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## Grandma & Grandpa Kučinić

My mom's parents emigrated from Cetingrad Croatia around 1912. Grandma nee Balenović.



The Croatian pronunciation on my mom's maiden name is "kutch-in-itch", Americans pronounce is ku-cin-ick". The family of Ohio politician added an "h" so it is Dennis [Kucinich](#). That gets it a little closer to the Croatian pronunciation. My mom felt it's a mistake to add the "h". She felt it would confuse people about the family ties. There is some confusion as to when my Grandpa Paul Kučinić came to America.

We have [a letter](#) from the Immigration Service saying, "On the [North German Lloyd s/s "Neckar"](#) which reached this port on May 31, 1912, there arrived a passenger, one Pave Kucinic, aged 17, from Batnoga, Hungary, (father named Tone Kucinic) destined to uncle, Joe Szulic, Greensburg, Pa.,. Listed with the above were Tomo Jurcic, Pave Kalic and Mile Zalic, also destined to Greensburg, Pa."

There are some obvious mistakes on the letter.



Mary and Paul Kučinić came to America at the beginning of the 20th century. Here is the whole family. My mom, Anna, far left, then Uncle John, Grandma Mary, Grandpa Paul, and Antie Helen, later Paulson.

One issue with the letter is Grandpa's country of origin. Batnoga is not in Hungary. It is in Croatia, part of Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1992. Batnoga is near Cetingrad, his listed city of birth on the Naturalization form attached to the Immigration letter. He arrived in Baltimore on May 31, 1912. On that form he lists his country as [Slunj](#), which is a town near Batnoga and Cetingrad in Croatia.

Other anomalies in the letter are his name, listed as Pave, when it would have been Pavel, the Croatian form of Paul. His father is listed as Tone, when it should have been Ante, the Croatian form of Anthony.



This is a wedding picture for Paul and Mary Kučinić. I am sorry to say I can't identify any other person in the picture. Grandpa's naturalization form states he was married on November 27, 1920.

The immigration form also states grandpa's birth as April 1894 in Cetingrad. Mary Kučinić nee [Balenović](#), was born July 22, 1903 in [Irig](#), now [Serbia](#). She was 17 when she married. The form shows she arrived in New York on July 4th, 1908.

What I heard from my mom, is that grandpa actually came to America in under his brother's name before 1912. In 1912 he would have been 18 years old, so he might have assumed an older brother's name if he had to be 18 to immigrate to America.



Here's Grandpa in 1971. My mom made an album for me and I ruined it when the fire cabinet got flooded. Duh.

Grandpa joined the Communist party and went to the Soviet Union to fight the good fight. Word has it that when he got there, the Soviets asked him what he did in America. Grandpa said, "coal miner". The Soviets handed him a shovel. That was not his idea of what he should be doing. He later wrote Grandma to send money so he could come back to the United States. He still received his copy of [Narodni Glasnik](#), a Croatian-language newspaper of the Communist party. I put down his affiliation when I got a security clearance in 1981, and it went through anyway. [Grandpa hated Nixon](#).

Grandma worked in a canvas factory in Cleveland Ohio. Things got better when Grandpa returned from the Soviet Union. He worked a Republic Steel. His naturalization papers say he was a burner, a worker that uses a torch to cut steel, often referred to as "scarfing."

In 1971, my dad took a promotion to Boston. When we moved to Framingham, Grandpa and Grandma bought a house in Maple Heights Ohio, closer to other relatives.

Dad argued with Grandpa, but adored Grandma. She held the family together, never complained, and worked hard her whole life. I remember when she drove a needle through her thumb at the canvas factory. I don't think she was out more than a few days. I wonder if some treatment on the canvas gave her the stomach cancer that killed her. Grandpa also wrote my cousin Bobby a letter that said he and grandma would gobble aspirins for pain. I am sure aspirin can damage your stomach lining and probably cause cancer as well. After we moved to Brecksville, dad drove grandma to her job in downtown Cleveland every day. I think he enjoyed talking to grandma on the ride. She was a sweet soul, and probably a good therapist.



A 1944 picture of Helen Paulson, nee Kucinic, John Kucinic, Grandma Mary Kucinic, and my mom, Anna Rako nee Kucinic. I would love to know the car behind them. I doubt our family could have afforded it.



The picture is dated 1954, Grandma Kucinic is in the passenger seat. That makes sense, since she didn't drive. My dad would give her a ride to the canvas factory where she worked. In this day it might be called a sweatshop. The driver might be a lady from the canvas factory Grandma worked with.

My family rented the downstairs of a house from my Grandparents. Yes, it used to be that an unskilled factory worker could buy a house back in the 1950s. When my parents moved from Cleveland to Brecksville, Ohio, they returned the favor and let my grandparents live in a cottage on the three-acre property. Grandma had a garden, and Grandpa had his shed. They both were in heaven.

Grandma loved the three-acre property we had in Brecksville Ohio. She cultivated a big garden in the back yard. One year she planted 56 tomato plants. We gave away shopping bags to all our friends and relatives, and still ate tomato three time a day. She also planted green beans, which I hated to pick, since they were low to the ground. On the west was a large patch of corn. Nothing tastes better than an ear of corn you pick and carry to the pot.

As a Communist, Grandpa was also an atheist. He used to exclaim, "Lord, you come down through the roof, I pay your fare." He taught us kids [an old Communist song](#):

*Long haired preacher, come out every night.  
He try telling you what's wrong and what's right.*

*If you ask him for something to eat.  
He telling you in a voice so sweet;  
"You get yours by and by.*

*You get your pie in the sky when you die."*

Grandpa drank beer, but was not a stone drunk. I am pretty sure it was to relieve the pain of his rheumatoid arthritis. He gobbled aspirin, and Roloids in equal measure. I often wonder if modern medicines could have done something for him. Since he could not work, he collected Social Security for a large portion of his life. A great deal, I doubt he paid much in. Again, a good Communist.



Uncle Dan, my mom's uncle, John Rako, my dad, and Uncle Larry Rako. Grandpa Paul Kucinic suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, but still could cut the grass.



August 10, 1941. My mom, Anna Rako, nee Kucinic with Grandpa. I think she is trying to pull his arm down so the picture doesn't show him drinking. Grandpa loved Rollin Rock beer.

Grandpa had a thing about a clear direct path. There was a small walnut tree in front of the door to his cottage in Brecksville. He had to step around it to walk across the lawn to the garage. So he poured kerosene on the roots until it died. Dad was furious. That fury was nothing compared to when we went on vacation, leaving Grandpa and Grandma to watch the house. Grandpa took it upon himself to cut all the bottom branches off a row of pine trees that separated the front of the property from the back. I remember pulling into the driveway, to hear my parent's say "Oh God, what has he done?" You ain't heard arguing until you hear it in Croatian.

Grandpa used to ladle out soup for us. He would say, "Pavel, you like your soup thick, or thin?" I always would choose "thick Grandpa". He would always laugh. He also let me try Rolling Rock beer. I took a swig, felt the pressure build in my mouth, and heard Grandpa laugh when the beer shot out my nose.

Grandpa taught me crucial life skills. One was how to stand behind an open car door and pee in the parking lot. Ten-year-olds have to go when they have to go.

Grandpa hit me once. He slapped me across the cheek. Hard. I was practicing knife throwing on his old wedding picture in the barn. It was a big oval, 14 inches tall. A perfect target. I figured it was in the barn, so it was not important to him. I figured wrong. This was one of the reasons he named me "Damage Boy."

Grandpa Kucinic was the original MacGyver. I remember him rigging up some kind of gable vent with a cord and some duct tape and a board or plate. The solutions were often "home brewed" aka "half-assed," but they always worked. He cared way less about form than about function.



May 30, 1954. That's me at nine months. Grandpa adored the grand kids. He would give us candy and ruin our dinner. Mom would yell, to no effect.



January 1953, grandpa with my brother John George Rako, at four year's old. I will be born eight months later, in August.

Grandpa was the original dumpster diver. He brought home an old stand-up radio one day. It was out at the curb of someone's house. It worked fine. I took it Michigan, and moved it to California. I never should have sold it at the Berryessa Flea Market, if only to remember Grandpa by. He amassed a bucket of locks without keys, and a cigar box full of keys. I found a match one day and was in seventh heaven for a week.

Despite having **no education past the second grade**, Grandpa insisted all the grand kids go to college. Once there, he would consul us, "Love and education don't mix". He even had one cousin sign a contrast that she would stick to her studies and not get married. He spoke five languages, Croatian, English, Russian, Polish, and Hungarian. He taught himself to read and write as a child, and would peck out letters on his typewriter in bad English, but passable Croatian.

I think Grandpa's and Grandma's story is typical of the remarkable thing elitists call "the common man". There was nothing common about them. I remember when they would talk Croatian, my mom would scold, "Speak English in front of the children! We're in America now." I am sure there are immigrant grandparents from every county that gets the same chiding, right to this day.

Back then, we didn't understand that a child can easily hold two languages. It's not like Croatian would push out the English. My Hispanic friends are blessed. They can switch between English and Spanish in the same sentence. When I took my mom to Croatia in 2007, I wished I had learned Croatian from Grandpa and Grandma. At least mom spoke it, and a lot of relatives spoke English.



Grandpa being helped by my dad.



Grandma and Grandpa, maybe Maple Heights.



Grandpa, Uncle Matt Medovich at a pig roast.



A 1944 picture, Paul Kucinic and his shovel. He was a tall and imposing man, strong from years in the coal mines and steel mills.



May 30th, 1954, Grandpa holding me at nine months of age.



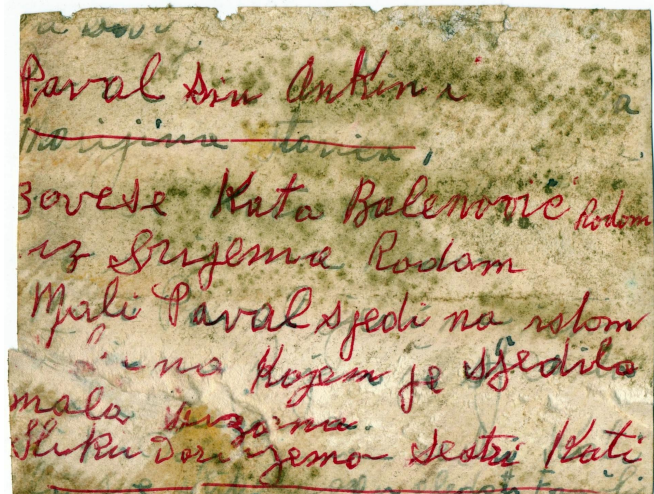
My cousin [Bob Paulson](#) sent these two pictures he had. This one is Grandpa and Grandma in the kitchen. This is a pretty early picture, I would guess 1950s. Too bad we waited so long to go through these. When my mom was alive, she might have identified what year this was in. It was Cousin Bobby's house in Bedford.



Cousin Bobby also sent this, Grandma Mary Kucinic, her mom, Kata Balenovic, and Ann Medovich, Grandma's sister. Bobby explained that Kata would live at the three daughters' households, trading off, once her dementia appeared.



I think that is me, sitting with grandma's mother, Kata Balenovic. We called her "Stari bubba," which means "old lady."



This is the back of the picture. I will ask my Croatian relatives to translate it. I don't remember he much, I think she lived in the cottage in Brecksville with Grandma and Grandpa. She developed dementia. I remember her shaking her cane at the TV when some Western showed shooting. "Don't you shoot in my house," she exclaimed, in Croatian.



I am not sure if these are relatives. The picture said, "Skola u Batnoga," which means "School in Batnoga." I do know Grandpa wrote many letters to "the old country". I assume they sent him this picture. When I took my mom to visit in 2007, the people there remembered Granma. When I was a kid, I took some of mom's costume jewelry to make a treasure chest that I stored in Grandpa's barn. It disappeared. I asked, and Grandpa said he threw it out. I cried for weeks. I told me mom 40 years later, and she laughed. Grandpa was a pack-rat. He saved bent rusty nails. Mom said Grandpa would never throw anything out. She figured he sent it to relatives in Croatia. I assume he was playing the big-shot from America. He was a true Communist, giving away other people's stuff.



I asked Grandpa why he had a 1958 Chevy if Communism said to share all our stuff. He said, "Oh that car is just enough for me." That is the day I became a capitalist. He would drive on the center of the road, "to not pick up nails." He eventually crashed the left fender, just what you would expect. I miss them both.