

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Smoky Hollow Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 434

An

Interview

with

ANNETTE MILLS

on

June 3, 1976

ANNETTE DOLORES MILLS

Annette Mills was born on January 13, 1926. Her parents are Angela Bellino and the late Mr. Dominic Lefoer. Annette is a native of Smoky Hollow and was born in the heart of this particular area, at 314 Adams Street. Born and reared in this area, Annette lived in the house she was born in for the first twenty years of her life. She moved from this area to California to marry her husband in March of 1946. Her husband, Gale, was in the service during World War II and was stationed at Camp Mirmar. The Mills' have one daughter, Cecile, who is twenty-three years of age.

Annette, her husband Gale and daughter Cecile, are all in the Master's program at YSU and hope to satisfy all the requirements for the degree during the first summer session 1976.

Under the supervision of Mr. Earnhart, Mrs. Mills was instrumental in collecting and taping interviewees for the Oral History Program, Smoky Hollow Project.

Mrs. Mills was delighted and privileged to do the assignment because there was a personal interest and concern involved in the project. It is with great satisfaction and deep regret that the course is coming to an end. Just as this course is coming to an end so is a lifetime for some and fond memories for others and a sadness for all that were involved in any shape or form with this particular area in our community. As the homes are demolished and others deteriorate the thoughts and memories of these people will be as strong and lasting as the brick streets in the heart of those from Smoky Hollow.

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INTERVIEWEE: ANNETTE MILLS

INTERVIEWER: Annette Mills

SUBJECT: Personal Experiences in Smoky Hollow

DATE: June 3, 1976

M: I am Annette Mills. The last eleven and one half weeks I have been working on the Smoky Hollow Project for the Oral History Program at Youngstown State Univeristy. I live at 2164 South Schenley Avenue, Youngstown, and this is being taped on June 3, 1976, at 9:00 p.m.

I want to say that I have come to a conclusion after all of my tapes and with my project on Smoky Hollow: It is with deep regret that it is now coming to an end.

I would like to include, if I may, my own personal experience in Smoky Hollow, being a native of this area. I was born on January 13, 1926, in the heart of Smoky Hollow at 314 Adams Street. I was born in this area and lived there until I got married in 1946. I really felt a warmth and closeness and a secure feeling in Smoky Hollow that I have never felt anywhere that I've lived since. Things were not always plentiful during my early childhood, as most people who grew up during this era knew. It was the time of the Depression, and for a long time after everybody had to tighten their belts a little bit. But, aside form that, there was always plenty to eat, plenty of comfort, blankets, warmth, and love. Things of this nature can make a person feel loved and secure.

We had very little when I was a child as far as store bought toys or games. I could recall as a youngster, not just myself and in my immediate family, but also all of the neighbor children, we would dream up activities and things to do to keep us preoccupied. I can remember getting magazines from neighbors, old magazines that they had accumulated. We had savings of movie stars. We would cut out the pictures and had great, big gift boxes full of them. We would use them

them to trade. We would trade maybe two of somebody's favorite movie star for one that we treasured. I can remember even playing cowboys. Girls would play Roy Rogers, Buck Jones, and Buck Rogers, or whoever the last star happened to be in the last serial that we saw. If it happened to be Roy Rogers, then you were Roy Rogers. It was always a toss-up, who was the most current or most familiar star to us at that moment. Then, of course, the trading of the pictures became more demanding among all of the children that were in the hobby of collecting movie star pictures.

I can also remember spending a night during the summer on the front porch. Along towards morning it would start getting cooled off, and you might either sneak out and go inside and sleep, and leave your neighbors sleeping on your front porch. Or else you would say, "I think you had better go home because I'm getting cold," or "Should we go inside and sleep now," either because of being cold, or being aroused by a barking dog, or maybe nothing else but your imagination running away with you. That was quite common, to sleep on somebody's front porch overnight.

We had many games that we played: kick-the-can, kick-the-stick. Many times we would play jump rope with the rope being extended from one curb to the other. Adults and children alike would join in the activities. If they were playing the game, they had to go by the rules. If they missed, they had to take their turn being "out".

I can remember playing hide-the-paddle. We played that and the adults would also join in with us. To take part in this game, a stick would be used. You would kick the stick, run and hide. The person who was "it" would have to chase the stick, find it, and go out looking for those that ran and hid. When they found you, they would crack you across the backside. The last one to be found would be, of course, allowed to run in and tag base and free. If they hollered "free" before the one that had the paddle, then everybody who was caught before could run and hide again. Sometimes one person could be "it" all night. But the chances were very slim because the person that was "it" would stay pretty close to the base and a lot of times the last person to try to come in to holler "free" would be tagged or cracked with the paddle before freeing everybody that was waiting to run and hide again. It was a fun game, but sometimes the cracks got pretty hard. The adults, too, got their cracks if they happened to be the one who was found.

There were a lot of things that happened, a lot of fun things. Coming from a big family myself, I can remember that there were many times when you wished that your mom

and dad could just be with you alone. But, of course, this wasn't always possible with a big family, and also with the chores that had to be done to provide the upkeep of a big family. I know that my dad worked at Youngstown Sheet & Tube for fifty years. After work many days, he would spend long hours working in the garden or preparing to put in a garden. So his time was pretty well occupied. After he would come in and settle for the day, it wouldn't be too long that you would actually have to spend with him by the time he bathed and got ready for bed; it was almost time that the children were in bed too. There was very little time spent that way. Sunday, of course, was always family day. We were always together. It was the day that dad didn't work in the garden and mom spent most of the day in the kitchen providing food and finishing up what she had started the day before.

There were many things that I remember. Going to school always seemed like it was so distant. It was distant. We walked first to grade school, which was from Adams Street to St. Columba's School, the old St. Columba's School, which is now a parking lot on the corner of Rayen and across the street catty-corner from where the St. Columba Cathedral is today. Then after grade school was Rayen High School. We walked, again, to Rayen High School.

Many, many mornings the snow banks were so high that you couldn't even see across the street. You couldn't see over the snow. There was maybe a path, if you were fortunate enough, that somebody had made prior to your going through. We had very little privileges as far as riding the bus. When you rode the bus to school it cost you a nickel one way. There were no free busses, no picking up at your door, no stopping at any block in the neighborhood. You had to walk downtown to the square to pick up a bus. If you tried to pick it up in front of what is now Jones Hall, but was at that time Youngstown College, to go to Rayen, the bus was so full that it wouldn't even stop. It would just go right by you and if you waited for several busses you could be late for your classes. So about the only way, if you got up early enough to walk to the Public Square to pick up a bus, chances are you had standing room only. But it would still cost you five cents and that night you had to walk home from school. I think it was good for us, that walk in the cold and all. I remember coming home and my hands would be frozen. I thought they were going to fall off. I can remember mom putting cold water on them, and I thought, "Why are you putting cold water on them when they are already cold?" I've learned since then that if you put hot on them it would have really stung. But your clothes would be wet, your socks soaking wet, your shoes would always have white marks from being wet and then dry

and be as stiff as a board in the morning. You tried to soften them up and get the white marks off because it just didn't look right.

Clothing was very limited, but we were always taught to be clean. We had to dress properly. We couldn't go to school in some of the "get-ups" that are worn today. You wouldn't think of wearing jeans, not even after school in a lot of cases. That wasn't the fad then. But as time went on, there were more leniencies towards this, as there are today, as we know. They wear the midriffs and the jeans and the tailored slacks and all the way down to slack suits. But this was not the mode of the day. You just didn't do it. The boys wore shirts and slacks, never jeans, and ties. I know there for a long time I toyed with the idea of quitting school because I didn't have the proper clothes.

Many people, in talking to them, that quit school, this was the reason. School didn't cost anything, not in the high schools. You didn't have to buy books. In the parochial schools you were obligated by law of the church--these were man-made laws--to send your children to the parochial schools. If not, then you were not given the privileges of the church. In one particular case, I remember, my mother was not given absolution at confession because she could not afford to pay the tuition at school. Not until she was able to pay that tuition was she permitted to go to Holy Communion. This hurt my mother deeply, and my older sister then decided she would quit school to help pay the rest of our tuitions through grade school. As the years went by, then of course this, too, came to pass, and it was not any longer mandatory that you send your children to the parochial schools. There were provisions made that if it were impossible to pay this tuition that the church would see to other ways of getting the children into school without forcing the issue of payment.

After my own experiences at school, I know that I had gone to work almost before I was even old enough. I went to work at the General Fireproofing making B52 airplane panels and seats during World War II. I worked there for several years and after the war was over, I quit. I moved to the West Coast and out of the Smoky Hollow area in 1946. I married my husband in San Diego in 1946.

After living on the West Coast for several years we moved back to Youngstown and have been in the area now since 1968. I lived there on the West Coast with my thoughts ever wending towards Youngstown, and I'm glad I'm back here. I made it my first request from the family arriving in Youngstown that I wanted to go to the Smoky Hollow and see the old neighborhood. When I went through there I almost cried. It was kind of a mixed emotion. I couldn't remember how narrow the streets

were. I had forgotten the brick streets that were still intact. The curbs, and a sunflower that my father had planted in the corner of our garden. The sunflower was still there, but our house wasn't. Our house had burned. Of course, it had burned long after my family had moved out of the Smoky Hollow area. It was really a strange feeling. It just seemed like the house across the street was almost on top of our house, and I couldn't remember that as a youngster; that the houses were so close. Even across the street seemed like it was right on our sidewalk. I couldn't imagine how my house could have fit in the space that was left. The only thing that was familiar was the sunflower that was still in the corner. I remember that so vividly because my father had planted it, and it was during that time of the year when the flower on that sunflower was about as big as ever. It was just there--one big flower, one big stalk--right in the corner of the yard, almost as if to say, "I'm still here!" It really left me with a kind of mixed emotion; kind of glad to have been part of the Smoky Hollow, but sad because the old homestead wasn't there any longer. It made me sad to think that the house that I was born in was not there anymore. Sad because the family didn't live there anymore. It just didn't seem like everything was right. I don't know just what it was about it, but it just left a very odd feeling inside of me. It's really hard to describe. I almost felt like part of me died, and that my name should have been left up there on the monument, on the corner of Walnut and Rayen. I still feel this.

Several weeks ago, I again took a drive through Smoky Hollow. As I went through it, I see now that they're tearing down what I thought was the best house in Smoky Hollow. The windows are all ripped out of it. The doors are torn from the hinges. I later learned that they are being demolished. A lot of the old homes are being demolished. It just left a lump in my throat. It just feels like part of me is going with it. I have a deep love for Smoky Hollow. I'm very proud to have been part of it. It is with deep regret that I see it coming to what it is. I hate to see it being destroyed. I don't ever think that there will ever be another community that could compare with it or that could ever be the same, no matter even if all of the people were living in the same neighborhood in another area. I don't think there would be that closeness, that community feeling, that close-knit, that neighborly existence that there was in the Smoky Hollow.

We had our differences among the younger children, and I can recall incidents where the adults would stand firm for their children, just as parents would do today. They would stand up for their children to the other parents, but they were disciplined after they were indoors, for whatever the problem seemed to be. If it was a matter of sassing or if

it was because you broke a neighbor's toy, whatever the incident happened to be, there was always a discipline that followed, although the parent would stand up for her children at the time. There were never any grudges between the children or adults. There may be a few exchanges of words between the adults and in a matter of hours, sometimes within the same day, the two would be conversing again as if nothing had happened. It was never "I don't speak to so-and-so," or "Mr. so-and-so did this." It was never carrying of tales. Anything that was not up to par was handled right then and there, and never carried on and on in stories from one person to another. It wasn't that kind of an environment. It was if you had something on your mind, you said it, and it was forgotten. I'm sure that in the other families it was the same thing. There would be disciplines inside the door in the individual home without making it a neighborhood event.

Getting back to, again, some of the things that I remember so vividly. I can remember my father coming home from work and many times he wouldn't eat all of his lunch. I don't know why it always seemed like such a big treat to have these leftover lunches. Sometimes it might have been just a fried egg sandwich, and when I think about it now it just almost turns my toes. But, it always tasted good, and we used to almost fight over who got the leftover lunch. I don't like a sandwich now just to take from home to have at lunch time myself. I just don't like to carry a sack lunch. I just can't imagine as a youngster why we always thought that was so good. This was kind of a thing, I guess maybe it was because everybody else wanted it and you thought you did too. But anyhow I can remember taking my turn and getting it occasionally and how good it would taste.

I can remember while growing up that we had quite a large family. There were eleven of us children, nine girls and two boys, plus my mom and dad. There were quite a few feasts. It seemed like every time you sat down it was a big meal, even if it was just spaghetti and a salad and meatballs. It was a pretty big spread just putting that many plates on the table. I can remember my mother making what would be corn meal as you would call it today. But they called it polente in Italian. It would be made and spread on a wooden table. It was cooked in a big pot that my mother would stir until done in boiling water and spread it while it was still hot on this wooden table and cover it with sauce. Everybody sat down at a corner of this table and would eat right from the table. It was one big spread. There were no dishes. It was all spread right on the table. You would eat it almost like a purina consistency after it was cooked with the sauce over it and the Romano grated cheese. I can remember how good it would taste. We would draw a line. It was kind of like a

game, although we wouldn't play in it. We wouldn't dare! We would draw a line with a fork or spoon and that was our part. Nobody was allowed to eat that part unless you didn't want to eat it all or you couldn't. Then they were permitted to go ahead and eat it. But that was always kind of an extra treat. We didn't get this very often but when we did it was something different and good. There was a lot of spaghetti and sauce. A lot of times there was sauce without meat.

Of course, Sunday was always the big day. There was always chicken or rabbit. Always some kind of meat, chuck--I remember a lot of chuck roast that they would use in the sauce. It was a good grade of meat and it was one of my father's favorites. Whenever he got paid, one of the things that he brought home was chuck roast. There was very little pork in our home. My father was Catholic. In the part of the country where he was born in Italy, they just didn't eat pork. I don't know why, but he carried this belief with him to America. We just never had too much pork in our home as youngsters. I love pork today, but we didn't get that much of it because my dad would not eat it, ham, or bacon, or anything like this. In later years, then, he did, but as a youngster I don't ever recall too much along that line. There were, like I said, a lot of chickens because my parents raised their own, and rabbits, lots of garden vegetables because my father raised his own garden. There were always lots of fresh tomatoes and cucumbers, corn, lettuce, radishes, onions, bush beans, green beans, peas, every kind of vegetable that you could think of. Spinach, there was always plenty of that. So much so that there was enough for canning. Mom would can lots of tomatoes and peppers. Of course this was not only used in sauces but soups and stews and pizzas, and a lot of the meals that were prepared in the home. I don't remember too much about it, except my mother making bread. It would always be in a number two wash tub. That would be an all day process, the kneading, letting it raise, and then kneading it again. It would be like one hundred pound sacks of flour. It would be nothing to make maybe twelve, thirteen, maybe twenty loaves of bread in one day. Of course there was always some of the dough that was siphoned off of the bread to make pizza.

Another thing that I can remember, that was always kind of a treat. There weren't too many store bought cookies, doughnuts, and things like that because they were just beyond our reach as far as money was concerned. But I can remember my mother frying some of the dough and making what we called fried dough; it would be equivalent to a sugar doughnut. Then she would roll it in just plain granulated sugar, and that was really a treat! It would still be warm, and always tasted so good. So really when you stop and think about it, we ate better than we do now. Myself, with my schedule, I find with working and going to school, and studying, and everything, it's usually quick meals. Hurry up and maybe either broil, fry a steak, or

boil potatoes very quickly, or have a pot roast partially browned the night before, and then maybe finish up the next day just before a meal. But there is never the home-cooked, all-day session that I can remember my mother doing. Of course, three is a small number compared to thirteen. When I think about that, that was quite a chore in itself, just preparing for that many. I can remember pigs in the blanket, which was another meal that mom would cook occasionally.

Anyhow, there was always plenty of food and we always had warmth in the house, there was always coal for heating. I imagine a lot of the things were hard to come by, but I didn't realize the hardships because I was only getting the benefits of these things. I didn't know what all took place in providing these things, the cost of the coal and providing all the money for the food, and preparation, and that sort of thing. Not until later years did I become cognizant of the fact that there were many obligations that had to be met, and I wonder now how they were ever met. But some way or another, they were. We all survived it.

Besides the thirteen, including my mom and dad, we also had a dog. We had him for years. I think he was the family dog for about seventeen years. It was quite an ordeal when the family had to put him to rest, just because of old age and whatever, but they did finally have to put him to sleep. We all cried over that; we were notified by mail that our family dog had to be put to rest; we have pictures of him. It was very sad because he was like a part of us. Even with our own dog in our own little family, when we had to put him to rest, how we all cried then, too. They do become a part of you. There was always enough of everything for the dog. He was a beautiful watch dog. He always warned you whenever somebody was coming. He just had such a dislike for the gas man, meter man, any meter man, or anyone that seemed unfriendly. The milk man seemed to fare pretty good after a fashion, but there for a while he had to be very careful. We were in a fenced yard and not too many dared open that gate, because they were afraid of the dog.

My father passed away about ten years ago and I think with his passing away that pretty well made up my mind as to wanting to come back, getting back with the family in Youngstown. I was very glad when things worked out so that we could. We've been back here now since 1968, and I'm very glad to be back in Youngstown. However, the neighborhood that I'm in now, I would hesitate to say anything about my neighbors because I don't know anything about them. I'm sure if a crisis or anything happened that they would need my assistance that I would be more than willing to help them. But I have been in this house now for nearly nine years and I don't know my neighbors' names. It just seems like it's a whole different ball game compared to what it was in Smoky Hollow.

Getting back to Smoky Hollow, I have interviewed some of the people who are still in the Hollow. There are some still living there that I know of that I did not interview for various reasons. Either I couldn't get in touch with them or because of illness, or things of this nature. It is again, with deep regret that I see this project coming to an end because there are, I know, a lot of people who would have been more than happy to have contributed their little bit of knowledge to this project had they been reached. I have pretty much spoken on the people that were readily available at the time that I was, so that I could do this. Because of the time limit and also I don't know where some of these people have gone to.

The women, the girls that I knew as a youngster, of course are married and I don't know half of their married names. Not being in the area at the time that they got married, I have lost contact with a lot of them. There were Slovaks and Polish people who I know I would love to have interviewed. I'm sure that they would have been more than happy to participate in this project as everyone that I have interviewed up to this point were. They were more than generous and more than cooperative and very, very generous with their time and information, and grateful because they were asked. I feel that any member or any party that was contacted from this area, would have been more than happy to have contributed whatever information they could to this project. It is with deep regret that I haven't contacted all of them. I would have liked to have gotten some of the Polish, some of the Slovaks, some of the Hungarians. I knew some lovely Hungarian families that were in the area. I know that Mr. Pegues was a part of Smoky Hollow. He lived on Andrews Avenue. I did contact his office trying to set up some kind of an appointment with him again, and it just seemed like I never got back to pursue it any further and again, that is with deep regret. There are many others that I'm sure could have been included in this, and again it wasn't done intentionally or I didn't select certain ones. It just happened to be the ones that I called and were available to me. Their time was available and mine was available at that precise moment, so I went ahead and I did it, whenever the time was permissible. I didn't want to overlook anyone and I did that anyway, beyond my control.

I want to include also that the Smoky Hollow is rapidly coming to an end. It is gradually being demolished. What homes are still there I would say are deteriorating. The neighborhoods are just slowly becoming a thing of the past. It is again with deep regret that I see this area just about being wiped off of the map of the Youngstown area. It is very, very sad, I'm sure, for some of the old-timers who are still there. I feel a void in my own life because of this, and I am so grateful that I was permitted to go ahead and do this project.

It was a personal selection and I hope that this will be beneficial to whoever cares to learn anything about the Smoky Hollow, either in the immediate future or in the distant future. I just feel that you had to really be a part of it some way to really know it. I hope that through these tapes and the information that is given in this project that those who find interest in it go ahead and research it to find some of what the people of this area have felt; the warmth, the closeness, the unique situation that they were in. If a little bit of this could rub off, just a little bit, to each person who reads this I think they would become a better person for it. I hope that this project enlightens those that are of interest, and I hope it interests those that just happen to pick it up and read it by accident. I found the assignment not just interesting . . . It was again that I say that I had a personal interest, and with finding the Smoky Hollow being demolished, gradually, and that it will someday be a thing of the past, I was so grateful to have been able to do the project and hope that somebody gets something from it. I really enjoyed this assignment and again it is with deep regret that I find it coming to an end.

END OF INTERVIEW