

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Niles Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1590

MARGARET PALLANTE

Interviewed

by

Marcelle Wilson

on

October 26, 1994

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Niles Project

INTERVIEWEE: MARGARET PALLANTE

INTERVIEWER: Marcelle Wilson

SUBJECT: Niles Project

DATE: October 26, 1994

W: This is an interview with Margaret Pallante for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Niles Project, by Marcelle Wilson, on October 26, 1994, at 10:30 a.m.

What was your childhood like as you were growing up in Niles?

P: I come from a large family. There were seven boys and three girls. I am the youngest of the ten children so there is a span of probably 22 years between the oldest and myself. It was like having two families because as I was growing up the older members of the family were married and gone. So I grew up more or less with some of their children. It was a very loving family. We were a very hard working family. It was a family where my mother and father did not allow any profanity in the house. Obedience was very strict for my father. There was no spanking. It was always know that when my mother said something we were to do it. We were not to sass her back or give her any bad times. It was a very considerate family where if you were going to be late coming home you always called mother and told her, "Do not wait. I'm going to be late," so that she would not hold dinner for you or did not wait up for you.

W: When did the first members of your family come to Niles? What year and who came here?

P: My older brother Joseph was born in Brazil. Then there was Mary who was born in 1903 in December when my family came to Ellis Island. They came in September and they were quarantined until December, and my sister was born in New York. My brother Joe was born in 1901 in Brazil where my mother and father had stayed there and my father worked in coffee fields.

W: Did they have friends or relatives in Niles?

P: My father's father came here very early and started work at the brick yard. My father came back and he was very young. My father started work at the brick yard at thirteen years old. So they went back and forth. So my father was here as a young child. His father came over and was one of the first persons to work at the Niles Firebrick Company.

W: Where did you grow up? What street did you grow up on?

P: I grew up on Warren Avenue. It's on the west side of Niles.

W: What was your neighborhood like as you were growing up?

P: I think we were probably one of several Italian families over there. When we moved there it was mostly vacant land when my father built over there. He moved over there for reasons of closeness to school and churches, and he wanted to build so his children have, more or less, an open space to grow up. It was sort of a wilderness over there at the time.

W: What was your house like that you grew up in?

P: The house that I grew up was a two story red brick house.

W: How many rooms did it have?

P: It had three bedrooms and a big bath on the second floor hallway. Downstairs was a living room, a hall, standard, the dining room and a kitchen. We had a big yard. A lot that the house was built on and a lot in the back which was made into a garden and fruit trees.

W: What was the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood?

P: Very mixed. I would say there were Croatian, Hungarian, Irish. It was a very mixed neighborhood.

- W: Did you play with all the children in the neighborhood and got along with them?
- P: Yes. We played the ordinary games that children played at the time. Without the television it was mostly outside games. Hide and go seek, kick the can, things like that. We played baseball in the streets. We played together.
- W: Did anyone besides your parents and your brothers and sisters live at your house? Were there any extended family members?
- P: From my mother's stories and my dad, when they first moved and they lived on the east end of town they had relatives and they took in boarders to make ends meet. I do not remember that because I was not in that part of their life yet.
- W: Where did you go to school?
- P: Jackson School on Warren Avenue and Niles McKinley. I did not go to college.
- W: What did you do for fun as you were growing up?
- P: I played games, and we had bicycles. The park was up the street from us. We played house with the other children in the neighborhood, things like that.
- W: Did you go to the movies?
- P: We went to the movies all the time, yes.
- W: How much did it cost to go to the movies?
- P: I remember five or ten cents somewhere. Then it was a quarter and gradually went up.
- W: How many of your family members completed high school?
- P: Seven completed high school. All but three finished.
- W: Did any of them go to college?
- P: Yes, my brother Don, who is the principal at the high school, went to college. My brother Paul was a teacher and my brother Larry was a teacher. Three others went to college but they never finished. They found other interests.
- W: Where did your family go to church?
- P: My father and mother started out at Mt. Carmel Catholic Church. Then when they moved

to the west end of town we went to St. Stephen's. It was within walking distance.

W: Who were some of the ministers or priests that you remember?

P: Father Gallagher, Father Roach. Over the years, Father Turk, but that is in my later years. I remember Father Roach and Father Gallagher in my younger years.

W: How long did your family attend St. Stephen's?

P: I am still a member of St. Stephen's. The rest of my family now goes to Mt. Carmel.

W: What were some of your favorite things when you were young? Do you remember going to the store and buying candy?

P: That was one of the things we did. My mother had a little purse which she always kept in one of the kitchen drawers. When we came home from school at noon to eat our lunch we were allowed five cents to go to the candy store next door. You never had to ask for the nickel, it was always there. You weren't allowed to take more than a nickel. I remember that. We talk about that often. In fact, I have her little purse here. We did not have to ask her for the money.

W: Did you like to go down and get ice cream?

P: Yes, we would go to the movies, then we would go to the dairy store and buy ice cream. I remember going to the five and ten downtown after school in my older years. I had girlfriends that worked there. I used to get candy and buy things at the dime store.

W: Did you go to a lot of dances as you were growing up?

P: No.

W: They didn't have them or you weren't allowed to go?

P: Oh yes. We had high school dances.

W: What did your father do for a living?

P: He worked at the Firebrick company ever since he was a little boy.

W: What did he do at the Firebrick?

P: I imagine in his younger years he probably did manual work. Then he was made foreman and he was more or less the overseer. He worked day turn.

- W: Did your family own a business outside of your dad working at the brickyard?
- P: Yes, my dad in the early years built a building in Niles and they had a shoe store. Several of my brothers and sisters worked at the shoe store.
- W: What was the shoe store called?
- P: Then he rented it out and it became more or less a restaurant or cafe. Then, one of my older brothers, Ralph, went into business. He had the restaurant for a while and my dad worked there after he retired for a few years. He helped out. My mother made spaghetti sauce for them all the time. They would take it down to the restaurant. They were in the shoe store and the restaurant business.
- W: What were some of the jobs that some of your brothers and sisters had and maybe some of the jobs that you had when you were growing up?
- P: My younger brothers, of course, all had paper routes. While they were going to college, I know they worked at General Electric part time in the summer. I never did work until I was out of school. I worked at Strauss for a couple of years. Then I went to work at the county courthouse. I started there as a secretary and ended up as the clerk of the Trumbull County Commissioners. I was the first woman ever to be nominated for that job in Trumbull County. That was the first in Trumbull County for which I am very proud.
- W: Was it hard being a working woman in the forties?
- P: No, I enjoyed it very much. I worked there for 35 years. My sister Mary worked most of her life in Strauss selling shoes.
- W: Did anyone in your family belong to social clubs like the Elks or the Eagles, or maybe a religious club or group?
- P: I know some of the boys belonged to the Elk's Club. Bob had worked at the Y.M.C.A. I don't know.
- W: What was a typical family meal like as you were growing up? Did you have certain foods?
- P: We had breakfast, of course, when we were going to school. We always had breakfast. My mother always gave us a hot meal at breakfast time. We came home for lunch. My father would come home from work. It was about 4:30 when he got home. Supper was on the table at 5:00 and it was always a very good meal, and it was hot. When times were hard, my father made sure that there was meat on the table. He made sure that the

children got their food first. Then he took his. He always made sure that the children had enough to eat first.

W: Did all the children who were living in the house at the time have to be present for dinner?

P: No, because they were doing other things. They may have been playing baseball or something. Most of all we were there for meals and especially on Sunday.

W: Did you have a lot of Italian meals or vegetables out of the garden?

P: A lot of vegetables we had from the garden. Sunday was a very big meal at our house. A standard Sunday meal was some sort of hand made macaroni. My mother always made handmade on Sunday. She always had stuff filled veal, meatballs, and braciolo, which is round steak. That was a typical Sunday meal.

W: What did your family do to celebrate a birthday or Christmas, or Easter.

P: I don't remember anything special for birthdays. There were no big parties or anything. Holidays were very special and everyone came home for holidays, the whole family. As the years went on the family grew bigger and we had tables in the living room and the dining room. My dad and mother insisted my mother do all the cooking. It wasn't like today when someone brings a casserole. My mother did all the cooking for the holidays.

W: Did you have a special Italian food?

P: There were always fruits and nuts. The meal would always include macaroni, but there would be turkey or some kind of chicken, with mashed potatoes and gravy. We always ended a meal with fruit and nuts which is the standard Italian ritual.

W: What type of transportation did you use as you were growing up?

P: My dad never owned a car. When there were buses our way he would go to the bus. Otherwise, he walked the mile to work. Of course, when the boys got older they had cars. If they were home at the time they would go down and pick my dad up, otherwise he would take the bus home.

W: Was there any kind of trolley or train?

P: Oh yes. The train disappeared and the bus line came through. That didn't last very long either at our end of town. Then the cars came. Mostly at first it was walking. We walked to church all the time. Mother walked to town practically every other day to get the fresh meat and food.

W: What happened when a family member died?

P: My mother always said it was her place to go. She said, "Mother always went to the funerals and father always went to the weddings." She always said that. Most of the people were at home when they died. I really don't remember ever going to a funeral until my niece died at the age of nine. I was thirteen when she died. That's the first funeral I remember and she was at home at her other grandma's house.

W: Were funeral homes around at the time or were they just not popular?

P: I think they were probably around, but most ethnic people have their families at home.

W: What did things, such as a cup of coffee or a meal at a restaurant, cost?

P: It has been so long ago. You could probably get a sandwich for a quarter or thirty cents. I remember going out to lunch and spending a dollar.

W: Did you eat out much as you were growing up?

P: No, not until I started to work.

W: Were there many restaurants in Niles at the time?

P: Downtown Niles had many restaurants, so called restaurants and bars.

W: What music or groups did you like as you were growing up? Did you listen to the radio a lot?

P: Yes, we listened to the radio. My brother Don and I always favored classical music. We bought the classical records for the record player. He is two years older than I and as we were growing up and graduated and came home from college, he had a car. We would go to Cleveland to see the Operas, or to Youngstown.

W: Did you listen to the old time radio shows?

P: Oh, yes. We listened to Amos and Andy. We had a small radio at the time. Some of them are larger. We would sit in the living room, all of us, and my dad would turn the radio on and we would just sit there and listen. That is the only kind of entertainment we had.

W: What kind of refrigeration did your family use as you were growing up?

P: We probably used the old refrigerator with the ice. At that time we had an electric refrigerator.

W: Did you always have indoor plumbing when you were growing up?

P: Yes. I don't remember way back. I could not tell you, but the house I lived had inside plumbing and there were houses around us that did not have inside plumbing. I'm sure in the older times when they moved there they did not have it.

W: Did your family participate in any local politics?

P: No. I got into politics. My job was political. So I was always involved in politics. My father did not. As far as I know, he did not have a union because he was in management.

W: What were the 1930s like for your family?

P: We were not affected as other people were by the depression. My father worked every day so we were very fortunate that we did not have to go to the so called "soup lines" as some of our neighbors did. I remember going down to the soup lines as my neighbors got food. We were very fortunate.

W: Did the local stores in your area give out credit to people?

P: Yes, we had the grocery store next to us that gave credit because they asked my mother if she ever wanted to charge, but my mother would never charge. If she did not have the money she wouldn't buy. The department stores downtown also would give credit to people that they knew. I remember my mother found this one coat at the one store she wanted. It was a winter coat. She did not have the money to pay for it at the time. They asked her to charge it. She said, "No, I do not believe in charging." She would not buy it until she had the money to pay for it.

W: That is a lot different from today. Did you do any kind of volunteer work during World War II? Did you do any volunteering for the war effort?

P: No, I was working at the time and I had brothers who were in the service at the time. I had planned my future, which was to go to college. When the four boys left for the service in 1941 and 1942, my dad asked that I stay home because there was no one there but my mother, so I ended up at home. When the boys came home they wanted to send me to college, but at that time I had a good job. I did not want to make the switch.

W: Is there anything else you would like to add?

P: No, thank you.

MARGARET PALLANTE

Margaret Pallante was born on May 12, 1923 in Niles, Ohio, the tenth child of Joseph and Lucia Pallante. Miss Pallante attended Jackson School, located on Warren Avenue (Niles) and graduated from Niles McKinley High School in 1941.

Miss Pallante's first job was at Strouss Department Store. In 1945 she became a secretary for the County Court House and later became the first woman to hold the position as Clerk of County Commissioners. She retired from this position on December 31, 1979. Miss Pallante enjoys reading and volunteers her time at St. Stephen's and Washington Junior Schools.

W: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW