

Interview with Ray Maurin

August 15, 2002

[NOTE: OCCASSIONAL POOR AUDIO QUALITY LEADS TO SOME INAUDIBLE MOMENTS]

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Ray Maurin (RM): Father was born in Moropitz, M-O-R-O-P-I-T-Z, which is, at that time was in Austria, and is now in Croatia, and he was born in 1885 there. And he became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1896. What's of interest is the spelling of the name, which I think happened a lot of times, people would give confusing pronunciations to names, since my name is spelled M-A-U-R-I-N on the certificate, it was spelled M-R-I-N-A so it's strange that a French name and, when I was in the Navy during World War II, they asked me about it and, they asked me if I was a Marine and I said, "No, I'm a sailor." So my mother was born in Croatia also, but they were married in 1905 and they had nine children. Her maiden name was Severin, which is interesting because I just heard, is that in Croatia, before all the battles that are taking place there now, they found a town by the name of Severin, which is quite interesting. Severin was some kind of a noted political figure but it wasn't carried on. They married _____

Interviewer (I): 1905?

RM: 1905.

I: In Ironwood?

RM: In Ironwood. They worked in Iron Mountain for a while.

I: What did he do?

RM: He worked in the mine, of course, then they moved to Montreal where dad worked in the mine again. Later the family moved to Ironwood, Luxmore [spelled phonetically] Street. My grandfather became ill with pneumonia from working underground in a lot of dampness, poor conditions, grandfather died in 1898. Grandmother Severin died in 1945. But I'd caution [?] coincidence, my father, Joseph Maurin, and his brother, Martin Maurin, died on exactly the same day, but we didn't find him, he lived in Chicago, and he apparently had a diabetic seizure and they didn't find his body until days later, so he, we were wondering why he never showed up to the funeral. Mother remembers Houghton and where dad came from Houghton and lived in a boarding house in Jezcabo [spelled phonetically]. She said, "Three others wanted me, but I didn't want any of them. Every Thursday I had off from housework, dad was acquainted with me, and wanted to stay so the others would come to the house, and didn't anymore, he would call me and say, 'Marinka,' [spelled phonetically] people had no cars, we had to walk to Jezcabo [spelled phonetically], and Luxmore Street [spelled phonetically]. And those were the days you had to walk or take a streetcar bus or buggy. One day, on a Sunday, dad hired a horse and buggy and went for a ride to Blakefield [?] and back on the old road. In those days, streetcars cost a nickel, if you made five dollars a day that was good pay for housework, and the most I'd got was twelve dollars a month. When I went to the hotel to work and got _____ but not a bed." Mother recalls working for a Jewish family, and "After they ate the daughter came into the kitchen, put a few pieces of food on my plate, and said, 'Here's your dinner.'" And another time the twelve-year-old boy would, they would let him do whatever, go to bed, parents didn't care, and he was mean. No, I didn't have an easy life," she says. "I had one _____ just wash the dishes but after that father said go upstairs and fix the beds. I had it rough." Then she had a good thing, I had a home and mother had something for me to eat. Grandma was very good to all six of us.

She always had something to eat. My grandfather worked underground in the mine and the family moved to Montreal. I was the oldest one in the family and my father got a cold in the mine and he was home sick for two months before he died. I had to go up to the mines and _____ work in my bare feet, and also went downtown to sell berries that I had picked. It was a hard life, just went to the fifth grade in school. Mother had to raise six children, and she couldn't speak a word of English. She had a hard time, too. When Ben [?], that's my uncle who was living here _____, he worked for the telephone company, he told mother to answer the phone by saying in English, "There's nobody home," and then she would hang up. Yeah, Severin is a prominent name in our history. The, it's a town _____ by the name of Severin in Croatia now, my sister visited. Well, what else?

I: Your mother's parents came here from Croatia?

RM: They were living there in Croatia. They didn't know each other until they came to the United States and [poor tape quality, about 30 seconds of inaudible noise]. My father, Joseph P. Maurin, was an early recycler. He used empty powder boxes as building materials long before it became the "in" thing to do. He was employed as a voice engineer at the Newport Mine, and he brought home these boxes that were usually discarded in junk heaps, and he built these boxes like they were of bricks, and so he just, they were constructed of pine, and they were pretty well-built, he used it with like bricks were laying one atop another, in bricklaying fashion, and then you covered the inside with cardboard and wallpapered the walls, and he put in a small wood-burning stove for burning trash and my mother explained once that it took him a month because he couldn't get all the boxes at once, didn't cost him a cent to put it up, and it gave him a hobby. Well, I used to be a painter at one time, and I used the cabin in the backyard as my studio, well, I found that the mice and squirrels liked to build their nests in these cartons, and so I didn't know

what to do, I thought a cat would solve the problem, so I got one, and they cleaned out everything, the squirrels they would bring in their pinecones, leaving pits and pieces all over the floor, well, the cat just used to sit there and dream of catching something. After that I gave up painting and sculpturing, but I still use that cabin for storage.

I: How about your dad and mother, did they belong to any Croatian societies or anything like that?

RM: They didn't use their spare time, which, they didn't belong to anything at all. But there was a Slovenian society at one time that other families were more interested in.

I: You said your dad used to go to Marinisco for the mine transports.

RM: Yes, when dad used to go fishing in Marinisco area after fishing they dropped in for a cool one at this place called My Friend's Place. So it's a handy little phrase you can use also when my mother asked him where he was, he would always say, "I was at My Friend's Place."

I: That was run by Mike Mishko [spelled phonetically], he was probably another Croatian as well.

RM: Yeah, they understood the language. Some of the foods that were famous ethnic foods were, I can't give the Croatian pronunciation but they like to make their own sauerkraut, they would cut up cabbage on a great big long slicer and then this cabbage would drop into a barrel and this was stored, like in our house we had a storage room just to keep things cool and that sauerkraut was fermenting and it was used for a meal and then with sausages that my mother used to make, she used to get the intestines that the meat people used to make sausages and she had her own recipe and used to make sausages, but another thing was just like all the other people who live here they made pasties and everybody had a favorite recipe for making pasties because it could

be either Croatian, I mean, what do you call the other kind of pasty? Anyway, that's a food that everybody ate –

I: And you put rutabagas in there, didn't you?

RM: Yeah. And the miners brought their pasties and ate them underground, so that was a universal food for the people.

I: How about making like home brew or moonshine?

RM: We used to pick dandelion flowers which were in abundance in the fields, and we'd go out and fill up bushel baskets full of dandelion blossoms. This was also used to make dandelion wine, and I don't know if it's made anymore by anybody.

I: What did it taste like?

RM: It's a very sweet wine, and I don't care for sweet wine.

I: Is it a clear wine?

RM: Kind of a, I can't remember what it looked like.

I: And what kind of bottles did you put it in?

RM: They had the bottles with the caps on it, and also jugs that they'd fill up and go to parties or whatever.

I: Did they have any customs that came over from the old country that they kept doing here? Say, for holidays?

RM: It's, no, I really can't think of anything right now.

I: Are the names that they gave all your brothers and sisters English or American names or - ?

RM: They liked to use Biblical names. Which were not very popular when people were given a name which didn't fit their lifestyle.

I: What were the names of your brothers and sisters?

RM: There's, starting from the oldest, is Lawrence, and then Rudolph, everybody'd tease him and call him "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer", and then there was my sister Gertrude, but she shortened it to Trudy, and then my other brother Joe, became Joseph Jr. because that was my father's name also. Joe was quite a skier, that's another sport that was prevalent in those days, we used to have hills, several of them, for jumping, which you don't see much anymore, it's a different kind of skiing, but that's one of the customs they brought over from Europe, there was a lot of ski hills at that time.

I: What about the other family names, like of your brothers and sisters, what other names?

RM: That's about it.

I: You're all the way down to Trudy and Joe.

RM: Yeah, and then mine, Raymond, which shortened to Ray, and then there was one more, yeah, his name was Isadore, which is a difficult name.

I: Did your mother and father ever talk about why they came over here in the first place, what made them decide to come over here?

RM: They never did, I don't know, it was just a thing that people needed work and this was a place to come.

I: Did they talk about coming over on the ship, any stories?

RM: I can't remember them ever telling me about coming through Ellis Island, but that's another story.

[END OF INTERVIEW]