Then later on too, I took piano lessons and my brother got an accordion and my dad made sure he got lessons. So the music was always in our family. Then my second husband bought me a button-box accordion which is something I always wanted to do because my father brought one here in 1929. He bought it in Austria and he brought it here when he came; then after he sent for us and I was about eight years old here, he sold it to one of his friends, and I felt so bad because he didn't have it anymore. I always loved that instrument. So then somehow or other after my husband was not a State Commander anymore, he got interested in this ethnic stuff and he liked that music too. So we tried to get my father's accordion. We knew who had it—about three families that it went through—but the young fella said he's going to try and play it because his dad played it too. So about two years after my husband surprised me with the new one, which really did surprise me, and I had to learn to play it. Anyway, this young guy, he offered to sell it to us. He said he'd come over and I said if you just bring it over and I could put it on my lap and look at it just for a few minutes that's my main thing. But as soon as he walked in the house with it, my husband says, "I'll buy it." Didn't even ask him how much he wanted for it. That's how much he thought it would mean to me.

Esarey: Is that it?

Roth: Yes, no that's not it, my father's is older but it looks just like it, except it's older.

Esarey: Where is your father's?

Roth: My father's right now, since I moved him, it's at my son's house.

Esarey: Okay. That's special.

Roth: Oh, it is a special.

Esarey: Artifact.

- Roth: And it's a beautiful sounding tone to it; especially the base is so full.
- Esarey: The picture that you have, is that of this one or the first one?
- Roth: Yeah, well, this one here, but it's so much like that other one, only thing this one's got the shiny nickel... yeah that, and my dad's is more like a dull finish. But it had had edelweiss design flowers on it too.
- Esarey: How did you learn to play?
- Roth: Well, since I had a little bit of music in me I picked it up and got the momentum going, and after so long you just start playing. Then my husband took me to Joliet a couple of times where men used to teach it there. He got me started on my left hand a little bit better than I knew how. And just by playing it, it came to me.
- Esarey: Practice?
- Roth: Yes, and by ear.
- Esarey: How did it feel to be able to play again?
- Roth: Well, I felt pretty good once I got fairly good at it because it was kind of unique to be able to do that. I mean, you know, it's fun to see people enjoy it. When I got to be fairly good at it—maybe later on—and I liked it, I used to jam with the different bands, and you know, there was always that little bit of extra attention you get and fulfillment with music.
- Esarey: Tell us about jamming with the different bands.
- Roth: Un huh.
- Esarey: That's an interesting...
- Roth: Polka bands type of people that you know....yeah.
- Esarey: This is like a new world to me.
- Roth: Oh, yes.
- Esarey: Describe that a little bit. What is it like here in Springfield with the polka bands that were once in the area?
- Roth: Well, they're kind of going out of style now. There isn't too much of them but when I was playing the accordion maybe fifteen, twenty years ago, thirty, there was lots of this picnics and such as that going on. Auburn, Illinois, used to have a picnic every year and they had a button box club come from St. Louis. I know one year, I think there was twenty-four of us playing and that

was really ah—kind of chilling to you to think that many accordions were playing and they do blend in with each other real well. It was beautiful.

Esarey: Sounds beautiful. What year was that, about fifteen years ago?

Roth: No, more than that because my husband's been going twenty one years. It'd probably be about thirty years ago.

Esarey: Okay.

Roth: Probably, let's see... yeah I was about thirty, thirty-five years ago.

Esarey: You continue to play?

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: How did this Slovenian sisters, how did you and your sister get going with your...?

Roth: Well, she ah, happened to acquire a stump fiddle from some German man who had a stump fiddle that it was real plain when she saw it; she decorated it all up and did all kinds of, some souvenirs from Slovenia and the edelweiss flowers and a couple of horns and tooters on there. We used to play it. It reminds you of a kitchen-band type of music. Yeah.

Esarey: What is a stump fiddle?

Roth: Well, that's what it is. Is you stump it and you go like this to it. It reminds you of a broom. She used to always get up and say "Once upon a time this was a broom. Would you believe?" She says "I learned to play it but I don't sleep anymore." (laughter) Just kidding around, you know. But it was kind of cute and I noticed, as much as my instrument was so pretty and it's a lot more to it to play it, she certainly got a lot of attention from that stump fiddle because of the way it looked. But that's typical from Europe to have that, especially in Germany.

Esarey: And were there more than the two of you being asked....

Roth: At one time, yes.

Esarey: Tell me about that.

Roth: There was three of us.

Esarey: Who was the other person?

Roth: The girl was comparatively younger than we were but she used to have a band of her own, Dorie Ushman, and she liked this type of music.

Esarey: Well, I've heard that band.

Roth: Un huh. Her husband, Chuck Ushman, yeah, yeah. When they found out that Josephine and I—her husband found out that my sister and I could harmonize—that's when they first invited us to maybe sing with the band.

Esarey: Um, hum.

Roth: And then, as we got to know them better, why Dorie Ushman—she played a piano accordion real well—she kind of adopted us too, and the three of us got together and made tape. I've got it right there. We got to do a lot of playing with the different ethnic things that came up, and really got to enjoying it.

Esarey: In a six month period or a year, how many times would you go out and play? I'm just trying to get a sense of....

Roth: Well, for one that was maybe more often than not would be maybe a couple times a month.

Esarey: Okay. You have a picture here somewhere of the two of you. One of those pictures of you and your sister...

Roth: Oh yes.

Esarey: ...in Slovenian...

Roth: Well we called ourselves the *Slovenian Strollers*.

Esarey: The *Slovenian Strollers*. How did you come up with that name?

Roth: Well, at first we called ourselves the *Bavarian Strollers* because of the instruments we played and then we decided since we're Slovenian and Dorie was German, but that's what we automatically just started to call ourselves, the *Slovenian Strollers*, because we often walked and played music.

Esarey: Oh, you could walk and play?

Roth: Oh yeah, I could. In fact I used to walk all over the fair with my button box. I couldn't do it now. (laughter)

Esarey: The State Fair?

Roth: Yes, oh we played at many a state fair, at the Ethnic Festival and then for the senior citizen building, too, yeah.

Esarey: And these aren't costumes, these are beautiful clothes. Did you make those?

Roth: Yes, we did.

Esarey: You sewed them?

Roth: Embroidered our blouses, yes.

Esarey: They look very authentic.

Roth: Yeah, pretty good, um hum.

Esarey: I notice in this picture, just as you described, that the stump fiddle is very well decorated.

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: She's got all kinds of things on there.

Roth: Yeah, she's got a flag on top if you notice.

Esarey: Yes, the American flag.

Roth: Yeah, and she'll take that flag off and she'll say "And this is my favorite souvenir." (laughter)

Esarey: She was happy to be an American.

Roth: Un huh, oh yes.

Esarey: How long did you do strolling?

Roth: To play together like that? Well a long time because, I haven't even thought about it really.

Esarey: Just as a general idea.

Roth: I got my accordion when I was...

Esarey: Sixty?

Roth: Yeah, so we did that... I'd say we did it for fifteen, twenty years, about twenty years, because see I'm eighty-six now.

Esarey: So it's not been that long that you have not been strolling?

Roth: No.

Esarey: The two of you.

Roth: Yeah. Yeah, we played about three, probably three or four years ago, we still played somewhere, you know, some nursing home or whatever. We played at this place years ago.

Esarey: Did you?

Roth: Yes, un hun.

Esarey: You both have stopped this, now?

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: Because of health reasons?

Roth: Age and health, un huh. Mostly me I think.

Esarey: First moment I met you, you were playing that button box. I'll never forget it. It was amazing to hear you play.

Roth: Um hum.

Esarey: I'm wondering if we could borrow one of your tapes to record some of that...

Roth: Um hum.

Esarey: ...some of your music?

Roth: Oh, yes.

Esarey: Would that be okay?

Roth: Yes, okay.

Esarey: Unless you'd like to play it for the recorder at some point?

Roth: Well, I don't know. It's not impossible, I guess.

Esarey: I wouldn't ask you to do it right now.

Roth: I'll play a little...yeah no.

Esarey: If I came back we could do a song.

Roth: Well.

Esarey: If not, I'll take it off of one of your tapes. Would that be okay?

Roth: Oh, yeah, that would be fine.

Esarey: Okay, perhaps you prefer that.

Roth: Because I've got a lot of pretty songs on there, yes.

Esarey: Okay. Let's go through...

Roth: Yeah, I could still play a few songs for you pretty well.

Esarey: Could you?

Roth: Oh, yeah.

Esarey: Okay, I think we'll do that one more time just to get a few...

Roth: Get an idea...

Esarey: ...songs, even one song.

Roth: I'll play a Slovenian tune.

Esarey: Yes.

Roth: Um hum.

Esarey: It would be wonderful.

Roth: Thank you.

Esarey: Okay, if you don't mind.

Roth: I should be honored. (laughter)

Esarey: We would be honored to have it.

Roth: I have a lot of those, so it's copies. Dorie had that made even. She's the one I think that made it.

Esarey: Well, we're going to use this.

Roth: Okay. Um hum.

Esarey: Let's go through some of these other pictures. I think there's probably stories that go...

Roth: Pictures of the village.

Esarey: ...with some of them.

Roth: That is the village.

Esarey: This is the village that you lived in.

Roth: Um hum.

Esarey: It's very hilly.

Roth: Yes, oh yes.

Esarey: Describe...

Roth: Oh yes, it's like in the Alps and just down in the little village there's... the cemetery is right there. My father lived right around the corner on his farm. Let's see, this was the church, so I was born about here somewhere in this area. There was one road there anyway through their little village, just one street.

Esarey: Many farms.

Roth: Yeah, they were small but they were surrounding...

Esarey: Terraced, they were very terraced.

Roth: Yeah, un huh.

Esarey: Well, what church was this?

Roth: Catholic.

Esarey: Catholic church, okay. It's a good picture.

Roth: I have a better picture than that.

Esarey: Is this the church that you...

Roth: No, that is another church that we visited in.

Esarey: Describe this one.

Roth: It's a little town near here. Now see, this here is another angle of my village, but just a small portion; you could see where this church is here and that's that one there.

Esarey: It's much more hilly than I would have thought that it was.

Roth: Yeah, well this is pictured downward, that's why you don't see the hills as much.

Esarey: About when was this picture taken, would you say?

Roth: (sound of pages turning) Gosh, you know I really couldn't tell.

Esarey: A rough guess?

Roth: Well, let's say the '40s or something like that.

Esarey: Nineteen forties.

Roth: Nineteen forties, un huh. That'd be a pretty good guess.

Esarey: And you were living there at this point in time?

Roth: No.

Esarey: No, you had already moved?

Roth: My grandma was still there when my mother would write and all my cousins, and aunts and uncles, we left every one of them.

Esarey: Okay, I remember you told me what year you came over here.

Roth: Nineteen thirty-three.

Esarey: Okay, and this is a picture of...

Roth: My father, he was in the service there but he...

Esarey: Describe the uniform a little bit. This is what branch of the service?

Roth: Soldier, he was in the cavalry.

Esarey: Okay. Would this have been the Slovenian cavalry or what would it be?

Roth: Well, it would be under Slovenia, yeah. Yugoslavia.

Esarey: It's a very formal picture.

Roth: Un huh. I have a big one. I think my sister's got a big painting-like, you know, old fashioned type of picture there.

Esarey: And we have his full name.

Roth: Un huh.

Esarey: Young man.

Roth: Yeah, nice looking guy.

Esarey: Very good looking.

Roth: He was six feet tall, pretty nice looking.

Esarey: Okay, let's get some more pictures here.

Roth: Well, I found this one of our ship that we came here.

Esarey: Describe the ship a little bit.

Roth: Well, it tells you all about how big it is.

Esarey: Yeah.

Roth: And how many people, so it's built by a German, I know.

Esarey: Where did you ride on this ship? Where were you...

Roth: We were on this, we were not in the lower deck. We were in the...

Esarey: Upper deck?

Roth: Yeah, but not the deluxe, the next one.

Esarey: Careful, you've got a....

(background noises indicating something was out of order)

Roth: Huh, oh. I see what you mean...it was nothing. These were just notes that my sister and I used when we were singing and some words for her. So it's nothing too good in here.

Esarey: This picture of your ship...

Roth: Called the *Majestic*.

Esarey: ...called the *Majestic*, and you, your sister...

Roth: My brother.

Esarey: Brother.

Roth: And my mother.

Esarey: And mother were all on this ship.

Roth: Um hum.

Esarey: And we have some information about your trouble under way. Your sister got sea sick?

Roth: Yes, and my mother.

Esarey: And your mother, but not you.

Roth: Me and my brother didn't get it. We were lucky (laughter).

- Esarey: How long did it take you to get over here?
- Roth: Five and a half days just on the sea, on the ocean. It took us thirteen days altogether from Kranjska to Springfield.
- Esarey: You described also that you had quite a long time in Ellis Island.
- Roth: Yeah, they put us through those lines and asked us our names and that's where I got my name of Marjorie because it sounded like Marji. My name was Amaljia and my mother called me Malji when I was a little girl, and so sounds like Marji, so that's what Uncle Sam named me: Marji, Marjorie.
- Esarey: And that's where—did your sister get her name too.
- Roth: No, she was alright. Her name was Jozefa and that's Josephine, you know plainly.
- Esarey: Okay. Were there any of these pictures on the ship that mixed, you know, you remember?
- Roth: Well, this was the only picture they have in here of it and the people that were on it that time, they pictured that.
- Esarey: Okay, so I could borrow this?
- Roth: Yes, you could. Um hum, yeah.
- Esarey: Okay, alright.
- Roth: But at that time I think it was one of the biggest ships there was. It was a very deluxe...
- Esarey: How did that happen, that you got on that ship?
- Roth: Well my father made the arrangements here because he was here four and a half years and sent for us, and they had it all fixed up. In fact, he did such a good job, he had like an agent or something waiting for us at every time we stopped anywhere so that he could guide us to the next destination, because there's quite a bit to it when you're traveling from there to here and because my mother could not have done it.
- Esarey: Describe again how you got from place to place. You landed and then the agent met you where, and what was your first destination? Do you remember?
- Roth: Well, from the ship, after on the boat there was somebody in Ellis Island that met us and got us through.
- Esarey: Okay, you got to Ellis?

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: And you're in New York.

Roth: We're in New York and we were guided there too, and from New York we went on the train to Chicago; that's where my father and my uncle met us at the train station there. That's all I remember, then I remember seeing my father for the first time.

Esarey: Oh, what was that like?

Roth: Well, at that time you know, you don't realize yet the jest of it but I know my brother used to tease me a lot when he'd see somebody. He'd say "There's your dad." or something. And so I was thinking afterwards how it must have felt for my mother. Hadn't seen him for four and a half years and then all of a sudden your life is there again.

Esarey: Emotional.

Roth: Yes.

Esarey: Traumatic almost.

Roth: Yes, un huh. And was a beautiful meeting, emotional.

Esarey: Yes. Let's skip over just a little bit and tell me about your children. A little bit about, we'll get their names, but what did they do with their lives? Are they, you know, I'm interested in how they....

Roth: Well, my eldest one lives in Chicago now and she just retired. She's sixty-seven and she worked for some kind of company that does pension work for companies, and yes, she graduated from Loyola University. Then my second daughter, she was a school teacher and she's just retired too; she's sixty-five. And I can't imagine having them that old already.

Esarey: No you can't, can you? (laughter)

Roth: And they have nice families too. Let's see, my son, who is nine years later, he graduated from Southern (Illinois) University at Carbondale.

Esarey: Um hum.

Roth: He did have a real good job with the Professional Engineers for twenty-three years and then somebody—a group from Chicago come down and took over the whole office. So now he's not working right now.

Esarey: Are they musical?

Roth: Not especially, but the grandchildren are. I have a grandson who's real musical. In fact, he's going to Quincy College for music.

Esarey: Do you see anyone following in your footsteps with the button box?

Roth: Well, I keep hoping that one of them will. I was thinking the one grandson who's in music—I says I sure hope that you know, someday, because I says it'll be pretty unique and they thought so too. So you never know. If they've got music in them, they'll be able to do it.

Esarey: Something to look forward to.

Roth: Yes, un huh. Right now they're so young yet and they have small children and you know what, it's not like it was with me; when I got older, then that's when I started having time and wanting to do it. It meant more.

Esarey: You've played at a lot of different kinds of locations too, haven't you?

Roth: Yes, nursing homes, schools, some church functions, picnics...

Esarey: Funeral?

Roth: ...and I played at a funeral three times last year, a year ago before I got where I wasn't playing anymore, um hum. And that was for the Polish. I joined the Polish Club and learned some of their songs and just happened it was some very common songs from Poland. I played them right up there in front of the casket because it seemed like it means a lot to them too. They're musical in that way like we felt. Europe anyway was full of music.

Esarey: Okay. I'm going to stop. I think we're going to stop right here.

Roth: Yeah, okay.

Interview ended: