

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Depression

Personal Experience

O. H. 964

JOSEPH MERANTO

Interviewed

by

Dolores Z. Margiotta

on

May 21, 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH MERANTO

INTERVIEWER: Dolores Z. Margiotta

SUBJECT: unemployment, welfare, unions, attitudes
of people

DATE: May 21, 1976

DM: This is an interview with Joseph Meranto for the Youngstown State Oral History Program, on the Depression, by Dolores Z. Margiotta, at 54 Pershing Street, on May 21, 1976, at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Meranto, you told me that you came to this country in 1913 as a young boy. Can you start telling me what in Youngstown, or where you lived and the things that you remembered at that time?

JM: Well, we lived down on a little street down off of Federal Street, on Spruce Street. In fact when we first came we didn't have any place to go and we had a shoe makers shop here on Federal Street. A lot of people will remember it because his son has a drug store. Of course he closed the drug store now.

DM: What's their name?

JM: Colone, Mike Colone. They took us in their house for a few days until my father was able to find a house. Then we moved down here on Spruce Street. And we lived there until 1918.

DM: How many in your family?

JM: Well, when we came from Italy there was three of us and my mother. My father was already here. But after that she got two more children. Now there is five of us. No, four of us came from Italy. Only one was born here.

There was two boys and two girls. And we came here around 1913 and we stayed in. In fact we got off of the train up on Mahoning Avenue. And there was nobody there to pick us up. We were lost. So somebody came there, found out we were Italian--we couldn't talk English. So they took us over a house up on Wood Street, a fellow by the name of La Tessa. He used to have a bakery shop. They took us up there and this fellow finally found out where my father was. Believe it or not we didn't even see my father until we got on the street car coming on Federal Street, and then we went over Colones. Then, of course, right after that we rented a house down on Spruce Street, and we lived there until 1918. I went to the old Brier Hill school for three years, and, of course, after three years I was sixteen and I went to work.

DM: Where did you go to work?

JM: When I first started work, I started work at the Erie Railroad. Then in 1919 I got a job in the Youngstown Sheet and Tube, at the Brier Hill plant. And I was there, believe it or not, until 1945.

DM: Well, then you were there all during the Depression?

JM: I was there all through the Depression but there was very little work. In 1929 we got out of work and I didn't get back to work until 1942. That was all the time in between there that we struggled. We really struggled in between there because there was nothing to get. In fact, when my youngest daughter was born we didn't have any gas, any electric, we had kerosine lamps. I remember we had two going upstairs there.

DM: Well, when did you get married Mr. Meranto?

JM: I got married in 1923.

DM: And then you had how many children?

JM: Well, we had five children.

DM: So you really had a hard time, with not working. Were you able to find any type of job during that time?

JM: We did everything. We went out and got a job, even digging graves, believe it or not. I never done it but I have been up there trying to get some of that work. Of course in 1933 we finally got a job with the

government. It was a government job. And we worked 80 hours for \$60 a month.

DM: Oh my, that was a lot of hours.

JM: We worked 80 hours and we were digging ditches as much as 25 feet deep because there was a sewer, we put in a sewer line from out off of South Avenue, Simon Road.

DM: That would be out in the country?

JM: Yes, well it was in the country at that time, off of Midlothian there. We dug ditches there until, and I worked there until around 1933. And then, of course, the mill started up again, and we would go in and get maybe a couple of days of work a week. And that's about all.

DM: Do you remember when you worked on this government program how much your wages would have been?

JM: Well \$60 for 80 hours a week, so you can divide that into 88 and. . .

DM: It wasn't very much?

JM: No. (Laughter)

DM: Did you, of course, then you must have had a garden, or did a lot of. . .

JM: Everybody had a garden. In fact we had a piece of land up in Hubbard that the Sheet and Tube loaned us for the Depression. We planted a whole patch of potatoes, probably a couple of acres. They loaned us the money for the seeds and everything. And then what happened, the day before we went up there to dig them up, somebody beat us to it. When we went up there to get the potatoes, somebody else went there the night before and dug them all up and we went up there, a gang of us, there must have been around twenty or twenty-five of us. All the people from the neighborhood that went up there and planted them, we were getting ready for the winter, so when we went up to get the potatoes we were all out of luck, we didn't get any of them.

DM: And they never found out who took the potatoes?

JM: No, no, no.

DM: Did the Sheet and Tube do this then for it's employees?

JM: Yes, the Sheet and Tube did it for the employees.

DM: But then did you have a garden around your house too?

JM: Yes, we had a garden in the back there, of course you couldn't plant too much. But that was a great big garden up there. In fact, we used to take turns nights watching it. Maybe I would stay one night, and another guy would stay another night, and that's the way it went on. It was just the one night that we didn't go, they cleaned the garden out.

DM: That probably was very disappointing?

JM: Oh, yes. Very.

DM: After all that hard work.

JM: After all that hard work.

DM: You mentioned the neighborhood that you lived in, how close everybody was to one another and how they helped each other. And you did mention about baking bread in the back yard. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

JM: Well . . .

DM: How did you do it, I mean outside, what kind of ovens did you have?

JM: We had a brick oven, it was made out of brick. My father made it. And we used to throw wood in there, we used to go down the railroad tracks and pick up these here wooden ties that they put on across the tracks. We get them up there and split them up and dry them. And that is what we used. It used to heat up the oven pretty good. And then we would bake maybe twenty, twenty-five loaves of bread.

DM: Now did the other people use the oven when it was heated up like that?

JM: Yes, you could even cook in it. In fact, before my mother died, after she would get the bread out she would make pizza. And then she would maybe get a piece of meat, put it in there and cook it.

DM: How long did you do that? When did the oven finally disappear in Brier Hill?

JM: Well around 1930, 1935. In fact, I think it was later than that because we didn't have any, well it could have been around 1945, that's when I think it disappeared. Because the thing was falling apart and we were using gas oven.

DM: Inside, right?

JM: Yes.

DM: But it was sort of a neighborhood kind of thing too, they would just come over. . .

JM: Yes, they came on, we used to let them use it.

DM: What about wine, I heard that some people made their own wine too?

JM: Well, of course they made it, but I never made any wine. My father used to make a little bit once in a while. But not too often. It was too expensive, you had to buy grapes and grapes were expensive.

DM: Right, at that time, yes.

JM: Well at that time it didn't cost as much as it does nowadays to be able to get grapes for \$2, \$2.50, \$3. Out of a box of grapes you could get two and half, three gallons of wine. That's not too bad. But know they run around \$12 or \$13 a case.

DM: During the Depression they had many government programs to help the people, besides working. Did you know of anybody who had to go down, say for instance, for welfare?

JM: There was no such a thing as welfare. I think the most we ever got was around 50¢, \$1.50 a week. Then we used to have to go and get it either on Rayen Avenue down here, or out on Glenwood, where that school is, Catholic school. What was the name of that? You know up on Glenwood Avenue, that big home, I think the city bought it now? There was a big school there and they shut it because they didn't get enough students there or something and they sold it. That used to be a welfare. They used to get some groceries. Mostly a sack of flour or a peck of potatoes and that's about all you got. Maybe a package of sugar, about five pounds of sugar. And sometime you would get two or three quarts of milk. But it really wasn't satisfying at all. Then they had

soup kitchens down the bottom of the hill, you have to believe me now. Believe it or not that stuff wasn't fit to. . .

DM: Really, you couldn't eat it?

JM: No, and the kids wouldn't touch it.

DM: You mentioned, I had heard something about, Hoover Shacks, did they have any around your area, down on the railroad where you lived?

JM: No, there was none around here at all.

DM: None at all?

JM: They did build some because we seen them, but I don't know exactly where. But around here everybody had their own home. Of course we used to have a hell of a time. They shut my water off in the middle of the summer, shut the water off because we couldn't pay. So finally after arguing with the fellow when he went over to shut the water, he went out in the street to shut the water off, my father got a pickett off the fence and chased him down the street and he finally left. Then he came back two or three days later with a work sheet and we worked our water bill off.

DM: Now what kind of work did you do then?

JM: Laboring down at the water department.

DM: Well during the Depression then, since you had hardly any money, what did you do for entertainment? What did you do in the neighborhood?

JM: Get together, our families used to get together, our families used to get together and play cards or something.

DM: Did anybody have cars at that time?

JM: No, nobody had cars.

DM: Well then how did you get to places? Did you walk?

JM: Walked. We walked, and one time, to tell you the truth, right after the Depression was over I went down to Sheet and Tube, I got examined to go back to work. The doctors told me that I couldn't get to work unless I got

a pair of glasses. So I came downtown and I didn't know what to do, I didn't know where to get any glasses, so there was a doctor in the Dollar Bank building, he was there and somebody told me, "You go to him and he might help you." So I went over to see and I told him, "I got a job, but I can't go to work unless I get a pair of glasses." I said, "If you can help me out the first pay I'll give you some money." So he examined me, and he had a pair of glasses made. I forget where it was the glasses were made, but anyway he told me to go there and get them and pay them. Here the guy wanted \$2.50. I didn't have it, see, so he called up the doctor and the doctor told him, "You charge that to me." Then when I went over to pay him he didn't even want to take the money, things like that get into your mind and you don't forget, see, because there isn't too many people, at that time, that would do something like that for you. That's how I got back to work.

DM: But you walked everywhere. What about, I know baseball was one of the things, some of the Italian games like Bocce, things like that.

JM: We played baseball right up here on the little, there's a garden there now, there's a lawn, rather. We used to play there. We used to walk down to Sheet and Tube. The worst part is, right after the Depression, you would go to work, and maybe you had to go three or four days straight. And maybe get one day out of it. We used to go there and the boss would stand there and said, "You, you, you work and the rest of the guys go home." And you did that maybe four, five times a week. Maybe out of five times a week that you went down there you got two days work. Sometimes one day, and some weeks you didn't get any. Then we had to walk down to Campbell, if there was nothing here we would go down and walk to Campbell.

DM: You mean all the way from Brier Hill to Campbell?

JM: From Brier Hill to Campbell, yes.

DM: That is quite a distance?

JM: Oh, yes.

DM: How long would it take you to walk? Do you remember how long?

JM: Oh, about, at least an hour and a half. We walked all

the way down, right at the bridge there, at Campbell. Right, almost in the center of Campbell. Right in the Sheet and Tube office.

DM: That was quite a distance. It would be rather disappointing when you got down there and there wasn't any work.

JM: That's right. How many days I walked down there for an examination for a job and never got any. And we used to go to all the mills. We used to go to Carnegie, we used to go all over. We would get up early in the morning and hit these different places. Sometimes go four or five different employment offices in one day. The next morning we would do the same thing.

DM: How did they pick these men that they chose to work that day? Was there any particular way that they did it or just hap-hazard? "You, you, you," like you said.

JM: Well, the one I said, "you, you, you," were the ones that were already employed. See they were already employed into the plant, they already had some time in. But these other places they just hired me.

DM: Mr. Meranto, you also told me that you played in a band during the Depression. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

JM: Well, we didn't get very much. We tried to get as much as we could but believe me, sometimes it was hard getting any work for the band. But when we did get some work, these people that hired you always trying to chisel on you. I mean you went in, they know you were in need and they always trying to say, if you ask them for \$5 and they trying to bring it down to \$3.50 or \$2 there.

DM: How many men in your band.

JM: I had four men and myself, five. Sometimes only three of us went out on a job. But the worst experience that I had, I played for a guy out here on Logan Avenue, and we played for New Years Eve. We played until 1:00, and he came over at 1:00, his crowd was big and his license was until 2:30 so he says, "You go ahead and play an hour and a half and I will take care of you." So when we got through playing he came over and he gave us \$2.50. \$.50 a piece for five of us. I'm telling you, I was ready to hit him with my saxophone. I was

ready to wrap that thing around his neck, but what can you do, that \$.50 went a long way because you could buy almost a bushel of potatoes for \$.50, see. And I had five kids to feed so it was pretty hard to turn him down.

DM: What kind of doings did you play for?

JM: Well we used to play in night clubs, at that time it was a big thing. Because right after their whiskey and wine came in, beer gardens were opening up all over. And there was a lot of work. There was a lot of work, but I mean everybody didn't pay too much. Because there was no money to be had so they took advantage of the guy that went out and worked. It isn't like today, today we have a union and you have a certain price.

DM: Did you play for weddings?

JM: Yes, in fact my son played piano for me. My son is a piano player. He played piano for me for a long time.

DM: Do you remember any of the weddings that you played for? What kind of weddings, as compared to today, you know, today we have the big receptions and everything.

JM: We had the same thing them days. A lot of them had their weddings at home. Right in their home, instead of having a hall like they have today. They had them in their homes.

DM: And then you would play at the homes.

JM: Yes. We played for parties, in them days they even played for baptism. When a woman had a baby, they baptized the baby and they had a party and they had an orchestra.

DM: Well that was the only form of entertainment they probably had. Because no one went out to movies or to other dances.

JM: No, we couldn't. We couldn't go anywhere.

DM: Did you play at any dance halls?

JM: Yes, I played one night at a hall in Campbell. I think they called it the Bucket of Blood, or something. But, anyway we played over there and there was a hell of a battle there. We was up on the stage, of course we was

out of the way, but it was a heck of a place to play. First they told us when you play over there you got to be careful. Of course, we stayed in the background and of course the police came in and they stopped the whole thing and it was all right after that. But that was the worst place. We played out at New Castle, out there--different places.

DM: That was a good way to earn some extra money.

JM: Yes.

DM: You did go into tailoring but that was at the latter part of the Depression.

JM: That's right. Well that was after I was sick. After I got better from being sick, I couldn't very well go back, right back in the mill, so I started a tailor shop and I have been tailoring ever since.

DM: How did you learn your trade?

JM: I brought that with me when I came from Italy. I brought the trade with me. I learned it there.

DM: Who taught you that?

JM: Well in the old country I didn't go to school, there was no school to be had. The town I was born in didn't have no school. And everybody learned a trade. I learned the tailoring trade because the fellow lived right across the street from me and I used to go there and make button holes and stuff like that. Of course I was pretty young when I came here, but I knew the trade pretty good when I came here.

DM: And you never forgot it either.

JM: No, I never forgot it. Then I picked it up when I was later in years, I picked it up again and that is how I got started.

DM: Where was your tailor shop at that time?

JM: Well just like I said, I started right at home and then I opened that place up there up on Federal Street.

DM: And how long did you stay there then?

JM: I stayed there for about ten years and then I came back again and I still have my shop here now.

DM: It is unusual for a man to go into that sort of work. Did you work for yourself rather than say another company?

JM: No, I never worked with. . .I worked for the fellow downtown, Harry Schwartz, he used to be on Fifth Avenue. I worked with him for quite awhile. He had his own shop. We used to make clothes there. Expensive clothes. Then after I quit him I came on by myself.

DM: Mr. Meranto, during the Depression, do you recall what the attitudes of the people were at that time?

JM: Well they were happy.

DM: Even though they were poor.

JM: Even though they were poor. Sometimes we would go in the garden and pick up a few dandelions and come in and make a great big salad. Everybody would dig in there with a great big loaf of bread and they'd enjoy themselves.

DM: That's good. Did they have anything against the government at that time? I know that President Roosevelt did some good things with his programs, and things that he initiated. What do you think the people thought of him?

JM: They thought he was a great man. Of course even Hoover was a great man. You didn't have anything against the government. There was no work to be had and we couldn't get any so we lived the best we could. But we were happy.

DM: Would you say the kids today could take a Depression such as what you had to go through?

JM: No, no. I don't think the kids today would take it. They are smarter than we were. Of course we come from Europe. The majority of the people that we congregated with were from Europe. And we were satisfied with the little we got because even though we got little here we didn't get any over there. We actually went to bed hungry there, of course sometimes we went to bed hungry here, too, but not as bad as it was over there. But we were contented.

DM: What was the name of the little town that you came from in Italy?

JM: The name of the town was Boiano, it's the state that's Campobasso.

DM: I don't know where that is? What part of Italy?

JM: It is north of Naples. Up in the mountains. Our town is right in between two great big mountains. Believe me now we didn't see any, I never seen snow until I came here. We'd get up in the morning, we would see something white on the ground there. We didn't know what it was, but by the time we got up, why it was gone. About 9:00 in the morning the sun would come out and everything was gone. It would be warmer. We never had shoes. It was really rough.

DM: Like coming over as you did, from Italy, and then experiencing the Depression, did that change your mind about the country being supposedly suppose to be a great place to live?

JM: No, I still say that this country is the greatest country in the world. I came from Europe and I wouldn't give 2¢ for it to tell you the truth. In fact when I was eighteen I got a letter to go back and serve, see you had compulsory service over there. To go back there and serve in the army, I just tell them to go to hell. I wouldn't go back there. (Laughter)

DM: Do you remember like, say for instance, in the Depression downtown any of the banks closing and what the people did who had money in the banks at that time?

JM: Yes, my father had money and we had some but we couldn't get any. We never got any of it.

DM: You never got any rebate on it? Some of the government programs you know allow for that.

JM: Some of them got some of it back. I think they got around thirty percent of it back. Of course I didn't have that much in there to get back. . .

DM: It was still your money, though.

JM: Yes.

DM: What did you feel about that?

JM: No hard feelings, just, there was no money, somebody got there before you and you were just out of luck, that's

all. There was no hard feelings, like you see some of these people today, and right away they condemn the government for some of the things that is happening. We never felt that way. Of all the people I have come into contact with, through playing in the band and playing for parties and I met a lot of people. And playing for weddings and stuff, I never heard anybody say, "Well, the government is this, the government is a bunch of crooks." This and that, you never hear that. Until now, now you hear it. But we never heard it then during the Depression. Everybody was satisfied with what they could get. Even though we had to get up at 5:00 in the morning and walk down to Campbell to see if we could get a day's work. We walked to Carnegie, we walked to different places trying to get anything at all. Nobody ever complained. We just went and we enjoyed ourselves.

DM: Dr. Meranto, do you remember something about your neighborhood during the Depression? What it was like?

JM: Mrs. Schiavong, Dan Schiavong, they have the Sparkle Market in Boardman, I don't know whether you know him or not? He had a little store here on Federal Street, on Oakland Avenue. We used to deal there, in fact I owed him quite a bit of money when I went back to work. He carried us over. Of course we just bought what we actually had to have. We didn't buy any fancy thing. Just maybe flour and bread and maybe some sugar or butter oil, and stuff like that, you couldn't be buying fancy things because, well he probably would have given it too us but we never spent anymore than we had to. When I went back to work, I owed him quite a bit. I paid him a little at a time, I had him put the bill on the side. I would pay him so much a pay on the old bill and in turn pay the stuff that I was getting everyday.

DM: He did that with a lot of people then, right?

JM: Yes, he took a big loss from some people, but he carried us and we were satisfied. I mean he treated us good. In fact, these kids used to go there and he used to do what he could for them. My son Joe, he used to go over there quite a bit and he would always stand up for them. They could do no wrong.

DM: You mentioned before about a doctor coming to your house to deliver one of your babies. . .

JM: Dr. Mermis, remember he's dead. He used to be out on Mahoning Avenue. He came over to the house and

delivered my youngest daughter. With lights like that.

DM: Kerosine lights. Did he do this quite often? Because women at that time didn't go to the hospital.

JM: He was good to us. I went to him ever since I can remember. Ever since he got into practice. In fact, him and I came out to be very good friends after that. We were very good friends. I used to go over to his place. He lived up at Hillman Way. Down in there. Down in them houses in there. I used to go in and see him quite a bit when he was sick. See he was sick for a long time. I used to pop in and see him. He was very, very, I don't know, how do I say it? He had a lot of compassion for people. I mean he helped wherever he could.

DM: He would come out to the house anytime you wanted?

JM: Yes, yes he would.

DM: What else can you remember about the neighborhood that you lived in?

JM: We were all very neighborly. We all helped one another. We started a little job and first thing you know you have half the neighborhood doing it.

DM: Were you working around the house too?

JM: Well not inside but on the outside. Help out on the outside, do a little cement work or sidewalks or something. They would help out, everybody used to come in and help out.

DM: Not like today?

JM: Nope, no. I go out there sometimes, I can't even push that lawn mower with my legs. You would think one of the. . . In fact there was a couple of kids here this winter, and I asked them if they would clean the sidewalk, "No." So I asked them what they wanted? They said, "Oh, give us 75¢." I said go ahead, you do the job, and after they got through they came in and I gave them \$2.00 instead of 75¢. But the job wasn't done. They just made a path about eighteen inches wide, all along my sidewalk. Now we would have never done things like that in the early days.

DM: Well your children were young then during the

Depression, because most of them were just born at that time. Did any of them, when they got a little older, help out by. . .

JM: Oh, yes. Ralph, my son Ralph used to play in the band. And everything he made, he took it home and gave to his mother. Of course, the other boys were a little younger. Ralph was the oldest and he helped the most. He went on and got a job at school, working at the school.

DM: What school was that?

JM: Jefferson school.

DM: What did he do there?

JM: Custodian, helped the custodian out. Then from there he went to Haven, he did the same thing up there and then he went to Rayen. In fact when they went to school, they always said the Meranto boys, they don't have the best clothes in school but they had the cleanest clothes in school.

DM: Well that is something to be proud of, I'll tell you.

JM: Yes, yes.

DM: Did the Depression effect them anyway? Do they remember it?

JM: Oh, yes. Ralph remmebers quite a bit of it. In fact Ralph used to go down, when we would go down to the relief house sometimes and get some groceries up there that they were giving away. He used to go up and get it with a little coaster wagon. Borrowed it off of one of the neighbors.

DM: And how old would he have been at that time? Did he go by himself then, all the way down there?

JM: Well, he was born in 1926 so he could have been around nine, ten years old.

DM: And he would go downtown to pick up some groceries.

JM: Yes. We used to walk way out on Glenwood Avenue to get some groceries too. We walked way out there. And we used to walk downtown, down here at the warehouse, where Superior Beverage is now, down there on Rayen Avenue,

right across from that junk yard. What is that Franklin down there? We used to go down there and get some groceries. Maybe once a month. Every two weeks.

DM: You talked before about working for one of these government programs, was that the WPA?

JM: Yes.

DM: And you mentioned working digging graves?

JM: No, I tried to get in, but couldn't.

DM: You couldn't get in?

JM: No.

DM: What did you do in the WPA then?

JM: We were putting in a storm sewer line on Simon Road, coming up Midlothian, then going over to South Avenue, then the other part of Simon Road. See, there is two parts of Simon road. Then we went on, what is the name of that street where the cemetery is?

DM: Lake Park.

JM: Yes, Lake Park Drive. We put that line in there. That is an eighteen inch line. Great big line like that. And that, we put that down in there, maybe twenty feet deep.

DM: Now, did you have to dig this by hand?

JM: All by hand. Everything was done by hand.

DM: Nothing automatic?

JM: No, nothing at all. We even would put the pipes in there by hand. Some of them pipes were pretty heavy. We would put them on rope and start them down, just a little bit at a time.

DM: But that lasted for how long then?

JM: Well that lasted until 1938. And I got TB in 1938 and I was. . .

DM: You weren't able to work then?

JM: Yes, I was unable to work, yes.

DM: But then that is when you went into the tailoring.

JM: Yes.

DM: Well that was almost the end of the Depression, just before the war then. Do you remember anything then about the start of the war or how it might have effected you or your business?

JM: No, I don't think anything affected, the war didn't affect us at all, we just got to work and that was it. I didn't get back to work until 1942. I was in that steel strike.

DM: Do you remember anything about that steel strike?

JM: I was one of the. . .

DM: Really, because it was supposed to have been a very bad strike at the time.

JM: Yes, 1936 it started. We started organizing in 1936.

DM: You mean the union.

JM: Yes.

DM: Right.

JM: Then in 1937 we went out on strike.

DM: What were the feelings of the men toward a union at that time?

JM: Well the men were right in between. They didn't know whether they wanted it, they didn't know whether they didn't want it. In fact, when we organized the Brier Hill there, we only had around 13% of the employees signed up. But you had to, like today, you had to show 50% signed up people before you can start to organize. At that time we just, when we went on strike at 13% we just closed the shop up. We closed the shop and they couldn't get in and out so that was it. And then they had to sign cards.

DM: How long did that strike last? Do you remember?

JM: Well as far as I was concerned it lasted until 1940. Of course they never called me back until after 1940.

DM: So, what did the men actually do then? Because there was some blood shed wasn't there?

JM: Oh, yes. Not here, not at Brier Hill, we didn't have any blood shed at Brier Hill, but they had it up at. . . Out on Poland Avenue.

DM: Do you remember anything about that?

JM: No, I wasn't anywhere near them places. Down here I stopped a blood shed by, they had Pennsylvania Police, what they called Pennsylvania Police. They had on their own property, when they were on a train. And they were running through a strike zone, they would put Pennsylvania Police. They were up there with shotguns. A bunch of guys were going to hop this freight see, and get in trouble. So I went down there and stopped them. I said, "No." I said, "That is their property, you just stay off of it." And it was a good thing that they stayed off of it because on the other side when the train pulled up on the other side there was 25 or 30 Pennsylvania Police.

DM: Do you remember what they went on strike for? What did they go out for?

JM: To organize. They wanted a union.

DM: Really?

JM: And if anybody needed a union, they really needed a union. Just like I said, we used to go up to the mill and you maybe would have to go up there four or five days a week. Maybe out of four or five days you would get one day's work. That wasn't fair. We used to go down there, and like today now they have their schedule to work, they go down there, and if they don't work they get paid for four hours. Those days we didn't get nothing. We went down there if there was work for you, you worked, otherwise you went home.

DM: Do you remember what the salaries were at that time when you had gone out on strike?

JM: Well the salaries were around 60¢ an hour. I think they were making around, anywhere between 60¢ to \$1 an hour at that time. But then when we went back, I think we started at 33¢ an hour.

DM: So the wages dropped then.

JM: Yes.

DM: Do you think it was because of the strike?

JM: Well I don't know what the reason was, but we did take a cut in wages.

DM: When did they start to increase again?

JM: Well, they started around 1940. From 1940 until about 1942 after the war started. Of course when the war started the wages froze. They couldn't go up or down. But the wages went up and they didn't go up too much.

DM: What about during the wartime, the hours that the men worked. Was there such a thing as overtime?

JM: Oh, yes. You could have had all the overtime they wanted.

DM: I mean did they get paid overtime?

JM: Yes, yes.

DM: Because during the Depression the men did not. You worked, like you stated before, so many hours and that was it and you just got a straight wage. But then in the mill you did get overtime during the war?

JM: Yes.

DM: Some people say that because of the war, you know, this is what helped us get out of the Depression. Do you think that is true?

JM: No, I don't think. I think we would have gotten out of it anyway, because Roosevelt was doing a great job when he got down there. He formed the unions, I mean he didn't form them, we formed the unions, but he helped out with that Wagner Act. A fellow by the name of Wagner, I think he was a congressman. He put a bill through that people could organize. There was no discrimination. Because before that, if you were caught organizing, the company would fire you and that was it. You just couldn't get a job no place else. They tried to follow you all over.

DM: Well especially in a town like this because it was a steel mill town.

JM: Well, even if you get out of town, we had a fellow that they put off the job, he had a job up in Cleveland. He had the job the night before, and when he went to work the next morning, why the job was gone. They said, "Sorry, we don't have any job for you. The job is filled and we can't do anything."

DM: Well you said before that there was about 13% of the men who formed the union before the strike. How many then afterwards did your percent go up?

JM: We had around 85%.

DM: That's good.

JM: We went up from 13 to 85%.

DM: And did it stay that way most of the time after?

JM: Well, after that you went to work in a mill then you couldn't work after 30 days, you had to join the union. Otherwise you had to leave. Too bad some of the other unions couldn't do it. Especially the school systems can do that.

DM: Well then Mr. Meranto, do you have any closing thoughts about the Depression and how it might of affected you as you look today? Are you a little bit more leary about spending money or. . .

JM: Well of course I am (laughter), you can ask my wife that. I'm always leary of spending money. I don't like to spend anymore than I have to. Because we have seen a time where we were destitute for anything that we could get.

DM: But during the Depression you had both good times and bad times.

JM: Oh yes. I mean I don't regret it to tell you the truth. I am glad I went through it and I am glad I saw it. A lot of people would never get that experience. We have had a lot of things done where we walked every place we went, we never road. We walked to Campbell, we walked to Ohio Works, we walked to Carnegie, we walked to Girard. We walked every place. I used to go and see my wife before that. Of course before that I used to walk up to Girard. People don't walk today. My granddaughter is only sixteen years and she had got a car. She runs around. Her father stays home and she runs around with a car.

MERANTO

21

DM: (Laughter) Well that is how it is with the kids.

JM: Yes.

DM: Okay, well, is that about what you remember.

JM: That is about all.

DM: Okay, thank you very much Mr. Meranto.

END OF INTERVIEW