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edited

Buxton Project: 424-2104
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Q. Just for purposes of recording would you please state your full name?

A. I'm Eleanor Sojaka and I am 66 years old.

Q. You were born in 1914?

A. 1914.

birth

Q. Where at Ellie?

A. Out east of Lavilla about 7 miles on my grandfather's farm. It's John Durbala.

Q. John

A. Durbala.

Q. D-u-r-b-a-l-a?

A. Right.

Q. Durbala. Where was your father's from?

A. He was from Austria, Hungary ^{or} Czechoslovakia.

Q. Where at, do you know the name of the village? I know you must, you did at one time?

A. I did have Durbiana it was.

Q. And it's in Slovakia isn't it?

A. Yes.

Q. Your mother's, his first name is John?

A. Right.

Q. Your mother's name?

A. My mother's name was Varoncia Durbala.

Q. What was her maiden name?

A. That was her maiden name was Durbala. She was a Durbala this is John Sofranko was my dad and my mother was Varonica Dubala and she was born over at Evans over close to Osculoosa.

Q. Now let me get this straight, your father is John Sofranko but you lived on a Durbala farm?

A. Yeah.

John

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Q. Her father's farm?

A. Her mother died when the youngest child was only a few days old and she was left there to raise the whole family. There was 7 boys and 2 girls and my grandfather and the family and she was only 16 years old and she

Q. Your grandfather never remarried did he?

A. No. He died in 1942 but she raised that family and then in 1908 my dad and mother were married and he mined but lived a few miles from there, they conducted their courtship mostly by walking or the mail or something of that order.

Q. Where did he live?

A. His parents lived over at Given which is over by Osculoosa. It was a mining place over there, right on the Des Moines river and he used to tell us about the Indians being down there on the river you know camping and for years they got arrowhead from down on the river bottom but I never was fortunate, at the time I was too young to go down there. We used to have to go down through the orchard and all grape ar-bers and walk over to the river and they wouldn't let me go because I was too little, I never did get to go through there.

Q. So he spent most of his boyhood over there?

A. Yes, and he worked in the mines.

Q. He worked there and he didn't move until he moved over here to your mother's father's farm?

A. When ~~we~~ ^{they} were married.

Q. When ~~we~~ ^{they} were married.

A. And then he lived there.

Q. What did he do at that time?

A. He was still working in the mines.

Q. Was he still working in mines around here or was he?

A. After he moved over, after they were married, he moved over and was working at the Buxton mines and then he was a hoist engineer and the last mine he worked in was White Bird which is right beyond Miami out east of town here where Miami is and that was in, we lived at White Bird when we left the farm we lived there for 9 months and he already had we three children and another one on the way and he decided that he wanted to get into something that was a little bit safer as far as employment was concerned and something that he could get a little bit more stability to form more family life and that was when we moved to town and he went into the garage business. That was in 1919.

Q. Had a garage here huh?

A. Yes, from the first 5 years he was in a garage with my mother's two brothers and relationships don't always hit off the best and in 1924 he built a garage down here in this house and that's where he was until he retired, until he died really. He retired after my younger brother came home from the service and then he kept on working around the garage, taking care of the furnace and doing little odd jobs

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A. because they wanted him to feel like he was needed, he used to take care of the furnace and things like that you know and that was when he died in 1961.

Q. What about your mother?

A. She had, I wonder now when I think back and I think how old I am and how old they were when they were doing all these things and I wonder how they did it. You know the older you get the more you appreciate your parents and wish you had maybe done some things differently than you did but I think everyone has those regrets but one of the things I look back and I think how in 1924 when times weren't any better than they were, could my dad had ever tackled building a garage and a house at the same time. But we never wanted for anything. I mean we had all the basic things. My parents were not strict with us but they were, they made sure that we had plenty to eat, we never went hungry, we had something to wear, we got a good education, we went through high school and from there on if we got any more education or got jobs or something we were on our own. We could stay at home as long as we, well I stayed at home all the time because I got employment here in town but they were, my folks never bought anything on time. There was only one time that I know of that they had to get a loan and that was during the depression times, the homeowner's loan that was out of Omaha and I think they borrowed something like a thousand dollars then and had to pay that back and outside of that we never bought, and I think that kind of wore off on us we never buy anything on time either. We either had the money to pay for it or else you don't get it. And it's such a different way of looking at life nowadays because many of the younger people have to start out with everything and they owe for everything and if they don't have the money to pay for it they come repossess it and that's it.

Q. How many kids were in the family?

A. There were 6. There were three, the three older ones were born out on the farm and then the year after we moved into town my next sister was born.

Q. Can you give their names by their birth order, the oldest first?

A. Uh huh, sister Marene is the oldest one, she is 70 and she'll be 71 in October and Ray will be 69 in September and I'll be 67 in September, Thelma will be, I always have to stop and figure up, she was born in 20, 1920, she'll be 61 in January, no she'll be 62 in January, that'd be 82, and then Francis will be, she was born in 24 and Gerald was born in 29.

Q. Where are they all now, I know where you're at and where your sister is.

A. Fransis is up in Ida Grove, her husband died in 1966 and she had 6 children to raise the youngest one was 5 years old. And they're all grown up now working and married and so forth. Ray lives in Des Moines. He retired from the garage a couple of years ago and this February he moved to Des Moines with his wife, they have 2 children and then my sister Thelma lives here with me. She works for an attorney in Albia and she has a daughter at North Liberty and then my younger brother Gerald lives here in Lavilla and he has a family of eight children and he is the father of this Denise I was telling you about. So I think she's the second oldest one. They had a boy who'll be 29 I think this month and he is crippled with arthritis. In his elbows and in his knees. He's going to school at Iowa City too. He's going to be in insurance. He started out when he first got out of high school he wanted to be a sports coach of some kind and he developed this arthritis and no chance of it now so he's going to be an insurance underwriter because the doctors have told him that he's going to eventually end up in a wheel chair and he's been up there for about 3 years. all the while he was in school last year.

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Q. Was it genetic then or what?

A. Every 8 days he could tell he was going to have a spell of this arthritis where his elbows and his knees would swell so badly that he could hardly pull his pants up over his knees, every 8 days and he is a little better right now but he's on the cortisone. They gave him that almost as a last resort and then he's feeling a little bit better right now but they're cutting back on it because of the side effects they're trying to take her off.

Q. That's too bad.

A. Yeah it is.

Q. Especially for a young man.

A. Yeah, someone older. I can remember when my grand dad's house out on the farm, it was always open to everybody. Every year we had big family reunions out there. One time they had a 4th of July picnic down in the pasture and you know people didn't think anything about it, everybody would come from far and wide around and they just ~~had sand~~ ^{had sand} sat up down near the pasture, you'd have to ~~just~~ ^{jump} the Creek or go up and down the hills or something and this one particular time they had and it must have been right ~~around~~, it was right after we had moved to town about 1920 I suppose and a big downpour came. Everybody ~~swimmed~~ ^{swimmed} nobody could go anywhere because the roads were all dirt and so they all stayed at my grandfather's house that night.

Q. These people, who were they that would come out, were they all Slovaks?

A. They came from all around the neighborhood even from miles around they'd come there and they just had one big 4th of July picnic.

Q. Were they all Slovaks Ellie or what?

A. The biggest part of them.

Q. The biggest part of them but there were some non Slovaks?

A. They were friends and they were relatives and some of them were neighbors but most of them were people who couldn't get anywhere. I can remember that my dad had a roadster and you know that's just a little old one seater and I had to go back into town with mom and pop because they had to get back in and I can see him yet plowing through that mud with those big old wooden wheels you know they used to have on cars and we really had a time getting in but we made it and Clara and Ray, sister Marene and Ray got to stay out there and they just tormented me to death. They said we just had all the ice cream and peanuts we could eat, we just had everything and we just sat up and ate all night and I believed that for years and I always resented and I held it against her and it wasn't for a long time afterwards that I found out that they never had any ice cream and peanuts at all they were just teasing me.

Q. At these gatherings Ellie, what do you remember them having, let's start in the way of food first, was any

A. Well a lot of people would bring food and then it would be, what food would be prepared.

Q. So it was a pot luck?

- A. More or less, just like we have. How they ever kept food from spoiling, we worry about it now just of an afternoon how they could keep it down there without ice or anything.
- Q. What dishes would they serve, was there any Slovak foods there?
- A. I can't remember that, I just don't know. I can remember the plain old staple things like chicken or something like that you know and potatoes and the like but I just don't really remember what they. At that age I was more interested in the entertainment we had, the firecrackers we'd shoot or something like that.
- Q. What entertainment was there?
- A. They'd have a program, maybe someone would sing or someone would give a speech. A speech used to be the real thing at any of these 4th of July celebrations you know, back in history and some politician had to make a big speech 45 minutes or an hour long and everybody sat there and listened to him.
- Q. Who'd make the speeches at these?
- A. Well I don't really know whether, who would make them.
- Q. Politician or would it be?
- A. I just think at this particular one I think that this that there might have been someone that would have some little yarn to tell or something like that you know and maybe it was a story telling time you know they could get together in groups and talk over old times or something along that order.
- Q. Remember going to Slovak weddings?
- A. Yeah, I can remember one I went to, a little house up by Hamilton and it was just a little square house. This family still lives around here.
- Q. Who were the people?
- A. Kocurs, K-o-c-u-r and it was just jammed packed, they danced in there and it was ~~not hard~~ and everybody danced and you couldn't hardly move on the floor it was so crowded.
- Q. Now I've heard that at these weddings would last a weekend.
- A. Yeah, when my parents were married their wedding celebration lasted 3 days.
- Q. What were the days? Start on a Friday or what?
- A. I'd have to go back to the date and it was August 29, 1908, whatever date that was, I don't have a calendar that has that on it. But I know that their celebration went on for 3 days because we had a man here an Irishman who had been at the wedding and what brought it up was when he neared his hundred year, they had an article in the paper about him cause he never touched booze or smoked and my dad just laughed because he said I'll never forget when we were married that he was there at the wedding and he said, came up at the end of the first day and he says well John he said I'm going home now but I'll be back tomorrow and he was just John and he didn't live very far from there at the time. He never did drink or smoke but he sure had a good time at the wedding.

- Q. Can you describe in some detail Ellie these 3 days starting with the first? What would happen on the first day, was that the day of the wedding ceremony or is the ceremony on the second day or just what?
- A. They just had _____
- Q. Now what would happen on the first?
- A. That was what they called liquor.
- Q. ~~spiva~~^{iw}
- A. ~~spiva~~ wasn't it. I think that's what they called liquor, when you said _____
- Q. You're probably right, that's probably the Slovak word, in Czech it's pivo for beer and vin for wine and sometimes in Slovak it ends in a whereas in Czech it ends in o. Okay, now they would get together, what would happen the first day?
- A. I can't tell you that. See by the time they'd probably go in by wagon or buggy or something in to get married and the marriage ceremony would be over and then they'd drive back out to their home, the better part of the day would be gone. So there wouldn't be too much celebrating done then but I imagine there'd be a crowd of people waiting for them whether there were very many people at the church or not I don't know.
- Q. Marriages were what, predominately in the morning?
- A. I think probably so, because it hasn't been in just the ~~latter~~⁺ years that we have had afternoon and evening marriages.
- Q. And the bride and groom and the rest of the family would go back to the home place?
- A. No honeymoon.
- Q. No honeymoon?
- Q. That was just unheard of in those days, a honeymoon?
- A. No, they couldn't afford it in the first place and it wasn't much of any place to go.
- Q. Now Ellie was there a chance for the bride and groom to get off and have some privacy while the ceremony was going on or they would just
- A. During the dance they'd, I think most of the time they danced. One of the customs that they had and that is sort of coming back you've seen these dollar dances that they have now, they're bringing that back a lot. That the men pay a dollar to dance with the bride and the women pay a dollar to dance with the groom. I've seen that done several times this summer, I've gone to four weddings this year.
- Q. That's coming back now huh?
- A. It's coming back. They did that down here.
- Q. And they did that at the Slovak weddings?

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- A. No what they did there, they'd have a big dinner and they'd have this big feast around the table as near as I can recollect before the people got up from the table they would pass the plate around and everybody was suppose to put money on the plate for the bridal couple. Then that got when you get down to modern day it gets a little bit embarrassing because you have to pay so much for a wedding gift anymore to present to the bride and groom that you don't generally go into big money like that but they would get quite a bit at that time they probably didn't buy gifts for them, they just gave them money and that was it. But nowadays you buy shower gifts and you buy wedding gifts and then you go to the dances it amounts to quite a bit.
- Q. Who would prepare the food Ellie, was it up to the family?
- A. Yeah I would say that it would be, now I can't tell you about that and that's where some of the people like Emma Starks would come in handy, she'd remember more about that.
- Q. Let me ask you just a couple of more things about Slovak weddings around these parts. I've heard of a custom Ellie where the women all the women would encircle the bride and dance around her while they sang in Slovak and the custom was that they would continue to do this until she cried and the gast of the song, the theme of the song was that even though that that's one of the happier days of her life as the young woman that there is a lot of sadness in life ahead of her. You remember anything like that?
- A. No, I don't. That sounds horrible.
- Q. Doesn't it, it really does.
- A. What was the point of them doing that? Just to remind her?
- Q. I understood a custom from the Smiths that they tended to be, well let's call them the elders and probably a lot of that was probably feigned the crying in life and maybe in some cases it was real enough. But the dancing, what kind of dancing would go on? Was it folk dancing from the old country or was it American dancing?
- A. Well I'll tell you if you want to very many dances like the one I went to, I wasn't very old, I remember the guy I danced with but you never danced very much of anything because it was so crowd and you were so packed you couldn't any more than just wiggle around a little bit and that was about it.
- Q. What would be the instruments played Ellie?
- A. Violins.
- Q. Violins?
- A. Uh huh.
- Q. That's interesting, that's what I hear over and over again, that was the dominant musical instrument, violin. Anything beside strings, you remember any other sound, any percussion sound, any horns, no?
- A. I don't think so, I don't remember ever any, big big horn yeah and I can remember they kept that in the front room, it wasn't the living room it was the front room and we'd sit on that old hard davenport and listen to that thing and that was one of our biggest pleasures on a Sunday afternoon would be out there and they'd have this circular disk you know that they put on there and it would play off that and

A. that was the biggest thrill. I wish we had that thing, I don't remember what happened to it.

Q. So what you remember are the strings, ^{that was} what any other kind of instrument you don't remember?

A. I don't remember any more than that.

*Edmund's notes
Lavilla*
Q. Okay, now we search a little bit to Lavilla. Let me tell you about what I've been hearing Ellie and then you just check tell me whether it's essentially correct or not. I've heard that Lavilla was a town that was pretty much divided between well I don't know what you, the English speaking people or old American ^{style} and then some of the immigrants, the Slovaks and that the Slovaks lived on which side of town?

A. the south side

Q. And English speaking on the north side, is that how you remember it?

A. I had never thought of it that way but I can tell, isn't that strange I've lived here all my life practically and I never thought of it that way. Most of the Slovaks and the miners and those people did live in the south part of town, that's why they call it south end.

Q. They called it South End.

A. South End, even to this day, someone lives up in South End it's a natural thing and there used to be several stores up in the south part of town. We had clothing store, we had shoe stores up there and grocery stores, there was another a couple of more grocery stores

Q. Who owned those stores?

A. Well beside the Papier store that's there now, Steve Millerpitch had a store up there and now this isn't a Slovak name, his name is Pignari, Frank Pignari he had a little grocery store, it's a tavern now.

Q. You mentioned Milatich are there Milatich around? _____

A. They had this grocery store up there and off hand I can't know there's no Milatich here I can't think off hand.

Q. How about the other stores?

A. There was a clothing store up there, it wasn't a Slavish that had it, his name was Hardman and then there was a shoe store, P.H. Terry, Terry Fin was his name and he was Italian, he had a shoe store up there.

Q. Were there a number of Italians in your neighborhood?

A. There were several.

Q. You remember some of the family names?

A. Going through this book, seems like there was Basoni up here and some of the names of I'm sure here, well like there was like Lathie and Toigo, now those are the names I remember out of this book. I can't tell you, I'd have to go through there to tell you whether they were from some other territory, they were from right around

A. here I know these people, there was a Delles family that lived here and there was a Bodner family. But at the same time you did run onto the occasion like there Bridson family. they were black and there was Kings and the Runways and some of those people, but they were black. Runways

Q. They lived also on the south end?

A. They lived up there too, and there were Avons were Italians and oh it was, there was Mansenis that lived around here without going through these names.

Q. Fine. What other nationalities lived on this south end, we have blacks, Slovaks, Italians, who else, Croatians

A. Yeah there was Croatians lived up there. I can't just name them right off. There were several milatich families. They're still confused to this day yet. Bill Mill, there were 2 Steve Milatich families.

Q. How do you spell the name?

A. M-i-l-a-t-i-c-h. And there was some Gasbers that lived up there in later years. There was Langhs the Obriens, there were some O'Briens that lived up in there, they were some Irish. There was Brien and O'Bryan and the Karrs of course those people were all involved in the church membership. I think I said Gaspers and then there's Bodners and then the masses, I don't know whether you would divide the line I suppose right downtown here. Most of those people though then I would say maybe in the last four blocks of the town at that end of the town.

Q. The 4 extreme southern blocks of Lavilla is where most

A. Yesh that's where most of it.

Q. Now I've heard that the Slovaks not only were there Slovak Catholics but there were also some Slovak Lutherans there right?

A. Yeah.

Q. Had a Slovak Lutheran Church here, in one of the Swedetown and Buxton right?

A. Yeah.

Q. Do you recall?

A. That Lutheran Church over and I don't know whether it was Slovak Lutheran but there was that Lutheran Church over by Buxton It burned down several years ago but they had a beautiful church over there.

Q. But Slovaks did they have, were those the 2 churches, the one Lutheran Church and the Catholic Church which the Slovaks went or was there another or any others Ellie that you know of?

A. We had other churches here in town but not, we had a Community Church, we had a Methodist Church, we had a United Buxton Church, they get to go there, those are all more this end of town. Most of the Slovaks went up here, I remember I think I told you I can remember when different priest would come over here, Slovak Priest would come back maybe a specified time during the summer and it would be announced ahead of time so they could get the word around to people further away you know that could get here to come and hear confessions in their own native tongue of telling.

Q. Where'd these priests come from?

A. They came from well like missionaries or some are like, they would come from Detroit or from Chicago or some other place would make arrangements for them or they would write and ask you if they could come and see these people they would have a mass in their own tongue and Katherine

Some

Q. *you mean* here at St. Peters that mass was said in English.

A. And in Slovak, they'd have Slovak mass there.

Q. I'm getting confused *now* did they have mass in Slovak at St. Peters?

A. Only on these special occasions.

Q. Only on a special occasions, otherwise it was in English or Latin?

A. English or Latin. Now Katherine could tell you about, she could remember when her sister Jeri said something about too that they remember one time and it was a whole congregation of people that came and they just settled in everywhere just like a big reunion and there was this *once* Slovak get together and they went to mass and confession and everything but it was just like everybody gathered in for a big celebration you know and she said she just didn't remember or didn't know how they'd take care of everybody.

Q. What did mostly the men on the South End did, were they most of them miners?

A. Most of them were miners.

Q. I've heard a little about the kids, especially the boys fought with kids on the north side of town, you remember any of that? Was there friction between the two parts of Lavilla in those days?

A. Not that I can remember.

Q. Any prejudice or anything like that?

A. Not that I can recollect.

Q. No you can't recollect?

A. *Yes* say, no doubt there were a little flare ups you know kids in school. I remember back when the girls in school called me a *hunk* one time and I really had my feelings hurt because she called me a *hunk*

Q. But nothing more than that huh?

A. No, I think by large I think most of the kids got along *pretty good*

Q. Would you take the picture that you've loaned me and start with your grandfather there and give me *_____* go in order and give me those men's names so we have that for a record.

A. I can't give you all of them, very few of them.

Q. Tell me when you're skipping somebody then, would you? Your grandfather's first right?

A. My grandfather is first and to his immediate right, he's facing this way right behind him in the white shirt is Ervin Oboski and he's up in his 80s now I'm sure and going down the line there I can't place very many of those people off hand, down about the center of the picture is Frank Potik.

Q. How do you spell that?

A. P-o-t-i-k. Some of them I can't see very well.

Q. Which one is that?

A. That's right here.

Q. Okay, suit coat.

A. Yeah, I should be able to remember these two and I can't place them for the life of me and I jump way back here to where my dad is toward the end of the thing and I just

Q. Now Mr. Potik is sort of facing, the picture is taking his front right and he's got his hands down by his hips. Now your father looks like he has a hat in his hand and it's right behind a taller man there was a hat in his left hand and then your father and his tie is a little off to one side there is that it, is that your father?

A. No my father is right behind that shorter man, there's a tall man and then there's a shorter man and then my dad is behind him.

Q. Okay, your dad has hair almost like the Kennedy's, huh?

A. Maybe.

Q. I mean it's

A. Yeah, uh huh.

Q. Yeah okay. I see which one it is now. Who were these men, what was the name of the organization?

A. I wish I could go back into the records, if I knew what year that was I could go go back into the perial ^(archive) recorda and find the write-up on that.

Q. What was this Ellie?

A. It was sort of a district meeting that they had of the men's lodge and that's what all those were those ribbons there.

Lodge

Q. Is this the National Slovak Lodge?

A. Yeah, this was this branch here that they had.

Q. Would be what _____

A. Decorative I believe that's what it was and my mother was secretary of the, did you ever see any of those badges that they wore?