

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Niles Police Department Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 308

JOSEPH JENNINGS, JR.

Interviewed

by

Steven Papalas

on

August 20, 1982

JOSEPH JENNINGS, JR.

Joseph Jennings, Jr. was born on October 9, 1919, in Niles, Ohio. He had one sister and two brothers, all of whom were raised on the second floor of their father's nightclub at 600 Mason Street.

Jennings was a fine athlete as a young man. He graduated from Niles McKinley High School in 1939. From 1940 until the outbreak of World War II, he attended Kent State University on a football scholarship. There he majored in physical education.

He entered the United States Army on March 8, 1942, and served in the war as an infantryman until he was honorably discharged on October 16, 1945.

After the war, Jennings worked at the Jennings Nightclub with his father until he bought the Park Cigar Store in 1948. Four years later, Jennings sold the cigar store and moved to Florida when he went into the tavern business. He returned to Niles after retiring in 1976.

Jennings and his wife, the former Ann Hodges, had three children, Joe, Joanne, and Bernie. Joseph Jennings, Jr. is a member of Mount Carmel Church and is also a hunting guide in Canada. He is active with the VFW and the American Legion. He still makes his home at 600 Mason Street.

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH JENNINGS, JR.

INTERVIEWER: Steven Papalas

SUBJECT: Speakeasies, Mason Street, School, KKK, President Kennedy

DATE: August 20, 1982

P: This is an interview with Joseph Jennings, Jr. for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. The topic is the Niles Police Department. The interview is given by Steven G. Papalas at Mr. Jennings' home at 600 Mason Street on August 20, 1982, at 10:40 a.m.

Mr. Jennings, can you tell me what year you were born and where you were born?

J: I was born on October 9, 1919, in this very building where we are now holding our interview.

P: You were raised here all your life?

J: I was born and raised here on this east end and mingled with a lot of old-timers. I was just a young lad and trained and boxed in our gymnasium and speakeasy we had downstairs, which later on, in 1932, my father got one of the very few licenses which was issued when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected. It became a popular nightclub back in the 1930's and 1940's. In the 1940's war broke out and I enlisted for a year. After I had won a scholarship playing for Niles High School, I went to Kent State University. There were fifteen or sixteen of us that were told to get our year in and then after the year was in we would come back and resume our college education. Instead of getting out in 1942, after five years the war ended and I came back to Niles.

P: Can you tell me anything about school and high school? You went to Niles-McKinley, right?

J: I went to Niles-McKinley and even in those days there

was a resentment of the ethnic groups. If you wanted to go with an English girl, it was more or less forbidden because if you were Italian, or Polish, or Greek, you weren't accepted. But the days then were enjoyable days. They were nice days. Everybody was close-knit. In our time nobody knew each other by their given name; everybody had a nickname.

P: Who were some of your best friends at school and what were their nicknames?

J: I had a friend named Ted DeMatthews. Nobody knew him by Ted; his name was Ace. We had another lad by the name of William Chambers whose name was Butchie. Another friend of mine, Raymond Muche, his name was Pug. Another lad named Mango was called Wowie. His kid brother's name was Pooper. Oh, there were so many. I could take an hour saying different names of people. Nobody knew anybody by their right name, including mine, which is Pobo.

P: Who were some of your favorite teachers in school?

J: My football coach, Earl Hooker, Robert Sharp, who later became our principal-- I can't recall too many-- Mrs. Bowman, who later became the wife of a sheriff. His name was Russ Stein. He was an all-American at W. J.

P: How about subjects at school? Did you have any favorite subjects?

J: When I found out I was going to get a scholarship I studied harder and took up some courses that I didn't like, like algebra and geometry and things like that. We had to have time for entrance into college. I like civics and English and history. They're my favorite subjects. I didn't particularly care for mathematics.

P: Did you have any experiences playing football that stick out in your mind?

J: Well, we were short on linemen, and I was a backfield man my sophomore and junior years. Earl Hooker asked me if I would play guard. I said I would if it would help the team. From that position, against Akron Buchtel, I scored a touchdown. He had a play put in for me where I scored a touchdown from a guard position. That was one of the highlights of my career. And then recovering a fumble in the Warren Harding game that led to a nothing-nothing victory. That was probably the two highlights.

P: When was that, about 1939?

J: That was in 1938, that year. That was when I was a senior.

P: What can you tell me about Mason Street? If you were going to walk down Mason Street from 36 Russell Avenue where you had lived, who are some of the people you might meet? What was it like then? What would a typical day on Mason Street be like?

J: Walking from 36 Russell Avenue down to 600 Mason Street, everybody that you saw you knew and could call by first name. If they were older you would call them by their last name. Starting with my uncle's home, Sunny Jim Jennings, who lived on the corner of Mason and Wood Street, to the Tuckey's who lost a boy in the service. His name was Lee Tuckey. By the way, he was a personal friend of mine. He lost his life in the Pacific. Then, on the left hand side of the street coming westward, was Jess Woppsoda, who was a fine, fine man and worked with us down here at our place. Then the Cicerelli's and the Stabile's and the Salerno's and the BelCastro's and my Aunt Theresa Rose, who was married to my uncle Charlie, and the Skiffy's and the Frederika's, the Liberatti's, who had a meat market up here on the southside of the street, on Mason street . . . Mr. Liberatti's first name was Ed. We called him Big Ed Liberatti. He had a young son named Pete who was a personal friend of mine. Then, on the corner of Fulton and Wood Street there was a hard working family in the concrete and road business.

P: Fulton and Wood?

J: Fulton and Mason Street; I beg your pardon. We had a shoemaker named Salerno. Jim Brutz and Marty Brutz and their sisters made candy. They made some of the best chocolate candy that was made in this area. The Bernard's were right across the street. That was going from 36 Russell right down to Wood and Mason Street.

P: What are some of the earliest recollections that you have in your life, when you were on the corner of Mason Street and Wood Street.

J: I remember during the Ku Klux Klan trouble when all the Italian people got together and the Ku Klux Klan was supposed to march into Niles and raise havoc and they were supposed to go over and terrorize and rape the sisters of the order of the Humility of Mary. Everybody, all the Italian people and friends, got together and there were many guns handed out and people surrounded the convent and none of the sisters were harmed. They were stopped here in Niles. There were people that came from all over the country that wanted to see Niles, Ohio, which they later called Niles, America. That was one of

the big highlights in the era of the people of Niles, stopping the Ku Klux Klan from coming into our area. It was the east end where most of the Italian people lived that stopped the Ku Klux Klan.

P: What was Mayor Kistler's role in that riot? Do you remember? Did he help much or did he hinder the cause?

J: Mayor Kistler, as I understand from my father, was tainted in that respect. He was acutally called a Ku Kluxer himself. He more or less cooperated with the Ku Klux Klan, as I understand it.

P: From my readings he even went so far as to hire deputies who were members of the Ku Klux Klan, and he knew it!

J: That could be probably true. Your information may be very accurate.

P: Do you remember an incident that happened at McKinley Heights during that time, that may have involved Naples when you stopped the Klan from coming into McKinley Heights? Someone told me that he was one of the people who personally stood at the intersection and informed them, in no certain terms that I can't repeat, that if they progressed any further they were going to be in deep trouble.

J: Naples and my cousin Marty Flask and another young man by the name of Nelson Brutz and Jimmy Muche and an Irish lad who used to fight in the stable down here, his name was Dude Murphy, he was another tough gentleman, those were the kind of people that stopped the Ku Klux Klan.

P: Were there any shootings that you know of?

J: There were several shootings. There were a few people wounded and they had quite a skirmish down there at General Electric down there at Mosquito Creek where the bridge runs under there. That used to be the old G. E.

P: What did they call it, the General Electric Skirmish?

J: It was the General Electric Skirmish and they were supposed to bomb one of our trestles. There were some bombs planted. I think if they came in by train, they were supposed to be blown up. I'm sure Naples could give you more information on that.

P: In other words, the members who may have been Knights of the Flaming Circle were going to bomb the bridge

if the Klan came in?

J: Right, by train. I remember they captured some Ku Klux Klan uniforms and had them tied to the bumper of my dad's Studebaker and ran them through town as a trophy, like we would have done with German uniforms.

P: What about anybody riding around town with a machine gun on their car? Do you remember anything about that? I've heard the story and I can't verify it. They said they were standing on a corner right here in front of Jennings Dance Hall and somebody came by with a car--the cars in the old days had open backs--and they had a machine gun mounted back there.

J: I couldn't verify that statement, but I'm sure Mr. Naples could give you an accurate statement on that.

P: It has also been my understanding that Jennings Dance Hall was the center of the resistance to the Klan movement.

J: At that time it was a speakeasy and a fighting stable, the locker room for baseball and football teams.

P: Okay, and when the Klan came in, did people gather here?

J: This was the meeting place for the anti-Ku Klux Klan.

P: What can you remember about those meetings, anything?

J: Well, I was too young to attend, but I remember there were many guns distributed in this area. I remember my mother with an apron and she must have had two or three dozen guns there, different caliber, .38's, .32's, .45's, and they were distributed to the people that didn't have arms. Then they were told to go to different places. When they needed them they would be ready.

P: Where did the guns come from?

J: I couldn't answer that. I really don't know.

P: Did other women participate in that riot in any way?

J: My Aunt Theresa, she was involved.

P: What was her last name?

J: Theresa Rose, the wife of Charlie Rose. Again, Dewey Naples would know some other ladies that were involved. They were intent on none of the sisters being molested at our convent located behind St. Stephens Church and St. Stephens Parochial School.

- P: Have you ever heard anything about St. Stephens and Mount Carmel churches being desecrated in any way just before the riot? Did the Klan go in there and destroy the church inside or vandalize it?
- J: Not to my knowledge. I don't think they got that far. If they did, somebody else would probably know about that.
- P: Do you remember anything else about that riot?
- J: I remember I heard that there were some people seriously injured at the G. E. Skirmish, even so far as somebody was thrown in the creek down there. Whether that's true or not, I don't know.
- P: Who was thrown in, a Klanner?
- J: A Ku Klux Klanner, and there were several of my relations, such as Marty Flask, who had to serve time at the Canton Workhouse for weapons charges and assault and battery charges.
- P: What about any Klansmen, did they serve any time?
- J: I don't know if they did or not. To my recollection, they were more or less the chosen people and the people that were in power politically weren't bothered as far as I know. But they sure as the devil didn't march in Niles like they anticipated. People from all parts of the country came here to see and look and meet the people that stopped the Ku Klux Klan because they were anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, anti-everything.
- P: Who were some of the other leaders and their resistance against the Ku Klux Klan? Do you remember?
- J: My uncle, Sunny Jim Jennings, who ran the speakeasy at that time was a very generous man. When people during the Depression didn't have enough food to eat or enough coal to keep them warm, he had that delivered to their homes. My dad, Joe Jennings, he was another man that was instrumental in forming an organization known as the Flaming Circle that stopped the burnings of the crosses and running rampant through Niles. Other people like who you mentioned, were Bree Naples and Marty Flask, and Dude Murphy, and names that I mentioned. Sam DeAugustine was known as Beansie. And another gentleman by the name of Jimmy Muche, who was a good club fighter, was also involved.
- P: A club fighter, you mean with a stick?



- J: No, he was a good boxer, a real rough boxer. He had a boy named Frankie who went to the coast later on and was also a big fighter out of this area.
- P: Which Muche was it that disappeared later?
- J: That was the one, Jimmy Muche.
- P: Why? Do you remember?
- J: It was an involvement, as I understand, with the Farr brothers out at Jungle Inn. That was another gambling place. He worked for the Farr brothers, and there was a dispute of some kind and nobody has ever pinned down who did it and why they did it. We have a pretty good idea, but it's something that isn't talked about. They later were supposed to have found his body near New Kensington, Pennsylvania. He was one piece of a guy, one nice guy.
- P: Tell me a little bit about the Jennings Dance Hall. How did it start? I understand, first of all, there was a store here before, a grocery store?
- J: It was a grocery store that my grandmother and my father started. Later it was converted into a bar and nightclub in 1933 when FDR became our president. Then it went into a separate club. Later on a band played and people came and danced. My mother made spaghetti and meatballs, which were known all through the area here and they would come and dine. Her spaghetti and meatballs, the whole dinner, was for 35 cents: salad, meatballs, spaghetti, and Scarnecchio's bread, which is still a favorite bread in this area.
- P: In other words it was a bar, a dance hall, and a place for a good dinner all at the same time.
- J: Supper club.
- P: Did you have orchestras and singers come in?
- J: We had an orchestra here. The first one, the leader, was Earl Rupp. Another young gentleman, whose nickname was Gaffer, played guitar. We had a young gentleman named Paul Rowebotham that played piano. Eddie Jones played the drums. A lad by the name of Flash Gilbert played the trumpet. He was killed in an automobile accident during that period. At times we had a young gentleman by the name of Victor Christofaro who was supposed to go big time, but he got killed in an automobile accident in Youngstown.

- P: Is he any relation to the late mayor, Carmen DeChristofaro?
- J: He was no relation to Mr. Carmen DeChristofaro, who later became our mayor.
- P: Did you have boxing matches there?
- J: They trained downstairs, and later upstairs. We had a ring upstairs.
- P: Who were some of the fighters?
- J: There were fighters like Harold Skarny, Tony Zill, Jimmy Muche, Hobo Sanfry, Ray Showers. We had some pretty good boxers that fought at that time in the big time. They were potential champions, but nobody ever became a champion. They fought some good fights in Chicago and New Castle, New York.
- P: What about football and baseball teams, did your parents or you and your brothers sponsor any through the dance hall?
- J: My Uncle Jim, Sunny Jim Jennings, was the fight promoter and backed a football team for many years. They played about the time the Canton Bulldogs started professional football. This was a semi-professional football team. My dad was one of the backers also, Joe Jennings. Later on I sponsored a baseball team and a basketball team under the banner of Jennings A. C.
- P: Was it semi- pro?
- J: No, I wouldn't classify it as semi-pro, but we played very good baseball.
- P: What was Jennings A. C.? Was it in the same establishment as the dance hall?
- J: It was in the same building. This was the training quarters and headquarters for both baseball and football.
- P: In 1919 there was a raid near Jennings Dance Hall on the speakeasy. There was prohibition at that point and, of course, there was bootlegging and allegedly there was a speakeasy running downstairs at that time. Frank came in from Warren, picked up a friend, and they came by here out of curiosity to see what had occurred, and they were picked up. Do you remember anything, anybody telling you about raids here?

- J: In 1919, that was the year I was born, so I couldn't recall. I presume there were raids on speakeasies and homes, depending on who was the mayor and who was the chief of police. It wouldn't surprise me that there were raids every once in a while to keep everybody happy that were prohibitionist, anti-whiskey, anti-alcohol, or whatever. But then in 1933, when FDR was elected, everybody got licenses to sell the very thing that they used to raid against.
- P: Why was bootlegging so important, so popular, here on the east end during the prohibition days?
- J: There was good whiskey made by the Italian people and good wine. As long as there are people there is going to be the serving of alcoholic beverages. It's like marijuana, it's not legal, people want it, they're going to get it. It was the same way with whiskey or with alcohol; people want it and they're going to get it. This was the area where people had the fortitude or the gumption, so to speak, to go ahead and make it and sell it. Things were hard then, Depression, and that was one way of making a dollar. People would come from other parts of the county to come and buy this product. It was illegal and it was good stuff. You didn't have to worry if you bought it in this area. It wasn't like bathtub gin or something that wasn't aged. It wouldn't hurt your stomach or kill you. You got it here at Jennings' or other places that were bootlegging or where the speakeasy was, you were sure of a good drink of whiskey.
- P: Where did the Jennings', your parents, grandparents, and relatives, get the whiskey from? Did they make it here themselves or did they buy it from another still?
- J: It was made at different places in stills. Some was bought from other places in barrels and some was made at different hiding places.
- P: Here on the east end?
- J: On the east end.
- P: Did you ever have the opportunity to go into other speakeasies?
- J: I was just a young lad, and being the son of one of the proprietors I was allowed to come in and out. I was spoiled a little bit. That's how I learned to fight and box. I, personally, was through the gymnasium downstairs. One side was the gym and the other side was where the pool table was. People, during the Depression, would come in and play pool and play cards or have a

drink of liquor.

P: Did you ever see the inside of another speakeasy anywhere?

J: There was one down on Grant Street that was owned by Sheriff Flannigan.

P: If you were to walk into it, what did it look like? Was it in the basement or upstairs?

J: This particular one was upstairs and it was nothing elaborate, but usually a pool table and a bar was there. But no whiskey or anything would be shown. If you were known and recognized, you were allowed in. The whiskey was usually hidden in a trap somewhere. Hell, I knew policemen, when they were off duty, they would come and get their little half pint or pint or get a little drink. So it wasn't any big sin to have a drink of whiskey in those days.

P: After the war, when you came back, did you see much change?

J: Oh, there were a lot of changes then. The people were very much disoriented and the veterans were coming back by the thousands and trying to get jobs.

The place here was open for gambling at the time and I immediately went to work dealing. Instead of going back to college--I got married in the service and had a young boy born in 1944 at Fort Benning, Georgia--I came back and went to work gambling with people like Jess Soda, whom I have mentioned, and Doc Rhvella, and Ray Muche, and an Irish gentleman by the name of Jack Flannigan, and Spisak, who's another really nice person. He has also passed away. I went to work there and we opened up a speakeasy upstairs. It was an after hour place where we had gambling and slot machines. We had a gymnasium upstairs, which I later gave to Mike Birskovitch. My first paraphernalia that I had, boxing gloves, bag, and the ring, I gave to Matt McGowan who was under the banner of Niles Police A. C. and who was a real fine gentleman and did a lot of good work for the young people. That was my ambition when I came back, to carry on where I left off when I went in the service, but I didn't go back to resume my scholarship at Kent State so I, being in the gambling business, tried to do my best with the young people.

P: What was your father like? How did he run the dance hall when he opened it up? I understand that there were a couple of times that he had a problem with the black hands trying to take over the business. Have

you ever heard those stories?

J: Well, there were stories like that and there were a few that were taking advantage of the Italian people coming over here, and what little money they had, there were people here trying to take it away from them.

P: They were black-handers?

J: They were black-handers and my dad and my uncle and a young man by the name of Sammy "Beansie" Augustine, and other people--names that I don't recollect--put a stop to that.

P: How?

J: Well, they were told verbally, and if they didn't stop, other means were used. One was shot and wounded, but he didn't die. That slowed it up considerably, and from that time on there weren't so many of our Italian people getting shook down and money taken away from them.

P: How did the black-handers try to shake them down, under what pretense? What were they doing?

J: They were told they could get jobs and they had to give these people money in order to survive, to stay here. They were just, not really ignorant people, but they weren't acquainted with our customs here.

P: They were immigrants?

J: Yes. I guess some of that went on in Italy at one time.

P: In other words, Mr. Jennings, you're saying that the black-handers would tell a newly arrived immigrant that he wouldn't be allowed to stay in this area unless he contributed a certain amount of money, is that it?

J: In so many words, They had to pay off to stay here, to get a job or to get a place to live.

P: And these immigrants didn't realize . . .

J: . . . that you didn't have to do that to live in America.

P: Wasn't your father afraid of the organization the black hand might have had behind it, the power and influence it could have had to come back and hurt him?

J: I think everybody had a fear that the only way you could overcome it was to fight fire with fire. There were a couple of occasions where our place got bombed. We were threatened and bombed. When my dad and my

uncle found out who it was, there was a meeting called and it was stopped.

P: How?

J: Well, it was stopped either verbally or by whatever force was deemed necessary.

P: Did the bombings occur because your father wouldn't give them any control of the establishment?

J: That's right.

P: In other words, it was very closed, it wasn't connected with organized crime at that time?

J: We weren't at any time, and I can say this with all truthfulness, that we were never connected with organized crime. Niles has always been that way. There have been other factions that tried to come in, but they were never successful. My dad and my uncle would rather close up than become involved with what was known as the mafia.

P: Did they ever close up?

J: We closed up on occasion rather than buckle under to the mafia.

P: You mentioned that your dad would tell them verbally to stay away or use other means. Why, instead, did he close up? Why didn't he use these other means? Or was it because, maybe, that the group was a little more powerful at that point?

J: More powerful, and one of their favorite tricks was using the bomb. Until things got straightened out the place remained closed rather than let them come in and have a piece of the establishment. People like my uncle, Sunny Jim, and my dad and Marty Flask did not tolerate any breakdown, so to speak, by the mafia or the black hand or whatever you want to call it.

P: Do you remember any of their names? Did anyone ever tell you? Or is it anything you want to repeat here?

J: The people are dead now and they have no way of defending themselves, so I would rather not mention names. If someone else wants to, that's their privilege, but I'd rather not mention names.

P: How did your mom hold up to all this?

- J: Well, being of Irish extraction she was a very durable and, I might say, a tough lady, but a beautiful lady and happy-go-lucky, and was accepted by the Italian people. She was an O'Malley and very much Irish and she would go to all the Italian weddings and sing the songs in Italian and dance the tarantella and different dances as well or better than the Italian people. She was accepted and liked by everybody on the east end and everywhere she was known.
- P: What about your father? What type of person was he?
- J: He was the silent, easygoing type. He never raised his voice, not even to me, or my brothers and sisters. He did a lot of good for the city of Niles in many ways. He was loved by everybody. He was silent, easygoing, and was respected by everybody else.
- P: What year did he pass away?
- J: He passed away on April 22, 1956, and had one of the largest funerals and the flowers couldn't even be put in the funeral home, both he and my mother. We were very proud because they were beloved citizens of this community.
- P: Do you remember anything about people of the past and present such as mayors and police chiefs? Do you remember Mayor Charles Crowe?
- J: Charles Crowe became mayor, I believe, after Kistler. He was well-liked by the Italian people and immigrants. He was very, very well-liked. Then, I believe, Mayor Kistler came in and that's when all the trouble began with the Ku Klux Klan. It was short-lived and it was really stopped here in Niles, Ohio, by a group of people from the east end, not only Italian, but Irish. The Catholic people as a whole defended the convent, like I said before, and they stopped the Ku Kluxers from parading in Niles. There is no doubt about it.
- P: Is it true, from the stories I've heard, that it was actually the Ku Klux Klan that helped to defeat Mayor Kistler after eight years of being mayor of Niles?
- J: I believe that statement is accurate.
- P: I understood he wouldn't give them a permit to march.
- J: That's true. That's what I was told. But I was just a young lad then and I just remember the guns being distributed and the uniforms that my dad carried behind his car to show them that they weren't going to march

in this particular little city, which was later called Niles, "America", because they were stopped here.

P: How about police chiefs, which police chief stands out in your mind the most?

J: I think Matt McGowan was a fair and square chief of police that understood the people and their problems. Chief Berline was also another very nice gentleman. He was chief of police before Matt McGowan. We had one named Chief Nicholas who was well-liked, but he was a little bit before my time.

P: Can you tell me anything about Chief Charles Berline?

J: He came in after Chief Nicholas, I believe. He was a fine gentleman. He had a son, Jim Berline, who I went to school with. He got wounded by shrapnel in World War II. We went to school and played football together. They were a fine family.

P: Do you remember anything about some of the police officers at that time?

J: Well, we had officers like Nick Warsaw, who was of Italian extraction. He was a fine officer and was never known to arrest too many people. We had another one named Mickey Aques who rode a motorcycle. When he first came on the force he was noted for arresting a lot of people for speeding. Then we had Chief John Ross, who is chief now. He came back from the service as a patrolman. When he came back from the service they threw him off the force, but I and the rest of the legionnaires went to bat for him and got him back on the force. He later became chief of police to succeed Matt McGowan, if I recall.

P: Why were they going to throw Ross off the force?

J: It was something about civil service, I believe, or something like that.

P: In other words, he had been a policeman before he went to war?

J: For a very short time, then when he came back he tried to get on, but the fact that he served a year or whatever in the service that went down in his paper like ten percent. Through pressure we got him back on the police force and he later worked up.

We had other nice officers. Anthony Margico was of Italian extraction and was a fine officer. We had other people. We have always had a nice police force. If you were wrong in doing something they came and talked to



you, and if you were wrong you were arrested. It was as simple as that. I don't know too many of the officers nowadays. Going back a few years, when I was boxing, we had one named Andy Toriello. He was a fingerprint expert.

We used to train down on Mason Street. It was called the Sons of Italy Lodge. That's where we used to do our training for nightclub fights. Matt McGowan had a stable and we would train there. There were people like Sam "Goofy" Rich and Mr. Steve Safran who were put on fights. We had fighters from Warren who came down like Ray Sanfrey. I fought a young lad by the name of Billy Miles out of Mineral Ridge, who was a tough kid that later got killed on a motorcycle. There were also fights held at the old McKinley Theatre where they played basketball and had boxing events. It was owned by St. Stephen's Parish. They had fighters like Gene Spar from Warren and Ray Sanfrey, who was a good club fighter.

I might be getting a little bit off the subject. Talking about police in our community, they were all very nice people: Nick Warsaw, Casper, and another one that people might have forgotten was Albie Booth. He rode a motorcycle before Mickey Aques. And then we had Matt McGowan who worked his way up through the ranks. So we had a lot of people that understood the community and we had a good police force.

- P: Can you tell me anything about one of your relatives? This is more recent, it would be 1960 when President Kennedy, who was a senator then running for president, came through Niles?
- J: When the parade came down Robbins Avenue and the future President Kennedy came down in a open car my sister presented him the Infant of Prague in memory of the Jennings family. My sister has given away hundreds of these, which is given from the Jennings family to people like senators and coaches like Tony Mason and Joe Paterno. I think the latest one that is going to be given will be to Boom Boom Mancini. She gives them to people that do things for our area that warrant one of these. There have been many, many of these Infant of Pragues with a crown and all dressed up really pretty which she gives to nice people.
- P: What did he [President Kennedy] say to your sister? Did he have any remarks when she handed him that?
- J: My sister can give it to you word for word, exactly what was said. He was astounded and amazed and very grateful that he was given it. I don't know for sure if a letter was ever sent to acknowledge it. A lot of our governors

and people in Niles were given these beautiful statues.

P: Who was the first mayor that you've ever known in Niles? Who would you say was more constructive and progressive for the town?

J: I think all of our mayors did a good job. Mayor Cicero, who is our present mayor, was on an anti-gambling crusade when he was elected, and everything was shut down. That was his policy and we accepted it. There was no problem there. Before him, we had Mayor Arthur Doult who passed away suddenly in Florida. He was a fine mayor. We had a Catholic mayor, Carmen DeChristofaro and Thomas Smith and Ray Hubbard. There are a few names that I can't recall.

P: What would you say about Carmen DeChristofaro?

J: He was a good mayor. He was a Republican mayor who wasn't supposed to win because he was Italian and Catholic. He was elected.

P: Was he the first Catholic and Italian mayor?

J: I would say so, yes. It was a surprise to the community, but he was a good mayor. We had a mayor, Edward P. Lenny, who was Irish and Catholic, another surprise. I think some of the things we talked about earlier, about the ethnic groups and the malice and the hard feelings, is finally leaving Niles, which I think is a good thing. If you're Italian, or if you're Irish, or if you're Greek, or Polish it doesn't matter, I think people nowadays vote for the man, not his family background or whatever. If he's qualified they elect him. I think Niles is still a wonderful and beautiful place to live in.

P: Thank you very much for the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW