

715/234-4165 DOWN HOME DAIRYLAND  
TAPE INDEX

John and Rose Tomesh, Joe and Virginia  
Tomesh, Albert and Regina Tomesh, Tony  
and Adeline Tomesh, Lilian Tomesh Dvorak  
and Clarence Dvorak, & Dorothy Tomesh  
Schwab

At the John and Rose Tomesh Farm  
Haugen, Wisconsin  
July 31, 1990

Recorded by J.P. Leary  
Nagra 4-L recorder  
Three tapes

Tape One

[Note: birthdates for siblings not always on tape, but I picked up a few.  
John, b. 1919; Joe b. 1922; Lilian, b. 1918; Tony b. 1930.]

1. Announcement.

2. Everyone introduces themselves. Joe, second of the boys. Albert, third of the boys. They strip feathers once or twice a year. John, oldest boy. Rose. Regina. Adeline, doesn't like to strip feathers, but likes the party. Dorothy Schwab. Lilian Dvorak, loves to strip feathers and raise geese. Virginia. Clarence Dvorak, haven't got much to say. Tony, youngest of the whole family, did a lot of feather stripping on his Christmas vacation.

3. Joe. You butcher the geese in the fall, around Thanksgiving. Scald birds to get feathers out. Save them and dry them. Then pull feathers sometimes off of live geese. In the winter you get together, and "the gossip really flies." [DHD?]

4. Lilian. Geese raising is really fun. Once had a goose set on 17 little goslings. Nowadays just buys goslings and raises them. Geese really grow fast. Went to Czechoslovakia found new way of dressing out geese. After butchering wrap wet them in a blanket, then put an iron to them to steam. Makes the feathers come out. Used to do it with hot baths. Sure are good to eat for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

5. Joe. Duck feathers are good too. Goose the best. Chicken feathers "zero" in Joe's book.

6. John. Parents farmed west of Haugen. Vaclav and Ludmila, immigrants from Czechoslovakia. Mother couldn't speak much English, dad "picked it up pretty good." Had ten children. Milked a lot of cows. Sometimes seven were milking by hand. Mother always raised a lot of chickens, geese, and ducks. Sometimes called in neighbors too for stripping bees. Women chatted around the table. Men played cards. Had a big lunch. "That was my wife here." [Rose prods John. "Mother had . . . " through reference to wife good for DHD?]

7. Albert. Did some stripping evenings and Christmas vacations. Neighbors came over, but you couldn't always call on them and kids had to fill in.

8. Joe. "I was one of the outlaws at home a little bit . . ." Mother had a 100 geese, had to do a big pile everyday. Joe stuffed his pockets with feathers and chucked them in the snowbank. The feathers appeared in the spring. "They were there for the birds to make nests out of." [DHD]



9. John. When Joe was 17 or so set up a telephone with a neighbor Wilfred Dostal. Set up a system in the winter between three neighbors. A lightning storm eventually burned out the system. Sometimes people would play banjo or accordion over the wires.
10. John. Things tough in the early 1930s. John and Joe made skis out of barrel staves. Once they got them slick all the kids in school wanted to try them. Teacher would give them an extra half hour at noon to slide and make ski jumps.
11. John. A good joke helped with the feather stripping. When someone laughed "the feathers would fly." John and Joe liked playing cards with the older men, especially when they had a good run and won. Smear and 500 were the typical games.
12. Albert. The men smoked their pipes and cigars. Frank Wrobel, Grandpa Joe Dvorak. Women's hands were going as fast as their mouths.
13. Joe. Would listen in while playing cards to what the women were talking about. "You learned to play cards and you also learned a little bit on the side."
14. Joe. The grandpas thought they would beat John and Joe, but they ran into a couple of "sharpies" in John and Joe.
15. Regina Uchytel Tomesh. Women started stripping first in her family. Men would be at chores. Then by ten the women would be tired with sore fingers, but the men would be ready to go for quite a while.
16. Lilian. One time folks had to go out doing chores and they left a big loaf of rye bread. Albert tried to cut it and cut his nose. [DHD?]
17. Lilian. Can make pillows and blankets from the feathers. Makes pastry brushes from them too and dusters from the end of the wings. Big blankets on the bed years ago about a foot and a half thick. Not much heat in the house in the winter in those days. "When we got out of bed, we flew."
18. Lilian. When daughter or son got married, mother would want to have a nice blanket and pillows for the couple.
19. Joe. Before he got married got two pillows from goose down and a couple of feather ticks. Got paid back pretty good for his labors. Wife Virginia still takes her pillow along when she travels.
20. Virginia's mother had turkeys. They stripped those feathers and they were pretty nice, although not as nice as goose.
21. Joe. When he and Joe were kids only had an old beat up button accordion. In 1939 folks got them a small piano accordion. John stuck with button accordion, but Joe plays piano accordion. Got piano accordion about age 17 or 18 and then started playing in a band.
22. John. Can't read any notes. Old button accordions were brought in by the



immigrants. Heard his first one played by a neighbor, Joe Sperl. John remembers his first car ride as a similar thrill. Bought an accordion for \$3 just after high school. Just like a "heavey horse," needed to get the bellows taped up. "You couldn't hardly play a polka, you didn't have enough wind."

23. John. Set aside accordion in late teens. Went into the army in 1942, then got married, raised a family, ran a farm. Once in awhile pulled out the accordion, but now pulls it out more often in retirement.

24. Lilian. Dad got to be a US citizen before mother. Mother always feared she would be deported. But finally she got her citizenship. That night, although she never drank, she had some wine. L went with her dad to St. Paul where her parents were, but they were on their way back to Czechoslovakia. L's grandmother couldn't write, but wanted to send some money to her son. Some people from Nebraska took the money and wrote to the Tomeshes and eventually sent them the money. Helped Vaclav buy a farm.

Tape One ends, begin Tape Two

25. John. Had a neighbor who wanted the kids to bring their civics books to his place so he could take his citizenship test. When he went for his test, they only asked him who the president of the United States was.

26. John. Parents got a Czech newspaper and dad always read it to her every night as she crocheted, especially the serialized romance. Dad lived to be 94. Smoked or chewed since age 16. Dad didn't play accordion, but "was great for" singing Czech songs.

27. Joe. Dad would sing songs and even make them up when Joe would play the accordion. Years ago Vaclav would tap against a brass ring and sing Czech songs. Even in his 90s he would sing in Czech. Joe sings a few learned from his dad.

28. Joe. Kids always talked Czech with their mother, but have also brushed up since visiting the old country.

29. Joe. Dad never had a songbook. Songs all in his head.

30. John. On local Bohemian bands. Vic Sokup had a band, so did his brother Ben. Then there was Subrt's band (pronounced Shubert). And some Hrdlickas had a band called The Swingsters. Emil Hrdlicka could really swing out the Clarinet Polka.

31. Joe. Neighbor Irvin Bergman played mandolin and banjo. Joe played accordion. Mike Sirek ran a bar in Dobie and after Joe and Irvin had played an amateur show, they were invited to play at Sirek's. Wilfred Dostal played banjo and saxophone and accordion. Also had a drummer. Joe wishes he had that old zip now. One of Joe's sisters has marked down the places where he has played. Joe played quite a few Czech tunes. Polkas, schottisches, waltzes. Plays all by air, not these modern numbers.

32. Joe. Some good polka bands came through the area years ago. Whoopee John played through the area years ago. Joe took Virginia to see him play at Sokup's



in 1945. Used to go to free shows in Sarona, followed by Walt Tharlton and his wife and others who played some modern music.

33. Joe. Ted Hagg on Whiskey Hill near Long Lake encouraged Joe to try to play accordion. After that he begged his folks to get one for him.

[Leary primes the joke pump with a Bohemian joke about a kolacky.]

34. Joe. A couple of Bohemians, Joe and Tony, were going to go fishing. Tony would furnish everything but the drinks and the food. Joe gets four cases of Strohs and four doughnuts. "You dummy, when are we gonna get time to eat them doughnuts."

35. Joe. Last summer had a Czech couple to visit for a month. Had been over their about eight times before and had met nine first cousins and all their kids with his brother Albert in 1975. Has about 150 relatives there now. Would stay a month at a time, and even has an accordion he bought over there that stays there so he can play it when he comes over. Bought it on the black market. Was an experience for some of their relatives to come over here. Couldn't believe the variety in the grocery store.

36. John. When he was in the service in Germany at the tail end of the Battle of the Bulge ran into various prisoners. J called on to interpret for Czech-speakers. "They'd almost swarm over you." Was actually with the medics. Often gave some food to a hungry German kid against regulations.

37. Parents made salves with goose fat. Onion and mustard plasters. Goose grease with garlic. A tea called "pelinka" (sp?). "Once you took that, you didn't get sick." Terrible stuff. Pig's ear, a plant, another remedy.

[Leary tells Bohemian and octopus joke.]

38. Joe reckons there's a story about mushroom pickers around Haugen, but he can't remember it.

39. John. Soon as mushrooms come the old Bohemians are down picking them. The Indians see them and tap one on the shoulder and say, in Czech, "are you Bohemian too?"

40. In Japan the bomb didn't kill the Japanese, it was the Czechs running after the big mushroom.

41. Lilian. Two Czechs, a young couple, had a horse, one said to another (L speaks in Czech). (Joe translates.) The girl asks the guy to whip the horse a little, make him fart, she likes to smell that.

42. John. Johnny sleeps in the room next to his parents. Went to parochial school. Church bells ringing. Nun says I wonder who died. Johnny says, I know who died, it was (speaks in Czech). (John translates.) Mother says, it's no use, it won't get up anymore.

43. John. Used to have a new story for Rose every day when he worked off the farm.



44. Joe. Went hunting with older brothers John and Joe. Young Tony, only three, followed them. One of the older boys shot a rabbit. They sent Tony home with the rabbit. He says "I am here already" in Czech. Lilian says one boot was different from the other. Tony could barely see over the rabbit.

Tape Two ends, Tape Three begins.

John plays button accordion and Joe plays piano accordion on the upcoming tunes, with each of them singing, along with siblings Lilian, Albert, Dorothy, and Tony.

45. Baruska

46. Tinker Polka (fragment)

47. At the Spring (U Studanky)

48. Ja Sam Sirota

49. Louka Zelena

50. Ja Sam Sirota (fragment)

51. Svestkova Alej

52. Sla Andulko do Zeli (Annie in the Cabbage Patch)

53. Baruska

54. Hup Sadyna

55. Julida

DHD ? 56. Louka Zelena

57. Red Wing

58. Life in the Finnish Woods

End of Tape Three, End of Session