

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Niles Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 759

FRED M. MEDOVICH

Interviewed

by

Stephen Papalas

on

February 18, 1986

FRED M. MEDOVICH

Fred Matthew Medovich was born on August 9, 1923 in Warren Hospital to Joseph and Janet Medovich. He is a lifelong resident of Niles and was reared in Russia Field district of that city.

Medovich attended Niles schools, graduating from Niles High School in 1941. He was inducted into the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers on May 1, 1942 and transferred to the Army Air Corps. His time in the military was cut short because he was wounded in a night training exercise.

After his discharge from the service, Medovich attended Ohio State from 1943-1946. He graduated in 1960 from Youngstown College with a B.S. in Education. In 1963, he earned his M.A. in Guidance from Westminster College. Medovich began his teaching career as an art instructor in 1962. He still holds that position today.

It should also be noted that Medovich had been active in sports as a high school student and he continued as an athlete at Ohio State where he lettered in baseball.

Medovich gave a detailed account of his experiences in Russia Field. His interview was particularly interesting as he described life during the Great Depression and his family's struggle with their neighborhood grocery business. He also described his older brother, Stephen Medovich, who from various accounts, seems to have been an exceptional person. Stephen was killed in an air crash during World War II.

Medovich and his wife, the former Josephine Boccia, have three children: Jan Higdon, age 36; Stephen, age 33; Mark, age 27.

Mr. Medovich is an active member of St. Stephen's church,

K. of C., the National Art Education Association, O.E.A., and various other educational organizations. He and his wife reside at 1510 Elaine Court, in Niles and he enjoys painting, golf, and swimming.

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INTERVIEWEE: FRED MEDOVICH

INTERVIEWER: Stephen Papalas

SUBJECT: food lines, Depression, World War II, grocery  
business, church, early Niles

DATE: February 18, 1986

P: This interview is conducted by Stephen Papalas with Mr. Fred M. Medovich at his home, 1510 Elaine Court, Niles, Ohio. The date is February 18, 1986. This is being done for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. The topic discussed deals primarily with Niles including the Depression, Mr. Medovich's brother Stephen, and various other topics.

Mr. Medovich, could you tell me when you were born, where, so forth?

M: I was born in Warren, Ohio on August 9, 1923. I am the son of Joseph and Janet Medovich. They were business people. My dad was an electrician in the beginning. He later became a trouble-shooter for the Republic Steel Corporation in heavy electric motors. His job took him to Cleveland, to Pittsburgh, and basically Warren at the old open hearth where he took care of most of the electrical equipment.

The family moved to Niles in 1924. Mother opened a business up where the Parlor Nite Club now stands at 711 Olive Street in Niles. At a later date, 1925, my father, with the help of James Trachial, the contractor, built the house across the street, which is now standing and now owned by my son. In the early times as far back as I remember when the house was being built, my first accident was having my head stuck in the window. After that was taken care of I was no longer allowed in the building until it was complete. It had all of the modern facilities and naturally all electrical outlets, far more than the average home; after all, dad was an electrician.

In the early years during the Depression I can recall our spending time in the old Empire Mill, chipping away mortar from bricks.

P: Where was the Empire Mill?

M: Where Albee Homes are now.

P: At the bottom of Summit Street?

M: Yes. We separated bricks and chipped away the mortar, merely cleaning the bricks. We then set them in piles of fifty bricks for the buyer. His name was Abraham and he came with a horse and buggy. He would pay 5¢ for fifty bricks.

During the Depression owning a nickel was like \$100. Much of our time was going in the early mornings in the summer. We used to get on a truck by a farmer when it came time to pick beans, pick strawberries, and help harvest the crops. Life during the Depression was a good therapy so to speak. It was one, big family in Russia Field. Everybody did something to help another.

P: Can you tell me where Russia Field was?

M: Russia Field is in the lower east side of the city of Niles. It got its name from the old Russian mill that was built there many years before my time; I don't know. Old-timers used to talk to us, like Mr. James and Mr. Harper. Most of them were Scottish people. Those were the real pioneers of Russia Field at the time. Of course, I was familiar with Mr. and Mrs. Harper who lived down the street not far from us. He used to tell us stories about how the mill was run. Mr. James, whose son now lives somewhere around Bentley Avenue I believe, Harrison James . . .

The early times when we were in our early teens. . . When the Meander Dam was being built--before the fence--I can recall that we would row over to the old Lisbon Railroad. The train would be going to Lisbon. We were allowed a ride to the Meander Dam Reservoir area. We were allowed to pick apples, under supervision of course. Every boy, maybe fifteen, twenty boys, would have a half a sack of apples. We would carry them home. It was a long track. Of course, it took all afternoon to get home. We would dump the apples in the central part of the Russia Field which was the old Kinder Bakery.

P: Where was that at?

M: That is on the corner of Belmont and Olive Street. Right now there is a little gas station or a garage that was built in there. Mr. Kinder was, of course, not to my knowledge . . . but Mrs. Kinder was a pleasant, old woman at the time. She was great at making candy. Of course, that was a reward for bringing our apples.

The mothers, of course, would all go to that place and then distribute the apples among themselves. You could smell the aroma the following day. Apple pie was being made here and apple sauce was over here. Everybody had something. Mrs. Caizzia had an outdoor oven. Mrs. Caizzia and her daughters were breadmakers. They, of course, were given flour by the other families. They would do their thing, make bread, which we would distribute around the neighborhood. Mr. Zuzulo was the shoemaker who repaired our shoes, sometimes for nothing, sometimes for a nickel, sometimes for a dime, whatever was available.

P: Did Zuzulo have sons?

M: Yes, two.

P: Is John one of them?

M: John and Nick and, of course, the daughter Marie.

This was, of course, the time of the Depression. As I mentioned before, a coin was something we didn't see every day. What we earned was mostly vegetables. We used to bring home beans; we used to bring home strawberries, whatever we did. We would pick a quart and then anything over the quart we would naturally keep, plus the fact, if it was a good crop the farmer would give us \$1 or something like that.

Our recreation was man-made more or less. I can remember the first time I had a bicycle. My brother bought it for me for \$2, but we had to put it together. It was secondhand, of course, and he had to weld the frame. It was my first toy as I recall.

Other means of recreation, of course, was swimming. We had many names for the swimming places. At the old Meander Creek there were certain spots. One was the White Bridge; one was the P-P, and one was the Bend, which was the favorite. The water was clear.

P: Where is the Bend at today?

M: It is still there. The tributary coming from the dam to the Mahoning River, it hits into the Mahoning River just by the old Lisbon tracks across from the old Steel Products. It is the mill on Walnut Street. The railroad used to run across the bridge going to Lisbon. That is no longer there. The bridge is still standing, but there is no railroad. Anyhow, that is where the tributary comes in at the Mahoning River from the Meander Creek.

In the wintertime it would be flooded and ice; it was our skating rink. We didn't have ice skates. We had tubulars from scraps that the old Sikes Mill used to make, which is now the National

Gypsum Company. We would bend these pieces of tubulars over our shoes that we would wear and have two runners and we would skate on them. Those were our ice skates.

Hockey, of course, we cut a tree with a limb that would be shaped like a hockey stick. We used a rolled up spring or maybe another piece of wood for a puck. We would have our hockey games on ice.

At the time Tarzan was a very big thing with us. The older boys such as my brother, Stephen, John Sarbu, Paul Spirko, and Jack Predica built the ties and strip by the Bend. It was on the other side of the Bend. Then there was a little part of an old railroad that used to come down from where that estate was on the south side.

P: Waddell Mansion?

M: Yes, Waddell. There was a little railroad that came down there. They padded the area with all kinds of grass and leaves and everything and then used ropes and we would swing and holler like Tarzan going down for maybe about five swings before we would reach the end and then dive in the water. That was kept secret for about three or four years. No one ever knew about it until one day one of the boys in the neighborhood came off the last swing and there was still somebody on the last limb. When you put two on the limb, the limb broke. He suffered a bad gash in the back of his ear, which kept him out of the service, Joe Gyonski.

The recreation part, of course, baseball was the summer fun. Either we would watch the older people play and then we would have our own pick-up games in the field after they used it. We had a field at Stanley Works. We had a field behind the other mill that was across the river, the old Empire Mill.

P: Where was the old Stanley Works?

M: The old Stanley Works and the old Galvanized were together down on Carl Street. Stanley Works was the bustling industry and Galvanized made these long ice cans for the railroad and all over the world. Mr. Robinson used to be the owner, W.R. Robinson. He was a nice man. He used to stop in and see my mother all the time. He enjoyed talking with my mother when my mother had the store. He always stopped in and bought his usual coffee and doughnuts and then he went to work. Mother always said that Mr. Robinson was a philosopher.

At Stanley Works there were many, many people who lived in Russia Field and around the area. Stanley Works made washers and nuts and bolts and things of that sort for the hardware industry. During the war, World War II, it was a bustling place. All of the women in our area went to work in there.

My brother graduated in 1933. As I understand he had one of the hardest courses that the high school permitted, a scientific course. He still couldn't get a job. Having two sisters in New York, he went to New York and worked in the Brooklyn Navy yard as a welder. That is where I saw the beginning of the outside of Niles.

P: You mentioned a sister. How many sisters did you have?

M: Four.

P: Who are they?

M: The oldest one is Ann; she was with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in New York. She worked in the accounting department. Before she went to New York she used to work for the Niles Steel & Forge. She was a graduate of the Warren Business College. My sister Katherine was an interior decorator from out of Boston College. Her ways of decorating pleased a lot of people. Matilda was the youngest sister and she was in New York in 1933. She graduated in 1931. She was the youngest girl in the 1931 graduating class; that was graduating at sixteen. She used to walk to school with the one who was the oldest in her graduating class, Spiro Gulgas, who I believe lives in Boardman, Ohio now.

Of course, the Gulgas family was another family. They lived across the street from us. There was a lot of congeniality. Russia Field was international. We learned everything. As a matter of fact, I remember going to school when I was in junior high school, and I would say, "Good morning, how are you," in many different languages. Of course, I don't remember them now, but I knew it in Greek; I knew it in Romanian; I knew it in Croatian; I knew it in Italian, Polish, Hungarian. They used to come to my mother's store and I would listen to them. Of course, my mother spoke many languages. My father spoke nine. When you have this kind of international group of people, you keep up your languages, and this is good. This is something I surely miss today.

P: You are right.

M: I think that is why we say that Russia Field during the Depression was one, big, happy family. We were together. There was a togetherness. There was help for each one.

There were some bad things. During the Depression, of course, the old Baltimore & Ohio Railroad used to come up loaded with coal. I'm not speaking of Russia Field in particular, also the Grant Street area and in Warren too. I'm speaking from Girard up. People would go down to the Girard area where the train was making a gradual climb coming into Niles and they would hop on the freight. Then they would have a designated area where they would drop off a little bit of coal for their own

use, not overloading anything really, but enough to hold them off for a week or something like that to keep their homes. I guess the people on the railroad realized this. There was never any kind of an arrest or anything like that. Nobody was doing it for profit. There was just the need; there was no money.

I can recall during the winter months old, makeshift sleds, four or five people pulling a load of coal. The kids all helped. There was nothing else to do at the time. It was on a Saturday morning. All of the younger ones my age, of course, were away from there. We weren't allowed by that spot. When somebody needed help like pushing a sled or wheelbarrow up the hill, that was when we jumped in and did our share. We didn't think anything about like stealing coal. It was all a need. I don't believe we ever had that. My dad always worked.

P: You had mentioned Matilda. Did you have any other sisters?

M: Katherine, Matilda, and Josephine.

P: Three sisters?

M: Four, Ann. Ann was the oldest.

P: Are they still alive today?

M: Yes, all of them. They live in California.

P: Then you had your brother Stephen. Were you the youngest?

M: Yes.

P: Being the youngest of the family, how did that affect your situation?

M: I was spoiled; I was spoiled by my sisters; of course, my brother did a lot too, but my brother was my father. My brother was eight years old. My father was rarely home. I did see my father on weekends a lot of times. During the Depression when he would work one or two days a week, he would go down to the fields down between Olive Street and the Stanley Works and over through McDonald and pick up sandstone left here from the old glacier ages. They were big pieces of stone. Dad built the barn out of that stone. The floor is still standing; the walls are still standing. He built that in 1931. It was destroyed by fire July 4, 1945.

P: Where at?

M: 716 Olive Street.

P: You mentioned they had a business first where the Parlor is now

and then across the street.

M: Yes. When we moved from Warren originally, mother opened up a grocery store. She also had a grocery business in Warren.

P: What was the name of it?

M: Joe Medovich's Groceries. Dad was not a businessman, but mom had to do something outside of raising children and taking care of other things. In Cleveland she had a boarding house and had six boarders. Her education was in nursing.

P: This is when your mom had the grocery store where the Parlor is today, the same building?

M: Yes. Dad owned that building. He bought that building.

P: Then what year did they move across the street?

M: When he finished building it, which was about two years later.

P: Is that a grey house now?

M: Yes.

P: It would be right behind the Russia Field Market.

