

Nikko Montante Interview of Phil Fedele**March 2019**

Nikko: So first could you just state your name.

Phil: Phil Fedele

Nikko: And where and when you attended college.

Phil: I attended Brockport. I think probably I don't know, maybe 58 through 61 I did it in 3 years, went to summer school so I graduated in 3 years graduated in 62. And graduated I don't you know probably in June or whatever I never came to ceremonies and I got married like a few months later.

Nikko: OK then 1st what's the main reason you'd say you decided to go to college?

Phil: Oh boy none of my friends from high school went to college at this time none of them. Maybe one you know who was a bright guy, the guys I hung around with I was a jock so many of them did not most of them did not go to college. I don't know I mean I just. I honestly don't know what I I was obviously had the brains and the inclination so I don't think there was a. Wasn't any enlightenment when I went. I was in the service prior to that in the Federal Reserves and I took correspondence courses in the army so I think that you know there was always an inclination to learn.

Nikko: Other than that would you say that your parents motivated you or anything like that?

Phil: I don't think so, my father was a civil servant at the U.S. Post Office and he had me take the civil service test. And he also had me... Introduced us me and then my friends to the Army Reserve System. Somebody in the post office who worked with him was in the in the Army Reserves and so anyway and I took the test and I passed. When I got out of active duty I worked

in the post office for 2 years and that's why I didn't come to Brockport and didn't go to college so I worked for 2 years and then, you know you know became a full time student.

Nikko: So would you say that back in the

Phil: Let me just back up. I think my father his he you know he was part of the greatest generation you know went through the depression he went he was in the service in World War Two And I think his main concern probably was security know what I mean because I think that that's and you just wanted to lay a path out for me and he would have been happy I think with you know a civil service job, he was happy with the civil service job he assumed that I would at least be OK with the civil service. So.

Nikko: So would you say that college was a necessity for you?

Phil: Probably yeah I mean just for me personally intrinsically in that not for a career.

Nikko: For other people would you say it was just a vital part of life in the fifty's and sixty's for people to go to college?

Phil: Not in and that's probably true for professional people. But in my situation. I had a lot I had we were from a very big family and only one other of my 1st cousins preceded me to college and that also was Brockport. And then in my generation of 1st cousins altogether I'm thinking only maybe only 3 of us went to college and finished. Some started and did not finish but I think only 3 of us finished college so even though I thought it's important you know apparently you know all the values of the family I think were more, more focused on security rather than professionalism.

Nikko: So would you say that it was possible for other families to make ends meet without having to go to college like they can get a good enough job, high enough pay?

Phil: You know in those days yes absolutely you know I mean. There were lots of work in the fifty's and sixty's I mean lots of work and so people and wages were, were enough so that just usually almost always the male worked and brought enough home to satisfy the family you know economic conditions.

Nikko: So for you what would you say that your college experience was like here Brockport good, bad?

Phil: Formerly or currently?

Nikko: Formerly.

Phil: You know it was positive it was good it was very good that I, no it was good but I was a commuter, so I didn't spend enough time on campus. You know the only times you know to visit the library or go to any of the arts endeavors. I only went to the library when I had an assignment you know. But you know if I lived on campus I think I would have gotten more into it.

Nikko: So what were the classes like back then, the length of the number of students, how hard they were?

Phil: Oh, gee. I would guess the classroom sizes for the most part were 20 you know 25 to 35 people I'm trying to picture the rows in the size of the class and all the class rooms were in what is now just the administrative building there were no other classrooms it was everything was contained in and I'm not sure what it's called now but uh the administrative building. And that had everything there, the gym so it wasn't it wasn't a big challenge at the time. And that also was the time when Rochester and it was forming a public television station they called it RAETA in the Rochester Area Educational T.V. something like that and so were there were some classes that were broadcasted locally, you know to various classrooms and so you know you may have a lot in that particular class but I'm not sure if I paid attention to the T.V. You know what I mean? A lot of those were science classes which did not excite me.

Nikko: What would you say that difficulty was like of some of the classes?

Phil: Those that I enjoyed they were not difficult, I mean English classes, literature classes, I enjoyed education classes I didn't like, you know this was the closest and cheapest school to go to for me and so I did come here but I didn't really care for the education classes. And I wasn't excited about the science classes so. I forgot your question

Nikko: the difficulty...

Phil: Oh well again some were easy, it's a truism but those that I enjoyed and liked I delved into those of the others I passed I mean I did make the honor roll a couple of times and then I didn't care anymore you know. I just proved to myself I mean the honor roll and then I just got by after that.

Nikko: So back in the late fifties were there specific requirements by New York State for you to pick classes to take or were you allowed to choose all of your classes

Phil: Oh I thought I was allowed to choose all if the classes except for the education oriented classes because this is what Brockport taught you either came out of here as a phys. ed teacher or an elementary school teacher. So I'm sure they had requirements and yeah I'm sure they that was dictated by the Education Department or somebody.

Nikko: What are some struggles that you faced during college?

Phil: In the formerly? You're talking about? Well I'm not sure if I all that I'm not sure if I faced struggles. Again, I commuted. So I wasn't here a lot. And I worked I also worked a part time job in Rochester so I had been home for some of that and you know I was a young man so I had social endeavors. And I'm you know I was a jock so we played a lot of ball but at the same time you know on the weekends we went out and drank like everybody else.

Nikko: So what were some issues that you faced with being a commuter?

Phil: I think the biggest issue was that I was not participating in college life and I don't mean just the drinking or the fraternities if they even had them then and again you know I came to these conclusions later. That you know I should have if I was here I would have got more involved in the cultural activities and I did you know I didn't I didn't I just didn't. There was a lot going on at home you know in Rochester in terms of normal the guys you know doing their normal thing

Nikko: So other than what you just said was tuition ever really an issue for you?

Phil: No. I'm not sure what the tuition was but it was pretty reasonable, no it was very reasonable I don't know what it was but it was reasonable. And no that wasn't ever an issue as matter of fact that didn't take out a loan you may call it you know a defense loan. Whereas you know I think they wanted to encourage people to teach to teach in the cities or special programs and I think I borrowed \$600.00 and I bought Xerox stock. So you know I thought I didn't need the money to live on that I lived at home with my parents. I don't think I payed them any room and board but. But I you know I lived at home and so money wasn't an issue.

Nikko: From what you know would you say that financial aid was easily accessible for all people?

Phil: Yeah here? I think it was yes because again they had a special loan and they'd come up every once while and they'd tie it to the defense budget somehow. I mean it had nothing to do with defense, but in those days you know Congress wheeled and dealt to get included various bills in and you know whether they were related to the title of the bill or not so no money wasn't and again, I think here for everybody I don't think I don't know I mean I don't know anybody else but money was not an issue. There was kids took off and went on their spring vacations, and not everybody but some of them.

Nikko: So from your time in college in the past what is one thing that it has just stuck with you like a good experience from college?

Phil: I think it did give me the appreciation for and of learning and education you know and just learning more and I want to back up one more time just a little bit. I have a granddaughter now who's at Geneseo and we and she could have commuted but we encouraged her, myself and her mother who is a college graduate also encouraged her to stay on campus and take part of the campus activities and she did so she's still there you know and that's in that what I did not do but we encouraged her to do it because I thought it was very important to get involved in college life. I'm sorry, your last question was...

Nikko: Just a good experience that you remembered.

Phil: Oh boy, an experience that I remember it was affiliated or you know with Brockport but actually in Brockport, no. But one of the things I did while I was ever Brockport I met a, you meet different people obviously and I met this kid from New York City. And he and I and a black student this is like 1960-ish. Drove down through the south this is just you know prior to the Freedom Riders and all of that and we had a black kid with us who you know he we took him to Sanford, Florida up we want to Fort Lauderdale that was a big place at the time from Fort Lauderdale, we went to Miami he had friends or relatives in Miami he was Jewish and then from Miami we drove down Key West and went over to Cuba we were in Cuba in 1961 with Fidel Castro and you know that's something I'll never forget that was you know related to Brockport but it wasn't part of Brockport.

Nikko: So going back to you said how would you say that Brockport at least treated students of different race.

Phil: Oh I didn't see any. Anything different I mean as matter of fact though I got it I got it I'm not sure if I had any classes with minorities I can't the kid that we took you know drove through the south with I didn't have him in any class I didn't meet him until he must've been friends with the kid from New York, or the kid from New York posted something on the bulletin board saying I'm going to Florida and what he wanted, I don't know but I didn't know him and I don't remember I honestly I don't remember any minorities and in those days, minorities were strictly

black, I don't remember any black kids in any of my classes so I don't know about the racial relationships between teachers and black kids because I didn't experience that.

Nikko: Would you happen to know if it was difficult for different people of different ethnic groups to get into college?

Phil: I am not sure if it was difficult to get into college I just know that different ethnic groups were in different places you know sort of on the social scale. You know we were Italian-American and I don't think any colleges would've held me back- I have no idea- because of that but I think again. Most of my friends and that's who I can relate to their you know on the they all lived in the Italian ghetto and and you know on their values were get a job and very few of them went to college some did after, in fact I was sort of the standard bearer people asked me who went on for bigger and better things than I did in college, you know how hard was it to do you know to go to college because you know they were also then would have been the 1st from their family you know and I said you know you do your work and you can do it it's not bad it's not hard, just do your work. And you can you can you can pass.

Nikko: So would you say back to the said about the Italian families looking for jobs instead of going to college would you say that family values sort of dictated if a person went to college or not.

Phil: I'm not sure if I use that strong a term dictated but I think it just was at that time that was sort of the normal thing to do what was expected of you to do. Because again there were lots of jobs and. You know everyone wants to make money. So they you know I think that the easiest thing was to get a job and work and a lot of my friends also a lot of them, the males, they wound up in civil service type jobs, a half a dozen of my high school friends were policeman and the other half a dozen were firemen so they know, they took that route that my father sort up saw me going into their parents had the same ideas. Get a nice secure government job you know you won't make a ton of money but you're secure.

Nikko: OK so let's switch it up a little bit and talk about high school you know would you say that your teachers in high school assumed that their students would go to college after?

Phil: I went to Madison High School which does not exist now Madison High School was. About 25 percent black the rest were all white there were. No again no Asians, no Puerto Ricans and my opinion about the teachers at Madison High School was they would have they were happy and they even directed their thinking to the white kids getting civil service jobs the black kids getting other jobs, nobody going to college, a very few going to college. And that happened to be true, very few did go to college in my you know in my say 50 from 53-57, and I think the teachers did. That was their goal that was their aim and I spoke to a teacher who I got friendly with after and he's still alive. And we meet you know every once in a while that we still get together not anymore and I told him the same thing that the teachers at Madison, black kids that just wanted to work any place, the white kids, get a civil service job and that's their goal and he said that was true they never gave us another credit, anybody black kids or white kids never gave except a very few very bright students who demonstrated their brightness, they didn't give us the they didn't do us justice and I you know I told this to a former teacher who I never had but we became friends after and he agreed with me completely that they failed the Madison high school teachers failed their students. And I still agree with that assessment.

Nikko: So would you say that high school didn't prepare you for college?

Phil: True it did not prepare me for college. No you know and I had just had this innate yearning for learning but it did not prepare me for college in fact, prior to high school I went to a Catholic school and I don't know how you know I didn't open up a book at Madison for the first two years because what they were teaching me I already knew and they you know I mean they put me in classes that were at best 8th grade classes and I don't know why because they should have known that kids coming from Catholic schools at that time were better prepared than kids coming from the public school system and I don't know why. Why it happened that I had a lots of 8th grade type classes even though I started in the 9th grade most of the most of the other kids in it from the grammar schools of public schools at that time you went through 7th grade in you know in an elementary school and then you went to the 8th grade at Madison so they were there in the 8th

and 9th grades I didn't get there until the 9th grade but at the same time I didn't I didn't learn anything new minimum two years the only new courses I learned were geometry and algebra you know, and some English classes but I wasn't interested in the English classes at the time and it was a fun time though. Madison High School was a very fun time for me and for all my buddies we all loved that. Yeah we all loved it.

Nikko: So is there anything that you believe should be taught today to kids that are in high school now in order to prepare them for college?

Phil: Boy. I mean it's so different now I mean the whole social arena is so different. And you know with the computer I mean that's it seems to me they're teaching tons of computer and that's probably still the future part. And that you know, but I don't know if kids in high school are ready. To really learn. Except for the bright kids. Again just going back to my granddaughter she was accomplished in both athletic and scholarship at Greece Olympia High School and there are right and when we talk to her a little bit about it you know there are she wasn't considered the nerd or maybe she was you know there were the smart kids who who did music and did who did music and cultural things and sports and they were one group another group were the geeks or whatever and I mean they don't what they do you know and then you got the normal kids I don't know no I really don't know but I think. You know it's the problems today, race relations and politics you've got to get the kids to understand there but on that I don't know if they're ready I really don't know I don't know.

Nikko: So you briefly mentioned how computers are a thing that's taught often in high school would you say that technology has become an issue like it's getting in the way of teachers properly teaching?

Phil: I think so. I agree with that statement, at the same time it's not going to go away I think it's going to get worse, before it gets better and I don't know how or when it gets better but. The you know all the computer in effect you know the smart phones they are computers, mini computers. I mean they are just so, again, my granddaughter goes to Geneseo. I mean, she's never without her smartphone never even when she comes over. Though she doesn't talk when we're eating you

know any but it's sitting right next to her on the table and I don't if she turns it of but as soon as the formal eating is done you know all she and another granddaughter they you know and grandson they go to their smart phones and see who wanted to talk to them or communicate with them so again I think the computers they are the future. I mean that's obvious they're teaching kindergarten kids to play with small you know I mean look computer like toys so that's not going to end and I don't know what the future is.

Nikko: Back to talking about college would you say that in your opinion the importance of college has changed over the past decades?

Phil: I wouldn't say it changed the important changed because it always again going back into the fifty's and sixty's. You went to college to get a better job. And you usually you did either in a professional field or you know in manufacturing or whatever but if you went to college you got a better job and today it's almost mandatory that you go to college to get decent job I mean not even a great job but if you don't have a college degree now you're relegated to \$15.00 an hour rest of your life unfortunately.

Nikko: So would you say it's almost back to one of my 1st questions. Nowadays it is a necessity for people to attend college if they want to get at least a decent job?

Phil: Yes. College and or a trade school that. And that's what it should be I mean that you know there should be an alternative and some of the tradesmen or tradespeople, air conditioning people, heating and air conditioning, plumbers, mechanics automobile mechanics they make a decent dollar they really do. But I also see a lot of people who have those skills. They're working for companies but also they're striking out on their own again and the computer allows that because you can advertise in e-mail or do whatever they do on the computer, let lots of people know you're in business and what you do you know and have pages that explain what your role is or you know what you know so I think a lot of people are doing their own thing in that in those trades fields, which is good.

Nikko: So you said that your granddaughter goes to Geneseo but did your children go to college?

Phil: I had 3 children, 2 of them went to college and my son didn't not. My oldest daughter graduated from Niagara as a nurse and then she met another friend while she was nursing she. They decided to join the army and the other woman lasted one year she met a husband in the army, a captain and they got married and she left. My daughter on the other hand, loved her job in the army and stayed for 30 years and did well did very very well in the Army she became a nurse and that's when she got her master's at the University of Texas became a nurse anesthetist She served in Iraq twice she served in Afghanistan once she served in Korea several years and she was one of those top people. Very focused and very bright and very hardworking, so she rose up the ranks and she became an O6, that's a full bird colonel. She was invited to go to the War College which is an invitation to become a general, she did not do that because she had lost a child at birth, and then she and her husband went to China to adopt a child, so she and she's still in the she's not in the military but she still works so she's got this drive, and she works for the V.A. in Augusta, Georgia. Her sister my youngest child, went to Bonaventure and she bounced around a little bit after college and then took the civil service test and now she is a supervisor in the probation department of Monroe County. My son who was who was as bright as both of them and maybe even brighter in some aspects math especially. He always worked, he had a part time job with friends on the street and then he took a civil service, he works for the city of Rochester in environmental services, he's got a year and a half to go and he's going to retire with 35 years in there. So he and he never had the drive that the other two had you know he just never did so but he's happy he might be the happiest of all 3 because he has no stress.

Nikko: From a parental point of view, would you say did you push your children to go to college? Did you encourage them to?

Phil: Yes, yes, always encouraged them to go to college. And 2 of them did the other one never my son I don't think I got to first base with him going to college you know I mean no I don't mean that I don't think he ever filled out any applications or even expressed interest. The other two we encouraged, we encouraged all three but the other two took advantage of it and we did everything we could to make sure they loved it or you know they were comfortable if there were any financial issues I didn't let them know, I didn't want them to think they couldn't keep going because you know I was, I didn't have enough money. So my wife and I you know we made sure

that they were able to go and never expressed that we couldn't afford it. And even though it was tough sometimes.

Nikko: So that was actually part of my next question. Do you think that from the time you attended college to when your kids went, your two daughters, was tuition less affordable compared to when you went?

Phil: They were both, we took out loans for each of them we were able to pay him back and what you know we paid him back. When I went to school I took out a loan that I didn't have to, and like I said I bought some stock with it which I later on used that by my house, you know it converted it back to cash and bought a house. But they both came out with student loans and my wife and I came out with student loans and we paid them and they and I'm not sure how much there it was they got they got some discounts also you know what some of those plans. You know that the government offers. But right, there's no question that today it's outrageous the fees one has to pay to go to school. In my opinion.

Nikko: What would you say are some things that you think should change about how college today, how colleges today function?

Phil: Well, I think you know, how they function and I have no opinion on that, but I you know but I think there should be ways and there are very you know there are some that will allow some kids to go to school without burdening them or their family or you know the high cost of payments you know and you know all the free school free college is. The you know the governor of New York is doing I think that's good. And, as far as making that universal via Bernie Sanders' ideas someone's got to pay for it. So you can't they can't be crazy but we incrementally we should continue in that direction. Because college graduates will contribute more to the system and society than non-college graduates I mean because even non-college graduates all of them don't go to trade schools I mean a lot of them are working at McDonald's or you know clerks at the drugstore or you know a department store which are which are disappearing so I'm not sure what they're going to you know it's either that you give people an education in either college and or trade or you're going to have to wind up giving the money under a different

pretext which the working people will object to so you know people got to have money to live I mean so I mean and I'm not sure if I answered your question.

Nikko: You got part of it with the tuition cost.

Phil: Outrageous I mean they should I mean we can see the scandals that are occurring now. But. And that you know but at least now it's open in terms of, the media, newspaper, and reporters tell us what's happening before we that happened I'm sure you know nobody knew about it, society is much more open now and transparent than it was 50 years ago.

Nikko: So back to something we talked about earlier about technology other than it being a potential distraction would you say it actually is beneficial to students today?

Phil: Yeah it is, it is. Especially for those who are serious because they have the world's encyclopedias in their cell phones and their smartphones so if one is really serious you can look up everything and read anything you want because it's there you know in the cell phone, a little problem with that is it's so easy to get the answer to a question a specific question you just Google it and it's answered that you don't do any research on it, you really don't know I mean if you've got the answer and that's OK. What else you need? But often when you read books you learn something else you know that's that you didn't expect to learn and you don't get that with computers unless you're serious and you read the stuff and you're not just asking you know when did Columbus discover. America. I mean if you read it you'll learn lots more than a date.

Nikko: So one of my last questions for you. Is there anything you'd like to say about how college impacted your life?

Phil: Well, again I think it again what's special you know courses that I liked, it pushed me further to go to school more and take classes. Lots of classes and just learn and that's satisfying for me. That's why I'm in this class that I'm doing now. You know I spend a lot of time with it and I have a private life and all that takes a lot of time also. Which I think will clear up and you know in a couple of months, but you know I have you know I'm 80 years old I have a wife I

have children I have grandchildren I have great grandchildren so our family unit takes time. But at the same time college did stimulate me to learn and that's what the obviously I like to do.

Nikko: What made you decide to come back to school to audit classes?

Phil: I don't even know why I knew about it or started it. Also I'm involved in political party politics and I also I'm a joiner and I said you know I give money not tons of money but I've enough money to get on mailing lists I guess because I must have sent money to Brockport I had also had a friend who graduated from Brockport who got involved in politics. She graduated from Brockport and she was one of the honchos in soliciting money so she would send me letters and I knew her from politics so they were semi-personal, and so I sent money and I guess sending money. They you know not great sums but sending money you get mailing lists and so finally I got on the mailing lists about auditing the classes and I said hey, this looks good. And the first class I took was Dr. Martin's French Revolution and that you know that intrigued me I had known a little bit. I didn't know much but I thought at the time I thought well we're going to read Tale of Two Cities and then talk about it you know it was much more than that obviously. Not more than I bargained for but it was much more than that and so I enjoyed it and then the next course I took was History of American Film which sounds very enjoyable and it was and now I'm taking, Military, U.S. Army Military History, so which I also enjoy because I have an affinity toward the military.

Nikko: So other than how it impacted your life, college. How else has it just generally improved your life, has it provided better opportunities for you or something?

Phil: I don't think so. No I don't think it did. I did you know I did get some graduate courses a lot of them. I was aiming for a degree a master's degree in history and at the time I was taking my coursework in Louisiana I had a wife and three kids and they all wanted to come back home once I left Louisiana and started working and you know all the family and that pressure, yeah family pressures you know I slowly but surely did not do my thesis. So I never finished, I never got a graduate degree which I regret had I gotten that, I'm thinking I would have loved to teach European history in the college.

Nikko: Then lastly, is there just anything you'd like to say about your overall college experience, any difficulties you faced in college, just anything you'd like to say?

Phil: My most of my college experience that I truly enjoyed were classes well the classes in Louisiana, you know because they were history classes. Classes I took before I even came to Brockport in 1959 or '60, whatever it was '59. They were just classes I took at M.C.C. history classes though. And you know for no credit, but there was no such thing as auditing then when I took the courses and the coursework and then these courses. So, what was the point of the question, what was that again?

Nikko: Just anything you'd like to say about your overall college experience.

Phil: Oh, my overall college the positives were taking courses that I wanted to take obviously and mainly you know 90 percent history courses and the rest literature courses. But they were not that related to my original college experience at Brockport, they came after. Some before and some after, but mostly after, it was all of them after. So my Brockport experience was not that great, you know self-satisfying for me, but all the history and literature course I took were very self-satisfying. And I probably wouldn't've got to the second part unless I went through the first part.

Nikko: If there's not anything else I'd like to say thank you for doing this interview and taking the time out of your day.

Phil: And we did it in an hour!