

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT
RODICA BOTOMAN
FEBRUARY 17, 2014

Q. Good morning. I am Judy Fountain, and today is February 17, 2014, and I am thrilled to be introducing and interviewing Rodica Botoman, whose birthday is May 27, 1934. Thank you for doing this, Rodica. I really am grateful. And your story is important.

A. I hope so.

Q. Let's start with, I know your life is so full, but I'm going to ask you to focus, right now anyway, on Ohio State, and get started there. Describe the positions, the roles you played at Ohio State, what units they were in, what time periods.

A. You know, my position when I retired was as an Associate Professor in the Slavic and East European Languages and Literature Department. I started in 1975 as the Coordinator and Director of the Romanian Program, from 1975 until 2002, when I retired. So what can I say? As a family background a little bit, I was born in Romania. I was born in a middle-class family and had a happy childhood until the Iron Curtain fell with a very brutal dictatorship that started at that time, and it was hard for us all. I even had to function, starting in 1956 when I graduated from college, as a teacher under such circumstances, in Romania. However, in 1969, with my husband and my son, who was 14 at that time, we found a way to leave Romania. And so it was really wonderful to be able to come to the United States. We left Romania in the summer of '69, and had to spend six months in a refugee camp, so it was not as easy as it sounds. And then in 1970 we received the Visa being sponsored by my husband's cousin, a wonderful family in Cleveland. It was January 21, a day we always celebrate now for 44 years in this country. We arrived in Cleveland, and from there on we started our life as immigrants. So what I

want to mention is that as far as Ohio State is concerned, for us, the three of us, it was in 1971 that we received a much-needed extended hand, first through a Glenna Joyce Scholarship for my son a scholarship that covered his expenses. As for my husband, a geologist, 45 years old he was, with 20 years of experience behind him in Romania. So the only way to get a job in his profession here was to be a graduate student again in the Geology Department. How grateful we were when he got a research assistantship position so as to be able to start his graduate studies. After that, not as easy as we would have liked it to be for me, finally I applied to graduate school and got first some financial aid as a work-study student to work for \$1.20 an hour.

Q. In what department?

A. French. It was for a Romanian Linguistics project with Professor [David A.] Griffin, and then finally I got in the budget as a Graduate Teacher Associate, in French. And so the three of us were students. If you could see us we worked hard but we also had the happy times that we couldn't have as students in Romania when we were young.

Q. Your son was a student in medical school then?

A. No, he was an undergraduate. He graduated in Biochemistry with a double major, also in English and after that he went to Johns Hopkins Medical School.

Q. So the three of you were all students together?

A. Yes, George and I as graduate students and my son as an undergrad. We rented a modest house near campus and started our student life. Busy course work, also teaching, research and long hours of studying. Sometimes the three of us met at midnight in front of the library and walked together home. And you know, our dignity, integrity started to be restored in a nice way. For us, Ohio State remains our Alma Mater for the three of us. It's

also Johns Hopkins University for my son, of course. Notice I brought into focus the immigrant identity because that's what, from the very beginning, was obvious. Why am I saying that? Because of many reasons. You are confronted with a language that is not yours. I had 18 years of work behind me, Judy, as a teacher in Romania, and all of a sudden you are glad to get a provisional teaching certificate to teach only as a substitute. I had a kind enough cousin to teach me how to answer the phone when they would call me to go to a school on the West side of Cleveland. Then I also had to learn how to call a taxi to take me to that school and than back home. How wonderful it was, though, to be in in a classroom in front of the students again. I was certified to teach German, French and Latin and so I tried to avoid speaking English as much as I could. But I was also ready to learn from my colleagues, and everybody was very kind. My income the first year in Cleveland as a substitute teacher, I arrived in January, and I started substituting in March, was \$800 that whole year.

Q. Oh my gracious.

A. My husband, though, who worked at that time in a factory, was trying to help financially, meanwhile applying for jobs as a geologist with no positive results. But anyway, financially we had the minimum we needed. My son worked also. And the interesting thing is, that everybody around us, including the family, was trying to extend a hand of help. We were really blessed with the family we found here more supportive than we ever dreamed of. Everybody, though, kept insisting, "You have to forget your profession for a while. You might have to get other jobs." I went to an unemployment office and tried hard to get a job; meanwhile, I realized how much I loved to teach. While talking to relatives and friends I remember insisting "I love to teach and I think I am a good

teacher.” The other thing as an immigrant that I was confronted with, Judy, and I never forget that, you come with 18 years of experience. So it happens that we left Romania in August '66. That academic year I was part of a committee in the capital city for introducing new topics in the curriculum for Romanian language and literature. A major subject there. As a result, I was one of the recipients of a “Profesor evidential” award, a prestigious teaching award there. Then you find yourself here and nobody knows you to give you a recommendation as a teacher. So you can imagine, one of the professors in Geology was kind enough to write what he knew on my application for Graduate School “She speaks three languages fluently and two others well. So she’s an accomplished linguist. They seem to be honest and hard-working people.” And this is how I was accepted to graduate school. So that was another thing. But how rewarding.

Q. And when you were accepted to graduate school it was for what degree that you were pursuing?

A. Master’s degree because we had our five years of university studies in Romania but here we only receive the equivalent of a Bachelor ‘s degree.

Q. So you were getting your Bachelor’s degree?

A. No, a Master’s degree.

Q. In what topic? What was your major?

A. French. Romance Languages and Literatures. And so I attempted to go to the German Department because in six months in the refugee camp in Austria I brushed up on my German, but I decided on French. And so George was also a graduate student in the Geology Department. Two years after, he was the first one to get his Master’s degree, and got immediately a job at the Ohio Geology Survey. I also got my Master’s degree after

him. We were just going from one graduation to another. Now I had a chance to get a job somewhere else. After two years of being a Graduate Teacher Associate in French I learned about the multi-skill approach and new methods of teaching foreign languages. However, a new opportunity occurred and I was offered the possibility to teach a sequence of Romanian language and culture courses.

Q. So talk about that opportunity, because there was not a Romanian program at that point, right?

A. No.

Q. So talk about the details of how that got started and who was your advocate during that time.

A. Talking about what was the most crucial moment of my life in the United States and at Ohio State University that almost changed my destiny, it was in 1975. So from '72, when we came on campus, to '75 I got my Master's and continued with Ph.D. courses. I remembered I was approaching 40. Our son needed money to go to Medical School. There were possibilities for me to get a job with my Master's degree in French. It was then when Professor [Leon] Twarog, the Chairman of the Slavic and East European Languages Department, approached Professor Griffin, the Chair of the French Department, and also talked to the Dean and mentioned he would like to offer me a chance to teach Romanian. They got a grant. For one reason or another, there was money for teaching less commonly taught languages, and rightly so, because you notice Judy, now with globalization, there are no major cultures or minor cultures. Even the smallest countries on earth are important for many reasons as special situations or even problems occur. So what I remember is that Professor Twarog invited me in the Slavic Department

and offered me \$5,000 for that school year, to set up three sequences in a Romanian Language and Culture sequence of courses. These new courses were to be on probation for two years. I looked at him and said, “How can I say yes to \$5,000 a year when our financial situation is how it is?” He said, “I talked also with the French Department and they will have you teach a French class also, and the grant altogether will be \$8,000.” So I said, “Much better.” And with that in mind, you know, I decided to accept this job offer. It was never before, that I came up with a big decision without consulting my husband. I was afraid that he would say no to this job offer because, although he was working at the Ohio Geological Survey, his dream was to find a job somewhere else as a mineralogist. So I remember leaving Dr. Trowarg’s office and walked up to the house where we were living at that time and I knew that if I would not accept this possibility to teach Romanian I would regret it for the rest of my life. And I also realized to what extent money for me in this case was secondary. So anyway, I went home, dialed the number and said, “Dr. Trowarg, I accept the job.” It was only after that that I called George explaining to him the situation and he said, “Rodica, so be it. Let’s see.” Probably he was sure I will not get the students as required. In fact, I was the first one to say to Professor Trowarg, “Why Romanian? Who wants to take Romanian? I tried so hard to forget my Romanian background.” He said, “Rodica, you love this country. This will be your contribution as a teacher here or if not we will realize that it doesn’t work. But remember this would be a pilot program for less commonly taught languages. We’ll see what will happen.”

Q. Wonderful. And this was, Romanian was not taught at that point in any university. Is that right?

A. It was taught, Judy, but only if they had strong graduate programs and the support of the History, Political Science, Linguistics Departments with a focus on Romanian area studies. But how many students they had? There were mostly graduate students among others at University of Washington in Seattle and at the University of Rochester. Two American Fulbright American scholars who studied in Romania wrote their dissertation in linguistics on topics related to the Romanian language and when they returned they initiated a Romanian program. More for research purposes. This was to be different, very different, what I was to do at Ohio State. So first I contacted [E. Garrison] Walters [Assistant Dean, College of Humanities], because I needed support for the culture course to be taught. He was, I think, at that time in the Provost's office. He had just returned after one year as a Fulbright scholar in Romania where he learned the language so we spoke Romanian together all the time. I mentioned to him that I was asked to set up two language classes, and one culture and civilization course, which would be in English and I needed him to team teach this course with me as a historian. He was glad to help and so I had the support for the culture course. Now, for the language, however, picture this. No books, no tapes, nothing to compare to what French and Italian and some other major languages had. So I had to put together a curriculum and syllabus for the two language courses that were 293A and 293B. These were the low-level undergraduate elective courses, and I had to have at least 20 students each quarter.

Q. In each class?

A. Only one class.

Q. But you had to have 20 in that class?

A. Yes. It was structured with Fall and Winter Quarter daily language classes and Spring the culture course in English and to my surprise, I couldn't believe it, I got the 20 students. We advertised it. And I went and talked to the counselors and explained to them this experiment that we were to do. Very hard work. I tried to make it academically rigorous because at the end of two years, I had to write a proposal that had to be evaluated by departmental committee of professors above my rank, and then by the College of Humanities, and then the Provost's office.

Q. Right, right.

A. I got a lot of support through the years. I learned, for example, that it was Dorothy Jackson, who was Associate Provost at that time, who was very supportive for the approval of the proposal. Again a woman who said, "This is hard work. Let's reward that." To put together that proposal was a very hard project for me. Imagine I had to have ready attached to it a 200-pages pilot book that I had to write on my electric typewriter.

Q. Oh my gosh.

A. I did Judy. And so we tried to make it. Who were the students? They were graduate students who decided that it would be interesting to write their dissertation on a topic related to Romania. Like in Anthropology, two of them. [Professor of Anthropology] Erika Bourguignon, their advisor, sent them there. See what I mean? And then there was Rebekah Jorgensen, also a graduate student, though it was hard for me to have a positive reaction when she told me what her plans were considering the conditions of those days in Romania. She had as an advisor, a professor in the Cinematography Department, and she said, "I wrote my Master's Degree Theses on the impact of American TV productions on a small community in France. And now I want to write my Ph.D. dissertation on the

impact of American TV productions on a small community in Romania.” Can you imagine coming up with such a research project to take place for one year in Romania of that time? Well, her Fulbright grant was approved and she did a wonderful job in completing her project there. There were, in fact, two extremes in the group of students I had. There were some I called “lost Romanians,” Americans of Romanian descent wanting to learn Romanian “so we can talk to our grandparents” said one of them, a medical student he was, now he is a dentist. However, as I said, some were graduate students such as Craig Packard, who is now with the Institute of Applied Linguistics, and some others were either in Slavic linguistics or in Romance Linguistics. Romanian has very interesting features, with a Latin language structure heavily influenced by others around. That’s how it started.

Hard work it was but I was happy I could do it. As for the Culture course I tried to create a frame of reference interesting enough not only for the language courses and also to stimulate further area studies. It is then when we introduced in the culture course topics related to folklore. For example, if I was to discuss romanticism in Romania, other topics would be included, such as The Contribution of Romanians to world culture. Examples such as Dr. [George E.] Palade, who won the Nobel Prize for his research on cell biology. Or Constantin Brancusi, the founder of Modern Sculpting in the World and others in different areas. In other words, we tried to make the course not only informative but also interesting. I remember one day when, after a Folklore slides presentation, one of the students came to me after class and with a smile corrected my way of pronouncing the word “slides.” So it was a lovely experience. It was during the culture course that one of the students said “Why don’t we set up a Romanian Club and meet every Tuesday for a

fireside chat, so you can supplement class information? You have a lot to share with us.”

And then why not to also teach some traditional Romanian dances, they suggested, to which George said gladly “Yes” and this is how the OSU Romanian Club started.

Q. The club. Oh wonderful, I did not know that.

A. This is how it started. I had this enthusiastic group of students. When I wrote the proposal, I made it sound so easy and fun, but it was hard. You had to prove the validity of this new type of program. It was hard.

Q. It was. You were still teaching all your classes, right? It wasn't like you had release time.

A. Not at all. So it was a one-person program. Let me tell you how necessity makes you as creative as you can be. You know what it is? So I talked to Professor Twarog and I said, “The proposal proved that it is working. Now we have to structure it so as to be accepted in the group of required foreign languages.” They were offered at Ohio State, when the quarter system was there, in four quarters: 101, 102 103 and 104. However, I said, “This is not going to be possible with the Romanian program. It will be different from others because it is only one teacher that teaches all courses, and I could not teach the first three levels and then interrupt for the summer and continue with the last sequences in the fall. In the fall they will not remember much.

Q. Right.

A. So I structured it as two quarters, 101, 102, and the third 111, intensive two hours daily. I even did some research on teaching an intensive course as a better way of learning a foreign language, you know, Judy, that set up a structure that other foreign languages at Ohio State University could use. I don't know if you are aware, but now 30-some foreign languages are taught at Ohio State University. The great majority of them are less

commonly taught languages. Even the term minor languages had to be corrected. “There are no major or minor languages,” I said. A better term is “less commonly taught.”

Q. Yes, exactly.

A. So what I’m trying to say is that most of them are taught now either as an individual instruction or as part of the regular language requirements, including Swahili and so forth. Our experience maybe helped others.

Q. Wonderful.

A. Some of these language programs are put together by the Foreign Language Institute.

Q. So when you got your proposal done, was it accepted right away?

A. It was, but you know, Judy, it was turned back to me two or three times. I had to have the syllabus ready so as to indicate even the pages for homework assignments. With my book project into making I went and said, “You know what? My homework assignments will be through handouts gradually.” But I had to do it.

Q. You had to have those all done?

A. Everything, yes.

Q. How long did that whole process take?

A. In the second quarter, I realized if I continued to have the students – even if the courses were undergraduate-level electives for graduate students – it was just good for the future. You know, I have to say I started the second year to work on this proposal definitely in the summer of 1975 and continued to work through 1976. I spent sometimes 12 hours on my desk. No computer, of course, at that time, so at a certain point I got a sharp pain in my arm. I went to the doctor wondering what it was. He said “you have carpel tunnel.

You hand write, pressing the pencil too hard.” Do you see what I mean? It’s interesting, isn’t it? For me anyway. Thank you for listening to my stories.

Q. It’s amazing, Rodica.

A. You know what it is? When you get an extended hand, when you expect less and an opportunity occurs, then do not hesitate to take this opportunity. I’m so glad I did that because I made a career out of it.

Q. So after you got the proposal accepted, then what changed?

A. It was very different. It was extremely rewarding. I found out that the Romanian program was probably among the very few less commonly-taught languages at OSU that got equal status with French, German, Russian, Italian, Chinese. And then came Romanian. After that, Professor Twarog said, “Rodica, this is the time now to expand the program and thus more proposals were to be written. If you look in the University Bulletin under the Romanian program you can see all the new courses that were initiated and established throughout the years. It’s an entire page.” And all those proposals of courses of different levels had to go under scrutiny for approval. This way a Minor in Romanian was also established. It was hard work but very rewarding. So as I have mentioned the first courses were initiated in 1976, and they became permanent part of the curriculum in 1980. It takes time.

Q. It does take time, right.

A. Once it became part of the foreign languages required courses I started to get gradually more students. First 50 students and then more. I divided them in parallel classes and I was teaching all of them. I was at that time an instructor and I was teaching three hours daily straight. As these courses were taught by the same person who was also a regular

faculty member attracted even more students because some of them, mostly undergraduates, were very apprehensive about learning a foreign language. They were not even sure they will be able to go through this requirement. However, there were some who took the courses because they needed them for their area studies. So I had a mixture. And so my goal was to turn that attitude of some into an enthusiastic way of learning. If you teach the language within its cultural frame of reference, it makes the learning of a foreign language a living experience. Grammar alone will not do it.

Meanwhile, an instructor being at that time, I also had to finish my dissertation as soon as possible. So working on my 350-pages dissertation I had to also teach three hours a day, and it was only when I had almost a hundred students in the program that I finally got help. The number of students surprised some and to protect the integrity of the program I gave, Judy, six exams a quarter in nine weeks. I convinced the students it was the best way for learning the language and that was because I said, “I need to scrutinize very seriously the first quarter for a good basis in order to do well in the sequences to follow,” and I had students who had to give up. I always said, though, “Come back when you can focus more on this requirement.” I never said because you cannot do it. Some of my students worked and also went to school, or they didn’t have time to study taking other challenging course, and this was harder than they thought. The exigency was necessary. I will never forget sitting at my kitchen table in our house correcting, until after midnight sometimes 80-90 exams every week and working on my dissertation also. I am not trying to make myself a hero I’m just trying to say that when you are determined and love what you do, with hard work even the most utopic dream can come true. Of course if we are healthy and get the support we need.

Q. So talk about, you completed your Ph.D. How long did that take you? And you received it in French, right?

A. Yes, it was in 1981. You know, it was then when I could see the light at the end of the tunnel. During this time, I have to say I had the support of my family. You know, as a mother and as a wife, you had to stretch every hour trying to do the best for your family also. I had the support. In other words, a very good son and a very good husband. Very supportive. He said that he was so supportive because he felt, not guilty, but sorry for me quite often when we were in the refugee camp and then our first year here. He was so glad to see me as a graduate student teach again. It was his decision to cross the Danube and leave Romania and he thought I would be sacrificed professionally. That's what I also thought. What to do with my degree in Romanian. Talking about Romania and why Romanian, I remember having Professor [Paul] Michelson from Huntington College as a guest lecturer in my Culture course. A great historian he is that studied in Romania. And one student said to him, "Dr. Michelson, you speak so well Romanian, what motivated you to do that besides your research, and what shall we tell others when they ask us why do you take Romanian? That question really bothers us. Why did you take Romanian?" Tell them, to fight ignorance in the United States," was his reply with his well-known sense of humor.

Q. So once you got your Ph.D., then what happened? You've talked a lot about your program, but what happened to you professionally then as far as rank?

A. Yes, Judy.

Q. Once you completed your Ph.D.

A. At that time I remembered they approached me and said, “We want to keep you.” I had at that time around 150 students in the program. Of course, not all of them ended the courses, however the program was strong, but I understood that I had to strengthen my research. Well, it was a dichotomy. I was teaching only undergraduate courses, and my research was in the Philosophy of Language, Narratology, and Semiotics of Culture with a focus on the Romanian Political Novel as integrated in the Eastern European area studies. So it was not easy. That was very hard, because I needed my time. Finally, a second position in Romanian for an instructor was approved. This way I had in the Program, July Donat, a wonderful colleague and an excellent teacher. She works now for the State Department, but she was for three years sharing the teaching with me and we also had a Graduate Teacher Associate. Imagine how many credit hours this program brought to our department.

Q. Oh right, you brought a lot of revenue, a lot of money. And you were only an instructor.

A. Right, and I was an instructor. I was promoted as an Assistant Professor once I got my tenure. And that was in 1984. No, Judy, no, I’m sorry. I have to correct that. It was in 1981, when once I got my Ph.D., I also got my Assistant Professorship.

Q. It was no problem with that. That was automatic.

A. We were reviewed.

Q. But there are people who, I mean I think at least Dr. Twarog and others recognized your contribution and honored you in that way. That’s not always true.

A. No, Judy, and you know I’m aware of that. If I was not to create this unique program, you know what it was? Creating my own job.

Q. Right, that’s true.

A. That's the truth. And I did not have anybody in my field to compete for the students. In the field, I didn't compete. Yes, there were some rumors, "Oh she's taking students from Italian." You know what I mean? But it had nothing to do with my promotion. So in other words, I had the support I needed. But I also think I had to secure a good academic ground. Remember, there were three criteria for promotion once you were an Assistant Professor. It was Services to the University, Research and Teaching.

Q. So, certainly teaching was extraordinary.

A. Once I became an Assistant Professor I got my first Arts and Sciences teaching award, and so that helped. Research also because I had conference participations, publications, so forth, though for research I had to make a big effort. As an Assistant Professor you are reviewed every year. With the help I got in the Romanian program I taught less, as well as correcting exams not as much as before. I made the exams, of course, but it was mostly supervising. However, in 1984, I got my tenure and that was very tough because by then, the criteria were very tough. Now it's even more brutal.

