

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 655

ALBERT ANTONUCCI

Interviewed

by

Elisa Calabrese

on

October 17, 1985

ALBERT O. ANTONUCCI

Albert O. Antonucci, son of Daniel and Nancy Antonucci, was born on April 8, 1923 in Warren, Ohio. The Antonucci family moved to Youngstown when Albert was one year old. A few years after graduation from Woodrow Wilson High School, Albert Antonucci began his service in the United States Air Force on January 7, 1943. He was stationed in England for three years and received an honorable discharge on October 18, 1945.

Between the years 1960-1966, Mr. Antonucci was employed by Republic Steel. Other employment includes: William Pesa Construction Company 1966-1975, and since 1977 has been employed by the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority as a sub-rehab coordinator.

On August 20, 1966, Albert married his wife Florenz. They have one daughter Kathleen, age 22. Mr. Antonucci is affiliated with St. Dominic's Catholic Church and the Catholic War Veterans. His special interests include golf, bowling, and gardening.

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INTERVIEWEE: ALBERT ANTONUCCI

INTERVIEWER: Elisa Calabrese

SUBJECT: World War II, low income housing, YMHA

DATE: October 17, 1985

C: This is an interview with Albert Antonucci for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Elisa Calabrese, on October 17, 1985, at the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority, at approximately 2:00 p.m.

Mr. Antonucci, just to get started can you tell me a little bit about yourself, your background, your origins, your family, that type of stuff?

A: I'm sixty-two years old. I'm married, and I have a daughter. I work for Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority as a sub-rehab coordinator.

C: What year was this?

A: It is going on nine years that I have worked here. Before that I worked for General Electric Appliance Warehousing and Kraft Foods, and I also was a turn foreman for Republic Steel.

C: You are a lifelong resident of Youngstown?

A: I was born in Warren, but we moved here when I was one year old. So I have been here for sixty-one years.

C: Can you tell me a little bit about what Youngstown was like mainly during the Depression?

A: When I was going to grade school and that, everything was so much closer, neighborwise and that. The neighbors were more closely knitted. You knew what your neighbors' problems were and you helped each other more. Today you

don't even know your next door neighbor practically.

We never had too much fun when I was young. I can remember quite a few days when there wasn't too much on the table when I was ten or eleven years old. Around 1940 things started picking up a little bit, and I went into the service in 1943. I was in England for three years.

My sophomore year of high school my brother-in-law was working on that Westlake project job, and I got a job down there as a water boy with another kid. All we did was bring the water or move some small stuff from around. That was all we were hired as was water boy. We worked with the bricklayers mostly and the carpenters. I don't even remember too much how that place looked. All I know is that we used to ride down and a couple of times I had to walk to work if I missed my connections from the south side all the way down to Westlake.

C: That is a long way.

A: Sure. But then I got transferred to another job with my brother-in-law. When you are kids like that, you don't look around too much at what is around you. Looking back I should have noticed it more. I remember the thing that impressed me most was crossing those railroad tracks to Westlake. There was a lot of activity there then.

C: What do you mean about activity?

A: We would see trains going by and all that. Now they have eliminated the tracks all together. They put in a street. I didn't observe that much. It is funny that I had to come back and work with them again and looking at them when they are still there fifty years later.

C: Right.

A: They are well built.

C: Yes, they are. You said you worked there as a water boy and you were telling me about the average day. All you did was just bring water.

A: Just bring water. We had to pick up loose items that got loose.

C: Your being at Westlake, what kind of neighborhood was around there when you were a water boy. Did you notice anything? What type of atmosphere or what kind of stores were around the area?

A: I do remember there was a little grocery store right across Evans Field there in the back of the left field line there. I used to go there a couple of times, but there was a grocery store right down by Evans Field. That was a nice field. It was a really beautiful ball park.

The neighborhoods were a lot better then than they are now. It was a nice neighborhood and there were a lot of nice homes around there.

C: How old were you when you were working on Westlake?

A: Sixteen.

C: Sixteen. When you were at Westlake as a water boy, do you remember any of the contractors, the engineers, or the architects, any type of politicians who came by when you were there, anything like that?

A: The only one I came in contact with was my boss. He was one of the original builders.

C: And his name is?

A: His name is William A. Pesa. He worked with Felix Pesa & Son. He was the president of the company. Heller-Murray was the other contractor and I think Joseph Bucheit. That was how I got the job as the water boy, but then I went out to Liberty to build a house. That was the end of my water boy days.

C: How did you get the job here at the Housing Authority?

A: I was laid off for a while. I saw an ad in the paper for inspector; so I answered and I got hired by Mr. Amedia. They hired me as a section 8 inspector. From there I dropped into sub-rehab coordinator.

C: What year was that when you were hired?

A: I was hired here in 1977. Up until a year and a half ago I was a section 8 inspector. Then I went into sub-rehab work where we have in all, 102 units scattered sites throughout Youngstown. We have about three or four different buildings on Elm Street. I think it is bringing up the property, really. We have only forty some units on the north side, and we have about forty on the south side. There are about sixteen on the west side and about twelve on the east side.

C: You said you worked three weeks there at Westlake.

A: Yes, only three weeks.

C: So you said Pesa, Bucheit and . . .

A: Heller-Murray.

C: Heller-Murray. In the three weeks you were there do you remember any outstanding events that took place, anything that would stick in your memory, anything from day to day when you were there that impressed you as a young man of sixteen years old?

A: I was always moving around with those guys. Working with bricklayers and carpenters they always want something. I was just amazed at the progress in the way that the building went up. You would see the footers and then they would start working on the footers. The next day you go up there they have started putting brick and block up. Then you see the plaster work going up. I never got to see a complete job when it was done because I wasn't there. I could just see them getting started laying the footers down and then some brick and block, but I never got to see the building getting actually finished.

C: Did each contractor have their own specific job to do, or did they work together as a corporation?

A: No, they went as a corporation. They combined heads because it was such a big job at that time. That was the first job I think in the country such as that. I don't think they were big enough individually to bid on the job; so they just went together. They had a special name that they called themselves.

C: Do you remember it?

A: No. I think it is probably in the records. They got lucky enough to get the bid, and they built it. They did a nice job on it.

C: How many hours a day did you work?

A: Eight hours a day. I remember it was either 7:30 or 8:30 to 4:30, but I know it was eight hours.

C: Did you work five or six days a week?

A: Five days a week.

C: Do you remember by chance how much you got paid as a water boy?

A: Fifteen dollars a week I got. That wasn't bad.

- C: No, that was pretty good.
- A: I think it was \$15 or it was pretty close to it.
- C: Did you witness or you yourself have any accidents?
- A: No, I never saw anything like that.
- C: Were there blacks and whites who worked together?
- A: I didn't notice that. When I was young, I didn't look at that. I never paid attention to that.
- C: There was some segregation when they were put up.
- A: Oh, yes, I remember they put them all on one side.
- C: Right, when they were moving in. I just wondered if they worked together or if there were different jobs.
- A: Come to think of that I don't recall that. There were people; that's all I know.
- C: That's the way it should be. You were paid by the corporation or were you paid by Pesa?
- A: I was paid by the company. It was a company, a special company.
- C: Do you remember any dignitaries or architects or any type of politicians who came?
- A: No, I don't remember any at all.
- C: Do you have anything you want to add about Westlake itself, anything from the past on up to the present, anything or any thoughts that you have about that?
- A: The thing I am really impressed with in Westlake is that I am amazed at how well those units have kept up as far as a building built with that efficiency. They are nice and strong and sturdy. They are a little outdated probably in the bathroom style or kitchen, but we are all remodeling all of them as soon as we get some money on them. We have new windows on a lot of them, and we have rebuilt some kitchens. They are really a well built unit. We all can't live in Boardman or Austintown. The only thing we have to do is stress the fact of keeping them up right on house-keeping really. They should have some pride in keeping the units going.
- C: Are there any type of restrictions or any type of inspections that take place?

A: They have monthly inspections.

C: To this day?

A: To this day. They know which ones to visit more than others, and they have a yearly inspection. They have a yearly reevaluation of income and every other thing. We have a housing inspector, a girl, who goes by and looks and inspects each home to see how the tenants are keeping it up. It is a big problem. We have a good couple thousand people scattered all over Youngstown and Campbell.

C: You worked at Westlake in 1940. Is that what you said?

A: 1939.

C: 1939. Is there anything else?

A: That's about it.

C: Well, I thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW