

Dominick Regione interviewed on June 21, 2005 by Ronald Theriault in the kitchen of his home at 92 Main Street, White River Junction, Vermont.

RT: I'm Ronald Theriault and I'm interviewing Dominick "Minnie" Regione. This is an oral history interview for the Hartford Historical Society. It is June 21st, 2005, Tuesday. We are in the kitchen at the home of Mr. Regione at his apartment above Colodny's at 92 South Main Street.

Minnie, tell us about your family and your experiences of growing up in the White River Junction area. You know, where your family came from, and where, when they arrived in town and where you were born?

DR: I am Minnie and my folks came from Patalena (?), Italy, and I was born here in White River November 5th, 1910, and I went to school here, and I graduated from grammar school in 1927 and I went to Hartford High School and there I played basketball, football and baseball. In 1928 and '29 in basketball we won the State title, the first time it ever happened at Hartford High School and I can name you the, all the players and the coaches that were on that team that year.

We will start with the front row was Pete Lyford, Larry Falzarano, myself as captain of the team, and Bob Stone, Pat Blanchard. There's Coach Robert Hamley, and the other players were Zip Stone, Gerard McCarthy, William Leads, Roy Johnson, and the manager Zak Rector.

See in the early days they used to have these shows come in town and, and also in the early, early '30s and '40s was the Twin State Fair which was a big fair but after that they changed it to the Twin States Fair, but it was a nice couple of years at that fair, it used to rain every day, every day and so they finally did away

with it with the, with the shows and the racing and the, all the different play, play, play things they had like the ferris wheel and the merry-go-round and all those little things, you know, and this was a booming town.

RT: Where did they have the fair?

DR: Huh?

RT: Where was the fair?

DR: The fair was up in Mountain Avenue up where all the stores are, where all the offices are, and there is a bank up there, Gateway Motors, Mascoma Bank, Allstate Insurance Company, and there is quite a few other buildings I can't think of their name of, and of course when I, when I was in high school I quit my junior year, and in those days the money you made was scarce, I went to work in a railroad for forty-six cents an hour. After I worked there for almost ten years I quit there, went to work for Twin State Fruit for \$25.00, which was about \$7.00 more than I was getting when I was working on the railroad.

And this, this town in the early '20s, the '30s was a booming town. They were, had here oh, about twenty-five, thirty trains come out, go out of this town and passenger trains, freight trains, trains that go to Montreal, which was called the Montrealer. Then there was a train that used to go to Boston, another train used to go to New York, and there all sorts of freight trains that went out of here, and it was quite, quite a booming town back in those days. Today there's practically nothing here, all practically all the trains have gone, once in awhile the Amtrak comes through here, and once in awhile the freight train comes through, they blow the whistle, remind you of the old days.

What I remember school here, the teachers that I can remember was Mrs. Spaulding, in grammar school, and --

RT: Kienan, Kienan or Keanan?

DR: Then in high school I had Mrs. Young, Mrs. Oaks, Mrs. Osgood. I guess that's it, that's just what all I remember.

RT: Principal?

DR: Oh, my principal was Mr. Parker. I think that's all.

RT: What did you do about lunch?

DR: Well, we went to school at 9:00 and we used to come home for dinner and go back, and at 1:00 and we had school until three.

RT: Did you have to do chores at night?

DR: Oh, well, after school we used to do -- My, my folks also used to have a garden that after school during the summer season we had to be doing, plant the garden which I hated, but that provided us for the winter, different peppers, onions, potatoes, celery, cabbage and I hate to do this -- I hated to go after school water all the plants and for, for fuel during the winter, we would chop, chop up old railroad ties that my father used to get where he worked on a section during the fall of the year they would put in new ties, we, we'd take the old ties and bring them home, saw them, chop them, get them all ready for the winter. It was quite a, quite a tough love in those years, those years lot of work, but sometimes we still enjoyed it.

RT: What did you do for fun?

DR: In the meantime when we was kids, we would play ball and play outdoor basketball and outside we just had one year into another.

RT: How about the theaters?

DR: Oh, we used to sneak in the theaters during the first show. The people used to come out the side doors, us guys sneak in the side doors, see the second show. Once in awhile the, the ushers used to catch us and throw us out, but we had fun.

RT: What did it cost to go to the movie, do you remember?

DR: Twelve cents we used to go to the movies so it would cost us twelve cents. Then, then later it was a little, a little, little more expensive. I think it; they charged us around eighteen cents in the old theaters. Wow, it's quite a life.

RT: How about church, church?

DR: Well, I, I wasn't much of a churchgoer. We used to go to catechism once whenever I felt like it, but most of time I never did, but my folks were real Catholics. My kids and my wife was brought up as Catholics. At Christmastime we had Christmas at home.

In my days all our shopping and buying groceries and stuff and clothing was all in White River, and in this town they had let's see, one, two, two, three clothing stores. There was three drug stores in this small town, three drug stores plus there was Teddy's Grill, Mayfair Restaurant, and there used to be another restaurant on the railroad station and there was one, two, three, four poolrooms.

RT: Poolrooms?

DR: Yup. In this small town. Yeah and there was one bowling alley and early there was two bowling alleys, and the place where Teddy's Grill was at that time was the Adams House, and the, they had a bowling alley and poolroom in that place. You couldn't go in there unless you was twenty-one years old at that time and then they made a ruling if you got a written permission from your folks that you could go into the poolroom. That's the only way we could go in.

One time I was in there, of course I wasn't eighteen years old, my dad come in, took me by the arm and take, took me out of there. Of course the owner wanted to know what the reason was. Well, my father couldn't speak very much English, he says, "My son he's not eighteen yet." So out the door we went, and later they changed it. When we became eighteen years old they were, you used to be able to go in the poolrooms and outside of that there wasn't too much excitement for young, for young guys.

RT: Did you date?

DR: Yeah, well I wasn't very much of -- I wasn't very much of a dating man. I was only interested in playing sports. You know, I never -- When I was in high school I didn't pay too much for lady friends. That's one of the biggest mistakes I made. I neglected my studies which I should have taken before I was interested in my sports, but just like today there's a lot of things that I, I don't know definitions of some words because I didn't have that experience for only going to school for three, for three semesters and the only thing I wanted to do was play baseball, basketball, and football and forget all women.

RT: Who was your first date? What it your wife?

DR: Well, there was one, one girl I especially liked. Her name was Maria O'Neil, yeah, and she also used to kid me, and I was -- Every time she talked to me I get bashful as hell, and she always was the same, brown eyes why are you cruel (?) And there was, was other girls we spoke to but, there wasn't much dating until I was, until after, after I got out of high school, and I dated once in awhile. No, I wasn't much of a woman's man.

Then met my wife. I went with her, oh around a year or so and then we finally got married.

RT: Where was she from?

DR: She was from Lebanon, New Hampshire and during my course of my years I, I had three children, Louise, Nancy, and Mike, three lovely children.

RT: What is your wife's name?

DR: My wife's name was Madeline, and my kids was Louise, Nancy, and Mike. And I have, oh a whole bunch of grandchildren and great grandchildren and great, great, great grandchildren, a whole bunch of them and they are all lovely and wonderful. They are to me.

RT: What was it like bringing up children in the --

DR: Well, you taking my, my early marriage it was kind of tough. Groceries and clothing were cheap, but the salaries were cheap too, and you could buy a pair of shoes in those days from Endicott Johnson shoes for \$5.00 and shirts one or two dollars, but it actually bring, put it back in those days was pretty tough.

Anytime you wanted to go anywhere, like you wanted to go to the movies or anything like that the movies they'd cost you twelve cents and you had all you could do to get twelve cents.

RT: Did you have a car?

DR: No, I bought a car when I, when I worked on the railroad. I bought it off Pippins Garage, Gateway Motors. It was down -- was down, it was down by the underpass by the railroad bridge. Gateway Motors was down that area.

RT: By the fire station.

DR: By the old fire station, now Gateway Motors up, up on Mountain Avenue where the old fairgrounds used to be.

RT: What kind of car was it?

DR: Huh?

RT: What car, what kind of car?

DR: I had a Ford.

RT: A Ford?

DR: A Ford, Ford Coupe. Well, my first car that I bought, I bought, bought, bought privately for \$15.00.

RT: And it ran?

DR: Oh, yeah, it was --

RT: It ran?

DR: A guy, a guy that lived next to my folks, he passed away. He wasn't, he wasn't married but he had a lady friend who lived with him, and one day I asked her how much she wants for the car. She says \$15.00. At that time my sister

Philomina, she was working for laundry and I had to borrow the \$15.00 off of her and I still got my receipt from the lady that owned the car for \$15.00. I got it in here somewhere, and then from that day I got a Model A Ford. Then I bought a Rupert, and then I had a -- what the hell -- I forgot I had two, three others cars. I bought about twenty different cars off of Middle's(?) Garage, Rupert, a Cadillac, two Cadillacs, three, three or four Pontiacs, bought a Buick, well anyway I bought too many of them.

RT: You hit me as an old, you know a hometown boy. Where did you go with these cars?

DR: Well, we -- I used -- I had mostly Pontiacs in the later years. I, my wife and I used to go to travel around, used to go Scarborough, Maine, Foxboro, all the places where you could bet on horses and finally they had horse racing in Rutland which was much closer. They had racing up in Scarborough, Maine, up in Rochester, New Hampshire, Suffolk Downs, Rockingham. Visited all those places, yeah, make some, we lose some, lose mostly.

RT: I have to ask you, you said your basketball team won the State Championship. Did they get to travel when they, after that or try for the national title or anything?

DR: No, the only place we went to the town appropriated I think it was around \$1,100.00 so we could go to the national tournament, in Chicago.

RT: Did you play there?

DR: Yeah, we played, our first game was with Heath Kentucky and they beat us, but we didn't play good out there. The climate was different. It was -- We went

out there it was in April. It was much warmer out there. We left and here it was snowing, still snow on the ground. And then you lose your first game; you play what you call a consolation game. We played Wheatland, Wyoming, and they beat us.

RT: Oh.

DR: We played terrible out there. We could of gone quite a long ways if we could only -- At one time we did, one time when we played Heath, Kentucky they had us eight to nothing, I called time out, within, within a few minutes we went ahead of them ten to eight, and that was the only spurt that we had. For the rest of the time I don't know we didn't play as well as we did here. At home we, we won every one of our games at home. We won, and all we won nineteen out of twenty-two. But out there was different place where Al Capone was.

RT: You're not a tall man?

DR: No.

RT: How tall, about how tall were you back then?

DR: About five three.

RT: And you played basketball?

DR: Oh, yeah.

RT: Well, how about the rest of the players were there any tall men?

DR: Oh, yeah. You take Roy Johnson he was around six. Phil Lease was around six. Mike McCarthy was six two, and Zip Stone and Bob Stone and the rest of the boys they averaged around five seven, or five eight or nine. I was the only midget. In fact, I was only the small kid on the tournament. I was only five

three, and now I have shrunk down to five one. But during, during the Second World War I was married and had two children and it came to the time where I got a notice to go up to Woodstock for my physical. We get up there and it is Frank Fussie was there, and well anyway we went up there and they asked you, after you pass your physical I had to take a written test because I didn't graduate from high school, so I pass that. We had to wait our turn before we went to talk to the officers at different branches of services, the Army, the Navy, the Marines. So when it came to my turn up –

(The tape ended.)