

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

O.H. 2163

Sally Jean Wagner

Interviewed

By

Michael Kenneally

On

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: Sally Jean Wagner

INTERVIEWER: Michael Kenneally

SUBJECT: YSU History

DATE: February 22, 2004

P: This is an interview with Sally Jean Wagner for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on YSU History, by Michael Kennaely, at Mrs. Wagner's house, on February 22, 2004, at 2:30 pm. This project was funded by the Ford Foundation.

K: I'd like to start with some general background questions. When and where were you born?

W: I was born in Youngstown, March 23, 1938.

K: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

W: I have two younger brothers.

K: And their names?

W: My next youngest brother is John, John Avery, and then I have the youngest in the family, Robert Avery.

K: Tell me some things about your parents, their names and their occupations.

W: My mother was Helen Howard; she married my dad not too long after she was out of high school. My dad is John Russell Avery. They were both from Youngstown, my mother was always a housewife, she never worked outside the home. My dad worked at W.O. Strausbaugh motor company, he was a parts specifier.

K: Did he attend college?

W: No, neither one of my parents attended college; they both graduated high school.

K: Where did you live when you were younger?

W: I lived on Glenwood Avenue on the lower South Side of Youngstown. It was 504 Glenwood; the house is no longer there.

K: Did you live there most of your life?

W: Until I got married.

K: Could you describe that neighborhood for me? Could you give me a walking tour of some of the areas?

W: Well, we attended U.S. Grant elementary school, which was about two blocks away. Glenwood at that time was a main North-South thoroughfare, very heavily trafficked. It's just up from Mill Creek Park, where I spent a good deal of my childhood. It was almost entirely residential back then, there were a couple companies there; Borden Ice Cream had a fairly large concern there, and Barton Heating and Cooling was also there, but other than that it was strictly residential, mostly single family, a few apartments, but mostly single family residences.

K: When you were going to elementary school and primary school, did you have any favorite subjects?

W: Not particularly, I enjoyed going to school, although if I had my druthers I'd rather not, like most kids. When I went to elementary school, Youngstown had split grades, so until I was in fifth grade, I was always in a room where there were two grades, and I particularly enjoyed being in the younger set of the room because when I wasn't doing anything I could listen to the older set and see what they were doing. I just found it very interesting to be in a split grade, I preferred that. I'm sure the teacher didn't, but I did.

K: Well, more experience.

W: Yes.

K: Did you play any sports, or were you involved in any extracurricular activities as a child?

W: In elementary school they didn't even have any extracurricular activities. We always played baseball, stick softball, we had a bat and we had a ball. We used to do a lot of tree climbing; we had a sandbox in our back yard, and a swing. We used to play a lot of the time down at Volney Rogers playground where we played washers, tennis, and played on all the playground equipment, they used to flood the baseball diamonds in the winter time and we would ice skate down there.

K: Oh, really?

W: Yea, it was neat and I don't know why they quit because it was such a nice place to have an ice rink, and there was no danger whatsoever it was only four inches deep, and the Mill Creek Park policeman would always be in charge and they would have a big bonfire going on most evenings.

K: How did your parents influence your education?

W: Well, even though we didn't have much money, mom and dad always made it clear to us that it was very important. I was one of the few...in fact I didn't know anyone else whose parents subscribed to National Geographic Magazine when I was kid, no one else...none of my friends parents did that, mine did.

K: When did you attend YSU?

W: I graduated from high school in 1955, and started that fall.

K: And the name wasn't Youngstown State University at that time you went.

W: It was Youngstown University, brand new Youngstown University.

K: It had just changed from the college?

W: From Youngstown College, they used to call it YOCO, then they called it YU.

K: Why did you choose YSU, or Youngstown University, excuse me.

W: I can't really say that I chose it, it chose me. When I was in my senior year of high school, the folks from Youngstown came there and made it known...I don't recall whether there was an assembly or anything, but somehow or other it was made known to all of the seniors that we were eligible to go down to the university and take a scholarship test, to qualify for a scholarship to Youngstown. I don't know how they were given out, I remember going down. We had to get there on our own. It was during a school day. We

were dismissed from school. A bunch of us girls hitched a ride with one of the boys in the class who had a car. He took us down, we sat through the exam. After the exam we met with different professors. There would be, like, three or four of us to a table, and it was Dr. Cohen, who was a professor in the chemistry department, and he just kind of talked to us. I didn't really know that that was important or anything, I just carried on the conversation with him, and then afterwards I was given a full scholarship to the university. I don't know how many they gave out, but it was for \$300.00, and it covered the first year's tuition, I had to pay for my own books.

K: Where did you buy the books?

W: At the university bookstore.

K: What did you go in to study?

W: Well, I started out...I really had no intention of going to college initially, because no one in our family had ever gone, and had I not gotten the scholarship I'm sure I wouldn't have gone. I knew our family could not begin to afford to send me away somewhere, and I didn't know what would be a good thing to study, and my mother said, "Well, you know, I've heard of this thing called medical technology, where you could study to become a medical technician, and it only takes a couple years schooling, and I think they make pretty good money." And so I thought, "Well, I kind of like biology, and sciences, I'll try that." So I initially started with a major in medical technology, which was at that time a two year program, and then the third year you went to the hospital and finished up there.

K: But you changed your mind about that?

W: Oh, yes, I changed my mind after I took my first history course, and I decided right then and there that I loved history, and didn't love biology in nearly the same way. But that came later, that came in my sophomore year. My freshman year I was on track for the medical technology degree.

K: Could you describe the campus for me? What buildings there were?

W: Well, there was the main building, which I guess is now, what, Jones?

K: Jones Hall.

W: There was Tod Hall, and the library was made part...the front part of Tod Hall was the library. There were some painted green, wood painted green temporary buildings that housed a cafeteria, a small gymnasium...I can't think of any other buildings...well, oh, the engineering building, I'm sorry, I never took courses down there. There was an engineering building down on the south end of the campus, and then there was Clingan and Waddell Hall, which I think one of the presidents later bought and remodeled into a home, but it was down on...what street would that have been...it was at the south end of

the campus too, south east end, off of one those side streets, not off of Wick, and I had one math course there.

K: What about student lounges, or any recreational areas for students, was there any of that existing?

W: No, there was that little cafeteria that I talked about; I guess those wooden buildings were temporary buildings from World War II. And there was a cafeteria there, which I never used.

K: Were there any activities or clubs that you belonged to?

W: No, because I worked my way through school and really didn't have much time for extracurricular activities. I did join a history club, which just began in the last year, my senior year; we were like the first members of it.

K: Where did you work while you were going?

W: Well, that was connected with my medical technology major, which I started in. I had the last...let's see, when I was still a senior in high school, one of the guidance councilors called me out of class and said, "Mill Creek Park is looking for a secretary for the summer, would you be interested?" And since it was only...the park office was only two blocks from my house, I said, "Oh, yea, that'll be perfect." So I worked there, and I think I made, like, \$140 a month. So I got three months worth, so I was rich when I actually started at the university, I had enough money saved that I could probably have paid my second year's tuition. But about November I thought, "I'd better look for a part time job," so I went to the placement office, I don't know if they still have that, they had a placement office to help people find work, and I told them I was looking for a part time job, and they found out that my major was medical technology, and they said, "Well, the pathology office up at North Side Hospital needs someone who can type and spell," and since I could do both, I was sent up there. I worked there all the way through school, and after.

R: Afterwards you graduated and still worked there?

W: Yes.

R: I'd like to come back to that after. Were there any housing available for students on or near campus?

W: Yes, I had friend who came from Pennsylvania, she lived in Buechner Hall, that was...what was the name...let's see...was it...I can't remember what street it was, but ran North South, next to Wick. But that ended by Tod Hall there, and that's where Buechner Hall was, and it was a place for women to live. I don't know if there was a place for men or not, there must have been, but I don't know of it.

K: But you commuted to the college?

W: Oh, yes, I lived on the lower South Side of Youngstown. At first my dad drove me because he worked at Strausbaugh's, which was just up the road, so he would drop me off at 7:30 in the morning on his way to work, I scheduled 8:00 o'clock classes, then I would grab a bus out to the hospital and work until about 7:00, and then grab a bus downtown, and then grab a bus home.

K: Were there parking lots at YSU at that time?

W: Yea, there was one parking lot that I knew of, it was just...there probably were a couple others, the one that I was familiar with was right beside Tod Hall, and I always, after I did get a car, and needed to find a space, I always just got there at about 7 o'clock in the morning so I could get a parking space on Spring Street, which offered all day parking at the time. At that time, if you parked in the parking lot you would get stuck in, because they not only filled all the spaces, but then people would pull in behind cars and leave their keys in the car, and then when you came out, you might have to move 5 or 6 cars to get your car out, and then you had to move all those 5 or 6 cars back in again.

K: They would leave the keys in the car so you get in their car and move them?

W: Yes.

K: Could you tell me of any traditions that were observed at Youngstown University, such as Homecoming.

W: I'm afraid I didn't participate in them, but there was something called the Sadie Hawkins Day Dance, and the chase before the dance, that was kind of going out of favor by the time I was there. The Sororities and Fraternities participated in it, I never did.

K: Youngstown State University has a big rock on the campus; it's in the middle, was that there when you were attending?

W: As far as I know it was.

K: The Sororities paint it.

W: I think they did...

K: That was there when you were...

W: I think it was. I wouldn't swear to it one way or the other. Since I didn't belong to a sorority it didn't impress me.

K: Did the university publish a yearbook?

W: Yea, and The Jambar, both.

K: Did you buy the yearbook?

W: Yea, I have it somewhere.

K: You still have it?

W: Somewhere, don't ask me where, I think it's in the basement in our bookshelf, I'm not sure. I have it, I know I have it.

K: What issues did The Jambar discuss, if you could remember any?

W: Parking!

K: Parking was an issue?

W: Parking was number one. I can't remember anything political.

K: No?

W: No, parking, and the food in the cafeteria were the sore spots that I can recall.

K: Was tuition a big issue? The cost of tuition?

W: I don't recall that that was a big issue either. As I said at that time it was \$300.00 for two semesters, that was a year's tuition. I felt it was very, very reasonable, and I don't recall anybody complaining about the high cost of tuition. In fact, I thought it was so reasonable, and after I got my job I had so much money, I didn't even apply for the scholarship for my next year, I just felt, "I've got the money, let them give it to somebody who doesn't have it." So I didn't even apply after my first year.

K: Was there any military presence on campus?

W: Oh, yea, there was an ROTC. I can recall a number of students in my classes in their uniforms. At that time there was no stigma connected with ROTC, it was before Vietnam, and after Korea, yea there were quite a few ROTC cadets.

K: Who was your most influential or memorable instructor?

W: Well, I had a couple of them, a number of them actually. The history department, which I just came to love, had so many real, real good instructors. The first one, the mesmerizing one to listen to was E.B. Smith, he could make history so exciting, and that was...he was the one that made me think, "I want to do this." And after him there was Dr. Behan, who was the head of the department, he was an excellent professor. There was...what was his name...the old gentleman...I can't think of his name, I never had a

course from him, but he was like the senior historian, and a fine old gentleman with white hair, and was referred to as an unreconstructed southerner, but he was a southern gentleman, what was his name? He was a fixture on the campus and I can't think of it...Dr. Gould. And then there was Dr. Bullough, who I have seen recently on the History Channel being quoted, I don't remember where he had gone to, he...I had him for Medieval History, which I thought would be dull and boring and it wasn't, he was excellent.

K: How diverse was the student population?

W: Not nearly as diverse as it is today I'm sure. Youngstown wasn't that diverse back then. I don't know, I didn't feel that the population varied very much from the population of South High School where I'd come from.

K: How many women students opposed to the number of men?

W: I think there were more men than women, but I wouldn't know what the percentage was.

K: Did you graduate?

W: Yes.

K: With what degree?

W: A.B. I majored in history.

K: What year did you graduate?

W: 1959. Back then it was traditional to get your degree in four years, very few people took longer.

K: Did you go to the ceremony?

W: Oh, yes.

K: Can you describe it for me?

W: No. Can't remember much of anything. I do...we also had, was it a Baccalaureate Ceremony? I think we did, and a parade down Wick Avenue. I'm pretty sure we did, we had some kind of a Baccalaureate type ceremony separate from our graduation ceremony.

K: That's interesting, I don't think they do that now.

W: I don't think they do either.