

INTERVIEW OF ROSE KOOT CZAJKOWSKI

March 3, 1984

Windber, PA

By Mildred Allen Beik

MB= Mille Beik

RKC= Rose Koot Czajkowski (1916-2006)

Beginning of Tape 1

MB: Rose I was wondering if your family surname name Coot had any meaning or anything?

RKC: Well Koot in Polish is Kot, and in English, Koot would be Cat and in English well actually they change your name ...ot which is a Polish name to ...oot, which is a English sound and it sounds better, Koot instead of Kot, so in Polish its Kot and in English its Cat.

MB: Can you say something in Polish then?

RKC: What can I tell you? (Polish Speaking)

MB: What does that mean?

RKC: Well that means that I am so happy that you came here to visit with me and I thank you greatly that you took me out to a beautiful summer.

MB: Well your welcome, how do I say you're welcome?

RKC: (Polish Speaking)

MB: (Polish Speaking), well your going have to teach me some polish.

RKC: So what else did you want to talk about?

MB: I was wondering, when did you live in Windber exactly and how long?

RKC: Well I lived in Windber when we first got married so that would be in 19 um we lived with Franks mother and then we moved to Windber in 34, in 1934 we moved there and we lived in two rooms by a lady name Ms. Shonin, and so we lived with her on 7th street and that's when I got pregnant and then I went to Windber Hospital and had my baby. The Snow was so deep at that time that they had to push me up a cart up a hill to take me to the hospital. And they got me there three guys are pushing the car and my brother Joe and my sister's Josie's second husband, Joes on the back, they had to stay overnight at my house because he couldn't get back Hanketville, so they stayed themselves on the floor and here I am up and down on the steps had to go to the bathroom and here I am two flights of stairs. Then they took me to the hospital I weigh 165 pounds. But I went to the hospital that way, there weren't things at that time the way we have today. The road gets clean immediately here, and everything gets going, at that time it didn't, there were two different people that pasted away they could not be buried they had the services for them in the church, but they kept them in the cooler at the funeral home until they could get the cemetery ready and someone could clean the road to go up to the cemetery and so they had to be stalled off, as a matter of fact a relative of ours died in Central city and she also could not be buried because of the bad weather and the snow was really deep. And that was really a big snow storm, yes very much so.

MB: So then you lived in Windber from then?

RKC: Yes then we moved to my mother's place a summer house, then from the summer house we moved up to Somerset Avenue. Our address was 209 Somerset Avenue, from

there we moved to 40 to live with this lady. We had to live there and um, well maybe I'm wrong we moved to 40 in a little house and then moved to Somerset Avenue. Then we moved to 1117.

MB: So how long did you live at 40, a long time?

RKC: Oh yeah, Dick was only about 4 years older when we moved to 40, and he's 45 now, that's 41 years.

MB: So that's a long time, so what was 40 like when you first lived here?

RKC: It was a lot of people, we had a lot of Rico stores, the Company store and we had, we didn't buy with cash, and we had books that we would charge the food on. And when the man bought the pay home then every two weeks, they wait every two weeks for pay then on a Friday everybody's out waiting for that Husband to get home, to get that check. And run down to the store, pay the book pay whatever you owe. And start your book again and do your grocery shopping, there wasn't such a thing as car and you go to the mall and shop or whatever, occasionally we would drive over to Windber and buy some meat at some store, like Johns market. Or Conjacols, and that's when you had money to buy it, there was no charge there. Other people did, they had to know you to give you charge. So ours was all charged at the Rican Stores, everything and then if we were running short at one that did bill you they would give us a deal for \$50 if you wanted it, and then you went to the bigger Rican Store on 15th street and then you bought what you wanted there because it was a big department store. And you bought the children's cloths on debt, they loaned you like \$50 and then you would be paying it off. We didn't really have too much cash anytime.

MB: I see, and all that time your husband has been a miner until he got sick I guess?

RKC: 31 years

MB: Oh boy and you go to Johnstown very much?

RKC: Yes we used to go to Johnstown, we would look for all the sales my sister in law

Ann Koot that's my husband's cousin and my brother would be working night shifts.

They takes early in the morning and her and I would go down and we thought it was such a big deal to go to town we would lay away drapes whatever we need and would go every two weeks to pay on them like maybe two dollars or whatever. And sometimes he would bring home fresh sausage and then he boiled it with ham because it looked so good and nice pieces and we always went to Johnstown every two weeks because we had bills to pay down there, like maybe some furniture we bought, our Penn furniture. We go down to Madlin we have a little lunch down there and we thought it was a big deal my brother was always good and patient and would go down there.

MB: Did you drive then?

RKC: I never drove to Town at the time at one time my daughter drove into town and it was a very wintry day. And our car broke down right by Ripples, and we stayed in a restaurant, it was a very nice restaurant where Howard Johnsons is now, and the car broke down and my husband who was on his way to work had to come get us. So we cut the car of the road but she drove into town. But later I did drive into town a lot whenever I...

MB: Were there streetcars and things in those days?

RKC: Yes there were street cars as a matter of fact long ago before I could even

remember my husband taught me this his uncle and my husband's father they owned a street car down on Johnstown and they had it running how long I don't know, but they have one down there. So I don't know too much about that.

MB: So in 40 Windber, what kinds of people lived there, were they different nationalities all mixed together or would one kind of nationality lived together?

RKC: No not really on that street on that street where I lived we always lived near the English people and so Dutch and there was a German family a Russian and Hungarian, Polish all kinds, and I remember but there was a Mexican Family. The first street I only lived up there and also now right now in the house that you lived in there is a Mexican family there now.

MB: When you think of Windber and all the mining camps around do you think there was like ethnic divisions, like certain groups living in places, like if you think back to the 1930s.

RKC: I don't think.

MB: People sometimes say that maybe Italians lived in one part of town and basically they still do

RKC: On 21st street and past there, there's a lot of Italian people living there, but the Polish they are scattered around I would say so.

MB: And when you think of Windber, when you think of the people do you think of certain people being more powerful than others? Who would you think as powerful in the town itself?

RKC: You mean someone better to do than you are?

MB: Yeah, in having a certain amount of power?

RKC: Well Mr. Wally would, I think since way back with his ford garage and everything I would think with his for garage and everything even up till now.

MB: Are there any other names, or political families?

RKC: Well Mr. Wally would be because he had power all the way up from Washington.

MB: Is there anything that you think of that has changed a lot since the 1930s, either just in 40 or the town itself.

RKC: I think Windber itself has changed, it's more beautiful than has been at any time, and however there aren't as many stores as there had been once. It used to be a lot of stores like the AMP, the Acme and oh just Grants and all of them, but you don't have any more of them. Now it seems like it's dying down right now, they had AMP down where the flood was. And that was flooded up the riverside took that over.

MB: Yeah, that was more recent years.

RKC: Yeah, that was more recent,

MB: Was it before or after Eureka left?

RKC: Before

MB: Because at one time I only remember it being the Eureka stores.

RKC: Well AAP was one time up between 10th and 11th street like right where Chester

is the flower shop right there, yeah, it used to be a Genz store and it was all down the street and there was, whenever I got married there was Dick's market and there was a funeral home. All of that has changed and they all moved up the street further and much more beautiful I would say. But one thing that did change a lot was the catholic churches. Yes they have changed a lot.

MB: How so?

RKC: Well they changed a lot, you wasn't allowed to have meat on Friday they changed that and they changed from Latin to English. And you have all the books to read, before you went to church you had your prayer book or rosary to read, and the priest would go on about his business and conduct the mass. You could go ahead and do what you want to do. And now you're sort of all get together and its sort of a group like. And that way however, older people they like the Latin way.

MB: Did you ever have Polish in your church?

RKC: Yes

MB: Because you went to Saint Johns?

RKC: Yes

MB: Do you remember how that changed at all?

RKC: Well father Mack had passed away, and he was doing a lot of things preaching in Polish and even some English. And as soon as we got the newer priest father Berderick. He changed a lot, Sunday Mass or High mass, he will have it in Polish. But he was mostly in English, younger priest.

MB: Are you taking about today?

RKC: Yes today

MB: But occasionally you still have a Polish service?

RKC: We have a Polish service, we also have a Polish band and a place a Pokka mass. I liked it very much, everybody sings and everybody has pamphlets and do all the singing which is nice, and now they even have younger children in a Quaoar which is a youth group and they have many more things now which younger people are involved and I think it's better for them because they are involved in church and they are not afraid. Like with confessions and that sort of thing. No I think they are a lot more lenient with everybody. And the children are not that quite afraid, and they go on trips and everything. Which long ago you never see that never. It was different quite different. You did not have lay people come up and be talking.

MB: Could you tell me what it was like to be a miner's wife?

RKC: I wouldn't say it was exactly difficult but at times you never knew where your next dollar was going to come from because sometimes they only worked one day to a pay that was in the beginning.

MB: You were married during the Depression weren't you?

RKC: Yes I was , but really It didn't bother me at the time at all, because now if I had to do it I'm used to more luxury at the time.

MB: Did you grow your own food to help support yourself?

RKC: Well we did grow our own food yes when lived at 40 we did we had a garden. But when we moved here we didn't plant anything. But it was so nice, our friends had Gardens and stuff and we always got things from them. But otherwise, it was kind of hard when Frank had to quit working because the mine was going to close down anyway. And for the first six months we didn't get no red penny from nowhere. And we were very fortunate that we had our bonds and we cashed every bond we had in order to pay our bills and eat. And we very happy we were very independent because of our bonds, we didn't have to ask anybody for anything.

MB: Were these war bonds?

RKC: Yes all our war bonds, we hate to do it, but that's what we had to do

MB: Did the mines work well during the war?

RKC: Well yes towards the beginning they worked very well, towards the end they didn't work that well.

MB: You were telling me Rose when your husband got sick and he had to quite the mines. When was that?

RKC: Well that was 18 years ago so that was in 1947 right?

MB: No more than that, he must of work more

RKC: Well he's been passed away for four years so let's figure that out.

MB: So that would be 62,

RKC: Yes

MB: I know that's when the Berwind mines closed.

RKC: Oh I don't remember, yeah, but he didn't work for 18 years then so that would be 18 from 80 right?

MB: right

RKC: That would be four years from July when he passed away.

MB: Did you go to work then?

RKC: Oh I had worked practically all my life. I was even working while I was pregnant. In fact another family that lived 4 or 5 houses away she just had a new baby Ms. Solomon, they had a food market right there next to Citizens Bank. And I don't know if they were Serbian or what they were. I guess they wanted some help and I went out to help then and they used to give me three dollars a day, when some people would give me 3 dollars a week and she gave me that right I went to the store bought some groceries and came down the rent wasn't high. 10 dollars a month for rent and I would say anywhere from light and that's what we paid every month so rent wasn't very high. But then we had to get a car too, so we were paying off that car.

MB: And you did housework?

RKC: Yes I did housework and I have worked for a lot of nice people Doctors, Relators, and cleaned their offices and their homes, very nice people. And then I started to work at the Citizens Bank for 22 years and a year ago in '83, I quit.

MB: So the two of you were able to work?

RKC: Yes we were able to work very well. And the children had a chance if they wanted to go to college they could have went. And Joe she was working at the Berwind office she was a telephone operator. And then she also worked for the telephone company, and this was when we bought this house, this house was going up for sale in 40 and her boss had told her, so she told us and I said I didn't want to move in this house because it wasn't like it is today there was so much to do in there. But eventually everything turned out fine.

MB: So you have three children?

RKC: Yes I have Joe and she's living in Mansfield Ohio and she got four children and Dick lives in Maryland he has three children, and Dave lives here and he has 3 girls. So I have 10 grandchildren.

MB: So none of your children have ever gone into the mines?

RKC: No never

MB: That was different from previous generation

RKC: Yes, and David's very luck too, because being that we got married 11 years ago and he's had a Job since he got married, even before he got married he was in Vietnam for two years and he got back and has been working 4 days a week, but still that's wonderful because a lot of men aren't working. His wife she works too, she does a lot of things to supplement income.

MB: So in the 30s and 40s when the mine's weren't working as much, how can you compare that to today?

RKC: In a lot of ways I would say, for instance with your food you didn't eat as well then I would say other fancy things and quick things at that time you did a lot more cooking because of gardening and you got your things from gardening. You had to make your lima beans and your cabbage, it wasn't that expensive, and the children weren't as fussy like these Grandchildren. They are very fussy today, they just don't eat anything at all. So I think that had a lot to do with that and things were just different like your neighbors I think they would all just sit out on the porch and play cards and everything was just happy go lucky, today everybody just changed. They are just not as sociable today. You don't have that warm feeling towards them, you had to know them real well first. Before it was different you went down to the 40 store and you would wave and talk. Incidentally the 40 store burned down like 3 weeks ago.

MB: So could you tell me, I guess you chose to stay in Windber when you retired, can you tell me what you like about Windber what kinds of things you like about Windber?

RKC: Where I live, what I like about Windber because everything is so close that I can get into the car, five minutes I'm at the store, the bank, and church. And what have you and it's nice and the people down Windber, the customers are nice, and the clerks are nice and everybody is just real nice to you. And that's what I like about it and I guess because I been here so long, and you just say Hi to everyone and it's just so pleasant. You don't feel lost, when I go to Ohio and stay there for two weeks my Daughter lives in the Suburbs like and you have to car everywhere and the people there just don't associate with each other like they do here. And I'm glad when I get home because I miss all my friends here. I like to talk to them.

MB: Is there anything you don't like about Windber that you wished were different?

RKC: Oh I don't really know just off hand of what that could be, one thing I don't like is when you went down the country and all this stripping. I don't like to see all that land stripping. I like to see the land being planted and have the corn on there and all your produce and stuff, I don't like to see all these hills and the holes they make with the stripping that they do. However they do cover it in due time, but I don't like it, I just think it ruins the scenery of things.

MB: Is that an issue then?

RKC: Yes

MB: In the 30s and 40s I guess the Union came in the 30s, do you know much about that?

Was your Husband in the UMWA?

RKC: Yes he was

MB: Can you tell me anything about that, anything on the Union Organization?

RKC: No, the only thing I know that belonged to the UNW is that they did a lot of good for the Windows and the miners because you had your hospitalization taken care off through that. Which is great, at my age I had Medicare which is wonderful, however If I didn't have that I would have to take up BlueCross or BlueShield, which was a little hard with the income. We have so nice today we go to the hospital in February thinking it would cost me a lot of money it actually didn't cost a penny. Because UNW would take care of it, and what they didn't take care Medicare took over.

MB: And your husband did he die of Silicosis?

RKC: Yes

MB: Black lung?

RKC: Yes black lung

MB: And I guess there were some benefits with that, compared to the old days?

RKC: Yes, it benefits and it was in March of 82 is whenever they started giving Windows pension who didn't get pension before and we were getting a pension of 95 dollars a month which was a great help.

MB: Do you remember anyone having black lung when you were growing up? I guess they were not getting benefits.

RKC: No I don't think they got benefits then, but I do know a man and he's also Polish and he had a sleeping rocking chair couldn't lay on his back and he was so bad he was all twisted up his name was Mr. Cosgrove and he had all these oxygen things, he didn't have all this equipment that they have today. And that's what he was suffering from and he was suffering hard and he could just not breath at all and his picture was in the paper on separate occasions showing what coal dust could do to the miner. He was an older person he was in the mines long before my Husband and they didn't have the mask and the things that they have today the equipment and they were eating up the dust and it was going right into their lungs.

MB: So I guess that was the change and the benefits from that. Do you remember any stories of mining accidents or folklore? So miners had, like some wouldn't work in mines on certain days because they had a superstition.

RKC: I don't really know of any incidents like that, though there could have been but I don't know any.

MB: Did he enter the mines at a certain age?

RKC: Yes he was 17 when he went to work in the mine and that was up in Kelso, and sometimes he said he would put Ice skates on and go down to the creek, he went don that way and would go to work the other way. He only worked there for a short time.

MB: And his father had been a miner?

RKC: Yes he was a Miner, but he wasn't loading coal he was doing something else in the mine.

MB: His father or him?

RKC: His father, he wasn't loading coal all the time, more towards the end he was a mechanic but he was still around the dust and everything he had to go fix this, they called him to fix this or that, my brother Stan, he drove the motor he got the dust the he got the sand dust and that's very bad.

MB: Did most of your husband's brother's go in the mine?

RKC: My husband didn't have no brothers he was the only boy but his brother in laws all worked in the mine, all of them.

MB: So that was a change, did your husband want his sons to go in the mines at all?

RKC: Well he wished that he wouldn't had to in the mine, but there was nothing else to do around here, and it was actually hard to just pick up and leave and go a city when you

had everybody here, like his sisters and mothers and all that and my whole family if you feel like leaving and going, you also realize you can't make it no place else. So I would say he never want his boys to go into the mine I would say not. Because I do know that he would often say later when he was feeling sick "Boys you don't what this is like, when a person has to suffer", and he said " I never want my boys to go into the mines anywhere"

MB: And how did you feel about that?

RKC: I felt the same, I often said I wish he could have had jobs in Chicago. And this may not of happen he say "Well what can you do about it". And he was very, he wasn't big complainer, he said "What's to be will be"

MB: Is there anything else you can say about them or Windber anything that comes to mind about Windber that someone else who had seen this town or knew the people from it?

RKC: Well all I could say is that when people would come here like from Detroit and New York whatever they always go to see the mines go down to the mines and seat at the tracks. They would go down to see you working down at the tipper here and doing all that work where the dust is coming and it's an awful lot of dust. You couldn't go out there in the summer time and not get dirty, the chimney was always black a lot of dust coming from there. Sometime the guy at the mine Mr. Jamdee he would put the bags like you should in there to prevent the dust. However when these people would come from the city and come here they would go as far as the mine drift where you go in but they could never go in. But they would be watching what was going on and they would be so

amazed. But they would never go into the mine, or a dark place, so I would feel that they would never want to go in because everybody would take pictures of mines and just everything because they could not just visualize how things could go on in that mine, I know myself I would never want to go in there. I always dreaded see an ambulance thinking the worse of things and how they going to haul him out, and I just hated the idea of the mine.

MB: Did you worry about accidents?

RKC: Oh I most certainly did, yes I did, and I would be just so leery wondering what was going to happen in that mine. I never thought of even the black lung like it all happened and turned out. I always thought about accidents in there and would they ever get him out, we always thought about a fire or something in there, it would just happened.

MB: Did you worry about layoffs

RKC: Oh sure they had to let you know, they wouldn't exactly be laid off, but they would not be working you know because they be striking with the stick or something and nothing would be coming in because the strike and no money coming in to keep your children in clothing or whatever.

MB: Do you remember any strikes in particular?

RKC: Oh yes I remember some strikes?

MB: Tell me about it?

RKC: All I know is they were striking and not working and there was nothing coming in.

MB: And you had to make ends meet?

RKC: I made ends meet, he would be home and he would make meals for the children and I still be working, and I would work more than usual because I could work a little more if I need to. But I couldn't always work every day because of the children and he be working. And some time when he went back to work he would be called to work, for the mechanic to fix something maybe he go two days, and my mother in law would watch the children. While I go to work, I used to even get on the bus to go to work would go to Gueisstown, I drive a car to go down there, I knew how. But I just with withered time I wouldn't take the car to go. I took the bus down there.

MB: Do you have any other memories and recollection?

RKC: Oh yes I had memories of my Allen's, Allen's was my neighbors, John Allen I think it's time to shut it off.

End of Tape 1

End of Interview