

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Dan Pallante -- Family History

Personal Experience

O H 1255

MARY M SWIGGER

Interviewed

by

Daniel Pallante

on

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P This is an interview with Mary Swogger for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Family History of Dan Pallante, by Dan Pallante, at 6825 Lockwood Boulevard, on July 17, 1989, at 3:00 p m

S I was married on October 26, 1933. My husband was Clarence J. Swogger. He was born on October 28, 1903, and he died on March 22, 1983. He died from a stroke. He had the stroke on February 2, 1977. On that same day my brother Joe died in a hospital in Buffalo, New York, from cancer. That week is when they had a terrible snow storm in Buffalo and they could not even get his body out for a whole week. They had to delay the funeral.

Now I have three children. The first one was Catherine Elaine. She was born February 12, 1935. She died on April 1, 1935 at six weeks. The second was Donald William. He was born on January 31, 1937. Thank god he is still living. Patricia Anne was born on January 12, 1939. Don was married in 1957 right after he graduated from high school. He had two children, but then they were divorced. I do not remember the year. He remarried, and I think that was in 1977. Patricia was married in 1961 after high school and three years of nurses training at St. Elizabeth's hospital. She has three children. The oldest is 25 and the youngest is 21. Jim is the oldest and he is with Prudential Insurance in Vineland, New Jersey. Bridgette is the second child. She is the tour guide director in South Carolina. Catherine just graduated from college and is a department manager for Jacobsen Company in Columbus. That is the family history. When we were small kids, we lived in a log cabin in about the center of where the McGuffey mall is now on the Eastside on McGuffey Road.

P Who would have built that?

S I do not know. I do not have any idea. I just remember us living there. There was a sand bank there where they used to get sand for the contractors and all. I do not know if my father worked there or not. We had none of the comforts of home. We had oil lamps. We used to fight about who had to clean the shades on the oil lamps. That is all I remember of that place.

P That was the first place you lived?

S That is the first place that we remember living. Then we moved to a house on Madison Avenue -- I do not know if it was called Madison at that time or not -- right across from Madison Avenue School that is there now. Then my father built this house on Verelmon, which years ago was called Maple.

P How long would you have lived in that log cabin?

S I do not know. We were little kids. It was before we went to school, and I am 82, so that would have had to been at least 75 or 80 years ago. We did not start school until we moved to Maple Avenue, which is now Verona.

P· So it would have been sometime around 1905?

S. Yes Is our math right? After we lived on Madison Avenue my father built this house. It was a really nice house Catherine was born there There is five years difference between she and I, and I remember the day she was born I thought she was a cat. I wondered why my mother had a cat in bed with her I was five years old at that time. Later on, I do not remember the year, he built a house right next door to it where we all went to school from and grew up in We lived there until we all left. My mother died in the house, in the brick house.

When we were little kids before we even started school, the end of the street was just a big woods It is run through now to the next street, which I forget the name. There was this beautiful woods down there and a spring where we used to go down and play. We were allowed to go down with supervision There was a creek that came from the spring and made a pond In the wintertime we would skate on the pond, but of course, we could not afford skates so we made skates out of curtain rods We improvised. There was no street lights or anything at that time Later on the street lights were put on and it was a big deal to go out and play under the lights.

The boys played kick the can and the girls played with their little dolls We made our dolls out of old socks and old clothes. Four in those days came in sacks of cloth Your mother always bought one-hundred pounds of flour because there was no bakeries then You baked everything yourself You made doll clothes out of those. We wore underwear with the words Sarasota because there was no Clorox in those days You could not take it out We used to wear panties that had Sarasota Flour written on it It is true Like I said, the boys, there was no such a thing as buying baseballs. There was no baseball at that time. They just played catch, or threw the ball back and forth to each other. I do not remember what they boys played with

My father was a cement contractor He made his own cement block He had this little piece of equipment, a machine of some kind in the backyard, but it was all done by hand He had no education at all I do not know if he could add two and two, he had no math He taught me, gave me the figures, and when I was in grade school he would know how many feet the cellar was. No, he knew the size of the cement block and I would figure it out, how many cement block he would need for those measurements

P He made his own cement block?

S He made his own cement block by hand with this little machine, mixed up all the stuff and everything It was in the backyard That is how he did his business A lot of his work is still used today That house he lived in that was built, the cement steps are still in perfect condition as the day he made them I think Catherine told him about making the driveway and the stone walk up at the Arms It is still there on Wick Avenue

P: Were most of the roads dirt then?

S: Yes I do not remember, but it was years afterwards that the street was paved Everything was dirt, then.

P Did the family have a car or truck?

S: Yes, my father had a little Ford It was called a roadster in those days He made a little half ton box for the back of it. I remember him making this. He used to put the seats in it for us kids and he would take us out to our relatives that lived in New Bedford that were farmers On Sunday afternoon he would take us out there Today, it would seem like you were going to New York City. It was so far away That is the only car that I could remember him having We were in school, so it would have to be in the 1920s, because I graduated from school in 1923. That would have to be in the early 1920s, or maybe earlier than that. I hope I am getting my dates right I graduated from Immaculate in 1923 and had the highest average in the room I got a statue of the Blessed Virgin as a prize, and I still have it. I showed it to my daughter and said, "I do not want anything to happen to this when I am gone " That is how old that is, 65 years old. That was my claim to fame Of course, my father died in August of 1923. He died in the same year that I graduated from grade school My Uncle Frank did not live with us at the time, but he kind of sheltered us after that. He kind of looked out for us because my mom was left with the four kids

P What did he die of?

S At that time it was called consumption It was a very prevalent disease at that time of people's lives There was no medication for it. What caused it? I do not know. They were worried I remember we had to go to St. Elizabeth's Hospital It is called relief today, but it was called Allied Council then If you could not afford the doctor then you were allowed to go to St Elizabeth's to the emergency They were worried about me contracting the disease at that time because I was thin They were not worried about the other kids They were worried about me.

P Did both parents speak with a strong Irish accent?

S No Mom had a lot of expressions Instead of saying you, she would say ya's We were little. I do not remember my father in his conversation Not that I remember having any Irish accent at all Expressions, but not accents. After I graduated from Immaculate I went to Lincoln High School, which was on the Eastside off Oak Street. I forget the name of the street. It was either Garland or Pearl. It was in that area. Of course Uncle Frank wanted me to continue to have a good education Maybe he thought I was smart It was because I got a good grade in grade school He questioned me all the time on what I learned He did

not think I was learning anything, which I was not. I could answer every question that the class was asked. I could anticipate questions from the good training that we had from the Immaculate.

We had algebra the last year of our eighth grade. We had algebra the last six months of our eighth grade. Those were things that were not even thought about in the public schools at that time. He did not think I would accomplish anything at Lincoln so he had me quit there after a couple months, then I started at Ursuline. I took what they call the academic course, the first year which is the course for normal education, no specific thing. Then Mom said, "You have to go to work." She needed the money, so I took the commercial course. Of course, I graduated in 1925 with the regular graduating class. I got my certificate. I was good at bookkeeping, but math was my favorite subject. I was pretty good in math.

P Who was the oldest of the four kids?

S John was the oldest, and I will tell you, it is funny why. I was a year ahead of him in school and I was younger than him. I was thirteen months younger than he was. When we were ready to start school, Mom sent us to a little school by Truscon Steel. It was called McGuffy Street at that time, which is now Madison Avenue, right off Albert Street. There was maybe three or four rooms in the school and they had a kindergarten. Mom sent us there because we were too young to walk all the way over to the Immaculate. We got a little paper notifying us that we were ready for the first grade. He lost his and I kept mine. There was no records in those days. You had to produce whatever was necessary for what you were doing. He lost his and I kept mine. We went to Immaculate to start there, they put me in the second grade and he had to stay in the first because he did not have anything to prove that he had the first grade. Everybody thought I was the oldest because of that. I was ahead of him all through grade school. He was born March 13, 1908, and I was born on May 15, 1909. There was fourteen months difference. I do not know if he went to East or not. Catherine went to East High School.

P I think she said he went to Immaculate.

S That could very well be. We all had to go because there was no relief in those days like there is today. They did not offer anything. You took in boarders if you had to. Eventually, my Uncle Frank that sent me to school came and lived with us and paid board. That is what we existed on until we were old enough to go to work. Then I went to work for Senator Roberts, I think until 1927. I think her name was Mother Agnus that was principal of Ursuline High School. Senator Eugene R. Roberts went up to Ursuline High School so they would recommend somebody to be his secretary, or stenographer, what they were called in those days, to go down to Columbus with him. She suggested me, which was an honor. I presume he interviewed me, although my mind is very fuzzy about that.

I got the job, anyhow. I was seventeen years old at the time. I had never been off the Eastside before. I had to go down on the train by myself. Somebody gave me the name, and I do not know whether it is Mother Agnus. I will say the principal, because Mother Agnus seems to be in my mind. I could be wrong, whether she gave me the name of this lawyer in Columbus that I was go to see so he could find me a room.

I did not do that for a couple of days because we left at 10:00 p.m. and boarded the train at the old Pennsylvania Depot up on West Federal Street. We traveled over night and got there early in the morning. I met this really nice lady. She was my partner in my seat. I will tell you how dumb I was, she found out about me, a little bit of history and all; where I was going, why I was on the train. She said, "We will go to breakfast together and I will show you how to get out of the station and everything. We will go Dutch." I did not know what she meant by that. She paid for the breakfast because I did not know what she meant. She paid for the breakfast and took me out and showed me where to get the streetcar. She told me how many blocks it was to the Y.W.C.A. She said, "You go there and get a room until you contact your friend that you have to."

I went to the "Y" with my little suitcase. In those days there was a row of beds in the dormitory. It was a dormitory type thing. That is where I stayed for a week. I lived out of that for a week. I had my suitcase beside the bed, ate my meals, found a restaurant or something to get my meals. Things were so easy living at the time that the suitcase just stood there every night when I went back. This attorney found me a room with a really nice lady. It was on South Main Street in Columbus. I still have some of the letters that Barbara wrote me then. She was elderly and she had a son that was single that lived with her. I had a room upstairs and kitchen privileges. A lot of times she would have something ready when I came home from work. She would say, "Come on and eat with us." A lot of nights I would bring doughnuts home.

The difference in the pay. I forget what the pay was when I worked for them. It was \$90.00 a month. It was like a fortune in those days. It was not as complicated a job then as it is today. There was not that many laws to be made. People did not break the laws so we did not have to make new laws. They were mostly all attorneys who had their jobs at home. In fact, I think the majority of them were, or they were in some other business like this Niles P. Johnson. He had to be quite well known in Youngstown, and I think he was head of a grocery store or produce company. He had a son, I think, that went into politics. I did his letters. When that finished, I cannot remember, but I do not think Senator Roberts went back. It was all patronage like it is today. I only worked during that one session of the legislature.

I came home and worked for this real estate company in the old terminal building. They were a company out of Pittsburgh. Their main office was in Pittsburgh. They used to bring poor people here from the little towns around Pennsylvania that were mostly all miners. They sold a lot of property out on the West side. A lot of the homes are still in existence out there. Many generations of people are still on the West side. I recognize the names of them every once in

a while. He built the homes. He would sell homes to them that were already built. He had his own contractors. He would bring them here, sell them the lot, then build them the house.

During that time, a little later on, the Depression hit. He had a lot of properties that he rented to people. When there was nothing moving the poor people would come in to pay he said, "Just keep that in the office and use that for your salary." They would come in and some months money would come in, and some months money would not. If I had a fairly good month and some rents came in I would sort of budget that for myself so that I had a little bit of money on hand all the time. Then it got so that there was nothing coming in, even though the poor people that rented the homes could not pay their rent.

There was a lot of lawyers in the terminal building at that time. Some of them were real well known, but I cannot think of their names. Anyhow, they had to let their girls go. Of course, as long as the building corporation let this real estate leave their office open, I was there. If they needed something important typed up they would come to me. I would get a quarter for every letter that I would type. I had a notary public commission at the time. I would get a quarter for every paper that I would notarize. Some weeks I made a quarter, some weeks I made nothing, some weeks I made a dollar. Then the prices were in conformity with your wages, so to speak.

There was this market downtown, George's. People will remember him. He was in politics, too. He had this big market down next to the square now. I do not know what is there now. He sold bread, five loaves for a quarter. Meat was cheap. I remember I was going with a guy at the time and we were going to have his mother for dinner. We did not have any money, so I made a few pennies that week and went down and got a pork roast. It cost \$ 27. It was \$ 09 cents a pound. You did not make any money, but then things were reasonable then. If you made a dollar you ate for a week.

P. Things really changed after the war?

S. Yes. Then things kept getting worse, and finally the real estate company owed so much rent that they just took the furniture for what they owed for rent and closed them up. It was a beautiful office. They had beautiful furniture and everything. Then Mr. Kemp, who was manager at State Auto Insurance at the time, was on the same floor, but he had a little office. He was still in business. He moved into the office that the real estate company was in because it was nicer than his office. He asked me if I would work for him. He had a secretary at the time. He was paying her \$7.50 a week. He let her go and hired me for \$5.00, which was heaven on earth, \$5.00 a week. I worked for him and things were looking up. Then I got married in the meantime and I wanted to move into my own place. I think I was pregnant at the time, too. I had to leave. I asked him and said, "My mother needed the money. Would he take Catherine?" Catherine had taken commercial courses at East High, and she was out of school at the time. I do not remember if she was working any place or not. He

said, "Okay, we will try her " She retired from there, from State Auto

P Where was Clarence working?

S Republic Steel When we were going together and work was fairly good, he bought this beautiful big Chrysler Roadster, which they were called at that time It had red leather seats. Of course, the Depression kept getting worse and worse and he lost it. Then when things started picking up a little bit, it was still on the lot We bought it back. That was an incident, too I have to tell you, when I was still at home before I was going with Clarence, I was dating and we were in an automobile accident I had broken ribs and I was in the hospital a couple days. They kept you in the hospital for broken ribs. When the insurance company came and settled, I got a settlement of what I think was \$50 00. We had no radio, television was not even a dream yet We had no radio, no music at all. We took the \$50 00 to one of the stores downtown and bought a little radio We really enjoyed that. When the first payment came, we did not have any money so they repossessed it That is the story of my life so far.

P Where did you first live with Clarence?

S. On South Forest Avenue, right off Himrod in the upstairs of a double house. We paid \$10 00 a month rent He worked for Republic Steel all his life His dad worked in the open whole department and he got him a job in there. At that time, it was bootlegged. If you wanted whiskey or something, you bought it from a bootlegger. Anyhow, he got caught. He had a really good friend who bootlegged whiskey and he brought a pint into the mill one day. They used to bring it into the mill. Then they would sit by what they called a coke jack, whatever that was, and they would drink the whiskey for lunch or after lunch. They got caught, and however many was in the group that day, they got fired. Shortly after that they decided to put in the electric well in the mill, which was down off Poland Avenue. He applied and got a job there in the construction of the mill when they were putting it in When the mill was ready to operate, he applied and got a job on the mill. He got Joe a job, too When Joe was able to go to work he got Joe a job there, and Joe's eye sight was very bad. When Joe was little, Joe never finished the eighth grade because through malnutrition, he went blind He would not wear glasses He was so proud that he would not wear glasses. His eyesight came back. When he needed the job, I do not remember if it was his first job or what, but Clarence wrote down all the things for the eyesight examination when he was hired for a job He brought them home and Joe memorized them He passed the eye test through that. He retired from Republic Steel They worked themselves up and they retired, both of them. That is how he got into the electric well. He was head welder there when he retired. They had many a strike. I remember in 1937, I do not know how long it lasted, but it was quite a lengthy strike

Welfare was in existence at that time and I remember being at the store



and this lady behind me had fruit stamps, some kind of a coupon to get groceries. She had ham and steaks, bacon, and we had nothing. When you were on strike you used your savings. We had a little bit of savings. We bought hamburger, dried beans, stuff like that because we had to stretch our savings. When you were on strike there was no strike funds or anything. I do not think there was even a union then. Maybe that is why they were striking, to get the union in. There were other strikes, but that one in 1937 lasted a long time because the rent was so high to try to pay, two or three dollars over that ten dollars.

P When did you finally end up in Hubbard?

S We moved to Hubbard in 1941. Donny was a very sick child. He always had a cold and bronchial problems. At that time they had visiting nurses that came to the house. I cannot remember how he got into contact with them. They had clinics and they were for the public. You could bring your babies. There was down, right off Center Street just as you approach the Center Street Bridge. We lived on South Forest Avenue which was on that side of town. You took your babies down there and it was free of charge. It was a community thing. Of course, the nurse, she was a doll. If you had a child that needed attention between visits, she would visit you at your home, which she did.

We lived upstairs on the second floor. The kids played in the same room all the time. If they had a cold that day, they came out and played in the same room. There was never any sun that hit that room. She advised us, "If you can at all, get out where he could get outside and play and get air during the day. I think it would help." I started, the day that we went to see about the house. It was out near his mother's because she lived in that immediate area in Hubbard and they were digging the cellar. We went out and talked to see how much the house would cost. There was no apartments then. You lived in an upstairs or downstairs house, or side by side. I started saving quarters, nickels, dimes. We went out and talked to the man and I had that envelope with two hundred dollars in it, and they were nickels, dimes, and quarters, maybe a few dollar bills. He accepted it as a down payment.

There was not even a house on that end of the street. All the cellars were done. He had built on the other side up across the railroad tracks, clear at the opposite end that we finally lived on. Our house was the first house that was built there. Two hundred dollars, and we did not do business at the bank. You saved your money and you kept it in your drawer at home. I took that envelope with pennies, nickels, and dimes in it. That is what we bought the house with. It cost \$4,500.00. It was only \$4,400.00. We had picked a house out that was closer to Route 62 and Route 7 because there were buses around at that time. I thought I wanted as close to the bus as I could get so I could go to town and get the groceries. We had a car, but Clarence worked every day and he took the car. He worked weekends and everything then. We went out to talk with him about further proceeding to buy the house and at that time he said, "I have a

house started. The deal fell through. The people cannot buy it. There is an extra lot on it. If you will take that, I will give you that extra lot for \$100.00." That is all he had to say to Clarence, because Clarence's dad got three lots. We got 100, 100, and 80, by 325 deep for \$4,500.00. The interest at that time was four and a half percent at the Home Savings. All you had to do was have a job and be reasonably decent. It took us twenty years to pay it off, \$45.00 a month. People say today, "Gee, you are making money. You can afford these prices that they ask." I do not go for that because in those days you made less, but everything you bought was in proportion to what you needed.

End Of Interview