

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Niles Police Department

Personal Experience

O. H. 578

GAVINE ROSS

Interviewed

by

Stephen G. Papalas

on

July 20, 1982

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Niles Police Department

INTERVIEWEE: GAVINE "CHAPPY" ROSS

INTERVIEWER: Stephen G. Papalas

SUBJECT: Police officers and station, Mayors, KKK riots,
Main Street, Businesses in Niles during 1920's
and 1930's

DATE: July 20, 1982

P: This is an interview with Gavine "Chappy" Ross, at his home, at 1341 Clark Street, Niles, Ohio, on July 20, 1982, by Stephen G. Papalas, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program.

Chappy, I understand that you were born here in Niles.

R: That is right.

P: Can you tell me where at?

R: I was born at 217 Langley Street in Niles, Ohio. I have four brothers and four sisters. My dad and mother's names are Joseph Ross and Mamie Ross. Do you want my brothers' names?

P: Yes.

R: The oldest brother is Patsy Ross. My next brother is John Ross, Mike Ross, and myself. I have four sisters, MaryAnn, Caroline, Annie, and Jennie.

P: John Ross is the police chief of Niles today?

R: Yes, he is the police chief of Niles. Do you want me to tell you when they died?

P: Yes.

R: Two brothers and two sisters have passed away in the last four years.

- P: Where about on Langley Street were you born? What can you tell me about Langley Street at the time when you were growing up?
- R: When growing up on Langley Street there were probably around eight houses on the street. Right next door there was a house that they used to call the Black House. It used to be a big beer joint. Right across the street used to be the Niles Firebrick. In the back of that used to be the old blast furnaces. One the side of that on the track used to be the Erie Station.
- P: You went as far as junior high school, right, because you had to go to work?
- R: That is right.
- P: Where did you work at? How old were you?
- R: When I started to work, I was about fourteen years old. I worked at the Mahoning Valley Steel as the helper for old Rick Williams. I used to jump packs for him on a hot mill. He used to pay me \$5 an evening. Then I started working at the Stevens' plant when I was eighteen years old or a little older than that probably. I worked there from 1932 until I retired in 1971.
- P: When you were in school, junior high school, where was the school at.
- R: The school was right where it is at now. It is on Washington Avenue. I take that back, it was on Hartzell Avenue.
- P: That was Washington School?
- R: Yes. That was Washington Avenue. That is where I went to school up until ninth grade. I had to quit school and I went to work. I worked at the Stevens' plant.
- P: Chappy, could you tell me what year you might be able to remember, the earliest year you could remember, about downtown Niles?
- R: I can remember downtown Niles when we moved out of 217 Langley to 316 Langley Street. That is up by old Fusco's building. In back of there, there used to be Fusco's plant. It used to be a dry cleaner, Fred Fusco and his dad. He had two brothers and I think one of the Fusco boys is still living. I don't know where he is at.

At that time, we stayed there for eight or nine years. When I was a young kid, I used to drive seven fellows. They used to be boarders there. We used to live in the back and they lived in the front. I used to drive them to where Milton Dam is today.

I used to drive them down to Milton Dam every morning and pick them up at night and after school. I went to school at that time. After that we moved from there. We were there for eight or ten years. We moved up on State Street right across from the St. Stevens School. From there, I lived there until I got married.

P: What can you tell me about your parents? Where were they from?

R: My parents are from Naples, Italy; both of them are from Naples, Italy. My mother came here when she was around thirteen years old. My dad was maybe ten years older than she was. They got married. She was thirteen when they got married. They used to live on Mahoning Avenue up on top of the building there where an old water tank used to be. That is on Mahoning Avenue. Right now it is the corner of Mason and Mahoning Avenue. They have got houses built there right now. There used to be an old water tank. They used to live up there. From there, they moved down to where I was born. That was before I was born.

P: What about your wife? What was her maiden name?

R: Her maiden name was Dorhoff. She was born in Wyoming.

P: Do you know anything about her parents?

R: They came from Russia. He worked in a coal mine in Colorado or someplace. I am not sure. They moved to Youngstown. My wife had three sisters and two brothers. One brother died. He had pneumonia when he was about eleven years old. I think it was about that time. They were living on Russell Avenue at that time. First they lived down on Walnut Street. That was when the old mill used to be down there. There used to be a mill down there where the sewage plant is now. It is the Mahoning Valley. It goes through the Mahoning Valley. Her father worked there for many years until I was married.

When I got married in 1934 before my wife had her first baby, her dad was coming home from work one afternoon while we were at a show. He was killed by a train on the corner of Summit and the railroad tracks down at Summit Avenue. My oldest son, Donald, was born two weeks after he was killed.

P: Right there by the railroad tracks by Kolon's place then?

R: That is right. Right where Kolon's Bar was.

P: What can you remember about downtown Niles?

R: Downtown Niles, I was working in the theater. They used to have the old Warner first. That was down on State Street.

Right next to the Warner theater they used to have Angle Cimenaro. There used to be a barber there next door to him and right next to that they used to have a bus depot. The buses used to stop there and pick people up.

P: What year would that be?

R: That was 1925. When I started working the shows, the buses were still there. They were picking up people and taking them to Warren and Youngstown. It was a round-trip route. They would all go around. Below there on a corner around State Street there used to be Jensen's Hardware. On the corner the bank used to be the United Bank. Up above the bank there used to be People's Shoe Store. Joe Doran used to manage it at one time. Right next to that was old Hoffman's Store. You had Hoffman's Store there. He used to have a two-story building there. It burned down. I remember one of the ladies was upstairs who burned to death. The fire department wasn't there. It was over there where the post office is today. That is where the old police station and fire department were together. Right next to that was Ideal Market, and the Dollar Bank is where it is at now. It is still there. They remodeled it. All of these buildings are torn down now.

P: From the urban renewal program?

R: That is right.

P: Who were some of the merchants that you might remember? Did you have any favorites?

R: I used to know all of them. I was assistant manager at the theater under Mr. Peter Rufo. He was the manager of the Robbins, the McKinley, and the Warner Theaters at that time. We had three theaters that were under the Robbins Company. At that time I was assistant manager under Pete Rufo for about seventeen years. I worked for the theaters plus I still worked at the mill. I worked in the mill in the daytime and at night, at five o'clock, I would go to work and come home at eleven o'clock, six nights a week. Besides that I used to have other jobs. At midnight I used to go with Ace DeMatthews. I used to put ceramic tile in. We worked until maybe two or three o'clock in the morning. I used to get up in the mornings at 7:30 to go to work down at Stevens' plant. I did that for many years. I worked with Gene Roberts for a long time after that.

P: Who is that?

R: Gene Roberts is a contractor. Did you ever hear of Gene Roberts?

P: No.

- R: Right now he lives on Robbins Avenue. I used to work for Louis Boccia, the contractor. I worked for him many years.
- P: What can you tell me about the theater that you worked at?
- R: The Robbins Theater?
- P: That was on Main Street?
- R: That was where the racket shop is now. That was where the Robbins Theater was. Right next to that there was a jewelry shop. Next to that, they used to have a Kroger Store. The Kroger Store was right where Reisman's building is now. There used to be a big Kroger Store. There was a jewelry store between that. Then there was the theater. Next to the theater we used to have a furniture store. Sam Soriano used to run it. Next to that was a McKinley Bank where it is now. Mr. Evans used to run it at that time. Below there were a few other stores, but I can't recall what they were. There was a grocery store, a shoe store, and Jones' Poolroom was there right where that finance company is today.
- P: Chappy, what can you remember about the inside of the theater? If I was to walk into the front door after I bought a ticket, what would I see?
- R: The first thing you would see would be a big candy stand with a big popcorn machine. We used to have popcorn in fifty pound bags. It was already made. We never used to make it like they do today. They brought it in from a company out of Youngstown, in fifty pound bags. Our candy used to come in gross lots in big boxfuls. We used to set them up everyday. We set up candy and Hershey bars. At that time, the big Hershey bars were 5¢. The most expensive one was 10¢; those were the big Powerhouse bars. Popcorn used to be 5¢ a little bag or 10¢ for a big box, and you used to get butter with it. That was the highest you ever paid for popcorn.

When you came in there, we used to have three aisles; the middle aisle, the one on the right side, and one on the left side. We used to have a ramp that you went down to the stage. We used to have a stage there. We used to have shows there, a lot of amateur shows years back. We used to have amateur shows and a lot of times we used to have a guy tap dancing on there. We used to have a very nice, young fellow, Geno Lazzari. He used to be a tap dancer. He is dead now. There are other fellows that I know that used to go and dance on the stage.

At the Warner Theater, their's was different. We used to have a candy store place, but it was on the opposite side. We only had two aisles in there. There were two side aisles and no middle aisle. There were about three hundred seats in that theater.

Robbins had an upstairs and two balconies and side views. They used to seat around between 1,000 and 1,200 people.

P: Did they draw big crowds?

R: We used to have a packed house all of the time years ago. The theaters used to be 10¢ for children and 25¢ for an adult. A lot of times they used to give tickets out for 10¢ and you could go in to the show. Later on in the years we used to give bank nights. The whole family could go for 25¢. Later on in the years, they started coming out with dishes. You could go in and buy a ticket and on the way in you would get a plate or a dish. A lot of people used to pack those houses in.

P: What was a bank night?

R: Bank night was when we used to give money out. They used to sign their name when they came in. We used to have a big book that you signed your name in it. When you go to bank nights and if you were there that night and if your name was called, you would win maybe \$100, \$500, or whatever the prize was. *maybe*

P: Like a raffle?

R: Yes, it was like a raffle. We used to have bank nights and raffle nights.

The McKinley Theater, that was down about two blocks on the same street, on Main Street. The Warner was on State Street. We used to have another theater. It was right where the home of the elderly people are living now. Right there used to be the Stafford Theater. That was run by Mr. Stafford. I used to work there too, years ago.

P: Is that where Central Park was?

R: It is where Central Park is now. That used to be a school there. It was old Central. It used to be there. Years ago they tore it down. Then they had a stand built there. They used to have Capaz Band. They used to have music there every Sunday. People used to gather around that park. Then on State Street, up around the corner they used to have what they called George the Greek. He used to have a shoeshine parlor and block hats. That guy was one of the best fellows around for that time. He died about five years ago. He used to shine shoes and block hats. He used to have a little place in there right where the article shop was put in later on in years. Pete Rufo's brother used to run that, Henry Rufo. Right next to the Warner Theater on State Street was Mike Ross, the barber.

P: Your brother?

R: No, he was one of my cousins. He started a barbershop. There is nothing over there now. Right next to the barber-shop we used to have old Albert Guanere. It used to be right on the corner of State Street and Park Avenue. It used to be Albert Guanere there. We used to go in there and buy ice cream cones for a nickel. We used to get three scoops of ice cream. We used to get a bag of candy for a nickel. He used to make homemade candy. Fudge and any kind of candy you wanted he had there. He used to have banana splits; 10¢ or 15¢ was the most you ever paid for a banana split. You used to get three scoops of ice cream in it, and all the flavors you wanted on top. In his place there were all marble tables.

P: Marble tables?

R: All marble tables in that place. It was nice and clean. I think this family was a very big family too. He must have had around five or six sons. Then he had four daughters. I think just very few are living. I am not sure.

On Church Street there used to be Abraham's Store, E. J. Abraham. Right next to E. J. Abraham was Law's Market. Right where United Cigar is today that used to be Holloway's Funeral Home. He used to have a horse and buggy in those days. That is where he used to have his funeral home right there.

P: He had a livery stable then too?

R: That is right. That livery stable went long. After that, years go by, and they tore it down and built a big garage there. That was where Emery Powers had his garage there for many, many years. I used to work there a lot of times with Angrid Caurso. He was like a foreman under Danny Powers. Danny Powers was the boss there. Emery was his big boss. That is his brother. Emery used to run the flower shop on Vienna Road. It was all that land up there.

King's Newsstand used to have papers there. I used to sell papers. It was where Bank America is now. It was right there.

P: Did they call that the Idle Hour Cigar Store then?

R: No, they used to call it King's Newsstand.

P: Where was the Idle Hour Cigar Store?

R: That I can't remember unless that was Bill Crize's place. Bill Crize took over after Tom King left. Then they moved it down to . . . Right now there is nothing there; it is just a parking lot. That was where they moved the King's Newsstand. It is a parking lot right next to Calvin's Drugstore. That was all King's Newsstand. There used to be Soriano's Music Store. They used to have a big hotel over there right on the corner

where Calvin's Drugstore is.

P: Was that the Antler Hotel?

R: Yes, the Antler Hotel. Then down a block from there, where Jumble's Barbershop is today, that used to be Nicodene's Hotel. Right across the street used to be a big three-story building where Mitchell Shaker's mother and father had a big store there for many, many years. I remember when we were kids and our mother and father used to buy our clothes there. We used to pay \$2 for a pair of shoes. They used to buy pants for \$1. Nowadays, you can't get them. That is what it is.

P: As you were growing up, did you know any of the policemen from the Niles Police Department?

R: I knew a lot of them. In fact, I used to be down at the police station a lot. I lived about a block from the police station at that time.

P: Did you know a Dickey Neiss?

R: Yes, I did very well.

P: What kind of man was he?

R: He was a good fellow. Dickey used to always walk the beat. That is all he ever did. He and Newhart, a policeman that they hired later on, used to check all of the doors around town. At that time, they used to have a policeman to check all of the doors to see if they were closed or opened. They checked all of the theaters. They used to walk down as far as Frank DeJute's Garage, way down at the end of Main Street right where the VFW is now. Right there used to be Frank DeJute's Garage. There was a big garage there.

Later on in years, Stiver's was there for many years. It was there. Then there used to be a gas station that is still there today. It used to be run by the Salerno brothers. They ran that. Angelo Caruso used to work for him. After Powers went out of business, he went up there and worked. He was down there. Angelo worked at the Barrel Works, the same place I did. It was many years back in maybe 1940 or 1945.

King's Newsstand was right where that parking lot is today like I said.

P: What else can you tell me about Dickey Neiss? Do you remember him getting shot once?

R: No, I don't remember his getting shot, but I heard about it. I remember hearing about him getting shot. There used to be a few other policemen there. Berline was the chief of police.

He was a very tall man. He was about 6'3" and weighed about 275 pounds. He was a very nice fellow and chief of police.

Lawrence used to be a motorcycle cop. He was a young fellow about 5'5". He was a skinny fellow. They used to have motorcycles at that time instead of police cruisers.

Booth was another motorcycle cop. The city employee that we have today, Smitty, he used to be a motorcycle cop. The one that retired, Scotty, was a motorcycle cop at that time. Then we had, when Berline got out of office, Matt McGowan. He was one of the best fellows that we had in town. He used to pick up all of these kids in town. He used to have a gymnasium for them. He used to pick them up and teach them how to fight. He had Sonny Horne, Birkovich, Easterbrook. Easterbrook used to be a policeman too. He was a fighter. A lot of those policemen . . . They used to have a Casper. A lot of those policemen way back . . .

P: Do you remember Chief Crooder at all?

R: No, I don't.

P: How about a little bit later? You would be a little kid then. How about Jack Barrett?

R: No, I don't remember him either.

P: You were a kid then.

R: I was probably five or six at that time. I remember when Crow was mayor, Charles Crow and Marshall.

P: What do you remember about Crow? Tell me about Mayor Crow.

R: Mayor Crow was kind of a happy-go-lucky guy. He always treated the people really nice. I didn't know who was in his administration. At that time, they didn't have it like they do now. They have safety directors. They only had one boss. He was the boss.

Then we used to have Marshall; he was our mayor.

P: What kind of man was he?

R: He was a very nice fellow.

P: Do you remember Kistler?

R: Yes, I remember Kistler. He used to be an insurance agent too at that time. He was an insurance agent and the mayor of our town.

P: Looking back now, who would you say was the best mayor the city had?

R: The best mayor I ever thought was . . . Do you mean way back or just any time?

P: Any time.

R: I think Carmen DeChristofaro. In my time, he was a very good man. He treated everybody alike wherever he was, whether they were Catholic, Protestant, black or white. He treated them all alike. He tried to help them all out. He was a very good man. I think he was in office for four or five terms. I'm not sure, but at least four terms.

P: I want to go back to an incident that we mentioned awhile ago with Neiss. You said you heard that he was shot. What can you remember about it? Can you remember anything that you heard?

R: No, I don't remember too much about that.

P: Do you remember what year it might have been?

R: I don't remember that either. You only hear it from mouth. People talk. At that time, I was pretty small.

We used to have very nice policemen. We used to have a policeman that lived on Washington Avenue, Warsaw. He was one of those fellows who was happy-go-lucky. He walked the other way if there was a fight here.

P: Andy Warsaw?

R: Pardon?

P: Was Andy his first name?

R: I think it was Andy. No, it was Nick Warsaw. He was a very nice fellow too. I recall back in 1934 I was working at the Barrel Works at that time. Rivella's used to have the AC where the AC is today on the corner of Mason and Wood. They used to have a big gambling joint there. Right across the street used to be Jennings' AC. Jennings used to have a lot of boxers in there. That place used to have more boxers that came from all over the country. They used to train there. They used to have good boxers like Easterbrook. Mat McGowan came from out of there. Jimmy Mouch, Sandfry Brothers became good fighters. They used to have a lot of those fights there. They were good fighters. My oldest brother, in fact, used to be under the name of Patsy Flanagan. He was one of the lightweight fighters here in this town at the same time that Easterbrook and Mouch were.

P: What can you remember about some of the later mayors after Kistler?

R: That far back, I just can't remember. I was real small. Up in the years I used to stay at the police station and knew a lot of them. They used to have the fire department there. A lot of those guys I used to know used to be firemen. They are all retired now.

P: Do you remember Dick Whitticker?

R: Yes, I do. I remember him.

P: What kind of man was he?

R: I didn't know too much about him. He was always on the force. He was a policeman too. There were a lot of policemen that were very nice fellows. It wasn't like it is today. In those days, they didn't have twice the stuff that they have now like dope and all of that stuff, young kids, speeding, reckless driving and all of that. They never had that. At that time, I remember we had very few cars on the road. There were very few cars.

P: Most had horses, huh?

R: We used to have streetcars. We used to have streetcars coming through Niles that go to Girard and Youngstown right from Niles right along the track. We used to have streetcars in the middle of Robbins Avenue. We used to have a streetcar line. We used to have a streetcar-bus depot, a car barn, right down there at the end of Robbins Avenue where the fabricating plant is now. It is right in back of where GE (General Electric) is now. Right in back of there used to be an old car barn. Then we used to have right along the car barn a fruit stand. It was a big fruit stand. Some big fellow used to have a fruit stand there. I don't remember his name. They moved that fruit stand up on the corner of Church Street. There used to be the **high school there** at that time, Old Central High School. That is where they put the fruit stand. That is where the B & O train house used to be. You had the B & O at that time and then the Erie. They used to have a lot of trains going down through this valley. This was one of the best industrial places in the country at one time. There was work all over. We had Republic, U. S. Steel, Mahoning Valley, Copperweld. We had all kinds of plants. We had Stevens' plant. Where Stevens was now there is a container division. They used to make boxcars there at one time.

P: Before that it was the Angle Aircraft.

R: They used to make airplanes.

I remember when they had the trouble here with the Ku Klux Klan. That was where all of the National Guard was. They were set in that building. The National Guard was in where the Stevens' building is now. That is where they had the National Guardsmen.

P: On the corner of Mason and Erie Streets?

R: That is right. The National Guard was there.

P: Chappy, what do you remember about the Ku Klux Klan riot?

R: It was a bad situation at that time between the Ku Klux Klan and the people. They were always mad and they always burned a cross. I remember the Central Park at one time when I was working at the Warner Theater. They came in there and burned a cross and there was a shooting. I think two people got killed at that time. I don't recall who they were. They went up there and there was a big fight at that place. That was where the old Central was at. Now it is the home for the elderly people. It was right in there. It was really bad.

P: Was that before the Ku Klux Klan riot itself?

R: That was a riot right there.

P: Before the one on Federal Street?

R: That was before that. They were having that all of the time. Then it quieted down. Later on in the years, it seemed like it was quieting down and they seemed to be making peace with each other. It seemed like they got along pretty good.

P: Why did the Klan even want to come into Niles?

R: That I don't know. I couldn't tell you. If they wanted to have a power over people or something like that, I couldn't tell you.

P: Someone told me that some Klan members desecrated the Catholic churches here in Niles shortly before that riot?

R: I don't remember that.

P: Who was involved there? Were you there at all? Did you get to see it at all?

R: I know a lot of people who were there, but I don't know their names. A lot of people have passed away; they are dead. I wouldn't mention any names because it would involve a lot of people and I don't think it is right.

P: Where were you on that day?

- R: I was at the theater at that time. It was right where the Warner Theater and the Stafford were together. That's where that riot started, right in that park there.
- P: How many people were involved?
- R: There were a lot of people. I couldn't tell you, but there were a lot of people.
- P: The Army had to come in?
- R: Yes. They had the National Guard come in.
- P: How long were they here in Niles?
- R: They were here maybe three or four months. They lived right in that place there.
- P: Were any of those Klansmen from Niles?
- R: I couldn't tell you that either. They could come from Niles or out of town. I don't know. They usually had their masks on. They always came in with masks. Nobody knew who they were. There were a lot of leaders from Niles here. People didn't know who they were. A lot of them did know, but I couldn't tell you who they were.
- P: Mrs. Lith, Joe Lith's wife Louise, told me that she and her sister went down there during the riot and they picked up their hoods and were throwing pepper in their faces. I was surprised that the women were involved.
- R: They were. A lot of people were then. I don't remember that.
- P: It is an interesting story. When she lifted the hood on one man, she recognized who it was.
- R: There were a lot of them from Niles in that. They were well-to-do people too.
- P: Those were rough times.
- R: Yes. It was rough in those days.
- P: Do you remember Vince LaPolla, the councilman?
- R: I know him very well. In fact, he is the one who sold me my lots here. He used to live on Robbins Avenue.
- P: He was the first Italian to be elected to council.
- R: That is right. He was the first Italian to be on council. He was in there for many years. He was an old republican too.

He is the one who sold my lots here. I bought my lots from him and built my house. He was an agent for the Italian people.

P: A real estate agent?

R: That is right. He always treated the people pretty nice.

P: He was a councilman for forty years. Most of that time he was a councilman at large. How did he survive in politics for so many years, at large, when he was an Italian at a time when most people who weren't Italian were prejudice?

R: That is right.

P: How did he survive?

R: He was one of the finest guys around. He was a very good guy. He knew a lot of people, a lot of Italian people. The Italian people were giving people the business here. That is what it was. At one time, there were a lot of Italian people here. At one time, the Irish used to run it; then the Italians came in and got together. There were a lot of Italian people here at one time.

P: I find his story interesting. I knew he came from the Third Ward which was predominately Italian. When he became councilman-at-large, most people weren't Italian at that time.

R: He treated people really nice. I remember him. He used to take people and get them their citizen papers. He used to go up to Warren and get citizen papers for them. He would help them out and everything else. He would go and get mortgages for them. If they sold a house and they didn't have any money, he would go down to the bank and see what he could do for them. He used to do a lot of favors for a lot of people of all nationalities. He used to help them all out.

P: Do you remember anything about Greek coffeehouses or anything like that in Niles?

R: We never did have any of those. I don't remember. I do remember George the Greek Hot Dog Shop. There is nothing there today. It was right where the new fire station is. It was down about 100 yards, and if you were going towards the fire department, it was on the left-hand side. The old mill used to be down in the alley there. They used to have the mill down there. They used to call it the grease mill. They used to have old mules and stuff. They used to make flour. That is where we used to go and buy sacks to make our underwear. My mother used to make underwear with those sacks.

P: Is that right?

- R: Yes, sir. In those days, everything was rough. When I was a kid I remember our dad would buy us a pair of shoes and he used to get tire soles. He would cut the tires and put soles right on them to last twice as long.
- P: Somebody else told me that too.
- R: I wore them many years.
- P: That was a popular thing. I think other people did too.
- R: That is right. Our dad used to sole all of the shoes. We never had the shoemaker do all of the work. He used to have one of those handmade, steel shoemakers. He honed shoes and stuff.
- P: Chappy, I would like to ask you about a time during Niles' history that was kind of popular. A lot of people remember it and talk about it with excitement. It was the era of the bootleggers during the 1920's, 1930's, and probably the 1940's from what I understand. Do you remember anything about those days?
- R: Yes. When I lived at 217 Langley Street, they used to have what they called the Black House down below where I lived. Right in front of my house they used to have a big beer joint there. That was run by Tom Bruno and the Carano Family. The Carano's used to own all of those houses. My sister used to live in another house and my grandmother lived in the next up there. We all lived together then. Right down at the house in back of us, they used to make whiskey. They used to have stills there to make whiskey. They used to sell whiskey all of the time. They had a lot of bootlegs down there.
- P: What did it taste like?
- R: I don't know. I never drank, smoked, or chewed in my life.
- P: Is that right?
- R: That's right. I never did. We had it on the table all of the time. My dad made wine. We had whiskey. We had everything. I don't think any of my brothers ever drank; just lately they have been drinking a little bit now and then.
- Up above the corner right now where the Rod & Gun is today, on the corner of Langley and Pratt there is a brick building.
- P: Is that the Army-Navy Store?
- R: That must be the Army-Navy now. That used to be a big beer joint run by a policeman when he retired. It was Louie Munch. That was one of the best places to go in and have a beer. On Saturday nights they used to have spaghetti dinners for guys

there. When I was going with my wife at that time, I used to go down there. My brother used to be a bartender for him years back.

P: Which one?

R: Johnny. That was years back. I used to go there and have my spaghetti dinner. I would eat and then go home. I used to live on State Street then. I recall down next to that used to be a little beer joint that I used to clean up in the morning before I went to school. That was run by Joe LaBouster and Curley Sangly. That was right next door. On the corner of Park Avenue and Grant Streets was one of the biggest beer joints they ever had. That was run by . . . I can't recall his name right now.

P: Was it Vigoritto's?

R: Oh, yes, it was Vigoritto's. That is right. Old man Vigoritto used to have that. It was right on the corner. That was the biggest beer joint they had on the corner. Right across the street they used to have Kish's Food Market. They used to have a food store there run by Kish and his wife. That is where we used to do our business. All of the Italian people who were up there like Russo, LaMonge's and Custintines' used to live in that area.

P: Stabile's from the area?

R: Yes. There were a lot of people. Caruso's used to live down there near the track. They used to have a big double house. They used to have the icehouse at one time. It was a big icehouse right where the track was. Right now you would go over the track and it was on that side. A trucking company is there right now.

P: Was that the Niles Ice Company?

R: Yes. That was Niles Ice at that time. After that, Charlie Rose used to run it. After that, they brought a beer joint in there. They made a beer place. They used to sell Renner's Beer out of there.

P: Is this all bootleg era still?

R: Yes, it is all bootleg era. That was as long as the bootleggers were around.

P: Do you remember a place called the Cagoosey Pond?

R: Yes, we used to go swimming there. That right now is where the old firebrick was. It is where the city keeps their trucks. They built a lot of homes there right now. That used to be the Goosey Pond. That is where we used to play our base-

ball on ashes and stuff. That was an all ash field. We used to play our baseball. We used to have a team. Nick Cirolini was one of the best pitchers around. We used to have our team there and we would play our baseball.

P: Why did they call it the Goosey Pond?

R: There were a lot of frogs down there. They used to have frogs and fish down there. It used to have green tuff all over it. Then you used to have the Mahoning River. That is where we used to go swimming. That is what we used to call the "Little Italy." That was right where they made that park on Langley Street. There used to be a bridge and we used to go swimming in there. We used to jump off of the bridge there. We used to wait for the train and jump off.

P: Onto the train?

R: No, into the water. We used to see how fast we could jump. We used to call it "Little Italy." That is where we used to go catch our . . . There were a lot of frogs and crabs at that time. We used to get our crabs and frogs and put them in cans. We would get water, boil water, and heat it, cut the tails off of the two little snappers and eat them. It was all good meat.

P: What happened to that pond?

R: I think it is all filled up. I think it is a little stream going under the bridge and down through where the old mill used to be. I think there is still a little water stream down there. I haven't been back there for many years.

P: Was that at the end of Pratt Street?

R: No. That goes right from where the junk yard is now; Robbins Avenue bridge goes right down under there and through there.

We used to have another pond where we would fish. That used to be all fishing area all through there. Where the A & P used to be was all fishing area where Valu King is now.

Right across from the high school they used to have a boat place there. A young fellow used to run it. Right next to him lived Sam Petrilla. At that time we used to have swimming and picnics there. It used to be a wonderful place to swim. It was just like Idora Park is today. It all went to waste. There is a lot of waste water from GE and up the river.

P: A lot of people went there?

R: A lot of people used to be there swimming.

P: What was on the high school area? What was on that ground then?

R: I think that was just open field. I don't remember.

P: I want to go back to the bootlegging days again. Do you remember anything that was exciting or sticks out in your mind? What do you remember about those days?

R: Those days are really exciting. Everybody used to make whiskey. I think every other house was making whiskey and selling it. There used to be five or six houses around there that would make whiskey and sell it, make wine. In those days, it didn't bother them. Today you have to have licenses and that. In those days, they would sell it and that would be it.

P: Do you remember any of the raids that the police had on some of those stills?

R: No, I don't. That is something that I always turned the other way when it happened. I never wanted to get involved in anything like that.

When we were kids at the barbershop, a haircut used to be 25¢. They went up a dime. The most they ever were was 35¢. They used to give you a haircut and in those days they used to shave you. A shave was 25¢. They used to give you a massage and a hot towel for 35¢ in those days. Now look what it costs you just for a haircut, \$6.

P: Did you ever hear of Elliot Ness coming to Niles?

R: No, I never heard that. I don't think he ever did.

P: I haven't found any evidence, just rumors.

R: If he did, I would know. I don't think he ever did. They used to have a lot of rackets around here. There were plenty of rackets like the Jungle Inn. That was really a bad place.

P: I have heard a lot about that.

R: That was a bad place. Jimmy Muccio used to be there. That is where he is missing from. They never found him after that.

P: What happened to him?

R: Nobody knows.

P: Is he a relation of Tootsie Muccio?

R: That is his uncle. That is a Muccio from California. It is his father.

P: As I have been reading in the newspaper about the bootlegging days, it seems that a lot of the people who were bootleggers were immigrants. They weren't necessarily Italian. They were Greeks who were involved.

R: It was all mixed. It was everybody.

P: There were Slovaks. Why?

R: It was mostly Hungarians and Pollocks and stuff.

They used to make that corn whiskey. How they made it, I don't know.

P: Did they make this in the old country?

R: They might have made it the same way. I don't know. The only thing that I know is when I lived on Langley Street they used to have a cellar. They used to have these five-gallon tin containers that they used to hide. When they wanted them, they would go get them. They used to have coal. In those days, fruit cellars were just bare dirt. They managed to keep their fruit cold down there.

P: Why did the immigrants turn to bootlegging? Why didn't people who have been here a while do it?

R: Maybe they didn't want to. I couldn't tell you.

P: Is it possible that maybe some of them couldn't find jobs and this was a way of earning a living?

R: At that time there was a lot of work around here.

P: What was the relationship like between the laborers and the managers and owners of the plants? Did they get along? Were they taken advantage of?

R: No, some plants did and some plants didn't. When I worked at the Stevens' plant, Stevens himself used to run it. He used to own the Stevens Bank. He had this place. He used to treat the men perfectly. In fact, every year he used to give us a bonus. For every man, it was maybe \$500 more. He used to give us a bonus. At Christmas time he might give us a turkey or a ham all of the time. They always gave us something until Republic Steel took over; we didn't get anything.

P: Your brother is the police chief today?

R: Yes.

P: How did he become police chief? How long was he a policeman before he became police chief?

R: He had been there a long time as a policeman. Then he went to sergeant and then took the test and has been chief of police for a long many years.

P: He has been chief of police longer than any other man.

R: He has been there a long time.

P: What are some of the more interesting actions that occurred with the police department that you might remember?

R: I know at that time with motorcycles, we never had trouble with people like they do now. Now they have cars and it is a fast life. It is too fast. It gets out of hand. That is the way I feel.

P: I thank you.

R: Yes, I enjoyed giving it to you and I appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW