

KECK-143

AUGUST ANTHONY ZUANICH

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YUGOSLAVIA, 1920

AGE 10

ALLEE: This is Debra Allee. I'm talking with August Anthony Zuanich on Friday the 7th of February, 1986. We are beginning this interview, which is Interview Number 143, at 1:30 PM. We are about to interview Mr. Zuanich about his immigration experience from Yugoslavia in 1920. Shall we begin at the beginning? Can you tell me when and where you were born?

ZUANICH: I was born in Komisa, Vis, the island, it's the Island of Vis, and the town is Komisa, in 1909. On August 29th. And we lived there with my folks, two sisters and

a brother. Then I can't recall what year, but my father came to this country, oh, well, I was born after he came back. So he must have been prior to 1909. He came to the United States and he was, he didn't come to California. He was fishing for salmon on the coast of Washington. There was also a lot of Yugoslav fishermen up there at that time. And he stayed here for four years. Then he came back and I was born after that. Then when he came back here my oldest brother, John, he says, "You have to go to the United States." He says, "This is no place for you." So he had brought some money that he had made, American dollars, and he sent my oldest brother, John, to the United States. And he came over here and he was very successful, a good fisherman. When he was real young, in fact when we came here he already had, was a captain of a boat, fishing boat. At that time they were small boats, but he had a boat and he was married when we came here also. But then in 1920 he decided, he sent some money and he sent us all passage to come here. So we left everything behind over there. We all packed up and that was right after the World War. In fact, we were the first ones to leave that part of the country at that time. I remember when we had to go from

out little town, about an hours walk to Vis, where the little steamer came, and from there we went to Split. Then from split, Yugoslavia we took another steamer to Patras, Greece. That's where we were supposed to get our ship. Well, on the way over, with all this we finally got there and when we got in Patras they told us that the ship is going to be ten, fifteen days late. But as it was we stayed there a whole month. And there was, I think thirteen of us. There was me and my father and mother and two sisters. And then there was another friend of ours that also name wa Zuanich. Her father, the wife and two children, two daughters, came with us under my father's care and then there was two more children. Nina Vitalich and John Vitalich that their father was here already but their mother had passed away in the old country. And they was with us. And then there was an adult. Nina Porsich. And we were all in one group. So when we had to wait for this ship in Patras they stick us up in the immigration building, I don't know what it was, an agency where it was they put us in one big room. And we had mattresses and we slept there on the floor. But it dragged out. Instead of fifteen days we were there a month. And everything ran

out. We, my brother tried to send us some more money because we had run out, all the ladies but my mother had a little bit of gold and what the girls had. We had to pawn that to buy food to eat while we were staying there.

The agency wouldn't feed us. And so we finally got, finally the day came when we got aboard the ship. And it took us twenty-nine days I think we were aboard. We were in the second class. My God, that ship was loaded from top to bottom. We used to, as kids we were in the second class, we used to run down and mingle with the other passengers, you know. At night they'd have different nations that would get together and they'd sing, they'd play the accordions and we were just kids. We had a ball. To us nothing mattered. We ran. We had plenty to eat. We had our own cabins. I stayed in the same cabin with my father and mother and my two sisters occupied another room where they had two Greek ladies with them. They were from Greece. And they got to talking with each other. They learned how to speak a little bit of Greece. And Greek language, they picked up some of the words, you know, from them. Well, then we got to New York.

ALLEE: Were there other nationalities besides Greek and

`Yugoslavians?

ZUANICH: Oh, my God, there were. A number of these people were Hindus with their, there was practically every nationality, I think, under the flag on that ship coming over. I couldn't name them all, how many.

ALLEE: Was that exciting for you to see all these different people?

ZUANICH: Oh, yeah. My God, in fact, you know, we came from Yugoslavia from that little island. I mean, I hadn't left the island at that age and we only see one kind of people there. There were a few Italians would come and the people that lived at the island. But I, we never saw a black man. There wasn't such a thing as a black man. I didn't know there was people that were black.

ALLEE; Were there black people on your ship coming over?

ZUANICH: Oh, yeah. Well, there were colored but not any black that I really, like Africans or what. There were like Hindu, Indians, or some of those. But the ship was

really loaded. So right away, well, we got off the ship and we boarded a small ship to take us to Ellis Island. And we stayed there ten days.

ALLEE: On Ellis Island?

ZUANICH: On Ellis Island. They had the one girl, this Nina. Well, she, they didn't cut all her hair off, but we were running back and forth and we all had lice. (He laughs.) And she had it so bad that they couldn't get rid of it so they shaved all her hair off. And she was so mad she says, "How come they shave all my hair off? They didn't do it to the other ones?"

ALLEE: And you got the lice from the ship, going down in the hold?

ZUANICH: On the ship, you know, we ran down there. They tried to keep us from running down in the third class, but we were kids, we'd climb over the rails and we'd go down there and mingle with the other passengers. I remember in the passageways, my God, they had the bunks for the third class. They were stacked four high where they slept, you

know. They just took as many as they could aboard the ship. But there, you know, we were treated nice and actually we didn't go out, there was a huge opening but it was fence, there was a huge wire fence.

ALLEE: On Ellis Island this is?

ZUANICH: On Ellis Island. And then they had a huge dining room and they fed you breakfast and lunch and dinner.

ALLEE: Did you eat any new foods there? Did you--

ZUANICH: Well, I mean, as kids, everything was good to us. Whatever they would serve. You had plenty of bread and butter and white bread. That was something. When I was growing up there happened to be between six and ten the World War was going on and stuff started getting kind of scarce. And I know we were rationed there. A lot of time my mother, I would come home from school and be hungry and you had to keep the bread under lock and key. You'd get one slice of bread because she had to wait till the next rationing to make more. But then, you know, on the way over we had plenty of everything. Then

they used to, they'd blow the whistle after dinner we'd all get out in this open area. They had tables and someone would sit and the older people would play cards and us kids would just run around. Back then we'd all run upstairs to the room where we all go to sleep at night. See, some were as far as three high. I remember going up three bunks high.

ALLEE: You were in like a dormitory room?

ZUANICH: Yeah, a big room.

ALLEE: With boys?

ZUANICH: Oh many. All kinds of people (he laughs). And we all used to try to run altogether with my father and my mother and the group we were in so we could be in one area. Because there was really nobody to, in there I noticed that would guide you or tell you. And anyway we didn't, wouldn't understand. My father did pick up a little bit of English but not really too much in the four years that he was over here. So, but they knew real good Italian. My father and mother spoke good Italian and so

did the two sisters.

ALLEE: And were there people on Ellis Island that spoke Italian?

ZUANICH: Oh, yeah, there was a lot of Italian people that they would communicate with.

ALLEE: The people that worked on Ellis Island then, they mostly only spoke English to you?

ZUANICH: Yeah, mostly they would all speak English. I didn't hear anybody that would speak our language, or I didn't, you know, we kids, maybe my father probably found somebody that probably talked to him.

ALLEE: Do you know why you were, why you had to go to Ellis Island and stay for ten days?

ZUANICH: Well, that was the procedure, but some of them stayed two days, three days. What I understood later after even we got here, I said, we got to talking to some people, "How come you stayed so long at Ellis Island?" They said, "It only took us two days." "Well," he says,

"At that time there happened to be an epidemic of some kind of disease that was running around. They wanted to be sure that nobody breaks out before they let you out of there." So that's why they said, they kept us that long.

ALLEE: I see. And you just had a good time when you were there.

ZUANICH: Well, we had plenty to eat as kids and everybody, father and mother, they were, my two sisters were the ones. They were getting jittery, "Oh, my God," they said, "Here we leave and look where they brought us. We're like in a jail." And my father said, "Oh, don't worry, it won't be long." Well, we finally got out of there. One day here comes this little ferry boat and here we go, we got all our belongings and got on this boat and then we got on the train to come over here.

ALLEE: What kind of stuff did you bring with you?

ZUANICH: We didn't have too much. We had a little suitcase. Just our clothes, you know. The other stuff was all left behind.

