

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Lectonia, Ohio

Personal Experience

O H 888

PAUL GUIDO

Interviewed

by

Paul Merz
on

November 19, 1981

M This is an interview with Paul Guido for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on Leetonia, Ohio, by Paul Merz, at Mr Guido's home, 366 Somer Street, Leetonia, Ohio on November 19, 1981 at approximately 3 30 p m

Paul, what I would like to tell you to do is to tell me where you were born Tell me about your parents and your brothers and sisters

G I was born in Leetonia There were seven children. My father immigrated from Italy The first time he was over here was in the 1890s He came to this country and immediately went to work at the coke ovens. He worked there all of his life My mother also came from Italy My dad had previously been married and his wife died He returned to Italy and that was where he met my mother He married her and they came to this country again

M He was married to a woman in Italy and came here and left her there the first time?

G That was what I was told They never spoke much about her. As youngsters, we lived right where the Cherry Valley blast furnace had company homes on either side of the Cherry Valley Dam On one side was what they called the white row, the upper part On the other side it was called the red row There were frame homes, but they were painted red.

M Was the dam directly in between them?

G Right. The blast furnace was to the north. The red row was right alongside the Erie

M Did you live in the white row?

G No, I lived in the red row I think our home was where the Legion Club is now It seemed like that generation enjoyed themselves more They were always out playing We played a lot of sports. It seems like we had more fun then.

M Did you eat more fresh food then?

G Oh yes. We always ate fresh food Your parents cooked it, not out of a can. You never heard of cancer back then Those old-timers lived to a ripe, old age, too They worked like mules I would go to the back of the coke ovens and watch these men draw coke by hand out of the oven That was with a big, long bar

M I saw a picture of that. They pulled that out of there and draped it out of there into carts

G They used to have a wheelbarrow and they would haul it in that. The Erie would bring cars in through there between the coke ovens With the wheelbarrow, they would dump it

off into the cars

M Was that stuff red hot?

G It was still hot, but before they drew this coke they would come in the morning, about 1:30 or 2:00. They had a big water pipe with a hose on it and they would water the coke. After it burned down to a certain extent, they would water it and put the fire out. After the fire was out, they would pull it out. They had some kind of machine on the order of an elevator that went up some long stack. It would dump when it got to the top. It was used in order to make iron. I know how they make it, but I cannot explain it. They had what they called red ore, they used it for making iron.

M Was that the kidney ore? Did you ever hear of that?

G No, but it probably refers to the same thing.

M It was good ore.

G When it was all ready, they would open a stack and let the molten iron come out into these forms. It was like an escalator, but the size of pig irons. The molten iron would pour off into these molds. It was like a conveyor. By the time it got to the end of the conveyor, it was cooled off and it dumped off into the railroad car.

M How big were those? Could a man lift one?

G Yes. At the end of that, up towards the blast furnace was a slag dump where they used to dump the slag from the furnace. Up above, they had the standard slag and there was machinery there to crush the slag.

M Was Gary an ex-slag pump?

G Yes. That used to be the dump from the furnace. That was waste. Beyond that was a regular standard slag. They had the machinery to make the slag and then when they had the slag made they would go and dump it in the cars. They had access to the railroad, it was right alongside it.

M It was all railroad, not by truck?

G All railroad. They used to have horses haul things.

M Did they haul coke into the coke oven with them?

G I cannot recall that. They used to have a little trolley, and there was a little, narrow gauge

rail on top of your oven. This trolley had cars on the end of it and they would pull up and they were full of coal. This trolley would take it along and pump it into the top of the oven.

M: How long did it take from the time it went in the oven until it was done?

G: I am not sure.

M: Tell me a little bit about your mother. You already mentioned your dad.

G: My mom took care of us. She cooked and made sure we had food. During the Depression, it was pretty rough. We were hard-up, but we managed to make it, as long as we had beans or potatoes or something. She always managed it. I do not ever remember her missing a meal.

M: Were they strict parents?

G: No. My God, they were not strict enough. They were too good. They both died of brain tumors. Both my parents worked all their life.

M: Your dad worked at Cherry Valley up until it closed?

G: Yes.

M: What do you remember about him working at the coke company? Did he ever talk about it? Did he like working there?

G: It was not whether he liked it, he had no other choice. A lot of immigrants when they came over, did not know anything. They went into labor.

M: He got from New York to here. Were there men who would go to New York and hire the immigrants?

G: I do not know. I do not even remember how he got to this town. This district was really the industrial district, Youngstown. It seemed like they were all situated around this district here.

M: I talked to someone that knew about the McKeefrey Mill and he said that they would go to New York and get immigrants to come and do the work.

G: That is right. There used to be another blast furnace. They used to call Leetonia the biggest little town in the state of Ohio because of the industry.

- M· The man who brought the immigrants in was called the padrone? The job your father did, was it real hard?
- G Yes, it was hot too. At the coke ovens, they also had a coke drying machine. The coke drying machine could not get back in the back yard. There may have been about a few ovens in the back yard. The only way to get the coke out of those ovens was to draw it by hand.
- M Could he go from the coke ovens into the mill itself?
- G No.
- M. Was the coke oven the worst job in the place? Is that where the newest immigrants started to work?
- G· They had a lot of them working in the blast furnace. The coke ovens were the dirtiest job. I think that was the roughest job.
- M Could a man only move from the coke ovens to the blast furnace?
- G It depends on if they wanted to or if they had the opportunity to get there.
- M Your dad did not move? He stayed at the coke ovens the whole time?
- G Yes.
- M Did he have twenty or thirty years in there?
- G· I do not really know.
- M· Tell me about the Depression. What do you remember about that? Was there any good that came out of the Depression?
- G I do not know what you call good.
- M Did you work at all during the Depression?
- G· They had what they called the Works Progress Administration, the WPA, so I filled in for my dad because he was not able. There was something wrong with his hands, so I filled in for him. There used to be a Y&O Railroad, Youngstown and Ohio. On the first bridge going out of town on Lisbon Street, there used to be a big bridge where the Y&O went to Lisbon. There was good foundation material for roads there. I worked for my dad shoveling this stuff onto trucks. They would haul it away and bring it out to the country.

roads and fill them.

M. You dug it over there?

G Yes

M Did you load it onto the railroad cars?

G. No, the trucks

M Is that where the wooden trestle was at?

G Yes

M Did you get drafted during the war?

G It seemed like I was being ignored, and I was waiting and waiting I was inducted on August 15, 1942 I ended up in Columbus From Columbus I went to Fort Benjamin Harrison. From there I got in the MPs Then I went to Fort Riley, Kansas, and then to Fort Knox I stayed at Fort Knox until we left for overseas I think in 1943, I went from Camp Shanks, New York to England. It took thirteen days. I went on an English boat called the Duchess of Richmond The food was terrible and everybody was sick I never got sick

M Tell me about the Italians. Do you remember being treated differently because you were Italian?

G No On the north side, there were mostly Italian people living It seemed like they could never hit it off right The south side and north side were not too sociable The Irish were in Grafton

M Were the Italians concentrated if the Irish were in Grafton?

G There were Italians in Grafton too

M In other words, the people who tended to work around the furnaces lived in Grafton?

G Not necessarily.

M What about the "Black Hand?"

G My uncle was killed by the "Black Hand " He was going out along the railroad tracks on the west end out towards the raw cut They shot him, cut his throat, and laid him across

the railroad That was on New Years Day in 1914

M What was the "Black Hand?"

G Some organization I cannot tell you too much about it

M. Were there Italians in the "Black Hand?" I understand it was a group of Italians

G They claimed that they were mostly Italians

M Did they tend to look out for the Italians? There was a Ku Klux Klan, was not there?

G I remember that

M That was anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant?

G· Yes

M. Was the "Black Hand" a response to that?

G I do not know

M. They tell me years ago the Guidos were not anybody to fool with

G My oldest brother would not take any lip from anybody He was big He weighed 260 pounds

M Did the Italians tend to stick together? If one Italian had trouble with people in town, did they stick together? Were you pretty close in your neighborhood?

G· The Italians were sociable Years ago everybody was sociable

M: Did you have any trouble trying to go to the south side? Did they tell you to get out because they did not want you around?

G. No They were not too friendly though I imagine it was because of different religions and that

M Do you think before your time things were worse?

G· No.

M In other words, you think you lived through the worst time as far as the groups getting

along and you did not think it was too bad?

G No, it was not too bad

M What was Leetonia like during the 1940s and 1950s?

G I cannot tell you because most of the people were away in the service

M You were here in the 1950s Was it a friendly town?

G. Yes.

M What about delivering mail? You delivered mail for over thirty years

G I had a lot of friends I miss it I like the outside People were very friendly to me

M Tell me about the things you did for them What happened to you over the years, nice things? What is your fondest memory?

G I do not know. Everybody treated me really good I always asked the old people how they were getting along I made sure there was nothing wrong with them

M Thank you very much

G Thank you

End of Interview