

YONGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farrell, PA

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1980

Antoinette Richards
Interviewed

By

John Kasich

On

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Youngstown State University

Oral History Program

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Interviewee: ANTOINETTE RICHARDS

Interviewer: John Kasich

Subject: Farrell, PA

Date: May 17, 2000

JK: This is an interview with Antoinette Richards for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on the History of the nine and ten hundred blocks of Fruit, Hamilton, and Emerson Avenues in Farrell in Pennsylvania by John Kasich at Farrell Pennsylvania on May 17th, the year 2000 at 12:30pm. Okay what is your name?

AR: Antoinette Richards.

JK: Okay what was your maiden name?

AR: Antoinette Basil or Basile however you want to pronounce it in Italian lingo.

JK: Okay and when did your parents move into this neighborhood on Hamilton Avenue?

AR: My parents moved here in 1925 and I have the same homestead that's been here since they have been here. They came to the United States for jobs, my father worked at Sharon Steel in the blast furnace. He stayed there for 50 some years until the day of his death. Then my mother God rest her soul also, she loved everybody on the block because we were having picnics out in the yards, we used to sleep on porches at night, that you can't do today and wish that you could. But in due time I think that it will all come back to the way that it was.

JK: Like you said your family came here, where did they come from?

AR: They came from Bagnoli, Italy, in 1925.

JK: The same town that my mother's side is from?

AR: Your grandmother, your grandfather they were all the same.

JK: Where were you born?

AR: I was born in this house on Hamilton Avenue.

JK: When was that?

AR: Sixty-eight years ago. March 21st, 1932. And I have lived here ever since.

JK: When you were a young child what do you remember about the block, or the kids, or the neighborhood?

AR: We used to have a ball sled riding down on Hamilton Avenue because it has a slope of a hill. We used to play with the snow, baseball and everything else. We didn't have to go to park, they allowed us on the streets and they even used to block the streets for us to sled ride down on them. I loved it!

JK: Do you remember some of the neighborhood kids that were like your age that you played with back then?

AR: I played with Mary Alter, Christy Alter, Larry, Sophie, Edmond Korab, your mother, Jennie Kasich, and Jennie Buccino used to come over, Violet Blaszek they used to live down the street, all the family. We had one tremendous ball on this block.

JK: At the time, the homes, where they same as they are now or did they have siding on them or what?

AR: They were all made of wood. And then people in later years either put aluminum siding or bricked them up to keep them warm. We used to have potbelly stoves before we had gas furnaces. Then we got the gas furnace with the coal, but the best was the potbelly stove that you had in your dinning room. It heated the house. Not like the stoves today. And you didn't use as much gas.

JK: When the houses were all wood as far as you could remember what were they painted or the colors or do you remember?

AR: The colors were usually gray, white, a light blue, green, and then they would trim in an off color.

JK: I noticed on your house and a lot of the research I was doing most of the houses had this little decoration right up at the pitch of the house.

AR: I still have it. It's right at the peak. I still have it and think there's only about two or three other houses on the block that still has it. And I won't take mine down, because that was the deal to make it look nice.

JK: How about as far as you can remember the street was always brick way back?

AR: The streets were always brick and it's only been a matter of fifteen or twenty years that they have paved it. And I wish they would have left the bricks, I think the bricks are safer than the paving. Alleys used to be all dirt and now they are starting to get paved.

JK: Where did you go to school at, like grade school?

AR: J Farrell and then we had the junior high that was on Fruit Avenue. Then we had the senior high, which is McClusklies Gym that was our school. And we would have a ball. Even at school. Teachers were nice and if you wanted an education they have always said that Farrell is where you can get educated.

JK: At the time way back in those early years how about did a lot of the neighbors have gardens around here?

AR: We all had gardens John. We used to have tomatoes, peppers, and ours was one of the beautiful ones because we had it on both sides of the yard. On one side we would put peppers, garlic, and lettuce. On the other side we would put all tomatoes and we canned. And I still can even at 68 years old. I still do canning. Because nothing is better than having your own no preservatives you know what's in them. You don't know what you are getting at the store.

JK: This was probably in the middle 1960's I was just a little kid myself, I might have been six or seven years old. My grandmother brought me up here and I remember always having the doings in this basement and I don't remember if it was some relatives came from Italy or whatever it was, but I remember there was pigs feet and they wanted me to try it and I said oh not for me.

AR: You can gel pigs feet, you can get them in the stores gelled. I still make them. I make them every winter. That's the best time to make it and I love it. We called it gelled pigs feet and then we'd make homemade sausage; we even made our homemade wine. I still have the press, I still have the grinder, and my youngest son told me not to get rid of it and he is forty years old. So, the wine press, and grinder belong to him.

JK: That's a great tradition to pass down, cause in this day and age a lot of people don't go for that kind of stuff. Talking about food and everything what kind of grocery stores were in this area years ago that you remember all the way through.

AR: We used to have a butcher store right on the corner and we used to have a dairy right across the corner on the eleven hundred block. Klein's Dairy where we got milk, and butter, and odds and ends. But the butcher that used to be over here was Michel's and they would have meat, fresh meat, pork chops, and lamb, anything you wanted. And then we had Mark's that was a few blocks up that sold your vegetables bread and what have you. We had a nice selection of food.

JK: Did you ever go down the other end of Hamilton on the corner of Idaho? Did you ever shop down there for groceries?

AR: We had a store called Carine and I used to go there. And then down the street used to be DeBarkleer's, and he made some good homemade sausage that he learned from the Italians. And he wasn't Italian, but he learned. And I even still make sausage.

JK: Predominately in this neighborhood years ago what were most of the nationalities, who had the most?

AR: The most nationalities on Hamilton Avenues were Italians and it used to be called little Italy. And everybody because of being Italian there are people that are how should I say, they are heart giving, they would do anything for you, and the way that things are today you are not going to get this unless you have still some of the elderly that are still around, which we do have. And I have wonderful neighbors that will help.

JK: What other, beside the Italian neighbors, what other nationalities did you have?

AR: We had Polish, we had German, we had the Slovak's, the neighbors we used to have were Croatian's. And they would go to St. Anthony's Croatian and we have a church on Fruit Avenue St. Albert's, which the Polish people went to and still go to. I still bump into those people that go there. And we have talk about the block and a lot of the younger kids that got married and moved. The elderly parents either passed on or what have you. But it was a good time.

JK: Also, in the neighborhood when you were a kid or even up to the last twenty or thirty years, but particularly years ago in the 30's and 40's if you can remember. If you went up and down the street could you smell different people cooking different things and you know?

AR: Oh I used to love my Polish neighbor when they used to make their dill pickles or their sauerkraut. Wonderful smell, come one we'll give you some, or the Italians with their spaghetti and meatballs. The German's they make very good bread; German's make very good bread. And then we have where others would make their pastries it was different ones.

JK: How about social clubs, I mean like the New Deal club, what do you remember about the New Deal club or any other clubs around the area?

AR: The New Deal club used to be a club where only members were aloud to go. Today they have social members. They used to go up they would play pinochle or what have you and then they would have on New Years Eve everybody was invited. They would furnish noisemakers and we used to have a good time going up to the club. My father belonged to it for the longest time, he was a lifetime member, and your grandfather was a lifetime member.

JK: How about in the neighborhood here porches, did people sit outside and visit?

AR: We would sit outside John, we would visit, we would help each other, and we would sing, and everybody would say what beautiful music is made on Hamilton Avenue. It was, I'll never forget it and I even tell my kids today that they don't have a life, the life that we had.

JK: What effect did World War II have on the neighborhood; do you remember anything from the war, what it was like?

AR: When WWII broke out I remember that everybody was devastated. And they knew who was going to go to war and who wasn't going to go to war, who was going to come back and who wasn't going to come back, it was a tragedy. And luckily it was over and a majority of them did come back.

JK: Do you remember your parents ever mentioning that these were all company homes, or did they pay rent, or did they buy later, or did your family buy it right out?

AR: They were bought it was a tin mill that owned them. When the fellows started working down at the company they would sell. The cellars were all dirt you had to dig them to put a floor in them. I remember when our cellar was dug, dirt flying everywhere. But the company homes, we didn't rent my dad bought it right a way because they were dirt-cheap. They would get it for like fifteen hundred dollars. And your not going to buy today for fifteen hundred dollars.

JK: Did he happen to mention when he bought the house what was it like, was it fixed up already or not or what?

AR: The walls were plain they had wallpaper on them. After years when they were able to afford it they would take all the old plaster off and put new plaster on and have just a plastered wall. But everything was wallpaper; everything was wallpaper and just trim wood. And then like I said the cellar was not completed and you had to dig the cellar and we used to use the cellar as a kitchen. At Christmas time everybody would get together and really have a tremendous time at Christmas. Neighbors would visit each other that they don't do today.

JK: What about entertainment like movies, where there any shows in town?

AR: There were two shows on Idaho Street. One was the Capital and one was the Colonial. We used to buy our popcorn, they used to have a popcorn stand, we used to go get a bag of popcorn and we used to go to the movie. You used to get in for a nickel. The shows, then they used to have the shows down in Sharon. We even used to have entertainers used to come in Sharon that you could go see.

JK: As far as Idaho Street what other businesses used to be up there years ago on the block?

AR: On Idaho Street?

JK: Yeah.

AR: On Idaho Street they had a hardware store, they had a clothing store, they had the five and ten called Murphy's, and they had grocery stores down on Idaho Street. But the main one was when Dr. Greenberg's parents used to have a clothing store, they had a little bit of everything: your pans, your clothing, your socks, everything, and we used to have a ball going over there. I remember your grandmother and I used to walk down there many a times. And they would try to

say what are you getting today, what are you giving away? And they were Jews, but they were good Jews.

JK: As far as yards, you mentioned that the back yard was all garden, was there little grass in the fronts?

AR: All the fronts had grass.

JK: Did they have power mowers years ago?

AR: No, they had hand mower, a push mower was what we used. I wish I still had that push mower, I think it does a better job then your electric ones.

JK: How about the street on the outside again, where there a lot of trees back then?

AR: They had trees on both sides then John, and they were a pain. The trees were nothing but a disaster in the winter. Some people wouldn't even clean their leaves and I think it was the younger generations because the elderly always clean everything. There were those who helped that neighbor and this neighbor and that one, they would get the shovel in the winter, do the snow on the sidewalks and it was a wonderful place.

JK: How about did a lot of neighbor's have hedges or bushes?

AR: A majority of us all had hedges and then in time they were taken out because they wanted to beautify the land more.

JK: Generally, you're a long, long time resident, if you had to go back or now where would you rather live in the 30's?

AR: If I had to do all over again John I would take the back from way back in the nineteen thirties and forties. I loved it! Because it's not like it was then.

JK: Were people poor then?

AR: People were poor because of the depression, but they because of being poor they would make this and say I'll give you this and you give me that. It would be like a trade off. And it was a happy trade off and people were relieved to do it.

JK: So, today what do you see? How did things change? Do you know what happened?

AR: Today, well like I say's if it wasn't for the elderly if God didn't take and put them in their resting place they would still be here and I don't think they would move. But the children they sell and get out of here. There are no jobs to be had really around here. And the kids today they don't want to stay around here. But between you and me to live in Sharon, Sharpsville, Mercer, whatever, I'll always pick Farrell, because it is a community that is willing to share, give, and help and it's still that way. Even with the ones moving in I have no problems with my neighbors

none what so ever. In fact they will come do you need anything, so I have wonderful neighbors and I don't think it will ever change.

JK: You still prefer if you could go back to go back to those quote good old days.

AR: I would go to the good old days, because that's when you had it. You could sleep on the porch; you were out there until three or four o'clock in the morning. No one would say anything to you. Today all you hear is the boom box or whatever kind of music they have. And that's not what we had in the 1930's or anything like that. It was peaceful.

JK: Okay, that's very, very good. Anything else that you'd like to add about anything on the neighborhood or just about anything, just life in general, the neighbors, the grocery stores, the town?

AR: I talked to a neighbor this morning I don't plan on moving I don't plan on going anywhere. I have no problems with it.

JK: Okay, Antoinette thank you for this interview.

AR: Your welcome John.