

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jackson Milton School Project

High School Experiences

O. H. 673

DAVID METZLER

Interviewed

by

John Gulgas

on

May 9, 1985

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jackson Milton School Project

INTERVIEWEE: DAVID METZLER

INTERVIEWER: John Gulgas

SUBJECT: high school days, rural high school, school activities

DATE: May 9, 1985

G: This is an interview with David Metzler for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Jackson Milton Schools in the 1950's, by John Gulgas on May 9, 1985 at 4:00 p.m.

What were some of the favorite subjects? Did you have a favorite subject?

M: Yes, I liked English. I liked the prose part of it, the writing part of it.

G: Did you finish writing your book?

M: Yes, I have it finished. Five publishers have it now, but I haven't heard anything yet.

G: Did you have a favorite teacher?

M: Yes, she was an English teacher, Mrs. Lauban.

G: What was it about her class that you enjoyed? Was it the way she conducted it or the way she taught?

M: I liked what she taught all right, but she would get into the prose part of it, the story part, and we would get off the subject once in a while and talk about other things.

G: Of the activities that you were involved in, extra-curricular activities, which was your favorite?

M: Football. All they had was football and basketball;

sometimes they had baseball.

G: What was practice like in those days? What was the first thing that you did as you walk through a practice with me?

M: We would start out with about ten laps around the ball field. Then the line would go over and work the sled. It was probably like it is now, but not as sophisticated. The physical part of it was just as rough.

G: Did your guys wear padding then?

M: At that time everybody around here was off the farm or had worked on a farm, but now you have to weight lift to get muscles. We didn't have to do that. We had them from working on the farm. Everybody in the community could get a job in the summertime either working as a gandy dancer on the railroad or at the open hearth at the tile mill. Even now I think farm strength is greater than weight strength.

G: What about the social functions, did you get to many of them?

M: The social functions were great. The kids at that time had a lot more things to do than what they have now. There was a rifle club, a swing band, a choral group, junior and senior plays, minstrel shows, variety shows. A lot more of the functions took place right at school. The May dances and proms and everything, they always had to have a theme. The class would spend about two weeks decorating the stage up as a houseboat, but they don't do that anymore. They just go rent a hall.

G: I guess you were more involved in it; it wasn't just a dance.

M: It was for the kids so the kids did the decorating. The bigger boys would make sure nobody tore it down. Vandalism wasn't as bad because they spent all the time putting it up.

G: Did they have as much of a problem with drinking at those things? Did kids come in drunk or anything like that?

M: No. The percentage of kids that were there for reading, writing, arithmetic and to get business done was a lot higher than what it is now.

G: In your mind what was a typical day like at the high school?

M: As I got older a typical day was skipping school. I had a job working in a sawmill, and I was big in high school. I could make a lot of money working in there. It was right when they first came out with chain saws. In the sawmill

when you worked with a crosscut, if two guys would go out and cut a tree down you would get paid something like \$8 a thousand board foot if it was in that tree. Another guy could make \$8 for dragging it out with a team of horses. A guy at the mill would get paid so many board feet. When they came out with the chain saws that \$8 that you were getting for one thousand board feet, if you went in the woods early in the morning and came out at night when you couldn't see anymore, you could make \$22 a day. My dad was making \$75 a week. As a high school senior, when you skipped a couple of days and went in with a big chain saw, you were doing good. I bought a car, my own clothes.

That's a different time; at that time, postwar, everything was booming. If you were strong and the townspeople knew you were a good, hard worker, you could get a job anyplace.

G: What were the consequences for skipping school, did you catch a lot of hell for that?

M: Yes, they would call you in and talk to you. One time they sent the truant officer out to my house. I was just getting ready to go to work; I was skipping school so I had on old, heavy Levi's and a big, heavy leather jacket and an old cap and was ready to go. The guy knocked on the door and said who he was. I knew who he was because I saw him in school. He knocked at the door and said, "Mr. Metzler, I want to talk to you about your son David." I said, "Come in and sit down." I was seventeen, but I looked older. I guess I needed shaving. He went through the whole thing about being responsible until the boy was eighteen and having to get him in school and his record being terrible. I just repeated the things that my father had said. I said, "He is at the age where you can't do anything with him. I talked to him." He said, "Yes, we understand all right, but you have to get him in school." I said, "Okay," and he went back to Youngstown and I went to work. I think I missed seventy some days my senior year.

At that time in the area my grandfather owned a big, 224 acre farm across the street. He had ten boys and two girls; my father was the oldest. Everybody in the area knew the Metzler's. The Metzler's were a big family and the Yochman's. The families were known. My mother died when I was young and my dad had a little problem with alcohol. The community would say, "We have to look out for this kid, He was a good boy, but he has gone astray." Everybody would go out of their way to try to bring me back into the fold. It was that type of situation where people tried to look out for you.

G: How was lunch time, were you a packer or a buyer?

M: Lunches were about the same. I never got bad food.

G: What about any of the fads in that time that you remember?

M: Fads were like they are now; they all started on the west coast. It was about six months or a year before they worked their way here. Some of the kids that had moved in here from different places started with spade shoes and peg pants and suede shoes. The girls had saddle shoes and long, pleated dresses and cashmere sweaters.

G: Did you have any nicknames?

M: Harold Moore was called Pine Squirrel. A bunch of kids that ran around together called themselves the Gazaltzsky Brothers. They had jackets and everything.

G: Was there an after-school or weekend hangout?

M: Everybody used to go down to Shorty's Pool Hall. The skating rink was a big place to go. Newton Falls was the closest theater. There were two theaters in Newton Falls or you could drive to Youngstown.

G: As you look back do you think there was something you could have done or would have liked to have done that would have made your high school experience better?

M: I should have studied more. I probably could have gotten a scholarship because I was that big. If I would have had the programming that I am giving my son I probably would have come out a little different. It is a different era; now you can point out and say, "Look at the jobs. There is nothing to do out there; you have to get this education and go on to college. Then maybe you can get a decent job." There is no guarantee even then. At that time there was no question about it, as soon as you got out of school you could go to work someplace, anyplace. When you went to work for a guy you had to show him a good day's work. It was how strong a back you had rather than knowing the mathematics.

G: What was your most memorable event in high school?

M: I have some real good ones. The one that is the most memorable is because it comes up the most often. I lettered four years in football. In my senior year we went over to Malvern; they had a great, big tackle and everybody was watching me and this guy beat on each other.

The score was 6-0 and he was pucnhing on me and I punched on him and I got thrown out of the game. I went in, changed clothes and was on the sidelines. I was hollering and the cop came over, the chief-of-police and another cop. They didn't realize that I had been part of the football team because I was big. They told me I had to be quiet or I would be thrown out. I told them something to the effect that they didn't want to try to do that. The one guy grabbed me and I punched the chief-of-police and opened up his lip. The other guy hit me with a club and they pinned my arms behind me and put me in the cruiser and took me down to the jail. Then a big fight broke out, a big melee, the whole crowd of people, ladies hitting ladies with purses; it was a real donnybrook. It was great. They took me down to jail and threw me in the drunk tank. At that time you couldn't throw a kid of sixteen in there, so they had to get the mayor of the town up and there was all this hullabaloo. They had three buses; the coaches brought the buses down in front of the jailhouse. People came down with their cars. Finally the mayor said, "We can't have this. There is a kid in the tank." He got me out and told me to be a good boy next time. Even now if I see an old-timer around they say, "Boy, I remember the Malvern game." They don't remember any other game I played in. When I was a sophomore we had a championship team, and nobody remembers that championship team.

- G: Sometimes kids in high school are not up on current events and sometimes they stick with them, like the Truman-Dewey election or the U. S. Steel Strike or the Korean War, do any of those . . .
- M: Everybody knew about the Korean War. Nobody payed much attention to current events. There were some things that were current events that you couldn't talk about. That was in the McCarthy era. We got a guy bounced out of school, a teacher who was a progressive teacher; he talked about communism. He wasn't advocating communism. He just wanted to say that you can't compare apples to oranges unless you understand this is an apple and this is an orange. He was a progressive man who was trying to show how communists operate. When we had any trouble with this guy we would go home and tell mom and pop or somebody around the community that this guy was telling us about communism, and he got bounced. I'm not sure if that was the only reason for it. The kids knew that they were doing a job on him. Even back that far the kids knew about the black situation, that there were black veterans coming back who had fought in the wars. They had special outfits and that. You didn't talk about that situation. You didn't say, "How did this guy fight the war and come back and now he is supposed to be a hero, yet he is getting all this stuff down in the South where he

can't go in the same toilet." The kids knew about that. It was maybe the beginning of a rebellious time and maybe in the 1960's they started to say, "Hey, I want to know about it." The 1950's was the beginning of rock n' roll and it was the beginning of a lot of things which led into the 1960's. Unless you wanted to get all kind of trouble you just didn't talk about some of the current events.

G: I guess today everything is talked about.

M: Maybe they went too far. They talk about everything now.

G: What practical jokes do you remember?

M: The addition was put on the high school when I was down there. That would be the auditorium. When they built the wall between the boys and girls locker room and they ran a pipe through there we removed one of the blocks. That wasn't really a practical joke. We had a good thing going until somebody commented about padded bras and stuff.

We put Limberger cheese on some of the teachers' car manifolds; that would mess the car up a little bit.

When I was a senior five of us got kicked out of shop the first two weeks. We welded the vises together or something. We got kicked out and they said we had to have a credit to finish, so they said we could take home ec. We went into the pizza business. We would make pizzas and sell them out the windows. They were so impressed with our cooking abilities that they put us on Channel 21 one time. We were on the Margie Mariner Show. I made a casserole on her show. There were five of us guys. We only had it the one year because we were in so much trouble.

G: Any other practical jokes?

M: One time we made stuff in chemistry class and didn't know what we made. We dumped it out the window and it got all over the cars. We made a hell of a paint remover. It took all the paint off of the cars. We all had to pay about \$30 apiece to get the cars repainted.

In shop class we glued things together that shouldn't have been glued together. We glued together vises and put glue in the shop teacher's shoes. He used to change shoes. He had a wooden cabinet and he would take them out and we had them spiked down in there, so he couldn't.

G: The last question I have deals with your senior trip. Did you go?

M: I didn't go. I was working and missed out on that one.

G: I know that was a big thing. Everybody did fund raising in order to go to Washington.

M: I think they were probably happy I didn't get to go.

G: They were afraid maybe you would pull some more jokes.

M: Mrs. Lauban used to say, "You are a natural born leader, but you always lead them in the wrong direction."

G: She had you pegged. Is there anything else about high school that you want to include?

M: I bought the school superintendent a beer one day at the Seven Mile Inn. His car was there and we skipped school; about eight guys jumped in this old Plymouth I had and we were going to Shorty's Pool Hall. I saw his car there and they all wanted to panic and hide. I went in and sat at the bar and bought a beer and bought him a double. He appreciated it. What was he going to do? I was out of school; he was out of school. He drank his shot and I drank my beer, and we all went home happy.

The difference between then and now is that then we did a lot more with cars, racing cars and drag strips, tearing engines down and rebuilding engines. There were a lot more guys that operated with junk yards and car parts. Maybe there was more camaraderie with the adult people than what there is now. The jobs that we have now at the plants or offices, there is no association with the young people. At that time there were more guys that ran little garages and ran little businesses around town and they talked to high school kids a little bit more on an equal basis than they do now. There was a gas station to hang around. You always had your nose down in an engine and a guy would show you how to do it. Now everything is fixed by Mr. Goodwrench under different circumstances.

G: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW