

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Jackson Milton School

Personal Experience

O. H. 1081

RODNEY H. LUTES

Interviewed

by

John Gulgas

on

May 8, 1985

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Jackson Milton School

INTERVIEWEE: RODNEY H. LUTES

INTERVIEWER: John Gulgas

SUBJECT: high school days in 1950's, activities

DATE: May 8, 1985

G: This is an interview with Rodney Lutes for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on school days in the Jackson Milton High School in the 1950's, by John Gulgas, at his Isaly's store, on May 8, 1985, at 4:30 p.m.

Let's start off with your favoriet subject in school. When you went to class, what was your favorite subject?

L: Math, I guess.

G: Really? Now, why? Was it the teacher or the subject?

L: I think it was the subject. I think because I understood it and all the rest of it I didn't do too good.

G: Now, which teacher is most memorable in your mind, or coach, because I know you played in sports? More than one? You had a lot of favorites.

L: I would say M. Kepner; he was the superintendent. He also was a teacher. I can't remember any names back that far. It has been a long time. Algen, that was one of the best grades I ever got in high school. He was a teacher.

G: A teacher. I know he taught algebra and I think all the other math classes too, probably. Did he teacher algebra and all the other math, or was it just algebra? I think somebody. . .

L: I think it was Algen. It seems to me it was. I can't remember.

G: What was special about his class, that you kind of liked?

L: Respect. Everybody had respect for him.

G: That is true. Now, of all the activities you were involved in, which was your favorite? Was it the sports, or was it something else?

L: In high school?

G: Yes.

L: I really wasn't involved in sports too much. But, sports was (my favorite) because all of my buddies played.

G: Well, that is logical. What did that demand of you to be on the team in those days? What was it like to be on the team?

L: Well, I played basketball when I was a junior, I think, in high school. Practice every night, just like today I would say. Maybe not quite as tough.

G: You think it was easier?

L: I think. I don't think we had the pressure that they have today.

G: More fun in it.

L: As far as sports.

G: Kind of more enjoyable. Did you have a lot on your schedule? Did they play like six games?

L: Oh, no! In basketball?

G: Oh, I am sorry, you said basketball. I was thinking football.

L: No, we played every school twice. So, it must have been about the same as today.

G: I want to know about your nickname, "Az."

L: That is the reason I didn't play sports.

G: Why?

L: Because I had asthma.

G: I was talking to your daughter last night and she said, "Where did he get that nickname?" Then it occurred to her, she said, "Probably because he had asthma." So, they called you "Az."

L: Yes, that is what they called me.

G: Alright, mystery solved.

L: I used to have a little squirter that I went around with to just squirt everybody. So they. . .

G: . . . called you "Az." That makes sense.

L: For instance, that year I played basketball for, I would say, three or four weeks. Then I was down for a week. I would catch a bad cold and then I would get this asthma.

g: I guess that is probably why you didn't play a lot of sports. That makes sense. Okay, mystery solved. Now I know where you got your nickname.

How about the social functions? Any of those that really stand out in your mind, that you can talk about?

L: No, I can't remember anything.

G: You can't remember any of the social functions? You don't remember the May dance?

L: Oh shoot, I remember everything. I remember the May dance, the alumni banquets, the prom, and everything.

G: Any of them really stand out?

L: I would say the May dance was always one of the biggies in our day.

G: That is what I have been hearing.

L: We had a nice May queen too.

G: Yes, she was. She was really good-looking. I saw that in the book. Somebody married that girl, didn't they?

L: Yes.

G: He had good taste, didn't he? What was a typical day like at the high school? You walked in, what do you remember

the most if you were to walk through a typical day, as you kind of drift back into your senior year?

L: Going to school, first thing seeing Mrs. Lauban.

G: Tell me about Mrs. Lauban.

L: No, she was alright. We didn't see eye-to-eye on exactly everything, but we got along fine.

G: Nobody skipped class?

L: Well, I can't remember quite that far back. I am sure we did some of that too, off and on.

G: What about lunchtime, were you a packer or a buyer or did you kind of leave the premises for lunch and come down to the Isaly's?

L: Lunchtime we always sold Klondikes. I was involved with that in the cafeteria. We sold Klondikes from Isaly's and we made money for our senior trip. I did that for, I can't remember how long.

G: So you were working for Isaly's before you got out of high school?

L: Right.

G: What about any of the fads? What was, let's say a fad of the time that you liked or didn't like? In dress or in maybe some of the things that were going that were stylish. Did you care for the fads of the bobby socks?

L: I can't remember. I really can't.

G: How about after school activities? Now, did you have a favorite hangout?

L: Yes, sure. We all did. You have to remember this was a small community, much smaller than now. Of course, Isaly's was one of the hangouts, but I never did much. See, I lived at the lake. So, we had the Pink Place, which was a small restaurant in Custer's Stand. We hung around in there. When I went to see my buddies, who lived halfway between, there was only one place. That was the, now the. . .

G: Dairy Isle?

L: No, the Blue Ridge. Anyhow, we used to. . . Really that

was one of the only places. One of the guys that graduated with us, his father owned that. So we would go in there and get pop and stuff. We didn't drink, not then.

G: This was like after school type thing?

L: Or in the evening, or whatever.

G: What did that place look like on the inside? Can you describe it?

L: Oh, gee whiz, no. It was a dump.

G: It was a dump? As soon as you walked in the door? Did it have four walls? Now, it must have looked nice to you or you wouldn't have been there everyday.

L: But we didn't have. . . I shouldn't say it looked like a dump. It really didn't. It was a nice place. Well, things were a little bit different back then than they are today I guess. Of course, I really can't say that today because I don't go in those places too much today. There weren't too many people there.

G: It was kind of low key.

L: So, when we went in there we could go off in a table by ourselves. If the boy was there, we would go outside and horse around outside. But, if we wanted a bottle of pop that was the only place to go. There was no places else to go.

G: No place else to go, that is true, really. I like the roller rink. Did you go roller-skating?

L: Oh, yes. I am glad you brought that up. I lived in that when I was in high school. We went skating three or four nights a week, I guess.

G: That kept you out of trouble. Or did that get you in trouble?

L: No, not at all. That was something. That was nice.

G: What did you like about it?

L: The skating and the company was good. I liked the guy that owned the place. In fact, I knew him all of my life. He just recently passed away. And again, that was the only thing there was. There wasn't anything else.

G: From what I gathered, it was a pretty close class. You guys did a lot of things together. I mean, you weren't just going out there by yourself.

L: Oh, yes. We were closer than. . . I don't know what they are today, but we were close. We talked about it here not too long ago; we talked about our class. We said the reason we were close; we weren't only close with just our class, we were close with the whole high school.

G: Yes, that is the impression I got.

L: We had thirty-three kids graduated in my class. All the classes were the same.

G: Yes, they were small like that.

L: Okay. Well, how many kids do you have in your class today?

G: 112.

L: Well, in the whole high school we probably had 112. It would be like you knowing how many people in your class, but we knew everybody in high school. It wasn't just in our particular grade, it was the whole high school.

G: I am getting the impression that it didn't really bother you that you had a lot of underclassmen with you.

L: Oh, no. We knew them all. We were all one, big. . .

G: Happy family.

L: Yes, happy family. In fact, there was a treat in between classes. I can remember we used to horse around. We would be going down the steps or something, and we would catch a couple younger classmen and work them over a little bit, just horsing around. But, every once in a while, two or three of them would catch one of us and it would be the same thing. It was fun.

G: It was a little different. Nobody got hurt?

L: Oh, no. It was fun horsing around, horseplay.

G: That is different. You are right. It is a lot different than what it is today. I don't know if I should ask about the "solitis"?

L: I can't remember.

G: You can't remember that one?

L: No.

G: Or the gay time?

L: I will tell you a little. The "solitis" were some girls that we met from Youngstown. And that is what it was. We used to, once in a while, go see them.

G: Oh, just a friendly little chat?

L: That is all.

G: I think we will just leave it at that.

L: We are not going to get into the gay time at all. I can't remember that.

G: We will just drop that. I read that out of the yearbook and I thought I would ask you about it. You know, you willed that to a couple of fellows in, that were underneath you there. I just wanted to know what that was, that is all. If you had it to do over, what would you have done to make your high school experience even better? Or, were you satisfied with it the way it was?

L: I think I would have studied a little bit harder. I would have put a little more effort into it than what I did.

G: I think that is true of a lot of people.

L: I think I would have put a little more effort in it. Of course, the older you get, the more you look back and you understand why you maybe should have.

G: What was your most memorable event that happened in high school, that really stands out in your mind when you think back to high school? Is there a single most memorable event, day, or occasion, a lot of little different things?

L: No, I don't think. I mean sure, there was graduation, there was the May dance. One thing that stood out in my mind and I think about it today, Mr. Kepner was a tough guy. He was tough. We respected him; he wasn't mean tough; we respected him. When we became seniors he lucked out. He really did.

G: You had him last year?

- L: Yes. Well, you know what he told us? He told us, "You guys are old enough now. It is time to start straightening up; you are not kids anymore."
- G: So, the last year he let it go a little bit?
- L: He started treating us like we were going to be adults. Of course, we were adults, I think, quicker than the kids of today.
- G: That is highly possible. You lived through some interesting times when you were in high school: Truman-Dewey election of 1948, the U. S. Steel strike in the early 1950's, the Korean War, and the McCarthy trials. Did any of that occur to you, or was it all kind of hazy, fuzzy?
- L: Fuzzy.
- G: Some remember it and some don't.
- L: The Korean War was after I graduated.
- G: That's right.
- L: Of course, I remember that. As far as the elections, we talked about it in high school.
- G: But, it wasn't. . .
- L: No, it was nothing real.
- G: A few more things here. Can you remember any real good practical jokes that either you played on someone, or someone played on you, or you just saw?
- L: We never did that.
- G: Oh, no! Now I know you are lying.
- L: Yes, I can think of 100.
- G: One would be fine, Rod. Just one.
- L: I didn't do anything.
- G: Nobody's underwear got run up the flagpole?
- L: No, we used to have good times just like they do today, I am sure. We might have run the milk bottle from the Isaly farm up on the flagpole at the school a few times.

We knocked over a few corn stalks in our day. Maybe a few outside jobs. And we had to put a few back up.

G: Okay. Well, we are going to finish it off. What I just want to know now--it is the last question--tell me about the senior trip. Did you have a good time? What do you remember about it?

L: Very good. The first thing I remember, the first night we were there, we went to a restaurant someplace and I got sick. I really got sick. I think maybe it was food poisoning, I am not sure.

G: Bad? Were you the only one?

L: No, all three of us got sick. The senior trip was really something. It was to Washington. We all looked forward to it. We worked our whole high school years to save enough money so we all got to go. We went and we had a very nice time. The day I got sick. . . The thing I looked forward to most was that Smithsonian Institute. Well, I missed it because I was sick. I was really sick. But, I went everplace else. We really had a good time. We have good teachers that went with us. We raised the roof and we didn't sleep the whole week.

G: I don't think they do that today either.

L: We had a good time. We just really had a nice trip. We saw a lot. I feel these kids miss something today when they don't get this. Maybe they can't today. They can't afford it.

G: It is different. No doubt about that.

L: Like I said, we worked. . . All that money, when we worked in the cafeteria all during lunch, all the Klondikes we sold and all the candy and everything that we sold, all that money went towards our senior trip.

G: Just out of curiosity now, was that a one year deal or was that from the time you were in seventh grade? When did you really kind of start fund raising for that? I was kind of curious.

L: I think we did all during high school.

G: It was just like, when you graduate this will be your trip.

L: I can't remember what. . . See, I am sure it was maybe

like the cafeteria thing, I am sure the seniors probably had that every year. Yes, I am sure it wouldn't have been just one year of selling.

G: I bet it beat the cafeteria food.

L: Well, we ate in the cafeteria, that was another thing. We ate in the cafeteria, or I did. Most of us all did. We didn't take our lunch.

G: You are there. Macaroni still stuck to the plate?

L: Oh, yes. I got to know the cooks. They always fixed me up.

G: See, it pays to have friends in the kitchen.

L: I still see them now and again. Some of them are still around.

G: That is what made you decide you were going to get into the business, is that it?

L: No, no.

G: That happened years later?

L: Many years later.

G: Did you ever thing when you were in high school, that you would end up owning the Isaly's?

L: No.

G: No, it just kind of happened?

L: When I was in high school? Oh, definitely not.

G: I mean, did you have it as an ambition that someday you wanted to own your own little. . .

L: Well, my own business, but never anything special or particular.

G: It just kind of happened as time. . .

L: As time went on, yes. We did own the Isaly store when I was in high school.

G: You mean your family?

L: Yes.

G: The one that was at the lake. So, it was kind of in the blood.

L: Well, yes and no.

G: You looked at it a little different then than you do now?

L: Yes, there was no restaurant in the one at the lake. It was strictly ice cream and you know; there was no restaurant. More of a store type business. I think it was my life ambition to go into business for myself.

G: But you didn't just quite know when, where, or how.

L: No, no. I was in business with another fellow in town here. He and I were partners.

G: Oh, I didn't know that.

L: Well, first I went to work down at Mahoning Sash and Door. I don't know if you know where that is.

G: It was on Mahoning Avenue, wasn't it?

L: Yes, right near Wickliffe there. I worked there eight years. I worked my way up to be a shipper. Then finally I quit and I went into partnership with this other guy.

G: Now, that was right after high school?

L: Yes. Eight years, then I started my own business with a partner. The partnership didn't work out too good and I bought the Isaly store.

G: You have been here ever since.

L: Twenty-three years.

G: You are hoping Mother's Day will be a success.

L: I am hoping.

G: Well, good. Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW