

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU History

O.H. 2242

Heidi Salapata

Interviewed

By

Noelle Kauffman

On

May 10, 2005

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INTERVIEWEE: Heidi Salapata

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SUBJECT: YSU History

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P: This is an interview with Heidi Salapata for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on YSU History, by Noelle Kauffman, at the YSU History Department, on May 10, 2005. At 11:15 a.m.

K: Heidi, first and foremost I'd like to thank you for taking the time to do this interview with me.

S: No problem.

K: First I would like to start by asking you some background information, predominantly about your childhood. So would you please tell me where and when you were born?

S: I was born April 22, at 4:02 in the morning; I know that's really odd that I know that, at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, in Youngstown, Ohio.

K: What was your childhood like growing up?

S: I had a wonderful childhood. I have three brothers and one sister, and my parents, and we lived in a neighborhood where there was so many people around. My childhood...it

was busy because we were all involved in sports, and activities, and stuff like that, but I loved my childhood, I'm still a kid half of the time.

K: Tell me a little bit about your parents.

S: My mom is a nurse, and she's been a nurse ever since I can remember. She now chose the city of Niles. My mom, the best way to describe her is she's like an angel to me. I always tell her that she should be a saint, like there should be a St. Kathy, because my mom is probably the best person in the world without a doubt. I mean, she's just giving and caring, and she never, ever puts herself first, she always puts everybody else before her. And she's just so sweet and kind; she's the cutest little thing. And then my dad's a character. He works in the steel mill; he's worked in steel all his life. The most important thing I guess in my parents' life is kids, always grown up. I mean they're always supportive of us in sports, and school, and everything like that. My dad is an avid Penn State fan, and that is something that he's really big on now, I mean, he's had season tickets for years (Rest of sentence inaudible). I mean it's sometimes odd to see how they got together, because my mom she was like the nerd in school, not like a nerd, but she was like the goody-goody, and my dad was like the jock, and I say to my mom, "How did you end up with him?" But they're cute though, I love them.

K: Tell me about your three brothers and sister.

S: My oldest brother is Michael, and he's going to be thirty. He is like a big brother of course. They're all very, very protective of us and each other. He's a great guy, wonderful guy; he's going to be getting married soon, so I'm very excited about that. Then there's my brother David, who just turned 27, and just recently moved back home. So I'm really excited, because ever since high school you know...he went to Penn State, and then Florida State, and then he lived in D.C. So he's been gone for a while. And growing David was like...he was like my idol, I liked every sports team that he liked, because him and I, we were a lot alike, we looked alike, we liked the same things. So David was more of like, "I hate to see her acting like David." And then there's my sister Lisa, who just turned 26, and I would say was the one that I had the most difficulty getting along with over the years. Growing up we really got along well, going to high school, and we played sports together, because she was only two years older than me at school. But recently, you know, her getting married and everything, she moved away, she's probably the one I'm the least close with now, which is really hard because she's my only sister. And then there's my younger brother, Shawn, and he was kind of like the rebel of the family I guess you could say, but I mean he's still a character. I have the best siblings in the world, I really do, I mean, I gave my sister a lot of hell because she's so different, but I am so glad that I came from that family, because my brothers, you know, since we all live at home now, my sister's been living away, we're very close, and we all look out for each other. So I loved growing up with my family. We used to play baseball in the street, we were so weird.

K: That's sweet. Where did you go to school growing up?

S: I originally went to a Catholic school at Mt. Carmel, the parish that we belonged to. And we went to Catholic school until I was in fifth grade, and then I switched to a public school. And I'm very glad that I did because some of the education that I received at the Catholic school just wasn't up to par. When I first switched in sixth grade to a public school, I really had to get myself caught up in a lot of the subjects. And then I went to Edison Junior High, and then I went to Niles McKinley High School.

K: Any favorite teachers?

