

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ethnic Groups - Youngstown, OH

Personal Experience

O.H. 1190

DOMINIC SAULINO

Interviewed

by

Molly McNamara

on

August 1, 1988

M: This is an interview with Dominic Saulino for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Ethnic Groups of Youngstown, by Molly McNamara, at Mount Carmel Church in Youngstown, Ohio, on August 1, 1988, at 1:00 p.m.

Okay, Mr. Saulino can you give me some background on your family, your parents, your brothers and sisters?

S: Yes. My mother and dad came from Agnone, Italy and they came to Youngstown, Ohio.

M: Do you know why they came here?

S: I really do not know why they ever selected Youngstown. That is a good question. They raised three children. One deceased, myself, and my sister presently living. And they lived by me on the East side of Youngstown.

M: What street did you live on?

S: Down on Dalmatian Street. And my sister and I both attended grade school at Madison and from there we went to East High School, and graduated from East High School.

M: Okay, on the street that you lived on the East side, were there a lot of other Italians there?

S: A combination of others. On one side of us we had Slovaks on the other side we had a Russian family, but the majority on that particular street at that time would be the Italians.

M: You are saying just on the one side of the street?

S: Well, on both sides of the streets.

M: But there were a lot of immigrants?

S: Mostly all immigrants. My mother had no education whatsoever. My dad, fortunately, had the opportunity to attend in Wood Street School, just down the street here, and I think he attended no higher than about the fifth grade. It was the fifth grade at that particular time, had to be, because he did not learn to speak English very well, and he was able to read and write the English language. My mother had no education whatsoever. She always spoke Italian to us and that is how we picked up the Italian language. That was back and forth with her.

M: Did she ever learn English or was there no reason for her to?

S: Well, she did learn English, but a very broken type of English. She made herself

where she was able to go ahead downtown shopping or what ever have you go and then we just spoke back and forth to her sometimes in English, broken English.

M: Now did she ever work outside of your home?

S: My mother never worked outside of the home. My father worked in the steel mills and worked for Youngstown Sheet & Tube for years, until the time that he retired from the steel mill.

M: Do you know what kind of job he had?

S: He worked in what was called the boiler shop, and we used to watch him come home at night all dirty, so he really put in a hard days work.

M: Can you describe what Youngstown looked like when you were growing up? Is there anything in particular that you can remember?

S: Well, I can remember, naturally, all of the steel mills smoking away and mostly all of the homes naturally built at the coal furnaces or stoves. And I can remember that Monday used to actually be the wash day for all of the people. And at that time, I remember we used to have, if I can recall it, on our street two or three out door ovens, you know. We used to get out there and they used to bake the bread and what have you, and the washing was always done by hand. I can remember there was just never even having a washing machine up until later on, but my mother used to get down there and just boil the clothes and pour this and what have you, and then ring them out with some of those old hand ringers they had.

M: There was a lot of ethnic groups in your neighborhood other than Italians. Did they all get along?

S: Very well so.

M: Really?

S: Very, very, very well. All of us always got along.

M: Even the parents? I mean there had to be a language barrier there?

S: Well, there may have been a little bit of a language barrier, but there is always a way they communicated with one another and that is just what they did. In fact, I still have my next door neighbors who are Russian and live up on the North side now that still call the house.

M: I have noticed that a lot of people have said this. That there was such a closeness and I am almost surprised because there is such a variety of people living together. Why do you think that they were so close as compared to today? If there is a mixed race in a neighborhood, they usually do not get along the way they did back then. What do you think is the reason for that?

S: I do not know what a direct answer would be to that. I really do not know. Like I said, we just had more closeness. I know that you have heard many times that you could turn around and leave the house and never even bother locking the door and whatever, leave anything out and no one would ever touch it and it was just everybody trusted one another and really loved one another. You had that closeness and what changed it, I would attribute it to just the lack of discipline that we have today. Back in those days, if I as much as opened my mouth, you always got one of those bangos and it is still fearing which really works. I think that it would work today.

M: Do you remember any of the Depression in this area of Youngstown?

S: I remember the Depression, yes I do.

M: Can you describe it?

S: Well, it was just hard and struggling because I remember, in our particular neighborhood, we lived about a good four blocks from what we call the Burkley Woods Area, and there were three different families of us who used to go up there and we dug up and planted a large area up there, you know, of whatever vegetables or whatever, but I can recall having to walk with two buckets in my hand and going up to a fire hydrant, which would be two good blocks away from where we would be planting and that is what we used to have to do, and go and water the plants and that, but that is how everybody, any area that you had to plant or grow anything then, that is what you did.

M: Now, did your father still have his job? Or was he effected at all by the Depression?

S: No, my dad worked. Maybe he would work the five complete days a week or whatever the hours that they used to put in a week, but he would get in a day occasionally during that time.

M: Well, did you find that the neighbors and everything sort of stayed together through this, or was it a everyone for themselves sort of thing?

S: It was always, always a togetherness. But I can recall, as far as the old homestead, we were always very, very close, friendly and probably you have heard that that moment someone got sick, someone would look out for you, you

know. If someone did not feel well, someone would come over with a bowl of some chicken soup or something, and that is exactly what they did.

M: Okay, you said that right after high school you went into the service. Could you describe for me what branch you were in and where you went? This was what year?

S: I graduated high school in 1940. I got a job in one of the plants and then we had to register for the draft and I found myself drafted.

M: How did you feel about that?

S: Well, at that time, believe it or not, when we went to get examined and we passed our examinations and we knew that we were going to be accepted, we felt real good about it.

M: So there was a sense of pride then in going?

S: Oh yes. And at that time the age limit was twenty-one to be drafted and I was drafted just a little pre-twenty-one. In fact, on my birthday I was home and right after that we left here and we went up to whatever, and from there we took our basic training in Louisiana and some of the other different southern states down there and, before you know it, we took off to sail. We went to Oran, was our first stop. Then, like I said, North Africa. We were there and, like I said, at the time of it our basic thing then was to put up prison camps because of the troops captured.

M: And you were an engineer, right?

S: I was with the engineer corp.

M: So most of these camps were where? In West Africa or North Africa?

S: North Africa. We were around in Oran and we stood in Africa for about nine months, and then from there we moved up into around Naples and we went into Anzio. Our outfit, fortunately, being an engineering outfit, we got to see at least two thirds of Italy. We moved quite frequently to different areas and we finally wound up way up in Northern Africa. I am sorry, in Northern Italy, and in a city of which they called Bozano. And the reason why we went up there is because the war was over in Europe and they were packing up everything and getting ready to ship to the Pacific. We were up there in Northern Italy and that is where they had a lot of lumber mills, if you want to call them that, and we went up there and just took all of the lumber that we could take in order to crate all of the things that had to be shipped to the Pacific.

M: Did you have any family in Italy at this time?

S: Yes, I did. I had my grandmother, who was pretty well up in her years. In fact, we were preparing to go over and try to see her in about the time that I was preparing all that and I never did get to go there. There is talk now in going over there and I will tell you the reason why. There is man named Debartlo Jr. and he took a group there and they went over there to Italy. He went to where my mother and dad are from and he and my older son Chuckie are pretty close friends and he called one day and he asked Chuck, he said, "Hey, where are your people from?" And Chuckie, my son, did not know that they were from Agnone. Anyway he said, "We are in Agnone up here and there is a big Via named Via Saulino."

M: Really.

S: So we were talking about it. I have always wanted to go back there and I think that one of these days, not too long, I am going to go back.

M: So were these relatives or anything?

S: So, I do not know. We are waiting for them to get back from there. They went to London. Chuckie and them are in London now. The 49'ers played the football there yesterday. They did take a bunch of pictures of all of this and I am going follow it up from there.

M: They could be cousins or something.

S: Something. Like I said, Via Saulino, but I did not see any Via Debartlo or anything, so it could be something. I think that I am going to try to follow it up from there to see whether it is.

M: See the background on your family. Okay, when you were discharged from the service, did you come back to Youngstown? What was it like when you returned?

S: Well, I do not know that there was really that much of a change.

M: How about job-wise?

S: Job-wise, I went back to the job that I originally had before I was drafted.

M: What was that?

S: I was down at one of the fabricating plants. They used to make steel piles and from there I made an application for the Police Department and the Fire Department. Finally, I was accepted on the Police Department back in 1949.

M: You were an officer on the Police Department?

S: No, I wound up being a detective. For twenty some years I was a detective.

M: What was that like?

S: Well, a lot better than it is today, let us put it that way. Well, back in those days we worked we worked six days a week all of the time. There was no forty hours. We worked six days a week. The pay was never too good. One of the reasons why I accepted it and took it then was because of the security that was behind it. They had a pension plan that, fortunately, I am taking the benefits of it today. But it was work and we enjoyed it back then.

M: And you said that you were a bailiff sometime after that?

S: Right. As I said, I left the department and they asked if I would take a bailiff's job in one of the municipal courts under Judge Haines, which I took. And that job entailed all court work, preparing of cases that had to come to court, but I finally had my fill of it and I said, "This is it and I retire."

M: Where were you living at this time?

S: When I first got married, we moved into an upstairs apartment that my wife and I rented. Then we bought a home on the East side, which was on Dalmatian at that time. Money was very, very hard to get. We were out looking at different areas within the city. And at that time they were just beginning to build here on the West side, Kirkmere area. And we tried to make applications for there and we had also looked at another home on the West side, put a down payment on it but we could never get the loan because the government said that we were not making enough money under a policeman's salary. So, I finally got to buy a home on the East side and I go that through the help of a friend who was in the real estate business. All of my three children were born there and then the neighborhood got so bad on the East side from what it used to be.

M: Well, how do you mean bad?

S: Well, it got more black and just terrible.

M: Well, what happened to all of the people that lived there?

S: Well, most of them just moved away. Most of them moved away and some of the ones that stood there have passed on and died.

M: Well, the house that you lived in, that you bought when you were married on Dalmatian, was that the same house that you lived in as a child?

S: No. I lived with my mother and dad, which was about three houses down from there.

M: That is interesting.

S: Yes, that was about three houses down from there. And the house that we lived in was a home that I can recall as a child being built at that time. It was one of the newer homes on the entire street.

M: So from there, where did you move from the East side to where?

S: From there we moved to where I live presently on Pineview.

M: And that is still in Youngstown?

S: That is still in Youngstown.

M: Is there any difference from the East side to where you live now? What are the people like in your neighborhood?

S: Oh, the people, you know we do not have the closeness up here that we had on the East side growing up. I do not know what it is but they just do not have that family closeness. Maybe it is because, at that time, we always used to hang clothes outside and, like I said, you baked outside and just stood outside and now everybody is just locked up more, I guess, then we were then.

M: Are there a lot of Italians in that neighborhood?

S: There is just a couple of families, two families, and they are directly across the street from us who are Italian. And they have some black Italians up there, too.

M: But it has changed from the East side to where you live?

S: Yes, definitely.

M: And you belong to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church?

S: I belong to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church.

M: Did your parents belong here?

S: My parents belonged here.

M: How about your children?



S: My children all came through Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church and still belong, my grandchildren do also. I was baptized here at Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Another interesting thing that I can remember back, in those days they had no transportation and the entire family, we used to strictly walk all of the time, rain, whatever the elements were. We always walked. It used to be on the Christmas Eve of that year and we used to come here and come to mass and we used to walk all of the way up to Albert Street and across to Great Oak Street, snowing, but how enjoyable it really was. Today we do not want to walk to the grocery store and back. I guess that it is so odd that the time that we spend coming back, all of the walking that we did.

M: I guess that you had to, though?

S: Walk, walk, walk to school, walk everywhere.

M: Can you describe what Youngstown was like? You said that you walked a lot. Do you remember anything in particular, how it changed from, say, maybe the 1930's or 1940's to what it looks like today in downtown Youngstown?

S: Well, downtown Youngstown, if you went down there even through the week, but I can remember just growing up even before we were inducted into the service we used to go downtown just to walk around and hang around. The crowds that were on Federal Street in downtown is a whole on both ends. We used to go down there and just stand around and look at the girls, I guess, and then whatever have you then, but just to see everything. My mother used to go down and she would buy chickens. She used to take the bus at the time and they would go in there and there would be certain chickens that she would want and they would tie the legs up and she would take them on the bus and come home and stand there and she would be pulling the feet on the chickens and she would just "chweok". I really liked that. They were so good.

M: Do you remember the street cars in Youngstown?

S: Yes, they used to run up and down the street.

M: Now were these ones with the cables?

S: No, they had to regular "D" tracks. They had the tracks.

M: When did they finally do away with these?

S: They were probably still around in the 1940's. They still had the street car. In fact the street car used to run downtown all of the way. It was quite a ride. In fact, that is what a lot of us used to do. They had a Sunday pass at that time which cost you a quarter and we used to take the kids and ride the street car back and

forth. It was just a joy to ride. They had the old street cars with the trolleys. We had the trolleys running up then, right after, that is, when they came out with the trackless trolleys.

M: Do you remember any of the businesses downtown in Youngstown?

S: We had a lot of the so called Italian stores down east.

M: These were grocery stores?

S: Grocery stores just like Laricia's. You had a lot of the chicken houses, fish houses and stuff like that, and we would go downtown there and go and buy live chickens. There is a difference.

M: Much different than today.

S: Much, much different.

M: Okay, as far as the church, can you describe some of the ethnic customs, for instance, on Christmas Eve. What sort of customs do you practice, or do you do anything special?

S: Well, different pastors, of course, practice their own different little things. Our big celebration, the baby is in different kinds of processions that we have here. That is just about it, carrying the infant Jesus up and putting him up in manger and stuff like that.

M: Does your family eat fish on Christmas Eve? Did your parents practice this, too?

S: Oh, yes.

M: Can you describe that for me, please?

S: Well, we always, with my parents, we would have the different varieties of fish. We used to have the eel, the calamari, and the other three or four different fish.

M: Someone told me that there were seven fish and that they represented something and I was wondering if you knew the story behind that? I have no idea.

S: I do not know of that. I never heard that.

M: That was the first time that I had heard that, too, and I was wondering if I was missing something.

S: I never heard that, but still with my family, on Christmas Eve we have about three different kinds of fish.

M: So you have keep that tradition then?

S: Yes, still carried. Christmas Eve everyone comes over to our home and has Christmas.

M: Now, do your children speak Italian?

S: No.

M: How about your grandchildren?

S: No.

M: So you really have not passed this along to them?

S: I just had no way of passing it on. Like I said, I am beginning to forget it myself. You know, I try to use it around here with the Italian people sometimes and still carry it on pretty good.

M: Now was there a difference with the Italians that belong to this church? I know that there was a variety. Do they all speak the same dialect? Is that part of the problem there in passing along the tradition?

S: Oh, not really. You have different dialects but they are not that different, you know. Maybe just a little bit harder. Some of the words may be a little bit harder to understand but, for a general conversation, you can carry on and understand very well.

M: Were you ever to Italy to where your parents were from? I mean, have you ever gone back, other than being over there during World War II?

S: I believe that we will be going there.

M: Did your parents ever return?

S: No.

M: Did they ever, just in general, did they ever mention what it was like in comparison to where they grew up to Youngstown? Did they ever think that it was better or worse than anything?

S: Well, I do not know whether it was better. It was probably a lot harder. They had

to work a lot harder than over there for what they got and other than that, they sure loved this country. I do not think that they would have ever wanted to go back to live there permanently again.

M: I know that a lot of immigrants that came here for instance, maybe the husband would just come and he worked here for a time and then he would go back and get enough money to go back. But that was not the case then, was it?

S: No. I know some people like that. We had a gent here just a few doors up who came over here and they raised a family here and he did quite well here, believe it or not. But the whole family is back over there now. I do not think that I would ever want to do that. I would like a little sight-seeing but like I say, I am planning, God willing, maybe one of these days I will go.

M: I think that that is wonderful. Is there anything else that you would like to add or mention that I have not covered? Is your wife Italian?

S: No.

M: Was there any problem with your family or your community or whatever because you married out of the Italians?

S: No. My wife fit in real, real well. She is Irish. I leave out all of the Polish jokes. She fit in real well with the customs and my mother and father and, likewise, us with them.

M: Now were her parents immigrants?

S: I do not know if her parents were or not.

M: Now did she grow up in the neighborhood that you did? I am just curious.

S: She was in the old neighborhood there on the East side.

M: Then this was part of all the ethnic groups getting along, you think?

S: The good old days which will never return.

M: Is that how you feel?

S: Oh, yes definitely.

M: Okay, thank you.

End Of Interview