

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History Program

YSU History Project
O.H. 2162

Bob Avery

Interviewed

By

Michael Kenneally

On

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: Bob Avery
INTERVIEWER: Michael Kenneally
SUBJECT: Time at YSU
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K: This is an interview with Bob Avery for the Youngstown State University History Project for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Mike Kenneally in St. Cloud, Florida on March 12, 2004 at 8:10 PM.

K: Well, let's start at the beginning. Could you tell me when you were born?

A: August 21, 1948.

K: And that was in Youngstown?

A: Yes sir.

K: And you grew up there?

A: Yes.

K: Where did you grow up?

A: 504 Glenwood Avenue.

K: Could you tell me about the neighborhood? Could you describe what it was like, what you remember about it?

A: Well, our backyard went into some woods and that joined in with the park, so basically you would consider our house backed up to the park.

K: Millcreek Park?

A: Millcreek Park.

K: Did you go to Idora Park a lot?

A: Not really. It was very seldom. I used to hang out on Volney Rogers playground all the time.

K: Oh really? Is that where a lot of people hung out?

A: Well, it was only like two blocks from the house so you could get straight down there from the backyard and we had a little path that would go to the area. We were five houses this side of it, but go through the woods and there was a path that would take us to the ballpark and then the offices down there where we used to hang out. A lot of the teachers from the Youngstown Schools would be the summer staff that they would have there.

K: Oh really?

A: We played baseball usually there and got to know a lot of the teachers that I had later at South High from their summer jobs they had there.

K: So you stayed in Youngstown pretty much the whole time you were growing up?

A: Yes.

K: You went to high school there, South High?

A: South High.

K: I know you have brothers and sisters. Were you the youngest or oldest?

A: I was the youngest.

K: You were the youngest? And you had how many siblings?

A: My sister was first, then my brother. They both went to Youngstown.

K: Could you tell me about your parents?

A: Mom was a stay-at-home wife. Dad worked for Strausbaugh Motors from about 1935 or 1936 on through his retirement.

K: When did he retire?

A: Good question. 1976.

K: He worked there awhile then.

A: It's when he was 65. I wish he would have retired at 62.

K: What was your father's name?

A: It was Russell that he went by, but it was really John Russell, but he always went by his middle name, always signed just with a J and Russell.

K: And your mother is Helen Avery, right?

A: Helen Avery.

K: Did either of your parents attend college?

A: No.

K: When you were going through high school in Youngstown, did you have any particular subjects that you were interested in at an early age there or was it pretty much run-of-the-mill?

A: I kind of thought I might get into engineering, so I kind of went that route going through high school, but some of the higher math and I didn't get along that well.

K: Yes, I understand that. Did you play any sports? Were you involved in any extracurricular activities through high school?

A: Just in band.

K: You played in the band? What instrument did you play?

A: I was a drummer.

K: Did your parents have a big influence on your education? Did they push you?

A: Not really. They never really encouraged it, but basically, I just kind of thought about going to college as part of giving it a shot.

K: So you had that in your mind when you were in high school, about going to college?

A: Yes, when I was in high school, I figured I'd definitely start college.

K: Did you think about going anywhere else or was it always Youngstown?

A: Yes, it was Youngstown. It had to be somewhere I could work and go to school.

K: You were working?

A: When I first started I wasn't working because I wasn't old enough. I was just 16. I graduated early.

K: Oh really.

A: So, my dad got me a job at Strausbaugh's but I couldn't get hired there until I went down to the school board to get a permit to go to work. Even though I had graduated from high school, I wasn't 18 so I had to get this work permit at 16 so I could work. They didn't make me work the required the hours that you used to, it was basically unlimited hours, but I still had to go to the school board to get that so I could even get to work.

K: So you graduated high school early? Did you go through all the grades?

A: I skipped fourth grade.

K: You skipped fourth grade and went into fifth, so you did pretty well all through high school?

A: No, I was an average student.

K: Okay.

A: My sister was valedictorian. My brother was National Honor Society. And I didn't quite make National Honor Society. I did get by okay, but I just missed National Honor Society by a little bit. Top third of my class, but I didn't get the National Honor Society.

K: So when you went to Strausbaugh's, what were you doing when you first went in there?

A: I was one of the order pickers. Basically I worked part-time around my schedule.

K: Right.

A: And they had me scheduled around school schedule.

K: So when you did enroll at Youngstown, you were 16 then?

A: Yes, I was 17. I had one whole semester at Youngstown. I didn't become 17 until August the following year.

K: So what year was that? Do you recall?

A: I started in 1965.

K: 1965.

A: I was 17 when I started classes. Yes 17.

K: Okay.

A: I was 16 when I signed up because it was in June and in the summer time, when you first sign up right after high school and you don't get accepted until sometime that summer.

K: Right, and then it doesn't start.

A: I was 17 when I did start.

K: Did you have a declared major right away?

A: I just got into business department.

K: You went into the business department?

A: My original major was going to be retail merchandising, and I changed it to industrial merchandising later on. I thought I would prefer industrial sales.

K: Did you stick with that throughout?

A: Pretty much so, finding courses here and there, like I got two or three minors I ended up with, because some courses weren't available.

K: Did your job pay for the college, or did you get any financial aid?

A: No, I didn't. Basically, mom and dad got me started the first quarter and then I was working after that and I took care of everything after that.

K: So in 1965 and when you were there, what was the campus like? Do you remember? Give me like a walking tour of the campus if you could.

A: Well, let's see. The new building was Kilcawley Hall, and the cafeteria, I think they had just opened that Fall. Of course, everything basically revolved around the library at that time. We still had classes in the old Todd Hall that was next to the old main university building down there, and then there were also classes there.

K: Okay.

A: Tod Hall, that old house there, there were several classes in there. And on the North side of the library was the business department. The library set here and then this side was the business department so all of their offices were there on the second floor.

K: The cafeteria you mentioned, was that in Kilcawley Center? That wasn't part of Kilcawley Center.

A: It was across the street. Kilcawley Hall was the cafeteria building.

K: Kilcawley Hall, I'm sorry.

A: I don't think it's there anymore. I haven't been to the university in a long time.

K: Okay. Kilcawley Center now is the big hub.

A: Yes, I think Kilcawley Hall is long gone. Basically the few dorms that they actually had were in Kilcawley Hall and the cafeteria was beside it and it wasn't that big of a building.

K: Besides the cafeteria, was there any place for the student body to congregate or to have recreation, restaurants or bars or anything like that, on campus or near campus?

A: As for anybody going to the bar during school hours, I don't think anybody did.

K: Okay.

A: Basically we just went to classes. Most of the people at that time worked and you were going from work to class and getting back in your car and going out and we had just gotten a parking lot opened. I don't even know if the parking lot was open the first year I was there.

K: Where did you park?

A: Anywhere.

K: On the streets?

A: Anywhere you could find, old yards and places that they were going to move for the parking lot.

K: Was that a problem?

A: Parking was a real problem until they got that parking lot opened. I'm trying to remember, because I'm pretty sure they were working on a parking lot at the time. I don't have that good of memory of it.

K: So you were working, did you also go full-time? Did you take full-time courses?

A: I was full-time the whole time I was there. I would carry between 12 and 15 hours. I tried to carry 15, but a couple times I dropped down to 12 depending on how much work I had and how things worked for courses. A couple of times I had 15 set up and a course wouldn't appear and I'd end up with 12.

K: Yes, that's still going on.

A: And a couple times I had to jump around and grab another class so I could keep the 12.

K: So what was the business school like?

A: At the original time I started, I thought it was pretty good because most of our teachers were professionals in the industry. They probably didn't have the doctorates that some of the ones that came later when it became a state school, but they had actually worked, which they knew the real world which was more than the ones that were teaching you theory later on after it became a state school.

K: So you think they brought a little more experience.

A: Oh, definitely a lot more experience, and in my workings in my job around here, they were definitely a lot better at educating us then the theory ones were. But with everything changing in the business world like it is, it's nice to know the real world, but a lot of the stuff, what I did 20 years ago is obsolete already. Five years ago is obsolete already the way things change.

K: So, did you participate in any other activities, extracurricular? Did you continue music?

A: No, I dropped all my musical things. I basically worked and went to school and tried to keep a social life in the evenings after school.

K: So what would a typical day on campus be like for you?

A: I used to get to campus at 7:00, and Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays were different from Tuesdays and Thursdays. I would usually try to be out of there so I could go to work at 3:00 because after my first year, I was working full-time, and I'd go to work at 3:00 then down at Strausbaugh's. Two days a week I could come home and change, other days I would just go straight to work, and then I'd hang out at work until we finished the trucks which was anywhere from 11:00 to 2:00 PM depending on how busy it was because we loaded trucks for the area. We had trucks going to Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Akron, and we had to load all the trucks to make sure they were ready to go before we could go home. At that time, I would go up to Mickey's Bar, which was

my favorite hangout and hangout there until closing time and at 7:00 I'd meet all my friends in the cafeteria.

K: Where was Mickey's at?

A: Mickey's was on Market Street and Hylda.

K: Was that kind of like a college bar?

A: A young people's bar. I wouldn't say it was a college bar. Most of the college bars were over around Wick Avenue. There was the Library and several college bars. I never hung out there.

K: So you were going to YSU during kind of a volatile time in America, during the Vietnam War. Were there any protests or rallies that you could remember?

A: There were a few protests. We had some real whackos in the English Department; it was a husband and wife that were very strong activists. Unfortunately, I had one of them and they knew I wasn't following their thing and I actually dropped the class because I knew I wasn't going to do well with them and I ended up taking it with another teacher who was fine. We used to go over to Kent State on the weekends, me and my buddies, until they had the shootings over there, so that kind of tempered our Kent State stuff. That was just kind of a wild time everywhere. But, basically, because the students, I would say 75 to 80 percent of them worked at that time, they didn't have time for protests and all that stuff. Everybody worked and they did their jobs and the college kids that protested were the ones living off of mommy and daddy and had too much time and were looking for something, and we didn't have that in Youngstown. Kent had a lot more problems, and Ohio State had even more problems.

K: What was the ROTC presence like during that time on campus?

A: It was there. I remember a few ROTC people, but I really never got caught up in that.

K: Now the Jambar was in print?

A: Yes.

K: Was it not?

A: Yes, I remember. I don't know how long but I remember something about the Jambar.

K: Do you remember any of the issues that that paper was discussing? It had to have been right along with the times.

A: It was probably something I might have picked up in the cafeteria and you look at it and then you're gone. Like I said, we used to meet, me and my buddies used to meet there in the cafeteria, I'd always drink a soft drink and have a donut and then we'd be going to our classes at 8:00.

K: So the cafeteria, was that a big hangout?

A: That was our meeting place. Yes, it used to be you met a lot of people in the cafeteria or the library, but the cafeteria seemed to be a hangout at that time.

K: Did you observe any of the traditions like Homecoming?

A: Actually, I never went to the Homecoming. I used to go to some of the events they had. I went to a lot of the concerts that they sponsored.

K: They sponsored concerts?

A: Yes, we had, well I think it was the Newman Club had Neil Diamond, and the Esquires, and Mitch Rider, and they had a big concert down at Struthers Field House one time.

K: Is that where they held most of these?

A: Those, they were usually held outside of the campus because there wasn't anything on campus to hold it at. Chad and Jeremy, they had them for something. They had the Fifth Dimension, and Flip Wilson for some kind of thing and I don't even remember where that was. The Four Freshman, they had the Brothers Four. There were a lot of groups that they had come in, and I would go see them here and there. The one I didn't see that I wish I would have seen was at Idora Park, they had the Classics IV. I wish I would've seen that one but I didn't get to.

K: Do you have any memorable experiences from any of those concerts?

A: I just enjoyed the music. I see these guys down at the oldies station and say I saw that forty years ago and my kids go "Uhhhh."

K: What about books? Did they have a place for you to purchase books on campus?

A: Yes, we had a used bookstore too. Everybody would try to hit them up for used books. But most of the time, you always had the new edition.

K: Yes.

A: It seemed my luck; I think I got about two used books in my life.

K: How were the prices?

A: Basically, considering today, it was cheap. I think I went to a couple hundred bucks for books and everything for the year. Of course, it started out as semester and went to quarters.

K: Oh. What about tuition? Was tuition ever a big concern?

A: Well, no, because tuition at that time was very reasonable. Anybody that wanted to go, that wanted to work could easily pay their way through college. Because, if you lived at home, that's the other thing, if you lived at home, because like I said I think it was only like \$150 a semester, if I'm not mistaken, when I started. It was really cheap and then maybe another \$30 or \$40 for books. And even in those days, \$200, working at \$1.75 an hour, which minimum wage was \$1.25, but again \$1.75 an hour, you still could come up with \$200 pretty quickly.

K: Did you live at home?

A: Yes, I lived at home the whole time I went to school.

K: At the same place on Glenwood?

A: Same place. Lived there all my life, until I moved to Florida.

K: When you were going there, did you have any instructors that really stood out, that you feel really helped you?

A: I can't really pick one. I liked some teachers that were very helpful. Mrs. Brown, I ended up with her for a woman's fashion class. I knew nothing about it, but I needed class so I took it. She was great. I liked her. She was nice. She was basically my advisor. I needed some classes and she said come in my class and it turned out to be pretty good, because she was very informative. Mr. Grimm, he used to work with Republic Rubber? He was another one that would give you a little bit of what the real world was like while he was showing you the books.

K: So this was someone who was actually working in the field and would come in and teach classes?

A: Well, actually I think he was teaching full-time, but he had worked in the field.

K: Okay.

A: I had a couple of teachers like that. I think my advertising teacher, Mr. Mamula, he had worked for Negley Signs. They could tell you a lot of things. I think the best thing was examples. When your book is giving you theory, they could tell you an example, and it means a lot more when you have a real world environment and you know that this is a lot easier to understand. But when I first started, the business department, basically I knew all the teachers, because I pretty much had them all and it was a lot smaller, more

one-on-one communication. You knew your teachers and they knew you. After it went state, they got all these new professors in; basically half of them probably never worked a day in their life. They probably still haven't. They can give you everything they know, but in fact the one teacher did admit and he said, "Here you are. You have all these guys that are working in the industry, and then you got me. I'm a professional student. I can teach you everything there is about theories, but I've never worked a day in my life," and he's right. But he was good, and I enjoyed him because he said, "This is all theory."

K: Do you think that that gave you a more balanced education?

A: Oh, definitely. You could tell as more and more theory, the more guys coming at you, that they really didn't know the real world as much as these first guys that had taught you.

K: What was the student to teacher ratio, roughly, do you think?

A: I have no idea. I'm thinking most of my classes had about 30 to 35 people, but I'm not positive about that. I just took a wild guess.

K: All right. What about diversity in the student population, different ethnic groups?

A: I never really gave it much thought. I went to South High and I really didn't notice a whole bunch of difference because basically I think if I'm not mistaken, 2/3 of my graduating class at South High, even though 35% of them were black went on to college. I knew a lot of kids at Youngstown that were from South High so I really didn't see, probably a smaller amount of blacks definitely, but the ethnic groups, I didn't really notice that much. The thing that I noticed the most was we had a bunch of nuns that were curve killers. They would read every book. Here we are, 80% of us working, and this nun that is spending 90 hours a week on this class killing us. We used to call them the curve busters.

K: Besides the nuns, were there a lot of female students also?

A: Oh yeah, I would say. That woman's fashion class, that was all females. I was so embarrassed when I went in there.

K: Were you the only guy in that class?

A: No, there were two guys in the class. There was me and another one, but I came in like the fifth day or sixth day because I changed my schedule, my class wasn't available so I had to get into it. Mrs. Brown told me I would go in and try. She liked the man's perspective on things. She would at least give me a C, and I said, "A guaranteed C for three hours. I'll take it." It turned out I had a good time and I think I got a B+ in the class. It worked out pretty good.

K: Not bad.

A: She asked me, "What do you think about this thing," and I said, "I'm too busy trying to get them off," and she just laughed and said, "Well that's a good point." She was great, and she said, "Well, that's a good point. What do you think about the three hooks?" I said, "You just think you know what you're doing and then they hook them in the front, and it messes you all up." She was just roaring.

K: So, what year did you graduate?

A: The fall of 1970. I took the summer class and then I was a fall graduate, at the end of August or something like that.

K: Did you go to the graduating ceremony?

A: Yes, it was at Stambaugh Auditorium.

K: Oh, they held it at Stambaugh?

A: Except we didn't individually get our diplomas. They did that in certain things, but there were so many people in the business class, they just said, "BS and BA," and everybody stood up.

K: Oh, they didn't call you up on stage?

A: Well, they did with some of the people, but there were so many people in the business class, they just had the whole business class get up.

K: In the business class. So they did have all the colleges at the ceremony?

A: I think they had all the colleges at the ceremony for that group, but they only called up a few to the stage.

K: That's interesting. Okay. After you graduated, did you do any postgraduate work?

A: No. I spent another year working at Strausbaugh's.

K: Okay, you worked at Strausbaugh's for another year?

A: Yes.

K: Did you eventually go on to pursue anything?

A: After that, I moved to Florida, because Youngstown was a dying town, and the writing was on the wall, so I came down here for vacation, and saw a lot of opportunity. Disney hadn't quite opened yet so I moved down here. That was in September of 1971.

K: And you worked in your area of study? You went into business?

A: I got a job down here in a plumbing supply house. Basically, they hired me because I had a degree and they were going to put me in the office. They had me doing all this, but they wanted me to learn the ins and outs first, and after six months of learning the ins and outs, knowing it up and down, and not moving into the office, I left. I got a job as a carpenter's helper. I learned the carpenter trade because there was a lot more money at the time and I was just a young fellow, and so I worked as a carpenter, got in the union and worked as a carpenter up until 1975. At that time there was a building boom, 1971, and because I could read prints, which I had learned at YSU, I used to do a lot of the layout things like that so that was good for getting you in with all the superintendents. But when I finally hit the union bench, waiting to go out, we had 400 members and 400 of them were unemployed, and the 50 or so supervisors that I knew were all laid off too.

K: Right.

A: I got a job as a truck driver helper, just because I needed a job quickly and there I stayed for the next 26 years. I did everything in that company, which basically started out as really small, basically satellite operation and it grew to be bigger than the home office. I started out as quality control and did the warehousing and did all the inventories. I never could get rid of the inventory part. The inventory and quality control stuff, I got stuck with. I got into the sales version of it and ended up taking the transportation part of it and all these little things just went one to another. Pretty soon I've got the job of about six people, which wasn't too bad at the time, because they all corresponded to each other.

K: Right.

A: Also when the plant manager was sick, I was in charge of the plant. I wasn't the assistant plant manager by title, but basically I was in charge of the plant because I still had to make everything run. I didn't know how to run the machines, but I knew what we needed to run, so I basically told them what to do, and this and that, which I had down even while the plant manager was there. He just basically made sure that the machines ran and let me schedule production.

K: So, looking back, your overall impression of Youngstown State, the education you got there?

A: The early part with the real guys was a lot better than the second part. I think the later part with the theory just shows that you can learn things. And learning as I did on the job, we went through deregulation at the time, meaning our shipping prices went crazy, where we used to start getting a truckload prices out at, I think it was like a \$1.50 per mile at regulation. Later, I was sending stuff out at \$.75, half the cost.

K: Right.

A: Because we had, by learning how to set up things where we could load trucks, I could get big companies to drop trailers and we would have the trailer loaded, they could go make their unload and then come and drop an empty trailer at our place, pick up their

load at any time of day or night, because we were a 24-hour operation, and the driver could be logging miles, and if they had a team, their destination the next day, they were happy, they didn't have to be in a place at a certain time. And by working with them, they really worked with me. I got great rates.

K: So you feel your experiences at Youngstown prepared you?

A: It helped. Certain teachers would tell you, "You know you've got to give and take here and there." It's funny, if you work hard helping a trucking company, how much they'll work to help you, because those drivers know if they can come and grab their trailer and its already loaded at any time, they don't have to sit around and wait for it, they can be logging miles. They love it.

K: Is there anything else you'd like to add, that I may have forgotten?

A: No, I just wished at the time, I don't even know if they had any computer courses, because when I graduated, the computer really wasn't a real thing.

K: Yes, it was just starting to come in.

A: When I started my first job, in the industry, we didn't have computers until six or seven years into the job. And then I got the job of putting all the stuff on the computer. I went dragging and screaming, "No, no, no!"

K: Right.

A: But I ended up being the one who had to put everything in the computer, giving the new locations, giving names to the items and numbers, because this now has to be a number to put in the computer, and then I had to give it a location and all that. We were doing different things, because I didn't know anything about a computer; we did things that you really weren't supposed to do. The days when I first started there, everybody had this theory that everything had a place and it would all fit in that place and then you would go to the next one. We were a manufacturing company and we were manufacturing containers, we made nursery supplies. We would make about two million of one item before we would switch over to another. And then we'd run about five or six hundred thousand of this item, and you could not have this place for this. We had an eight-acre parking lot as it was, full of mountains of containers. I worked with another one of our guys there that was good at computers. He was a computer nerd so to speak and he made a program that I wanted that worked with the computer and was set to take random storage inventories, and we went with random storage 20 years before it was national, now everybody's doing it, and we had a hard time finding a program later that would match his program that would feed into all of our sales costs, and ours was just an inventory program, and when I said I wanted this inventory program put into their cost program, they said, "How?"

K: Right.

A: Nowadays, they finally got it entered, and it never did work as good, we were always having problems.

K: Speaking of on-job training and experience and trying to figure these things out, did the business school have any internships or any on-site, on-job training like that?

A: Not that I'm aware of.

K: No?

A: No. Not that I'm aware of, because we would have a few job interviews at the end where companies would come in, but in 1970 there wasn't much going on.

K: Yes, you're right.

A: I didn't know anybody at the university that got jobs from there.

K: Oh really?

A: Yes.

K: That tough?

A: Yes. The only guy that I knew that got a job period, and I don't think he got it through the university, was my friend, and he got a job at South High teaching school.

K: Is that why you moved to Florida?

A: Well yes, that was one of the reasons.

K: That and the good weather?

A: That wasn't why I moved to Florida initially.

K: Right.

A: Because I basically was working at a job, it was a dead-end job in a dying town, which was using a little bit of my education, but I was basically the receiver and doing all the returns and receiving all parts from the factory. When I originally moved to Florida, it was just because I saw there were job opportunities. At that time, I didn't realize that it wasn't high tech jobs and there weren't very many jobs down here for college degrees, which is what I found out when I did move down here. That's why I got into the construction trade.

K: Well, is there anything else?

A: No, I think that's pretty much it.

K: All right, thanks Bob. This concludes the interview.