

JOHN MICHAEL SHUSTER

A Paper Presented to  
Mr. Plant  
Western Wyoming College

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for History of Wyoming

by  
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April 26, 1983

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I arrived at the Shuster house on 201 Gale Street about 4:00 p.m. There Mrs. Odessa Shuster greeted us with open arms. Mr. Shuster had'nt arrived yet, so Odessa showed me around the house and what a history this house has.

It's a cute little pink house that sits on the corner. The inside consisted of a remodded kitchen with all the luxuries. Off of the kitchen was the livingroom, which was once a bedroom. The livingroom was filled with beautiful plants, a few antiques, and your basic furniture with a television also. Between the kitchen and the livingroom is the new addition which was built on after the house was origanally purchased. This consisted of a hall decorated with old pictures of family and the old horn that Joseph Shuster, John's father, used to play. On the right of the hall were two bedrooms, on the left was a bathroom and bedroom.

Still John has'nt come home yet. So Odessa said we just had to drink to their 40th wedding anniversary. She broke out the Black Berry Brandy, and after a few of these John finally shows up. It seems like all true "Wyomingites" John not in any hurry to do anything stopped off to chat with an old neighbors son.

In comes John, we sat at the kitchen table, he joined us another shot of brandy and the interview got underway. John Michael Shuster was born on July 27, 1913, on a Sunday. He was born to Rozalia and Joseph Shuster in what is now their livingroom. Back in 1913, it was the bedroom. There was no doctor in attendance, but he did come a few days later to check out the situation.

Although John had other brothers and sister, John was the only one to be born in the house. The rest were born in the hospital or elsewhere. There are; Frances born 1903 and died shortly after birth. Joseph born 1906, and named after his father. He died in 1937 of a heart attack. Louise, born in 1907, still alive and married to Rudolph Anselmi. Frank born in 1908

and died sometime in high school from getting kicked in the kidney playing football. Julia born in 1910, and died shortly after birth. The last being twins, James Cyril and William Meshodius born in 1919. They are still alive. James resides in California and William lives in Rock Springs.

This family would have never gotten to Rock Springs if it had'nt been for the mines. In 1902, Joseph Shuster came from Yugoslavia directly to Rock Springs to work for Mine #1. It seems back in those days, the mines would send out letters to people, not only in the 'old country' but in other states as well. The letters stated that they needed miners and that they could borrow the money from the mine in order to pay traveling expenses. So Joseph packed his bags, borrowed \$400.00 and arrived to work in Mine #1, in 1902. I might add that his main motives to move was the high wages paid by these mines.

Joseph settled in Rock Springs, bought the little pink house, which was then a company house. Then the house itself consisted of two rooms; one bedroom and the kitchen. The price paid was \$50.00. This all happened within the first year Joseph was here.

In 1903, Joseph sent home for his future bride, Rozalia Zuppan. Upon arrival in 1903, they were married in that beautiful pink house. They needed more space, because of the boarders and the start of their family. Joseph added the master bedroom. For extra money and because it was the proper thing to do, they took in boarders from the old country who arrived with no place to stay. There was usually three or four at a time and the room and board cost them ten to fifteen dollars a month.

There was also a wash house out back. They had no bathroom and the mines did not supply the men with a place to wash and change. Every day when 5:00 p.m. was rolling around they would fire up the 'monkey stove' and heat up the water in the old copper boiler, for the men to wash and change. Then on Saturday nights, every took their baths in the old wash tub out back.

John remembers these as happy days. Their house was considered the community hall, where friends and neighbors mostly from the 'old country' would congregate for weddings, parties, and dances. There wasn't that much to do back then, besides Joseph made wine in the cellar and Rozalia was a great cook. Everyone else brought instruments if they could play and pretty soon you had a live band and dancing.

One of the things that comes to John's mind is the games he used to play and the toys. The family didn't have much money, so they made up their own games and toys. He used to take the old log cabin syrup tin, the one shaped as a log cabin and use that as the engine for a train. The old sardine can was attached to it and this was the tender.

The games he played was "Purgatory" where each boy had a washer. They dug small holes in the ground like a golf course and try to toss the washer into the holes. Then there was "Duck on Davie", a game where you take a large flat rock and place your smaller stone on top. The other would then would try to knock it off by throwing their stones at yours.

Through John's childhood, he rarely if ever went downtown except, to go to the store. Beckwith and Quinn was the store. They had a system where they kept what you bought in a little black book. Then on payday you would go and pay off what you owed.

As far as John's school days, he graduated from 12th grade, but spent his time jumping from one school to the next. In 1st and 2nd grade, he went to the old Junior High on A and B street, across from the Telephone Company. After 2nd grade he went across the street to the old church, where Bell Telephone now sits, but this got so crowded he had to move to the City Hall for 3rd grade. Then in 1922 he went to Yellowstone School through the 6th grade. John had to walk to school everyday considering there were no buses or automobiles.

For Junior High which consisted of 7th and 8th grade, John went back to the "Rock Building" where he went for 1st and 2nd grade.

High school days were spent in the old school. An empty building now near the Telephone Company. John graduated from the 12th grade in 1932. In high school John played basketball and football. His great achievement was winning State Championship for basketball, in 1932. This was also how John saw a few of the cities in Wyoming, by traveling with the team.

Another thing to do in high school was the "Mixers". This was a dance held on Friday afternoons, about twice a month. It was called a mixer because all the classes (even the "Greenhorns", freshmen) went. It was not a date type of dance, everyone showed up on their own accord.

When John graduated in 1932 there were no jobs available in the mines, being the depression. Things got even more complicated when Rozalia died in 1933. It seems she had complications from bearing twins that were never attended to. It was so late by the time she checked into the old hospital and there she died.

This left John to care for the "troops". Being out of work, John did the cleaning, cooking, and ironing. However he had a "verble agreement" with his younger brothers. When the mine was idle, one to three days a week, the brothers got up and looked after Dad. When the mines were working, John got up to look after Dad.

This really didn't go on too very long. The "old man" told John to get a job. So he went to work up by South Pass, on a sheep ranch. Here he worked for his keep only. He fixed the fences and did range work like ear marking, docking, and branding. John does not recall any trouble between sheep and cattle ranchers. Most of the men were honest, hard working and there was no trouble.

After about three months of ranching John worked as a "Gandy Dancer" on the

railroad. He was paid 39¢ per hour, eight hours a day. John worked through Medidine Bow; North Platt, Nebraska; Oshkosh, Nebraska; and Omaha. This was hard work with little pay.

Then John went into the whole sale business in 1935. He drove a truck and delivered goods for the stores. He expanded and for awhile drove to neighboring towns. Yellowstone Wholesale, where they kept Coors beer, is where he stored his truck.

On October 19, 1941, the "wind" got John and off he went to the army. This was Before World War II broke out, and he thought he would only be in for a year. But the war came and John was stuck for the next four years.

John did his basic training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma and trained in heavy artillery. Before being shipped overseas, he married Odessa Bertha Marie Keranen, his sweetheart from Rock Springs. Odessa took a job in Washington, D.C., working for the civil service. They married in Blackstone, Virginia, just the two of them were together at the time.

John then went overseas. He was a Motor Sergeant, who took care of all the motor vehicles. The things John remembers the most is getting malaria, not once, but twice. The first time was in Sicily, he was on this way to the Bob Hope Show, about two to three miles away, but has to turn back because he was sick. He was then shipped off to Falerno. This was the same hospital that Patton slapped the soldier. John arrived a couple of days after this. He said he was more scared of getting slapped by Patton and called a coward then having malaria.

John did get over his malaria, but came down with it again in Rome. He was in the hospital in Rome and bunked next to a French Indian, called "Ganones". He said he remembers the ears this guy had in a salvation army sack, that stunk

to high heaven. This is the way the French paid their soldiers, by the ear. When a soldier kills the enemy, they chop off an ear, then turn their ears in for pay.

John was one of the lucky guys overseas, he was released on October 15, 1945. He never had to fight, he was shelled a few times, but made it back to the U.S. and straight to Wyoming all in one piece.

Back in Wyoming, Odessa and John has their family, three children. As Odessa puts it, "One to replace each of them, and one for the earth". The oldest Maryilyn Bernadette, born 1946; Patricia Louise, born 1949: and Kathleen Odessa, born 1953.

John went on to work for the Power Plant, from November 5, 1945 for about the next 17 years. He worked cleaning boilers and just about anything they needed to be done. When P.P.&L. bought out Southern Wyoming Utilities, they laid John off and did not give him future employment.

John then went to work on Hi-Way 80 for about 6 months or so. He especially remembers working on the tunnel in Green River.

Finally, John ended up working for the County. He started on September 2, 1965, and worked for 15 years until he retired.

John and Odessa still reside in the old house on Gale Street. They have just celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary and although they live on a fixed income, they enjoy ever momment of life.