S: I loved a lot of my high school teachers, like I loved my Italian teacher, Ms. Salvador. She was this little lady, and she was awesome, I loved her. And I really liked my English teachers, actually, they really helped me to write, which is good, since all I do is write papers. Actually my History teacher in high school weren't impressive at all. Except for Mr. Papalas, he was really good. But other than that I really didn't have a favorite, I liked all my teachers. Except for my Chemistry teacher, she was horrible, she didn't know anything. That would be my least favorite teacher, that would probably be an easier question. We would have all night sleepovers the day before a test, and we would start just to teach ourselves the information, because she was horrible. So that was my least favorite teacher. I don't have a favorite.

K: What about your favorite subject?

S: In high school I would say my favorite subject was probably English, English or Math. Which is really weird being a historian, like going to be a historian now, to really enjoy math. I loved Italian too, because I am Italian. But I would have to say probably English and Math.

K: Where you involved with any extracurricular activities at school or with school?

S: Yes, I was a cheerleader, I was involved in the Drama Club, I did fast-pitch softball, I did volleyball, I did basketball. Yes, I did it all. I was involved in speech my senior year, which was a wonderful experience because, I mean, for the first year we went all the way to state, me and my partner came in tenth in the state, and then we were sixth in the district. So that was really an experience, because I was like, "Oh, I won't do speech, dorks do speech." By the time I hit my senior year I was done with the sports, I threw out my shoulder in fast-pitch softball, so I didn't play that anymore. And basketball I just realized after my junior year, "I'm not going to go anywhere with this," so I decided my senior year I'd quit all my sports, and cheerleading, and all that stuff. I was involved in everything, it was crazy. But I loved it.

K: What about after-school activities? Aside from the sports and stuff like that.

S: Well, I took dance since the age of three-and-a-half. So that was mainly what I did after school at least once or twice a week, sometimes more towards competition time. But that was my big activity outside of school. And I would hang out with my friends.

K: So aside from the dance, hanging out with your friends and your family, what else did you do for fun growing up? And play baseball in the streets.

S: Yes, we did, we had the pothole too, and little sewer things that we used for bases, and then we'd get like Frisbees as bases on first and second. I don't know, I did the normal kids stuff, you know, we'd go to the movies, we'd go shopping, my family always took vacations. One of our big group activities was going to Penn State games, we loved to do that. And going to my grandparents,' and stuff like that, it was always a lot of family oriented stuff.

K: This is a tough question, but take your time to think about it. What would you say was your most memorable experience as a child?

S: I have a lot that just come to head when I think of my childhood. I think of when my younger brother Shawn – he was a little bad boy, he could only have been like six or seven, and I was always the sensitive one in the family, like I would cry at the drop of a hat, and everyone else would make fun of me. But I remember he got hit with a baseball bat, and I remember he came home and he had this patch in the eye, and I saw him and I would just sit there and cry because I felt so bad. And I think my other most memorable experience, which, you're going to laugh at me, it's really funny. I was little, and we had this picnic table in our backyard, and it was wood, and I decided that I would be real cute and I'd lay on it, well somehow my shirt came up and I got like 25 splinters in my belly. So that is one moment that I remember from my childhood, and I was young then, but I remember that.

K: That had to hurt.

S: You know how little girls wear those cute little halter tops? I decided to lay on the picnic table, move around...

K: It's funny now when you can look back.

S: But I have so many memories from my childhood.

K: You're very fortunate.

S: Yes I am.

K: After you graduated high school, did you go straight into college?

S: Yes, I originally went to Slippery Rock University in P.A. because I wanted to be a physical therapist. And I was dating a kid from high school that I had dated for like seven years off and on, and he had gone to Arizona State. So I went to Slippery Rock my first year, and then I was going to transfer out to Arizona State to go to school with him, but that summer before I was going to go there he decided to cheat on me. So I was kind of left like...I still wanted to go to Arizona State because I would have liked it, my mom

didn't want me to go all the way across the country, and by this time all my friends at Slippery Rock already had roommates for apartments and stuff like that. So I decided to go to Penn State Shenango for a year, and at that time I had gotten a job at Hillside Hospital, and I worked in health care, and I was like, "I don't think I can do physical therapy, this isn't for me." And I'd always wanted to be a lawyer, but I never thought that I could go to law school and everything like that. So I started majoring in law, and then I went back to Slippery Rock the year after and lived with two girls that I had met my freshman year. And at this time I started dating a new guy, and he worked back here, so I decided that Slippery Rock wasn't for me to be there. And that's when I came to YSU in the fall of 2002.

K: You said you worked at Hillside?

S: Yes.

K: Let's go a little bit before that. Tell me about your jobs, like any jobs throughout high school or...

S: Yes, well I babysat since the time I was in like seventh or eighth grade, my little cousins and all kinds of people in Niles, even people in Warren, I mean all around I use to baby sit, that was my thing. And then in high school I didn't get a job until my senior year because I so busy with sports and everything, you know, babysitting here and there on the weekends for different people, and I got money through that. And I got a job at K-Mart actually, right before Thanksgiving my senior year. And then I stayed there until January because they cut my hours down to four hours a week and it was a waste of my gas money to drive there. And then in March of my senior year I started working at Niki's Eatery's Pub, it's now Marciano's in Niles, and I worked there for almost... I would say a little over two years, two-and-a-half, three years, and I was a server and I was a manager. And then in 2000 is when I got hired at Hillside, and I've worked there ever since. I started as a behavior tech, and now I'm supervisor of the behavior techs. And then in 2001 I started teaching dance for the dance studio that I went to as a child, and I still do that. So right now I still work at Hillside, and I teach dance.

K: We know why you chose YSU, so with the exception of majoring in physical therapy and deciding that wasn't right for you, and then law obviously didn't work out too much. What happened after that?

S: When I first started at YSU I was majoring in Political Science because I was thinking about law. And then I took a History class with Dr. Dirk Hermance, and I loved it, and I had known Dr. Pallante through dance, so I talked to her about it and I decided to become a History major also. I was going to major in history and political science. I was always torn, and I had worked for lawyers before, this one time this summer, I forgot to mention that, and I just realized you know, I don't think I want the life of a lawyer, I want to have a family, and I don't want to be bogged down with law stuff doing case reviews and studies all over the weekend. So I decided to I wanted get my PhD in History and Political Science. And then the more I thought about it, the Political Science Department

here just kind of deterred me from that because they're just...it's not like the History Department at all. In the History Department everybody is as nice as can be, everybody is willing to help, or whatever. So that's when I decided that I would get my Bachelor's and everything in History, and then, you know, my Master's and hopefully my PhD.

K: How did you pay for school?

S: I actually have a scholarship right now. When I went to Slippery Rock originally I had a couple scholarships that I gained in high school, and then I used to take out loans. But now I have a scholarship, the Terry Lynch Scholarship that I got in 2003, and I've had that ever since. The rest of it I just pay, you know, whatever's left over from that.

K: As an undergraduate, what kind of activities were you involved in?

S: Well, at Slippery rock I was involved in their dance program, and I was also a cheerleader there. At Penn State I really wasn't involved in too many activities, I kind of just went there and basically went home, I had too much other stuff to do. At YSU I've definitely been involved in a lot of activities. I was involved in Model U.N. for two years. I was involved in the Honors Societies for Political Science and History. I've partaken in History day for the past two years. I belong to the history Club, and I presented a paper there. I briefly was involved with the YSU Dance Ensemble in the fall of 2004. I think that's it. I think that's enough! (Laughter).

K: How did these activities impact your studies as an undergraduate?

S: They really didn't conflict too much. The thing that took up the most time was the Model U.N. But it was also a learning experience, because you got to meet so many people. We went away to conferences in Chicago and stuff, and Kent State Ashtabula. So it was a learning experience, as well as a fun experience because you learn a lot about people in various countries and their foreign policies, and everything like that. So I would say that was what took up the most time, but I also took it as a class to where I got credit for it. Other than that I really don't...they don't conflict with my studies, and I don't let them take precedent over them.

K: As an undergraduate describe a typical day.

S: Here at YSU I feel like I'm here all day. I'm always tired too, tiredness is one thing. I'll come here sometimes a little bit early and I'll go in the computer lab, do some work. I'll come up to the History Department, talk to the professors or whatever. Then I'll go to class, and then if I have breaks sometimes my boyfriend will come meet me for lunch, sometimes my friends will go to lunch, you know, between breaks I just hang out with people or I do schoolwork. And then attend meetings if I have to, you know, for the various activities and groups. Sometimes I just come here, go to class, and then I go home, but other times I stay around and do whatever.

K: Currently you're working at Hillside you mentioned, and still teaching dance.

S: Right.

K: When you first came to YSU, what did the campus look like?

S: When I first started attending it was basically how it now except for the Rec. Center is really the only new thing since I actually attended YSU. Even throughout my childhood I remember coming here for like English Festivals and football games or whatever, and I don't think I paid that much attention to it. I know there's some new places to eat, like Mighty Moe's is newer, it was the old Burger King. But really, as far as the campus goes, I think it's much nicer than most people give it credit for. I do think the Rec. Center is a little close to DeBartolo, but I also think its good that they have decided to build it.

K: With the exception of the Rec. Center, what do you think of the new dorms that they've built down in Smokey Hollow?

S: I don't really know why they built them down there, I don't know if that was the best location. I mean they look really nice, I've heard from some people that live in them that they might not have been built architecturally sound, engineering wise. From what I've heard, I don't know, I've never set foot in them, they look nice form the outside, but then again they don't really go with the atmosphere that surround it. I mean that looks like something that would be in the middle of Boardman, or Canfield, or Poland, and it's the middle of downtown Youngstown. But if it's what brings people here. I also remember when they built the Cafaro Dorms and those over there, I remember as a child, like in high school or junior high, whenever they got those, I remember them building those. It just seems like they're so far away though.

K: What do you think of the area around the campus?

S: You know, it's sad. I think it's starting to improve, you know, the whole Youngstown 2010, or whatever. So I think that is good, and they want to build the Convocation Center, or whatever it's called. I think there's bad areas to it, you just have to stay away from those. But I mean I don't think – I went to Slippery Rock and it is in the middle of nowhere, like we had to drive fifteen minutes to go to Wal-Mart, you know? It's a Wal-Mart! The only thing that was at Slippery Rock was a Subway, and a Sheetz, and A McDonalds. So I guess I like it here better. There's still stuff that you can do on campus, and then you can always get away and go to Boardman, or Niles, or those places, so at least you have that option. I mean I think it's a deprived area, I think it has a chance, a hope, but I mean I don't think it's the worst place in the world.

K: No, I agree, I just think it has a bad rap basically. That needs to change. Once that changes I think a lot will change.

S: Right, right.

K: What do you think of the student publication?

S: I don't read it that often. *The Jambar* is not the most well-written source of news out there. I give people credit for wanting to do it. I don't find it intellectually stimulating, but I also don't think it's the worst thing ever. It's *The Jambar*. I don't really know how to describe it, it's just *The Jambar*.

K: When you first attended YSU as an undergraduate, what was the gender ratio of male to female students?

S: Oh jeeze, actually in a lot of my elective classes it seemed like there were a lot more men. But now that I'm in History, in a lot of my History classes I think it might be like 60/40, more leaning towards women actually. I don't know, I guess I don't pay that much attention. I would say like 60/40 in my History classes, I mean I think it's pretty close, I think there are a lot more women, which is awesome, I that's great to get more women in fields like that.

K: What about the racial ratio of students?

S: Oh, predominantly Caucasian. Definitely. Almost in all my classes there are maybe a few African Americans here and there, a few other ethnicities, but predominantly Caucasian.

K: And what do you think is the average class size? Your basic undergraduate?

S: Well, my electives are obviously bigger, which I didn't take too many electives here because I had gotten those out of the way at Slippery Rock. But there were a few, and I'd say those were the bigger classes with like 30 to maybe 40 students. It was between like 25 and 35 I'd say. When I got more into my Political Science major classes and my History major classes, definitely a lot smaller, I'd say in the twenties, there was actually one class with only 5 of us in it. You know, I'd say between 15 and 20 was predominant for my upper-undergraduate courses, the upper level ones.

K: What – as an undergraduate once again, what was your social life like while you were attending YSU?

S: Well, I do a lot of stuff with my boyfriend, who doesn't go to school here. But I have a lot of friends that go to school here, and I mean, for my social life I don't get to do a lot, but when I do, I have a lot of fun. We go out drinking now and then, go to a movie, or go out to eat or something. Like attending frat parties and stuff like that? No, I don't do that. I did that my freshman year at Slippery Rock and that was enough for me. I don't know, I feel like a really old 24 year old, but with working and trying to keep good grades my social life sometimes takes a back seat.

K: Are there any particular hangouts here at YSU that you went to?

S: We went to the Inner Circle a lot, especially I the Political Science Department with Model U.N. We would hold a lot of our meetings there actually at Inner Circle for the

Executive Committee of the Officers of Model U.N. We would hold a lot of our meetings there. Other than that I hang out in the History Department a lot, which I know sounds really odd, but if I have an hour break...if I leave I'll never come back. And we hung out at Inner Circle, (Inaudible) from the History Department, and wherever.

K: How did you get to school as an undergraduate?

S: I drove myself.

K: And where do you park?

S: Hopefully in the parking deck most of the time if I can find a spot. I think they should make the parking deck bigger, like the one on Wick. Yea, I mostly parked in the parking deck.

K: As an undergraduate, anybody here at YSU that you would say inspired you?

S: Specifically no, I think all my teachers...like Dr. Hermance who is one of the main reasons I decided to major in History. I wouldn't use it as the word "inspire," I would more say "encouraged." I think they all have encouraged me and stood by me, and you know, kind of liked pushed you on to let you know that you can do stuff. But to say that they inspired me, I don't know, I guess I kind of...I don't want to say I inspire myself, but I drive myself, I push myself. I guess like me feeling like I'm doing the best job I think I can do is more what inspires me. And my parents. But I don't think there's necessarily a specific person that has inspired me, everybody in the History department is great, and they encourage me. No offence to them or anything.

K: How well has YSU prepared you for the decision that you have made to go to graduate school?

S: Oh, they've prepared me very well, I couldn't imagine...I'm kind of fearful of where I'm going to go for a PhD because I know everybody here, I love the History Department, and they have prepared me really well. I'm actually taking two graduate courses right now as an undergrad, and I don't feel like I'm behind. So I think that they have prepared me really well to go on and get my Master's.

K: Why did you choose YSU to get your Master's?

S: I figured I'm here, I know everybody, hopefully a better chance to get a graduate assistantship than somewhere else. Because I know there's some places you can go to and your Master's and PhD can be combined into one and you can get it done sometimes a little quicker. But I figure funding would be much easier to acquire here at YSU, and I know everybody, and I love the professors here, I figured I would just stay here and then when I get my PhD decide where I'm going to go then.

K: With the exception of your two jobs that you're currently working, how do you attend to pay for school as a graduate assistant?

S: Well, I'm hoping that I get a graduate assistantship. I hope I find out here sometime shortly. If not, I'll just continue to pay for it out of my savings, which would really suck, because I don't want to do that, but if I have to.

K: You are taking graduate classes, and as a graduating student, I believe that it's a safe assumption to make that you're going to continue on with some of the activities that you were involved in as an undergraduate.

S: Right.

K: Any other activities focusing specifically on History, but that are new to you as a graduate student?

S: I don't think there really will be anything new, you know, I'll still do History Day, I'm still involved with Phi Alpha Theta and History Club. So I don't think there will really be anything new that will be offered to me as a graduate student, because there's not like some secret club of like graduate students or something that you have to be a graduate student to be in.

K: So you kind of have the feel for what it's like as a graduate student, you're taking two classes and that's a lot.

S: Yea.

K: Tell me about a typical day as a graduate student.

S: As a graduate student? well, I think it's a lot different because you're classes seem to be more so at night, so I guess instead of attending classes all day, you do your work during the day then you attend classes at night. It's kind of hard to describe because my undergraduate course are during the day and my graduate courses are at night, so, I don't think it could be too much different. I mean I think it'll be different is the fact that I'll be taking three classes compared to the six that I was used to taking. But I don't find it any more intense or overwhelming, I just find it to be...I don't know, I don't think of it in the sense of like, "Oh, graduate school!" because my one undergraduate course right now I think is more intense than any of my graduate ones combined! So I don't know, I think of it in the way that it's all one big party.

K: What did you think of the transition?

S: I don't think I really experienced it because I am taking a couple of courses as a graduate student. So I think it will be a transition next year, when I 'm not here taking classes all day long and I'll be here all night instead. I think that might be a transition (End of Side A of Tape). (Beginning of Side B). As I was saying, as far as how the

students and teachers accept me, I don't think they looked at me any different. Actually, a couple of teachers already thought I was a graduate student, I think they were a little confused. But I haven't really experienced like a definite transition.

K: Throughout your academic career do you have any regrets?

S: You know what? No. Everyone's like, "You're 24 and you're just getting your Bachelor's?" But you know what? I learned so much about all different things. I decided – I mean everybody changes their major at least once. I don't know too many people that haven't. So no, because I did experience three really different universities, and it's kind of ironic that I ended up at YSU because I'm 20 minutes from my hometown. But no, I really don't have any regrets at all. I think my only regret was that I returned to Slippery Rock that one year. I think I should have come here, but I just have to take everything as a learning experience, because I might be 24 just getting my Bachelor's, but you know what? I'm getting it. And I never like, slacked off, I wish my freshman year that I would have done better, I mean I got A's and B's, but now, if I get a B I'm devastated. I don't really regret that I've learned from that.

K: What changes would you like to see happen at the campus? At Youngstown State?

S: I don't know, I think parking could improve. I think the elevators in DeBartolo run really slow. I take them up because I have to go up five floors, but I walk down. I think they could do – I mean the campus I think they're making a lot of changes to, I think just try to make the surrounding areas more welcoming and more, you know, get rid of that bad rap that YSU has because of Youngstown, not because it's the ugliest college in the world because, I mean, I liked it better than Slippery Rock and Penn State without a doubt. And I think that has a lot to do though with the teachers and stuff that I've encountered. I don't know, I really...that would be something I would have to contemplate, because I don't really know. Tough question Noelle!

K: After graduating I know you're here at YSU and you're already taking graduate classes, but when you are finished with that, do you plan on remaining active with university alumni activity subsequent to your graduation?

S: Yea, I don't see why not, I mean getting my Bachelor's and my Master's here at YSU I think it would only be appropriate to remain active and stuff. So yea, I think definitely I will.

K: Well Heidi, that completes my interview, is there anything that you would like to add? Take a moment to think about it. Or something that you would like to discuss that we haven't hit upon.

S: No I don't think so, I think we covered everything.

K: Are you sure?

S: Yea, if so it'll take me a couple of hours to think about it, so no, I don't think there's anything else, thank you very much.

K: No, thank you so much. This is an excellent asset I think to the collection that YSU is currently now compiling. Thank so very much for your time.

S: You're welcome.