

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jackson Milton School Project

High School Experiences

O. H. 698

GAIL HEDRICK

Interviewed

by

John Gulgas

on

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INTERVIEWEE: GAIL HEDRICK

INTERVIEWER: John Gulgas

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G: This is an interview with Gail Hedrick for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Jackson Milton Schools, by John Gulgas, on April 24, 1985 at 3:00 p.m.

Gail, if you could pick your favorite subject, what would it be?

H: I think I would probably go along the health line. My mother was a nurse, so I went through school thinking that I was going to be a nurse some day. Things that were health subjects, science related, chemistry, those were the ones of the most interest to me.

G: If you had to pick a favorite teacher, would they be in that field?

H: I really didn't have a favorite teacher. I liked every teacher that I had as I went along. As I worked in that class or with that subject that was the person who was of interest to me at that time. I really can't say I was going to pick anyone out on top of anybody else. Probably the principal, Mr. Kepner, who was a stern disciplinarian, and sometimes our Sunday school teacher, he was a man of great stature and quality.

G: Of the extracurricular activities that you were involved in, which was the one that you enjoyed the most?

H: The one I spent the most time with probably was band. You got to go on a lot of trips with that and you spent a lot of

time rehearsing. It was your ticket into the ball games, and that was of great excitement. I think probably the most fun thing to do was our class plays. Of course, that was speech and dramatics. Again, the music end of it, we had some minstrels as I went through school. Probably band related activities was my key one.

G: What was it about band?

H: It was the fellowship that went with it, the learning. You were responsible to the rest of your band group because you had to work one with another in order to have a performance. There was a lot of congeniality, and a lot of rivalry too. When it came to competition I was never the top one; I was always down around third. I didn't do much solo work. I did some ensemble work, but the fact that I was a part of that group . . . We had our uniforms. There was so much pride with having those uniforms and wanting them to look nice. I can correlate that with what I saw in the 1970's when my children were going. I was then even able to be a band mother. We worked really hard to get uniforms and I saw them destroyed. This, I think, is the difference in our relationships with school and what kids felt about their school system between the 1950's and now.

G: Do they compete the way they do today with other school bands? Were there competitions?

H: Yes, it wasn't quite as structured as it is today. We have field days where they have specifically band days, and we didn't have that. We had county competition and regional competition and state.

G: Did you ever get down there?

H: I don't think so. We weren't as organized as far as getting on the bus and traveling clear across the country to do those things in the 1950's. The money wasn't as available to do that kind of thing. As far as competition, we had a lot of comradeship for our school. Our school was very important, the Jackson Milton Blue Jays, and what we did and how we stuck together. I know there would be a certain faction of my class that said they didn't ever want to be known, that they belonged to our school system. For myself and my immediate friends, we felt that we were getting the best education.

G: Let's talk about social functions if you can recall. What were they like, school dances?

H: We had some group clubs, like the Latin Club or the French Club, and they would get together and have an offshoot of activities. The 1950's were bobby sock days and long, flowing, white skirts. It was important that we had saddle shoes and

the saddle shoes had to be dirty. The bobby socks had to come up well above the length of the skirt. You either pulled them way up and had the skirt floating over the top of them, or you rolled them way down so they were in a gob around your ankles. The fuller the skirt you could get, the better. There was a time when there were a lot of petticoats underneath that skirt. The more petticoats you could get and the fuller the skirt the better you were. There was a time when the hair was long down your back, and as bushy as you could get it to flow out past your shoulders. Make-up wasn't as evident as we see today. We had lipstick, a little bit of eye pencil probably, but not the eye shadow and not the all over make-up that they wear today.

Social activities, usually sometime in the Fall of the year there would be a Sadie Hawkins Day; that would be in November. We always had homecoming dances. I know a function that we used to have that is not in existence anymore; that was the Summer picnic. At the end of the school year, the last day of school . . . when I was in grade school this was a thing where the parents would come. Usually it was mostly mothers. A lot of times my dad would go because he was a farmer and he wasn't structured workwise. They would pack a picnic basket and your report card was always handed out that day. It was just a grand finale. If it rained it was in the gym. With sock hops we would have a band come in from Niles or Girard. Many times it was records that somebody collected and had a hi-fi that they could spin them on. There was always so much preparation; the crepe paper went up and the writing on the wall and on paper and hanging that up, putting balloons on the ceiling. It seemed like weeks of preparation. Then it was the big night and the boys would stand off on one side and the girls would stand off on the other. If a boy asked somebody to dance it was always a big thing and everybody was embarrassed. Half of the girls would go home crying because the wrong boy asked them to dance or the wrong boy didn't dance. Everybody was pouty. It was kind of a flop really, but we thought we were having fun.

- G: Lunch time, what was lunch time like? What do you remember about lunch time?
- H: Greasy, sloppy joes. Greasy chili. Warm milk. A lot of hustle bustle. For the most part I probably did carry my lunch. There were times that I bought my lunch. The lady that was the head cook, Gertrude Stroup, I don't know if she was getting subsidized with butter from the government, but it seemed like there was an inch of grease on the top of everything that ever got cooked. We filed down through a line to buy our lunch. It seemed like we were always packed in there elbow to elbow. Nobody had room and somebody was always shoving their banana or orange in your mouth or

vice-versa. I carried a little lunch box. It looked like a little school bus; it was an oval-shaped thing. It was good for hitting boys on the head when they didn't quite behave.

G: What about after-school hangouts, are there any that you want to mention or talk about?

H: Isaly store would have been a hangout. I was kind of a loner. I didn't get in to the crowd group. When you lived in the town of North Jackson, when you lived one block north, south, east, or west of the red light, you were in town. Those kids came and went in the Isaly store.

We had another ice cream and variety store called McGinney Folk; it is torn down now. Kids went and came there in the Isaly store.

There was also the Schrader's Filling Station; some of the boys would hang around there. In fact, one boy, Tom Probst, that would have been his uncle that had that and his grandparents. He burned himself pretty badly. He got mixed up with a tire. He was trying to vulcanize his own bicycle tire. He went there and wanted some people to help him get this tire and everybody was too busy. He was an impatient kid, about ten or twelve at the time. In the process he got himself on fire and was frightened and ran. Nobody could run fast enough to catch him, so he literally was a human fireball going down the street. Consequently, he had his legs burned pretty badly and had a series of graphs throughout our high school year. It was a good thing that he played basketball, because I think it was that activity and that constant running that really exercised him.

We didn't have any pool halls or bowling alleys. There really was not any entertainment in the town of Jackson for the kids. The big thing they did was go to Lake Milton to this roller rink. I got roller skates for my sophomore year at Christmas time. If I got to use them three times out of the year that was a really big thing. I was a farm kid; I had farm work to do. My mother and dad didn't believe that a roller rink was a place that I should be in. So I wasn't allowed to go to the rink very often; it was always with a church group or something like that. It was a place that a lot of kids did go. It was open three nights a week and Sunday. I think it was Wednesday night, Friday night, Saturdays, and Sunday afternoons.

G: Why were you called Sparky?

H: The name Sparky was given to me by my bus driver, George Johnston. We were in a community where most of the people who were around me, my schoolteachers and bus drivers, were the same people that I saw in church on Sunday. If we had evening entertainment someplace, like young, married parents

having a party of some sort, these would be the people I would see. The bus driver was a carpenter in the community. He drove the bus, went and did some carpentry work, and came back and picked up the kids. I was a likable kid. I had a lot of vim and vigor and was in to things, so he named me Sparky. It was a very loving term as far as he was concerned. I was a fat, chubby kid also, and of course the boys picked this up. So sometimes I was Spark plug because I looked like a spark plug.

G: As you look back, if you had anything to do over or could make any change to make the high school situation better, would you? Was it perfect?

H: I thought it was a very good school system as I went through it. I have to look in retrospect what went on in my life and what went on in the school systems in general with my children in the 1970's. To look at the 1950's, the ingredients that I see were very valuable, that the educators we had were community members; they were interested in the community as a whole because they, themselves, lived there and participated in it. They were also church members. They might have been the Catholic church, they might have been the Federated church, they might have been the Methodist church, but we saw these people on the weekends and Sunday as our teacher sometime there in church. Mr. Kepner, who was the principal from the second year that I was in school, he was certainly a community leader. He was a staunch man, stern. He was someone that you feared. If you were sent to his office you might not come back, you thought. At that same time you knew he loved his God and he wasn't afraid to say so, and he conducted his school in a Christian way. As I then became a parent and was involved with teachers that my children had, there was certainly an exodus from the community. The teachers would not in any way, shape, or form ever want to be in the same school system that they taught. They don't want to have their numbers published; they don't want to be associated other than their eight hours, or it seemed that way. I think there has been a little bit of change from what I am hearing now in the 1980's. That didn't happen in the 1970's. I saw in the 1970's some mutilization of kids in football and sports so that the coaches had their day, and it was at the expense of some of the students. I feel that some of the students got a lot of misguidance. In the 1950's, as I saw the teachers they were interested in every student meeting their maximum capacity. I will say that I had one English teacher who said, "You'll never make it at Ohio State. There is no sense in you even trying that." Those were fighting words, I suppose, because she had failed at Ohio State. I didn't know of her failure at the time she told me, but I found out later. Well, I did succeed at Ohio State. I did some other things also. For the most part I think they were interested in each kid being successful to their maximum capacity, and that is an important educational ingredient. To be an educator you have to be a stimulant to have the child

meet their potential.

G: What were some of the most memorable times regarding your senior week, your partying activities, the prom and so forth? Is there anything that stands out in your mind about any of those outgoing activities, commencement? Did you have senior skip day?

H: We didn't have senior skip day, but I skipped. We didn't label it as such. I suppose that was the most daring thing I ever did. I usually listened to what my parents said. I came home on the bus every day, but one day there was a baseball game, I think, in Struthers. It was someplace I had never been before. There was a carload of us that took off. We weren't with the safest driver. Fortunately we got ourselves back home and were delivered safely. We went down to see that baseball game. I am sure there are a lot more kids in my class that did more racy things than I did. I was kind of bland and mild. That was one thing that stood out was that time I went to the baseball game. I don't think my folks know to this day that that is where I was that afternoon. They thought I was finishing up things from school.

It seemed like we had a band banquet, a senior banquet. We had a prom. I didn't have a date to the prom. I went and fell down the steps and had a sprained ankle. I did not want to go and my mother insisted that I should go. I did go with this sprained ankle and had a horrible time.

G: Are there any practical jokes that stand out in your mind, whether by you, to you, or with your knowledge?

H: Halloween was always a big deal. I'm not sure which year it was that they put the superintendent's chair on top of the flagpole. I don't know which gang of boys that was that did that. We had a couple of fellows that were chemistry and science teachers and they were always doing something with the Bunsen burners and fixing it so they would pop and explode. It seemed like those fellows took the joke, but didn't get angry about it. There was a lot of prankster business with them. I think there were locker room antics that went on that I don't know anything about. We had one lady who always wrote with purple. Her writing was very distinguished, but there was also the fact that it was a purple pen that was used. Someone was forever trying to steal that purple pen or her purple ink. We had one lady who had a fiery temper and she was known for throwing erasers. This day and age she would probably be taken into court. If things weren't going right in the back of the room and she had her back to the class and was writing on the board--she seemed to have eyes in the back of her head, or at least she had antennae out and knew what was going on--she would wheel around and sail an eraser across the room. It was pretty likely that those erasers would disappear and she had to order a new supply of erasers pretty

frequently because the kids were not going to have them thrown at them.

G: What about some of the current events of the day, the Truman-Dewey election, the U.S. Steel strike, do any of those strike a chord with you?

H: No. The closing of the war in 1944 and 1945, that kind of thing, we were so restricted in clothing and food that we could obtain. There were food stamps then. It seemed like my parents were forever trying to make the sugar stamps last. It seemed like it was something they were going through and they were trying not to have me be bothered by it.

One big thing when we were ninth graders was that nylon stockings came in and everybody was able to have a pair, or a couple of pairs. Friday was dress-up day and you would put on your very best for that day. We had assemblies on this day and there might be a class or club responsible for having that assembly and they would be honored in that way or picked out. They presented the assembly and the whole school went, seventh through twelfth grade. Sometimes shows would be brought in and shown.

G: I wanted to finish up with a question about the senior trip. Were you involved in the senior trip? Did you go on it?

H: Oh yes. Definitely. I would say our kids were behaved. We didn't have any problems with them tearing up the hotel. I don't even remember what hotel we were in. I can't remember how long we were there. One of the nice things that happened on that trip was that our group was on a wide, wide street, about halfway in the middle, and there was a girl that I knew from 4-H who I saw. Her group was coming the other direction. There we were hugging each other and no one from either school knew what was going on. It was rather unique that two country bumpkins would meet in the center of Washington, D.C. Kids went and had a good time and weren't interested in tearing up equipment and facilities. They respected what they saw.

G: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW