

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Smoky Hollow Project

Grocery Business Experience

O. H. 92

NICHOLAS NAZARINI

Interviewed

by

Annette D. Mills

on

April 12, 1976

NICHOLAS S. NAZARINI

Nicholas Nazarini was born in Smoky Hollow, Youngstown, Ohio on April 22, 1916, the son of Julius and Philomena Nazarini. He attended Rayen High School from 1932-36 and was self-employed in a neighborhood grocery store in Smoky Hollow that his parents built and started in 1924. Nick worked after school and on weekends until he graduated and then took over full responsibilities of the store. After being in operation for fifty years by the Nazarini family, a holdup, shooting, and burglary forced the sale of the business. In the fifty years, this was the first occurrence of such an event.

Nicholas married Lucy Marinelli in 1940; they have three sons--Robert, Joseph, and Anthony. He served in the Army from 1945-46. Semi-retired now, he reflects that for the first time in years he's been aware of the world outside of the store because most of his working hours were spent in the store taking care of business. He is a member of St. Charles Church; before that he was a member of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. He belongs to the Knights of Columbus, Boardman Council and his special interests are golfing and dancing.

Annette D. Mills

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INTERVIEWER: Annette D. Mills
SUBJECT: Grocery Business Experience
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M: This is an interview with Nick Nazarini for the Youngstown State University, Smoky Hollow Project by Annette Mills at 453 Ewing on April 12, 1976 at 9:30 p.m.

Mr. Nazarini, tell us about your background.

N: I went to Madison School for the first and second grade. In the third grade through the eighth, I went to Wood Street School, old Wood Street School, which is now the Choffin Vocational School. At Wood Street School, we had Mr. Robinson as the janitor there. I believe most people remember him, because he was with Wood Street School all the time.

From Wood Street, in 1932 through 1936, I went to Rayen School. During that time, we had the grocery store on Adams Street. In my senior year I had my subjects arranged so that I would have all my subjects in the morning and in the afternoon, I was free to go down and work at the store in Smoky Hollow.

In the year 1940 I married. I am married to Lucy Marinelli. In 1945 and 1946, I was in the service. At that time we closed the store. Then, I reopened it when I returned. Ever since then I've had the grocery store through 1975. We enlarged it many times; three different times we enlarged the store.

We advertised in the newspaper with an advertising group. We were with Family Food Stores at one time. We also had a grocer's-cooperative, where we received our supplies, which we sold through the grocery store with the idea of getting groceries cheaper than we could buy them through any other warehouse or any other supplier.

- M: Could you tell us about your service time and what forced the closure of the store? Was it because of lack of competent help or just a matter of necessity?
- N: Prior to the service call I had--I worked down at United Engineering at the time--I had to have a job that was connected with the service or with the times, the wartimes. I operated the store and I had the afternoon shift all the time at the United Engineering. Then, I was drafted in 1945 and I left the store. My wife ran it for several months after that and then it was too much for her and she had it closed down until I returned. Then we reopened and both of us continued the store from 1946 through 1975.
- M: After your service time did you both work in the store at the same time or did you both work shifts?
- N: We worked the same time. She wasn't there all the time. She was raising our four boys. But she would help when she had the children, whenever she could. After the children were large enough to take care of themselves, she would help me full time.
- M: Did you work just eight hours?
- N: No, it was longer hours than that. Even though the store was closed, say six, or six-thirty or seven o'clock, there was always the book work, [invoices to check] that I had to do at home every evening--checking bills and taking care of my accounts, and posting and all that goes in with the business.
- M: Could you tell us about the business itself, some of the items that you carried in your store? What do you think accredited to its success for that many years?

N: In regard to the items of the store, we usually carried the items that went with the people that lived there at the time. If there were colored people there, the Negroes, we would specialize in the Negro foods. If there were Italians, we would have the Italian food at the time.

The same way with Slovaks or Irish at times, too. It all depends on whoever was in the area at the time. We would try to satisfy them with their needs. The last group of people that were there were the Puerto Ricans. We would carry some Puerto Rican food, not all of them, but we would give them those things that they would ask for.

M: Then it would be pretty much whatever the culture demanded.

N: Right.

M: What was predominantly the culture and nationality when you first recall going into the store?

N: It would be Italian.

M: What other long-term nationality would you say was there?

N: I remember quite a few Slovaks there. The Italians and Slovaks were there, I believe, about the same time.

M: That was from the very beginning of your own experience in the store?

N: That would be in the early 1940s.

M: Is the Nazarini store still in existence today?

N: Yes, under the same name, but not the same owner.

M: Could you tell us just when you got out of the store business?

N: We closed our business at the end of 1975, exactly at the end.

M: Was that kind of a sad period for you?

- N: It was. It was because that was all I knew, the grocery business. I didn't like to get out of it, but it was time that I should get out.
- M: You were there yourself exactly how many years?
- N: It's been over 45 to 50 years. I was born on Watt Street and moved to Adams Street and I've been there ever since.
- M: Then you feel like you left part of yourself there?
- N: Right.
- M: Can you reflect back on any funny incidents that happened?
- N: There were always people coming into the store that would be high a little bit on liquor or wine and they would always give us a good time. They would come in and reminisce themselves about the South or where ever they would come from, from the old countries, Italy or Yugoslavia.
- But there were so many different things, I just couldn't say any one particular incident or pick out any subject, there were so many of them.
- M: Is there anything that you would have done differently if you had to do it over again?
- N: I don't think I would do anything different now myself. The business, as it was, I think I would still go through the same things. I didn't want to get into a larger business than what I had. I liked the neighborhood business better than I would the large chain business. The store has been very good to us, and so have the customers been good to us. We enjoyed it. It was more like a family affair.
- M: Would you say that you had some wonderful experiences? Somebody mentioned you learned how to do the butchering yourself.
- N: It wasn't really myself. We did have salesmen that would come in and show me how to do it. But I also went to some workshops that were held by different meat houses, like Superior Meat or Sugardale. They would have them maybe once a year. They would rent a hall in town or out of

town and we would go.

- M: That's an experience that you probably wouldn't have gotten, had you not been in the grocery business.
- N: That's for sure. That was the same way with fruits and vegetables. They would have seminars on those, too; all the different phases of grocery stores. The Grocers' Association would always have seminars or conventions.
- M: Would that be to help you select better produce?
- N: Right. They know how to keep them and what to look for; you know when to buy and how to sell them and prepare them, which today is all together different. Today, it's mostly packaging. You must buy fresh and Number One produce for packaging, or else you will have plenty of repacking to do.
- M: Now everything's pretty much prepackaged today then?
- N: No. We pack it at the store. Few items are bought, packaged.
- M: You would do this yourself?
- N: At the store, yes.
- M: Was there anything else that you could think of that was different in your line of foods that you carried than there is in most grocery stores?
- N: We had some Italian trade, whereas we would have big forms of Italian grating-cheese where we would cut it on a wire machine. They would buy it in chunks.
- M: Could you describe this for us?
- N: It would weigh about 25 to 30 pounds, a big chunk of cheese, and it had black wax on the outside to preserve it, and it was real strong. Any grocery that sold Roman cheese, when you'd walk in the door, you would smell it. You'd know he had it.
- M: Did you ever handle "bacala" and things of this nature?

N: Codfish, or bacala, yes, we've had it just right up through the last year I was in business. At first it would come in with a bone and it would be salted. In the last few years it's been boneless and salted, and we always sell a lot of it. In fact, the Puerto Ricans bought a lot of it now, too.

Another item that we made a lot of was that homemade sausage for the customers, Italian style. We had a pretty good trade on that. We've made it, I believe, for over fifty years. My mother started making it and right up till the last day we closed the store, we had the same type of sausage--homemade.

M: You made this all yourself now, it wasn't bought from the meat suppliers?

N: No. We would grind the pork-butts ourself and season it and then stuff it.

M: Could you tell us about the seasoning that you put in?

N: My wife would season the sausage and all we would use is just black pepper, red crushed pepper, and salt. But the secret is letting it stay over at a certain amount of time, seasoned, before you would put it in the casing.

M: Could you tell us about the casing?

N: It was hog casing. It was very thin and you would have to have a stuffer on your grinder to stuff it.

M: Would that be what we know as kielbassie?

N: Kielbassie is smoked.

M: But it would be about the same size?

N: Oh, yes, country style.

M: The texture, of course, would be different?

N: Yes.

M: Was there anything else that you could think of that was different?

- N: In the food lines the things that were different all depend on the trade at the time. When we had many colored people dealing with us, they bought a lot of salt pork and hocks and chitterlings, pig feet, and hog maws, and snoots, and ears, and tails and things like that. We had them all the time; salt pork, bacon, we sold a lot of slab bacon. And ribs, spareribs, around the holidays in the summer we sold a lot of it for barbecuing. [Most of the slab bacon we sold, was sliced by us.]
- M: What are hog maws?
- N: Hog maws are the stomachs of the hog.
- M: Is that what we know as tripe?
- N: Beef tripe, yes, if it is beef.
- M: Do you have any idea how they prepared that?
- N: They usually cook hog maws with chitterlings, so I don't know just how they would cook it but I know they would cook those together.
- M: You mentioned something about barbecue ribs?
- N: Ribs, spareribs, were the biggest item for the colored trade during the summer holidays like Fourth of July, Memorial Day, and Labor Day.
- M: Did you have those barbecued yourself?
- N: No, I just sold them fresh. I didn't have the facilities to barbecue them. They would just prepare it themselves.
- M: During this period that you were in your grocery business in Smoky Hollow then you had many cultures.
- N: Right.
- M: Predominantly it was Italian, Slovak, and Yugoslavian?
- N: They're all the Slav languages. There were Polish and there were Hungarians and Romanians at the time, very few Romanians and Hungarians, but they were represented there, also.

- M: Would you say for the majority of years that this was the culture and then toward the end you began to get the black trade?
- N: Right, and the Puerto Ricans.
- M: When you first went into the business were there any blacks at all in the area that you could recall?
- N: I believe there were a few when they started off. There were a few all the time. Andrews Avenue was full of houses whereas today there are no houses at all. In fact, there were houses on both sides of Andrews Avenue at one time.
- M: Approximately what area was included in the Smoky Hollow?
- N: On the bottom of the east boundary line would be Andrews Avenue, I would think, and then Madison Avenue would be the north boundary line. Possibly Rayen Avenue would be the south boundary line and Walnut Street would be the west boundary line; a square in the hollow.
- M: To get out of the hollow you almost had to go up a little grade of some kind, didn't you, except for Andrews Avenue?
- N: Right.
- M: And then once you got past Andrews you would have to go up to a grade to get to the further east side. Is that correct?
- N: Yes. If you'd go up through Valley Street or to Madison Avenue you'd have to go over the bridge. If you went up Valley Street there was a little hill there you'd have to go up. If you went through Walnut Street you'd have to go up Walnut Street Hill. Going south on Andrews Avenue would be the only way there wouldn't be any hills to go through to get to town.
- M: Would you think that this was how the Smoky Hollow got its name--because it was in a hollow?
- N: No, I think Smoky Hollow got its name because of the trains that would go through and also because of the steel mills. It seemed like there was always a haze or there was always smoke down

there where at one time there were a lot of locomotives that would go up and down on those tracks going north and south; and then the mills-- there was Valley Steel Mill, but I forgot the real name of it; there was the Republic Mill-- and since it was a hollow, it looked like it always hung in there.

M: So then Smoky Hollow was actually smoky?

N: Smoky, right, at one time. Now there are no more trains passing that have smoke, they're all diesels now or electrical diesels, whatever they are, and the steel mills are down completely. The mill on Valley Street is not there anymore at all. There was a big pattern shop there also, at one time.

M: But they still call it the Smoky Hollow.

N: Yes.

M: Do you recall about what time your parents settled in Smoky Hollow?

N: I was born there myself in 1916 and so it must have been about 1906 that they settled there from Italy.

M: Do you know if they settled there because they had friends there?

N: They had relatives here. My mother had her brother here. I remember that.

M: Was he in the Smoky Hollow also?

N: Yes. He also, was in the Smoky Hollow and they also had a grocery store in the next block.

M: I was wondering if you could tell us anything about your own childhood?

N: It seems to me like I've always had a grocery store. If I would be playing outside with the boys, the ladies would always kid me saying, "Here goes your mother. She's calling you! Stop playing and go in the store." And that's the way I can remember everything--playing pass football in the street--that was it, it was always in the street. Either it was pass football

or kick-the-can, or kick-the-stick, or soccey or caddie. Everything seemed to be in the street and now that I'm grown-up, I can't see how we did all that in the street! The street looked so big then, but now it's so narrow.

M: Could it be because maybe you were a little bit smaller, too?

N: That's true. I believe that's the way it goes. We had bonfires, we'd roast potatoes, or wieners. It was mostly potatoes because I don't think I'd seen many wieners. There could have been marshmallows but there were no wieners, a lot of potatoes, and corn on the cob.

M: Didn't you have policemen going around your neighborhood in the Smoky Hollow?

N: There were policemen all right but they weren't in cruisers, that's for sure.

M: What did they do?

N: They were walking. They were on the beat.

M: Did they usually go two at a time or did they go one at a time?

N: No, they weren't doubled up. One at a time is the way I remember them.

M: Could you tell us what some of the neighborhood policemen looked like then?

N: The only way I can picture a policeman in those days was just as they are today only older, to me then. But today they all seem to be young men.

M: Did you find them friendly?

N: Oh, much friendlier. It seemed that way because they were always walking, whereas today they are in cars. They just pass you up. Before they would talk to you or they would whistle and whirl their stick around. And you would always say hello to them or try to avoid them because in those days we were afraid of policemen.

- M: Do you think that this fear of cops in those days was instilled in you by your parents?
- N: I believe so, because they were the sign of authority and you shouldn't do anything wrong or else the policeman would get you.
- M: In other words, you were taught to respect them because they were the law.
- N: The authority, that's right.
- M: Is there anything else that you could recall? I'm sure that you were allowed to go to some entertainment when the store closed?
- N: I can remember going to the Regent Theater or the Strand Theater, or there was the Orpheum Theater and the Hippodrome Theater. We would go to dances at the old Elm Ballroom or Idora Park. Then, I think, there was a Republic Hall on Albert Street. We would go there.
- M: Were those night spots, were they dance halls?
- N: They were dance halls. Then, also, during my younger days, there seems to have been more picnics than what we have today. There was always a group of either churchgoers or family picnics.
- Besides family picnics, I was thinking about different organizations like "Paesan-picnics." Do you know what "Paesans" are? They all come from the same city in the old country. One day there would be "Agnone" picnics maybe one Sunday, then there'd be a "Neapolitan's" picnic or there would be a "Bagnoli's" picnic, and we would all attend those because those would be mostly on Sundays. And there would be a lot of beer, lupini, and scapece. Do you know what "scapece" is?
- M: No, but would you describe it for us, please! (laughter)
- N: "Scapece" you might say, is a delicacy which consists of mostly all kinds of fish. It was a fish that was prepared with vinegar and other seasonings, which I don't know what they were, and it would be delicious!

- M: Was that fried food that was prepared with this vinegar or was it just pickled?
- N: I think it was pickled.
- M: Could you tell us anything else that was different other than the Paesano-picnics? What else would you say was real different during that era?
- N: I remember the old streetcar that used to go to Idora Park and once or twice a year they would have fireworks up there. That was a big treat for us. We would never see fireworks anywhere like Idora Park.

A few of the Italian churches would have fireworks on some feast days, like St. Anthony or Our Lady of Mount Carmel. It was a big gathering of Italian people and their friends.

- M: Was this just limited to the Italian people or was this just church functions, or was it neighborhood functions?
- N: Mostly it was church functions and it would be sort of a bazaar. When the picnic or bazaar or party was over, and during that time, there would be dances for old and young. They would do the Tarantella or the ballroom dances or whatever was in, then.

After their picnic they would have their fireworks. That would terminate the feast. And before the feast, I remember, at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church--I think they've done it even recently--just before the feast, to call the people they would shoot the few aerial bombs in the air to call the people to the feast or to the party, whichever they were having. I believe they've done that not too long ago and they have been doing it for some years.

- M: Would those fireworks be quite similar to a Fourth of July celebration display?
- N: Yes, I think it would be. I think Idora still has some maybe on Memorial Day or Labor Day. Some of the unions do have fireworks. They are the same, yes.

- M: Is there anything else that you could recall that was, again, different?
- N: Than of today?
- M: Yes.
- N: No, I don't think there's anything else that I could recall right now.
- M: Was there anything that you would like to mention as far as some of the games that were played or anything else of your childhood?
- N: I don't think there are any other sports other than what I mentioned. I really don't think there's anything else from my youth that I omitted right now.
- M: Was there anything else that you would like to mention about your own experiences in the store and leaving the Smoky Hollow when you did and leaving the business when you did?
- N: It was very sad to leave the hollow. We had many colored people that came in crying and asking us to please stay, which was very sad. They were very good to us and we were good to them. We would try to help them in most every way we could. We delivered their groceries free of charge. Some needed help with their mail. We would read it for them and assure them everything would be all right.
- M: It wasn't a pleasant thing when you had to leave?
- N: Exit, no.
- M: How many years, Mr. Nazarini, do you recall from the time your parents started into the business and including the time that you were in the business totalled?
- N: I would say it would be pretty close to fifty years. It would have to be fifty years.
- M: That's a long time for anyone to be in business. Maybe you need this time now to see what's happening in the outside.

- N: That's what a lot of people tell me, that it was time for us to get out because we'd been there long enough! (laughter)
- M: I just hope nothing but success for you. Is there anything else that you would like to include in this interview before we conclude this tape?
- N: No, I don't think so. I think that would be it.
- M: I want to thank you very, very much for allowing me to tape this and permitting me to do this. Thanks a million.
- N: Thank you. It's my pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW