

Mr. Mark Succarotte, Madison Jr. High School Teacher.
Transcript of interview for the Madison Historical Society Oral History Project.
Interviewed by Ariana Warren, Madison High School Social Studies Student
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Ariana Warren [AW]: [Recording starts] Today we're here in Madison Senior High. We're doing an oral history project for Mr. Rice's seventh hour class. I'm Ariana, and we have:

Mark Succarotte [MS]: Mark Succarotte.

AW: So, I'm just gonna start you off with a question. Did you grow up in Madison?

MS: I did. We moved here from New York, in seventh grade.

AW: So, was that a big change for you?

MS: Absolutely. Because I had no idea where I was and why we're here. My dad was a priest on Fifth Street, the church with the gold dome. So that's why we moved here.

AW: Did you also attend the church?

MS: I did. And I went to middle school here. So, I was literally a student here, and now I'm a teacher at the middle school, which is kind of cool and unique.

AW: So, what was it like making friends and trying to fit in?

MS: Very weird and very awkward. Because coming from New York, I had an accent, I looked a little bit different than everybody else. I didn't know anybody. So, it took a while. But then once I did, sports was a big thing. That got a lot of friends for me. And then I have a big mouth. So that was...

AW: What sports did you play?

MS: Everything. Baseball, track. I didn't do football. Because I played football in the ----long story----with every sport. Baseball. We even had a soccer team back in the day, believe it or not.

AW: Speaking of "back in the day".

MS: Yes, ma'am?

AW: So what classes did they have at Madison back then that they don't have today?

MS: Oh, we had a shop class, which we do in the high school. We had it for junior high. We had a home economics class, I took that. My class was the first class to take that class, because you got to cook the food and then got to eat the food. And I'm an eating kind of person. So that was cool. Well, we had a career class where we talked about like things we wanted to do in the future and guide us towards that. It was pretty cool, actually. There were a lot more kids in the school district too. There were more teachers in the school district. And Madison looked completely different too. We had restaurants, we had businesses, so it was really easy to get a job in Madison for those kinds of things.

AW: Okay, as far as the community, what role did you select to play in it?

MS: And hang on one second, I have to pause...

AW: As far as the community? How would you describe the community in Madison? What role do you think you played?

MS: Um, as far as describing the community? What do you mean? What do you need? Like?

AW: Was it defined where everybody was together?

MS: Oh, okay. Yeah, it was population wise, it was more mixed. It was like 50-50, where you had 50%, African American 50%. Caucasian. The community was together, like I played with everybody. And like, we get home from school, and then we played 'til dark, and it was like, whatever the sport was going on, at the time we played, it didn't matter who you were, what color you were, what race you were, what everything-- everybody got along.

AW: So, how did your world change over time, because you are now a teacher here at Madison?

MS: Well, I had two really good teachers that guided me, because when I was in school, there was no way I was going to be a teacher. I had no desire at all. And so, I had two really good teachers that really focused me and probably saved me, because I had a lot smarter people than me that were not so successful. So I thought, that's something that I want to do, because they made a difference in my life. So that's my plan, it is always to kind of re-guide, be a role model and try to stress that you can do whatever you want to do as long as you work hard for it.

AW: Would you say then that Madison is a safe place?

MS: That's a good question. I don't know about that one. Not as it used to be. Not as it used to be. Unfortunately, the other thing is, is the negative, not to sound bad, is that, you know, you have to leave Madison to have a career. You can always come back, you know, but you have to leave because there's not that opportunity anymore. So, like a lot of the kids that I taught, come back and tell me later after their college degrees or when they're in college, "I'm glad I got out to see the world first."

AW: Did you face any hardships growing up in Madison?

MS: Not really, I mean, not, not that I can think of off the top of my head. Like I said, when we played sports and hung out and did stuff and there was a lot more things, Nowadays, I can't imagine. You know, it's a lot different. It's not as safe. I don't think. Today, there's too many silly outside things that take our attention away from our students.

AW: What about high school? Can you tell me about high school, we spoke about middle school.

MS: High school was kind of the same thing where we had the same kind of population. I was in the same group all the way through from middle school to high school. I was in the accelerated group. So, it was the same group of friends and a lot of those same people I still talk to all these years later. So that's how tight we were as a group. We had some really good high school teachers too.

AW: So, for visitors coming to Madison, what places would you recommend them to go?

MS: Uhm...I don't know.

AW: Where did you and your friends go?

MS: Friend's houses, there was Dairy Queen. It was, I mean all kinds of stores, it was restaurants. It was chicken restaurants, Italian restaurants, there was Glicks, they had clothing stores, we had a sports store back in the day, a record store, all that was in Madison. So, you could do all kinds of things back in the day. We had a lot of school dances, and after-school activities. Man. High school is--- that was the thing, but everybody in high school had jobs too. So, after school, a lot of times people had to do their job like Hardee's, which is you know, your bootleg McDonald's. And so, a lot of people work there too. So that was kind of that.

AW: Was it hard to do a first job?

MS: No, it was not. What was my first job? My first job was, I think, at Voloskies Chicken. I worked at the chicken store.

AW: Was it by here?

MS: Yeah. Yeah, it was on Madison Avenue. And the cool thing was, I got to eat all chicken. Yeahhhhhhh, man!

AW: So, I see that you were playing the guitar in the black history program.

MS: Yes, ma'am.

AW: Did you learn how to play the guitar here?

MS: Yes. Yeah, not at school. But I mean, I played all the way through school. So, I was self- taught.

AW: Was there band here?

MS: But there was oh, yeah, there was band, it was band. There was art, we had, I mean, like I said, we had a lot more opportunities, I think. And I think things are starting to come back. But we missed a lot of stuff like our guys here at the junior high don't have an art class so that they miss out a lot of those kinds of things. Mr. Long is really pushing stuff forward, which is awesome.

AW: What changed about Madison that just is not great. It's not the same today?

MS: Well, the negative crime is more prevalent, you also have a lot of the businesses that were here left, so you don't have your taxes. And when you don't have taxes, you don't have things. You know, and when you lose taxes, and you lose things, you lose people, so people move out. So as I said before, you know, the population was bigger. My class, you know, I had a class of maybe 25, 26 kids where now you know, we have a class of 12, you know, you're losing half of your population. So that changes. Unfortunately, in businesses, without businesses being here, people don't have jobs. So, they have to go outside. But where are we at?

AW: So, with your role in this community, what would you change if you could make an impact?

MS: But hopefully, I'll make an impact on people just to give them a sense of pride and a sense of I can do and be anything I want to do. But I would definitely say giving kids more things to do. More things to look up to, you know, that's the big thing, because unfortunately, we have a lot of crime. And when people see that, they think that's successful, because of the flashy stuff that people show and do. You know, the other thing that I think we have to do is you have to earn the things that you get, you know. We're used to things being given right away, you know, versus working towards it and having a goal and then getting there and then you feel that self-accomplishment. Does that make sense?

AW: Uhm hum. So, earn the things you get. Was there anybody, your parents or in your younger days, they kind of engraved their mindset onto you?

MS: Oh, definitely teachers, for sure. There was a guy named Mr. Harrison, who was a history teacher in my high school. That's what he talked about. And he always gave us stories and things about how he struggled and how he overcame things. So, I think that's what I tried to do in my classes is give life stories, along with the information and tie it to their lives, my students lives, so that they can see it does include them and how they can use the things and look from different points of view.

AW: Educational wise, what can you educate us on that?

MS: That a lot of great people have come here, and there's a lot of great people still here. As long as we keep working together, there's gonna be a lot of greatness coming from Madison. We can turn it around as part of the process.

AW: Is there anyone in particular that you'd like to name?

MS: As far as what?

AW: As far as great people and talented people?

MS: Oh, all the people that work here at our school. I mean, they're dedicated. When people, students leave here and go to other schools, you know, they come back and always say, "It's not like here," and you don't realize it when you're here until later when you realize what you don't have kind of thing. You know, and that happens a lot. Our principal gives a lot 100%, Miss Flennoy. You know, those kinds of things. It's superduper important. Marshall was a student here. I went to school with him. You know, the same thing. Those people that dedicate, Josh Webster that's here all the time for everything to make people safe. I mean, you go right down the line. You know, Giovanni, who was one of my students who now is our head custodial guy. He's here all the time doing everything he can do. So I mean, all of those people, to me are heroes, anybody that you know, works and gives their heart for everything. That's 100%. Mr. Gardner, you know, a student here in Madison, same kind of thing. You know, Oh, he's 100% Madison.

AW: How long have you been working at Madison?

MS: 31 years. I know, I don't even look like that. Look, again, look look hard to believe. So you thought I was 22, and she didn't say that. But for the record

AW: Closing out this interview, would you recommend this school and community or Madison as a whole to anyone that is looking for somewhere to move?

MS: Yes, definitely. Because as I said earlier, it's what you put into it. It's what you do. There's a lot of great people here that are here. There's a lot of great teachers that are here. There's a lot of great students, I'd take our students over any place. Because with all the distractions and things that are going on in the community and things, distractions that keep people away from being successful, they still find a way to do it. This class here, Six-One is a top class, I have everybody but one person on honor roll in this classroom. So, if you could stay focused with that, or our high school kids, they get full ride scholarships to places with everything else going on around them. I'd take that over anything; that's heart. Heart always wins.

AW: Okay, thank you.

MS: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. I appreciate you.