ALLEE: Your mother didn't bring any favorite pots and pans or anything?

ZUANICH: No, no, we didn't. Gosh there would be, just everything was left behind it. And my father had a big place. He had like a restaurant. We used to, my mother and father cooked and every Saturday we used to have a big place and held dances every Saturday.

ALLEE: That was in the old country?

ZUANICH: In Yugoslavia, yeah.

ALLEE: When you were playing around when you were on Ellis Island on the outside near the fence could you see the rest of New York City? Could you see?

ZUANICH: Oh yeah, you could see fairly well there from the huge fence.

ALLEE: And what did it look like to you?

ZUANICH: At night you could see the lights and, my God, you know,

we didn't have electricity, and we saw all those lights and wondered what, you know, how come there are all the lights and over there we didn't have no lights or gas or anything, you know, when we left. At night you had to be under, we had a lantern or a light, candle light.

ALLEE: Do you remember the Statue of Liberty? Did you see, did you notice it?

ZUANICH: Oh, yeah, when we came, when the steamer comes, enters into where the Statue of Liberty is, then the ships was blowing their whistles and these little tug boats come along side, they all blow their whistles and the people try to get on one side so they could see the Statue of Liberty as you go by.

ALLEE: What did you think? Do you remember? You were a kid.

ZUANICH: We were a kid, you know. everything was new to us. It was, you know, the older people, they more enjoyed it, but I did too, seeing everything. It was quite an experience. It took us, from the time we left the island 'til we got to New York I think it was three months.

ALLEE; Wow. And when you came over the ferry boat into Manhattan what was that like? Did you have a feeling about that?

ZUANICH: Well, there was just not too long when we, you know, we got in the ferry boat and to Manhattan. Then we got right on the train and they boarded us on a train and we took off. So the first day we got on the train and they seated us and I was sitting with this fellow Johnny. He was about my age, the brother of Nina, that my father took responsibility for them to come over because their father was here already. So we were sitting. Here comes this black man. He's carrying a bunch of bananas. So he gives me a banana and he gives him a banana. And this lady was sitting across, I hadn't seen a banana before, neither did he. So I took the banana, both of us started eating it with the peeling and all (he laughs). So this lady kept watching us. Finally she came over and she said, "No, no." (he laughs.) She peeled it all. She showed us how to peel the banana (he laughs).

ALLEE: Did you like it?

ZUANICH: Oh, yeah. So when we, there was no food. They used to pass sometimes an apple or a banana on the train but it would stop every so often. We were on there six days. From New York to California to Los Angeles. Then it would stop and everybody would go out and there'd be a little stand to go buy food. But we didn't know how to talk English so we'd run to get this food stand and we'd sit down and we'd, the lady would come there, we'd point to her to give us this, give us that. She would give it to us and then my father would pay for it, you know. So and then the conductor would start blowing the whistle and my father had to keep track of us, you know. And he'd keep, restless, "Now you can't stay too long, you gotta eat because pretty soon the train is going to leave." And we'd run, run back to the train and on one place in Chicago we stayed, I think two or three hours. I think we switched trains in Chicago. I think I remember we switched trains. So my father says, my shoes all had holes in the bottom, the girls' shoes were all falling apart, so my father says, "We're gonna go," a little ways we walked, I don't know, three, four blocks

away from the station. He got some information that he'd find a store over there and we went in and he bought us all new shoes. So (he laughs) we're coming back and we come back and my God there's no train. And my father goes around, back and forth, he says, "Oh, now we're stuck here. The train left us." Well, we went to information and they said, "No, the train will be here pretty soon." So finally here comes the other train and we got on the other train. Now we come to Los Angeles and my brother--

ALLEE: Can I stop you one sec? While you were on the train, um, did you look out the window and see the size of the country or get a feeling about--

ZUANICH: Oh, yeah. Well, you know, he says, you know, traveling that many days, we kept saying, "Where are we going?" My sisters would say, "Where are we going? When are we going to get there?" You know, everybody, all the time. It took us on the boat, and again from, you know, New York, another six days on the train. We thought we're never gonna get there. Well, it finally came, the day came. My brother was right there and his wife and we had

a cousin and the father of these two girls and their wife that came with us. They were all waiting for us. And at that time my brother had an old, he had a car, he had a touring car. I think it was a Hudson. Touring car, you know, open. We all got in with him on the end of the car and he brought us to San Pedro. He had a home over here. And we all went to live with him. We stayed there, we were living at 530 West 12th Street. We came there. And I remember, I don't know, I don't think I was here four or five days and we had some friend of my brother's that was head of the papers. So right away I went to work. I don't know a word of English or nothing. I went down there and in the morning I'd go sell papers. Then they had this streetcar with, going right by the house on Pacific, and my mother would take me there and I'd take the streetcar and when I got through selling papers I'd come home and I'd go to school. And after school again I'd go sell newspapers. Make a few dollars. And the girls, right away they went to work in a fish cannery at that time. And my father and mother, he was in like, you know, used to having a restaurant or a coffee house where they played cards. So he got him a place, opened, you know. They had a pool table and they had two, three

tables where they played cards. So he would start making a few dollars. And naturally the mother, she stayed, my mother, she stayed home and cooked and my brother had his boat and he fished. And when I got on fifteen, sixteen I went to school and they put us, we went on 15th Street and they called it the Foreign Opportunity Room. Now there was Italians, Japanese, there were Greek, and we had this teacher, Mrs. Godfrey. Now she didn't, to my knowledge, I don't think she spoke any other language at all, you know, like to communicate with us. But right there they were teaching English. We were separated from the other kids because some were older, some were, there were some there that were ten, fifteen years old, some maybe eighteen, nineteen. And there were some younger than I was. And some that we could talk to that were Slav. We'd talk back and forth Slav, you know. And I remember her, a lot of times she'd say, she would separate us, "Now you come here to learn English." She said, "You can't, you're talking Yugoslav all the time, you'll never learn English." But kids, between me selling papers and going down there and hearing the languages, it didn't take us long. I think I was, we were in that Opportunity Room for about a year and a half

we went there. Then when we learned how to speak English and everything and how to read and write English, then I was sent, I went up to junior high. I went in the 9th grade. Then I stayed there until, I think I went until 11th grade. Then I, at this time, in the summertime, my brother was still taking me aboard the boat fishing. So I'd make a few dollars in the summertime, so then I could go to school. Well, in 11th grade I quit. I thought, "Oh, I think I'm gonna quit." "Oh," he says, "You better go to school." Well, I didn't like it. I wanted to go fishing. So I'd make more money. And I went fishing and that was my occupation. I was a fisherman and I got married when I was nineteen years old. I met my wife. She was, they lived in Catalina. They were from the, that's Kay's sister from the same island. And they knew, my father and mother knew their father and mother, you know. So I got married at nineteen and my, I was a fisherman, kept fishing. Always made a good living. I fished practically all my life. I did some other jobs off and on. I also worked in a ship yard in my later years and I was, I used to do some longshoring if the fishing was slow. We always had to keep going so we made a living. It wasn't anything at that time that you could

say, "Well, I'll collect unemployment, I'm gonna--." Somebody, nobody gave you nothing. You just, if you didn't have it, it was just too bad. You had to go out and work. You know, and my folks got, when they got older, real old, naturally we took them in and they lived with us for about eight years. My father and mother with me and I was the youngest one of the bunch so they said, "Well." And we had a little rough time, you know, with the wife and, you know, to keep the old folks when they got old. But somebody had to take care of them, there was nobody to take care of them. At that time, like I say, there was no social security or pensions or nothing. It was, you had to be, somebody had to feed them and have a place for them to live. So that's about the whole story (he laughs).

ALLEE: You said you had gone back to Yugoslavia.

ZUANICH: Yeah. I went back, you mean, I went back after--

ALLEE; Yeah. How was it?

ZUANICH: Oh, gosh. Like when we left, like I say, you know, we

didn't have anything. We didn't have lights, electricity. Then when we went, I had a nephew in the big town Ulcini, that's on, that's Yugoslav Riviera where they had a beautiful home there. And we spent almost a month there. And we went to Venice, we went to different place from there. Then we went back to where I was born. We took a steamer from there and went to Split. And that, when I got to Split I could start remembering, you know, how when we were there, but it wasn't that crowded, you know, it wasn't that much. But when I seen all, you know, how they have everything now, they have nice refrigerators and when we came even to our little town I went to visit the house we still owned. Had the house 'til about, oh four or five years prior to that my nephews came over here and they said, "Well, what are going to do with that house?" He says, I says, "Well, we don't intend to come and live over here." He said, "Why don't you--?" We left it to them. So there was four of them that, you see, when we left the only one that was left behind was one sister who was married. She was left behind, So when they got, they were taking care of the house and this in particular I says, "Well, we'll leave the house to you." And well, the other one says, "Well.

you can't do that ." He says, "There's four of them over there and they." So evidently they sold the house and after a while, and divided the money, whatever. But I went to see the house and, you know, the outside, you could never tear those houses down, the way they were built. Stone walls about that thick. And there was a big, there was a big huge place, like where the dance floor is. They made two apartments out of that and then where we had bedrooms upstairs they had made another apartment. They made three apartments out of that place. And the people that had it showed us, you know, how they used it in the summer time, they used to rent two and they'd live in one. And we just couldn't get over it. My wife says, "My God," she was born in San Pedro, you know. But then she says, "How did you used to live? How did your mothers and fathers raise you, you had no water?" The girls had to go almost from my house a good mile and a half. And they have these tubs and they use to, we had running water all the time, just water ran from a spring. And they would load up this tub and carry the water home. And that was for our water. And we had a few goats and a donkey and I remember being little, four, five, six years old and I'd take the goats after

school and the donkey and take it out to pasture. You couldn't ride the donkey because my father taught me, showed me two, three times, he says, "When you come back you gotta go in the woods." And you had to chop up wood and make two bundles and you loaded the donkey and you brought that wood back for the fire. He said you couldn't ride on the donkey. And you had the goats for the milk. We didn't have any cows at all on the island. And we had a lot of fish. We really never were that we were hungry, you know, the time we were there. During the war it was rough. When the Italians came, then they occupied the little island.

ALLEE: World War One?

ZUANICH: Yeah. First World War.

ALLEE: So you lived under an Italian occupation for a while?

ZUANICH: Yeah. Some of them did go with the Italians and some of them refused. But then eventually they got straightened out and then the Italians left and we went back to normal again under the Yugoslav rule. Then

everything started picking up better. We were getting more food and meat and stuff like that.

ALLEE: Do you ever think about what it would have been like if you had stayed and never came here?

ZUANICH: Yeah. Sometimes just wondering I says, "If I would have survived it," I was thinking, my wife, sometime we get to talking, she said, "What would you do if you still had to stay in Yugoslavia?" I says, "What would I do? What would the rest of them do? If I didn't know any better and that's the way we were raised, that's the way it would have been." I says, "Maybe if I had foreseen, like a lot of them do, when I got the age eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old, whatever," I says, "I would have probably done it with the rest of them. Immigrated here to the United States or take off and leave, you know." So it was like you had to go wherever it was best for you, yeah.

ALLEE: You mean you really just couldn't stay?

ZUANICH: No, I don't think I would have stayed, naturally. But

if, you know, a lot of people didn't have the opportunity to leave either. I had, when we went back there some of my school mates that I went to school with when we left there, they were still there. So you see, they says, "We never had an opportunity to come to the United States or go anywhere else." So they're still there on the island.

ALLEE: End of side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

ALLEE: Beginning of side two. Have you been back at all to the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island?

ZUANICH: No. We have never been back to New York or Ellis Island, no.

ALLEE: So you didn't see it again.

ZUANICH: I would like to see it. The place, I wonder, I don't think that building must be there in existence.

ALLEE: Ellis Island?

ZUANICH: Ellis Island. Is it still there?

ALLEE: Oh yes, it's there. They're restoring it. Part of the whole centennial is that they're restoring the Island.

ZUANICH: Because it was a huge building, I remember, big.

ALLEE: Did you explore all of it?

ZUANICH: Oh yes, as kids, we ran every place (he laughs). I think, I remember one day we ran out, I don't know, there was big iron gate and it was open and we ran out. Then somebody finally came after us and I don't know where we were running to. It was me and this Johnnie and the girl, Nina. The three of us got. We were running outside and this man came after us and brought us back inside the gate again.

ALLEE: Did the people who worked there, did some of them have uniforms or were they just like guards?

ZUANICH: Yeah, they had uniforms, like the men had those black uniforms, like a black uniform and a hat. But there wasn't too many. I never did see that anybody bothered you or, and when we used to run into, I couldn't see too many people how they actually worked it. But they had all these tables set up and when you, when they would blow the whistle and everybody would run into the dining room and everybody, everything would be there. The food would be there. They had all this bread stacked up. They had huge loaves of bread that looked like they were about this long.

ALLEE: About two and a half feet.

ZUANICH: And they had all this butter and you'd, the food would be all there on the plate and you'd sit down and start eating. They had water and then they had coffee and whatever, you know, it was all set up. I don't know how they worked that there, I guess that was the system that they had.

ALLEE: Was there a bedtime, a time you had to go to bed?

ZUANICH: Oh, yeah. I think it was around none o'clock. They would, I could hear that whistle and everybody would, there was two big ramps. One on this side and one on this side of the big hallway that we stayed on there. They'd open these gates and everybody would run. We'd go full speed up the ramp to, I think there was one story high where we'd go to the bedrooms.

ALLEE: Did they keep track of you? Did people know your name and did they--

ZUANICH: No, I never remember that they called roll call. Anybody who was put there, evidently they must have had it there, you know. In the office, I don't know if they kept in touch with my father, probably now and then with him. But, you know, a kid, we didn't pay too much attention about that.

ALLEE: Did you have showers and bathrooms?

ZUANICH: Oh yeah, oh yeah. We had showers and bathrooms and yeah. Oh, yeah they made, everyday this, I think

somebody would come talk with my father and then we'd, I don't know if he was talking to him in Italian or English, but he couldn't talk that much English. But Italian he did. And they used to come and tell us kids, you know, he'd come and gather the kids and he'd say, "You have to go in the bathroom. And," he says, "Wash." He says, "And shower, you know." There was towels there and soap and everything. You'd shower and wash yourself.

ALLEE: Um, they, I guess when you got off the boat that's when they inspected you and found the lice in your hair?

ZUANICH: Yeah, that's when they found, when we got to Ellis Island, that's when they--

ALLEE: Did you go through, were there a series of doctors and people that you had to see when you came?

ZUANICH: No. There wasn't. No.

ALLEE: Well, somebody cut your hair, so--

ZUANICH: Yeah, my eyes, the boys they didn't, you know. Our

hairs, when we left I think over there in Patras they cut our hair short. But this one girl, Nina, she was, she and the two little girls they didn't cut their hair. They're smaller. But hers had so bad that they shaved all her hair off. She was the only one.

ALLEE: She must have liked that a lot.

ZUANICH: No. (They laugh.)

ALLEE: Well, um, did you make friends on Ellis Island? Any people outside your family and your group, your traveling group?

ZUANICH: No, well, there'd be some other kids we'd play with and then some of them would shy away. Like these two girls and Johnnie and Nina, we'd be talking Yugoslav and they'd probably be this other language and they, I guess they didn't know what we were talking about and we didn't know what they were talking about. So we'd naturally kind of stuck together. We talked to one another and if you played back and forward, why, we talked to one another. You know, when you don't know their language and what

they're saying and they didn't know what we were saying, unless you run into some that were Yugoslav people.

ALLEE: Did you watch the boats in the harbor?

ZUANICH: Oh yeah. We could see all through that, you know, it was fenced, with big wire fence, you could see the boats. You could hear the whistles blowing, tug boats and all.

ALLEE: I'm trying to think before we finish if I have any more questions. No, I think that's very good. This is the end of the interview with August Zuanich. The time is now 2:10. This was Interview Number 143.