YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farrell Race Relations Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 823

ANTHONY DEMARTINIS

Interviewed

by

Ronald Rice

on

June 2, 1980

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INTERVIEWEE: ANTHONY DEMARTINIS

INTERVIEWER: Ronald Rice

SUBJECT: racial tensions, family heritage

DATE: June 2, 1980

R: This is an interview with Mr. Athony DeMartinis for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program,on the racial tensions during the 1960's in Farrell, Pennsylvania, by Ronald J. Rice, at 619 Lyle, Hermitage, Pennsylvania, on June 2, 1980, at 5:15 p.m.

Could you tell us a little bit about your childhood and what it was like growing up in Farrell and what you remember about your parents and family?

D: That is relatively easy. I was born and raised and still live in Farrell on the same block with the exception of a couple of years of school and service and working in different parts of the country. I'm back home now. Growing up in Farrell was not unique other than everybody back in the late 1930's, 1940's, 1950's seemed to be like one, big,happy family. It has changed drastically in the last twenty years; I have to say that much. But growing up there was like any place else; people helped each other. There was very little to do. Probably not until the late 1940's there was television, so growing up was more or less people communicating with each other. There were no such things as locking your doors. We used to get into troubles that most kids got into: Breaking windows, playing ball, and things of that nature, playing out in the streets past curfew. That was more fun and mischief than anything that was destructive. Then my parents came . . . My father was born in Italy and my mother was born here. All four of my grandparents came from the same rural town in Italy.

R: Where in Italy?

D: It is up in the mountains northeast of Rome, probably sixty miles outside of Rome.

R: All four of your grandparents came over?

D: Right. So in actuality, on my dad's side I am the first generation American. On my mother's side I will be second generation, but we will say that I am first generation American; I'm proud of my ancestory.

In my neighborhood it was predominantly people who were from foreign extraction not necessarily all Italians. But there were Italians and Slavs. That would probably be it, Italians and Slavs in that area.

R: Did your grandparents settle in Farrell?

D: Well, no. My grandfather on my dad's side had a farm in West Middlesex what they would call New Bethel. They were forced to leave there because of some individuals--this is only secondhand information--didn't like foreigners in the area. When they didn't do it, they burned the barn down.

R: When was this? Would this be the 1920's?

D: I would say this is probably back in the early teens. My dad was born in 1905 and he started working at the Sharon Steel. Back then I guess it was called Carnegie Illinois. He started there when he was fifteen years old. He wore a mustache to try to look older. So at fifteen that would probably be 1920's. I would have to say that it was in the 1920's. When they burned the barn down, my grandmother had ten children at the time and decided . . .

R: Ten children?

D: Yes, God bless them. They didn't have television or radio back then and cold winters. They decided to move into Farrell. Most of the relations on my father's side, that being his mother, father and sisters and brother, came over from Italy and settled in Farrell. My mother's side, her parents came to this country and lived in Beaver Falls. My grandfather decided that while he was out on the farm . . . A lot of people from that little community in Italy who came over here, they were spread in an area I would say from Pittsburgh to Cleveland. In that general area they were spread out, so he decided back then probably in the teens to start an organization called the League of the Children of "this city or this little town" in America. It is still in existence today. They would meet periodically and have a family reunion once a year more or less. The first one was held on my grandfather's farm. They still hold them today. It is more or less a fraternal organization now, a benevolent type of organization. It is small. Again as the children grew up and intermarried, it lost that closeness that it had back in those days.

R: It just wasn't all cousins.

D: It was pretty much the whole family. They probably were related in some way because in little towns I imagine there were a lot of marriages. For example my grandfather and his sister married a brother and sister. So we are really close as far as being related to the one family, the DeMartinis' and the Zappa's. I'm sure this has happened in a lot of families, especially if they came from small, rural communities in Europe. So there was a bond that probably was through blood even over there, and it came over here. Like I say, today it is not as close as it was.

I still have friends that I was . . . I had learned Italian when I was a kid because my grandparents spoke Italian and my parents spoke Italian. Then we lost it. When these three individuals, three boys in particular, came over in their late teens, they couldn't speak a word of English. We helped each other out. I was the best man in two of their weddings; one is still single. We were close because I knew where they came from; we had a closeness there. They weren't related, but they knew my relations that I still had living over there. It was really an experience; I was teaching them English. We got along pretty well. I took them different places. We went to Youngstown. For that matter, both of the guys finally married girls who lived in and around Youngstown. When they were nineteen, they already were in the tailor profession for at least five years. They learned a trade early in life over there which is one thing we don't have over here.

R: Yes, you are right.

D: They learned to survive.

R: They had to.

D: Like I said, this organization is not like it used to be because we grow up and we forget. We make new friends. But it is still in existence. We probably will see some of them this year. I don't know where they are going to have their reunion this year. They usually try to have a reunion once a year.

I think because of the language barrier they had to stick together and this is why Farrell is a unique community. It had a section of which was strictly Italian; a section which was strictly German; a section which was strictly Polish; a section which was strictly Saxon. I mean even though Germans and Saxons are supposed to be similar . . . They even went so far that at one time Farrell had a Ripley's Believe It or Not. It had more bars and clubs and churches per capita than any other city in the world. This was in Ripley's Believe It

or Not back in the 1930's sometime. That is why you had the Saxon home, the German home, the Italian home, the Sons of Italy, two different Croatian homes, the Russian Club. All these clubs, people would congregate there because of the language barrier; they would have someplace to meet and stay within their own. This is why back in those days you would find an Italian marrying an Italian from this section of Italy. The same with the Polish and the same with any other of the ethnic groups.

R: Most of them were employed in Sharon Steel right?

D: Most of them were employed in the old Carnegie Illinois. They probably even helped them build it brick by brick like my grandfather did. He came over here before he was married and he got his United States citizenship. He helped build the building which was Carnegie Illinois. Then he saved his money, went back, got married, and raised a family. I shouldn't say that he raised a family. He had two out of ten children there. My father was the second oldest. When my dad was thirteen weeks old, I believe, they came over on a ship that was partially steam driven and partially wind driven.

They landed in Boston and came to Farrell in a caboose. They were in the caboose of the train. These are things that you don't forget that you were told as you are growing up. It makes you proud of your heritage and how they suffered and how they worked. They really did their thing and they survived. My grandfather finally ended up building a grocery store--not building, I should say acquiring a grocery store in Farrell. He was a prince; he was so good-hearted. He kept a lot of families alive during the Depression. If I took you to his store which is still in existence and we went down into the cellar, you would find numerous credit books that to this day haven't been paid since the Depression. There were three stores in the area; one was owned by a butcher. His name was Donofrio. He didn't give credit, but it worked out for him. Now they have a beautiful store up in Hermitage.

R: It is named Donofrio's?

D: That is right. They had their store on the corner of Fruit and Stevenson in Farrell. My grandfather had his store on the corner of Hamilton and Highland, two blocks away. Then there was another grocery store a block away. [My grandfather] was such a good man and gave credit.

R: A lot of people just took advantage of it.

D: That is right, including family. I know that. That was the kind of man he was. I thank God that my father named me after him. I was the first DeMartinis born in this country. I was his second grandson but the first carrying his name, the

DeMartinis name. My aunt--one of my father's younger sisters--had married before my dad did. This is the background.

R: What do you remember about high school? I would like to know a little bit about going to high school in Farrell.

D: Well, with me it was a little different. I was going to be a priest at one time. No snickers please. In high school and grade school, I always wanted to be a priest. That is why I went to Gannon College. St. Mark's was more or less associated with the school at that time. I decided against that. In high school everything was . . . We would have our cliques, different cliques.

R: When did you decide not to become a priest? When you went to college?

D: When I went to college, the first year there. I had rheumatic fever during high school. I was going to go to a seminary right after grade school. They referred to it as a minor seminary. Well, that was when I had rheumatic fever. They said that it was going to be too strenuous and told me to go to a high school in my location. Of course, they didn't have Kennedy Christian here, so I had to go to some school. The closest Catholic school was Greenville and they had no room for anybody from Farrell or Sharpsville; they had a full complement of students there. Their total graduating class was thirteen. They had no room for anybody from the valley.

If you were from Farrell and went to school back in the 1950's, basketball was the thing. Every, I can't say every, but almost every boy that went to Farrell High School wanted to be on the basketball team. Basketball was the sport that had a couple of state championships. My graduating class, we had a state championship. It was close; it was family. Everybody got along; we had no difficulties. We had rivalries with kids from Sharon, Sharpsville. But back even in the 1950's we didn't go beyond that.

R: Athletics was the dominant thing then?

D: Specifically basketball was the dominant factor. Football, Sharon controlled football; Farrell was basketball. Sharon had a couple of good teams in those days too. It was all good clean fun. Like I said, if we got into mischief, it was mischief. As we grew older and tried to get our first beer, we would go across the line to the place on Brookfield Avenue there. It was a real dive. Brookfield Tavern or Brookfield Inn, something like that.

R: I think Brookfield Inn.

D: Okay, Brookfield Inn. I was there when I was seventeen. We would get in and get our two or three beers. Cars were a big thing if you had one.

R: If you could afford it.

D: If you could afford it. Well, it was funny. We were talking about the price of gasoline. Back in those days the guys would get together. The Hickory Drive-In was open at the time. The big movies in those eras were "Rebel Without a Cause" and Marlon Brando's "The Wild One". We must have seen that movie about four times with ten guys in the car. We put three in the trunk. It used to cost 50¢ for a carload back in those days. Gasoline was cheap. I think it was about 19.9¢ a gallon. The guys would scrape the pennies together.

R: Just for the gas?

D: Just for gas. We borrowed dad's car. Well, on our block we had a couple of guys that were mechanically inclined; so we put a car together. Everybody pitched in.

There was smoking in the cellar and smoking in the garage because you would get your ass kicked if they found out. You know, just things that you could look back on.

R: Farrell in the 1950's was just like any other high school?

D: Right.

R: When you got out of college why did you decided to get into insurance?

D: I didn't go right into insurance. Back in the 1950's it was very difficult to get a job. If I was smart--hindsight is much better than foresight--I would have gone to Youngstown College back then instead of wanting to go away to college. It might have saved shining shoes, cutting lawns, working in a grocery store, packing as a checkout boy or whatever, things of that nature. With the help of my parents I went to Gannon. Gannon was quite expensive even back then. We couldn't find summer jobs; you couldn't find a job. In 1956 when I graduated from high school they just got over the Westinghouse strike, the big strike. We were in a slight recession as I recall. I think it was more than that. The money I had put aside for college, without my parents, didn't get me through college. I went to college in 1956. I finished the first year. I finished the third semester which would have been my first semester of the second year, and money ran out then. I came back home after Christmas and got a job selling shoes at Nobel Shoes in downtown Sharon. What a trip. But it was making money. You couldn't get in the mills; you couldn't get in the plants even though my dad worked at Sharon Steel at the time; they were

not hiring. So I worked in the shoe store, and from the shoe store, I went to another shoe store in Youngstown. I went to Lustig's. I sold shoes for Lustig's and started making some money. I bought a car. Then I went back to school and finished the second semester of my second year and finished one semester of my third year. Then Uncle Sam called and said that it was time to be drafted. By that time it was 1961. I went into the service for two years.

R: The Army, Navy?

D: The Army. I was drafted in the Army for two years. I had it made though. I wouldn't call it luck, but they selected me to go to military police school. So I went to military police school and never went overseas. I spent all my time in the south. I know what the blacks are going through in the south. It was bad. Now this is in the 1960's.

R: In the service?

D: Oh, yes. We had four military policemen strictly there for patrolling the off limit areas to whites in Colombia, South Carolina. We all stayed together in the service; I mean we all stayed in the same barracks. But there were off limit areas for whites; there were off limit areas for blacks. We had different restroom facilities, different water fountains.

R: Even in the barracks?

D: No, not in the military. In the civilian life.

R: Just in civilian life.

D: Oh, yes. It was bad. Being from the north I could sympathize with those guys. One incident I will never forget was going down [south] when they put me in charge of the train from Pittsburgh. We left Pittsburgh and ate good on the train. They took care of us. We got to Washington, D.C. and changed trains. At approximately six hours later we stayed south on the Southern and Seaboard Railroad. I believe that is what it was called. We went into Virginia, and they had box lunches for us. When you opend the boxes--after you paid them and you got back on the train--there were maggots in the food. So that was that. Then we stopped at a place at the North Carolina/South Carolina border. We were supposed to get off the train and eat. We walked into the restaurant. We must have had, I would say, about ninety guys. Out of ninety there may have been thirty-five blacks. They would not serve us. They wouldn't let us sit. The whites sat and ate and the blacks had to stay outside. I said, "Either we all eat or you won't get any money." It was a very small town. We all ate together. That is one thing that I will never forget. That was about September 26 or 27, 1961.

R: How did the restaurant owner react to you?

D: I didn't give a damn how he reacted. He didn't like it at first, but then he either was going to feed us all or not feed anybody.

R: He wanted the money.

D: Right. He turned those things back into the government and got his money. They weren't very congenial. They didn't like it a bit. This was the south back in the early 1960's. We were from this area and we didn't have any of those problems.

R: Right, it wasn't as bad.

D: No, there wasn't a problem as far as blacks going anywhere. I mean there have been certain clubs that they couldn't get into. There were certain clubs Italians couldn't get in. It was as simple as that. That is why the Wolf's Club was formed because the Rotary and the Kiwanis and the Lions, et cetera would not permit Italians. Two gentlemen, both professionals--one was a doctor; one was an attorney--decided to form their own fraternal organization. I think we do much more for people than these other clubs because we give away scholarships. We raise money and give away scholarships each year to some needy kid and he doesn't necessarily have to be Italian. For that matter we don't give to our own.

The discrimination that there was was against more than just blacks; it was against any ethnic group. When we went down in the south, it just became more prominent. They didn't like Italians down there either. It was as simple as that. For that matter, they said, "Tony, you have three strikes against you when you go into the service, you are in South Carolina. You are Italian, one. You are a Yankee, two. And number three, you are a Catholic. So you have three strikes against you." That was discrimination. The young ladies liked the Italians from the north. They liked Yankees period. The guys didn't. The rednecks down there were bad news.

In a sense it was worse for a person being an Italian in the north than it was for a black because the blacks, even though they were not permitted into white areas, they still had their own place to go to and not have to worry about it. I mean the blacks were brothers so they accepted it. But the whites did not accept us in their establishments in the south. That is why when I was a military policeman and I had town duty, they either would go ahead and welcome us all, all the GI's, or we would close the place up. We got our little jab in there occasionally.

After I got back out of the service, I got into Westinghouse. I was working there. I went back to selling shoes for a couple

of more years, then I got a job at Westinghouse. I stayed there for eight years. This was when I became involved in politics. I have been involved because my mother has been a committeewoman for over thirty years. The grass roots part of it I have been involved in. I didn't really get involved until I got out of the service. When I got into Westinghouse, I got involved in the union, the labor movements, and in the Democratic party. They had asked me to run John Jaroski's campaign for him for mayor. This was a couple of years later now. I had been involved in politics a bit before I led his campaign.

R: Local?

D: Yes, local and state level and a couple of presidential elections for that matter. I was involved in Kennedy's election. That goes back again before I was in the service. I was on the committee, but I was really strongly involved in politics up until the mid 1960's, late 1960's.

R: Your main interest in that was for starting the union?

D: Well, it is a two way street. My mother being involved locally and on the county level and through the labor movement, I got involved moré on the state level and the national level. Through the F.L.C.I.O. I got involved in the governor's election and in the presidential election. That was when I left Westinghouse back in 1971. By that time I was president of the Young Democrats in Mercer County and vice-president of the Young Democrats in Pennsylvania. Governor Shepp had just been elected and I was offered a job with the state. I took a job in Harrisburg. I stayed there for two years and I got fired by the Democrats because it was local and fighting in the party itself. It all came from the labor movement. There were two facts in the labor movement at the Westinghouse. I was with the Dick Jalette faction and the other faction was a broader group, but they weren't as strong as the Dick Jalette faction. But they were strong on the outside. They brought the union politics out into the street into the Democratic politics and that hurt me and it is still hurting me today. I didn't get the party's endorsement when I was running for state representative because of certain individuals. I didn't get labor's endorsement because there were four guys on such a labor council who were political enemies in the plant in 1971.

R: That goes back a long way.

D: That goes back. People don't forget those things.

R: After you left Westinghouse and you went to the state . . .

D: I went to the state. I was with the Department of Labor Industry and the Department of Rēvenue as a supervisor in both of those departments. Then I came back out. It was then that I started

selling insurance. That is where I am at today. That brings you up-to-date as far as my background now. I think I have wasted a lot of time on it.

R: No, no problem. We talked a little bit about the early 1960's in Farrell. Do you remember any type of prejudice growing during the 1960's?

D: As I stated before, the early parts of the 1960's, I was either in school or was in the service.

R: So you didn't spend too much time in Farrell?

D: I didn't spend much time in Farrell. Now I did spend two years in the south, and when I came back, I was working and living in Youngstown. There wasn't any to my knowledge with the people that I associated with, and believe me, we associated with blacks; everybody with all ethnic groups. We had friends; we partied. Every Friday after you left the bars in Youngstown you always stopped at Robinson's for ribs. That was in the black section of Youngstown and this was like 3:00 or 4:00 in morning. There were no cops, nothing. That was the early part of the 1960's. In the middle 1960's I started working here. I would have to say there was a slight . . .

R: When you moved back into Sharon?

D: Moved back into Farrell, right. This goes back to 1968 when I moved back. No, I take that back. I moved back here in 1967 or 1966. If there was any kind of racial tension, I really wasn't aware of it. I did notice racial tensions other than the normal things that you find even back in the 1960's and the 1940's.

R: What would that be?

D: Slight prejudices, you know. But again it is the same prejudice it would have been if you were a black, an Italian, a Dago, or whatever.

My neighborhood at that time had a lot of blacks moving into the area. There were no problems, no problems at all in my neighborhood.

R: Most of the blacks moving in the neighborhood then were from Farrell and just moving?

D: Either from Farrell or from West Middlesex. Some came from the south a long time ago and just relocated and may have moved up the hill as they say. We had no problems with the blacks in my neighborhood. We ate at each other's homes. My neighborhood makes some of the best spare ribs. I used to wake up to spaghetti and meatballs on Sunday. In the summertime I would

wake up to barbecued spare ribs out on the patio. In my neighborhood there were no problems whatsoever.

R: Can you remember what you felt about some of the black minority leaders such as Martin Luther King during the 1960's?

D: Yes, I thought Martin Luther King had a cause that was justified. They say he believed that he was for nonviolent protest. Anytime you protest you get some people--when I say people, I don't specifically say any one ethnic group--biased to the extreme it is going to cause problems. So a nonviolent protest could breed violent protest and backlash.

R: How about most of your friends and family, do they feel the same way about it?

D: I really can't speak for them. My mother is outspoken, period.

I would like to say one thing here: I am not prejudice against a group of people. I am prejudice against individuals whether they be white, black, yellow, whatever if that individual in my estimation is a no good son of a bitch. I will be prejudice against that individual. That doesn't necessarily mean that because I am prejudice against him or I don't like him that I'm not going to like everybody else in his ethnic group or family. I don't believe in that at all. So my prejudice is based solely on individuals.

I could sympathize with Martin Luther King and a number of the others because I protested a lot myself. I'm outspoken a lot. It causes a lot of troubles. It cost me two elections because I was outspoken, because I stood up for what I thought was right in backing someone. As I said it comes back at you--backlash Even ten years later, it comes back and gets me. I learned the hard way. When you do something, you better think not just what is in front of your nose right then, but what is coming up in ten years or next week. So a lot of these protestors brought it on themselves. They were just thinking of the present. I don't know what the situations were. It could have been something that I had no idea about other than my own knowledge of being from an Italian [background] that I was prejudiced against also. I know, so I could feel for Martin Luther King to a certain degree. I really, in all honesty, didn't get involved that much with it. I guess a lot of people are that way until it hits you.

R: What do you remember about rioting in some of the other cities? Can you remember any of the rioting in Philadelphia on television or the radio or the newspaper?

D: I believe in all honesty the news media blows things out of proportion because it is news. That is their business. If something happened down the street and it was bad . . . It wasn't a baby being born because that is not news or if it was a flower garden

being taken care of by a group of elderly sisters, that is not news. But something that happened on the streets, that is news. They were there. Everybody has their opinion and no two people see the same thing. I won't see it the same as you can and you won't see it the same as I see it. So two different reporters can not report the same thing.

R: There is a lot of bias.

D: There is bias; I know it. It is that they just blow things out of proportion because it sells newspapers or television spots or what have you. I firmly believe that the media is as much to blame for the problems of the 1960's and the problems of today as any other faction of life. That is my own opinion now. The things in Philadelphia, the things in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention, I think were not media insighted, but sure as hell media inspired--not inspired, but abetted, aided and abetted. This is my own firm belief.

R: The media helped lead to some of the violence that happened in Farrell?

D: I'm glad you said violence in Farrell because to me it wasn't a riot in Farrell. It wasn't a racial riot. Everybody has a television today. I'm sure that even if you watch a program--it doesn't have to be a documentary--it is going to stimulate you one way or another. There is a lot of violence on television today. There was back in the 1960's; I think more so. When you see something in the news and you see a cop smack an individual over the head with a hose or a club, it is going to do something to you as an individual. Your adrenalin is going to start pumping. If I was a black, I probably would say, "Look, that son of a bitch hit that guy," knowing full well they edit everything. When we see the news, we don't really see the actual happening. We see the actual happening after it has been edited unless it is right there on the spot like when that guy was killed after he shot Kennedy. When Oswald was shot, that was live. Most of it is edited. I have spent some time in the news room, both television and radio news rooms, and with newspapers, and I know that they edit everything before it hits the public. We could go on and on about Vietnam. To me, in my biased opinion, wars happen. Wars have been going on since man became man. There have been wars; it is a necessary evil, not that I condone it. But these things happen. It doesn't belong in our living room. I mean the world is getting very small. Something that happens 20,000 miles away, we know right tonight by just turning on the television. These things don't necessarily have to be put in our living room. I mean they had war correspondence during the Second World War, but what made that a good war and Vietnam a bad war? The only thing that made the two different was that the Second World War, we read about something that happened in the Philippines or something that happened in France or in Italy or Poland weeks

later, that out GI's were doing such and such. Here you had a guy shooting another guy right on television during Vietnam. That happens all the time; I mean war is hell. But here they put it right on as if this was something awful. It was to a certain degree, but it happens all the time. The media to me usually helps to promote it.

R: The same thing with rioting then?

D: I would say.

R: Once the violence did start, you were pretty close to it?

D: Yes.

R: Do you remember any specific events?

D: Oh, I remember a few events. I didn't get involved in trying to calm down this particular disturbance. To my beliefs and I still believe today, it was not a riot. It was not something that was bubbling over waiting to erupt, you know, like a volcano because there may have been unemployment, but it wasn't strictly the blacks who were unemployed. There may have been poór housing, but it wasn't strictly the blacks who had poor housing. There were a lot of people moving into the area that couldn't find adequate housing. This goes back to an old story too. A lot of blacks moved north, and I heard it from a very good source that on one of the roads coming north, there was a sign along the railroad tracks that said, "Go to Farrell, Pennsylvania--the land of milk and honey." A lot of blacks moved north thinking this.

R: Farrell, because of the steel mill?

D: Because of the steel mill, because of the city itself. The blacks that lived in my neighborhood agree with me that there was no riot. For that matter, there was an incident one Sunday morning. A busload of blacks from Cleveland came and I believe it was at [route] 62--not far from the state line--that they were met by a group of black middle-aged citizens and elderly citizens. They told them to turn the bus around and get the hell out of there, that they weren't needed there.

R: They were going to bus in some problems and trouble?

D: Yes, that is right. To the best of my knowledge this disturbance in Farrell was caused by media, by the very hot summer that we had, and by the lack of things to do as far as recreation. We grouped on the corners; we did that when we were growing up. We didn't cause riots; I'm sure these guys didn't cause riots. I'm saying that there was a very small, hard-core group of individuals who maybe because of their wanting to get involved in certain organizations to protest may have gotten

involved in one of the more or less nonviolent organizations than what Martin Luther King was doing. These guys didn't have the masses in mind; there is no doubt in my mind.

R: Just themselves.

D: Themselves. Again like anything that happens when there is trouble, be it a fire, arson, or a fight, it is going to draw people. If something happened, a fire, say, on Broadway between Idaho and Sharon line, who is going to be there but the people who live there. The blacks are the people who lived there. This to me is the reason why they said, "We had riots. We had hundreds of people in the streets." Sure, you had people in the streets; you are going to have hundreds of people in the street if there is a fire anywhere.

R: So the news media just blew that up?

D: The news media blew that out of proportion and I firmly believe that. That along with the individuals who decided, "Well, I'm going to loot this place now because it is stime. I can get this. In the confusion, we can break some windows." It happened, but I will not call it a riot. I will call it a disturbance, a violent disturbance. It was that hard-core group. Those same individuals were the ones that they arrested for looting on Idaho Street. They caught them red-handed. They caught them taking stuff out and putting in the trunk of their car. They arrested them and brought them to City Hall. Where was City Hall? Down in the same area. So these individuals put a group together and said, "Come on. We are going to go march on City Hall so they will release so-and-so." They did and they released them. Mistake number one among the many that were made.

R: They let them go. The police and the governmental agencies didn't handle the situation like they should have.

D: No, but I don't think they were ready for it. I'm proud of being from Farrell. There was no more discrimination against blacks in Farrell than there was against any other ethnic group. It was a city that was made up of all ethnic groups.

R: It is a big melting pot.

D: That is right. It is a melting pot. I think it hit the city and the city fathers hard because they were not ready for something like this in the city of Farrell. They could see it happening in another community or even when it happened in Youngstown on Hillman Street and that. Those people there again, some of them migrated to the city of Farrell. I know that there are people there that probably live in Farrell now that were born and raised on Hillman Street in Youngstown. I knew these guys. It was influenced along with the media and

the lack of preparedness on the part of the city fathers not knowing what to do; I mean really not knowing what to do. That was when I started getting involved.

R: Into politics?

D: I only got involved when after all this was at its height and the people were scared.

R: When would that be, in the 1960's?

D: I would say it was in 1969, the latter part of the summer. It was only when I found out through reliable sources that there was a group of young, hot-headed whites who were going to retaliate. No one came in other neighborhoods, okay? My neighborhood wasn't bothered. There were blacks that lived in my neighborhood. It just happened in this one section of the city.

R: About what percentage of the total population do you think really caused all the ruckus and violence?

D: A very small, minute . . . I don't even want to say one percent.

R: It got out of hand and the news people picked up on it?

D: Exactly. I called one meeting of the business people in the city. We held it at the Oak Room in Sharon because we wanted to have it out of town. At the time the city was really having problems. The mayor did not know exactly what to do. The mayor was really getting very nervous.

R: Who was the mayor?

D: Mayor Jaroski. The police force was inadequate. They were not trained. They didn't have any reason to be trained into "fighting riots". Disturbances they could handle. I believe they let it get out of hand. The state police were available.

R: Do you remember anything about the curfew laws that were established in Farrell? Do you feel that they were a cause to the rioting, putting too many restrictions on the people?

D: Mayor Jaroski was under a lot of pressure. He had a history of . . . I believe it was heart disease. This was really too much for him to handle. When he put the curfew into effect, he did it with good intentions, but the curfew didn't stay. The blacks who were involved . . . Keep in mind City Hall was on the corner of Spearman and Idaho in Farrell. This was the area that was predominantly black. So when the curfew went into effect, those people who were involved in the disturbance marched on City Hall which really wasn't that far. I mean they maybe walked across the street, but they congregated

right in front of City Hall and demanded that the curfew be lifted otherwise there would be more trouble. The mayor backed down which was a big mistake. In essence, there really wasn't a curfew in Farrell.

R: It didn't last very long.

D: It didn't last. It was put into effect and it was removed.

R: How did your friends and some of your relatives feel about all the racial tensions that were growing and the violence that happened in the summer of 1969? Do you recall conversations with them and their feelings?

D: Well, you had mixed feelings like anybody would and fear. Put yourself into a situation that was a rare situation. You were born and raised in this town and everything was fine. Again people have a tendency to have their own private lives to lead and not be involved in community functions or happenings. A guy goes to work, comes home, has dinner with his family and he really isn't aware of problems until it happens.

R: Do you think most people were fearful of their personal safety?

D: Exactly. Now again we go back to the media. Right away it is hitting right in your own living room, right in your own family. The fear is there and fear has a way of . . . Like President Roosevelt said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Again because of this we react. This actually causes a reaction and the first thing you do is you think of your own personal safety. There were people saying, "Well, I'm going to sit on my front porch with a shotgun in my hand. They are not going to come in my house." People were definitely afraid.

R: Did anything happen here on your street?

D: Nothing.

R: Nothing?

D: Nothing happened on our street even though one of the instigators lived down here in the middle of the block. I think that is one of the reasons why there wasn't anything going on here in this neighborhood; he didn't want anything to happen to his own property. This again is just speculation. But there was nothing going on in this neighborhood. It was all contained right down in the lower end of the Idaho Street area, below Fruit Avenue to Broadway.

R: Do you know anyone who was directly affected by any violence besides yourself?

D: Directly affected?

R: Any friends who were injured, caught in some kind of violent situation?

D: No, no. I knew people who wanted to go down there. Again I think we discussed this before about the white backlash in certain situations.

R: Right.

D: I knew a lot of guys that wanted to get involved as far as causing bodily harm which I was definitely against. I mean that doesn't help the situation. But as far as anybody getting hurt in the disturbance itself, no.

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

D: Black Youth Action Committee, the media may have said that this was a good organization. It probably was. They were concerned. Again I still say that the instigators, the individuals who were in charge of this black youth organization were out for personal gain instead of for the community itself. Like I said this was a time, in the 1960's, where this was a big thing--to form organizations and get involved. To some people it helped. But again I have to stick to what I said before. I figure that the individuals who were the leaders and formed this organization were out for personal gain rather than to help the community.

R: Do you think they might have caused some of the violence?

D: Definitely. They were part of that hard-core group.

R: Was that part of the cultural center too? I think they opened a cultural center and granted some money.

D: Right. Okay, now we are getting into it. If you check the media and other records that are probably on file some place, you are going to find that these guys did rip off these individuals who were the leaders, ripped off the money that was coming in from the federal government. They used it for their own personal use, a good portion of it anyway.

R: To your knowledge were there any movements or groups of organizations which attempted to better the race relations in Farrell and perhaps prevent some of the violence that did break out, white over black?

D: Do you mean after the fact?

R: Before the fact.

D: Before the fact?

R: I mean did any groups see it coming and attempt to say, "Hey, we have got an explosive situation here?"

D: No, that is the whole thing. I firmly believe that everybody was caught off guard and that is why it was blown to such proportions. Now people who were in the government and public life, they had a tendency to listen and not listen; you know, listen but not hear. There may have been times when the individual would have gone to a council meeting to gripe about certain things and more than likely was listened to but not heard.

R: Looking back at the late 1960's and the racial tensions and some of the violence that did happen what changes would you like to have seen instituted in the neighborhood? What do you think could have worked to keep the situation from happening, or do you think it was inevitable?

D: Well, that is two-fold really. I think because of lack of communications . . .

R: Between the blacks and whites.

D: Between the blacks and city government, between blacks and whites, between blacks and blacks, between anybody. I think back in that era we should have listened to more young people talking. They were talking all over the world, all over the country. That was the decade of the hippies, right?

R: Right.

D: The flower children, et cetera. I think people were turned off because of the way it was coming across from the young people. Older people were saying, "Hey, man, we've been through this before. We've lived through this and that, so we are really not going to listen to that. This is just a phase."

R: They didn't like the way they were going about it.

D: Right, they didn't like the way they were going about it. The other thing besides the lack of communications was the fact that it could have been inevitable because of this lack of communications. It had to come to a head somewhere. The media is still there.

R: It had the snowball effect.

D: Yes, it did; I really do think it had a snowball effect. See, once something is instilled in their mind, it stays there.

R: Right.

D: You can't trust these kids. They are smoking dope, et cetera. You know, that is why they weren't going to pay any attention to them. It just built up and built up. I was watching the other day when the president met with a group of demonstrators in front of the Lincoln Memorial and he actually did not listen to them. He was there. "Tell me what's wrong. Tell me the problem." They would tell him; he wasn't listening. This is the same thing I believe that the older generation felt towards the younger people. No one listened to them.

R: Do you think the violence in a roundabout way got them the attention that they were trying to get?

D: Oh, they certainly got the attention. They got the attention. I don't know if I mentioned this before about calling the meeting of the business people. After we had heard there was going to be a white backlash, that there was going to be a group of young whites with intentions to do bodily harm to blacks . . .

R: Retaliation?

D: Yes. I got together with a couple of other individuals and we called a meeting of the business people to try to get the mayor to call in the National Guard and the state police for fear that there was going to be a white backlash. They were talking of going down there with pipe bombs and everything else. This is the reason why we called a meeting and we called it at the Oak Room, all these businessmen from the city.

R: The Oak Room in Hickory?

D: Yes, we held it at the Oak Room. Somehow they found out. I called the meeting, and we had the people there. Before we even started the meeting a number of businessmen said, "give them anything they want; give them anything they want." I said, "That is not the problem right now. The problem is to stop this backlash. Call in the National Guard before it does get out of hand or call in the state police." I think the state police came in first and then the National Guard. It was funny how the city fathers, not necessarily the elected officials, but people who had some influence in the city reacted. They reacted like everybody else. They were in fear; they didn't want to lose their business. They didn't want anything to happen to their families. They said, "Give them anything they want; give them anything they want." This really wasn't the situation. They started this even before we started the meeting. Then we finally got the meeting started, and the owner of the Oak Room came in and said, "Tony, I just got a phone call." It scared the hell out of everybody. He said, "The guy just said he knows what's going on and we better get out of here or they are coming up." He didn't know who it was from, but he said that it sounded "black". Anyway he called the Hickory police. The Hickory police came up;

they had a cop on the roof of the gas station next door; they had cop cars all over. The meeting broke up without anything being taken care of.

R: One more question. Are race relations in Farrell now any different than they were in the 1960's?

D: I think they have changed.

R: For the better?

D: I think for the better, yes. Definitely for the better. There are just so many things that are going on right now like this southwest garden project which is a community project. So far they have worked from Fruit Avenue down from Roamer Boulevard to the Broadway line on the south side of the city. It is blacks and whites working together trying to clean this area up.

R: So things have gone well.

D: My mother and father have been involved in it along with blacks. She is a black captain, whatever it is called. The relations aré there. Again it is a combination of the older folks who lived in town and some of the newer people who have moved into town within the last ten years, not so much the ones who are the instigators. I don't think they are even around except for a few of them. I think they have grown in ten years time to be more mature. Again like I said it was inevitable; we did learn from it. I believe that the relationships in the city betwee the different factions, different ethnic groups has progressed to a better way.

R: If you don't have anything else to add I want to thank you.

D: It was my pleasure.

R: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW