

EI-1162

PAUL FRKOVICH

BIRTH DATE: NOVEMBER 4, 1925

INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 17, 2000

RUNNING TIME: 1:32:01

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, Ph.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

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CROATIA, 1950

AGE 25

FROM REFUGEE TRANSIT CAMP IN BAGNOLI, ITALY, TO ARGENTINA, BY BICYCLE AND BUS TO MEXICO, THEN ACROSS THE RIO GRANDE ON FOOT INTO LAREDO, TEXAS. SETTLED FIRST IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI. DETAINED AT ELLIS ISLAND IN C. 1952 FOR DEPORTATION.

LEDENICE, CROATIA

SUNNYVALE, CALIFORNIA

LEVINE: Today is August 17<sup>th</sup>, the year 2000 and I'm here with Paul

Frkovich, who came from Croatia in 1951 at the age of 26.

This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I

know that you have an unusual story, not having come by

ship and . . .

FRKOVICH: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: So, let's start at the beginning. If you would tell me your birth date.

FRKOVICH: November 4, 1925

LEVINE: Where were you born?

FRKOVICH: Ledenice, Croatia

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

FRKOVICH: L-E-D-E-N-I-C-E, Croatia

LEVINE: And did you live there up until you left for the United States?

FRKOVICH: No, I did not. During wartime I went to Germany for apprenticeship in connection with Croatia and Germany agreement.

LEVINE: OK. Now you're talking World War II.

FRKOVICH: Ya.

LEVINE: OK, so when did you leave Croatia then to go to Germany?

FRKOVICH: In 1942.

LEVINE: Now maybe if you could explain for the tape, what was the apprenticeship? What were you leaving Croatia to do?

FRKOVICH: Because the war came, and we were out. We didn't know anything. So they were collecting people who wants to go to Germany. And I was one of them because I was young. At that time I think I was just but 17 years old and I went to Germany as an apprentice with agreement with German government and Croatian government. And ah, when war ended I went back. At that time was Yugoslavia, communist Yugoslavia.

LEVINE: Tell me what you were an apprentice to do? What were you learning?

FRKOVICH: Machinist. Ya.

LEVINE: Lets talk first then about the first seventeen years before you went to Germany. What was your mother's name?

FRKOVICH: Anna. Ann. Anna. That's what we called her. Anna.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

FRKOVICH: S-A-F-T-I-C

LEVINE: And your father's name?

FRKOVICH: NICOLA

LEVINE: FRKOVICH

FRKOVICH: Frkovich. Right.

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents? Did you remember your  
grandparents?

FRKOVICH: I had a grandma, but the grandfather died when my father was  
three years old. So I don't know any further. Anything about them.

LEVINE: Where your grandparents and even their parents from the same  
area?

FRKOVICH: Oh ya, we are from the same area, but just grandmother had a  
different name. I mean, but I don't even know that. The name, I  
mean. Where she came. Because I was...(sighs) We were  
awfully poor people. We had ah...my mother had seven kids alive.  
Two of them passed away at birth, and I was the oldest one. And  
as I grew up, at nine years old I went supposed to go to get

apprenticeship and there was no apprenticeship there. It was just labor and I mean plowing, clean the horses, feed the horses and calves and all that.

LEVINE: Did you go to someone else's place?

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya.

LEVINE: Did you go to someone else's place? Did you live there?

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. Nine years. But about three hundred miles away.

LEVINE: So as a nine-year-old, you went out to work that hard work. Wow!

FRKOVICH: That was supposed to be going as an apprentice. Then my father came there. I mean they were wondering, never no letters, no correspondence, no nothing. Then my father came over there and took me back home.

LEVINE: How long did you spend there?

FRKOVICH: A year. And then I came home. I went back to school. And the war came on. No, before the war came on I used to, again go work for other people.

LEVINE: But you lived at home, then?

FRKOVICH: No

LEVINE: No, you went out.

FRKOVICH: Ya, out to another village fifteen, twenty miles away. And I worked there as a kid. I mean again, I work (he laughs). And ah, just before wartime I came home and like I said, then I went to Germany.

LEVINE: I see. So you really had experienced a lot of hard work as a little boy.

FRKOVICH: Oh ya, Oh ya. As a little boy I didn't have childhood, let me put it that way. I just, as a kid I was always working.

LEVINE: What about your father? What did he do?

FRKOVICH: Well, he used to be salesman. He was the only one. There were seven of us. Father, mother, grandmother, and aunt. We were living in the same house.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house?

FRKOVICH: Oh ya, I remember house.

LEVINE: Can you describe it?

FRKOVICH: Ya, it was. Let me see... It was something like that wall to that wall (points to recording studio walls). One bedroom, kitchen. On the floor down below us we used to have a calf, and goat, and sheep. We used to keep them down below. We lived up there. That kind of a type house it was. And all of us were living in that practically one room and a kitchen. And now you know why I had to go (they laugh).

LEVINE: Where you in a town? Can you describe the village?

FRKOVICH: A village. It was but maybe a hundred homes. Nobody was that rich, except maybe one or two families in whole town. And the rest of us had a little land. Worked, labored the land. Plus little bit, like I said salesman, from here, there. Income. And like I say, only father was the one of supplier. Nobody else in that eleven family.

LEVINE: Now just to clarify, as far as you know was your mother's side and your father's side always from that area? Did they come from somewhere else.

FRKOVICH: No, my mother was about ten miles away, somewhere around there.

LEVINE: Oh, but kind of... From that country.

FRKOVICH: Oh ya, from that country, ya.

LEVINE: Going way back.

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. From that country it was. We always were close ups.

LEVINE: And how was your religious life as a child, growing up?

FRKOVICH: We went to church. I remember I was going to church. My aunt used to dress me nice and all that as a kid. And I am still the same. Catholic. And I respect my religion. And I wouldn't sell it for no money either. But I'm not church guy. I go to church -- Christmas, Easter, weddings, funerals (he laughs). And usually I say, when priest or somebody, they know me all, and when they say, How come we don't see you at church? I say, I am afraid the roof might fall in (they laugh).

LEVINE: I see, so you have your religion. Your just not a big church....

FRKOVICH: But I still like it and attend. I obey the rules.

LEVINE: When you went to Germany, what was your experience like there? What did you find out as a seventeen-year old going out of your country for the first time I assume?

FRKOVICH: Lonesome (he laughs sadly) and sad, but still I realized there was no living there where I come from either. When you put that, and clearly you think about it. It was better in Germany than it would be home. So I put up with it since '42 'til '45. Three year. Close to three years.

LEVINE: What did you learn?

FRKOVICH: I learned German. And I learned how to work. I didn't know that before. And then after that I never had a problem with finding job either, because machinists where awfully demanding, everywhere I went. I went to Argentina. I didn't have any problem. I came here and I didn't have any problem to find a job. And so on.

LEVINE: And how did you find the German culture coming from another culture?

FRKOVICH: I think it was very, very ah, discipline. I mean, you do this and you do this and you have to do it. I mean, just like getting up in the morning. I get up. I'm single guy and I could go bed. I never had a control over me, but I'm still here. And I still obey the rules; I make my bed every morning (he

laughs). That what I'm trying... One sample, okay? I make my bed every morning. And I have schedule. So this is like this. Before. Get up. First thing you shave, then this, then this, then this. And that's the rules. And I believe in that. Without discipline... (pause) because people take advantage -- especially kids. You let them go and you don't say Don't do this, don't do this there's going to try to pull whatever they can. Some of them, they get spoiled and unreasonable. That many people get surprise. That's why we have all this. Because there is parental, there is no control. Mother works. Father works. Kids are alone at home. They do whatever they want to and kids got muscles, but at that time no brain. They don't think for future what's going to happen tomorrow if I do this and that. I know because of experience that I did too. Like I said, muscles and hormones but no thinking.

LEVINE: What did you see of the war in Germany? What was your experience?

FRKOVICH: (He laughs) Bombs coming down on us! And uh, running away whenever alarm comes. And that.

LEVINE: So you were working like with the Germans to make machine, machine....

FRKOVICH: I didn't make machine, I just was learning. They just teach me how to make, but ah, I was not at stage that I was saying, well you do this, you do

that. Every time they give you something, they got somebody, teacher or uh experienced guy over you and tell you, You do this like this, you do this like this and bring a print, and do this and that.

LEVINE: So, um, you left your apprenticeship when the war was over?

FRKOVICH: Oh yeah, I went back to Cirko, Yugoslavia. Titoslavia. And then I saw what was going on.

LEVINE: And how had it changed?

FRKOVICH: Oh, terrible. You could not say nothing. Especially if you say I'm Croatian. Then you goner.

LEVINE: What did you have to say?

FRKOVICH: Just say Tito is good. Just say we got it good. And do what they tell you. Not what you should do, but what, do as I tell you, but don't do what I'm doing (he laughs).

LEVINE: So in other words, the Croatians were....

FRKOVICH: We were condemned. We went actually practically occupied by Serbs. Because every position there was of any importance, the Serb was right there. Their police were there. Government was there. Like I say, any position that was anything worth it, that's where the Serbs were.

LEVINE: Was life in any way better as far as goods and services, I mean....

FRKOVICH: Well, it was, it was just like in Russia. Everything was owned by government. You didn't have any control practically of anything. They had their medicals. They had their food, they had their supplies. And practically you didn't have nothing.

LEVINE: And how about your family members? Were they working then?

FRKOVICH: Well, my Father passed away '45. And my Mother was at home with what's left of kids. I don't even know how many there were with her. But we all dispersed. Everybody went one side, the other side, and ah, that was up to '58. And '58 my Mother passed away. And everybody was.. In effect, the house just falled apart.

LEVINE: I see. Did your brothers and sisters leave the country?

FRKOVICH: No, no. Nobody except ah, 1969, I brought one brother here to U.S.

LEVINE: Okay, so why don't you tell then when did you then leave your homeland and....

FRKOVICH: To immigrate again? Okay that was 1946. May first.

LEVINE: And where did you go?

FRKOVICH: I crossed the border of Italy. And at that time was going across the border -- first shoot then ask questions later.

LEVINE: How did you get across?

FRKOVICH: Just lucky I guess. Just decided I'm gonna go across the border. I came with a train, close to the border and at night.

LEVINE: Were you alone?

FRKOVICH: Ya. Oh, I'm always, I'm loner mostly. I... Especially in cases like this. I don't trust....( He laughs)...I'm kinda.

LEVINE: That's a risky business what you were doing.

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. That's what I mean. It was risky business. And I sneak through the night and in effect I was hollering at, but they didn't know what I was. Cause when you walk across the field, they had one wire approximately up to the knees. And the other wire was up there. And I hit both wires.

LEVINE: When you hit a wire what happened?

FRKOVICH: I think the ring bell at the station.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FRKOVICH: And that's when, when the guy came, HALT! and I dropped down on the ground. And he goes again HALT! and I still was laying down. Then some time passes by and he goes again HALT! I said, you don't know where I am...(He laughs)

LEVINE: Uh, huh.

FRKOVICH: Uh, huh. And then I ran the, a wall, I was going slow and keep on going. After that I didn't hear nothing from anybody. And I was going, I don't know how far, then I find bushes, and that's where I wait for daylight.

LEVINE: So it was all in one night that you made your escape?

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. But it was night before, before I came to the, that I slept outside, I mean, on the ground and all that, before I crossed the border. And then I went to English command in Trieste and that's where they...

LEVINE: You went to English command? What was that?

FRKOVICH: Military. I mean where the refugees usually go, and you get register. And they know I came from the other side and I was going whole darn week for whaddyamacall? For question.

LEVINE: Oh for questioning.

FRKOVICH: For questioning. And ah it got on my nerves. After one week, I say, If you're going to send me back tell me. I go by myself so I won't go to jail. Or send me away from here. And then they send me to camp in Bologna .

LEVINE: A refugee camp?

FRKOVICH: Ya.

LEVINE: In Bologna?

FRKOVICH: Ya. Then from, that was only transit camp in Bologna and then from Bologna, we had two choices -- either go to Fermo or Bagnoli near Napoli. And then I took Napoli.

LEVINE: Why did you choose Napoli?

FRKOVICH: Because I went to this camp (he laughs).

LEVINE: Oh, you went to the other one and knew you didn't want to be there.

FRKOVICH: That's right (they laugh).

LEVINE: Was Napoli a little better?

FRKOVICH: (Still laughing) Ah, well. I find it a little bit and I didn't have no money, I didn't have nothing. But it was not just me. I think it was about four or five guys, other guys, that we wanted to go together. So we came back to the transit again, to Bologna and then we went to Napoli, I mean Bagnoli.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay there?

FRKOVICH: About eight months.

LEVINE: And what was that like, in the camp?

FRKOVICH: Well that was another hell too. It was a camp. But eating, at that time I could eat anything but never was, you get food that was big, like bucket of food, but they go like this and pick it up. If it was warm beans or piece of potatoes in it (he laughs), it was good. Mostly soup, water with uh, like that. We were hungry there too, but what the heck, what do you expect? It is a camp. Refugee.

LEVINE: What did you do like during the day? How did you....

FRKOVICH: Nothing. We used to do cigarettes and we used to go to Naples and sell them.

LEVINE: You would roll them you mean? Roll cigarettes?

FRKOVICH: Ya, No, no. They used to have paper, made already and we bought something like this and fill out that just like this. Fill up that with tobacco and push it in and then when you do it, you cut the ends with scissors and look like (he laughs) factory made cigarette.

LEVINE: Where did you get the tobacco?

FRKOVICH: In ah, flea market in Naples.

LEVINE: Uh huh. So you and some of your friends did that to make a little money?

FRKOVICH: Ya, that's it. You had to do something. I mean, to improve little living.  
And that's what we did.

LEVINE: Now, who was in the camp? Where were they coming from?

FRKOVICH: It was command by England. Ah, oh boy, it was internationally IRA, the  
call it at that time, IRA, that was the supplying and helping the refugees.  
But actually English command was in there.

LEVINE: And where were the people in the camp coming from?

FRKOVICH: From everywhere. They were ah, Croatian. They were even Jews were  
there too. There were from every, practically, Poland, Russian, all over  
the Europe. There were refugees there.

LEVINE: And how had they, had they come in this way similar to the way you did?

FRKOVICH: Same way I did. Ya. Same way, same way.

LEVINE: By escaping over a border.

FRKOVICH: That's it. Risk their life, I mean, to escape.

LEVINE: What was it like being with a whole lot of people who had run away and risked their lives?

FRKOVICH: Well, everybody sticks to their own. I mean we had separate...

LEVINE: Barracks. Did you have barracks?

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. Separate. Barracks. Or even, where we were there was former Italian army camp. And the camp was empty and that's where they made that we had two stairs, I think, yeah. Two stairs. Buildings and this section was Croatian, next building was Ukrainian, or whatever.

LEVINE: Did you mix at all? You say you kept to your own.

FRKOVICH: Oh we mixed, we mixed. I mean, you know, with others, yes, but very rarely that, that happen.

LEVINE: Did you, this sort of a funny question but if you would just think about it. What did you learn about human nature being in such a situation that most people never even experience.

FRKOVICH: It's survival. Every body looks for themselves. Everybody. I mean, you just look how to survive. Practically, you didn't care what the others said or do. How can you get something and make it better?

LEVINE: So in other words if you could get extra food or...

FRKOVICH: Ya, that's something. Any which way.

LEVINE: Okay, so when did you leave there and how come you left when you did?

FRKOVICH: There was, ah, willingness to go. That was first. They ask you where would you like to go? In effect, I like to come to this country but I didn't have anybody. And in fact, I had somebody that I got address in New Mexico. Gallup, New Mexico and I wrote him a letter to send me affidavit that I can come to US. You know what he say? He wrote me back letter and he say he is willing to pay People's Democratic Yugoslavia whatever is in connection with my returning to Yugoslavia (he laughs). And I cried just like a little baby, like if I was criminal or whatever it is.

And he wouldn't even [ ] Then after that I didn't care where I go. I decide, and promised myself to come to this country. In Italy.

LEVINE: How did you get the name of the person who gave you that response?

FRKOVICH: I think I got that from home, when I was home. Then I got that address and I wrote them. And that's what he wrote me back.

LEVINE: So you must have been so depressed!

FRKOVICH: Oh ya, I was depressed. Like I say, then they ask where do you want to go? First place, I wanted to leave Europe. That was my ah, main object. I didn't care where I landed on continent of America, just that I come here. Then I was supposed to go for Paraguay.

LEVINE: Let me just ask you, did it ever occur to you to go back to Germany?

FRKOVICH: No. Because I know there is no room there. Because if I go there I still would be like refugee. Same thing as if, when I was in Italy.

LEVINE: Even though you had been trained there?

FRKOVICH: Doesn't matter. It does not matter. I am foreigner there, auslander. It doesn't matter.

LEVINE: So you where supposed to go to Paraguay?

FRKOVICH: Ya. I was supposed to go to Paraguay but when we got to Argentina, ah, they had connections, Croatian people, with Peron, at that time and they ask us if we would like to stay in Argentina. Sure (he laughs) we would! So there were thirteen of us.

LEVINE: Croatians?

FRKOVICH: None, yeah, over twenty-five. In one week we got papers and everything. Right in our hands and we stay in Argentina.

LEVINE: So what year was that?

FRKOVICH: 1947. The new year of '47. 25<sup>th</sup> of January, 1947.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay there then?

FRKOVICH: Well, then I got off, I start to work.

LEVINE: A machinist?

FRKOVICH: Yeah, no. As a machine repair guy. For a Swiss chocolate. Nestle's chocolate. And ah, I didn't like... I had good job, but promise, what I promise is, never (he laughs) done 'til I don't get there where I want to go.

LEVINE: You wanted to come to the United States.

FRKOVICH: I want to come to the United State. So I was working there, but in meantime, before I start to work for the Swiss company, I went on a ship. And I was thinking ship will go to New York or someplace, some port of US. But that...

LEVINE: You mean you were working on a ship?

FRKOVICH: Ya.

LEVINE: And you thought maybe you'd jump?

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. That was idea. And the ship went to Africa, Italy, back to Argentina. Again. Africa, Italy, back to Argentina. And I got tired of it. I went off in Argentina. Would you believe that that ship went from Argentina to England, from England to New York. (chuckles hard and low). See that? That's luck.

LEVINE: That's bad luck. (laugh together).

END TAPE ONE, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE B

LEVINE: But how long did you work on that ship?

FRKOVICH: Six months only. Then I got off the ship, then I start to work for that chocolate company.

LEVINE: Yeah. And how long did you do that?

FRKOVICH: Ah, 'til I didn't live Argentina. I don't know exactly how long was it, but I met a guy which I became a friend with him on a ship. And he introduced me to this guy that I came to US. One day we came like this, and we come to conversation and he said that he would like to go to US. I said, so would I. How? Well, I went through the consul that is nowhere. I tried a ship that is nowhere. I even tried disabled ship which was there to get on it, I paid the guy to bring us to the, to the ship and when we got close to it, the guy from the ship said, Ho, ho, who's there? (He laughs heartily.)

LEVINE: You mean, you took a boat to get to a ship, that was going?

FRKOVICH: Disabled, was supposed to be towed.

LEVINE: Oh, I see, I see, but they didn't?

FRKOVICH: They couldn't get because they had watchman over there. How do you going to go on ship? (laughing) And then we turn back. And then we decided, well, how. Let's go on a bicycle.

LEVINE: A bicycle?

FRKOVICH: Ya. Bicycle.

LEVINE: From Argentina?

FRKOVICH: Uh, huh. From Argentina. And we got two bicycles and we started to go through Uruguay. Through Brazil. Through Columbia. Panama. Costa Rica. Nicaragua. Honduras. San Salvador. Guatemala. In Guatemala we sold the bicycles because we didn't have visa to go into Mexico. They want visa. So we sold the bicycle. We sneaked into Mexico.

LEVINE: Over the border?

FRKOVICH: Ya. Over the border.

LEVINE: At night? How did you make that border? Any experience trying to get in there?

FRKOVICH: Well, we met some Mexican people. And we tell them that what we want. (He laughs) And they help us. They show us to take a bus, and they gonna check you and, but, if we made us as a Mexican. They help us. And they probably won't even look at. We be sitting and we cover you (he laughs) somehow and the bus was loaded too. And they smuggle us into country.

LEVINE: Now, did you have to pay them?

FRKOVICH: No. They were nice. Usually, in those days, the people, especially primitive people, if the foreigners comes over there and asks for help, they would do practically anything to help you. Anything. In a fact, in many places we came in a little village, and ah, we ask for at night to sleep. Oh, sure. They would make something. They would even feed us.

LEVINE: This is when you were bicycling?

FRKOVICH: Ya. Ya. Ya. Ya. And a fact, in Costa Rica, it was raining like heaven opened up, and there was little shack right in middle of nowhere, and we

knock on door, and woman opened door. We told her it's raining, could we stay here 'til it stops, at least. Oh, sure. Then, a little shack no probably bigger than this. And four or five kids inside. And there was a little closet, and she was dig and dig and dig, and brought out (he laughs) like box of doughnuts, she brought it out, cookies. And she put it on a table, and we look each other, and we look the kids, we didn't touch it (he laughs) And the kids, they were just watching like this, like little mices. Oh, man. That hurt. (He laughs.)

LEVINE: Now, did you speak Spanish?

FRKOVICH: Oh, ya. I still do. And ah...

LEVINE: So you really have seen such extremes.

FRKOVICH: Oh, ya. Sure.

LEVINE: Just the war, and the treatment.

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. Go through jungle. Along Rio Amazona. River Amazon. All way to Colombian border. And then we work over there for about month. They were building airport, Colombian. And they ask us if we... We couldn't go any further because there was no going through. It was about

five kilometers, jungle. Plain jungle. No roads, no nothing. And the mayor of airport, he was the boss of building, in charge, okay? Not boss, he was in charge of the airport and he told us if we gonna go help them repair the engines, that he will take us across the, across the, over the jungle. And that's what we did. They paid us. We didn't work for nothing. But ah, it was with the agreement with him that he will take us over the jungle with plane. And that's what he did. Yeah. We were there for a month. And we fixed three tractors. They were disabled, I mean. But they did and... And he was very happy, too. Because probably they couldn't, or they didn't have any help or something like that. In those days it was pretty hard to, no trained people. That's why.

LEVINE: Well, you probably couldn't get parts. You probably had to improvise however you fixed it.

FRKOVICH: Yeah. We knew. I'm practically when I was, especially younger, there was nothing there that I couldn't do. Whatever, I mean mechanically. Anything, practically. I see it, and... I could have done it.

LEVINE: And what about your friend?

FRKOVICH: Well, he was with me. Right there.

LEVINE: That must have been an incredible experience to have with another person, to go all that way.

FRKOVICH: Well, we went along pretty fine. Except at one places, he had a brother in Argentina. And ah, his brother called me Philosoph, (he laughs) because I'm adventurer. I like to go and I don't fear. I never feared. And through the jungle, I never feared either. I mean, and in fact, he was say, hear this! Hear that! By the time I was hear this, I was falling out. I just fall asleep. Practically I could sleep anywhere. Not anymore. (laughs) But at that time, I could. And we went pretty good. At that time, his brother wrote him a letter. He asked for help. And his brother said, No. After that, I told him, I say, if you don't want to go, just go back. I go by myself. I don't need you. Something like that. You know, we had, that was only time that we had, and when I told him that, there was no more questions, no more nothing. Because I was determined to go. And he was little doubting, but after that, when he saw that we are (laughing) going ahead, then he didn't complain any more. And then we came here, we came like I said, to St. Louis, Missouri.

LEVINE: Well, let's see. You got smuggled into Mexico. Then what did you do after Mexico?

FRKOVICH: In Mexico, we went to visit our people again, even consul. We thought...(he laughs)

LEVINE: Your people? You mean there were Croatians in Mexico?

FRKOVICH: Croatians. Ya. Oh, ya.

LEVINE: You knew they were there?

FRKOVICH: No. No. Telephone book. Or meet somebody. And from one to another and...

LEVINE: Did you meet Croatians anywhere else on your route after Argentina?

FRKOVICH: Oh, no. Not really. No. No. Just in Mexico. Because we were out of money (he laughs) and we want to, actually we went to consul. And we said we want to go back to Yugoslavia, but which was lie. But ah, we were thinking that they're going to send us to New York to ship, but they were smarter than that (he laughs). Well, the guy said, Well, how did you come here? Well, you can go to New York. (laughs)

LEVINE: What was it like meeting up with the Croatians in Mexico?

FRKOVICH: Oh it was... Because we had Croatians in Argentina too. We had organizations and all that, Croatians. Just like helping, Caritas and something like that. We had those. And ah, we were not that surprised. I mean, we were like ah, we're all people, not just the ones that go, oh, listen. We knew what to expect almost. And then, we went to our like say, Croatians, and they were living there and we told them what happened, and they didn't give you million, but they give you something. We in effect, we went, we start from Argentina with \$60. At that time was pretty good money. And we came to US, Laredo, Texas, with \$55.  
(laughs).

LEVINE: And how much later was it, from the time you left Argentina 'til you arrived in Laredo?

FRKOVICH: Fourteen months. (chuckles).

LEVINE: Wow.

FRKOVICH: Fourteen months.

LEVINE: Must have seen like a lifetime.

FRKOVICH: No, and in fact, right now, I wish, if it did take longer, if we knew what we know now, we would actually (he laughs), but at that time, you know, we just want to go...

LEVINE: What do you think, when you look back at that time, how do you think you feel about it?

FRKOVICH: It was just like nothing happen. It's passed. It's passed. Is passed. Nothing. It was fun. Cause we were young. We didn't think. I mean, from day to day. Some places, we used to be as abandoned ship on a sea. Sometimes we come to the houses, they, just like if ever richest family in the world, two people, they would take us, show us, this and that. Riding in the car (he laughs). All that. Because they were here also. So long, that when they saw us, and they say, We coming, we were over there. Oh, come here, we feed you. We take you there, we show you this, we show you that.

LEVINE: So you actually have some fond memories of that experience?

FRKOVICH: Oh, yeah. Oh ya. We have memories. And a fact, I got at home, written every town that I went through.

LEVINE: You kept like a journal?

FRKOVICH: Ya. Just dates. Just dates. Date, this town date, or this town date, or that town, and so on. Just that.

LEVINE: Okay. So you got to Laredo, Texas, and then what?

FRKOVICH: And then what. Well, then we, like I said, we had \$55 in our pocket. We took train. Just get away from the border. We took train to San Antonio, Texas.

LEVINE: Now, wait a minute. Did you tell how you got, how did you get out of Mexico, into the United States?

FRKOVICH: (They laugh) Well, we, from Mexico City, when we got through with our mission, our collecting few bucks, there is no reason to stay anymore there. So we started toward border. And Laredo was closest. We took bus to Montreal of Mexico. And Montreal is close to Laredo.

LEVINE: Oh, Montreal, Texas.

FRKOVICH: Mexico, yeah.

LEVINE: But could you just take a bus?

FRKOVICH: Where?

LEVINE: To go over the border.

FRKOVICH: Where are the papers?

LEVINE: Right.

FRKOVICH: They gonna, they're not gonna let us go through, cause you need papers to cross the border. When you go to Mexico, or you go anywhere...

LEVINE: Right. You have to have...

FRKOVICH: You have to have papers. We didn't have those papers.

LEVINE: So?

FRKOVICH: So, we came to Montreal, which is in Mexico. It's in Canada too. (laughs)

LEVINE: I know. That's what I thought first when you said it. Okay.

FRKOVICH: No. No. No. No. It's in Mexico, too. And then we stopped there. And during daytime, we took another bus ride, local. And we look where the border is, where we should go, and all that. Then, we went back. Then at night, we come back again, with local at night. During daytime, but before night, then we took again that ride, and near Laredo we went, we waited 'til it gets dark. It was somewhere around two or three o'clock in night. It was March 9, 1950 that we cross at Rio Grande. To swallow practically, and clothes we had right on top of our head, tied to the head, and almost I start to swim when I feel it under my feet is going up (laughing), and, but before that we went, we were coming toward Rio and all of a sudden a dog started to bark. Mmm. We thought it was Mexican guard. But it wasn't. The man comes out, but like this tall and with stick but like this tall, and when he saw, all he said, Mmm. (he laughs heartily)

LEVINE: It was a Mexican man?

FRKOVICH: (laughs) Ya. He had a little shack there and I guess he was living there. And he had a dog. But you can't hide from the dog, especially. There are no trees there. It's little, just vast land. Or sand or whatever it is.

LEVINE: Now, how far did you have to go in the water?

FRKOVICH: The man was but this tall.

LEVINE: About five feet.

FRKOVICH: Ya. Somewhere. And we ask him, how deep is water? And he said, to me about here.

LEVINE: About his waist.

FRKOVICH: Ah, hell, if it's to him, it's going to be to me but like this. And, but we took our clothes off anyhow, cause it was like I said, somewhere around three o'clock at night.

LEVINE: And how long were you in water? How long did it take?

FRKOVICH: Across river.

LEVINE: Yeah. How long?

FRKOVICH: I don't know. Maybe, few minutes.

LEVINE: Oh.

FRKOVICH: I mean, no more than ten minutes all together if it was. And like he said, to here. And when we start to go, the water start to come in my mouth. And I was ready to go and swim. Then I felt under my feet...

LEVINE: That you were going up and out.

FRKOVICH: That is going up. Then I quit. And friend of mine was little taller than I am. That didn't bother him (he laughs).

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. So how did you feel when you reached the United States after all that?

FRKOVICH: Oh, heck, when we got to the other side, shaking like this. Couldn't even put pants on (laughing) standing up.

LEVINE: Cause you were scared?

FRKOVICH: Cold!

LEVINE: Oh, cold.

FRKOVICH: March 9.

LEVINE: Oh, March 9. Okay.

FRKOVICH: Cold. Like hell. We put our clothes on, then we start to walk little further. And we find bushes, then we lay down there. In the morning we were coming to Laredo. I mean, yeah. To Laredo. And it was out of town. And we look at it, but it was not that far. So we walked to the town. And we went to a restaurant. And the guy was Mexican, we know. And we start to talk Spanish to him. No, he's talking English. (laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, you didn't know English then.

FRKOVICH: No. Heck, no. Maybe one word. Two words. Something like that. But that was all English. And good thing I knew German, and some words are, you know, similarity. And ah, then after that, after we ate something, we went to the train station to get tickets. So finally we got tickets and we went on train, and we saw the immigration people (he laughs) are going by and check people that came in with the train. And we start to talk, he knew a little bit German, but I was better in that, and we start to make believe that we are legal and all that. But they didn't bother us, because we came on train from this side, and they're checking the people only from the other side. So we went, so we come to San Antonio. Got off. Ask, how much is ticket from here to St. Louis, Missouri? Forty and some dollars.

LEVINE: Each.

FRKOVICH: Yeah, each and we didn't have it. And we had only between us, I think it was \$43.

LEVINE: Now, why were you going to St. Louis?

FRKOVICH: Because he had his relatives there. And we had only \$43 and that would be for one. But what the heck we gonna do with the other one. Okay. Then, we went, we didn't know what the heck to do, so we got an idea to go to ask bus station how much is bus? Because all over the world, train is cheaper than bus, except United States. So we went to see. I went actually to see for tickets, and I ask the guy, how slow, how much St. Louis? He say, nineteen and something. Oh boy. I didn't believe it (he laughs). I say, San Antonio, St. Louis. How much? He goes again, nineteen and something. (pause) (he laughs) I write it down.

LEVINE: Write it down and you gave him the money.

FRKOVICH: When he said nineteen and something, (laughs). I didn't say it..

LEVINE: Please. You couldn't say it. But you could show it.

FRKOVICH: Two. And he gave us two tickets. And that's... We didn't eat. And a fact, we met a German guy over there. But a born German. And I don't remember exactly, or he came from Germany, I don't recall that. But I think he was born here. And we met him, and he treat us.

LEVINE: Oh, and he spoke German. You could speak to him.

FRKOVICH: Ya. He treat us with eating.

LEVINE: You met him before you left for St. Louis?

FRKOVICH: No, no. We met him in a bus.

LEVINE: Oh, in the bus. How long did the bus take?

FRKOVICH: Oh, I remember. But I think it was two or three days, something. Two days and one night, I think it was. Somewhere around there.

LEVINE: And then you went to the relatives?

FRKOVICH: To St. Louis, Missouri, we came. But, oh boy. He, exactly, I don't know what the heck he was thinking, but he didn't call his relatives right away.

He called somebody else. And then, we came to that house, and from that house, then he calls his relatives, and then his relatives came there, pick him up and I was left alone.

LEVINE: Didn't take you with him?

FRKOVICH: That's American way (he laughs).

LEVINE: Well, how did you feel then?

FRKOVICH: I felt just like (pause) left. (choking laughter) Left alone, and then was from near my town a guy, and he took me in.

LEVINE: He came from near your town?

FRKOVICH: Not from my, next to.

LEVINE: In Croatia.

FRKOVICH: Ya. In Croatia. From my town, and then he took me in, he gave a place to sleep and eat and that was for just couple days. And then I start to look for a job. Went here and there. And went to church, Croatian church and the priest put me to work in hospital.

LEVINE: Not doing machine work.

FRKOVICH: Well, I couldn't do machine work, because I don't know the language. In South America, everything is centimeters. In here are inches. Thousands. Convert all that. It, I didn't have that knowledge, and I couldn't do it. (big sigh) Oh, boy. Then, I worked in hospital for about three months. But in the meantime, the Polish, there were some Polish people there. Young. Couple. Two men, actually. Friends. They were going to school during daytime. Then I would take their books and at night when I was working, read 'em and read 'em and read 'em and read 'em. Boy, did I read 'em. I didn't know what I was reading. But there were some pictures and all that. Read 'em, and read 'em and I did it. And when...

LEVINE: These were to learn English.

FRKOVICH: Ya. Ya. Ya. Ya. Learning English.

LEVINE: These were books to teach you English?

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya, ya, ya, ya. They were going to school for the language and I used their books at night when they were sleeping. I was working. And at work I used to write and rewrite, write and rewrite. And ah...

LEVINE: What were you doing in the hospital, when you were working?

FRKOVICH: As an orderly.

LEVINE: An orderly.

FRKOVICH: But late night, it wasn't much of doing anyhow.

LEVINE: So that's why you could study so much.

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya, ya, ya. And ah, that's what I did for three months. Then I could not sleep during daytime. I got just like toothpick.

LEVINE: Why couldn't you sleep?

FRKOVICH: I don't know.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. Just you...

FRKOVICH: Just couldn't sleep. And I got thin, and lose weight and it was getting to me, kind of dizzy. And ah, I asked them if they could put me on days. No way. Cause I was not qualified to be on days. Because there's questions.

There are different rules. And ah, I quit. And there was my, one man from my own town that came to US too. I didn't know him, over there, because he left before I was even born probably. And ah, I came to him and I told him what I did. Oh, boy. He gave me a hell. He said, I got two sons. They out of work for a year. I myself am out of work for two years. There was no work at that time. And boy, I went, when I went in the room I went crying. In the morning, I got up and go, there was a line of factories and all that along the river, and I went over there look for the job. Went few times here and there. And found place I came there and there were two guys in front of me. They had interview.

LEVINE: Did you speak English now, a little bit?

FRKOVICH: A little bit, oh, ya. I'm good. I used to fill out applications, just better than today (he laughs). Honestly, when you have to do something, you do it. And I fill applications and all that and I came here and two guys went in front of me, they didn't take them for interview. I came over there and I heard the sound of kind of Germanish language (he laughs), and right away I ask him if he speaks German. Oh ya. (laughing) And then he asks me what I do. Where did I learn and all that. It was I think, Wednesday. And he tell me, you want to come to work tomorrow? And I said, No. I started Monday. (laughing hard) So make full week. And that's where I start to work.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE A

FRKOVICH: In meantime, we had a congressman, meet the people of his side. They prepare dinner for this congressman and all that. Connections. And that congressman came for dinner, and he put, I guess, private bill for us to stay in this country.

LEVINE: Now, who knew the congressman?

FRKOVICH: Sullivan. US Congressman.

LEVINE: But the man who gave you the job? Who knew the congressman?

FRKOVICH: No. No. No. No. His relatives. His relatives, okay. Not them, knew congressman, but through connections somebody else knew congressman. But they invite him there for supper or dinner, I don't even remember anymore. And he came there and his wife also. And ah, that's how we got introduced and he put a bill for us. Private bill.

LEVINE: For you and who else?

FRKOVICH: John Marklin.

LEVINE: No. But I mean...

FRKOVICH: The guy that came with me. That was his...

LEVINE: Oh, after he dropped you.

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. We still had connections. Oh, we still had connections. We never broke up in general. I mean, we still have connections.

LEVINE: I see, so it was like, when you told your story to the person who offered you the job, that started the ball rolling.

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya, ya. He didn't know this story. I just told him story that I learned in Germany, that I came from over there and so on. He didn't know how did I come into this country. That was mistake too. (He laughs.) But we come to that later. And ah, that congressman, came there. And he introduced that bill and it was okay with immigration and everything. But I think ten months later, or eight to ten months later, he had a heart attack.

LEVINE: The congressman.

FRKOVICH: And soon as he passed away, little after that, probably ten, fifteen days, the letter comes. You have to leave the country. From the Immigration. You're one of them too. (He laughs.)

LEVINE: I'm one of them.

FRKOVICH: I say, you're one of the Immigration too.

LEVINE: Well, no. This is ah, this isn't Immigration.

FRKOVICH: Ya, okay. But I mean from the Immigration letter comes, you have to leave the country. So we got there, and he say, where do you want to go? New Orleans or New York? Or do you want to be deported? Or voluntary deportation?

LEVINE: So you said New York.

FRKOVICH: We took New York, and voluntary deportation. And when we got to New York, we find connection.

LEVINE: [We're going to pause here.] We're talking about, you got the job, the congressman died, and then you got the letter and you took to New York with the voluntary deportation.

FRKOVICH: Then we came, we came to New York.

LEVINE: And how did you come to New York.

FRKOVICH: By bus.

LEVINE: By bus, but by yourselves.

FRKOVICH: No, no. Two of us.

LEVINE: Two of you, but you didn't have escort or anything.

FRKOVICH: No, no, no, no, no, no. It was...

LEVINE: Under your own...

FRKOVICH: Under your own, voluntarily. We went voluntarily. We came to New York and he had relatives in here also. In New York. And we went over there of course. Of course, he stood with his relatives. I find myself a room to live, and I start, we start together to work in Brooklyn. And ah, in

meantime, we find somebody that had a similar bill to that congressman, that we met, but not same congressman. I mean, another from Minnesota I think that congressman was. But in meantime, we had to pay for that bill.

LEVINE: Wait a minute.

FRKOVICH: The guy that got connection with the congressman, he say, it cost him that much and that much, \$500 of each, at that time was money (he laughs).

LEVINE: He wanted you to pay him for having gotten you that far, to get the bill...

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. To get the bill. Because he say introduction and this and that, cost him money, so we didn't question that. But we pay him and when we got that bill, we thought, we are fixed. We don't have to worry about anything. We went to work. And we work over there, I don't know, for a year and something. I don't exactly know.

LEVINE: But in other words, you were supposed to be deported...

FRKOVICH: Ya, but we find that connection. That congressman, put a bill that we can...

LEVINE: Reversed the idea that you had to leave and that you could stay.

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya, ya, ya, ya. Ya.

LEVINE: And that's what cost \$500.

FRKOVICH: Ya. That cost of five each. Okay. But when we got that bill, we thought, now we fixed. We don't have to do anything. But meantime, that was mistake. We should have report ourself to the Immigration. And we didn't. And we start to work. But year and some pass by. The Immigration comes over there. You're supposed to report yourself, but you didn't and we show them that. But I guess the guy either didn't like us or something was somewhere. Three times he was going back to office, and back. And I guess convince his boss that we should go to Ellis Island. And he took us over there and right here. (He laughs.) And that's where I was three months and twenty days.

LEVINE: Wow. So you were brought to Ellis Island, 1951?

FRKOVICH: '52, I think it was. Somewhere around there, or maybe.

LEVINE: So, 1952. And you...

FRKOVICH: Or maybe '53. I don't know exactly. Maybe. I don't know.

LEVINE: And you were here waiting to be deported.

FRKOVICH: Ya. I was here waiting to be deported. They didn't know where because Yugoslavia was that time, Communist. If you are longer than two years out from Argentina, we were not natives Argentinean. I was immigrant in Argentina. If I'm out of Argentina longer than two years, without reporting to the ah...

LEVINE: Immigration?

FRKOVICH: Either consul or whoever it is that I'm out of there, after two years, I'm losing right to be deported to Argentina. Do you understand what I'm saying?

LEVINE: You were never a citizen of Argentina.

FRKOVICH: No, no, no, no. Not citizen. I was immigrant.

LEVINE: You lose your right to be sent back.

FRKOVICH: Ya. I lose the right after two years, if I didn't report myself to consul or to somebody official that I'm out of country. And I didn't report. We didn't

report. And they could not send us to Argentina. So, we were, who gonna take us, or whatever they gonna send us. But, in meantime, that we were in working and that we were on Ellis Island, the lady of the same congressman in St. Louis, she became a congresswoman. And I guess in St. Louis, the connections they were working over there, and tell her about us. And she introduced a bill for us which came through and you had to go and pay, I don't know, \$25. It was for the, to the Immigration and we got the green card. (laughs)

LEVINE: Describe Ellis Island when you were here. What was it like here?

FRKOVICH: Well, ah, it was not bad really. We had a meal three times a day. We were free, I mean, free to lay, to get up, to read, to... And you could work also. A dollar a day.

LEVINE: Oh, you mean like cleaning the place?

FRKOVICH: In kitchen and something like that. I mean, you could work dollar a day.

LEVINE: Did you do that?

FRKOVICH: No.

LEVINE: No. (both laugh) Yeah.

FRKOVICH: And I used to do quite a bit reading. I used to practically read most of a day all the time that I was there.

LEVINE: What were you reading?

FRKOVICH: Romance, history, stories, old-time criminals or detectives or something like that, most of time.

LEVINE: In English.

FRKOVICH: Ya. In English.

LEVINE: And was there a library here.

FRKOVICH: Ya. There was a library here.

LEVINE: Tell me anything about that.

FRKOVICH: Ya. You could get practically books. That's where I did get 'em. From the library they were free. I mean, you didn't have... We didn't even have to pay for it or anything like that. And we also say, if in former Yugoslavia

was living like we had it on Ellis Island, I think everybody would come to Ellis Island. (He laughs) I mean...

LEVINE: Were there many people here when you were here?

FRKOVICH: Oh, like this. Ah, they had different... On that side over there, there were rooms.

LEVINE: Oh, it was the hospital buildings. They used to call those hospital buildings. On the other side of the slip?

FRKOVICH: No, no, no, no, no, no. Ah, mm, here. On here. We look New York. From our, through our windows. And ah, it was clean bed.

LEVINE: It was a dormitory.

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya, ya, ya. Clean beds and ah, it was not bad.

LEVINE: But there were a lot of people.

FRKOVICH: Oh, there were all... Every nation in the world.

LEVINE: Now, the people that you met, what were they doing here?

FRKOVICH: Illegally, illegally here. Same thing. Illegally here.

LEVINE: Same thing. It was being determined whether they'd be deported.

FRKOVICH: Ya. Or if you got somebody workin' for you outside or something like that. I mean, but they were all for deportation, or illegally here.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. So you were mostly reading all day. And anything else about Ellis Island that you can remember, when you think back at that time?

FRKOVICH: Ah, (he laughs) I have to laugh for few months; I didn't get that green card right away. But I had to report every month to the Island. I used to carry hacksaw...

LEVINE: A hacksaw?

FRKOVICH: I mean the blade in here, in case they won't let me go. I was planning to escape. I was not planning to be deported, no matter what. Even if somebody goes with me to pick up my clothes, I was ready to run. I was not be, (he laughs) let to be deport.

LEVINE: Yeah. So you reported for how many months after that?

FRKOVICH: For couple months, and then the bill came and they gave us green card.

And when I got green card, friend of mine, this guy [Steve Basic EI-1163] brother came on vacation from California and we talked like this, how is in California and all that, but a month later, I think, I went to California.  
(laugh)

LEVINE: Now, how did you know this guy? How did you know Steve?

FRKOVICH: We met at church.

LEVINE: Which church?

FRKOVICH: 1950. Croatian church at that time.

LEVINE: No. Where?

FRKOVICH: Ninth Avenue, ah, oh boy, what that? 35<sup>th</sup>? No, no, no, no. 40-? 50<sup>th</sup> Street! Ya.

LEVINE: So in other words, once you got out of Ellis Island and you just had to report, you went to the Croatian church and then you met....

FRKOVICH: Oh, I, I, I, did go before to Croatian...

LEVINE: Oh, when you were working....

FRKOVICH: Ya, ya. Oh ya. We went over there before. And that's when I met him.

LEVINE: And that's in Manhattan or in Brooklyn, the Croatian church?

FRKOVICH: In Manhattan at 50<sup>th</sup> Street. Between, I think, 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup>.

LEVINE: Right. Yeah. I think I know... So then, ah, you made friends with other Croatians....

FRKOVICH: Oh, ya, sure. I knew practically every Croatian, they were coming to the church.

LEVINE: So then it was Steve's brother who told you about California.

FRKOVICH: Went to California, and then... (laughs)

LEVINE: So then what happened after you got to California?

FRKOVICH: Well, and then I start to work for AMPEX. Only was but two or three weeks. I didn't like that either. Then I went to Western Gears. I worked

there for couple, I think two or three months. I didn't like that either. I got on bad foot with the foreman. Then I went to look for a job again. I went Monday, I went, and took day off and went and find a job in Sunnyvale. Westinghouse at time. And I start to work for them and I been there for 30 years.

LEVINE: Oh. You're there now?

FRKOVICH: I'm retired already.

LEVINE: You're retired now.

FRKOVICH: Fifteen years.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness.

FRKOVICH: And, tell you just this much. When I went for retirement, and I got there, they look my social security. You supposed to be deported. (laugh) I look the guy, oh, yeah? I say, where was you all this 30 years that I pay social security! (big laugh) When they collect, they didn't ask me about deportation!

LEVINE: They didn't ask you about deportation then.

FRKOVICH: Now, that I have to collect, now they're asking me. Then I show him the papers and everything else. And he ask me also, how did you meet her? All this. I said, it's just simple. I met her husband. (laugh) But that different, right away in the gutter. How did you meet her? I said, no, I met her husband first. (laughing) And then, but she was lady. I used to write her Christmas cards...

LEVINE: This is the one that got you the bill.

FRKOVICH: Ya, or Easter cards every year 'til one letter comes back, nobody, no such thing, no address or something like that. I could not get in touch. I didn't know what happened to her. And last year, no, this year still, I changed my tax guy, the guy that fills out tax, and friend that used to work with me, friend. Acquaintance, that used to work at Westinghouse too, we still have veterans dinner every year, and ah, I ask him what he filled out and he told me about this guy. And I went over there, and I ask him where he comes from. He says, St. Louis, Missouri. Oh, I said. I was in St. Louis, Missouri. And then we start talk. I say, I ask him if he by accident knew. I said, there was a congresswoman in St. Louis, Missouri, by the name Leonore Sullivan. And ah, he didn't know. So there he goes on computer. (He laughs.) He looks here, he looks there. No. Then he went to funeral and it shows 1987 she passed away.

LEVINE: Wow. She was an angel for you.

FRKOVICH: Ah, she was for me. And she was quite a lady. Boy, she used to write me beautiful cards, beautiful remarks, I mean, on side of a card. She was nicest woman I ever knew.

LEVINE: Wow. Yeah. So do you think of yourself as American at all?

FRKOVICH: Ya. I think that ah, that's a probably better than another. I, whenever it comes to, or somebody talks, against America (laughs), just like if it was my country, which it cannot be, ah, I was born there. I respect my country. And if I didn't respect my own country, I wouldn't respect this country either. That's how I feel. But nobody can, I cannot say I'm American from foundation. I'm a naturalized American and I like America. I think is best country than any country in the world. But yet, we make mistakes. We do mistakes. I criticize it, and ah...

LEVINE: You can do that in this country.

FRKOVICH: That's it. Like that. But when it comes to ah (he laughs), outside, and say this is bad. America this. I say, What's bad about it? Tell me. I say, Where is any better?

LEVINE: Do you think you have ways about you that are American?

FRKOVICH: Ya. Oh, definitely. I have ways, but what I think, what I say or do, doesn't mean very much anyhow.

LEVINE: What do you mean?

FRKOVICH: Because the bigger people are, higher people in there in governments, they are the ones that make those solutions.

LEVINE: Did you become a citizen?

FRKOVICH: Oh, ya.

LEVINE: So you vote?

FRKOVICH: Oh, ya. I vote. I do all those things. I mean, probably like I said, better than many Americans, born Americans.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Considering your experiences, which are so unusual, how do you think that affected you? How do you think that whole, from the time

you left Croatia, 'til you actually realized you could stay in this country, how do you think all that has played itself out in your personality?

FRKOVICH: Oh, in my personality, when I went to the Immigration in St. Louis, Missouri, and priest was with us, and we took him because we didn't know the language, we didn't know the expression, and our people told us, well, go report to the Immigration. They're going to think that you are good guys because you report to... (He laughs.) If I knew what I know now, I never would go to the Immigration. But that was mistake which I always make those mistakes (laughing). But still, it came out pretty good. He said to us, when we told him all this story. And he say, how would you like to go back? And if I, if there was a hole, and I could fall in that hole...

LEVINE: You would have.

FRKOVICH: I would have. I would rather than hear what he's saying.

LEVINE: But how about you? And the way... Like you said you learned from being in Germany about discipline. What do you think from that whole coming from Argentina and all, how do you think that changed you as a person?

FRKOVICH: As a person, I think I see mentally, different think and different everything. When you are young and you don't have experience, then you cannot judge or see what the others are doing. You got only your opinion. But when you go through this, you can see a little further. And little distance, this, what this, like a man or woman, whoever, if you never was hungry, how do you know what hunger really is? Well, same thing as everything else. If you go through that, then you know. But before then, it's pretty hard. You can say, well, I know, I can feel. But if you never was there, there is only guessing what the other thing is, or what the other feel. That's what I think all the time. They can write books, they can do, but if you never did experience that, down deep, you don't know.

LEVINE: What do you want to do now?

FRKOVICH: Retire. I'm retired already for 15...

LEVINE: Just personally, what would you like to accomplish, or what would you like to do?

FRKOVICH: Well, I think I'm pretty close... .My own, again, my own opinion, I'm very ah, truthful, very realistic that I know I'm pretty close to the end.

LEVINE: Ohhh, 74?

FRKOVICH: 75.

LEVINE: But that's not old today.

FRKOVICH: Ya. But in meantime I have pain here, I have pain here, I got this, I got that. And ah, looking at all that, if one thing don't get you, the other will.  
(He laughs.)

LEVINE: What have been your satisfactions in your lifetime?

FRKOVICH: Well, I like music. I like travelling. I like going places. I mean, even today, at my age, probably, if I had somebody to go with me, I probably would be driving (he laughs). All through country. I like scenery. I like to see things. I like be with people, and if I can help, to help. If I can make you laugh, which in many cases I make many people laugh, whenever I go, I don't use nasty words, but I insinuate it (laughing), to bring you to the point where you gonna, and I'm gonna make you smile.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. Uh, huh.

FRKOVICH: And sometimes many people say, a lady of my friend, she's got MS. And we call each other. Is young, 40 years old. And she's cute too. And we

start sometime talk. Sometimes she cry. And say, don't do that. Say, you make me feel bad too. Then we talk and talk, then after that she say, Well, now I don't have to go to psychiatrist. (He laughs hard.)

LEVINE: Ah, that's great.

FRKOVICH: See, that's what I mean. In conversation, we can make, I can make, smile people. I can make even cry (he laughs) people, if, if... I was sharper when I was younger and I'm kind of losing a little bit, memory, that is. We all do I think at this age.

LEVINE: Yes. I think so. But you could be bitter about some of the things that you've experienced.

FRKOVICH: Why? Why? Why? It's over. When I came to this country, I learn also, don't cry over spilled milk (he laughs). And a fact, as far as written is concerned, I think in last ten years I didn't lose it, but I could have another \$200,000 in my pocket if I was even a little smart. See I had some land in California. 1992, '91, '92, if I sold it I could get \$170,000 for it. Today, since they cut out military, nobody wants to buy it. Okay? I had a place, also in Sunnyvale. I sold it but three years ago, four years ago. If I waited 'til today, I could double the price. You see? (He laughs.)

LEVINE: No use crying over spilled milk, right.

FRKOVICH: Right. I'm not money hungry, and what the heck? My life is okay. I'm living, I can afford it. I'm not rich, but I still have that I can live.

LEVINE: And do you have, I'm sure you do, but what are your attitudes about Croatia now?

FRKOVICH: Ahh, I love Croatia, but I don't think, personally, I don't think there will be peace there. Not just Croatia, but all region. All region.

LEVINE: Why do you say that?

FRKOVICH: Cause too many hard-headed people. Just like Milosevic. I mean, he's practically knocking down his own, choking them to death. Just for his advantage, I think. He want to be on top. Then Bosnia. Then Macedonia. And all those regions. They too small. But everybody want to have a good living. And nobody does not want to work. Because there is plenty land in Croatia. They always say when they immigrate to this country, first immigrant when they came. They didn't have anything. They have over there everything. Health and everything else. But nobody wants to make any effort. Oh, that's what I tell them too.

END TAPE TWO, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay, well...

FRKOVICH: Okay.

LEVINE: Tell me, we're just about to close, but tell me, is there anything else you can think of or anything you'd like to say regarding immigrating to this country, living most of your life really, in this country.

FRKOVICH: No, this country I think, in my own opinion, is greatest country that there is as far as accomplishment. If you put your head, and you want, you have a point where you want to go, you can get there. Maybe a little hardship. Everything that you want to become is a hardship, but you can get to the point where you want to be. Which there is no other country that you can do that.

LEVINE: Well, that's a beautiful way to end, I think. I want to thank you so much.  
Lovely interview.

FRKOVICH: Ya. That's it.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Paul Frkovich, who actually came to this country in 1951, but was in Ellis Island...

FRKOVICH: 1950.

LEVINE: Why do we, can't get that straight!

FRKOVICH: March 9.

LEVINE: 1950, you came to this country.

FRKOVICH: Illegally.

LEVINE: Illegally. But you were, but you were in Ellis Island in '52 or '53.

FRKOVICH: '52, ya, that's it.

LEVINE: Okay. That was confusing. Okay. Well, um, I want to thank you very, very much. And this is Janet Levine, signing off for the National Park Service on August 17, the year 2000.

END INTERVIEW

