

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Niles, Ohio

Personal Experience

O.H. 1601

GRACE A. SHEEHAN

Interviewed

by

James Allgren

on

February 22, 1994

GRACE SHEEHAN

Grace (Ross) Sheehan was born January 26, 1919 in Niles, Ohio to Nicholas and Mary Ciminero Ross, and is a graduate of Niles McKinley High School. Her late husband Robert Sheehan was a grandson of Patrick J. Sheehan, prominent Mahoning Valley businessman and general manager of Niles Fire Brick Company, manufacturers of industrial refractory brick linings for use in steel plants. She is the mother of six children: Elizabeth, Robert, Patrick, Michael, John, and Mary Grace. She has been self-employed as a seamstress, sewing teacher, business management consultant, and direct sales representative. She has also served on the board of the Ohio Legal Rights Council, as chair of the Consumer Advocacy Council, and Rehabilitation Services Director of the Advocate and Outreach Co-op for the Mentally Ill and Disabled. In her spare time, she enjoys floral arranging, swimming, and travel.

A: This is an interview with Grace Sheehan for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Niles Fire Brick Company, by James Allgren, on February 22, 1994.

Now, Mrs. Sheehan, you are a life-long resident of Niles?

S: Yes.

A: What memories do you have about growing up in Niles? What was it like to grow up there for you?

S: I was always real happy there, and I liked everything about the town and about the closeness of the people. I grew up on the far west side of Niles, which was not too far from Wadell Park. We were going to Jackson School, which is on the west side. The high school, which is Edison Junior High now, used to be Niles McKinley. When they built Wadell Park, I practically lived there.

A: What was Wadell Park like? What do you remember about it?

S: I think it was built in 1934. They had tennis courts. I used to help my mom and dad in the house early in the morning, working the garden with my father, helping out in the house with my mom. I would grab my tennis racket and bathing suit, and head for Wadell Park at ten o'clock. I played tennis from ten until noon. The pool used to open at twelve, and I was there from twelve to ten at night. That was my life during the summer.

A: So you would spend the whole day at Wadell Park.

S: I was proud of that. I played baseball, volleyball, and basketball for Saint Stephan's. I was real athletic going out. God, I enjoyed all of that. But when the pool was opened, I lived at the pool.

A: So, it was a very important center for your life.

S: It was, yes.

A: Now, you mention your dad. What was your dad's name?

S: Nicholas Ross.

A: What did your dad do for a living?

S: Well, when the Fountain Steel was open, he worked there. My dad was kind of a jack-of-

all-trades. He could do a lot of things, but I remember him working at Fountain Steel. I do not recollect him ever having worked at the brick yard. I was trying to think about that, unless he was there before I was born, or during the earlier years of my life. He worked in the steel mill. He worked for the railroad in later years. At one point in time, for the lawyer that became real famous--they were just talking about him on the television recently. Do you want me to talk about this?

A: Yes, go ahead. That is fine.

S: About ambulance chasers, I know my dad was about thirty-five years old. I remember he got hired by this lawyer, and he was employed in Cleveland. It is the one from Kinsman, the one that became a national figure. What was his name?

A: Is it Harshman and Gervelis?

S: No. I cannot think of it.

A: I cannot think of it either. I know the exact thing you are talking about. I cannot think of who the heck that is.

S: But I remember the pictures of my dad when he worked for him, when he had his office in Cleveland. But in those days, that was how the lawyers got their business. There was a show on television just recently, that made me think of my dad all dressed up in a dark suit, white shirt and tie. He was going to work for--doggone it, when you do not talk about these people that often. If I would hear the name, I would know it in a minute.

A: .What kind of job did he have, working for that attorney?

S: Ambulance chaser.

A: That was his title.

S: Talk to the people. Yes, that is what they used to call them, like on this movie recently. They went out, like if somebody had an accident.

A: Almost a singles man, almost.

S: Yes. He went out and recruited clients for the lawyers. That is where they got that term.

A: How long did he do that?

S: I know he did it one whole year, that I remember of. I was pretty young at the time, ten,

twelve years old, I do not remember. Maybe a little older than that. My dad did different things. He did construction work, and I remember W.P.A., too, when it first came out.

A: Was the W.P.A. at all involved in building the park?

A: Yes, I am pretty sure it was. Instead of knowing that, welfare -- as they have now -- that is ridiculous. He worked up there during the Depression. The mills were shut down. In fact, I remember the soup kitchens, too.

A: Were there soup kitchens during the Depression?

S: Yes. A part of the W.P.A., I think it was.

A: What could you tell me about those?

S: I remember people going with their old buckets, and most people that worked at the mill used to have either big aluminum buckets, oval shaped ones, or kind of rectangular. People would go down and get soup. They passed out free bread and soup. I think we went down a couple of times. During the summer months, we planted so many vegetable gardens, and my dad always had hot beds. We had our own house, and we had another big lot. Our lots went all the way back to the railroad tracks, like three hundred feet. We would plant that all with gardens. Everybody would help one another. We had our vegetables and whatever, but you canned thousands and thousands of quarts of vegetables. You planted everything.

A: So, all the neighbors pitch in and help each other out with these sort of things?

S: If someone needed help, as far as someone being sick, maybe mother or parents, they would go and help out with the kids. They would take care of them and cook for them. We did that, we even went across town to do that as I was growing up. Relatives would help. The neighbors would help. The kids would help in the evening. No one had to have money. Well, they did not have cars, they were lucky if the families had cars.

They would play in the neighborhood. In the evenings of summer, you would hear the kids playing: kick the can, chalk the rabbit, and play in the neighborhood. Sometimes, if it was a rainy day, we would get together and would usually come down to our house. I was the oldest of six kids. Pull toffee on the front porch. I would sit and tell them ghost stories, then they would be afraid to go home. (Laughter)

A: I bet that was fun.

S: You hear the older people tell you stories. Then the young teenagers -- in blackberry season, elderberry season -- would go pick berries down at the house. I learned to cook and bake when I was young. Like I said, there were always so

many kids. I baked pies for everybody, all of the kids. So, in other words, they had to help pick the berries. No ticky, no washy, you do not help, you do not get no pie or candy, or whatever.

A: It was kind of a community activity, a neighborhood activity?

S: Yes.

A: A lot of the times, you do not find that kind of closeness among communities anymore. Did you feel that Niles was special in that respect? Because I have been getting the impression, from doing interviews and everything, that it is small town values in the middle of . . . you have got this wonderful small town sitting in the middle of Youngstown and Warren. It is a pretty special place. I have been noticing that.

S: I always did. In fact, one of my sons, to this day, wants to come back and live in Niles. He would rather go there and find a house. My sister still lives in Niles. My daughter has lived here most of her life. She just recently moved to Liberty, which is just a suburb. I have always liked Niles.

A: You mentioned the school system. When did you graduate from Niles McKinley High School?

S: 1937. I have been wanting to get a hold of Jim Brown. He wants to know what I have been doing. I have got so many things that I have been doing, it would take me forever to write it. I should talk on a tape for him. Most of them are not doing a lot. I am so busy. I do not even have free hours in the day since I supposedly retired.

A: Supposedly. My dad knows about being supposedly retired.

S: I am supposed to be in Columbus Friday and Saturday this weekend; next week also. Now, if the weather is great, I am going to be running all over the state.

A: What sort of school was McKinley? What do you remember about being in high school there? That is usually a pretty special time in somebody's life. Do you have any special memories of high school?

S: Mr. Brown, I will never forget him, our history teacher. He was in charge of study hall, too. I used to love history. I got A's and B's in history. During study hall, the activity period to study, I would go down to the pool, because they had a pool. Did you know that?

A: No.

- S: It is the Edison Junior High, now. That is the school that I graduated from. They had a swimming pool, and I thought that was great. I do not know why they still do not have pools in high schools.
- A: Some do, but not very many.
- S: Yes. Because I always thought it was a necessity for any kid to swim. Save your life or somebody else's.
- A: Did you learn to swim early?
- S: Yes. When I was sort of young. We did not have any pools in town. We went to first and second farmers of the river, what we called Mosquito River, but they called it the lake. They developed Mosquito Lake from that river up there, actually in Cortland. I used to dive locally, not big time. Diving exhibitions and swimming meets with people from the pool.
- A: What you used was the pool at the park?
- S: Wadell Pool.
- A: What time period was that?
- S: Well, it was before I graduated when I started. I met my husband's brother first. He was a lifeguard. Then my husband became a life guard the following year. The different lifeguards, because I hung out at the pool, were coaching me in diving. So, like I said, a tomboy, I would do anything off the high board.
- A: You got pretty good at it then?
- S: Yes. I will never forget Billie Kay, he used to dive with us. In fact, I engineered in later years, after I had the kids and everything, a diving exhibition. No, it was before that. I was thinking of the one at Cedar Lake that I engineered. I coached diving out there. We had a thousand people out at Cedar Lake. I was coaching diving to the kids. That is what I loved about Wadell Park, I swam all of the time. We competed in the area. Youngstown, Idora Park, had a platform in their swimming pool. Did you ever hear about that?
- A: I have seen photos of it.
- S: They put the children's Kiddie Park in afterwards, after they took the pool out.
- A: That is the location, actually, of where the pool was at. I was not aware of that. I knew it

used to be there.

S: We did not like to go to Boards Pool. I remember, they only had a low board. That was the one on the west side. We used to go to Warren Pool. I also played basketball for Saint Stephan's Church when I was in high school. Even a year after I graduated out of high school, they still had that team. Those were girls' rules those days. They did not run all over the court. I was not that tall. I played guard for them. Then during summer months, when I was younger, all of the playgrounds had baseball teams and volleyball teams. We would play in competition with the other playgrounds. During high school, we had basketball and volleyball there. We even had a hiking team.

A: A hockey team?

S: A hiking team. I got all of my letters at high school. We would walk to Youngstown and back on Saturdays to get all the mileage. After school, that hiking club, we would walk out to Mineral Ridge. Every day we had miles until we had to walk three hundred miles to get the letter. There were all kinds of things. In fact, after I opened my pizza shop and restaurant, I was wanting to find a location and try to steal the desire of teenagers and to compete in sports. To me, that is a necessity for kids growing up.

A: I find that to be a very constant theme, especially, for some reason, in Niles it is stressed more so than it is. This is a big high school athletics area as it is, but in Niles, it seems particularly strong. I was interviewing Martha's uncle Larry, and he used to be the athletic director for the school system. He had a lot of really great things to say about it. You were saying that you are the oldest out of six kids?

S: Yes.

A: You had all brothers and sisters, both?

S: I was the oldest, then another sister, then two brothers, then two other sisters. Two boys and four girls. I just started to tell Martha about my brother. Actually, he is well known all over the world for his inventions. He still is supposedly retired fully, but he is still hopping planes, going to different countries.

A: Which brother is that?

S: Nicholas Dick Ross.

A: He is an inventor of . . .

S: They named this here Induction Coil. He even taught at Youngstown State University. Physics, I think, for a while. Professor Ross. In fact, his son is working there in

security. He has always been there for many years.

A: I know him very well. He is a fine man. I know exactly whom you are talking about.

S: But his dad, my brother, invented what they call the Ross Induction Coil. He was honored for that. That revolutionized electrical engineering, the concept of these big furnaces and these big plants, that is what he invented. He just came up with another invention recently. Last year he was getting ready to go to Pittsburgh, I happened to stop by -- I do not get to see him that often -- and he handed me a magazine that had another article about something else he invented. All the things he invented were for Ajax. They named that Ross Induction Coil after him. Back then -- you might have walked in when I mentioned it to Martha -- he was the guest of the Kremlin. In fact, he was even allowed to take his wife to Russia. That was when things were -- shoot, they could have snatched him and kept him.

A: When did he go to the Kremlin?

S: It had to be twenty some years ago, maybe. It has been a while. When we were not real friendly with Russia. He spoke before the Royal Congress of Engineers there. He has got personal friends in all your major countries, even Japan. He has been flying all over for years. South America, Italy, Germany, Spain, all over. Things he has invented, if the sales representative goes, he usually has to go, too, because he knows more about whatever it is they are doing.

A: He has to show them how it works.

S: He gave a lot of credit to the little town of Niles. In fact, while everybody else was playing cards and stuff, after he came back from the service, he went to college. He was going down there to Youngstown State University. He graduated from there. The reason he took a job teaching for awhile, he needed to use that lab, with all that invention stuff he was messing around with. He would be a good interview, I will tell you, because he gave credit to the town, I think. In what he did with his life.

A: We would love to do that sometime very soon. Something I wanted to ask you about, as far as it goes. You say you met your husband's brother . . .

S: First, before I met my husband.

A: Before you met your husband.

S: Jack Sheehan. Yes, he was a lifeguard.

A: Jack was your husband's brother?

S: Yes, older brother.

A: You met him first?

S: The first summer that they opened the pool.

A: Did you know about the Sheehan's before you actually met Jack?

S: No, I did not. The following year, my husband was the lifeguard. There was another, and his wife is still alive. Sweed McKlinick. His wife worked at the Y, teaching swimming all of those years from way back. She is still alive and still there. She is older than I am. They coached me. Sweed did nothing, of course I think he became disabled and was in a wheelchair. They lived in Sharon. He was going with his wife, and was married. Then they came out and we dived together. I dove with all of those guys all the time. I will never forget the day they coached me to do a full gainer.

A: How did it go?

S: Naturally, to get the maximum height on the board, you got to get the board with the balls of your feet and your knees straight. Then go up all the way, as far as you can go and then pull into the action in the air. Well, they were coaching me, I was doing other dives before this. I was going to do this full gainer, or was it a half gainer, one or the other. I think it was the full. Yes, it was a full gainer. The points count because the minute you hit the top of the board from the ladder on the high board. So I walk out and hit the board like I was supposed to, go up. Instead of going forward, I go off to the side. For some reason, I am coming back into the full gainer. Full gainers, you come back doing a full flip the other way. You are supposed to go in feet first. Hit the board, go all the way up, maximum height, do your flip, land feet first. I did everything right, but went off to the side. They all thought I was going to hit the board and get killed. They stopped me from going back. Then Sweed, I think it was he, said, "No, you got to go back up now."
(LAUGHTER)

A: Do it now, while you still can.

S: It is just like anything else.

A: Obviously the pool was like, almost the center of things.

S: Talking about the town and the economic times of that year.

A: How was everything?

S: Well, even though I was a tomboy, my mother would kind of make some of the cotton

dresses for the girls. Scrap of fabric, so I cut out freehand, a little dress for my one sister. Now, I was pretty young because she was just crawling. I made it by hand because they used old treadle sewing machines then, I was about nine or ten years old. Then I started cutting things out freehand, and making things for my little sisters. Then I started doing alterations while I was in high school. Even though I was in school, I was doing alterations for people. I converted that sewing machine into an electronic one, by the time I graduated. I wanted to be a lawyer to help the under dog when I was growing up. So I took college courses. I took Latin and everything else. When I got out of school, shoot, how could I go to college. There was no money. Things were real bad in 1937. So my sewing skills that I acquired myself led me to my first job, and I did not even try to get it.

A: Where was that at?

S: That was the National Youth Administration. They had CC camps for the guys. If you would talk to some older people, you would remember.

A: I know, I heard about this.

S: They sent the guys to work in the parks and forests, and they sent some over to Newton Falls, at a high school that was vacant at the time. So I graduated and they immediately hired me for assistant supervisor for sewing project on NYA for Trumbull County. They had that upstairs at the fire station on West Market Street, Youngstown. I used to get the bus and go there to work. I made very little money, but that was big money in those days. The part of that, though, that I was going down to Ferry School of Design in Youngstown, with Busta to help him with sewing. The clothes he made were for the elite and rich people of Youngstown.

A: Who was that?

S: Ferry School of Design, and he was the designer. That was when I was in high school. That was how the high school knew that I was doing sewing.

A: So that was how they could put you up for that other job?

S: Yes. I would help him on the garments he made. He was to teach me to draw and panadrafting, because I had sewn without patterns myself. You just go with the garment. That was where I learned to fit as you go with garments, because it made sense to me any way because I worked for him. I did that for, I think a year or two, before I graduated. That is how I got my first job. I never actually wrote a resume. My whole life I was self-employed, more or less, because I never did go out and work for anybody. I never punched a time card because I had my kids to raise. So I worked at home.

A: That helped supplement the family and company as well then. Did everybody kind of pitch in, as well as they could?

S: At home?

A: Yes.

S: I opened what we call the Neapolitan Pizza, because, at the time, my husband was not working. Things were always kind of bad. They had a strike at the plant or it shut down, or it was not working. So I supplemented the income quite a bit. With my sewing classes that I started at home, after we built the house. That was a cute story of the way I wound up building a house.

A: Where is the house at?

S: It was on the south side. My father-in-law, P. J. Sheehan, gave us a lot. I thought, "When can we ever get a house of our own?" I do not know if you want to hear that or not.

A: No, go ahead. I am sorry. I would like to talk to you about old P. J. in a little bit, too.

S: Because he thought well, if he gave us a lot, maybe some how, some way, we might be able to build a house sooner. They had, we called it the chicken coop, but it was not a chicken coop. Somebody else had lived in it before we did. It was a building in the back, next to the livery stable, that had two huge rooms. It was all finished on the inside and everything. I had two children at the time, my husband was not working too good, either. I was sewing for people. I will never forget having to work on two wedding gowns and veils that I had designed for these gals whom I grew up with on Hunter Street. They were getting married the same month, it was May. I just had Pat, my third child. At the time I was working on those gowns, he was crawling. Now how the devil was I going to work on slipper satin with a baby crawling around? I had to stay up all night and sew. I sewed with sheets under the sewing machine after the kids went to bed.

But we lived there because I thought that was the only way that we could accumulate enough money to start building this house. With three kids, I thought, "Well, let me see what I could do about it." We could not save any money, things were bad. My husband was not working too good. He tried to get a second part-time job. I thought, "Well, we have got this piece of property Grandpa Sheehan gave us. I know how we can start building a house. I will go downtown and try to make a little personal loan for myself." Trackson was president of Niles Bank, and I had gone to school with most of the people's kids that were in business around the area. So I thought I would go in to see if I could just get a little small personal loan, maybe three, four hundred dollars, five hundred dollars, or something like that. So I did. I got it with no cloud. I got four hundred dollars. I thought, "Good, now we are going to start." I went and contacted a

couple of supply places in Niles. I forget the name of the one who was down by the tracks. They had cement blocks and sand, all the supplies you need to start digging a cellar, and to start constructing a house, right?

A: Yes.

S: So I went down. I told them I was going to build a house, and I would pay them as I went along at the end of the month, for the supplies I would purchase, and they would deliver it. My brother, after I got this money, said, "I do not know how you are going to do this." I said, "Do not worry about it. I will get the stuff." My brother Nicky was at YSU, I think, at the time. He surveyed and I drew the plans for the house. We started ordering the supplies. We surveyed the property and the side of the house. We went according to plans. I got my first blisters shoveling the gravel in the newly dug cellar. I negotiated for the best price I could get to evacuate the cellar. I figured I would get it started and get up to the floor, and then worry about the rest later. It was thirty- eight feet by sixteen feet wide to start with. I thought, we will start with that, then we will go from there. So I got my first blisters and I worked right along. In fact, I did enjoy the work. Most of the time, I was out there working myself. I got pretty good with the trowel, and the level, and mixing the mud, and the mortar box, and working on the scaffold.

A: Well, just do it yourself.

S: Kids would come by from school and watch me work on the scaffold. Because my husband was working by that time, I was out there working by myself. Some people took some pictures of it, but I could have people testify to the fact that they remember me working on a scaffold.

A: Is the house still standing?

S: Yes. The walls are thicker than any walls I think anybody would ever have in a house.

A: Where is it located at?

S: On Fifth Street and Iowa. It wound up being a ranch L-shaped house. It became fifty feet down the other side, after we added on the bedrooms with the real knotty pine. The cellar out of the whole works. Those walls, you know the thickness of block walls. Then we stripped the inside and went with plaster board. Then I used textured plaster to finish the inside. Then later on we had some money. The outside, I got tinted cement and swirled it and made it look like a stucco house. Then later, when we got money, we got backer board and had aluminum siding put on it. We had a porch built and we built a patio on the back. But when I went down to the bank, getting back to how I started with four hundred dollars, we got it up to the floor. In those days, I think once in a while you would see out in the country, somebody would build a house and get up to the floor and

live in the basement. I did not want to do that. I knew you could close it in and get that far, if nothing else. That would be a value to somebody, especially if you had a lot. So I walked in the bank this day, because we had to go further, and I had plans all drawn and asked to see Mr. Trackson. I wanted to buy money for the rest of the materials to construct the house. I will never forget, he said, "You don't do it that way. That isn't the way you start to get a loan for a house." He said, "You either have to come to us before you break ground, with the contractors guarantee to construct this house and complete it, then we will give you a loan on the fully completed structure. Or you come to us before you break ground and get an okay loan, if you have other collateral or assets. I said, "What am I going to do now?" I was always real down to earth with people.

A: That is half up.

S: Yes. So I said, "We got that much going." He says, "Well." He knew of me anyway, from the kids in the high school and swimming and stuff. He knew I baked bread and cooked from scratch and all that kind of stuff. So he said, "I am going to make an exception to the rule." He said, "I will tell you what we will do. You continue to do what you have been doing. Keep ordering supplies and, as you go along, bring me all of the bills, and at the end of the month, we will pay them for you until you get the house completed." So I always offered to bring him homemade bread and stuffed pizza I was making. (Laughter) How many banks would do that?

A: None.

S: How many people?

A: Absolutely none that I can think of.

S: You see what I mean?

A: You are right. That is wonderful. That is all a part of just being from around here.

S: I do not know if his kids ever knew that, or whatever.

A: That is absolutely wonderful. That is a fascinating story. I wanted to ask you about your husband, when you were talking about how he was not working for a time. Your husband was Bob, right?

S: Yes.

A: How did you meet your husband? You met him after you met his brother? You met him the next year?

S: After his brother, he became the lifeguard the second year that I started to go to Wadell Pool. Because his other brother, I do not know if he was in college anyway, I think. Jack was not the lifeguard the second year, Bob took his place. He asked for the job, so he got it.

A: How did you first meet him?

S: At the pool.

A: Do you remember what you thought when you saw him? Was it love at first sight?

S: No, I do not think so.

A: Really?

S: I thought his brother was sharper, to tell you the truth. (LAUGHTER) I should not have said that. (LAUGHTER) No, he was bossy with the guys. The guys would walk over if I was taking a break and laying in the sun, or something, and he was the lifeguard. They would come over to talk to me, and he would yell over the microphone, "Quit bothering the ladies and the girls." There was nobody else but me sitting there. (LAUGHTER) He would chase them away.

A: A pretty bossy fellow?

S: Yes.

A: Where do you think he got that from?

S: I do not know. Probably his dad.

A: I have heard that P. J. was a pretty bossy guy himself.

S: Yes. He was an awesome person, I thought. His stature was commanding. The way I felt about the father-in-law, he was special. Most people were in awe of him, because he was such a good business person. He was affiliated with a lot of business people around town, but I did not know that much about his personal life.

A: As far as it goes, you and Bob were married when?

S: 1940, I think.

A: 1940.

S: Yes. I was working at that job, and I did not feel like I should quit it, being assistant supervisor. And things were bad anyway. Of course, I was sewing for people, too, at the same time.

A: Where did Bob work at? Did he work at the brick yard with his dad?

S: No. When I met him, I do not think he was doing anything at the time. He did not want to go to college, for some reason. All of his brothers, I think, did. Most of his family did. He was a lifeguard, then he got a job after that. Yes, because I was still in high school. I met him my junior year. I had my senior year to go after I met him. He was at the Y coming down Robbins Avenue, where it splits there. In fact, there is a Sohio station there, before you get to Vienna Avenue where it splits.

A: I know exactly where you mean.

S: He was working at the gas station. I remember, we used to like to do some of this. I roller skated outside, too, you know. Even when I was a senior, I would jump on roller skates. Who cared? I used to skate the McKinley Memorial side walk. In the front, you could cut big figure eights there if you had your skates. You know, on that big walk. I remember going up to see my husband, he was not my husband then, when he was working at that gas station, on my roller skates. I was playing basketball for Saint Stephans that year, too. He would come out to see us play basketball. Then he did that. Let's see what else. He became a bar tender. He used to like to go down and play cards with the guys, after he would leave the swimming pool. I lived down next to the Pallante's, which was not far from Wadell Park. He would walk me down the street. I would say good-night to him at the corner, "Good-bye, I will see you tomorrow." We were the first house on Hunter, after we passed the lot the Pallante's own over there. Then, he would go downtown and play cards with the guys. Then, he got a job at Steel Products. After we were married, he got that job. He took a job bar tending, too, I think. I do not remember, before we got married. There were not too many jobs he had, I know that.

A: That job he got after you got married, that was at Youngstown Steel Products? Was that where that was at.

S: No. It was in Niles. Niles Steel Products.

A: Because there was a Youngstown Steel Products as well. I have been to the Niles Steel Products building.

S: Yes, way down on the east side. When he had that job, he wound up tending bar at a cocktail lounge on the corner of Federal Street. That was during the war. He did not get to go to the war. We were married then, we had two kids. Because of his injury on his

- leg, he did not have to go. He was defirmed and did not get to go.
- A: I had a couple of uncles that got deferments, because they were married with children and that sort of thing.
- S: Then they had the arsenal. That was where he went to work during the war.
- A: In the gun arsenal?
- S: Yes. In fact, he was there the day the igloo blew and the truck blew.
- A: I heard about that.
- S: You hear about that, when the windows busted out of a lot of places in Warren and Niles. You heard that everybody jumped in cars and headed out there to see what the devil happened. He used great big bombs, they were like the height of this room. They used to move those, I guess that was what happened that day.
- A: They dropped one.
- S: They dropped one, they were not too careful.
- A: That is scary.
- S: That would be something. These bombs, they had them in igloos. That is what they did, they took the trucks, brought these things and put them in these igloos. They have pictures of them.
- A: I have seen old photographs from that. That would scare me to live by that. I do not know, I would be waiting for that to explode myself. They were talking about re-opening that a couple of years ago, but I guess nothing ever came of it. So maybe they were going to put that blimp factory out there, or something. Do you remember when we were supposed to get the blimp factory?
- S: Yes.
- A: He was a very imposing man, very proud figure. Do you have any kind of memories at all about the kind of person P. J. was, or anything personally you remember about him?
- S: Well I did not see him during the day much. He was always gone.
- A: Always at the brick yard.

S: He was proud of his kids. Of course, he had lot of kids. My husband was the youngest of fourteen. That is why there are not so many people left anymore. There is just one sister that I know of. I gave Martha the name of a niece that was older than my husband. I called her today. I thought she still possibly went to the same place. I asked her if she could dig up some information. She was always at the homestead. She was always there everyday, because they lived real close by. Her mother was the oldest Sheehan child, so that is why she is older than my husband. We were her aunt after we got married, and she was older than us.

A: Just because there were so many . . .

S: So many kids.

A: Right. That it would go down that far. Fourteen you said?

S: Yes. They had this big livery stable in the back that they used as a garage. They had this big bed. My mother-in-law loved flowers. She had a rose garden. This big bed that was the center of the drive that circled around the backyard. It was just an oval drive in the back turn around. The kids were talking about how they measured themselves in the livery stable, this big barn. You know, when they were growing up, getting taller, as they got bigger. My father-in-law played cards a lot. They belonged to a card club. They played cards with Clingan's, Wadell's, Thomas'. I was over here in this house years ago with my husband. I swear there was an elevator in this house. When I was going with him, he came over for his dad for some reason. I had been in the Clingan mansion, too, before the Clingan's were living there. That became the Y. M. C. A.

A: Right.

S: That is the home for the mentally ill.

A: Right, it is like a halfway house or something.

S: I remember them using it for the Y. M. C. A. once it was donated, the property. My father-in-law was always traveling around. You would see him on Sunday.

A: You say he was gone a lot because he was always traveling and things.

S: He had meetings all of the time throughout the day. So you never saw him through the day, hardly ever. When possible, he would come home and eat lunch. They would set the table the night before for breakfast, a huge dining room table. Then they set it for lunch, and, when in town, or when he could, he would come home for lunch. He was always going to other plants. We did not see him much through the day. Sundays you would see him.

A: He was a very in-charge kind of guy, I get the impression.

S: Yes. He was a real religious man. Real close to the church.

A: What church was that?

S: Saint Stephans.

A: Would have been Saint Stephans. Because I know that for the size of the town, it is kind of strange for there to be two Catholic churches in the same town.

S: Yes. Mount Carmel was always a pretty church. But that is basically the east side, for the ones who were Italian.

A: Right.

S: But they joined both churches in the end. Years ago. I think our generation, when they were growing up, had these hang-ups about nationality. The east side, basically, was where the Italian people lived, more the foreign people. Then you had your Hungarians, and so forth. On the west side, where I grew up, I think there were only five Italian families that I know of, on the west side, if that many. It still made a good mix, but it was funny how people congregated. Especially, I think, what led to a lot of people settling on the east side was the brick yard, to tell you the truth. Because most of those people were the ones that worked at the brick yard, the ones of the east side.

A: So they naturally settled around where they worked at.

S: So they come to town, and the ones that had position there that could leave and get a job when they came to town, they found jobs.

A: It was like they almost brought them here?

S: Yes, they did. They came to this country because they knew there was a job available to them, so they got hired there. Not as many people from the west side worked at the brick-yard. In fact, when I was growing up, I could hardly remember that there were. Because they did have the steel mill. In Falcon Steel, my dad was a rowler. In that original office, I think it is still the same office up there, do they meet about up there?

A: I think it is. I am pretty sure it is.

S: Niles, of course, RMI. The Damon plant. I remember going up there with some Italian ladies and getting the dandelions in the back of that office. There were not too many animals running around up there. There were not any houses up there. From my school

up to Wadell Park, they used to go out in the fields and pick dandelions. That was a delicacy. In fact, it is now. You can get them, but you have to order them from somebody. If you have seen the advertising for gourmet foods, you can order dandelions, if you really want them shipped in. In the back of that office was all nice, high grass. We would go with these gunny sacks. I helped, because I loved being outdoors anyway, so I helped this neighbor lady. We came in with all these bags of dandelions. Then, when we were kids, too, we would go and walk over the bridge in Wadell Park to go over to McDonald's Farm at an apple orchard, on the other side of Park Avenue, and the west side of Wadell Park.

A: I have an idea where I think you mean.

S: Maybe McDonald, something, seems to me that sticks in my head. Because there were no McDonald's food chains in those days. My kids did not grow up on junk food or any of that stuff, because there was not any, and they would not have gotten it anyway. We would get sacks full of apples on the ground. They said we could have all of the apples we wanted. Food stuff was all canned from the garden, so it was another thing people did. We used to have a brick addition to our house, with an upstairs open porch with pillars. We would go into one of the big bedrooms to get to the porch. We would spread the homemade tomato paste that was on the boards that my dad built and made on these horses. When the canning was over with tomatoes, we started with the apples, drying apples in the sun, making apple butter. You canned everything you got your hands on. That supplemented your food.

A: Kept everything going?

S: Yes. That was the best way to go, anyway. Everything from scratch. I remember doing that as a kid and making pies for all the kids in the neighborhood.

A: We have gone over a lot of things today. We got a lot of useful information here. I have had you for about an hour already today. I do not want to keep you too tied up.

S: I thought this was all on the brick yard.

A: On any old thing.

S: Because if there is anything else I can fill in for you, if you lack something between a certain period, I was real active with the school kids. I started Cub Scouts for Saint Stephans and wound up doing it for seven years and got a medal.

A: You started that at Saint Stephans?

S: Yes. Then I even got Mount Carmel School kids that wanted to go. They did not have

any Cub Scouts up there. I said, "Send them on down. I'll take them." Then, there again, I had both crews, you know, the Cub Scouts from up there. We used to walk to Wadell Park in the winter, and track chipmunks and squirrels. We would cook hamburgers, half cooked and half raw, over a fire and snow on the ground. I did a lot of stuff with the Cub Scouts.

A: When was that?

S: I volunteered at the school all of the time, too, in the cafeteria and stuff. I had my four boys all in a row. So if I was den mother for one, I better be for the next one, too, or I am going to hear about it. So I just stayed on. That is when I became den mother for seven straight years. Four of them were at that age to be in Cub Scouts. That is how I played my time there.

A: So, that would have been in the forties?

S: In order to be a Cub Scout, you had to be eight or nine years old. My oldest son, now, hit the big 5-0 last September. So you would have to go back and subtract ten from that. You would have to be eight or nine years old to be in Cub Scouts. So I had all of the boys in a row, Bon, Pat, Mike, and John.

A: One, two, three, four. Boom, boom, boom, boom.

S: Yes. I thought I would never have a girl, and my last one was a girl. So I did everything with the kids. When the Niles pool had to close, there were no funds to open it, I thought, "Where the devil am I going to take these kids swimming?" I took them swimming all of the time. From the day they were babies, they went swimming. My kids were all good swimmers. My Mike saved a kids life one day at Mosquito Lake when he was about fifteen. He saved a kid from drowning. But anyway, that is a different story. But he is good at that. He saved somebody else's life in a hospital a couple years back, too. So I take them swimming, and the only place they had available at the time, they opened up the Cedar Lake Swim Club. I do not think you remember that.

A: No.

S: You would be too young. Because I took all my kids and the neighborhood kids. They would come to the house with their baseball bats and their swimming suits and their towels and they would sit there until we did our chores. At nine o'clock in the morning, we left for Cedar Lake. I had to own station wagons.

A: You had to?

S: I had to because I filled them with like, twelve, fifteen kids. Talk about being a den

mother. I was their lifeguard, their coach, I fed them all. They had big pavilions out there, electrical outlets. I even brought out my sewing machine and did some of my alterations when I had them playing ball or something. They never stayed in the water, I had to be with them down there. So I recollect those days. In fact, a lot of the peoples' kids that I brought with me to this day remember I had some of the guys when they were kids come up to me and say, "We will never forget how you took us all of the time." So that made me feel good.

A: That must have been wonderful for them and you at the same time. Where was that lake at again? What swim club was that.

S: It is out on Lipkey Road. A priest owned it, Father Ed. Wait a minute, not Lipkey, it was Warren Road, down from Lipkey.

A: Okay, I know where you are at.

S: Where the shrine is. They were Lebanese people. I thought they were all Serents, I did not know the difference between Lebanese and Serents. I never heard of Lebanon.

A: Yes, it is right next door.

S: Yes. They had a little can on the counter, my daughter worked in their little snack bar they had out there. If you call them Sereian, you better put a quarter in that can, because they always noted that they were Lebanese. A lot of them thought that we were Lebanese, and I was so dark from going swimming and I am Italian, anyway. My kids are half and half, half Italian, half Irish. So I would bring the kids out there. We would, in the morning at nine o'clock, go, and come home at nine o'clock in the summer months. We cooked out there and everything. We probably got everything you needed. Do you want to do something later?

A: I got a lot of really wonderful stuff. I really appreciate you coming out.

S: That is great. I am glad to be of help. To me, it brought back recollections of all kinds of things. I think maybe, too, as a person gets older, I do not know about it. I think you have more of a feeling for history. Of course, I have always liked history.

A: Me, too.

End of Interview