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DAVID TULIN

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RUSSIA VIA JAPAN, 1921

AGE 27

PASSAGE ON "THE FUJI MAMARO"

SHIP NAME IS SPELLED PHONETICALLY BY THE TRANSCRIBER

NASH: Mr. Tulin, when were you born and where were you born?

TULIN: I was born 1894, January 4th, in Odessa by the Black Sea.

NASH: You love Odessa?

TULIN: Oh yes. It is a very interesting and a musical city, that gave a lot of outstanding musicians and singers and if you would pass, and like the Odessa citizens, it means they can go all over the world. A certain examination for you to pass by Odessa public. It is a very musical city and I love Odessa.

NASH: What do you mean you can go all over the world?

TULIN: Because they were very musical and very strict and they like you. It means that you are good and you can go all over the world.

NASH: Where did you grow up?

TULIN: I beg your pardon.

NASH: Where did you grow up?

TULIN: In Odessa. There I spent my childhood days. And my father was a lover of music and he implanted music, good music in me. And I remember he bought a victrola and we had to wind it up, and with a lot of classical music and outstanding singers. That's why music is my life, my air. In spite of my age, all day long I play records, radio. I am not a minute without music.

NASH: You said you were a unique man. Why?

TULIN: Well, it's a long, fascinating story. I'll try to be as brief as possible. After academic studies in Odessa, I began to work in an office,

which is not which wasn't far away from my home, and every day during the lunch time I had an hour in my permission, and I would go home, have my lunch, but before my lunch always I was singing. So one of my neighbors told me, "Mr. Tulin, why don't you go and study voice? You have a good voice." And I listened to him and he convinced me and coaxed me that I should go and study. I went to the music conservatory and gave an audition, and this was the beginning of my musical life. I began to study singing, which took me about five years. One summer, beautiful day, an impresario from an opera came to my teacher and he wanted to listen to me. I sang for him and he engaged me for a summer tour, and this was the beginning of my opera career.

NASH: What company was that?

TULIN: It was a Zhodorvb. It is a Russian opera company. We went all over south of Russia and then went as far as Tomsk Olmsk Yakutsk and Siberia. And on my way back to European Russia, there was a city called Samara. It is quite a European city, and it is a rich city because it was by the Volga River and grain was the main business of the city. It was really a very beautiful city. And then after Samara, we went to Nizhnij Novgorod they called this at this time, but now they call it Gorki, in the name of the Russian great writer, Gorki was born in that city. So after Nizhnij Novgorod or Gorki, we

went to the city of Tula. Tula is also a very interesting city and I have good memories from that city because there I met my wife. (he laughs) It was a very fascinating story about this first performance when we played "Aida" in Russian because all our operas were in Russian, so I would like to listen to English, operas in English to me the English is just as good as Italian, no difference. It is a beautiful language.

So I met my wife and we went to the show, which wasn't any snow, but to get out of the theater, we couldn't, because there was a lot of snow. We had to stay in the theater all night long and the doorman brought a samovar or tea kettle, and so we had some tea and sandwiches and then in the morning we went home. So after finishing Tula, we went to some more cities and then we came to city, Sevastopol, by the Black Sea. Then we finished the summer tour. Then I went to the hometown of my wife, Khar'kov. It is a beautiful Ukrainian city. After two months of going around, I got married and my wife, she went to Moscow and I went to Odessa to visit my relatives. But my wife told me a very interesting stories. It was a long time ago, there were some Russian officials who used to look for Jewish boys. They would put them in the army for twenty-five years and convert them into Christianity, but, and they finished the service of twenty-five years, a Jewish

man would be able to travel all over the country. So her father lived in Khar'kov and my new wife had the right to stay in Khar'kov, but unfortunately, when her father passed away she lost the right to stay in the city. And after the show, her brother-in-law came and told her she can't go home because the police was looking for her, so she better wouldn't go home.

So all night long they were going around the city. In the morning they went to the theater and the director of the theater went to the city officials and somehow he got an extension for her to stay in the city as long as the opera would last.

So after this opera she went to some other cities, but I was lucky enough, I met her and we got married. At that time, the Jewish people had the right to go all over because during the war a lot of refugees, they came from Poland and so on, and they had to put them somewhere so they gave them permission to go all over. And when I went to Moscow, I didn't believe that I am a Jewish young man walking around in Moscow without being arrested. So...

NASH: What year was this?

TULIN: It was in 1916. In 1917 we more were established. We could go around. So when we were married, we went to Ural Mountains in the city of

Perm. We played there for three months and then we went to the city of Yekaterinburg, which is now called Sverdlovsk, and we were there for a while until the springtime when the Soviet power came to the city. One beautiful morning we went to the theater and here we are, we became Soviet citizens, and we couldn't move out, we couldn't go on because they wouldn't permit us to go out of the city.

NASH: What do you mean you became Soviet citizens? What were you before?

TULIN: We were Russian, Russian citizens. Then is difference between the Russian and Soviets, (he laughs) citizens, you know. So we were staying there and we were there until the beginning of May. I remember the first of May there was a big meeting and a big concert. I was appointed to sing the concert after the meeting. So after the concert the commissar of the meeting came over to me and asked me, "What do you want, money or do you want sugar?" I said, "No, I want sugar." So he gave me two pounds of sugar and we had a feast because there wasn't any sugar in the city although we had the hard candies.

NASH: What did you do with the sugar? You didn't just eat the sugar?

TULIN: Oh, no. We had it, you know, by teaspoon. You were very

careful with it. Yes, so we went, after we finished the (?) season, we went on a summer tour, and we came to the city of, Oh I can't remember it. Anyway, it wasn't far away from Yetanburg, and the czar were there.

NASH: Where, could you say?

TULIN: It was also Ural Mountains. And when we were there, the czar was there, the Czechs were there and they wanted to get out of Russia, but the Soviet power didn't let them go out so they started to fight, and thanks to the Czechs, the army, the Red Army retreated, and thank to the Czechs I never be without thanks for them because they saved my life and my future life because we were with the Czechs and then we moved on. We went for the summer tour and then we finished and then we started in the city of Tomsk. We played in Tomsk and then we came, after Tomsk, we went to Irkutsk, and Irkutsk my son was born, the future American soldier, and he was National Guard, in the National Guards. And I am proud of it because I wrote the paper for him and gave him the permission to join the National Guards. And when the war broke out, the National Guards were the first one who were inducted into the army and he was five years in the army, so I told him, "My son, you be proud that you can do something for your country." Now, I want to go a little bit back. I skipped. I want to go back from Tomsk, Irkutsk, we went to city of Chita. Chita, there was another General Sinionoff [PH], and he had a wife, she was Gypsy. They called her Tsyganka Masha mean Gypsy Masha or Maria. And also, when we wanted to go to

another city, our manager wanted to do something to get permission to go in separate cars, and I went with her to different committees, to different clubs, and I sang and she was with us, and in every club we had a little drink. She could stand it, she could drink a lot. So the (?) of the Sinornof [PH] came over to me and said, "Don't let the Mrs. Sinornof [PH] drink too much." I said, "You go tell her. Why do you tell me?" But anyway, we finished the concert and then in the morning I saw her. I was walking in the city and I saw her. She was riding a car and she waved her hand and asked me to come over to her. Then she told me, "Come over to my house because the Ottoman or the Hettman, the leader, wants to see you." But I didn't dare to come to him. Then we went, after Chita, we went to Harbin. Harbin was after like a paradise, you know, when we came out from Russia to Harbin. It is a little town, but it was so full of lie, full of light, you know, that we enjoyed it very much. And then they made the mobilization there and they told us, "If you will go to the inducement point where they will ask you some questions, don't tell them that you can read or write. They ask you who you are, tell them that you are a singer in opera." So, sure enough, when I went there to be inducted into the army, they asked me, "Are you, can you or write?" I said, "No." "But who are you?" I said, "I am an actor." "And you can't read or write?" "No, I can't." "So go home." So I didn't get into the army. And then from Harbin, we went to Vladivostok. There again was another general. See, each region had its own general. That is why they lost the war. That was Kolchack, [PH] and somehow there was Japanese diplomat there, consul there, and Kolchack wanted to do

something for the Japanese consul because he was together with him. They helped him out.

NASH: Who was Kolchack? [PH]

TULIN: Kolchack, [PH] yes.

NASH: Kolchack is...

TULIN: He was the head of the region, you know. Although he was caught and they killed him, you know, assassinated by the White Guards. So we went to Japan. When we went to Japan, we went to the Imperial Theater, we played in the Imperial Theater, and I fell in love with Japan, Japanese people, lovely country, clean country, clean people. I love the Japanese. I don't know how it is now, (he laughs) it is all over the world, they are different. But still, in my memory, I love Japan. It is very industrial people in spite that it is a little country, but it is great. I love them very much. And it was a funny situation there. In the hotel where we lived, the owner of the hotel, he couldn't speak Russian. That is what he told us. Only somehow he started gestures and little English, you know, and then at the end of our stay in Tokyo, we had to go to another city. All of a sudden the owner of the hotel began to speak beautiful Russian. He wanted to know what we are talking about, that we are White or Reds, but anyway, so from Japan we went to China, Hong Kong. We went

to Hong Kong, and then from Hong Kong we went to a little town or city, Macau, or little island there, Macau, and we played there. But it wasn't very pleasant there because it is a city of clubs playing all night long, cards, singing, and across the street there was a slaughter house. It was very bad. So from this little town or island, we went to Philippine Islands. It is amazing how those Philippine people, they love music. I will never forget when I went to the market for shopping I saw one woman surrounded by baskets, baskets with fruits, and I told her that I am from the opera. She went in her pocket, took out a ticket, and she showed to me that she was going to the opera. By the way, when we were in Russia, in Siberia, after our wedding I was tired to go to the restaurant. I said to my wife, "How about to make some home made cook, food?" She said, "Well, I don't mind to cook, but we must share our labor. You go shopping and I'll cook." I said to my wife, "I should go shopping with all those lovely girls following me? Oh no, not me." Finally I had to give up my pride and since then I was shopping. So from Philippine Islands, from Manila, we went to little islands, they call them Cebu (?). In one of the islands, we gave a short opera, Ipagliacci, and then it was a ballet. So ballet and singers. So a girl was dancing there and they liked her very much. But the singer they took out. They didn't give him a chance. They wanted the girl dancer, she should dance she'd give them an encore, and she was dancing several numbers. She said, "No, give a chance the singer." They wouldn't. So our stage manager couldn't speak English so he came out and said, "Finish, no good," and he gave the curtain. Next day I couldn't walk in the city. They would

shout and yell, "It is finish, no good, finish, no good." (he laughs) So from Philippine Islands we went to Singapore. It is an English colony, very hot there, but we played there and then we were lucky enough not too long, and then we went to India, which is also very hot, and from India we were playing there.

And then from India, on our way back we went again to Singapore and from Singapore we went across Singapore, we went to Java Island. Now they call it Indonesia.

And I want to say the Dutch people, the Holland, lovely people. We liked them very much. They are so democratic and so lovely and so simply, and they made a Siberian ice cream in our honor. It was a small ship, but it was a lot of fun and it was delicious ice cream. We were there about nine months. We had very good business and we liked very much the, Dutch people. And, by the way, there in Java Island, we received our visas to go the United States. From Java island, we went again to Japan and we played there for a while, and we were waiting for the American ship, but we couldn't wait for them so we took a Japanese ship.

NASH: Do you remember the name of the ship?

TULIN: Fushi Mamaro [PH]. I remember it. It is funny, you know, how the mind works when elderly man. I hate to call myself an old man. I think, elderly man sounds better to me. Thank God I still have my mind and physically fit, and I like to walk a lot. So what I wanted to say, yes, from Japan, but every morning I remember I went to the harbor to watch the American ships, but,

they weren't passenger ships, they were commercial ships, but I looked at the flag and I thought, my goodness, what a beautiful flag it is. I hope some day to be my flag. Looking now, God was always good to me, and thank God we got a Japanese ship, after traveling twenty-seven days on the ship.

NASH: What year was that?

TULIN: It was in December 1921, and end of December I stepped on the shore of my future country.

NASH: Could you tell me a little bit about the trip itself on the boat?

TULIN: On the boat? Well, it was wonderful. The Japanese, we had to sing for them. We gave little concerts for them, and we were trying to study English with them, you know. It was a wonderful trip.

NASH: When you came to the United States, your visa was just to work in the United States as entertainers. Is that right?

TULIN: We really didn't know, but when we stepped on the shore on Seattle, Seattle Washington, when we saw the beautiful majestic city full of

light. You can't compare it to the Japanese cities it's because, you know, it is quite bigger than the Japanese cities, and I thought to myself how lucky are the American people. They should live forever and never die, and I am same, still of the same opinion. I think that American people should live and never die. And I feel kind of civil obligation to do something for my country and I wish that every American should do the same thing that I do, should love the country and be good citizens.

NASH: Mr. Tulin, when you first got off the boat, did you have any problems with the customs?

TULIN: Not at all. In the first place, in those days people of music and art, it was very easy to go to the United States, to enter in the United States. It wasn't any difficulties. We just came off and the only thing that we met an American manager. He left some money, you know, deposit for us. The only difficulty. And then we played there in Seattle, Washington, and then we went to Los Angeles. No, wait, Portland, Oregon. We played there, and then we went to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles is a huge, huge theater there, auditorium. It was something funny that happened there. I played a part in Dubrowsky, I played as being a bass always, character parts, I played Dubrowsky, an old man. That is a dramatic story, and I called, "Volodia, [PH] Volodia, [PH]" and my son's name, who came it was (?), he came with our friend to watch the opera. And when he heard , "Volodia, [PH] Volodia, [PH]" he started to cry.

Can't imagine my feeling. Here is a tragic story and inside of me I was laughing, you know, but I had to control myself, you know. And then we went from Los Angeles, we went to San Francisco and from San Francisco we went to Mexico City.

NASH: What were your impressions of San Francisco and Mexico City? Your impressions of the cities.

TULIN: Oh yes, oh it was lovely. It was beautiful. But in Mexico City it was difficult for us to stay there because way up in the mountains, and even I was told the Caruso, the great Italian singer, almost was flop there. It is difficult to breathe, you know, way up in the mountains. So we were glad to come back to the United States. Then we went from San Francisco, we went to Chicago. We played there tremendous business, and then we went all over the United States, and next season we went again to Chicago and we were lucky enough that the great Russian basso, Chaliapin, sang with us, sang ten performances of Boris Goudnov, and I had the good fortune to sing with Chaliapin, and it has affected my life because I was so impressed by him. He sang so great. He was such a great artist that I will never forget him as long as I live. The people of Russia were celebrating his hundredth anniversary. Then something happened. After we fold up our opera, I went to

vaudeville.

NASH: When was that?

TULIN: It was about 1924 when the business wasn't to the expectation, so we decided to fold up our opera and I went in vaudeville. Vaudeville was good work you know. It was quite popular.

NASH: And all this time you could continue to stay in the country without any problem?

TULIN: No problems, no. And naturally, when I was, in 1928, oh yes seven years, and I was in the country I became an American citizen. So I am very glad that I am a citizen and while we were traveling with the vaudeville, we came to Los Angeles and Chaliapin gave his concert there. So naturally, after the concert we went to see him and to ask for an autograph, and one of our actors said, "You know, Mr. Chaliapin, Volodia [PH] my little son," he was about five years old, "You know how he calls you? We called him Fyodor Ivanovych," in other words, his first name my father's name. In English you have Mack, Mack, but in Russian we called him (?), but Volodia calls him Fyodor Derevyanovych, it means wood, from wood, wood (he laughs). So he was laughing like anything. So when he wrote a program, when he gave his autograph, he wrote "To my little friend, Volodia [PH], from (?). My son still has the program.

He cherishes it. Said, "Even if they would offer me a million dollars, I wouldn't give it away." So he likes this program. So when we finished the season with the vaudeville, which I played in French, in English, so I said to myself, no more Russian singers with me. I must study English and I was looking for an English company and I found a vaudeville act with American singers. One of the singers was an Italian and he began instead to teach me English, he began to teach me Jewish and I never spoke Jewish, in Russia I spoke Russian, you know, so this teacher was an Italian, taught me Jewish. Then I was for a while at vaudeville and then Radio City began to build. It was in 1932. I was in the country about ten years, ten, twelve years, and I started to look for an opening there in Radio City which they were building, but you are obliged to sing six weeks, we sang on the radio, and when they opened up the Radio City I was with it for about five years, I was in it. I sang with the great conductor Rappay, and the manager of the theater was a Mr. Rotafel, [PH] or they called him Ratzi. [PH] And so after this I was all over, concerts and operas all over the country. And well, naturally, when they didn't continue to play vaudeville, so I had to look for something else, so I began to teach voice and I was teaching and I am still teaching, and I enjoy it myself. My system is less effort and maximum results, but don't force and take it easy.

END SIDE ONE

BEGINNING SIDE TWO

NASH: And now Mr. Tulin, would you like to sing some songs for us?

TULIN: Thank you. I will try. My first selection, I will an old Russian song. We called it Karabynh, and in English they called it "The Peddler."

This young man used to walk from village to village carrying his dry good package on his shoulder, and in one of the villages he met a lovely girl, he fell in love. He was trying to make love to her, but the girl resent him. Finally, he offered her some presents, a part of his package. Then the girl couldn't resist and they took a walk. They walked until they came to the fields where there was tall grass. What was the transaction, what was the present, we don't know. Only the moon way up above in the sky, she knew what it was all about, but, you know, the moon can't talk so I will try to sing what it is all about.

(he sings) For my next selection I will sing for you song dedicated to the great Russian singer, Fyodor Ivanovich Chaliapin. He came from the city of Kazan by the Volga River, and his famous song that he interpreted for the whole world was the Volga boatman song. I will try to sing it for you, but before I sing it, I want to tell you I had the great fortune to sing with this world-famous singer. As long as I live I will never forget those great days in the city of Chicago. (he sings)

NASH: Very nice.

TULIN: My next song is a Georgian song, of Caucasian. It is

dedicated to the glorious people of Georgia. They are lovable people and they have very nice customs there. Suppose you are invited as a guest to a house and you tell the host, "What kind of a lovely picture you have on you wall," and sure enough, the host will take off the picture from the wall and present it to you, and God forbid if you refuse to take it. This will be terrible offense to the host. You must take it. And that is the habit of the Georgian people.  
(he sings)

NASH: Thank you very much, Mr. Tulin.

TULIN: You are welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW