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STEVEN CONGRESS
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ALBANIA, 1913
AGE 16 (AS RECORDED IN THE INTERVIEW)
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APPLEBOME: This is Edward Applebome and I'm speaking with Mr. Steven
Congress on Tuesday, June 3rd, 1986. We are beginning this interview at
about 4:35 in the afternoon. We are about to interview Mr. Congress about his
immigration experience from Albania in 1913. This is interview number
183. Mr. Congress, can you tell me where and when you were born?

CONGRESS: I was born January 17, 1895.

APPLEBOME: And where were you born?

CONGRESS: Albania.

APPLEBOME: What town or city?

CONGRESS: Well, the name is Badilon. B-A-D-I-L-O-N. It is a small village.

APPLEBOME: And what was the city that was near there?

CONGRESS: Premet. P-R-E-M-E-T.

APPLEBOME: And what kind of village was it?

CONGRESS: It was a village of 250 Christian homes and 150 Mohammedan homes. We had churches and we had mosques.

APPLEBOME: Yours was a Christian family?

CONGRESS: Right.

APPLEBOME: What was it like growing up in that village? What did you family do?

CONGRESS: Since we were under the Ottoman Empire, they were rather ruthless because Ottoman Empire was really and truly split in 62 states, which the Mohammedans called it "vilate," which means state. And while they were _____ they had to be serious and rather ruthless. So before I become 15 my father thought that I should flee the country.

APPLEBOME: What were some of the ruthless things that they did?

CONGRESS: Because when they fought the Christians, the Byzantine Empire, they suffered consequences, and since all the Balkan states were under Turkey, they had to split, and they had to be right where Hitler was, only split thick, and when he got thin then he was ruthless.

APPLEBOME: Were there soldiers stationed in your town?

CONGRESS: In Premet, in town of 10,000, was. And of course, over there you had to go and register before you are 15. But I left before 15 because if you do register in two years you have to serve in the Turkish army. And over there we never wanted to fight the brother Christian. That's why my father sent me away to Salonika. Salonika was Turkey at that time, Macedonia. But they had no such kind of system if they discover that I went there. So he sent me where my brother-in-law was, in Salonika, to be near him.

Over there, I was 14 going on 15, I went to work in a pharmacy for two years in order to learn the Turkish language, too. In order to serve them because they were Mohammedans.

APPLEBOME: Which was the language you had spoken at home?

CONGRESS; Albanian. But then Albanian language prohibited by Turkey to write and read in school. But fortunately the Patriarch of Constantinople, when they lost their battle with Turkey, signed signature wherever there are Christians, Orthodox churches, the language should permit it. So I was obliged to go to a little school near the church and learn the Greek language in order to be civilized. And school, too. The church had a school. So, as a seventh grader, I'm jumping my subject, when I come to United States, in night school they told me my seventh grade was equal to ninth grade in America.

APPLEBOME: You were a good student?

CONGRESS; Yes.

APPLEBOME: And the Albanian that you spoke, you had to be secretive about that?

CONGRESS: Well, you see, it was not permitted, the language, to be written, or to have a newspaper, or in the schools. Because Albania had a leader that when Turkey, 1485 conquered Albania, in the later years they got their boy nine years old by the name George Kastriote. The Turks called him Skender Bey. Because they educated him in Constantinople and when he got to be 21 he got to be General. And he promoted some new places for Turkey. But when he found out that Albania was suffering from Turkey he asked the Sultan, "Since I remember the Albanian language, why don't you send me there so I can be of service to you?" There was fighting in the mountains everywhere. The Sultan gave him the ring, the blessing, papers, go. He went. Albania had 25,000 Anatolian troops in Albania. But the officers didn't like Skender Bay, they tried to postpone him until they hear from Sultan themselves. They waited and waited, Skender Bey got around to the Albanians. He said, "How many troops you have in the mountains?" They said 10,000. When it was Ramadan Day, Ramadan means in Turkish, like we have here Christmas, and then they were drinking, drunk, he brought the 10,000, smashed the doors, got in, slaughtered 20,000 Mohammedans. Albania was free for 25 years. All the rest of the Balkan states were under Turkey. Not Albania. Even the Pope hired him to help with Venice to chase Turkey out. But Skender Bey said, "When Byzantine Empire begged you for help, you gave them the cold shoulders, now you're suffering the consequences."

I've got a little country to support and fight, keep free." After 25 years when he died at the age of 65, that's the time the Turks come ruthlessly. And from four million Albanians become all the 25 Christians percent, and 75 percent Mohammedans. Be a Mohammedan or die. That was the motive of that ruthless Empire. So that's why my father had to send me to Salonika. I stayed there 1912 when the Balkan War began, and the Greeks were superior because they fight with heart and soul. They freed Salonika, Macedonia, and Turkey was defeated.

APPLEBOME: Did the fighting go on near the village you were in?

CONGRESS: Oh yes. But Albania right away got their flag out, but I didn't want to go back because I don't know what I'd find. So--

APPLEBOME: How were you treated as an Albanian who was now living in Greece?

CONGRESS: In Greece very good because Greece, Macedonia, Salonika was under Turkey. But they had their churches and everything, and their language. So 1913 when the Greek troops come it was surprising, of course, that a small nation could beat a great nation. So at that time I decided I had enough to come to the United States. My brother was in

Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

APPLEBOME: I don't think I understand. Why did you decide that you needed to leave?

CONGRESS: Because my brother was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And I said the new world had brought opportunities for some of the place that never was. But, I didn't leave Albania because we were poor. My father was in flour mill business. Three brothers. And we had land and we had wealth. But the life wasn't, wasn't a happy one under Turkey. So I decided to come to America and I had saved money for the trip.

APPLEBOME: You felt that you weren't free in Albania or in Greece?

CONGRESS: Oh, you see, when you are 15, 16 years old you don't think that deep. And naturally you think like 16. And perhaps the adventure was needed, too. So 1913 I decided, I got papers to go. I went as far as Piraeus. Piraeus was where all the shipping industry, of course that was a big city, and over there they booked me with a Hungarian line. Austria-Hungarian.

APPLEBOME: What had you heard about the United States from your

brother?

CONGRESS: My brother.

APPLEBOME: What had he told you about in advance?

CONGRESS: He told me the goodness and the liberty over here and if a person had the germ of success to work, America was the place.

APPLEBOME: How long had he been here for?

CONGRESS: My brother was here year and a half before me. He had to leave Albania like me. That's why father used to say, "To see children go way before they are grown up is a tragic moment." But that had happened.

APPLEBOME: Had he been writing you from Milwaukee?

CONGRESS: Oh, yes. And when I started with the ship we were flying the Austro-Hungarian Line flag. Of, course it was Franz Joseph's picture (he laughs) maybe you know. And the ship was immense, lot of people --

APPLEBOME: Where did you get the ship from?

CONGRESS: Piraeus, Greece, that's a big port. And--

APPLEBOME: How did you have enough money to be able to make this voyage?

CONGRESS: Well, because I worked two years in pharmacy and I had some money from father. Well, going to the ship, naturally there must have been about eight or nine hundred people. The immensity of noise, languages, was undescrivable. And it is good when you speak somebody's language because he approaches at you more friendly. So the Turkish language helped. The French helped--

APPLEBOME: How had you learned French?

CONGRESS: Well, in school, the Greek school give us lessons as much as a second grader. And of course The Turkish I learned outside.

APPLEBOME: You must have been a very good student of language.

CONGRESS: Yes, well the languages helped one another. For example,

if I let you "quovades" I tell you in Latin. In English, "Where are they going?" In Albanian, "kuvete." So you learn. If you tell me what does it mean, if I tell you what do you mean if I tell you ornithology, from Greek.

That words represents six, seven words in English. I know it in Greek in only one. If I say anthropology, three or four words in English, one in Greek. It's the richest language in the world. So when you say in Turkish _____, it's entirely different. Like the Arabs say, _____.

APPLEBOME: Do you speak Arabic also.

CONGRESS: Very few words. So in the boat I learned a lot. I wasn't lonesome.

APPLEBOME: You went over steerage?

CONGRESS: All alone. I had nobody with me. And, but you don't feel lonesome when you speak few languages. But then you find a lot of people that get seasick. I wasn't seasick. All the trip. And it took three weeks to reach the Harbor of New York.

APPLEBOME: Did the boat stop anywhere along the way?

CONGRESS: No.

APPLEBOME: You just sailed out the Mediterranean?

CONGRESS: Right out. It was big with three, five stacks. So must have been over 900 people.

APPLEBOME: Did you tell me the name of the boat, I'm not sure, do you remember?

CONGRESS: Austria-Hungarian Line.

APPLEBOME: Do you remember what the name of the boat was though?

CONGRESS: It was Austria-Hungarian Line.

APPLEBOME: That was the line.

CONGRESS: And the great leader and endorser was Franz Joseph, the King. To go back 75 years to remember that takes a lot of memory.

APPLEBOME: That's why we come and talk to you.

CONGRESS: Thank you.

APPLEBOME: So tell me what the boat trip was like.

CONGRESS: The trip was stormy, a lot of people got seasick, but then when you are at the table all the dishes go off in every direction. And a lot of people were frightened, especially some that were middle-aged. But reaching the port of New York, we reached it at night. And the biggest thrill that you get in your life is when you see the Statue of Liberty. You look, and when you see the light on the torch you can't explain, because it's unexplainable. And then you see the bright lights, big buildings with lights, that is the City of New York, the great city of the world.

APPLEBOME: You had heard about New York or had you seen pictures, how did you know what to expect?

CONGRESS: Well, because you read. You read a lot. And then--

APPLEBOME: What were some of the things that you read?

CONGRESS: You read how the Statue of Liberty was given from France.

Because they helped one another. And in the text books it says how Lafayette helped America during her need. That's why when I was in World War I when we reached France we said, "Lafayette, we're here." So you see how that works? So when you see the Statue of Liberty, if you please, you see, because the light brings the face of the Statue of Liberty, of course the Statue of Liberty at that time was 27 years old. Today it is pretty old. And New York City, as young as you are, you say to yourself, "This is the New World."

APPLEBOME: What did the people on the boat do when you pulled into New York Harbor and the Statue was there?

CONGRESS: Many were happy and many were worried whether they can pass. So when you go to great big place that is on, the sky behind, how it big it was. Maybe I was young and I see it with a different pair of eyes, but it was big. And to see thousands and thousands of people line up in perfect order. No noise, no loudness, or you see some officers walking around, no soldiers, no police, but officers that were from the ships I guess. And I'll never forget when a young man came to me and he said to me in a very poorly interpreted way, (he laughs) "What language do you speak, do you?" something like this. I said, "What language do you want? I speak Albanian, Greek,

some French, and a little Turkish." After we got through he took us, about 17 young boys, to be examined by three doctors. When I got through I had a big 7, and an address in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. That was all. So I made way to go to Milwaukee.

APPLEBOME: Let's just back up a little bit before we get to going to Milwaukee. What else can you tell me about the boat trip over? What were some of the things that you did or the people that you saw? You said you had a good time.

CONGRESS: You see, while the sea was calm, if my memory serves me right, the Italians would sing Italian. The Arabs, Arabic, like Turkish. And of course the Greeks had their own mandolins. And naturally when it was bad weather that happiness ceased because they worried.

APPLEBOME: And which people would you sit with?

CONGRESS" I sit with the Greeks and some Turkish fellows, and French and a few Italians. But there was, everybody was peaceful and kind to each other. Of course the only worry was whether they would be admitted.

APPLEBOME: Did you make any friends on the boat trip over?

CONGRESS: Made a few but later never corresponded.

APPLEBOME: Were you one of the singers> Would you sing in the evening?

CONGRESS: No, I didn't sing. I was a listener.

APPLEBOME: Were there any people dancing?

CONGRESS: Yes, when the weather was good. It was a lot of fun. You see, in the boat, if you please, when you have so many days, lot of people do get bored. And to see whether we're going to have a good day tomorrow because they didn't have the facilities we have today to given any knowledge of today or tomorrow. So when you live in the past you appreciate the present and you pity the one that takes life for granted and he does not know the dark days of past. Am I saying that right?

APPLEBOME: I think so, I think so. Let me ask you another question about the boat. Were there first and second class passengers that you could see?

CONGRESS: First and second, no third was no. I think they were good
to them. First class were some older people. And to those I
suppose it hit them, but when you are young-- (he laughs)

APPLEBOME: You're lucky that you had a nice boat trip over. Some
people were sick all the way and they had a very unhappy time.

CONGRESS: Yes. Well, you see, if you please, sometimes is wonderful
from the home you come from. Today I am reaching 92 and I say,
"Thanks God, I was brought up in Albania until 14 years old," and I still maintain
the principles. Honor. Father said you would better be dead than dishonor the
family. If you say in Albania "I pa bese" you're enemy number one to the
public. It means you are disloyal.

APPLEBOME: Were there anything you were able to take with you from
home? When you travelled, what did you take?

CONGRESS: Oh, I took a few souvenirs, which are all-- And of course
when you, when you travel to so many cities and then go to the army, and
when you are in the army and you are in good behavior, and your record is clean,
they give me the privilege, my hospital where I was serving, I was in the

medical department, that since my record was A-1, when the Armistice was signed they told me I could go to Albania to see my people. They did. So to keep some small records, they vanish, they don't last. Unless you have, even if you write something, in ten years the ink is dry. Same thing with life. I don't know if I make it clear what I want to say.

APPLEBOME: But when you did leave, what were the things that you took with you?

CONGRESS: From Salonika?

APPLEBOME: Or from Albania.

CONGRESS: From Albania I took things, that briefcase, some kind of money father give me, and he give me some coins, Napoleonic gold pieces. But strange as it may be, well, while I had my coins in a place where I'm supposed to live before reaching Salonika, the packets were trimmed and the coins were gone. I sent a letter to my father.

APPLEBOME: Do you know what happened? Do you know who could have stolen?

CONGRESS: Somebody stole it. Because it was a poor hotel before
reaching Salonika. And it was a Turkish town, of course, and--

APPLEBOME: You must have been very unhappy when that happened.

CONGRESS: Yes. Sometimes I remember father used to say, "Never
remember sad things. Happy things. Never speak ugly words. Beautiful
words." So to this day I preach that. But I have the good luck to have a good
wife, that she is superior to my knowledge. She finished University in
Greek. So whenever I want something from the classic to the modern,
she is my teacher.

APPLEBOME: This is the end of side one of tape one of the interview
with Mr. Stephen Congress. This is interview number 183.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

APPLEBOME: This is side two of tape one of the interview with
Mr. Steven Congress. This is interview number 183. Let's return
now to the time you arrived at Ellis Island. Is there anything else y
ou can tell me about the examination or how you felt or what people

looked like?

CONGRESS: The three doctors that examined us, you would say, in a few words, in French "parfet" perfect. And whatever the other fellow was, he would say, "What does that mean?" in Italian, and he'd tell him. He'd tell him it in the Italian. So that was the only way for some doctors they had to get it in a few words. But there were some, may I proceed?

APPLEBOME: Of course.

CONGRESS: There were some very unhappy and bitter. Because some of them were in ill health and others had trouble with their government and were not a choice of America to accept. So they were two kinds, that one in ill health and one that was guilty of his own affairs.

APPLEBOME: Were you worried about being rejected?

CONGRESS: No. No.

APPLEBOME: Did you see some people who were turned down?

CONGRESS: Yes. Yes, some. But I could not speak their language.

There were some Hindus from Hindustan. Because a lot of Hindustan people wore turbans like Turks. And they were turned down. I suppose they had trouble with England at that time. And many were ill. And they were easily found out how, what kind of illness they had.

APPLEBOME: What would they do with the people who were being rejected?

CONGRESS: They take them in different department and give them place to sleep, food, instructions, and to be patient, and the next ship was on their expense. That's all I know.

APPLEBOME: How long were you on Ellis Island for?

CONGRESS: Two days.

APPLEBOME: How come you were held overnight?

CONGRESS: Well, because the boat come at night, and the next night, by the time they were through with you it's late to go away. So they give you a place to sleep, good food.

APPLEBOME: What kind of food did they give you?

CONGRESS: Oh, they give you, like in Austrian you can say goulash,
like stew.

APPLEBOME: And where did you sleep?

CONGRESS: Oh, they give you a little bunk, but it is upper, lower. I
choose the upper.

APPLEBOME: Who did you share the room with?

CONGRESS: With one Italian fellow. He was below me.

APPLEBOME: So you couldn't communicate with him?

CONGRESS: No, not with him> A few words, in Italian we say,
"per se," "perse" in Albanian, "perque" in Italian. Of course in Italian
when you say "douve vi?" where are you going? In Greek "pou pate." In French, "ou
allez vous?" In Albanian, "kuvete?" In Turkish (says it in Arabic)
So you see--

APPLEBOME: How many boats had come in that day that it was so crowded that it took all afternoon?

CONGRESS: Too many boats.

APPLEBOME: Do you remember how many boats were there?

CONGRESS: Oh, I should judge about 40.

APPLEBOME: Forty?

CONGRESS: Forty ships.

APPLEBOME: There were ships all around the Harbor?

CONGRESS: All around the Harbor.

APPLEBOME: And how did you get from your boat to Ellis Island?

CONGRESS: Well, when you are, if you please, near, they put a big boat, so you walk. But they have things to hang out, they have ropes.

But it is every bit of 100 feet from the boat
to the sidewalk.

APPLEBOME: But from the main ship, the ship that you came in on--

CONGRESS: You get the sidewalk, from there another little ship takes
you to Ellis Island. Because not the same boat. Very small boat. Like
those boats we see in guards, you know, guard boats. And it takes you there in no
time.

APPLEBOME: So you really weren't worried when you were on Ellis Island?

CONGRESS: No, no.

APPLEBOME: Were you well treated?

CONGRESS: Very well treated. You see, when you are young you are
well liked. Because your demands are little. And you are joyful, kind,
light of heart. While a person is advanced in age doesn't have the advantages.
He has to think many things about his health, economical, and moral, if he is
guilty.

APPLEBOME: Did you see older people there who looked very unhappy?

CONGRESS: I saw some but most of them were serious, not smiling.

APPLEBOME: Were there people crying?

CONGRESS: Some. Especially those that were rejected, was really sad day for them.

APPLEBOME: Were you bothered to be by yourself?

CONGRESS: No. You see, when you leave home when you are 14 years old, in different country, you kind of get used to it. And the voyage don't punish you. The lonesomeness from this is gone. You get homesick when you leave home. You never forget.

APPLEBOME: After you got off of Ellis Island, what happened?

CONGRESS: (He laughs) Well, they put me in the right train to take to Milwaukee. And of course Milwaukee--

APPLEBOME: Where did they take you to the train station?

CONGRESS: I don't remember the train station where they took me, but I had to go through New York, through Chicago.

APPLEBOME: Who took you? How did you know how to get there?

CONGRESS: Oh, well they took me. They had it all written down.

APPLEBOME: Who's they?

CONGRESS: When they say address Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the big seven, underneath says the address and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

APPLEBOME: And what did the number seven stand for, why did they write seven?

CONGRESS: That was my number. So many boys were there, I was number seven. And when I got to Milwaukee, naturally my brother was there and a few cousins, but when you don't speak the language you are already a laying duck.

APPLEBOME: So how did you take care of yourself on this train trip?
What did you do for food?

CONGRESS: Oh, as far as that goes, they took us to a place where,
because when you have money they show you, you show them the money and
they take some money. And they take you to the place where there's dining room,
had something to eat, and they take, because I remember around \$47 with me. (He
laughs).

APPLEBOME: That was a lot of money.

CONGRESS: (Wife hands him glass of water.) Thank you, honey. When
you have a good wife you have a piece of gold.

APPLEBOME: That's the truth.

CONGRESS: In Milwaukee, Wisconsin most of them are Germans. And the
German language thrived there. The factories are German. The breweries
are German. And unless you have a pull to get a job, not any position, because I was
not capable at that age, 16, 17 you're young. But you work for a dollar
a day, it's very poor living. And because I didn't like the job in
factory I got a job washing dishes in a pharmacy where they had soda fountain. And

later on they taught me how to make the syrups for the sundaes. And when I used to make mistakes he used to tell me things that I don't understand. But i said, "Sorry. Thank you. Sorry. Thank you." But you see, when you are young you are so easily forgiven.

APPLEBOME: Had your brother met you at the train station when you got to Milwaukee?

CONGRESS: Oh yes, yes.

APPLEBOME: And you recognized him right away?

CONGRESS: Oh yes, right away, because my brother was five years older than me. And naturally he liked factory work, but I didn't.

APPLEBOME: Did hew speak English yet?

CONGRESS: A little bit. The only thing was that he didn't want to go to school and I liked to go to school. But to go to school you had to work daytime, make dollar, and a sandwich in your hand, you go to school, night school. You learn very little because it's a strange language.

You get some words from the French, from the Greek, but I am not advanced

at that stage yet. So it was difficult, year or two, and then I had to go to work and make more money because I couldn't live on a dollar.

APPLEBOME: Were you living with your brother?

CONGRESS: Yes.

APPLEBOME: Was there an Albanian community in Milwaukee?

CONGRESS: Oh, yes. But then you get, when you leave home, that you leave a very rich life, you consider yourself punished, in great discomfort to live the way you do. So slowly but surely you try to make something of yourself. Sooner or later I got to learn that I could do something. So I try also to be a busboy. A busboy they give you tips in the hotel. I got to learn English enough to be a waiter. They told me I had to learn more English to be a waiter, one more year. 1916 I become a waiter.

APPLEBOME: What hotel was this?

CONGRESS: Hotel Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

APPLEBOME: Where is it?

CONGRESS: Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

APPLEBOME: Where in Milwaukee?

CONGRESS: Grand Avenue. It was Hotel Wisconsin. Maybe it is today.

Believe it or not I'm not ashamed to say it, I didn't want to be a servant. I hated the word servant. Because my father, in the three mills they had with his three brothers, had 18 servants. And I told my brother--

APPLEBOME: How many servants?

CONGRESS: Eighteen. In three water powered mills. They had three mills. So my brother said to me, "Don't think like in Albania." I said, "I don't like this life." Anyway, 1917 come, I joined the American army.

APPLEBOME: Had you thought about returning to Albania?

CONGRESS: No.

APPLEBOME: Why not?

CONGRESS: Well, I wasn't ready. Because I had to be worthy of what my father said. What my father said, you want to know? When I was twelve years old in vineyard father was pruning. He had his men work for him in vineyard. Vineyard had a big wall and below the wall was a forest, one acre forest that belonged to us, belonged to the vineyard. And father said in lunch hour, "Stavros, " he said Stavros instead of Steven, "You see," he said, "This forest here?" I said, "Yes father." "What do you see?" he said. I said, "I see chestnuts. I see things that are fruitful, walnuts, and I see," I said, "Some that produce wild grapes that we can use them." "What else do you see, Stavros" I stopped. He said, "You see that big tree?" I said, "Yes." "It's an oak tree," he said. "When you grow up," he said, "when you grow up I wish you'll be an oak in the human forest." When you are twelve you are ignorant. You do not know the virtue, the wisdom of words. I tried to live what father said, to be somebody. But that didn't happen, what I was striving for. Maybe my father never talked to my brother the way he did. Because the older brother, Kosmas, he became a monk. He left home when I was a baby. So when I tried to volunteer at first they didn't accept me because I was born in Turkey and they said, "We're fighting Turkey." I had hard work to convince them that's why I left the country. I convinced them in most solid way, otherwise I didn't want them to accept me if they were not satisfied. So when they found out that I could, I was

in pharmacy, knew that I worked in pharmacy, medicines, read Latin, they said, "You should be in medical department. Take the gun away from him." I said, "Okay." So I only had a uniform and five bullets, that's all you are entitled to. So when I went to France we were 50 miles from the front.

APPLEBOME: Had you become a citizen when you joined the army?

CONGRESS: Oh no. They accepted me without, without papers. I didn't have no citizen papers. They accepted me as I was.

APPLEBOME: So how did you become a citizen?

CONGRESS: When I came back from army.

APPLEBOME: Okay, go on.

CONGRESS: So when I got to the army, to France, we went about 50 miles away from the front. They said, "Camp 41 must be outside of Dijon." Known as Il Sortil, Il Sortil is a little village and over there was our little field hospital, number 41. Over there we had no nurses but they used to bring a lot of wounded to us and I had to be the coucarian.

Coucarian mean cook, means they want to test the food before you give to the sick, dietician. So they told me, "You have to give medicines and food because you're the only one capable." But we had three or four fellows, and my English at that time was somewhat better than it was before. So before I knew, the wounded wanted me to write letters home to their people. That I could not do very well because I was not educated. But I tried the best. Anyone who do not know the mystery, the fiendish, the misery of war, one that does not know what was going on, one that does not know what the men go through. That fight for somebody's freedom. They go five thousand miles away to fight for somebody's freedom. It must take a good soldier, a good heart, and a lot of guts. That's why in my small way, in hospital, I did say. "Dear God, I hope America never fights again." Because the Great War, leave for home with three armies, an army of cripples. an army of mourners, and an army of thieves. But who listened to me? They wanted you to be tough. Kill or be killed. They wanted you to be ruthless, to fight for your country, for somebody's freedom. When you come back they want you to be an angel. But what you went through, how can you be angel?

APPLEBOME: So when you returned after the War, what did you do?

CONGRESS: When I returned I went to work.

APPLEBOME: Where did you live after the War?

CONGRESS: I lived in Milwaukee and then I come to Detroit, Michigan.

To Detroit, Michigan I come because I want to go to school, part day time and part night time. So while working I had to do any kind of work in order to go to school at night. This was, I was then at that time 23, going on 24. And my English was supporting me well. Daytime I go to school, sometimes night time. So I found out that I have all my credentials of high school. So my teacher was Mrs. Sargent, in Northern School in Detroit.

And she said to me, "Steven, now what are you going to do?" I said, "Now I'm going to go to medical school." "Medical school?" she said. "What a surprise." I venture to say that I noticed that there was something in her face, what I'm trying to do. "Good for you," she said, "Good for you, I envy you." So next day I went to medical school. So the professor looked at me. He must have been about 70 years old. Wonderful man. He said to me, "Your credentials? Diploma?" I got all the slips of papers. Everything over the three or four years. "What are those?" he said. I said, "Those are night credits, the white ones. Yellow, nights. White, daytime." "I am sorry," he said, "young man, but we do not acknowledge night credits."

APPLEBOME: What school was this?

CONGRESS: Medical school of Detroit. I got shocked. I looked at him. He come to me, he come to me and patted me on the back and he said, "Steven." And I said, "Yes, sir." "What are you afraid about?" he said. "Medical school is not everything. You can become a nice salesman. An insurance man. You can become a real estate man. You can represent some big companies that have dignity. You dress well. You shave, you look nice. You have a personality that they like." And he said, "You have also an accent that they will be looking to listen so they don't miss out." I said, "I'm no salesman." Rather disappointed and bitter. He gave me instructions on a piece of paper, he wrote everything down. "Start selling something very small." I said, "Such as?" "Anything but have dignity." So I decide since I don't go to school, I'm now 25, I'll sell shirts, neckties, and topcoats. And I went and they told me how to take measures, taught me how to do things, give me samples, and I'm out selling shirts. I was doing that for about six months. One day a gentleman said to me in a restaurant that I went and had my lunch, "I know a General Manager that sells real estate," he said. "And he dresses," he said. "tops. You can sell him six shirts, neckties. I don't know about coats," he said. I went there. This is Penobscott Building. Detroit, michigan. Forty-seven stories. That's where it was. So I go there. The girl said to me, "Do you have an appointment with the gentleman?" I said, No, Ma'am." She said, "Give me your card." Now, to give the card would maybe say I don't want anything. I give them my card. She went and he said,

"Send him in." I go there with my briefcase full of samples. His name was Jaun Fontain. French man from Canada but he was in America. "Well," he said, "what have you got?" I opened. showed him what I had. I talked to him, gave him real sales talk about shirts. And I said, "If you buy six the initials are free." He said, "I'll do. Buy six shirts and three neckties. But," he said, "you're gonna do something what I'm gonna tell you. Take the order first," he said. I took the order. "How much commission you get?" he said. I said, "Fifteen percent." So he said it's so much money, he give me the money. When we got through he said, "Let me see the briefcase." He took the briefcase. "How much do you make a week?" he said. I said, "I make about \$45 a week." "Well," he said, "I'm gonna give you \$50 one week to leave the briefcase here and your order book and go home," he said. "Come back, send my orders in, come back Monday morning," it was Friday, "monday morning work for me. In one week if you sell one lot, subdivision lot, you get \$50. And if you sell two lots \$100. And ten percent every month as pay." "I like that very much." "You do?" he said, "Fine." But he was going to do one thing, he said, "In two weeks you have to write that you don't sell no more shirts. You work for me."

APPLEBOME: And the job worked out?

CONGRESS: Yes. (He shows a watch) It says, "Presented to

Steven P. Congress by J.D. Becker Company, Department Manager, 1927. I became a Department Manager.

APPLEBOME: That's love;y, it's very nice.

CONGRESS: And I had in the first year, in first year, Ed, I was star salesman, they give me Elgin watch, it says, "Star Salesman, 1926." I gave it to my grandson. And I said, "When I pass away you can have that."

APPLEBOME: That's great. So you think you did the right thing coming to the United States?

CONGRESS: Of course. What I wish, now that the Americans should go and stay in foreign countries for awhile to appreciate America. Because when they take America for granted they are spoiled brats. Forgive me.

APPLEBOME: Okay, thank you very much, that was really a very nice interview.

CONGRESS: You're welcome.

APPLEBOME: This is the end of side two of tape one of the interview

with Mr. Steven Congress. This is the end of interview number 183.