Q. That's the right word, right.

A. Later on if I was to be promoted as a full professor, under the circumstances I could have not retired in 2002

Q. Because?

A. Because of the fact that first of all rules changed and kept changing constantly. And then I had already two published books and had to have another one academically evaluated by peer review nationally and published. And also I had to maintain the program meanwhile. By then I had over forty years of teaching in Romania and at Ohio State, so I

said, "Forget it, I am happy as an Associate Professor." And before retiring I got a based-on-merit 10 percent increase in my salary.

Q. When you were going through your tenuring process, was there any objection or did you feel supported through that whole process? Often women are not.

A. They are not. We were two women in the department. It was a small department. And both of us were reviewed for tenure. I remember being in my office across the hall where they were discussing us. It was quiet and I said this, I couldn't believe I said it, "You know Anelja [Rugaleva] if they don't want me, I don't want them either. Harder than this I know the two of us cannot work." That was my attitude. You stay there and say, "You work so hard and still it takes four hours to come up with a decision." I don't know how to tell you, though, but people were kind and good to me. And that's how it was. However, it was Dr. Twarog that came and told the two of us that we passed with a unanimous vote.

Q. Wonderful.

A. And one of my colleagues, Professor Naylor came to congratulate us and I said "Well thank you, Dr. [Kenneth E.] Naylor" and he replied "I had no choice, my dear, you built an impeccable case." And that is how it was. I sound maybe too emphatic, but I am just sharing a reality.

Q. But you know, the example of a Dr. Naylor, he could have found another basis for voting for you.

A. He was a great scholar

Q. Or collegiality. You see this sometimes. They're not collegial enough or something.

A. If I was in a different department that's probably what would have happened to me. To be frank, in the Romance Languages. I would have had more problems. Not that I didn't have the support of the French colleagues, but the whole situation, they were not sure they needed Romanian. And not only about the French, others also because they were not sure they wanted Romanian.

Q. Well, you were competition.

A. Probably.

Q. Well, you were.

A. For others. And you know, here I was needed.

Q. Right. And so at your unit level it was fine. And what about the college level?

A. That's what I was told all the time. Look at the criteria and do your best to try to meet all of them. So I had scholarly articles published in my field and they had to be on a national level. I already had one book I wrote with Gary Walters, and the other one was already accepted for publication by the Ohio State University Press. It is my 470-page book that is still used now "Discover Romanian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture." For language practice also a "Work Book" and a complete set of CDs for each of the 20 chapters of the book. All these accepted for publication. What really strengthened my academic record was that I applied for a grant and got an \$84,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to write the book. By then the program was evaluated nationally and I don't know who were those who evaluated the project, but I know that I got maximum points. I couldn't believe when I got the grant.

Q. So you had met all those requirements?

A. I had to. Probably not as high. They had to accept my language books as applied linguistics books, thus being scholarly books, because they were a necessity for me for the program. However, I had to complement it with research activity. One of the criteria was national and international prestige, so through the Society of Romanian Studies in the US we organized several national and international conferences at OSU. So in other words, the criteria as required were there, but remember again, I was in a different field. However, the competition academically was there and you had to prove your point. And that's what I tried to do. I have to say, though, that one of the merits of the program is that it is structured in a way more specific for teaching a less commonly taught language. Every single unit has what I call a "major cultural infusion." There is a text in English that gives the frame of reference of each of the linguistic chapters so as to give them the basic understanding of the culture. We also focused on communication, making the language a living experience for conversation. It was in 1994 that we got a Study Abroad Fulbright Grant, and so I took a group of nationally recruited students for advanced studies in Romania. In other words, the learning of the language became more stimulating and also possibly gave incentive to others to start a new program.

Q. Let's talk a little bit about, that's wonderful to understand, actually Rodica, I had never really knew all the specific parts, but I never heard them in that order. So it was lovely, thank you. I'd like to have you talk a little bit about how your personal identity, how did you, I guess let's talk about it when you first came, you identified as a person who came as an immigrant. But were there other terms that you saw yourself as when you came to the University? Obviously you were female but any other ways you self-identified?

A. I was always happy to be a woman and I was a confident woman because I had a happy marriage. I had a husband that I knew loved me and a very good son. So I was a self-confident woman to begin with as well as a self-confident educator and mother and wife. Why am I saying that? Because Judy, the way I am, I never separated my identity as a woman from that of an educator, to the point where my husband said, “You better be a teacher; otherwise, you are teaching us all the time.” I couldn’t stop being a teacher and I would say that values for me were the same as a woman and an educator. Values were the same. In other words, even if it was hard you noticed I am self-confident and I have my optimism that seldom can be shattered. But it can. You know why am I saying that? It’s because in many ways, when I came as an immigrant, my self-confidence was shattered incredibly. You take the first steps and you become someone else, someone that speaks with an accent, and you also become so sensitive that even now, after 44 years, Judy, almost half a century in this country, and people still ask me, out of kindness I know. “Where are you from?” I find myself, more often I say, “Can you make an educated guess?” And then I don’t say it. But that’s what I am tempted to say. And I realize that it is out of kindness. Why would I react like that? For me, it’s again and again a reminder that I don’t belong 100 percent here, when in fact I do. I love this country.

Q. You do, right, absolutely.

A. My vote is as good as anybody else’s; however, you see how sensitive you become. And number two, imagine you come here with a certain academic degree and you are an educated woman. So it happens. And then all of a sudden you have to struggle to say, “Where is the bus stop, please?” And this is how you start to express yourself in very basic simple sentences. So we went to learn English at the Public Library in Cleveland.

God bless those volunteer ladies that were there to teach us. We were using kindergarten books for children to help us learn English and so forth. And then I would go home and when my son would come home from school, I would say, "I have to write my own book now. I need 1,200 nouns. I need this many verbs. I need this many connection words, so I can communicate in English." And that's what I did. But I also said to him, "Okay, now we have 70 words a day to memorize, for you and for me." George worked in the factory and he had no time to think of that much. So my son said, "Why 70 words mother?" "Because we will forget half the next day. So there has to be room to forget some," I replied. It was that sort of drama in the sense that you are scared to go on the street by yourself. You cannot walk to places you need transportation, and you are used to go shopping to do everything by yourself. This is when I think how important it was for us, the support of the family and faith in God, because then you never feel alone. But I knew that I had to be the one to make the effort. I think the determination helps.

Q. How do you see your view of yourself as a woman affecting the way you taught in the classroom?

A. I think what affected positively, being a woman, was the determination to succeed and not to lose your sense of humor. Being a woman in the classroom from the outset I said to my students. "Here I am and here you are. I want you to know, I love what I do. I dedicate all my time to make the best out of my teaching, but there is a line right there. Here I am, your professor and there you are, be ready to ask for help anytime. But when I say a line there has to be a line of respect for each other. If there are any problems, any questions, please talk to me and I will be more than happy to help. Stop me anytime with questions, but this reciprocity respect has to be there and that has to be shown in several

ways. First of all, hard work because otherwise it's a stigma on you and on me and it's unfair for all the hard work we do." I would say this for those that think that they don't need to work hard. Number two, whenever you get discouraged, come and talk to me, because I wanted to say, but I didn't say it, that I am a monument of optimism. I said this because I have this positiveness based on reality.

Q. On your realities, right?

A. Yes, so as a woman I was always careful how I looked before I stepped in the classroom. No question about it. And that's part of being a woman. But it was more, do I look professional or not? That was my concern. And I think I found my way.

Q. Yes, you did. Absolutely. You spoke about your advocates at the beginning were men, Dr. Twarog, Gary Walters. Were there women throughout your career at Ohio State who made a difference for you to be successful, or who were barriers, created barriers for you for one reason or another?

A. There were many women, a personal example for me. They extended hands of help like you, Judy, who extended hands of support when I just came to Ohio State. And then also those women colleagues that were teaching with me in the French Department, yes, wonderful support I got from them every step of the way. When I wanted to discuss what to include in the program or not, for example. There is a long list I can mention. We had a collegial, wonderful collegial relationship. I would always go first to a woman colleague for suggestions, no question about it. Then also the support at the Provost level, I understood.

Q. How were the women at that level?

A. Dorothy Jackson was one of them. I never knew until I got my tenure. It was then that someone said, “You know who was really an advocate in the committee for your program and promotion was Dorothy Jackson.” And then of course the Dean. I also remembered Ilse Edse [Associate Professor of German], an outstanding linguist in that Provost Committee.

Q. Say the name again.

A. Ilse Lehiste, a linguist who is internationally renowned. She’s not with us anymore. But when she was in the committee for evaluation, she had a heavy word to say as a scholar. In other words, her vote of confidence meant a lot. And she was asked a lot to serve in important committees that were evaluating us in foreign languages.

Q. Did you know her? Did you seek her advice during any of that time?

A. Not really. Very interesting, no. Only when I got my tenure she was another one that approached me and said, “Rodica, now I know your record. I studied your case,” said she. I should mention though there were three file volumes with all my activity that I had to submit for my tenure promotion. I will show them to you before you leave today. And she said, “You know you can become a full professor if you strengthen your research the best you can. The point is, meanwhile you cannot neglect the students in the Romanian program.” She was the one, yes and this what she told me. I mentioned this because I am sure that it was also through the Association of Faculty and Professional Women (AFPW), when I became part of this group that also served for me as an example. It was Deborah Ballam and others, that were there to show the way to keep women issues focused. So in other words, yes, I did have excellent women support.

Q. Were there any women or men who created barriers for you that you experienced personally?

A. If there were some, it was behind my back. But I didn't know about it.

Q. Ignorance is bliss.

A. I'm sure it must have been. But then was the Dean's level and the Provost level, because remember everything that I did had to be reviewed for approval. You had a position in the Provost's office, so you know how it goes. Talking about barriers, I was upset for the fact that due to retrenchment, I didn't even apply to be a full professor, considering the situation and the time constraint as I was approaching retirement. The departments were struggling to cover existing positions financially. I remember, we'd give up any hiring, any improving of salaries; otherwise, we would have had to abolish one position. And we did not want that. What it was also was the second position in the Romanian program. I had really hoped that the instructor position would become Assistant Professor, tenure track. And we were so close, right there with this possibility. This way I would have had more help for getting a sabbatical and thus having more time for research. I only had one quarter off when I got the \$80,000 grant to write my book. So the second position was really needed, but it was at that time, exactly at that time the retrenchment came. I never forget Deborah Ballam, with the Faculty and Professional Women, organized on campus a big event and I represented the Association when I was President to bring forth the issue of women and the circumstances of the budget cuts. Because they were the first positions to go in a minor field like mine. So I also went to the Dean 's office asking for support for the new faculty position. That was not only the case of Romanian, but Korean and others were in the same situation. However the reply was, "We cannot approve now."

I said, “Are you the last one I need to talk to?” And he said, “Well, the Dean, but don’t take me wrong, Rodica, you are, though, one of the most persuasive person” Was it because of the circumstances? Yes, the Dean was a man but wasn’t that also because of the budget retrenchment ? What I know is that I did not get my second position.

Q. The reality is that, when there’s budget retrenchment, it gives permission to do things that may not be estimable.

A. But Judy, if there was a possibility for the clear case I had, believe me I would have made it. The woman in me, professional woman, I had enough background that gave me the strength to defend my point. It happened to others also at that time in the East Asian Department and other foreign languages, one or two of those positions were retrenched. What I was told as a consolation was that this was just temporary, and I said, “This is Dean talk.” Now I know this is the kiss of death for the second position. And it was. It was.

Q. You, in that instance, used your, I guess would say, your feminine ways to speak to the Dean.

A. I think it was really a determined attempt to help the Romanian program trying “to protect the innocent.”

Q. The mother.

A. Yes. Probably. I’m not sure but maybe with a smile and a witty remark being a woman probably could help.

Q. I’m sure it did. He said you were very persuasive. Who was the Dean? Do you remember?

A. I think it was, Dean Riley's assistant Dean Zacher. We became good colleagues and friends. Chris Zacher, yes.

Q. That's great. He's a good man. I didn't realize he had been your Dean at some point.

A. They were, Judy, all of them supportive. There's no question about it. I just tried, I was very determined to defend my point, knowing that it was a matter of money and commitment. And the University, meanwhile, applied retrenchments. And again, I was not the only one. So I cannot say it was unfair. It was unfair for many because of the budget retrenchment.

Q. But it wasn't targeted towards you.

A. No, Judy, no. I have all my gratitude to the people that I was lucky enough to get the support I needed. And when I wanted to be heard, I was received. Yes, they found time for me. So it happens, that some were men, yes. But no problem in that sense. Not more than others.

Q. Did you see, did you observe women being treated inequitably in any of your experiences? Your experience clearly was that you felt you were treated equitably?

A. Again, circumstances were such, remember, I created my own job. I created a niche in which, really an innovation would make a point, too. So for me was different, but I'm sure, Judy, there must have been some problems. If you ask me now, I'm sure. When I'm thinking of how many women really, even in my department, were working hard setting up new courses that should be a valid criteria, it was not considered important. To set up new courses, Judy, that is extremely important and hard. And just because the book was in manuscript but not accepted then for publication, our department had to follow the new

criteria and the vote for this case was there, but not unanimous for tenure. Do you see what I mean?

Q. Yes, was that for you or for somebody else?

A. Not for me. I was already one of the professors who voted for it.

Q. So you saw that?

A. Yes.

Q. And you wonder if that had been a man rather than a woman, what the outcome would have been?

A. They always think in terms of, "Oh, there is a family to be supported."

Q. Did you hear them say those things?

A. No, I did not, but in my head.

Q. I think that's true. That's one of the difficult things.

A. It has to be, because they are the providers.

Q. Exactly.

A. By tradition, not anymore.

Q. Right, but that image is still there, I think.

A. Don't you think?

Q. I do.

A. You know, Judy, our interview focuses on the situation in academics, but let us move our minds to the business and other professions, and I am sure as women, they often have to work ten times harder.

- Q. Well, and with your experience at AFPW, you saw a broader group of women and you saw women who had very different experiences than you did. I'm sure there that you encountered women who experienced this.
- A. Of course. Again, the fact that we were all together under the umbrella of a big academic institution, although the work was different, I remember, for example, those that work for the hospital, we all understand each other, where the problems were. And I learned also, how important the support of women, Judy, no matter what. And I had good male support, and again, if I did not have that support, I didn't know about it and I am glad because probably otherwise I would have confronted some of them asking for clarifications.
- Q. And I want to jump way, way back and ask you, do you think, because you shared this in a different setting, that your experience as a professional in Romania, that there wasn't perceived gender difference? Is that correct?
- A. That is one thing I want to say. Romanian women were at the forefront, even for getting the vote for women at the turn of the century. And who were those? Teachers. There they were by tradition to be considered and respected as women. To get the vote, yes, but remember you were also to be a wife, a mother, bring up the family, and profession as well. That was by tradition. However, in the time I was in Romania, though Communism was there and it was a brutal system, there was never an issue that a man that had the same job with me as a teacher would be paid differently.
- Q. And I think that may have really shaped, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but my suspicion is, that experience shaped your view when you came. So you had no other expectation.

A. I was surprised. First, that we couldn't ask each other's salary or how much one is paid; it was kept confidential. I was very surprised of that. Then I understood why not. It was a different system. If you were a teacher with this many years of experience, man or woman, or if you were an engineer or other professional, yes, we were paid equally, but I should mention, paid equally low.

Q. Right, I agree. But I think it's what I was thinking about was your frame of reference when you came here.

A. I was very surprised to see the difference, and I realized that it was an issue. What shocked me too Judy when I came was, the situation of women that were to start a family. Some were not hired as a young woman. "Are you going to get married?" I understood that type of question came sometimes before hiring a women. To hire her or not because then she will have a child. Also the lack of support for maternity leave here. That surprised me a great deal. I don't know how it is now, but I think this is where some women need support. On the other hand, it was interesting for me to see that here the idea was that you don't start a family until you are sure you have the means of support. This is in the books. This is the ideal. What happens with so many situations in which there is a single mother. So those are issues that need to be addressed and they are very complicated issues, because they are related with the social and cultural.

Q. When you served on any tenuring committee or decision making committee, did you ever hear, and the person was a woman, either a hiring committee or tenuring committee, did you ever hear anybody raise the question of, is she going to have a baby, or the whole baby question?

- A. No, not in the committees. And I think if that issue was there it was not mentioned. But it was there.
- Q. You knew that it was there.
- A. I knew. However, the committees I was in , remember, were related to my field.
- Q. Okay, let me see. Maybe I should ask you, what time is it?
- A. 10:30, no problem.
- Q. Let's talk for a few more minutes. Could you say, what was your most powerful experience at Ohio State?
- A. To see that my students liked my courses. But the most powerful experience, I think, was in 1974 because it changed my destiny when I was offered the chance to teach Romanian. I was on such a cross-roads. Imagine me as a mother, a wife, saying \$5,000 is OK for a year. So what? I accept it, regardless of how much it meant financially. In fact, it meant poverty.
- Q. Right, I remember all the times you cooked chicken, had to cook chicken, chicken, chicken.
- A. Absolutely. And buy the chicken and make four meals out of it. Yes, Judy, yes.
- Q. I remember that. Is there anything you think we should have covered that we didn't cover?
- A. No, I think the initiative to have women's voices recorded, it's wonderful. And I admire the fact that you initiated that, you and Deborah. Because Judy, it's a heavy-duty project. One thing is recording and then transcribing and putting it in a volume. How interesting.
- Q. It is very interesting.
- A. It will be a wonderful research topic.

Q. It is.

A. For the years to come.

Q. Right, that's part of our goal, is to have that data there. It's so rich. Is there anybody that you think we should interview, women who aren't on our list?

A. I forgot to mention the support I got and now I will suggest her name, Francille Firebaugh.

Q. Oh right, absolutely.

A. I hope I can enter her name in the support I got.

Q. Yes, we can talk about that. Talk about what her role was for you. And we are interviewing her.

A. When she was the Associate Provost for International Affairs, she knew of the Romanian program. I also worked with her in a university committee for Learning Resources. I chaired that committee and we worked together in evaluating grant proposals and she was part of that committee. She was very well respected. Her comments were always those of a true leader-scholar. What happened is that she approached me and invited me to go to her office and said, "There are a hundred some exchange programs with all these foreign languages and countries. I think it's time we do something for Romanian." I turned around and said, "Dr. Firebaugh, I don't think so. It's a brutal dictatorship in Romania, and I don't see how we can ever negotiate with them to bring American students there." And she said, "We have to try. We have to try, Rodica." Then we had two or three times meetings in her committee, and boy was I negative. I said, "It will be very hard for me to go back to that country and negotiate with them, when you know in their book I am stigmatized. And there is danger. I am an American citizen. I renounced the Romanian

citizenship.” But she said, “Still, even if you are to go with me?” I looked at her and said, “Okay, let me think about it.”

Q. You can't say no to her.

A. Because of the validity of her proposal . Meanwhile she is not only friendly, but she is also an outstanding leader and her sense of direction for the future is incredible. She was the one that was always ahead in her plans with what was to come. Well, we went, Judy, we went to Romania. She immediately, through the State Department, arranged a visit. And there one could see the differences between their system and our American system as Francille was trying to negotiate with the Romanians. I also cornered them on certain issues with some questions. It felt so good to be protected by the American embassy. And I told them before we went in a meeting, with Francille and our American Cultural Attache, “You will see in the meeting there will be three. One will say what the other one whispers in his ear and the third one spies on both of them.” That's how their system operated. And when I asked a question at a certain point, one turned around and said, “Professor Botoman, it looks like you forgot about how things work here,” because they had to say something.

Q. That's good. Oh, I'm glad you remembered Francille.

A. How could I ever forget? While there they gave us a driver and a car. We knew exactly who he was and why we got the car. Because this way we were supervised, so we couldn't even whisper, only when we were on the street. I never forget also going with her and with the Dean of the University of Bucharest to check the accommodation conditions for the students, the dormitories. Before we had a chance even to step not more than three steps in the building Francille was already there checking rooms and all

that comes along. Professor Coteanu, who was my professor when I was in Romania and now saw me in a different capacity, turned around and said, “Where is Dr Firebaugh?” She was already right in the building.

Q. What a wonderful story.

A. Then she came out and the Dean of the University said to me in Romanian, and I translated it, “Our conditions have a lot to be desired for improvement,” something like that. “All right, all right,” said Francille. For me it was very rewarding experience and then it continued like this with her support. When Francille went to Romania with me in her capacity as an Associate Provost, the Romanian program was already established, but she was there to notice it. Which meant a lot. It was President Jennings also. I think with the awards I got, I was to be in different types of events such as president’s recognition dinners and so forth.

Q. Well, wonderful. Rodica, thank you so much.

A. It’s my pleasure. I have to apologize for talking a lot, as they say in Latin “pro domo,” about myself, sounding too much.

Q. But this is about yourself.

A. Yes, but talking about all those positive things as, “Here are my merits,” you know? In fact, I do it with humility in the sense that I am honored.

Q. Well, you don’t take for granted what happened. You acknowledge it.

A. I’m glad you say so, Judy, and how happy I am to be interviewed by you.

Q. This is great, thank you. I’m going to turn this off.