

ABE MALOOLEY

Tape 1

July 30, 1981

Saratoga Cafe, 431 Wabash Avenue, Terre Haute, IN 47807

INTERVIEWER: Barbara Brugnaux

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BB: The date is July 30, 1981. The interviewer is Barbara Brugnaux. The interviewee is Abe Malooley. The site of the interview is the Saratoga Cafe, /Fifth Street and/ Wabash Avenue /downtown Terre Haute, Indiana/.

Shall we start out talking a little bit about your family and where you were born?

MALOOLEY: Yes. We can begin. /I was/ born at 439 North 4th Street in a big two-story house, and since /then/ we have sold it to Indiana State University. They have taken the abstract and investigated and found out that also prior to my dad buying that house, Eugene Debs was born right there. And there is a monument down there now in the same location where our house was. I thought I ought to put that in there because they did build a monument, and I thought it's nice to know. Although he /Debs/ lived . . . was raised in the other house and they've used that for a museum, but this is where he was born.

Of course, I was born in 1917 and my father had a grocery store. It was a large, old-fashioned grocery store /on the northeast corner of/ 3rd and Chestnut where Indiana State /now/ has a track field. And in those days, the /merchandise/ was all bulk and yard goods. And the yard goods /was measured by arms length/. I watched him measure (I was a kid) with their arm stretched out, holding the yards and holding the goods. And everybody sewed then. They would buy their yard goods and people made everything in those days. And they bought groceries. Everything was in bulk. I can remember when the first cans came out and the first

MALOOLEY: breakfast cereals came out /and/ candy bars. Prior to that /everything came loose in boxes/. And the Christmas candies were all in wooden barrels and good candy, and everybody would sneak a bite or two because it was all bulk. And I remember the policemen walking the beat. They walked the beat, and, of course, when they walked by the store, they always got an apple or orange or a bottle of pop. They walked up and down and everybody was friendly with them.

Actually, in those days nobody closed their doors. Nobody locked them. Doors were always open day and night. Nobody closed their doors at homes. And you didn't have problems because everybody was in the same situation. There were plenty of ethnic people on 4th Street and 3rd Street and 5th -- Hungarians, Romanians, Lithuanians. There were a few colored people. There were Jewish people, and it was pretty much of an ethnic area and small grocery stores in every block, some of them two in a block. And at 4th and Eagle there were three grocery stores on three different corners. And nobody /had to buy for a week supply/. You could run across the street or go to the store and get what you needed for that morning.

And, of course, the milkman delivered milk to the house. You put your empty bottle out there with the change in it. Nobody took it. And he'd leave a bottle of milk.

BB: How much was a bottle of milk in those days? Do you have any idea?

MALOOLEY: Eight cents, I believe it was, a quart. And that's when it was real milk, had cream on the top. And in the wintertime that cream would freeze and push the paper cap about two inches or an inch-and-a-half on top of the bottle. And, of course, the first one up and got the bottle, that was just like

MALOOLEY: ice cream. They got that, boy, right now! And it was /like that/ until they started homogenizing the milk as years went by. You don't have cream on the top any more. You could see the cream that high /one inch or more, depending on the temperature/. And it was all in milk bottles.

In 1927 my father passed away and we had to close the store. Now, prior . . . he came here in the 1900s -- early 1900s -- and opened the store and was quite a merchant and was well respected in his business dealings. He was one of the first of our people, the Syrian people /in Terre Haute/. He came from a little village in Syria. Our name Malooley is derived from the village he came from which is the village of Maloola. And that is the only place in the world today /that speaks Aramaic/. Newsweek had a big article three years ago /saying/ that the village of Maloola is the only village in the world where the people still speak the Aramaic language of Christ.

BB: Oh!

MALOOLEY: It was in Newsweek. So, this is where they /the Malooley's/ came from. And my mother came from a little village right nearby /called Ein El Shara/, and, of course, she had a brother here. Now, a lot of them /our people/ started in Fort Wayne and then came to Terre Haute.

And in March, 1907, of course, they got married and . . . I have the license today. Now, when he died in '27, he was buried at St. Joseph Catholic church and at the Catholic Calvary Cemetery. And our people were Christians and they were of the Orthodox -- Eastern Orthodox Catholic -- religion. He had such a large funeral And I remember -- I was a kid -- it was very big, very long; and they decided we need a church. So that same very year, in July, they bought the old Voorhees

MALOOLEY: school building on North 5th Street and converted it into a church. That's how they started their church; and today it's down at 1900 South 4th, a new church, new building, new hall, new parish house. And that is the beginning of the Orthodox Catholic church in Terre Haute.

BB: Has it always been called St. George's?

MALOOLEY: St. George Orthodox church. Orthodox Catholic. The Orthodox and the Roman Catholic -- the East and the West they're called -- were one. And, of course, they split about one thousand years ago. The Roman was the West; Orthodox was the East. Of course, Rome progressed largely because it was the seat of the Roman government and had the money. The Orthodox stagnated for many years. But now there is quite a few . . . there's about 105 Orthodox churches throughout the country. It's the old apostolic succession. It has not been changed. Their liturgy is the same as it was many years ago under the apostles. And, of course, you've heard of ecumenism; they're trying to get together and I wish they would.

Now, in 1927 . . . is the year I remember very greatly; and I remember a few years back, 1925, what the area looked like. There were blacksmith shops; there was one behind our store. There were horse troughs on each corner where people would bring their horses and water their horses. Everybody had a carriage and a horse, and we had a horse barn and a hayloft where we kept horses on 4th Street.

And the reason '27 rings in my ear, I started selling newspapers. After my dad died and we lost the store, we all went to work. And I sold newspapers for the Terre Haute Post which was on 4th Street. That year was when Lindbergh flew the ocean, very memorable. We also had the first talking picture. And another man died that was very

MALOOLEY: eventful was Rudolph Valentino. The women cried. There was a big extra on the streets, you know. He was the idol and women did cry when he died which makes '27 stand out in my mind because I sold "ex-trees" /newspaper special editions/.

Our people lived mainly on 4th Street. It was like, I would say there must have been twenty families. Of course, see they were all sort of related and Like this one fellow, Charles Maloof, when he came to Terre Haute from the old country, he had around his neck a tag saying, Terre Haute, Indiana. Charles Malooley was his cousin. So, of course, you know as you go through immigration and everything else, they keep /pushing them on/. He arrived here fine. And, of course, he also went into business.

My dad would help everyone that came, taught them. He was a self-taught man, my father. He read a lot -- astrology and things like that. I've still got some of his books. And he would teach each one some of the language, how to make their change, and he would help start some of them as the old people that carried suitcases and sold dry goods, linens, tablecloths, and things out in the country. They would travel around in horse and buggy and sell. And then they would come back and pay him for the goods they sold. So, he helped start a lot of them that way. And then they finally got into business which most of them did get into the grocery business.

At one time they must have had over 60 or 70 Syrian grocery stores in Terre Haute. And this much I do know that the small grocery store during the Depression, when the Depression came, helped more people with credit than is given . . . the store is given credit for. They carried people on books /credit/ and they did /a lot of/ this.

And I remember how the coal miners would come

MALOOLEY: across /the bridge/. They walked across the big Wabash /Norms Railroad/ bridge on Saturday night with their paychecks. Their lanterns were lit and it was dark 'cause they worked long hours and it was always dark when they got home. And all the wives were out there in front, just like the old movies, waiting for each guy to drop off and go in with his check. And they'd get it cashed, go to the store, and buy groceries. And this is the way it was. And I remember it plain as day 'cause it was . . . everybody was waiting on the coal miners. It was a coal mining town.

None of our people were in the coal mining business. They all went into sales or grocery stores. Since then a lot of them have closed because the children didn't take over. They went to school; they wanted other work. There are a few left, not too many. This was the progress of our people and they had found a place and they loved Terre Haute and they worked here and built it up as much as they could. They contributed to the growth of Terre Haute.

BB: Where did your people go to church before they built . . . before they took the Voorhees school and made it into a church? Did they have . . .

MALOOLEY: Yes. Some of them went to the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Catholic.

BB: I see. They didn't . . .

MALOOLEY: Not all of them . . .

BB: . . . try to have any kind of a . . .

MALOOLEY: No.

BB: . . . any other . . .

MALOOLEY: No. After they started their own church, yes, they went to work and donated and made a church of their own. Now, a lot of them stayed with the Roman Catholic, very few. And a few of them stayed with St. Stephen's which . . . and this kind of . . . they just stayed with them 'cause they didn't feel like changing. But the bulk of them did start the church. They had their board of trustees and they would have affairs, and they /cooked dinners/. People in this town liked the Syrian food and they would have big Syrian dinners around election time, called election dinner. The women would work for a week preparing all the food. And then the church hall was just crowded, and they would make money that way selling their food which they do once in a while now, down at this other church. People like this ethnic food. And I know that we had it a couple of times here called "Arabian Nights" and we sold out each night. We had a belly dancer, and in fact, WTHI spent five minutes on that night's news showing all about the belly dancer.

Was that you?

BB: (laughs) No.

MALOOLEY: No, that was (pause) Ingram, Sally Ingram.

BB: Oh, Sally Ingram.

MALOOLEY: Yes, she did. Was down here taking pictures and showed the bellybutton (laughs) and everything, dancing. So, they like the food and that helped progress our people in town.

BB: Talking about making money, how about some of the other ways that you made money when you were a boy, that you earned money?

MALOOLEY: Well, besides selling newspapers, we were the forerunners of the Good Humor man. We had a gang of fellows -- there was a mixture of us -- and

MALOOLEY: somehow we got the idea that we would sell ice cream bars. It was hot and there was certain shops that people worked in that had no way of getting anything to eat during breakfast, dinner, lunch. So we got these pots that you cook on a stove with a handle on them. And we got the Dauntless coffee can which was a tall can, and we went to the . . . Terre Haute Pure Milk is what it was called. It became Borden's Ice Cream later. We would go down there and buy a dozen bars of Eskimo pies. We'd put 'em in the coffee can; then they would furnish us ice around the can in this. And we would carry it around to these shops and sell 'em for a nickel. They cost us 40 cents a dozen. We'd sell 'em for a nickel which brought 60 cents and we made 20 cents profit. And, of course, there must have been six of us that started; and before the summer was over, there was 20. And we covered the town.

And the newspaper . . . where the newsboys congregated to get their papers to deliver, we could take five dozen. We got wagons later on -- we got money to buy wagons -- and carry them and go stand by the newspaper office, and they would sell 'em all. They'd buy 'em all up. You could make a dollar in about three hours.

Then, of course, in the wintertime we got the idea of selling candy bars to these same places. Each guy had a route. Now, on 3rd Street since I was . . . my dad had been on 3rd Street and I knew these people 'cause I used to play around there when my dad had his store -- like Kester Electric. And there was the Temple Laundry, Union Laundry, Kivits Produce House, and a few others. We'd get candy bars over at Biel's cigar store which was right across the street 5th & Wabash, north side of street where there is an oriental shop now. It was near the old Fountain Theatre, one of the last old movie houses to go. And he would sell us

MALOOLEY: candy bars for 40 cents a dozen. We'd sell 'em for a nickel and make 20 cents. And in the winter-time right after school we'd go over there and get our candy bars and go around and sell them.

Also when the first snow would hit the ground, on a Saturday we had our shovels out; and we'd go out and shovel snow, 50 cents and do a job like nobody ever saw. I mean the front, the back, the sidewalk, all the way to the alley. Then we'd get 50 cents, which was a lot of money.

Also, we'd caddy at the golf course /at the Terre Haute Country Club/. Caddying, we all got in line and each guy would get picked -- unless a guy wanted a special one -- and you got 50 cents for nine holes. You carried the bags and you got a dollar for 18. And, of course, when the tournament was on, you made five dollars then because that guy, if he wins, you got five dollars.

These were the ways . . . and, of course, there was a place besides /the/ Hulman /Company on Wabash Avenue/ called Bauermeister's. They had the Jane Justice label on their cans. And for every 10 labels you would get a penny; and if you got the big restaurant size can, it was worth a nickel. So, we'd go through the alleys of restaurants and find those Jane Justice labels and tear them off and take them down, and we'd get enough to go to a show. The show was only a nickel.

And as far as eating . . . this other fellow that sold newspapers with me, when we made a nickel, we would go over to Guy Jackson's meat market, which was at 4th and Cherry /the northeast corner/, and buy 3 cents' worth of braunschweiger and 2 cents' worth of bulk crackers. And we'd have a meal /as we/ sat on the curb (there wasn't any cars) and had enough /to eat and/ feed the dog /that was always around/.

MALOOLEY: Now, when the cars came in -- they came gradually prior to '27, of course -- you were lucky to see one car in a block. And, of course, they got more and more plentiful. But we used to have the wagons when they delivered the bread in wagons. The ice was delivered in wagons. I was talking to somebody the other day and they remembered how when the ice man came up to the area, he had to chop the ice -- 10 cents for 50 lbs. When he would carry it, we would jump up in the back of the wagon and get those chips of ice and get out before he got back 'cause it was cool and there wasn't too much else that a guy could do. We made our own games. We played sidewalk ping-pong, played horseshoes, niggety-naggety -- which is like hide-and-seek -- different games. We made our own fun.

Then, finally, when they built the swimming pool down on South 1st Street, in the summertime we'd make enough money, we'd go swimming. Before that, I learned to swim in the Wabash River. We'd all go down to the Wabash River /at the 8th Avenue beach and one near the old railroad bridge/ and swim -- a bunch of kids.

BB: Didn't you tell me about sledding on the Wabash?

MALOOLEY: About what?

BB: Sledding on the Wabash.

MALOOLEY: Sledding, yes. In those days /in the winter months/ the river would freeze up so solid. Of course, the banks were sloped and they became very icy. We could go and get our sleds and start down that bank, and you could go almost all the way across the river on one slide. And it was, of course, /tested first/. They always /tested for cracks/. They wouldn't /let you slide/ . . . everybody tested the ice before anybody let the