

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farrell Race Relations Project

Farrell Race Relations -- 1960's

O. H. 491

DORIS MAGNOTTO

Interviewed

by

Ronald Rice

on

December 10, 1980

DORIS V. MAGNOTTO

Doris V. Batanian was born in Cambridge, Ohio, on August 17, 1925. She was the oldest of eleven children. After graduating from Byesville High School in southern Ohio in 1943, Doris moved to Farrell, Pennsylvania with her father who went to Farrell to work at Carnegie Steel. She got a job working at Carnegie Steel as a secretary in the production planning branch of the mill. After working two years in the mill, she became ill with tuberculosis and had to be hospitalized for approximately six months.

Shortly after her release from the hospital, Doris got married to Herman P. Magnotto and has been married for thirty-three years. They have three sons: Paul, Timothy, and Michael aged thirty, twenty-six, and twenty-five respectively.

The Magnottos own and operate Magnotto's Golden Dawn Market located at 644 Wallis Avenue in downtown Farrell. The only training Magnotto received for her occupation was working long hours and seven day work weeks. She knows personally most all of her customers and takes a lot of pride in the service her store provides for the community. Magnotto feels she has been lucky because their store has never been robbed or vandalized during the racial unrest in Farrell during the 1960's.

The Magnottos lived overtop of their store until 1967 when they moved to their present home at 333 East Judy Lynn Drive in Farrell. Magnotto is a member of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church and her only chief interest outside of her family and work is reading.

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INTERVIEWEE: DORIS MAGNOTTO  
INTERVIEWER: Ronald Rice  
SUBJECT: Racial Tensions, Rioting  
DATE: December 10, 1980

R: This is an interview with Mrs. Doris Magnotto for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the racial tensions and rioting during the 1960's in Farrell, Pennsylvania by Ronald J. Rice, at 333 East Judy Lynn Drive Farrell, Pennsylvania 16121, on December 10, 1980 at 7:40 p.m.

Mrs. Magnotto, could you begin by telling us a little bit about what your childhood was like and where you grew up?

M: I had a very pleasant childhood. I come from a large family of eleven children, seven girls and four boys. We were a very close-knit family and we still are today. My mother has been dead now for about eight years and we have lost one sister, but the rest of us are living.

I think my father has a total of 37 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren, which two of them are mine.

R: You grew up where?

M: In Byesville, Ohio. That's where I graduated. It's right outside of the city of Cambridge, Ohio.

R: You went to high school there?

M: Yes.

R: What was high school like for you?

M: Very nice; I enjoyed it.

R: Kind of, like, a little school?

M: Yes, just a small town.

R: What did you do on a typical day?

M: Do you mean for entertainment of just . . .

R: Whatever you would do after school.

M: I would get up and we walked to school in those days. We had no cars, so of course, you had to have time for that. Me being the oldest girl, my mother was quite ill when I was growing up so I sort of had to take over the family and I helped raise most of my brothers and sisters.

R: You had a lot of responsibility?

M: Yes, I did. I never worked while I was going to school, but I did graduate. Then I was going to go into nurses training, but I came to Shenango Valley instead.

R: Did your whole family move up here?

M: No, not right away. My father was here working in the steel mill.

R: Sharon Steel?

M: Sharon Steel. I came here in 1943 after I graduated. I was going into training, but January I decided to keep on working. I was going to Youngstown St. E's. I was going to stay here to keep my father company more or less, and he got me a job in the office in production planning, that was Carnegie at that time.

R: Carnegie Steel?

M: Yes, so I worked there from 1943 until 1945 and I became ill so I had to quit work.

R: Were you going to nurses training during that time?

M: No, I never got to go into training.

Carnegie exchanged when Sharon Steel bought over, so most of the girls were laid off, except for a couple of them, and I was one of them. I was fortunate enough to get a job as a teller at First Federal Savings and Loan, downtown State Street. I worked there until I became ill, then I had to quit work. For about six months I was in a sanitarium with tuberculosis. Then I came back home. I was fine and recuperated and the following spring I was married to Herman. Of course, I helped him out at the store off and on.

R: You met him at the store?

- M: Well, not really at the store. I met Herman at the time . . . he saw me I guess. I was waiting for a bus one day and he saw me. I knew Attorney Fred Jarrett at the time and so did Herman, so he got Fred to introduce the two of us and we started dating each other. Of course then, I dated Herman all through my illness. After I came out we decided to get married the following spring and we've been married 33 years.
- R: Great. Was he working at the store?
- M: Yes.
- R: Did his parents own the store?
- M: His parents owned the store. Herman's father has been dead since 1943. I never got a chance to meet Herman's father. Mother Magnotto was in the store and Herman was in business with his brother Leonard. Leonard decided to go to Rapid City, he and his wife, so Herman and I took over the store at that time. That was back in 1957.
- R: Was it called Magnotto's?
- M: Yes, it has always been Magnotto's. In fact, it has been on that corner over fifty some years I think. Oh yes, it's a family business and it still is. Our son Timothy's in the store with us now and we enjoy it. We have a lot of nice people that we've met over the years and we've lost a lot of people to death and moving, you know? I know most of my customers that come in the store and that makes it nice.
- R: Did you have to go through any special training or just a lot of hard work?
- M: No, hard work.
- R: Long hours?
- M: We used to work seven days a week really. Of course we lived up over the store for years, so it was nice and convenient. I raised my children there. Of course, we had a summer home on Conneaut Lake, which made it nice to take the children in the summertime. I would have never been able to manage with them up there all of those years.
- R: When did you have your first child?
- M: Three years after we were married.
- R: How many kids do you have?

M: I have three boys. Paul was almost four years old and then I had Timmy. Then I had Michael nineteen months later. So we have three boys.

R: When did you move up here to Judy Lynn?

M: You've been here probably about thirteen?

R: About thirteen years.

R: What do you remember about the early 1960's? What was it like in Farrell, a typical day? You probably worked every day in the store?

M: I don't know what to tell you.

R: What would be your typical day, say in 1961?

M: We were always busy.

R: What time would you have to be at the store?

M: I don't start until nine, of course the boys are there at eight. The first part of the week we close at six and then on Thursday and Friday evening we're open until seven. We used to be open until nine o'clock, but no more. Then after this racial bit we decided . . . we never had any trouble really. We've never had a robbery, knock on wood. We've never had anybody break in. Really we've never had any problem with our immediate area.

A few times after a basketball game some children would get rowdy. One night we had a front door broken. It wasn't the kids in the neighborhood, it was kids from other neighborhoods that had come down to Farrell. It was after a basketball game. We've really never had trouble with them.

R: The early 1960's then was the same as in the later 1950's?

M: Yes, and of course, you know, when the rioting had started at that time, I don't remember what year it was, 1960 or 1961, they were having a lot of trouble and the kids were starting to riot.

R: In other places around the country?

M: Yes. Things were getting a little uneasy, but not in our neighborhood. As I said, we knew everybody and we had no problem.

R: Can you remember the first time you ever heard about some of the minority leaders, like Martin Luther King? Do you remember hearing about them at all in the late 1960's?

M: Oh sure.

R: Where did you hear about them, on the TV?

M: On TV and then of course, being that we have a lot of black customers, you know, you hear them talking. As far as I'm concerned, he was a great man. I had nothing against the man, no personal . . .

R: You say you heard a lot of your customers talking about him?

M: Yes.

R: How do you think their feelings were?

M: I know they were really crushed by his death. I mean after all, he was their leader. We would feel the same you know.

R: When Kennedy was shot?

M: When Kennedy was whot. I think it was terrible; it's a life wiped out.

R: Do you remember anything about some of the rioting that went on in other cities across the country? I know the TV portrayed a lot of rioting in Detroit.

M: We have relatives outside of Detroit. In fact, my uncle used to live right in one of the areas. I thank God he doesn't live there anymore; he has died since. But the area that he used to be in used to be a nice area; it was just wiped out from fires and what have you.

Then I remember my sister was ill in Buffalo and I happened to go up there to see her and I was amazed. I tell you, all the buildings that were closed up and destroyed. I mean it just really made you ill to see all that; to think that they could just go in and destroy property, it's unbelievable. I never dreamed that it would ever be that bad and I thank God it never happened here like that.

I know a couple of days when things were a little . . . oh, I don't think in Farrell we really had it that bad. Maybe a few minor little fires were started, but as far as really being fearful of it, no.

R: Can you recall any racial tensions growing in Farrell between blacks and whites at all in the 1960's? Can you recall any incidents?

M: Oh yes, a few of them. I don't know what I would call them, but they liked to blow off a little bit of their steam and let you know they're around.

R: A few of the young blacks?

M: Yes, but I don't pay any attention to them.

R: Would they single out verbal attacks against white or what?

M: Sometimes they would get a little huffy about certain things, but if you learn to just ignore some of those people they go away.

R: Could you give me an example? I don't mean to put you on the spot.

M: A few, two or three. You can't reason with them, or they think that you're picking on them.

R: Like in the store?

M: Yes. I had a little incident here the other day. I won't mention any names, but her brother owes us a bill and he had promised to come in and take care of it. My husband was good enough to let him have the credit, and he sent in fifty dollars with his sister and I refused to take it and she got a little huffy with me. I said, "Well, I'm not going to take it because if I do, I won't see your brother. He's not being very fair to my husband because my husband was too good to him." Her mother happened to come in the following day and I told her. She said, "I still have the money." I said, "You can bring the money up and I'll take it, but you know how your daughter is; you cannot talk to her." She said, "Yes, I know."

I just leave them go, that's all. I'm not going to get involved and things. One word will lead to another and it's not worth it.

R: Same things happen to them that they say?

M: That's right, so you can almost tell me, maybe there's a half a dozen, so you just say good morning or thank you or what have you and that's it; you just don't bother.

R: Could you see any kind of racial tensions between customers?

M: Only one woman that I really know of, but she doesn't come in to shop anymore.

R: Most people are pretty neighborly, pretty friendly?

M: Yes, they are. Thank God we live in a good neighborhood and like I say, we do know all of our customers.

R: Would you say most of your customers were . . . at that time,



what percentage would you say were black?

M: Then we didn't have as many blacks. I would say maybe sixty-forty--forty percent black. But now I would say we have seventy percent black and thirty percent white.

R: Because most people are moving out of that area?

M: Yes.

R: You don't feel there was any real tensions in Farrell?

M: No.

R: Okay. Are there any events that stand out to you at all as significant that could have caused any kind of racial tensions? Anything in the store that might have happened that caused somebody to get upset, feel they were a victim of prejudice?

M: Not really, not in the store, no.

R: How about outside of the store? Did you ever hear of any incidents?

M: You know, sometimes the children coming down from high school would get in fights or something and they would be very indignant if you would call the police. So we just got so that we just let them go, that's all.

R: They would get in fights over certain things?

M: Not really in front of the store. You know, like up on the corner, coming down the hill. You know how some kids are. But no, nothing in the store.

R: It wasn't something that was slowly building up then?

M: I don't think so, no.

R: Once some of the violence and . . . some people don't like to call it rioting. Would you call it rioting?

M: Not in Farrell, no.

R: How would you describe it?

M: I think people have the wrong outlook about the city of Farrell and it's not fair to us living here. We have a lot of good people, black and white. I mean I myself have some very dear friends that are black and we have made them lifetime friends. That is something that doesn't bother me or my boys. They have friends who are black and white, you know. We grew up with it and it's nice. They're like one of us.

- R: If somebody would ask you, what would you call it that happened? Would you just call it some violent outbreaks or some little bit of loitering?
- M: That's all! I think maybe on Idaho Street they might have had more. They had more window breaking, but really we have been lucky, maybe, I don't know.
- R: Once the violence did begin, I think a lot of it happened in the later 1960's, like 1967 or 1969?
- M: Yes.
- R: How close was your family through all of this? I'm sure that your store being there . . .
- M: A few times they'll stay up on the roof of the store and if anything happens . . . nobody's going to do anything to their dad's store. Then too, maybe we were lucky in another way. The fire department was right across the street at that time and of course, they always kept an eye on the building and that helps. Which now, they're on the other end of the city building and they're not facing like they were before. Maybe that helped us too, you know.
- R: Was anybody in your family or any of your friends ever involved or got caught up in any kind of violence?
- M: No.
- R: Did you ever feel threatened?
- M: No.
- R: Did it change your life at all?
- M: Maybe for a couple of days; you know how stories will travel. As I say, when there were a couple little minor fires and the windows were broken, naturally you're uneasy. That's your livelihood there and it's been there a long time and you don't want to see it destroyed. We kept checking the property more often and we made sure the doors were always locked, and what have you. In fact, many a years, why we never locked our back door down there; we were over the store then. Many times we never had the door locked.
- R: Can you think of any reasons why all that happened, the violence and stuff?
- M: I think just a few young people maybe don't want to work for things like we had to. Nobody gave us anything; we had to get out there and work and we've worked hard for it. As I said, I come from a large family and we worked for everything

we had. We were never hungry. But today, these young people want to collect a check and don't do anything.

I'm sorry, I don't believe in it. I think if they're able to get up and go out to work, they can do it. I would scrub floors if I had to before I would go on welfare, and that's how I feel about it. There are a lot of these young kids who are able-bodied people that can do a lot of things.

I know we were on vacation once and we were in this little town on one of the islands, maybe it is a Socialistic country, I don't know, but everybody worked and that place was spotless. You can go down some of these streets and they're horrible. They won't even pick up; they'll throw it down.

Put some of these young people to work and they won't have time to roam the streets. We didn't roam the streets when we were growing up. Our parents kept us home to do things.

R: Do you think the work was available for some of the younger blacks and stuff back in the 1960's, could they find work?

M: I think they had as much opportunity as the rest of them. Today they get the jobs, where most of the whites don't. I'm sorry. I think they have more opportunities and they get things easier than our children do.

R: So it's reversed discrimination?

M: It is.

R: Do you remember anything about the Black Youth Action Committee and the cultural center?

M: I don't remember too much, I just remember the name.

R: There weren't any times or places when you or your family or any of your friends were victims of violence or threats of violence, do you remember?

M: No.

R: What do you recall about the news coverage on Farrell during the rioting and some of the violence?

M: We always seemed to make the headlines regardless, I don't know.

R: How do you feel the Herald treated the entire situation?

M: I don't think they do justice to anything, really. Why don't they print some of the good things instead of all the bad. As I said, we have a lot of good people living in this area, but they seem to pick on so little.

R: Just to sell newspapers?

M: Yes, like some of these people who are trying to run this town and won't let the administrators run it. I just don't go for it.

R: Do you think the Herald could have helped add to some of the troubles that Farrell had?

M: I think they have.

R: What about the curfew laws, do you remember anything about that?

M: I think those are great. They don't need to be roaming the streets all hours of the night. I think it's up to the parents to know where their children are. I know mine, when they were growing up, they had to be in at a certain time and they knew it and if they were going to be late they called me.

But I know children . . . I've had little ones in the store that have picked up items and we have caught them and I'll say, "Where is your mother?" "She's not home." "Well, where is she?" "I don't know." You can't let little ones run like that and expect them--not just black, they're white too--you just can't let children run like that; you can't do it.

R: Some people feel that the blacks, particularly in the summer, it was a long, hot summer and the tension, their tempers were kind of short. Some people feel that maybe if there was more recreation for the blacks that things could have been better. They were all kept down on the lower part of the hill. Is there any truth to that? Do you think it made any difference?

M: They had as much as our children did. You make use of what you have. They had beautiful playgrounds and what have they done with them? We don't have them up here. I know two or three, they had everything in them. If you go to look at them today, it's a disgrace what they have done to them.

R: Destroyed them?

M: Destroyed them. It's fine to take care of them and give them things so the youth will have something, but take care of what you've got. You know, you just can't, why in a couple more years, well, I want something new now, this isn't any good. You've got to learn to take care of what you've got.

R: How do you feel the police and the governmental agencies handled the violence in Farrell?

M: I think they did a good job, as far as I know, enough that I could remember.

- R: Do you think they could have curtailed it a little more?
- M: Maybe they could have. I suppose they get hot tempered like you and I do at times and they're bound to; we're not all perfect.
- R: Can you recall how your friends or relatives felt, or did they feel pretty much the same way you did about what happened?
- M: I think so.
- R: Were there any movements that you knew of that attempted to better the racial situation in Farrell back in the 1960's perhaps to prevent some of the violence, and volunteer organizations?
- M: I think there were some business people and even some of the church members who tried to get together if things did get out of hand to try to keep it quiet, but I don't think that any of them really had to do anything.
- R: What's the address of your store?
- M: The corner of Wallis and Roemor.
- R: Was it ever damaged at all?
- M: No, as I said, we've never had a robbery or breaking in, in all the years I've been here.
- R: Windows were never broke?
- M: Maybe little windows were broken. We've had the storm break the windows; that's why we don't have windows in the front. But now as I've said, the front door window that was kicked in by some young kids coming home from a ball game, it wasn't the neighborhood children who did it, it was children from other neighborhoods that were there. That we know because the children in our neighborhood sort of look out for us and they come up and tell you.
- R: Can you recall your children ever speaking of racial problems? Did most of the children get along pretty good with them?
- M: No, as I said, our boys grew up with them and they never had a problem.
- R: Were there any problems in the schools? They never had any major problems?
- M: No. Of course our children didn't go to the public schools, so I don't know.

R: Did they go to Kennedy?

M: They went to Kennedy.

R: Looking back at the 1960's and all the racial tensions, what changes would you like to have seen instituted in your area or perhaps even down by the store that you think could have been done?

M: I think that the club that they built, what was the name of it?

R: The Boy's Buhl Club?

M: No, in Farrell.

R: Oh, in Farrell.

M: That's a beautiful building, in fact, I know our Paul even went there. I don't know what it is today, whether it's still in good condition or not. But they had that; that was a beautiful place to go.

R: Do you think they were really discriminated against, blacks were really discriminated against in Farrell?

M: No, I don't. I really don't. I think they have gotten a lot more in Farrell than a lot of other places. Still today they have a lot of advantages.

R: How different do you think race relations in Farrell are now than they were in the 1960's? Do you think they're any better or worse?

M: I think they're better. I mean I never hear of a racial . . . never.

R: Are things the same in the store as they were?

M: Yes. Maybe we've been lucky, I don't know, but we've never really had a problem and we've had blacks working for us. As long as I can remember we've always had one or two.

R: How do you feel about the theory that some people feel that, in the community, that most of the violence was done by people from outside of the community. People from other areas around the country came in?

M: I really think that's the way it happened. I think it was outside people who came in and stirred all this up. I really do. I have no proof.

R: Do most people feel that way?

- M: I think so, but I think it wasn't put that way at the time, That I can remember. Some of the headlines didn't read that.
- R: Do you know any other businessmen in the area whose stores were damaged?
- M: Now I'm almost sure Mr. Marks had his windows broken quite a few times. His windows were broken during that time when the so-called rioting occurred
- R: That's Mark's Music?
- M: Yes, and I think Mr. Hamilton and Hamilton Drugs had windows broken and maybe the Murphy store.
- R: Most of the violence took place down on Idaho?
- M: Yes.
- R: Was there much looting or burning?
- M: Some burning, but nothing like they have had in other cities. Nothing here, no.
- R: Looking at the overall situation, would you feel that it really didn't change your lives that much?
- M: I don't think so, no.
- R: Pretty much went on the same that you normally do?
- M: Yes.
- R: Did you ever participate in any kind of movement yourself?
- M: No.
- R: Trying to find out why, okay. Is there anything else that you might think to add that's important that we didn't cover.
- M: No.
- R: There's been a lot of talk about how certain areas of Farrell have been red lined. Strictly the lower part of Farrell is kept for the blacks and up on the hill, which would be from probably Hamilton up or somewhere around in there?
- M: Yes.
- R: Is it for whites only. Was it that way in the 1960's?
- M: No, we had blacks who lived right in this neighborhood. That doesn't bother me, but I think that the real estate people

have drawn that line. "Oh, you don't want to buy a house in Farrell," that's the first thing that they have said.

R: You mean to outsiders coming in?

M: Yes. I know that to be a fact. As it has come back, the people that have wanted to buy homes and they have said that to them.

R: The real estate people from outside of the community?

M: Yes, in Sharon and it's not fair to us.

R: Everyone has a little prejudice against Farrell?

M: I think so, yes.

R: Can you think of anything that would really cause that bad image? Could it be the bad press that Farrell received?

M: That hasn't helped us. Some of these letters that they have been publishing on the editorial page.

R: Today you mean?

M: Today. Let's publish some good thing about Farrell instead of all these little bitty things. It doesn't concern three-fourths of the people.

R: How about today, if a black down on the hill, if he wanted to move up here, could he? If he could afford the house, could he get the house?

M: Yes.

R: He wouldn't get the additional \$20,000. You know, if he were to go look at the house, they would say yes, but it cost . . .

M: They can't do that, no. If I put my home up for sale and I have a price on it, that's it. You or anybody else can come in and look at it as long as you make the appointment through the real estate that I have it with. No way.

R: Do you think the main reason that Farrell seems to be so segregated is economic reasons?

M: I think so. Of course, I wasn't born in Farrell, but I feel I've spent most of my life in Farrell. Whether they started just basing to be in one section like the Italians, I think Farrell, well, there are more little sections of nationalities of anyplace in the whole world that I know of and it seems like the Croatians are here and the Italians



are here and the Slavish people are here and that's just the way Farrell is. I don't know.

R: Do you think the blacks went through anything that the other nationalities didn't go through?

M: I don't think so. We've all had hard times.

R: They're just the latest minority.

M: That's right. I think most of them want to better themselves. You just have that certain little group and then they're the ones that start the trouble.

R: It's too bad the way it always works out.

M: That's right.

R: Thank you very much, Mrs. Magnotto.

M: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW