YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Shenango Valley Depression Project

Life in the Depression

O. H. 463

ROSANNA FENCYK

Interviewed

by

Marilyn Lees

on

August 6, 1982

Rosanna Fencyk

Rosanna Fencyk was born on March 7, 1920 in Farrell, Pennsylvania, the daughter of Angelo Sam and Colegera Nicastro who had immigrated from Sicily. Her father was the owner of a grocery store and tavern in Brookfield during the Depression.

All eight members of Rose's family helped in her father's business, some by serving as store clerks and some by later playing music in the tavern. Being a second generation Italian-American, Rose experienced a sometimes painful assimilation process as she grew up. She was envious of the English families in her neighborhoodwho spoke of the National Honor Society at Brookfield High School. Also, Rose was very musical and played the piano quite well.

Rose graduated from Brookfield in 1938 and worked her way through business college and then later graduated from Sharon General Hospital School of Nursing. She married Michael Fencyk in 1947, and they had one son, Michael Todd, born in 1954.

Today, Rose is employed as a bookkeeper for T&C Auto Center and is active in the League of Women Voters organization.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Shenango Valley Depression Project

INTERVIEWEE: ROSANNA FENCYK

INTERVIEWER: Marilyn Lees

SUBJECT: Depression, Work Projects, Personal Belongings

DATE: August 6, 1982

L: This is an interview for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Shenango Valley during the Depression, by Marilyn Lees, in Masury, Ohio on August 6, 1982, at 4:30 p.m.

First of all, when were you born and where?

F: I was born in 1920 in Farrell, Pennsylvania.

L: What were the names of your parents?

F: Angelo Sam Nicastro and Colegera Nicastro.

L: What nationality were they?

F: Italian.

L: Were they born here in America?

F: No. They were born in Sicily, Italy.

L: Did they immigrate here together, or did they meet here in the United States?

F: They were married in Italy where my eldest brother was born. My father arrived first, around 1908, and my mother arrived a few years later.

L: How many children were in your family?

F: There were six: Two boys and four girls.

L: And where were you in the family?

F: I was next to the youngest.

L: What did your father do for a living?

F: He mined coal, but disliked it intensely. So eventually he became a self-made businessman and operated several stores before entering the tavern business. In his later years, he operated a motel/restaurant/trailer park in Punta Gorda, Florida.

L: When did he first move into the Shenango Valley?

F: After living in Alabama, West Virginia, and Erie, Pennsylvania, he moved into the Shenango Valley around 1915. We lived in Farrell, then Sharon, and moved to Brookfield Township around 1929.

L: What type of business did he have here in Brookfield?

F: He had a very small corner grocery store. Prior to that, he operated a butcher shop in Sharon.

L: Do you remember what the store looked like?

F: Oh yes. Actually, it was a brick home, and one room was converted into a grocery store. This home still exists as an apartment dwelling, and is owned by a family member.

L: What kind of things would he have in the store?

F: Various grocery items: Canned goods, bakery items, milk, penny candy.

L: Did he have fresh meats?

F: Not as much as at the butcher shop. It was more like delicatessen meats, and weiners and hamburgers.

L: How many people worked in the store with him?

F: It was a family affair, but most of the work was done by my parents and oldest sister and brothers. My oldest sister completed elementary school, but did not go on to high school. This experience was very helpful to her--later on she was co-owner of a larger grocery store and department store in Brookfield.

L: How many days was the grocery store open?

F: Six days a week, closed on Sundays.

L: Was that typical of most stores?

F: Yes, I would say so.

L: What were some of your duties as a child?

F: The usual household chores. But I was lucky because I was next to the youngest in age, and the older ones carried most of the load. At the time, I had nimble fingers so my mother recruited me for sewing tasks, curtains, doilies, clothes; my father taught me to insert coins in coin wrappers.

L: What kinds of games did you play as a child?

F: Now that was fun! We played Red Rover, Ollie Ollie Otts's in Free, Kick the Tin Can, Crack the Whip, Marbles, Jacks, Jump Rope, Hopscotch, Baseball, Buck-Buck-how many fingers have I up (this game involved some athletic prowess). The street was our playground. Although traffic was very light, we always posted sentinels at each end of the street for safety purposes.

L: Was it a neighborhood affair?

F: Definitely, yes. We would sneak out of the house at every opportunity, but our parents were always calling us to come back to finish the chores.

L: Did you have any pets or animals at this time?

F: My family had German Shepherds--they were superb watchdogs.

L: Did you have any other animals, such as chickens?

F: We had a few for a short time. Many of the neighbors raised chickens. Actually, if people didn't have cash to pay for products that they were purchasing, it was not unusual for my father to barter with them for chickens, turkeys, eggs, or whatever.

L: Any rabbits?

F: I suppose at one time or another we had rabbits. My father was a good hunter. He was too busy to go often, but he always returned with something: venison, rabbit, pheasant.

L: What did the family do for recreation?

F: Within the home we enjoyed music and singing, and we played cards. My father taught us to play poker (his keen knowledge

of this card game kept us from starving during the lean years). We also listened to the radio and played records. Social events included weddings, baptisms, and celebrations of religious holidays, especially the Feast of St. Joseph.

L: What happened on that day?

F: Twelve guests were seated at the main table at noon, similar to the seating of the apostles at the Last Supper. Each food item would be served separately, starting with orange slices and graduating to soup, cauliflower, fish, spaghetti, chicken, and salad. Homemade bread was served, with fancy Italian cookies that had taken days to prepare. The meal lasted several hours.

L: On what day would this occur?

F: On March 19, St. Joseph's Day. This tradition came about in our family due to an incident involving my oldest sister. As a child living in Alabama, she had contracted poliomyelitis. My mother vowed in prayer that if her child recovered, she would honor the name of St. Joseph for the rest of her life. My sister recovered fully, and the vow was kept.

L: Were other family members invited?

F: Yes, and many friends. But they ate later and did not sit at the main table. And every guest took home a bag of goodies. We all looked forward to this special day.

L: How many family members lived in this area?

F: On my mother's side, none. She had two brothers, and was orphaned at 18 months of age. My father had four brothers and two sisters. Only one brother came to America, and lived in Farrell, Pennsylvania until he moved to Colorado. He was the only relative we knew.

L: Did you have any extended family members that, in other words, you adopted into your family for some of these things?

F: Yes. We had godparents, and my father kept in touch with many of the people that were on the same boat when he came to America. This friendship was maintained for many years. We always had out-of-town company, even from New York.

L: How would they usually get here?

F: By train, bus, or car. Some of my father's friends had cars.

L: Where did you live in Brookfield?

F: We lived on Lorain Street, the West Hill area, about 100 yards from the Pennsylvania state line on the Sharon side. Although we lived in Ohio, we had very strong ties to Sharon, Pennsylvania. That was our second home, so to speak, since many of our friends lived in Sharon. To this day, family members still live on Lorain Street; the rest of us live within a few blocks of the homestead.

L: What was the neighborhood like on Lorain Street?

F: To begin with, it was semi-urban. We had paved roads, and utilities. It was an ethnic group: Italian, Polish, Slovak and English. We envied the English families because there was no language barrier, whereas most of the other parents had not mastered the English language.

L: Did people share things at this time with one another?

F: To a certain extent, yes. Generally, Italian people are very generous and hospitable, but they have a strong belief in work ethics. We shared homemade wine, and vegetables from the garden.

L: Where did you go to grade school?

F: Addison Elementary; it is still in operation.

L: How did you get there?

F: We walked. It was about a mile away. Except in the dead of winter, we sometimes walked back home for lunch. Very few of us had proper winter clothing, and it's amazing how we survived the harsh winters. And we seldom missed attending school. Our lunch was wrapped in newspaper and tied with string. I liked having my lunch wrapped in the comic section, so we could have a few laughs. Our sandwiches consisted of very thick slices of homemade bread with a slice of baloney, or salami in it. We were almost ashamed to eat our lunches in the same area with the Americans, because they had these neat little sandwiches made with store bought bread, and ours were so sloppy and chunky! In retrospect, I know now that we were the lucky ones to have the homemade bread.

L: Were you at home encouraged to speak Italian by your parents?

F: They always addressed us in Italian, but we responded in English because we considered ourselves to be Americans. And we wanted so very much to be like our American friends. We frowned on speaking Italian (peer group pressure?), which was sad because I wish I could have learned to speak the

language fluently. At that time we comprehended the Italian dialect of our parents, and our response in English turned out to be a blessing for our parents because they were able to learn the English language from us. Although their English skills remained broken and fractured, we were able to communicate on basic things.

L: What high school did you go to?

F: Brookfield High School.

L: How did you get there?

F: By school bus.

L: Do you remember any of your favorite subjects at that time?

F: I loved school, and most of my subjects were favorites. But I especially liked reading and spelling and English. I liked reading, because literature was an experience in traveling for me.

L: What kind of school activities did they offer to the students at this time?

F: Just about everything we have now. We had band, orchestra, chorus, dramatics, debates, and even operettas. We had a school newspaper, the yearbook, and proms. We had football, basketball, baseball and volleyball. We didn't have gymnastics, but we did have good gym exercises, and we didn't have wrestling.

L: What was discipline like in school at this time?

F: To my knowledge, there were very few serious discipline problems. The teachers were very firm, but generally fair. At Addison School, the principal was a female; at Brookfield High School, the principal was a male. Both were dedicated educators; both were fair. Basically, my classmates were a fun-loving group, but we did have much respect for our elders. Besides, if we misbehaved in school, the wrath of our parents was something to fear. There was only one side to the story, the teacher's side.

L: Do you remember any favorite teachers of yours at this time?

F: Actually, I never met a teacher I disliked as a student. And I believe they really cared about us. My English

teachers were Henrietta McConnell, Marian Mook, and Genevieve Matthews; Frances Reeser and Ivey Patterson taught commercial subjects; Everett Gault taught algebra; other male teachers in the field of science were Philip Koppel, Clyde Hall and Melvin Isenberg. And I shall never forget my music teacher, W. Jenkins.

L: Where did young people go out if they wanted to go out on a date somewhere?

F: I can't speak for the rest, but the daughters of Italian parents were not permitted to date. We were permitted on occasion to go to the theatre with a group. I loved going to the Columbia Theatre in Sharon, especially musicals, and we would stay to see it twice. Then we would hurry home and try to imitate some of the dance steps we had seen. Once a year we were taken to Buhl Park--very few girls learned to swim, but the boys were allowed to go swimming in nearby Yankee Lake Creek. We were allowed to attend some school functions, especially if we were participants. Actually, other than going to the theatre or dancing at Yankee Lake or the Polish Hall in Farrell, there was very little for young people to do, except swim in the summertime. If you were lucky to have a car, then Youngstown offered more excitement. Birthday parties among classmates were popular. In those days, boys had far more freedom growing up than girls did.

L: Did you have a curfew of any kind?

F: Definitely! When the sun went down, you had better be home. About 9 p.m. on a summer day, every parent in the neighborhood was out screaming for their child to get on home. Chances are we were hiding somewhere right there, but they couldn't see us. We did a good job of stalling, and of covering up for one another.

L: When you were in high school, do you remember many students dropping out of school?

F: I was a freshman in 1935, and many boys dropped out of school when they reached sixteen due to necessity. Some took mill jobs, others odd jobs to help their families financially. There were very few job opportunities in Brookfield; most of the jobs were in outlying areas.

L: Where would you go shopping at?

F: Because of its proximity, we did most of our clothes shopping in Sharon, which had become a third-class city around 1920. There were no department stores in Brookfield at that time,

and transportation to Warren or Youngstown was not always available. There was a family store in Sharon called Anspach & Meyer, I believe, where the prices were reasonable. However, most of the immigrant families wore hand-me-downs. At best, we went shopping twice a year. We had no wardrobe to choose from, just a Sunday best, so to speak. The rest of the clothing was for school or play. And many of us made our own clothes.

L: When would you usually go shopping, like right before school started?

F: More like the middle of September or October. Clothes were bought for necessity and durability, not fashion. Many clothes were given as gifts at Christmas time.

L: Do you remember any stores closing when bad times started to occur in Sharon?

F: I really don't recall too many businesses that went under during the Depression around here. There wasn't that much competition around here, not like the larger cities such as New York or Chicago. And most of Brookfield was agricultural. Local industries did slow down, and there were layoffs. So the soup lines were quite long.

L: In Sharon?

F: Yes. The impact of the crash of 1929 wasn't felt here until the latter part of the 1930's, when personal funds started to dwindle down to zero. Job layoffs affected young newlyweds, who had very little seniority in the mills. The Salvation Army assisted the poor and the needy, as did the churches, with food. The WPA and CCC federal programs put many men to work around here. And most of us had an abundant supply of canned goods from vegetable gardens. The Welfare Department also assisted the needy.

L: What kind of health services were available for people at this time?

F: Christian H. Buhl Hospital (which is now Sharon General) was organized in 1896 and by 1917 it had expanded several times. And there were hospitals in Warren and Youngstown, Ohio. So we had good medical care. In the early 1920's, those who had contracted a communicable disease were put under quarantine at home. For some reason, children in the neighborhood got a big charge out of seeing a quarantine sign in the neighborhood.

L: Who would put it up?

F: Either the doctor, or the health department.

L: I see. He would put it right on your door?

F: Yes. The hospitals apparently were not equipped to handle contagious diseases, and this was a preventive measure. In those days, doctors did make house calls.

L: That was a common practice?

F: Yes. We still have one Brookfield doctor that makes house calls. I wish there were more.

L: Were there any clinics for people to go to?

F: Yes. Shenago Valley had a Community Fund (called United Fund now). The Sunshine Home had a dental clinic that accepted students from Hickory and Sharon, Pennsylvania, and from the Brookfield area. Many of the immigrant children went there for dental care. There was a well baby clinic, and a crippled children's clinic. Those in charge of the Community Fund at that time showed much vision and foresight in meeting the health needs of the community.

L: Did a lot of people use these clinics then?

F: In an article from the Sharon Herald dated May 1935, 129 visits were made in the month of April alone to the well baby and the crippled children's clinics; the dental clinic was visited by 596 children in the month of March, and 332 in April of 1935. Farrell, Pennsylvania became a third-class city in 1932, and offered some services to their residents.

L: Along those lines, can you remember at all what type of police or fire protection that Brookfield had at this time?

F: Brookfield had constables, and the Sheriff's Department out of Warren, Ohio was available. The Brookfield Fire Department was organized in 1948; prior to that, outlying areas came to the rescue; also, industrial firms in the locality helped with their personal fire eqiupment.

L: Was there a free library in town, Sharon at this time?

F: Yes. It was organized in 1903, and by 1922 the Sharon Public Library was free. It was about two miles from our home, and I spent many happy hours there. It was located on State Street, not far from the shopping district, where shops lined both sides of the street. Sharon was a major shopping district at that time.

L: What were holidays like at this time? As an example, what would your family do on a typical Christmas?

F: As a child, we lived in the North Flats area of Sharon, which was a poor section of town. We would hang up our stockings on Christmas Eve, and they were filled with an orange, several coins, walnuts, and maybe some candy and a very small toy, certainly nothing big. In my entire lifetime as a child, none of the girls in our family received a doll. But we didn't mind, because everyone living around us was poor, and they didn't fare any better. We were delighted to receive a new jump rope, or marbles, or ball and jacks, or a wood puzzle, or new pencils and a new tablet.

L: The Christmas dinner, what traditional foods did you have on that special day?

F: I don't recall if we had turkey. But I know it had to be pretty special, because ordinarily we ate a macaroni product seven days a week. We had fowl, perhaps pheasant or chicken, and homemade sausage and fish, and extra special Italian cookies that took days to prepare. Some were stuffed with figs, or dates, or nuts. Some were twisted into the figure eight, fried, and sprinkled with sugar. To us, eating these cookies was sheer bliss. I forgot to mention that our Christmas tree was a very small spruce with a few ornaments. Nothing elaborate, but nevertheless a tree.

L: Who was invited to your home for Christmas dinner?

F: Usually, it was just the family. There were eight of us, and we lived in very cramped quarters. However, we did have a lot of in and out company; godparents and close friends would visit. And they would bring gifts of candy and cookies, or slip a coin into our hands. A special friend from Youngstown would bring chocolate candy--a big, 5 lb. box, and a big basket of fruit. And we had bags filled with bread and cookies for our guests to take back home with them. Of course, we did our share of Christmas visiting; many of our friends lived fairly close. The only relatives we had in America was one uncle and his family of eight who lived in Farrell, Pennsylvania, and we visited them during the holiday season.

L: What was the mood of the people like during the Depression? Did you know anyone that lost money when the banks closed?

F: I don't recall whether or not any of the local banks were affected as much as those located in the large urban areas. To begin with, most of the immigrants didn't have much money to bank. My father had a healthy distrust of banks, and I doubt that he would sock his entire savings in one. And he wanted no part of the stock market. But he did know the owner of the Gully Bank in Farrell, Pennsylvania, and that's why he entrusted his funds to that bank. By 1929 we had

moved to Brookfield, and in the early 1930's he had established a tavern. It was attached to our home. It is a sad commentary, but during times of high unemployment, people have a tendency to drink more, and the neighborhood bar was a place to share their problems and air their gripes. And business prospered. As children of immigrants, we weren't aware of a Depression. Our diet remained the same, clothes were purchased because of necessity, and we had no frills or luxuries. Brookfield was basically an agricultural community; we canned vegetables and fruits and made homemade bread. The people that were laid off from their jobs at local industries probably felt the effects of the Depression the most, especially if they had elderly parents to care for. But even though it was a Depression, my classmates and I were far from depressed. And I really don't recall any conversations that revealed a mood of desperation among the grown-ups. We were accustomed to poverty.

L: When your father had the store, if people didn't have the money did he have a credit system?

F: He was very leary of extending large amounts of credit, but we did have a few reliable accounts. But chances are, he bartered or traded rather than extend credit to some of his customers. This was not unusual for him in his entire business life; he always made sure he had a bird in one hand, so to speak. He never cheated anyone and was generous in making loans to those he trusted. Some loans were secured with jewelry.

L: Did you get an allowance at this time?

F: It was unheard of! We had to show a legitimate need for anything we wanted. We were taught not to make requests, so we just exercised patience and waited for his generosity to explode every now and then.

Being only twelve years old, I had no interest in politics--none of the children did. But I do recall my father's opinions during F.D.R.'s term of office. He was a registered Republican, and I can recall some heated discussions in the tavern. It wasn't that he was against the New Deal totally; he had learned to read, and he did not trust the politicians in Washington to handle money prudently. He was concerned that the system would be abused, that it would open the door to a welfare state, and that the taxpayers would be bled to death in the long run. And he was dead set against giving the government too many powers. He mentioned more than once that there were "too many foxes in the chicken coop". When you consider that most of his customers were devout Democrats, he had a lot of courage.

L: Did you have a radio at this time?

F: Yes.

L: Do you remember F.D.R.'s fireside chats?

F: No. My father kept the first radio in the tavern. I recall that when he bought one for the home, we had to be very quiet when the news came on. The grown-ups listened to the news, but the children ignored it and did their homework or other chores. My interest in politics and government came to life in the 1950's and still continues.

L: Do you remember any other personalities at this time, like in the entertainment field, that you could mention?

F: Every generation goes through a particular phase of music. It is almost an expression of the signs of times. We loved music and dancing. As a child, I followed the roaring 1920's with the Charleston, the Black Bottom and other dance steps. We had friends that visited from New York, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Chicago, and they would teach us all the latest steps. We were considered "naughty" by many prim Christians, but my parents enjoyed our enthusiasm for dancing. I recall my father putting me on the table when I was about six, and I would do the Charleston for friends from out-of-town that were gathered in our home, and they would reward me with coins. That's how Iearned my first pin money.

As a teenager, I was very involved in music and the Big Band era. In the late 1930's, my favorites were Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Glenn Miller, Tom Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Harry James, Woodie Herman, and Stan Kenton. My favorite tap dancers were Ruby Keeler and Eleanor Powell. I don't recall being too impressed with the vocalists of that era, since we were in the jitterbug mood and preferred instrumentals.

L: Did you hear this music on the radio?

F: Yes, but by that time we had records and a record player; nothing like the fantastic stereos of today, but at that time it kept us entertained.

L: Did your parents complain as parents do today about the music you were listening to?

F: No, because the volume was subdued, and we didn't have a noisy gang around. Because the tavern was attached to the home, the only thing I had to worry about was the approval of the customers. The sound of the music did travel throughout the house.

L: Did you have any musical instruments in your home?

F: Yes. My brother played the accordion, saxophone, clarinet, and banjo. When he was sixteen, he won a prize at the Columbia Theatre on a talent show. There were offers to appear elsewhere, but he wasn't permitted to leave town because of his age. I played the piano, and during the late 1930's we both performed on stage at my father's tavern--it was a four-piece band.

L: For the customers?

F: Yes. The band consisted of accordion, sax, rhythm piano and drums. One reason why my father couldn't complain if I listened to records was that we had to build up a repertoire of music. To musicians, records and sheet music were vital. At the time, we had quite a following, because it was quite a swinging place.

L: Did any of the big bands come around here?

F: Yankee Lake and Idora Park hired many big bands. Yankee Lake Ballroom opened in 1928. During the 1930's and early 1940's, they had dancing every night except Sunday. So they encorporated as a Village in 1934 in order to have dancing on Sundays. They had "Scotch" night where the admission was 15¢, and there was dancing on Sunday afternoons. All the big bands played there, and dancers from the entire Tri-state area were there. The young crowd was jitterbugging and into the boogie-woogie, but many just stood around the bandstand to listen to the music. I understand that Rudy Valley was there around 1930, but he was not our cup of tea. Glenn Miller was there around 1941. All of this diminished during World War II.

L: Do you remember any of the songs that were popular?

F: We played the standards, such as "Stardust", "Tea for Two", "Body and Soul", "Sentimental Journey", "All of Me", "Blues in the Night", "I'm Confessing", and many more. Those were the slow numbers. For the jitterbugs we played "One O'clock Jump", "In the Mood", and a variety of boogie numbers that were more like jam sessions. I might add that I think some of today's music is superb--very imaginative, very creative.

L: How did people help each other out at that time?

F: In the event of illness, chicken soup was exchanged, but mostly with words of comfort or concern. Other than childhood diseases, I do not recall much illness in our neighborhood in the 1920's. Many of us had perfect attendance records

at school. We spent most of our play time out-of-doors; the air and water was not as polluted as it is now. And we were seldom exposed to crowds of people.

L: Do you remember anyone losing their homes at this time?

F: Not in our circle of friends and acquaintances. But I do recall my father making small loans to some of his customers, and they would put up some collateral, jewelry or something of value. He was not a pawnbroker, but he would hold the item until such time as they could get back on their feet. Many people went to him for help.

To my knowledge, there were few jobs for girls, unless they helped their mothers with laundry or scrubbing for others. Boys delivered newspapers, delivered groceries, and worked as pin boys at bowling alleys, or were errand boys at newspaper offices. If they were sixteen or over, the local mills and other industries would hire them.

L: Do you remember any people going to the CCC camps?

F: Not that I knew personally, but I'm sure there were. Many local jobs were provided by the Works Projects Administration (WPA). This was in the late 1930's.

L: Do you remember what kind of things they did in this immediate area?

F: Many things. I believe the Radar Base and the Youngstown Municipal Airport were WPA projects. They also built libraries, installed sewers, and built additions to schools, such as industrial arts classrooms. They worked on Pine Hollow in Sharon, and much more in Trumbull and Mahoning County in Ohio, and also Mercer County in Pennsylvania.

L: Was your road paved at that time?

F: Yes, Lorain Street was paved. Some of the roads in Sharon were bricked. Actually, most of the main roads were paved and dirt roads existed basically in the very deep rural areas that had very little traffic.

L: Did you have street lights?

F: I am not certain about that--living so close to Sharon; I know that Sharon had street lights, and our utilities came from Sharon. But I'm going to assume that since the area was built up with industries in Masury, Ohio, that we did have street lights. You must remember that by the 1920's, the horse and buggy era was gone.

L: Did you go outside the valley very much at this time?

F: Not during the 1920's. But in the 1930's it was sheer joy to visit Youngstown, especially during the Christmas season, to see the shops and homes all decorated. Downtown Sharon was decorated too, and we walked that mile to see the shops.

L: Did your father have his own car then?

F: I recall a Model A Ford--later on he owned a Nash. By this time, the 1930's, quite a few cars were on the road. Even then, Americans were in love with their cars. Anyone that had access to a car in the late 1930's was very popular. I recall that on our Class Day in 1938, ten of us piled into a car for a trip to Idora Park. It was a large car, but on our return trip home we were stopped in Hubbard, I believe, by the police. But we were polite, and begged them not to tell our parents. They scolded us, but since it was Class Day we were forgiven. That was the day I accepted a challenge to see how long I could ride the Wildcat at Idora Park. They ran out of funds long before I ran out of breath!

L: Is there anything that you would like to add? For example, do you view these days that you grew up in as the "good old day"?

F: I believe the term "good old days" would be a matter of individual interpretation. There is no utopia for any generation. The disadvantages of my childhood were many: existing on a predictable diet that was far from balanced, living in cramped quarters in a poverty area where foul language, bigotry and prejudice were not uncommon (Not all immigrants were received with open arms by those who had settled here a century ago. The Italians were dubbed Dagos, Wops, or Mafia. The Jews were called Kikes, or were resented because they were the merchants who owned most of the businesses in Sharon. The Irish Catholics were labeled drunks, and Polish jokes abounded). This was not Walton's Mountain!

Because of the language barrier, and since many of the adults had never learned to read, answers to questions such as "Why is the sky blue?", or "Why is the grass green?" invariably brought the same stock answer: Because God made it so. None of us had a home library of reference books, or for that matter any books.

Another disadvantage was the lack of proper personal hygiene and sex education, which proved to be most embarrassing for females. Parents were particularly strict with females. I don't think they realized that sheltering us only made us

more vulnerable and gullible, hardly the background needed to make wise decisions in the real world. Education was encouraged for boys, but not for girls.

But there were advantages to be gained as a result of my childhood experiences. We learned to live within our means, to respect our elders even if we did not agree with them, to conserve our resources, to cope with problems without indulging in self-pity, and to enjoy the small pleasures of life. My "good old days" would include the friendship of my uncle who taught me to shoot pool, to handle a rifle, to pitch horse-shoes, and how to throw a ball. Financially, he was poor, but he was rich with humor and wisdom. He died a few years ago in Denver, Colorado at the age of 100.

My good memories would include the taste of luscious peaches, grapes, apples, and watermelon; many food items do not taste the same today. I miss the smell of wholesome, clean air, and the taste of good drinking water. My "good old days" were when most people followed a code of ethics, and there were few incidents of crime, when traffic was light, and when there were fewer people. And when Brookfield had fewer houses, but many trees and meadows; there were deer, rabbits, and pheasants galore. And there were humorous times, times when ingenuity was called for, especially when the word was passed that the "revenuers" were coming (the sale of illegal whiskey by many immigrants in order to feed large families was common). The teamwork was well coordinated, and the "revenuers" left with a feeling of total helplessness.

It is not my nature to dwell on the past, except to use it as a yardstick. Flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing times without giving up important principles is essential to my generation in order to be productive. Individuals that are victims of habit have the most to lose--where it is carved in stone that clothes must be washed on Mondays and ironed on Tuesday. To many, 1982 will be remembered as the "good old days". Chances are, their good memories will be linked to their childhood if they were lucky enough to have a loving, caring family unit. As for me, I will continue to read, and to learn, and to grow. There is no time like the present.

END OF INTERVIEW