M: Right. The Russia Field Market was, of course . . . At the time when that started that was a church. Rudy Prince and Phillip Theodore got together and they built a tremendous business. During the Depression it ran all the time. He used to sponsor our baseball team, the Russia Field Civics; he gave us free fireworks. Rudy was the kind of man who loved good times. Unfortunately, he died young.

P: You mentioned that you cleaned bricks at the Empire Mill.

M: Yes.

P: Were those bricks thrown out from the ovens, they had been used?

M: No. The mill was already shut down and demolished. This was what was left. It was all the water tunnels from the Mahoning River. The water was pumped in from the Mahoning River. They were cooling water tunnels. That was all lined with brick. We would go and dismantle those tunnels. My brother-in-law was one of them who worked with that. It was our way of making a few pennies.

P: Were there soup lines or anything like that?

M: Oh, yes, I remember those.

P: What was it like?

M: Walking over to town and you would see these long lines. It was unfortunate. I can remember in old Monroe School, which was right in our backyard, that we had a soup line there.

P: Was that on Belmont Avenue next to the tracks?

M: Yes, Belmont Avenue next to the Erie Railroad tracks. It was called Bert Street School, but it was Monroe after. She taught there.

P: Your wife?

M: Yes. That is where I met her. She was my nephew's teacher. Anyhow, as it happened, they were portables. We had third grade and fourth grade. There was a shoe distribution center for the kids in the neighborhood there. They had some soup lines there, but most of it was downtown right on State Street across from where the Belmont Lounge used to be.

P: What's there now?

M: Nothing. It is a parking lot now.

P: Across from the fire station today?

M: It would be on State Street though, not across from the fire station. That was Jensen Hardware right across from the fire station. Right where you get the license plates now. . .

P: All the way up by the Chamber of Commerce.

M: A little bit over to the left of that near the Warner Theater. Then next to the Warner Theater was a big parking lot where the trucks used to go to unload for the stores from the back end. There was the Ideal Supermarket there; there was Jensen Hardware. It was a bustling town then; even during the Depression it was a Saturday night alive, so to speak.

P: What was it like?

M: Everything happened there Saturday night. We used to go to the Warner Theater for a nickel and enjoy a nickel's worth. A dime was so much in those days. It bought us all of the candy we needed and we saw two double features, all of this for a dime every Sunday.

P: Who were some of your favorite merchants downtown? Do you remember any of them?

M: Paul Shaker's. My mother used to get all of her sheets there.

P: What year would that be now?

M: We always had the business across the street. It was a bustling business. We had a lot of trade. My brother used to drive the delivery truck. I can remember helping him deliver groceries as far away as McDonald and Girard and Mineral Ridge. Dad had a good sense of cutting meat. My dad was pretty good with lamb and goat and he did so good with chickens. We raised our own chickens.

P: He did this at the same time he was working with Republic Steel Company?

M: Oh yes. He was always home on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mostly, but he did all of that work. He would do a lot of butchering on Sunday.

P: At what point then did your family lose most of the business?

M: 1929-1930. I remember one time when the business went out, the phone rang. At the time before the Depression dad and mom owned about four different properties around the store. I can remember Mr. Thomas from McKinley Savings & Loan calling. I happened to be standing by the phone. My dad said, "Well, another day another dollar lost." That meant that they lost another home. He didn't cry about it or anything like that. He knew it was coming sooner or later, but he did manage to save the house that he built, which is now there on 716 Olive Street. He did manage to save all of those little places that he had in the back.

We had three, little houses in the back that he rented out--practically loaned out. There was no money; people just lived there. Two of them were Arabians, Abdul and Hassin. They were like dad's helpers. They helped him build the barn. They helped him do everything he wanted. They helped him with the garden, then helped him take care of the chickens; they helped him smoke lamb and sausages. We had our own smokehouse. The barn was a big, beautiful barn. At that time this barn was completed in 1931. When you go down there, you see the walls. They are carved with 1931 in them, the sandstone.

I really can't remember when the business shut down. I can remember my mother arguing with my father not to pay the bill so that they could still hold it off for a little bit longer. Dad never believed in bills, so he went upstairs and found some old Firestone stock. He took three or four leaflets--I guess they were certificates--and he gave them to the salesman. The salesman didn't even bother looking; he just wrote, paid in full. That was the last of the groceries. We didn't have a store again until 1937, I believe, when my brother gave my mother some money and started from Warren Sanitary Dairy furnishing everything and called it Dairy Lunch.

P: How many years might have lapsed in that time when the first business went out and your brother helped your mom set up the Dairy?

M: 1933 to 1937, so it was four years.

P: Was it at the same site?

M: Yes. In the meantime my sister Josephine got married and the wedding reception was held in the empty store. We had some makeshift benches; we had a crowd and music and everything. My mother was a firm believer of modern things. She danced, swam; she did this, and she escorted the girls wherever they went. Up the street was the old German hall and every Saturday night at the old German hall there was something going on. Mother had a way . . . That's how I learned to dance as a matter of fact. She would pick up some little girl my age and then dance around once. She would stop in front of me and then I would have to finish. Then she would pick up another one and stop in front of one of my friends, and that was how Joe would start or Martin would start or whatever. This was the way we all got to be pretty good at polkas. It was a good time on Saturday night. It was something to forget the Depression; it was something to, I guess you would say, celebrate the end of the Depression because I remember most of that. The earlier days I can't really recall too much about dancing.

P: What was school like during this period of time? During the 1930's what grade would you have been in, junior high school, high school?

M: I was in junior high school.

P: Where at?

M: I went to Monroe School until fourth grade.

P: Monroe, is that on Belmont?

M: It was on Belmont.

P: There is a playground there.

M: Then Jefferson in fifth and sixth. I went to Washington for seventh, eighth, and ninth grade and then to the high school for eleventh and twelfth.

P: What do you remember most in high school as teachers are concerned?

M: Mrs. Shurreger and Ida and Mary Madden.

P: Shurreger?

- M: She was my speech teacher. She was also the drama coach and I used to help do all of her backdrops for plays. Stanley's last name I can't recall, but Mrs. Shurreger was an English instructor. N. C. Davis was one of my favorites because he made history so important and he was also an English teacher, but he was my history teacher. Ann Compana, I enjoyed her and Ida Madden.
- P: She wrote a book, a small book; it's in the newspapers.
- M: Yes, I even taught with her. She was a pleasant woman right down to the day she retired and she's still a pleasant woman. We visited with her when she was in the hospital last year.
- P: Is this lady alive today?
- M: Yes. In those days going to school was a pleasure. It was a learning experience, but it was fun. It was something that we looked forward to. I can remember every September on the day after Labor Day that I was all bundled up and ready to go. My brother saw to it that I had to have homework. There was no way I could get out of it. As a matter of fact, we used to use the store as a study because in those days the testament would come and in between time Martin Bender, Eddie Logar, and myself and Joe Feher would all be doing our homework in the store.
- P: Did you work in the store?
- M: Oh yes, always. I had to help. As I mentioned earlier I couldn't play basketball because I played football, so I had to stay home and help mom. Dad wasn't there and then my brother was sometimes working double shifts. He worked for Commercial Shearing in Youngstown at the time when I was going to school.
- P: Did your sisters help in the store?
- M: My sisters were never home. All of them were married. Josephine would come sometimes. They were all gone. Matilda left Niles in 1931 right after graduation.
- P: When you were in school, who were some of your best friends in your high school years?
- M: There was George Bufwack. He is retired from the water department here and Ed Logar; he lives in McDonald now. Joe Feher was one who lived in our neighborhood; he turned out to be a ceramic engineer; he is in Willoughby, Ohio. Martin Bender was the class president and he lived down the street from me. I would consider him my best friend. We did a lot of things together. We traveled a lot together; we did a lot of things.
- P: Who in school might have influenced you the most outside of members of your own family?

M: Influence me? I really can't say too much except for Ann Compana because she was a friend of all my sisters. They ran around together earlier. I guess it was maybe because she showed a little favoritism. She made sure that I studied because of my sisters; she wanted me to do good. I would say that she was one factor.

Valor Shurreger was a peach. I could always just see that smile on her face, "Of Fred, you do everything so good," and that sort of builds your ego. When we did the backdrops for all of her plays, it was all free lance; it was everything on our own time. That was the only art we had in high school in those days. Stanley and I would go around and draw Santa Claus with colored chalk to help everybody out to decorate their rooms.

P: During the Depression did you know of anyone who went into the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) or any of the government programs?

M: Oh yes, yes. The Russia Field older ones were in the CCC. My wife's brother also joined. They would come back and they would have talks about what was happening in California, the Dakotas. We would all sit down and listen to this tale. Some of them were good speakers. Martin's brother John . . . We used to call him Huntz; that is the German name for John. He would tell us about the stories that he went through with the CCC.

P: Where would you sit around at?

M: Kinder's. There was the old Midway Tavern. That was where Kinder's was at one time, the bakery. That is where the gas station is now.

P: On the corner of Olive and Belmont?

M: Olive and Belmont, across from there.

P: So you would sit there with your friends?

M: It was owned by Steve Spirko and then he sold it to Phillip Ettro. Steve Spirko was a foreman at Stanley Works and he liked his beer so he opened up the beer garden.

P: This is where the boys would talk about the CCC?

M: Yes, this was the gathering space, yes. There was a certain section for us where the old Pepsi Cola and the Coca Cola were and the music box. That was in the back over there. We weren't allowed in the barroom; we were too young for that, but we had to use the back door. John would come over, Huntz. Nick Schuller was another one.

The Schuller family was a very good family. They lived in the

last house on Belmont Avenue before you got to the river. During the Depression Mr. Schuller used a horse and buggy and picked up all of the scrap from the downtown and hauled it to the city dump. He had one arm. It was an accident, tragic accident there where Mr. Schuller and the oldest Schuller, Bill, lost a leg; Mr. Schuller lost an arm. Bill was very intelligent. Bill used to build boats for our use. Bill graduated in 1933.

P: What was your reaction when those other people started talking about their experiences with the CCC?

M: It was exciting because it aroused your imagination. You visualized what they were saying.

You find one family, because of the Depression, was splitting up. John Caizzia moved to Detroit. He eventually became a foreman for the Ford Motor Company. Joe Caizzia was an off and on type. He would go and be gone for a few years and come back. He would be like a Romeo would be. He would come back and dress up nice and fit and he always had a new wife.

P: What was your opinion of the government? I'm sure the guys ended up talking about the government at the time, didn't they, the federal government, Roosevelt and his programs?

M: I can remember the first time he ran for president. We used to make big signs, Vote for Roosevelt! Vote for Roosevelt! Of course, he won by a landslide. When the WPA (Works Progress Administration) workers were building down on that one avenue, we were thinking of other things like post lean-ons. Most of the people were leaning on shovels--progress was very slow. That was a theory we all came up with and made jokes about. Everybody idealized him, Roosevelt, because of his works program. He did open up, the CCC.

P: Mr. Medovich, you mentioned that you made signs, Vote for Roosevelt! What did you do with the signs?

M: Put them on the street. You got some sandstone or you got some limestone. There was a lot of it around from all of the mills around here, plaster.

P: So most of the people in your area idealized him then.

M: Yes, we were all democrats. I would listen once in a while to some of the goings-on there, but that was nothing. As far as politics I don't think anybody was too overinvolved except for local politics. I can remember somebody saying, "You are going to work for me. You are going to work for me," when I was a kid. I wondered what this working was. Here Stubby James had a car so they gave him \$20 and filled his tank to drive so many votes to the voting precinct.

P: The local politicians?

M: When I was in high school, I was able to drive. I made a \$20 bill that way too. I took advantage of that too, but that is as far as it went.

P: Who were some of the local politicians who you remember?

M: Chubby Sweagen, he was a foreman at the plant. I used to idealize him because he played first base and that was my position and he batted left-handed and so did I. The only thing I didn't like about him was that he liked to drink too much. Chubby always stopped at Steve Spirko's before he went home. Steve Spirko owned the Midway Tavern. Chubby was the clever politician. You know what was strange? He was a republican, but he always won. Councilman at large, they didn't have any particular precincts I don't even remember who was representing Russia Field at the time.

P: That would be the 3rd ward?

M: The 3rd ward, yes.

P: Vince LaPolla?

M: No. He lived up in the 2nd ward. He was a man everybody adored. Mr. Campana, Mr. LaPolla, those were well respected people.

P: Do you recall a name Jennings on Mason Street?

M: Oh yes. I only associate the Jennings name with the football teams. As far as the politics I was too young to know what was on the inner circles of that particular thing. He was more or less the godfather of a lot of people. He helped a lot of people. That is through the grapevine, what I know about him.

P: I have talked to a lot of people who were helped by him.

M: I knew Rita Jennings, Pobo Jennings. I played football with him and Mark Jennings. I knew them.

P: Mr. Medovich, what kind of an influence did your brother Stephen have on you?

M: He was a total, the total influence. He gave me everything I needed. When we had the grocery store, he would sort of connive me into fixing the window display. In those days the window display told the store. He said that I had a particular touch--oh yeah, just to get it done so that I would wash the window and make a nice new display there. I learned from learning how these salesmen would come in or these display technicians would come in and how they dressed up a window. It was no deal, nevertheless, the idea of how he said it.

Stephen was an artist. He drew a lot. As a matter of fact, one of his columns, he wrote about S. J. Bonham, who was the superintendent of the schools, in our 100th anniversary for the city of Niles in 1934. He drew a cartoon about him. He was one who would say, "If there is something bad about a person, forget them. Look at the good things and then evaluate them." He was my second father--well, you might say my first father--but to me he was true not only to himself but he was true to five or six people on the block.

P: Who were some of his friends? Who would remember him today?

M: Paul Spirko, now a pharmacist in Florida; John Sarbu--these are all scouts who he was associated with--Jack Predica, Freddie Predica, Steve Bellini, some of the 1933 graduates--I can't recall them--but most of the time Jack Predica and John Sarbu and Paul Spirko.

P: Are any of them in Niles today?

M: Yes, Jack Predica is still in Niles on Short Street. My brother Stephen worked with him at Youngstown Steel. Jack was an artist too. Every time there was a dance, he made signs about the dances.

P: Jack and Stephen?

M: They both did it, yes, but Jack did most of the work because Stephen had other business too. Stephen would be in the store when he wasn't welding or Stephen would be trying to get further education. He would be at Youngstown College studying.

P: What was he taking up?

M: Always math, he loved math.

P: What did he look like? Was he big?

M: They used to call him "Slim." That was his nickname. He was about 5'11", 5'10", always carried a mouth organ that he loved to play "Dixie" and all of those songs. That was his joy; he loved jazz and was a good dancer. People remember him as a congenial type. He was full of laughter. He was a storyteller. In the Midway Tavern he would talk about something that happened on the Market Street Bridge, which never happened. They were fictitious stories. Everybody would be listening and listening and the beer would get warm. They were just listening and listening. It would be a surprise ending that would turn out to be totally different from what the story was.

Stephen was that way. I can still see him walking down Belmont Avenue playing his song. He would see me and then he would raise up his right hand. He would call me by my real name, Ferde.

My family called me that. Most of the people who lived in the neighborhood called me that. Then when I went to school, the principal didn't like it. Miss Miller said, "Your name is Fred," and that is how it stuck. I sign my paintings Ferde all the time though.

Stephen was a total influence. When I was a young seven year old, he ran all the way home from high school in 1931 to be there when the marble championship was there. I was shaking like a leaf. He patted me on the back and said, "Show me how you can do it, brother." I did win the championship. He taught me how to swim the way you should swim. My mother used to drop me off her back when I was four years old. Mother was a good swimmer. Because of my brother I earned a savings award when I was twelve, a life saving award. Because of him I learned a lot of techniques in tumbling, in wrestling from watching him at the high school. He used to work hard at tumbling.

Steve Filipan was another friend of his who is now deceased. Steve Filipan was robust, big, about 300 pounds of solid fat. He died a multimillionaire in California in 1970. My brother and Steve used to wrestle and it was so much fun to watch when you had somebody who weighed 160 pounds and another one who weighed 300 pounds and one worked so fast and the other one worked so . . . Yet Steve Filipan was such a nimble man on his feet that he was one of the best dancers around. He was good in tumbling. Imagine a 300 pounder swimming and diving. Oh, he made a big splash, but he was good. He lived right across the street. As a matter of fact, it was Steve Filipan's father who bought the business off of my mother when my mother opened the new store across the street.

P: You mentioned that your brother with your help started some sort of a sports team through the store.

M: Yes. In high school I was playing football. That took so much time away from the store. My mother said, "No basketball." I was dejected. One day my brother came home from work and saw that I was dejected. I couldn't play basketball even though I made the basketball team in practice. Mr. Wiand was the coach and wanted me to play. I told my brother the whole story. My brother had to realize too that my mother needed help and he told me, "It comes first. This is a livelihood." I understood that. I was in high school; I understood it.

Out of the blue he said, "Suppose we would sponsor a team in the city league, can you round up enough boys to play in the league?" I said, "All my friends and those who didn't make the high school team will play." We took some has-beens too; we included some good football players. Joe Meere didn't know how to play basketball but because of his name in football, we needed him for promotion; he would bring the crowds. He couldn't score two

if you let him shoot fifteen times. Then there was Joe Churrazzi. He is now a custodian over at the football stadium. He wasn't what you called a basketball player, but he had height to be in somebody's way. Martin Bender would guard you so tight that he would take the shirt off your back before you would realize it and he was good. Then we had Johnny Muha. He was a clever forward, very fast. There were a couple of other boys from McDonald, Joe Kunkel and Davey Connors, also Andy Corrado, who is now a Harshman Trucking executive.

P: How did your team do?

M: Pretty good. My brother was looking at two points. He was getting free advertising for the store, Medovich Dairy, every time we played. We played twice a week. That was free advertising. He was looking at it from that point of view. He was a businessman and then, of course, he was happy we were winning. He changed the traditions. Instead of getting us jackets when we won the championship, he gave us nice button-down sweaters with a big M. Boy, we wore that to school with pride because we even beat the high school team. Mr. Wiand didn't appreciate it, but it happened.

When I came back from the service, a group of young high school kids like Louis Churrazzi, Sam Mollica, Paul Trena, asked me if I would sponsor a team. I told my mother. She said, "That is too much money. We can't do that." Right across the street from the store was the Midway Tavern. The old Midway Tavern had burned down. Phillip Ettro said, "Sure, we'll call it the Medovich Midway." That sounded fair enough. I coached the team. That was an undefeated season that year. I didn't play; I just coached the team. I used my past experiences on how to play basketball and I read a couple of college basketball books in the meantime, so it helped out. We had not what you would call a tall team, but very fast. We were playing people ten years older than us. We burned them with speed.

P: What else can you tell me about your brother?

M: I suppose he was one kind of a man who tried to please everybody. He knew he couldn't do it. I don't see any enemies in his life. There was nobody who could say anything bad about him. He was a kind of fellow who just got along with everyone regardless of what he was, white, black, orange, green--I don't care what color. Everybody respected him because he was a good listener.

Stephen was one who always brought the fondest memories, the teachings and other things. When he was killed, there was a sailor Lou Kermetz who was on leave in the Midway Tavern. I told him about it. He just fell apart. He was no relative of ours. He was just one who grew up in the neighborhood. When you look back, it was Stephen who pulled boys off the streets and put them

in the house so they had a bed to sleep in at night. He never forgot things like that. He was the sort of a man that you would wish you had around today when things are down and out. He had an optimistic viewpoint always; that carried him on through. He was my whole, total influence.

P: Holidays during the Depression, what was Christmas like, what was Easter like, what role did the church play?

M: My mother was our religious backbone, whatever my mother said. My father was a devoted Catholic. My father would fast for forty days for Easter, no meat, no butter, only fish and chicken at the most. Holidays were gala affairs. Of course, when you had four sisters, you made sure. As far as Christmas gifts, those were all necessities. One Christmas gift I received during the Depression was my father's coat but my mother had made it down to my size. We used to have two holidays. One was December 12th; that was St. Lucy's. That was the presents of the needy, in other words, what other clothes we needed. Christmas was always the evening mass, the prayers, and how you fought to stay awake and how long the masses were, two hours, but it was worth it.

The Saturday afternoon before Easter, Lent was over officially. There were all of the good things we could eat again. They were kinds of things that had highly religious backgrounds. Everything was worship, worship, worship--the prayer before dinner every day. The holidays, they were special. There was more food on the table. Even though the presents weren't there, there was . . . And then there was visitation too.

As I mentioned before, during the Depression the Field was one, big, happy family. Mrs. Caizzia would bring some bread. My mother would give her some rolls. We would go over Mrs. Caizzia's and look at her house and see how nice and clean it was. We would go over Mrs. Zuzulo's and then there would be an exchange of edible gifts, more or less appreciation for each other. That was all part of our life in the early years. That was life though.

We sang all of the songs, both in the languages and in English.

P: During the holidays, Christmas?

M: Yes.

P: Caroling, any caroling?

M: The sound of music was the same. The words were different. It was enjoyable. Going to Christmas Eve mass was the highlight of the season.

P: When you sang, was it in your own home, was it outside during

the holidays?

M: Inside. We didn't go caroling among the neighborhood, no. This was just individual families.

P: Was there much interaction between Russia Field and other parts of Niles other than just going to school?

M: Athletically, yes. We had a lot of that.

P: Was this like an isolated place?

M: As far as families, you might say that the church brought you out from the Field. We would meet in church. My mother would meet in church. My father, well, he always worked on Sundays. He would come home Thursday night and have Friday and Saturday off. He always worked on Sundays. I remember Father Santuro saying, "He is a good man and it is his labors that keep him away from us, but it is in his heart." He would say that. My father never forgot that when my mother told him about it.

P: This is a good interview. Is there anything else you would like to include?

M: Stephen, if anything comes to mind, I will tell you about it, but right now, I don't know.

P: I appreciate it very much. I certainly appreciate it.

M: Thank you.

P: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW