

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

O.H. 2187

Gregory H. Krystek

Interviewed

By

Jack Lorenzini

On

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: Gregory H. Krystek

INTERVIEWER: Jack Lorenzini

SUBJECT: YSU History

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P: This is an interview with Gregory H. Krystek for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on YSU History, by Jack Lorenzini, at the Quality Inn, Indianapolis, Indiana, on April 24, 2004. At 10:40 p.m.

L: When and where were you born?

K: I was born April 28, 1950, in Youngstown, Ohio.

L: Do you have any siblings?

K: Yes, I have five siblings, two brothers and three sisters.

L: What are your parents' names?

K: My parents' names are Eugene Anthony and Barbara Valaria.

L: What were their occupations?

K: My dad was a press-operator at General Fireproofing for more than forty years. My mom was a very good housekeeper.

L: Which neighborhood did you live in?

K: We lived in Boardman, the city of Boardman. Probably within a mile of Lanterman Falls, Mill Creek Park.

L: As a kid did you attend Lanterman Falls a lot?

K: Yea, we were down there quite a bit probably a lot of it I'm sure not to my parents' knowing. But yea, we spent quite a bit of time down there.

L: And I know that you took a picture of Lanterman Falls later in life, is that correct?

K: Yea, well, there's a picture, I think it's still there. There was a picture that I took in 1981 of the old mill before they refurbished the mill. I was home for my brother-in-law's funeral unfortunately, and I happened to go down there as I usually did when I came home, and I wanted to get a picture of it before they refurbished it. So I took a picture and I eventually donated a copy to Mill Creek Park.

L: What is your ethnic background?

K: I'm primarily Polish. I believe there might be some Czech in there, but I believe it's primarily Polish.

L: Where did you go to school kindergarten through twelfth?

K: I don't believe I ever really attended kindergarten. I went first through eighth grade at St. Christine's, and high school at Boardman High School.

L: Can you describe any influential teachers in high school?

K: In high school? Let's see...well, I remember my Latin teacher, Mrs. Atkinson. I did very well in Latin, but I can't really remember any of it now, but I do remember I liked it when I had it. Maybe my Geometry teacher, Mr. Ferrara.

L: I've had him.

K: You've had him? He's still there?

L: Thomas Ferrara?

K: Yes. How old is he now?

L: He retired. On the other hand, who were your least favorite teachers or least favorite subjects?

K: In high school?

L: Yes.

K: I don't know if I really had any least favorite. I guess I can't really say that I didn't like any teachers that badly but I can't remember it today. Subjects, maybe English, but nothing really sticks out that I didn't like in high school I guess.

L: How did your parents influence your education?

K: Well, I think they taught me that it was important to do well in school because it meant a lot for your future. So I think both of my parents were hard workers and I don't believe my dad attended much school after high school or I think my mom did attend a little bit of school after high school, but they were, you know, in a era where they really didn't attend college, when not as many people attended college. But I think they taught me that it was important to do well in school, and I should go on into college.

L: In high school were you involved in any extracurricular activities?

K: I think I played basketball on the intramural squad, but I don't think in high school I was really athletic. I can't say I wasn't interested in athletics, but I think besides basketball that was probably the extent of it.

L: What sports did your school offer when you attended?

K: Well, I'm sure there was the typical football, baseball, basketball. I'm sure there was golf, track and field. So the typical sports.

L: Today various teenagers have different methods of having fun on the weekends, what was a local hang-out for high school students?

K: For high school students? Well, at that time I can remember when we had cars we drove up and down Market Street, which you probably still do today, but it was driving up and down Market Street, going in and out of McDonalds, I think across the street from McDonalds there was a Big Boy. I think in high school there was the Friday-night dance, and a football game, and after that it was pretty much hanging out at McDonalds.

L: Who was the high school rival in football at the time? Mooney? Fitch?

K: I guess so, as I remember, I think the leagues have changed over the years. But yea, I guess Fitch and Mooney.

L: When did you attend Youngstown State University?

K: From the fall of '68. I graduated in '73. June of '73.

L: Why did you choose YSU?

K: Primarily because it was conveniently located. Well, I think I wanted to go in to engineering, and they had an engineering school which was a good school. So it was convenient, I could live at home, I could still work and attend school. So it was partial convenience, and the fact that they did have a good engineering school.

L: So you majored in engineering?

K: Yea.

L: What particular kind of engineering?

K: I studied mechanical engineering.

L: What led you to choose mechanical engineering?

K: I guess it just probably best suited what I was interested in. There were other options, electrical or chemical, but I guess I liked things mechanical. So I think that's why I went in to mechanical engineering.

L: How did you pay for school?

K: Primarily by working in the summer, and I believe I continued to work while I was in school. I don't believe that my parents were able to help me a lot with school, other than obviously providing me room and board. But I was able to work summer jobs. I worked in the steel mills, I worked at Firestone Tire.

L: What was it like working in the steel mills?

K: It was an experience. I think the advantage in the steel mills was it was a higher paying job than you probably got pumping gas at gas stations. So I think it was a good experience. It probably showed me...it maybe reinforced my idea that I wanted to get a college education so I could work at a job where I wouldn't be working in a steel mill, or working at a job where you would do more general labor. I would have the ability to make more money, and not have to work eight hours. You know, in an environment where it's not a clean environment.

L: Take a walking tour of the campus as it was when you attended. Can you describe what the buildings and grounds looked like?

K: Yea. I'm sure it's changed quite a bit since I've been back. I obviously remember the engineering building. At the time there wasn't really a student center. I think we used to hang out in the cafeteria a lot. There were a lot of older buildings. What was the question again, Jack?

L: The area around YSU?

K: Well, I think now YSU has bought a lot more land. I think it was more residential. A lot of the students parked on the streets. They still might, but I think there was probably more street parking right in the residential area, walking into campus. I'm sure the campus was a lot smaller. And there were areas, grassy area where you could sit out and study. But, it really wasn't a young university back then, but it was certainly growing. Like I said, I haven't been back on campus for years, I'm sure it looks a lot different today.

L: Can you describe a typical day on campus as a student?

K: Well, I guess the first thing would be finding a place to park. Driving around I'm sure everybody had they're favorite area where they could find a place, and if you had an area you could probably find it quickly because you kept going back to the same spot and get lucky. And then from there it was a matter of trying to get to class on time. And you know, maybe meeting some friends on the way to class or between classes. But I think there were occasions where between classes and lunch you'd walk to someplace to get something to eat. But it was pretty much walking from one building to the next with your books. Back then I don't remember many people walking with book bags, I think everybody carried their books under their arms, which nowadays – I don't know whether kids carry more books nowadays, but I know our kids in high school, it seems like they carry their whole locker on their backs. They must have fifty pounds of books.

L: Can you estimate how much books cost back then?

K: I'm sure even back then we thought they were expensive, but compared to what they are now I think and expensive book back then was probably ten or twelve dollars.

L: That's like one of the cheapest books today. What activities or clubs did you participate in at YSU?

K: Well, I belonged to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. I think I did play basketball, intramural basketball. That really might have been the extent of it, there may have been something else but I can't remember.

L: What housing was available for students back then?

K: There were dorms but I believe there weren't that many. For me it wasn't a consideration because I lived five or six miles from campus so I never really considered living in the dorm. But if I remember there were dorms available, but there weren't that many, and there were probably student apartments near campus.

L: What traditions were observed at Youngstown State University? Homecoming? Painting the rock?

K: Yea, I guess if I remember traditions, when I was in school they had a very good basketball team. They're football team was – I remember going to football games and

basketball games, and it was pretty much a tradition because they had a good basketball team, there was a good following of local interest in the basketball program. And you mentioned painting the rock, I assume it's still there, but that was part of it.

L: Can you tell me anything unique about the rock?

K: Not really.

L: The basketball team, was it coached by Dom Roselli?

K: Yea, I think Roselli was there near the end of his career when I was in school, but he was still a very good coach.

L: Was there a student newspaper?

K: I believe there was.

L: *The Jambar*?

K: Yea, *The Jambar*.

L: What issues did this paper discuss? Were they University-related? Or like world-related?

K: Well, back then I'd have to say it was more University related. It was probably not as political as it is maybe today.

L: Can you provide an example of it not being as political? Where there any political cartoons?

K: Yea, well, I don't remember specifically. I'm sure that back then there must have been some politics involved because that was back during the Vietnam War, so I'm sure there were probably some political protests or some sort of political flavor to it because of all of the college protesting during the war.

L: So you would say anti-war protests were the biggest issues on campus when you attended?

K: I would think so. I think that was probably the most on everyone's mind.

L: Did you participate in any anti-war protests?

K: I remember going downtown a few times in a student march protesting the war. I think I got involved later in the war in the earlier seventies when it became apparent that the war was sort of dragging on and it didn't look like there was any end to it. So that would have been in the '70-'71 period.

L: Where were you on the day of May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1970, Kent State, the shootings?

K: I don't specifically remember where I was. I remember we used to go to Kent State. There was a nightclub that we used to drive up to Kent State to go to. I think went back there a week or a couple weeks after the incident. But I don't remember specifically where I was on that day.

L: What was your reaction?

K: Well, I'm sure I was, as everyone was, surprised that National Guard troops would actually shoot Americans for what would appear to be no just reason. Especially with live ammunition. So I'm sure I was surprised and certainly not happy about what happened.

L: You mentioned that you went up to Kent a week or two after the shootings. Can you describe the sentiment of the town?

K: Well, we usually went up on a Friday or Saturday night, so we probably, I guess, the mood maybe - I can't remember the name of the night club, it was a dance facility, I can't remember, but I'm sure the mood was more somber. But you know we usually went up in the evening and came back that same night, so we didn't spend a whole lot of time there.

L: Was there a military presence on campus? ROTC?

K: At Youngstown? Yes.

L: How did students feel towards ROTC?

K: I didn't really think anything of them.

L: In general, though.

K: Did I know anyone in ROTC?

L: Yes.

K: There may have been a few engineers involved in ROTC but I think it was more the exception than the rule.

L: Who was your most memorable instructor?

K: I've got a bad memory on these kinds of things.

L: Or your most memorable or favorite class while in college?



K: Well, I know I didn't like heat transfer, that was one of my worst classes; I didn't care for that at all. For some reason I just never caught on to that. I think I liked metallurgical studies and material science, I enjoyed those quite a bit.

L: Were there any other least-favorite classes besides heat transfer? Any of the general education requirements?

K: No, in fact I remember enjoying American History quite a bit. There was an instructor in American History that I enjoyed quite a bit. He was a very good teacher. Just the way he taught was interesting. I think the general classes that I took I don't believe I particularly disliked any of them. I can't remember the other part of the question, what was it?

L: Can you remember the name of the history professor you had?

K: At the time when I was in school he was a younger professor, but I can't remember his name.

L: Jenkins?

K: I don't remember.

L: What did you like about this American history professor?

K: Well, if I remember, I think his class was on the American Revolution and early American history. It was just something about the way he delivered it. He made it interesting and you could tell that he enjoyed the subject. It wasn't just reading out of the book.

L: He psyched himself up.

K: Yea, you could tell that he enjoyed what he was doing and that he had a lot of interest in the subject. He was enthusiastic about it.

L: Perhaps it was Ronda.

K: It could be. I guess I can go back in my yearbook and look, I think they listed the teachers with pictures. It might jog my memory if I see a picture of him. I have a vague picture of what he looked like, but I'm sure I wouldn't recognize him if I saw him anywhere today.

L: So you have a campus yearbook?

K: Yea, I think I got two or three of the yearbooks.

L: What was the name of the yearbook? *The Neon*?

K: *The Neon*, yea.

L: And was it free of charge to students or tuition included?

K: It might have been included.

L: What kinds of things were in the yearbook?

K: Well, it was just a bigger, fatter, high school yearbook. I mean it was the typical organization. There were the student pictures and the activities, the Homecoming, the different plays that were presented. So I mean it was everything you'd find in a classic yearbook. Just much thicker, two or three times as thick as a high school yearbook.

L: How diverse was the student population at YSU?

K: You mean ethnically?

L: Yes.

K: I don't think it was...well, I guess in engineering there were probably some foreign students. By that I mean Asian, but I don't remember in engineering that many black students. So I guess from what I saw of the student body it was probably not very ethnically diverse.

L: How many female students were at YSU?

K: Actually I don't remember the percentage. In engineering there were very few. So being in engineering after the first year or so I probably didn't see that many women in my classes because there weren't that many women in engineering.

L: What was the typical attitude of the professors towards these female students?

K: I guess in engineering I can't say that they were favored or...

L: Were they looked upon differently because they were women? Being that it was a traditionally male-dominated field?

K: I don't know if they were looked at differently. They were maybe more of a curiosity than anything. I don't think they were necessarily belittled. It wasn't like they were trying to force them out or anything. I think the women that were there were welcomed. Like I said it was more unusual, I'm sure today there would be a lot more women in engineering.

L: You graduated in 1973?

K: Right.

L: Did you attend your ceremony?

K: I did.

L: Can you describe that?

K: I don't remember a lot about it. I remember waiting in line to come out. I remember talking with some friends that were standing together before we went out. I guess I remember sitting in the crowd. I can't tell you that I actually remember walking up and receiving my diploma.

L: Was the ceremony long and boring?

K: It was long. I couldn't tell you who was the speaker. But it was probably long because there were quite a few students.

L: If you had to estimate, how many students would you say attended YSU when you attended?

K: I'd say five to ten thousand.

L: Do you still have your diploma?

K: I do. It's up in the box, the archives. I'm sure I could find it. (End of Side A of Tape)

L: (Beginning of Side B) Did you go on to post-graduate work?

K: Well, after college I moved to Connecticut, and I did go to graduate school for a few semesters, but I sort of lost interest in it. I'm not sure whether it was because I didn't feel it was something that I needed for my job, or that I got involved with other activities and just wanted to do something other than school. But I started to go to graduate school and I took a few semesters of classes and that was it. I never really pursued it.

L: Where did you attend graduate school?

K: Well, I went to what was called Rentsleer Polytechnic Institute. I worked with aircraft out of college. They had a special program that was called RPI. They were paying for my education. The other thing I guess that stopped it was I only worked in Connecticut for two-and-a-half years and then I was laid off. So I moved to Wisconsin, and when I moved to Wisconsin I guess it interrupted my post-college studies and I never really picked them up again.

L: When did you move to Wisconsin?

K: In 1975.

L: And you're still there today?

K: Right.

L: Currently what job do you hold?

K: Well, currently I'm a mechanical engineer. I've been fortunate that since the day I graduated I've only been laid-off for a short period of time over those thirty years. But I work for a company called ReGENco now. We work with steam turbines and generators, service work.

L: Do you have any hobbies?

K: Primarily I guess it would involve bicycling. I like to stay physically active, so I do a lot of bicycling. I ride my bike to work when the weather is nice. On weekends when the weather is warm, other than biking we hike or ski, but not as much as we used to before we had children. That sort of changed our activities a little bit. I also enjoy photography.

L: What is your favorite thing to take a picture of?

K: Probably landscape photography.

L: Roller coasters?

K: Yea, roller coasters.

L: You recently were in Chicago to participate in a competition. Was it the John Hancock Tower competition?

K: Yea, well, I don't know how many years ago it was. I got involved with essentially stair climbing. They have races up buildings for charity. I did my first one back in '91 in Milwaukee and I found that it was a good activity for me to stay active in the winter when I couldn't go biking. So I would climb stairs, and Chicago happens to be a city where there are probably two or three of the biggest stair-climbs in the world. There's one up the Hancock Building, there's one up what's called the Aon Center, and there's recently been one up the Sears Tower. So I started doing the Hancock about five years ago, and last year I ended up doing all three of them because I wanted to do the Sears Tower at least once, and I wanted to do the Aon because I had done the other two.

L: You're placed pretty high...

K: In my age group I'm pretty competitive. I'd say I'm within the top five or six percent.

L: How many people participate?

K: Well, the Hancock is the biggest. I think the actual number of people that go up is something close to three-thousand.

L: So how many stairs do you have to walk up?

K: The Hancock is about 1,630.

L: Wow.

K: The Sears Tower is 2,200.

L: If there is one word to describe your experience at YSU, what would it be?

K: One word? Oh boy...

L: Good? Bad? Challenging? Hard? Fulfilling?

K: Well, it's all of that. It was certainly fulfilling because I'm still enjoying the benefits of that education. It was challenging. Engineering was a challenging degree. I think it was a good experience. I don't have any real negative memories of college.

L: Do you have any regrets in life?

K: As far as if I chose to do something different as far as career?

L: Anything. Would you do something different?

K: I don't know. I think I've been pretty happy with the way my life has turned out. I don't know, not really.

L: Is it a George Bush response to the Iraqi press conference?

K: Yea, right, the question wasn't on my list of prepared answers. I don't have a prepared answer for it.

L: Nothing is prepared in oral history.

K: Right.

L: If you could give advice to a mechanical engineering student today that they would need to know now, what would it be? What would you like them to know?

K: Well, certainly I think there's a tendency to maybe believe some of the studies that you undertake aren't going to be useful in your career, but try to learn as much as you can, take advantage of all the opportunities that education presents, because the more well-rounded your background is, the more flexibility you might have in the future.

L: I've been told you like roller coasters, correct?

K: Right.

L: What is your favorite roller coaster?

K: Wooden or steel?

L: Wooden.

K: Well, I definitely like Shivering Timbers.

L: And that's in Michigan?

K: Michigan Adventure. I also remember riding the Texas Giant down in Dallas, which was a very good wooden roller coaster. As far as steel roller coasters, probably the Millennium Force at Cedar Point right now.

L: When did you first start liking roller coasters?

K: I used to go to Idora Park when it was still there, so I guess that was my first taste of roller coasters. And I can remember going to Conneaut and Geneva on the Lake. I remember being there as a kid riding some of the roller coasters. And then when we were teenagers and in the college we went to Idora Park, and I think after that when I moved away from home I don't think I really had a chance to ride many roller coasters in Connecticut. Why I moved to Wisconsin, I had to go down to Great America (inaudible). That was the closest one. There weren't really any roller coasters in Wisconsin.

L: Is there anything that you would like to add that we did not cover today?

K: About Youngstown?

L: Everything we talked about.

K: I can't think of anything, Jack.

L: Okay, thank you for your time today.