

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

O.H. 2182

Dawn Durkin Schneider

Interviewed

By

Lesley Durkin

On

February 15, 2004

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INTERVIEWEE: Dawn Durkin Schneider

INTERVIEWER: Lesley Durkin

SUBJECT: YSU History

DATE: February 15, 2004

P: This is an interview with Dawn Durkin Schneider for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on YSU History, by Lesley Durkin, at Mrs. Schneider's house, on February 15, 2004, 7:30 p.m.

D: When and where were you born?

S: I was born June 21, 1973, in Youngstown, Ohio, at St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

D: Do you have siblings?

S: Yes, there are four children in my family. I have an older brother, Phillip Durkin, who is 34, I am the second child and I am 30. I have a sister, Lesley Durkin, who is 29, and I have a brother, Justin Durkin, who is 26.

D: Could you give me your parents' names and occupations?

S: My mother's name is Cheryl Durkin, her maiden name is Bernat, she is retired, she used to be a secretary at a doctor's office. My father is James Patrick Durkin; he is a retired firefighter for the city of Youngstown.

D: Did your parents attend college?

S: My mother did not attend college; my father had a very brief history in college, maybe a quarter.

D: Did he leave for any particular reason?

S: He went to Vietnam.

D: Where did you live?

S: Growing up I lived on the West Side of Youngstown at 2147 Cranbrook Drive. I lived there my entire life until I left to go away to law school, and then I moved to Cleveland. After I graduated from law school I came back to Youngstown and I again live on the West Side of Youngstown with my husband and my daughter.

D: Could you describe your childhood neighborhood?

S: Sure, we lived on the West Side of Youngstown, as I already said, we had a very good neighborhood, I would say, there were a lot of kids, we had a lot of people to play with, there was always something going on. You know, it was a nice neighborhood where everybody knew everybody.

D: Could you describe your home?

S: The house I grew up in on Cranbrook was your basic two-story house, but we had a swimming pool in the backyard. So, as you can imagine, we always had a lot of kids over because we had the fun house.

D: What is your ethnic background?

S: My father is Irish and Italian, my mother is English and Jewish.

D: Where did you attend school from K through 12?

S: For kindergarten through eighth grade I attended St. Christine's School on Schenley Avenue, in Youngstown, Ohio, and then from ninth grade through twelfth grade I attended Chaney High School, also in Youngstown, which is a Youngstown City School.

D: What kind of grades did you get?

S: I was a very good student; I graduated fourth in high school for my class, and in grade school I was in honors classes in the enrichment program.

D: Could you describe to me any influential teachers you had during this time?

S: I had a lot of teachers, I went to school for a long time, but my favorite teacher I guess would be the teacher I had for kindergarten, Ms. Kessner. She was also my father's teacher at St. Christine's, and then she had my brothers, and my sister, and myself. She is a very, very nice woman who just recently retired from St. Christine's. She taught you to appreciate things, have fun, and that learning can be fun. She was a very nice teacher.

D: What would you say your favorite subject during this time was?

S: I guess I go back and forth; sometimes I like Math, sometimes I like Science, I really didn't have just one favorite subject.

D: How about least favorite teacher?

S: I don't think I had a least favorite teacher, I was a good student, you know, I respected my teachers, I liked them and I would feel really bad if I said someone's name that I didn't like. I'm going to say that I didn't have a least favorite teacher.

D: Any particular subject that you really didn't care for?

S: I was never a very big fan of reading, or English, which is very funny because that's what my job now is, reading and writing papers and briefs.

D: How did your parents influence your education?

S: They were very easy going about the whole thing. I did good in school, so they didn't really have to push me hard. Me and my sister did really well in school, and we didn't have to be pushed. We didn't have to be told to do our homework, we kind of just did it, and got it done. My brothers may have a different point of view of the influence of their parents (much laughter), but I just did the work.

D: What sports did you play, or what extracurricular activities did you participate in?

S: When I went to grade school at St. Christine's, I played basketball, I ran track, and I was also a cheerleader. Any clubs that they had, I was in. We had an enrichment program, we did plays, we did things like that. In high school, I was a cheerleader from tenth grade through twelfth grade. As for other activities, I was in Future Teachers, though I'm not a teacher, the Medical Club, though I'm not in the Medical field, and I was in the Key Club. I was in a lot of things, maybe primarily to get my picture in the yearbook a few more times, but I did a lot of clubs. And because I thought it would look good on a résumé for college.

D: So your school had a variety of activities you could join?

S: Yes they did, both educational and athletic, there was always something you could be doing.

D: When did you attend Youngstown State University?

S: I started at Youngstown State University in September of 1991, and I finished in June of 1995.

D: Why did you choose Youngstown State University?

S: I chose Youngstown State University because it was close by, I got scholarships and grants, so I actually went to YSU for nothing. Actually, I got paid to go there, I would have to say, with all of the grants I received. I applied to some other schools, I had very good grades, I could have probably gone somewhere else, I just decided to stay close to home, we really didn't have a lot of money for four kids all to go to colleges wherever they wanted. My older brother wasn't attending college at the time, although he has since gone to college, so I was kind of the first one to go, and you know, when your mom's a secretary and your dad's a fireman, not a lot of money going around for four kids to go to college, so I went first and I chose YSU, and that's where my siblings went also.

D: What was your major?

S: My major was Psychology, and I had a minor in Criminal Justice.

D: Okay, you had said that you attended law school after that, do you feel YSU had a program that was sufficient enough to prepare you for law school?

S: Yes, when you go to law school there's no Pre-Law major that you have to go into in order to go to law school. So you can major in anything and go to law school. I was a Psychology major, a Criminal Justice minor, which prepared me well. I think if you're going to law school you should probably major in English, which I did not, or minor in English, which I did not. This is the advice I do give to people who tell me they want to go to law school. But I think YSU did a good job, I believe I had a very good education, I had very good professors in the Psychology department, so I was pleased with my experience.

D: Take a walking tour of the campus as it was when you attended, and describe the buildings and the grounds, how they looked.

S: I believe the buildings and the grounds are very similar to as they look today in 2004. You know, you have the middle of the campus which is green space that the University keeps nice. It's a very nice campus. It's located in downtown Youngstown, which is not the most beautiful place anymore. I think I can say that because I work downtown, but, you know, all your major buildings on the outskirts, I think it looks really similar to how it looks now.

D: Could you describe your typical day on campus? From getting up in the morning until your end of the day there.

S: Sure, I worked all through college when I went to undergraduate at YSU, and I lived at home because I only lived about five miles away from the campus. I'd wake up in the morning, I'd drive into school, I was a commuter, I would park, I would go to classes, I tried to go to my classes from about 8 a.m. until noon because after that I worked as a clerk at the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office. So I would try to go to school all mornings so I could get to work all afternoons. So I just went to classes and then went to work.

D: Okay, were there any activities or clubs that you participated in, or any that were available that interested you as a student at YSU?

S: Like I said, I worked a lot when I was going to school, so I really didn't partake in a lot of the activities that the University had to offer. I would go to school and actually just go to class and kind of leave, I know there were a lot of activities you could do, there were clubs, there was athletics, a lot of things, but I really didn't participate. I did go to many football games and tailgate parties.

D: You commuted and obviously you drove yourself, how would you consider the parking situation for commuters?

S: Parking in the early nineties was always interesting. You had to get to school early. If you had an eight o'clock class, you could always get a spot. If you had a nine o'clock class, you weren't always so lucky. There were a lot of spots, you just had to get there on time. I occasionally had troubles with backups in the parking decks and lots, but it wasn't that bad.

D: Where did you buy your books?

S: I would buy my books either at Campus Book and Supply or the YSU Bookstore.

D: Were they expensive?

S: At the time, I probably thought it was ridiculous, and I couldn't believe I was spending so much money on books, but then I went to law school and I realized that books at YSU are really affordable. I spent over \$200 per class in law school.

D: Did your tuition cover the cost of supplies, such as lab materials, or did you have to pay extra fees for them?

S: I believe at the time there were some fees for certain classes. I believe that they were extra. I think you had your tuition costs, which included your costs for each of your courses, and then there were additional fees for course with labs.

D: What traditions were observed at YSU?

S: They had Homecoming, and the sororities and the fraternities, Rush Week, or whatever the heck they had, Greek Week, or whatever that was, I wasn't involved with it, so I'm not really sure of those. When I went to YSU, the football team was very, very good, we won three National Championships, so football season was really big. I really can't think of any other traditions.

D: Did the University publish a yearbook, and if they did, did you buy one?

S: I don't know if they had a yearbook, I have no idea, I don't ever remember seeing one, so I didn't buy one. I never had my picture taken either to be in one, so I don't think they had one.

D: What's your opinion of the student Newspaper, The Jambar? And did you read it often?

S: I did used to read The Jambar. When it told what was going on around campus, and things that students thought were important at the time. You could find The Jambar all over the campus, you could just pick one up while you're on your way to class, or sitting and waiting for class to start, so I did read it.

D: Do you know anything about the military presence on campus, such as the ROTC?

S: I know that there were students that were in the Reserves at YSU at the time, and the only reason I really know that is because they'd be walking around in their uniforms and their camouflage. I was a Psychology major, as I said, and there was two young ladies in my upper division classes who were in the reserves and would wear their camouflage uniforms to class.

D: Who was your most memorable instructor?

S: My most memorable instructor would probably be Professor Graf in the Psychology Department. When I had him for one of the lower division psychology classes he came into class and he was wearing a janitor's shirt with his name on it, just to see I think what people would think of him, and he had us do these crazy memory games for test grades. We'd have to say flash cards very, very fast for another class for our grade. When I was in upper division courses, he started dressing like he was on the Star Trek Enterprise. So he was very entertaining, very, very smart, and just very, very different.

D: Who would you say was your most influential instructor at Youngstown State?

S: I really liked Professor Masaki in the Psychology Department. He's very, very smart, but also very different. Professor Masaki had a course where you would take tests, and you could keep taking a test on that section until you had the grade you wanted. But you had to have so many sections completed by the end of the year. I remember on the last section test I was one point away from an A, and I had A's on all the other tests, and your lowest test grade counted as your final grade. Professor Masaki called me at home one

day and said, “Dawn you’re one point away,” and I said, “Oh my God,” and we probably had a day left of school, and he said, “Do you want to come down right now and take the test again, and I went down and took the test again and got an A. He was just a really nice guy.

D: How diverse was the student population?

S: The student population was very diverse. We had people of all ethnic backgrounds that all spoke different languages. I came from a city school where I think we had a pretty diverse population. We had white kids, black kids, Chinese kids, so when I went to YSU it was pretty much the same just on a bigger scale. And it was nothing I wasn’t used to, I was used to going to school with minorities, so it wasn’t really that different for me.

D: Obviously you graduated since you went to law school, so I’m going to skip that question. Did you go to your ceremony?

S: I did go to my ceremony when I graduated from YSU.

D: Could you describe it for me?

S: It was very nice, it was not so overwhelming and not so scary for me. I guess a lot of people get really scared because when they graduate college they’re done and they have to go out into the real world and find a real job. When I graduated college I still had more college to go to, so I really wasn’t nervous or scared, it was a happy occasion. Graduation was nice, my family and friends came.

D: Do you know where your diploma is right now?

S: Yes, I do know where my diploma is, it is actually at my house and in a box. It’s not framed, my law school ones are framed in my office at work.

D: Did you develop any lasting relationships while at Youngstown State?

S: You know, I’m from Youngstown, and I went to Youngstown State and so did a lot of my friends, so I had a lot of relationships going in there. I did meet some other people, so I do have some friends – and there’s a lot of people that I work with now that also went to Youngstown State. My husband also attended YSU, as did several of our friends. So I do have a lot of lasting relationships, including my husband, from YSU.

D: Did you guys attend a lot of classes together? Was he the same major as you?

S: He wasn’t the same major as me, but we did take some classes together.

D: Obviously you went on to post-graduate work, can you tell me where and when you attended law school?

S: I started law school in August of 1995, and I graduated in May of 1998. I went to Cleveland Marshall College of Law in downtown Cleveland, Ohio, for three years, as law school is three years, and I graduated. So I have a Juror's Doctorate in law.

D: And the Bar Exam, did you pass that the first time?

S: Yes, I passed it the first time. I will never take it again so I will never leave the state of Ohio. I refuse to take another Bar Exam.

D: So did you find work in your area of study?

S: I have found work in my area of study, I started working at the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office in June of 1992, while I was still attending Youngstown State University. I began there as a file clerk. After I graduated Youngstown State University, I stayed and worked through law school part-time as a law clerk during the school year, and then I would work full-time in the summers. After I passed the Bar Exam I was asked to stay on as an assistant prosecutor, where I did criminal appeals for about a year or two. And now I still work for the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office, but I work in the Civil Division where I represent the townships in Mahoning County.

D: So any particular reason why you wanted to stay in Youngstown?

S: My whole family is in Youngstown, everyone still lives here, a lot of people give Youngstown a bad rap, but I don't think it's that bad. If it were a little sunnier it would be a little better, but, you know, you take what you get.

D: Now as an YSU Alumni, are there any events you attend as an Alumnus? Do you contribute financially to the school?

S: Occasionally I do give some money to the school. We do on occasion go to some football games, but really that's about it.

D: Looking back, what changes would you have liked to see at Youngstown State that you think would have improved the campus?

S: You know, I think they're doing great things now, they're expanding, there's new buildings, there's always a lot of development going on there. I haven't been back on the campus in a long time. I drive by occasionally, I know that they have that new building for education, which looks beautiful. I think they're doing great things on the campus.

D: Is there anything else that you think is important to add that we did not cover?

S: I think it's important to note that Youngstown State is a very good college and you can get a very good education there. It gave me a good background, I was able to go on to law school, I got in to law school, I passed the Bar the first time, and I'm doing very well in my field. If my daughter, who is two, said she wanted to go to YSU, I would say that's

fine, I went there, it is a good school. I just think that it's a good school, and you know, sometimes people might say, "Oh, you went to Youngstown State?" But truly it's not a bad place.

D: Okay, thank you for your time Attorney Durkin.

S: You're welcome.

D: You were a wonderful interviewee.

S: You're welcome Lesley Durkin.

D: Thank you for your time.

S: Sure.