

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jackson Milton School Project

High School Experiences

O. H. 682

JOAN MCMILLIN

Interviewed

by

John Gulgas

on

April 19, 1985

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: JOAN MCMILLIN

INTERVIEWER: John Gulgas

SUBJECT: school days, rural schools, school activities

DATE: April 19, 1985

G: This is an interview with Joan McMillin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Jackson Milton Schools, by John Gulgas, on April 19, 1985, at 3:30.

If you had to pick out a favorite teacher of the ones that you encountered in high school, who would it be?

M: I would say Mary Lucy Slavin, not necessarily because she would be my favorite, but because she was such a good teacher.

G: What made her a good teacher?

M: Being strict, making us learn, making it interesting. As a person maybe she wouldn't be my favorite person, but as a teacher she was.

G: Did you reserve that for someone else? Was there another teacher who was your favorite person?

M: Offhand I can't think of anyone.

G: She taught English though, right?

M: Yes.

G: Was English your forte, or did you have another subject that you liked?

M: I liked English; I liked the poetry part and learning, memorizing.

G: What was Mrs. Salvin's class like? What would you see when you went in there that was perhaps striking?

M: We went in and sat down and there was no messing around. Even if she was late you went in and sat down.

G: That says a lot. There is a list of extracurricular activities that you were involved in, which was your favorite?

M: I enjoyed the cheerleading part. In the middle grades, seventh and eighth grade, and in high school we had a girls basketball team, which was very rare back then. We played Berlin Center, and Canfield, but that was it. It was just like our gym class; it wasn't a basketball team.

G: Did they suit up for this?

M: We wore our gym suits.

G: You guys were ahead of your time.

M: They were green and had an elastic bottom. In fact, one of the girls wore her's or brought it and put it on at our twenty-fifth anniversary. She kept it.

G: Could she still get into it?

M: Yes. Anyone could fit into them.

G: What did it take to be a cheerleader? What did it demand of you?

M: Do you mean how were we elected?

G: Let's start with that.

M: We tried out in front of an assembly. We used to practice, although it wasn't the way it is now where today it seems almost like a separate course in itself. We would just meet and jump around and think up cheers; it was no big deal.

G: Did you have an advisor?

M: No.

G: Girls did that themselves, really?

M: Yes. Now it is a lot different.

G: Did you make up your own cheers?

M: Oh yes! They were real good ones, short and sweet.

G: Did all the teams that play have cheerleaders?

M: Yes.

G: What about social functions of the school, were there many social functions?

M: No. That is why it is so hard being an older parent of a teen-ager. When we see how the kids now are involved in this, and this, and this, it seems like everything takes precedence over the learning process; that is why it is so hard being a parent. My husband and I would say, "No, you can't do that," and it wouldn't go over too well. The other kids are allowed to do it, why can't I? This is what we would get. Our social functions were the prom. We would have maybe a sock hop, and if we got our chores done on the farm then we were allowed to go to it.

G: That is true, those came first.

M: In fact, the kids on the farm got out of school in May because it was time to bale hay. Things are a lot different now.

G: I want to know how you got your nickname?

M: Just drawing something out of the air. It goes back to everyone having to have a nickname. Someone picked it for me.

G: Do you think you could describe a typical day at Jackson Milton High School? When you went in in the morning what did you see?

M: We just got off the bus and went in; it was very uneventful I would say.

G: Until lunch.

M: The lunches haven't changed a bit. They were very uneventful. I used to work after school at the Isaly store during my junior and senior year. I would leave if my last class was a study hall. If you went through one day you went through them all.

G: Can you think of a student that sticks in your mind who was always getting in trouble?

M: Several.

G: What were some of the things that they did that they got in trouble for? What was a major crime in those days?

M: Going down to the center for a Coke, skipping school. If you had a study hall that was a big thing, to sneak out, run down, and get a Coke. Another thing was getting

back in without running into Mary Lucy.

G: I was going to ask how you did that. Getting past her would be interesting. So they cut class in those days too.

M: But only within walking distance.

G: Our's tend to get in the car and drive away.

What about the fads in clothing or hairdos, were any of those striking a chord with you that you particularly cared for or didn't care for?

M: I thought we looked fantastic, really. Bobby socks, saddle shoes, that was it. It was unthinkable to wear hose. That was only if you were going to a party or something. Now they wear them all of the time.

G: Make-up?

M: We varied lipstick, and we put it on after we left the house.

G: You alluded to the cafeteria, what was that like?

M: Just like it is now. It is amazing. When I was in the health program I went down once for lunch. It hasn't changed a bit. The macaroni still sticks; you could turn the tray over and the macaroni just sticks.

G: You mentioned going down to the center for a Coke. What about after-school hangouts, did they hang around at the center or did they go somewhere else to hang out? Were there hangouts?

M: I don't know because I had to go home and work. If we would date or something I had to be in at 10:00, one night a week. We would go to a place at Raccoon and Route 18 where they served hamburgers. We would go to a movie and go there, have a hamburger, and go home. Now they go to Pittsburgh.

G: That was a date?

M: Yes. A big date was the prom.

G: The May Dance, I understand that was another big thing?

M: Yes.

G: What was that like?

M: Smaller, but the same as the prom.

G: Was that held at the school?

M: Yes, everything was held at the school.

G: Did they get as dressed up for that?

M: We thought we were.

G: As you look back on the high school experience, is there anything you might suggest that could have been done to make it better? It obviously was enjoyable, but do you have any suggestions?

M: Now?

G: Yes.

M: Back then we were not promoted to make suggestions. In fact, I wish they could bring back some of that fear of the teachers, and the fear that if we got yelled at we would really get it when we got home. I wish we could see more of that now. I do not think these days are better. I don't mean the good, old day, I mean the good, old days of discipline. When a kid did something wrong, they would get paddled without the parents coming down and going nuts. Back then there was no question, if you got paddled, oh my!

G: Who led out all the punishment, was that done by the superintendent or the individual teacher?

M: Mary Lucy was very good with punishment. She could just knock a kid right out of his seat, no matter how tall he was.

G: If you had to zero in on your most memorable moment in high school, what would it be?

M: Senior year, the whole senior year was nice. That and graduation. We had a nice class and we were close. We are still close. They were nice kids. We've had two or three reunions, and we still get along good.

G: That's good. There are people that make friends in high school and then lose them.

You lived through some interesting times when you were in high school, the Truman-Dewey election of 1948, the U. S. Steel Strike in 1952, not to mention the Korean War. Do any of those strike a chord, leave a memory with you, good, bad, or indifferent?

M: The Korean War, the kids who lost their brothers or fathers.

G: That was kind of in the heat of things.

M: Yes. My husband was in the navy, and he got out in 1948. We were engaged then. I got married in 1952. He was on standby.

G: Describe some of the practical jokes that were played. You have to have been privy to some of them; cheerleaders always are for some reason.

M: We never did anything wrong, never. All I can think of is chemistry class.

G: You blew it up?

M: We tried to. Mr. Massaro was our chemistry teacher. This is something I am going to have to think about. We did have a good time. We just kidded around.

G: You mentioned the senior year. Were there any senior farewell activities that stand out in your mind? Did you have senior skip day?

M: Oh yes. Another thing was the last day of school, was dress, wearing jeans and maybe our father's shirt. That was outrageous because we never wore jeans to school. We were really living dangerously. We didn't want to wear jeans because people would know how poor we were.

G: Nowadays if you are wearing jeans you are not poor.

M: That is right. That is what the big difference is. A lot of people our age, we all act the same way, the kids will go in and pay \$45 for a pair of jeans that we would throw out back then. We were ashamed to wear jeans. I remember dad used to buy overalls for my sisters and I. He would pay 99¢ a pair for them. Now look at the price.

G: I think the price shot up as soon as they were allowed to wear them to school.

I was asking about the senior farewell activities.

M: The last week we just messed around; we didn't do anything. We just came and went as we pleased.

G: You had a senior trip to Washington.

M: Yes, there was a trip. We went on the train. We didn't sleep all that time. When we got there they told us--No one leaves their room. I have pictures of when we snuck out and went to a Chinese restaurant. We thought that was really something. The advisors knew we were gone; we just know

they did.

G: The class of 1951 went by bus, how did you rate going by train?

M: We were well-behaved. We had to sleep in the seats. I forget how long that took us.

G: Did you get to see the White House?

M: Just part of it.

G: You obviously enjoyed it.

M: Oh yes.

G: Were you ever in any of the school plays that you would like to talk about?

M: When I worked during my junior and senior year, I really didn't have that much time.

G: Were you in the rifle club?

M: No.

G: When you worked in Isaly's were you making the sodas?

M: Yes. I did the sandwiches. We had to do everything, even scrub the floors and wash the windows.

G: I don't know if they were making them back then, but I remember the skyscraper cones. They may have come along a little later.

M: I think later. We would hand pack the ice cream. It tickles me now, the unions--that is not my job. You scrubbed floors, wiped all the tables, and washed the windows, cleaned out the coolers when there was nothing to do.

G: Where did you fill in on seniors day when the students took roles? Joan Acri told me the other night that she was the secretary on seniors day. Was this true of the 1952 class, did they assume the role of someone in the school and do that person's job for the day?

M: I don't recall that. I faintly remember; maybe it was our class officers that did that.

G: Thank you.