

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL

Memórias – Preserving the Stories of Lowell's Portuguese Community

Oral History Interview with Luis Gomes, November 15, 2016

Biographical Note:

Born in the city of Horta on the Azorean island of Faial in 1930; Luis Gomes received his education in Horta's schools and attended Escola Do Magistério to become a school teacher; at the age of eight he started playing the mandolin, at nine the violin, and at 10 the cornet, by age 14 he was making musical arrangements, scoring music from films at the local cinema for bands in the area to play; at the age of 16 he was invited to lead one of those bands; upon completing his schooling in Horta, Mr. Gomes taught school for three years on the island of São Miguel before becoming a public servant for the police department and moving to Lisbon, Portugal, where in his spare time, he taught private school; at that time, Mr. Gomes also studied at the Conservatório Nacional de Música de Lisboa to further improve his skills as a professional musician, composer, conductor, and music arranger; he received a promotion and transfer to the Azorean island of Terceira to serve as a police office manager and in his free time he led two philharmonic bands and a small jazz orchestra at the American air base on Terceira.

In the late 1960s, Mr. Gomes, his wife and two daughters immigrated to the United States to the Lowell, area; initially he worked as an upholster for his brother-in-law in Wilmington, Massachusetts, and at night attended Boston State College, now part of UMass Boston, where he obtained his Bachelor of Science Degree in Education; he subsequently helped start the bilingual program in Lowell's public schools and taught in several of the city's schools; at Lowell High School he taught Portuguese as a second language and, while, working as a teacher, Mr. Gomes founded two bands, his general business orchestra and the well-known Banda do Espírito Santo de Lowell, where he conducted, arranged, and composed music; he led this band until 2000 when he also retired from Lowell High School.

Mr. Gomes was regularly sought out by other Portuguese band leaders, throughout New England, to write and arrange music for their bands; he also performed a significant amount of volunteer work to help the Portuguese community and this ranged from taking new immigrants to hospitals and translating for them, to driving to families' homes to discuss and encourage their children to go college; he currently volunteers as a director at the Lowell Portuguese Senior Center. In 2008, Mr. Gomes was awarded the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Portuguese Heritage Award by State Senator Steven C. Panagiotakos, for his "exemplary talent and civic commitment to the Portuguese American community."

Scope and Contents:

Interview conducted by local historian Mehmed Ali; focuses on Mr. Gomes' family background, his education and career, including his teaching in Lowell's public schools and an early bilingual program in the city's school system; much of the interview also covers Mr. Gomes' training and career as a musician, composer, conductor, and arranger of Portuguese music in the Azorean

islands, Portugal, and New England, as well as the influences that shaped Mr. Gomes' interpretation of traditional Portuguese music.

INFORMANT: LUIS GOMES
INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI

DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2016

L=LUIS
A=ALI

A: Okay this is interview with Mr. Luis Gomes.

L: That's right.

A: Luis Gomes? (L: Yes) November 15, 2016. And Mr. Gomes thanks very much for sharing sometime this afternoon.

L: You're very welcome.

A: So first a little bit of background information. Where and when were you born?

L: I was born in the Azorean Island of Faial, in the city of Horta, on April 18, 1930.

A: 1930?

L: 1930.

A: That is a long time ago.

L: Yes, long time ago.

A: To your health!

L: To your health as well.

A: So tell us about Faial when you were young?

L: Well, in Faial I attended elementary school (a four-year program) which was located across the street from my house, then I attended high school (a five-year program), and after that I attended Escola Do Magistério (a two-year teachers' program) to become a school teacher. That was the only college on the island and it only offered a teaching degree. Therefore, it produced too many teachers for the island, so graduated teachers were sent to Lisbon and other islands to find jobs. Therefore, I went to the island of São Miguel (St. Michael) and taught there for three years. However, I was not teaching as a permanent teacher with paid benefits, meaning that I did

not get paid for the three months of summer vacation. It was very difficult to live off that salary. So, after three years of teaching I decided to apply for a public servant job as a civilian in the police department.

A: Okay.

L: Faial at that time was a very special island because most everyone was educated and considered elite. I think it was because foreign tele-communication companies from other European countries and from the Americas were stationed there due to the island's prime geographic location. Underwater cables ran in and out through Faial. Faial was the Hub of tele-communication. Commoners from the island associated with many of the elite from foreign countries learning and assimilating to these foreigners' ideas and ways of living, driving the locals to want to educate themselves as well. Furthermore, rich people from other countries like France, Germany, England and so forth married many of the local girls raising those families into the elite circle if you will.

A: Okay.

L: So, I applied for the public servant position with the police department. Those clerical jobs were usually given to civilians and not to the police.

A: They might not have been that educated themselves?

L: Yes, back then civilians typically had a higher education than police officers who typically only had a fourth-grade education. Anyway, I applied for it and got the position. The problem was that there was a law that said if a promotional position opened and you didn't run for it, that you would be stuck in the position you were in forever with no further opportunity for advancement.

A: And what do you mean run?

L: I meant to say if didn't "apply", instead of "run". So, I had to apply when that next opportunity opened even though it was for a position in Lisbon. I was married with a baby daughter. I had to take the job because we needed the money. It was a tough time because I had to move away from my family and friends to start the new job and set up residence before sending for my wife and daughter to join me. I had no contacts in Lisbon. I had to find an apartment, all of which were very expensive and because of it, we had to share quarters with another family. To supplement my income, I wrote songs and made music arrangements of the most popular music for local bands. I would write the music and my wife would copy by hand copies of it for the different bands and instruments. But, the money still wasn't enough, so I also taught school privately for two years. I taught and prepared older students and adults for their fourth-grade immigration test. Adults had to have at least a fourth-grade level of education to be admitted to the United States.

Later I was visited by a relative of my wife from Terceira, an Azorean island, where there was an American naval base. That base had a large dance orchestra. My wife's relative encouraged me

to move there to become their band leader. Fortunately, I was promoted again and was sent to Terceira to be the manager of that police office. I stayed at that job for three or four years. I played with the American band which paid a lot of money. It was more money than my salary with the police department.

In the meantime, my wife had a brother in the United States who was doing very well. He had started his own business as an upholsterer and tried talking us into coming to this country. One of the main reasons was because the United States provided a much better and more affordable opportunity to educate one's children. The only university in Portugal was in Lisbon which was very expensive. It would also mean, we'd have to move back to Lisbon, find a new job, new residence, and so forth. So, we decided to accept his invitation as a sponsor for us to come to the United States.

A: Okay. So let's rewind a little bit. I want to talk to you about, you talked about kind of a foreign presence in the Azores. You talked about the telecommunications companies?

L: Yes.

A: So was there Americans based in the islands, or Europeans?

L: That was later during World War II. Portugal was an ally to the United States and England. When communications started between Europe and the U.S., they decided to do it using underwater cables. I don't know the specific reasons why the Allies chose Horta (Capital of Faial) as their American and English Base. Maybe it was due to the island's neutrality, security reasons, or geographic location with respect to the rest of the world. I just remember as a kid, about 10 years old, that there were three tele-communication companies that ran their cables underwater and all the cables came together underwater. Young Englishmen working at those companies in Faial would play football (which we call soccer in the U.S.) and the native Portuguese guys joined them and started forming different teams. They formed three teams.

A: In Faial, or in the (--)

L: In Faial. In Faial.

A: What were the teams? Do you know the names?

L: Yes, one was called "Faial Sport Club", the other was "Sporting Club da Horta", and the other was "Angústias Athletic Club". This might not be exact, but it's close. The first place where soccer was ever played in Portugal was in Faial.

A: Okay.

A: Right, right.

L: But anyway.

A: So these telecommunications companies, was this a place that people looked up to get a job maybe?

L: Well yah, they employed a lot of local people.

A: And was it considered a good position to work for?

L: It was. It was. I applied once but I wasn't lucky.

A: Okay.

L: Sometimes one might think one wasn't so fortunate but sometimes things work out for the best in the end.

A: For example, if you had gotten the job at the Telecommunications Company maybe you would have stayed there your whole life?

L: No, because with all the technical advances, those companies moved on to other countries. I now a few friends who were moved to Puerto Rico and are still there.

A: Okay.

L: But the payment was good.

A: Now let me ask you about the American base. So you said there was a base there as when you were small.

L: When I was ten.

A: Okay. And what about getting a job on the base also?

L: So, in Terceira, there was a land base where they employed a lot of Portuguese people. But, in Faial it was a naval base, so those jobs were held by the respective countries' ships' staff. Salazar, who was the Prime Minister at that time, allowed the allies to have a naval base in Faial along the coast to port their ships.

A: So maybe a few jobs, but not many.

L: No, no, if there were a few jobs it would be for the wealthy locals who had coal or fuel, but not the for the common people. There was more activity and movement in the city because the sailors would come into the city for dinner and so forth.

A: Sailors?

L: Sailors from those ships from other countries stationed at the naval base.

A: So you talked about getting posted to Terceira for the police. (L: Yes) And then you worked as a musician.

L: Yes, on the side.

A: Yah. So tell me about your, your growing up in music as a young person. Were your parents involved in music?

L: No. I think my father played the guitar. My father came from the mainland and my mother came from the island of Pico. When my father was very young, he came to Faial as a sailor.

A: In Faial?

L: In Faial, my father married his first wife (not my mother) and had a few children with that lady. They later divorced. My mother married her first husband in Pico at the age of eighteen. When she was nineteen and pregnant with my half-brother, Antonio, her husband died. Because she was a very good seamstress, she decided to come to Faial where clients paid better and with money. Back in Pico many clients paid with favors in lieu of money. She never went to school because there was no school back in Pico in those days.

A: She didn't even go to the fourth grade?

L: No.

A: Nothing.

L: When she came to Faial and Antonio went to school, she learned to read and write from him and she soon became a voracious reader. She later met my father, who was one of the Heads of the Customs Department at the seaport in Faial. When I was born my father was sixty-five and retired. (A: Okay) My mother was forty-five. They had gotten married a few years earlier and had my brother Manual who is five years older than me. My half-brother Antonio from my mother's previous marriage worked for one of those English companies in the kitchen serving tables. He learned to speak English well.

A: At one of the Telecommunications Companies?

L: Yes, and an English family from that company was leaving the island and gave Antonio a mandolin. It was a beautiful instrument, round at the bottom with veneered mother of pearl on it. Well, Antonio puts it away. One day my mother decides to get it out and takes the mandolin and me to a relative who played the mandolin. He tuned his mandolin and ours and says, do as I do. I can't remember exactly what I did, but I remember him saying to my mother that I showed ability for music and she should take me to someone else who could teach me. My mother did not waste a second. She took me for lessons. I was eight years old at the time.

A: Eight?

L: Eight. They taught me how to tune the instrument, how to play the scales, and how to use a pic. So, I was on my way. Once I learned the scale I could play any music that I already knew by heart. Back then I didn't realize how much music ability I really had. A few months later, someone told my mother that there was a violin for sale. She did not wait and bought it. It was a violin made of tin.

A: Made out of what?

L: Tin! Tin.

A: The metal?

L: Yah, metal. [Laughs]

A: Really?

L: Well it was nicely done! Nicely done! The violin looked perfect like a regular violin.

A: A tin violin.

L: Tin violin. She took me to a teacher in the city. The teacher took a look at the violin and said to my mother, "Do you like flowers?" She said, "Yes." Then he said, "you can plant flowers in it". She left offended, but a few months later she learned of another violin that was for sale, bought it, and brought me to the same teacher to give me lessons. I was nine at the time and learned a lot from that old man.

A: What was the guy's name? Do you remember?

L: Furtado. He had been in America and I think because of the Depression, came back to Portugal where he played music, tuned pianos, fixed pianos, etc. So, I learned a lot from him. Also, because my neighbors knew of me, one of them played in a local community band, he asked my mother to send me there. I was ten at the time. When they tested me, they said, "Oh he already knows music. Give him an instrument." They gave me a cornet.

A: A Cornet?

L: Yes, cornet. That's the little one. I was delighted with that instrument. That same night they taught me how to blow the notes and play the scale on the instrument. I came home and within a few days, I was playing every Sunday night. Same with the violin. When the band started rehearsing I would sit at the end of the trumpet line. I developed very, very fast. Harmony came naturally to me. They wrote a few notes for third trumpet, but I wasn't pleased with those long boring notes, so I began to play second trumpet from the sheet music of the guy sitting next to me.

The following year they gave me sheet music for second trumpet. Well I was delighted to have some harmony. But soon I found myself listening to the first trumpet players and playing their

parts. That's because I had that special hearing ability. I could memorize any song very quickly. In short time, I was made a first trumpet player. But when I was playing first trumpet, sometimes there were too many guys playing first, so it gave me pleasure to play second trumpet to add harmony to the music. I could and enjoyed going in and out of the different levels (first, second, third) with a song to add color and life to the music. I was a kid who was able to go a little bit ahead of the other musicians not knowing, just by intuition. When I was about fourteen, the band decided to form a Christmas musical group.

A: Okay.

L: They had no songs so I volunteered to write the songs.

A: Volunteered to write the songs?

L: To write the songs, to compose the music.

A: And how old were you then?

L: I was about thirteen or fourteen. Maybe thirteen. I was a modest kid who kept a low profile. I did those few songs for the group. I wrote a small march, a waltz, and something fun for everyone to sing. I made the music arrangements, transposing for the different instruments, without anyone ever teaching me how to do it.

A: And how many, how many instruments in the band roughly?

L: Well the whole band consisted of about thirty players. (A: Oh wow) But this was a smaller group of about 7 or 8 players made up from the larger band. Soon people noticed that I was capable of hearing and writing down music. I had perfect pitch hearing. For example, you could play a note on the piano without me seeing what you played and I could tell you precisely what note you played. It wasn't long before different band leaders would pay me with movie tickets to see foreign movies, listen to the background music, and write down the music on sheet music in the theater as I was listening to it.

A: So meaning you would watch a movie and hear the music from the movie, but write the notes down?

L: Yes writing the notes down on sheet music.

A: And you could do that instantaneously?

L: Well yes. I was writing down the melody and harmony as the song was playing, but of course it was playing too fast to write everything down in one pass, but because the music repeated several times, I would go back and fill in missing pieces, check for corrections, and sometimes I had to invent small parts to connect the two ends that had missing information in the middle. When I think back now, if it hadn't been for my mother taking the initiative to give me

music lessons, I probably would never have known the ability that I had. It would be like having a seed that had never been watered and given the opportunity to grow.

When I was sixteen, there was a musician who played in a country band and in community band. The community band lost their band leader and this musician knew about me as a kid with special ability for music, so he told that band to come invite me to be their leader. I was in high school at the time, so I accepted it because they would pay me. It wasn't much, but it was good money to help me pay for my high school tuition. We had to pay tuition in high school.

A: You did?

L: Everything (--) Yes!

A: Did that deter some families from sending students to high school?

L: Yes, I guess so, because there were other kids whose families had more means than we did, but they didn't go to high school. Those parents got jobs for their kids. But my mother was a tough and proud woman who wanted more for her kids.

[Recorder turned off then on again]

A: Okay, we're back live now. So tell us about your, you were talking about that you took over another band from the countryside.

L: Another band, yes.

A: What was the name of the band that you were in first?

L: The first band where I learned?

A: Umhm.

L: It was União Faialense.

A: Okay.

L: And the other band was Lira e Progresso Feteirense.

A: And any kind of (--) Where did these bands come about? Were they connected to a church, or?

L: No, no, no, they were independent. They were developed by community members on their own with no help from church or government. They established their own place and bought their own instruments etc.

A: Did they have uniforms?

L: Yes they did, they did.

A: And they weren't connected to political parties or anything like that?

L: No, no, no. They were not. In those days there were no political parties.

A: Really?

L: Salazar was one party. [Laughs]

A: So you were involved in this, the second band [Lira e Progresso Feteirense], and tell us some more about your musical activities.

L: Well when I went to the second band, the musicians were not very skilled.

A: They weren't as proficient as the first band?

L: Yes, so I had to work with the level of musicians that I had. Back in those days, there were bands that could certainly play intricate symphonies, etc., but the average people seemed to prefer simpler popular songs. Fortunately, I had the ability to take a song, make it simpler while adding enough changes to keep it interesting and adding rhythm to make it lively and fun to listen to. And it worked. We sounded good and people loved us.

A: And with your music style was it a little bit faster tempo?

L: It could be faster, or it could be slower, but it's got to have rhythm. And if we played songs that people already knew and related to, we were even more successful. While, I went to this later band, I never left the first one.

A: Okay.

L: So, when the second band (the one I was leading) didn't have a job, I would play with the first one. It was a sense of obligation that I felt to continue to help out the first band. I was a responsible kid and I didn't want members from the first band to think that I was now stuck up that I was a band leader and ungrateful.

A: Were you exposed much to Fado Music?

L: Say it again?

A: Fado? Do you know that music style Fado? F A D O.

L: Oh, the Fado. Some Fados are nicely adapted to be played by a band, but most Fados are in the words and therefore should be played with accompanying string instruments.

A: Okay, yah, yah. Now you were talking about that you ended up performing on the American Base.

L: Oh yah, when I went to Terceira.

A: Tell us about that experience. You first took the job at the police station.

L: Yes, I took that job and never left it until I immigrated to the United States. However, while in Terceira, I was invited to play and lead a band.

A: Smaller band?

L: No, no, it was a community full brass and percussion philharmonic band and it was a good one. It was called Fanfarra Operária.

A: That's the style of music?

L: No, the style of band, but they play everything!

A: Okay. What does that word mean?

L: Fanfarra, well, to tell you the truth, I don't know how to explain exactly, but what I know is they call it fanfarra because they didn't have any clarinets. Clarinets are like the violins in an orchestra that smooth out things. But those guys decided to have a band without clarinets.

A: And was that something new at that time?

L: To me it was. So, anyway I took care of that band for three years, but my desire was not to have to lead any more bands there because it was very difficult for band leaders. In Faial, I didn't have any problems with those bands. They were very respectful even though I was just a kid. In the second band, the musicians consisted of fishermen and farmers who were not educated but they were never rude to me. I think because I have a good way of treating people always being cognizant of not insulting or embarrassing anyone. For example, if someone made a mistake during rehearsal, I would let it go the first time and have the band repeat that part, then if they made the mistake again, I would say for example, trumpet section this is how this part goes.... I would sing it for them. The person would learn and not be embarrassed. When playing a concert for example, and someone made a mistake, because I could hear exactly who did it, I would just look at them directly with a smile, and they knew exactly what I was saying without calling him out in front of other musicians or the public. This is one of the reasons we all respected each other and got along.

Also as a side note, when I was in Lisbon, I attended the Conservatory of Music to improve as a professional trumpet player, a band leader, and conductor.

A: But the third group was different when you went to Terceira?

L: When I left Faial, I went to São Miguel to teach school there for three years. When I came back to Faial, my first band invited me to be their leader, because they didn't have a leader at that time. So, I took the position as leader with the first band where I was taught to blow my first notes through my cornet/trumpet. The band was very good that year. But in Terceira, things were different.

A: Well it helps set the tone for understanding you know, the community of that time. So anything you want to share.

L: As I mentioned earlier, I accepted the position of band leader in the Fanfarra Operária but my dream had been to form a small dance group to play popular modern music at the American base. I did that and continued to be the leader of both bands, the Fabfarra Operária and the dance band while I lived in Terceira.

A: Why?

L: In Terceira. In Terceira.

A: Yah, why? The [unclear] Observatory for the weather?

L: We went to one of the clubs at the American base, auditioned, and got the job.

A: Audition?

L: Yes, we auditioned. When we arrived, there was a big dancing band at the base which included many of the musicians from the Fanfarra Operária. The Americans were looking for a smaller more modern band, so they hired us and fired the larger dance band which later caused some tension back at the Fanfarra Operária.

A: You quit the big band?

L: I was not in the big band. I was in the Fanfarra Operária.

A: Yah, what was the name of the small band?

L: The Azoreans.

A: And how many, how many guys in that band?

L: Well we were about six guys.

A: What instruments?

L: A singer, piano, bass, guitar, drummer, and I played the mandolin and the trumpet. We quickly became very popular.

A: And with the small band did you, did you have a different style of music playing?

L: Well I don't know, because we were playing all styles of music. We play Herbert?

A: Herb Albert?

L: Something like that.

A: Like Tijuana Brass?

L: Yes, Tijuana Brass and all sorts of other songs and types of rhythms.

A: And what year is this?

L: Probably 1965.

A: Okay. And so you're about thirty-five years old at that time?

L: Yah, I was still young. [Both laugh]

A: And when you went to the base did you, did you consciously change your music to appeal to the audience?

L: Well if someone brought us new sheet music that they wanted us to play, we would play it, but normally we maintained our variety of popular music because it was well received and seemed to be what was in demand at the time.

A: Okay.

A: Yah, yah.

A: So you were introduced to different styles of music? (L: Yes) And what other kinds of music were you playing that was not Portuguese?

L: We played mostly jazz, some country music, and our guitar player who was very good would sometimes be asked to play Fados.

A: And when you say country music, American country music?

L: Yes, American country music and everything else. That's why we were killing the other bands at that time.

A: Jazz?

L: Also.

A: Okay.

L: I'm not much into heavy jazz, but I would play it.

A: Yah, yah. What were your (--) How did you feel about performing this new music?

L: It feels good. It always feels good for an artist to look down from the stage to see a dance floor filled with people dancing and having a great time. There once was a time when there was a large celebration at the American base for all of the different military forces. There was a big band playing with very skilled musician. We were going on stage after them. My guys turn to me and said they were worried because the large band musicians were better than we were. I said don't worry trust me. When we started playing the dance floor filled up because we were giving the audience the music that they wanted.

A: Umhm, good.

L: So I was very successful with the band.

A: Were you treated well on the base by the Americans?

L: Oh yes.

A: Okay, good.

L: It was good.

A: One last musical question and we'll move on, and I appreciate you sharing so many interesting stories. Did your background in Portuguese music transfer easily into playing other styles of music?

L: Yes, because I had a thorough background in music. And music is music. Styles are different of course. Jazz for example, is a more syncopated type of music. My preference however, is romantic music such as a bolero or something like that.

A: I'm sorry, one more question. The Portuguese instruments, were they easily transferrable into other styles of music?

L: Yes, yah.

A: Like the mandolin?

L: Yes, except for the Portuguese guitar, which is unique and should only be used for the Fado. But the mandolin can be used for everything else. For example, two years after coming to the United States, I formed a four-piece dance band. My wife played keyboard (i.e., melody and base). We had a guitar player and drummer and I played the trumpet and the mandolin. I would alternate between the trumpet and mandolin because it would be difficult to only play the

trumpet all night. The mandolin was conducive to most American dance songs. I have composed many marches both in Portugal and in the U.S. As a matter of fact, Johnny Leite has one of my marches.

A: That he performed?

L: Yes.

A: Or did he record?

L: That he performed.

A: He performed it, okay.

L: Someone from Portugal must have sent it here and he obtained it somehow. When I came to Lowell and attended one of his concerts I was pleasantly surprised to hear it.

A: Oh, you mean he, he had it in Lowell, but you, you had not arrived here?

L: Yes, someone sent it to him.

A: From, from Portugal?

L: From Portugal.

A: So he had it before you even showed up.

L: Yes, yes.

A: Well that's an interesting sign that your work, your work was worldwide already. So you said you formed a band when you immigrated to the U.S.?

L: Yes.

A: What was the name of the band?

L: Banda do Espírito Santo de Lowell.

A: And what does that mean?

L: Holy Ghost Band.

A: Okay. Okay.

L: We were called the Holy Ghost Band because we were going to be associated with to the Holy Ghost Society in Lowell, MA. Father John Silva volunteered to lend us the money to buy the instruments and uniforms for the band.

A: And what year did you start the band?

L: About three years after I arrived in the United States, which was around 1972. We went to Boston to buy the instruments and uniforms and I composed three small solemn marches us to play first time out.

A: Three small what?

L: Three small religious marches for processions.

A: Religious marches, okay.

L: I still have some of those marches. We wanted to get the band out that year, we didn't have a lot of time to practice before the feasts that were coming up, and we needed some marches to play. So, I wrote and arranged some simple music where I could get the band ready to play with only a few rehearsals. It was a bit more challenging to run a band here in the U.S. than it was back in Portugal because, all the musicians in Portugal were more dedicated and more responsible. They all came to rehearsals and all showed up to play the events. But, here in Lowell, it was different. Maybe it was because back in Portugal, the musicians needed the money more and there were fewer entertaining distractions. Here in the U.S. people made more money, had more fun places to go and fun things to do. Anyway, I had some strong players and some weak players. So, I had to write music at a simpler level for the weaker players to play, for the band to sound good.

In Lowell, it was also more challenging for me as a band leader, because many of the players would only show up to rehearsals and events when they felt like it, or when they had nothing else to do that was more interesting for them at the time. There were many gigs where key players didn't show up, so I would have to not only lead the band, but also play those instruments. There were a least a couple of times, where I had to lead the band, play the base drum with one hand and the trump with the other, as well as move one of my more skilled players, a trombone player, to play the snare drums because no drummers showed up. How does a marching band play a feast or concert without a drum section? I had to do whatever was necessary to not have the band miss a gig or sound bad.

A: Yah, go ahead. You don't have to mention names. Just (--)

L: Although I was asked, I never lent other bands my marches for them to play while I was leading my band. The reason is because I had many weak players, it took a lot of rehearsals and hard work to get them to sound sometimes only "somewhat" good but not always great. But, because the listener did not hear other bands with possibly better musicians playing those same marches better, the listener didn't know that we were not always playing great. Does that make sense? It wasn't that I had a problem lending other bands my music, I didn't lend them my

music because I was trying to protect my band's reputation. But years later when I was no longer involved with the band, I did lend and write music for other bands.

A: Yah!

L: I wrote a lot of music and gave the Holy Ghost Band all free copies of my music to play. I received a small annual stipend to lead and run the band, but I never charged them for any of my music.

A: That's nice.

L: I was very successful with that strategy to the point that other bands commented that we sounded so good because they thought we had better quality instruments than they did. But we didn't. We bought our instruments at the same places they bought theirs. But what I would do was write or rearrange our music to fit with the level of ability of my musicians. For example, for some musicians to be able to reach higher notes, they would need to practice a lot. But, because I knew they wouldn't be practicing to the degree they needed, I would write the music in a scale that wouldn't require them to go so high. I would always compose with the musicians' abilities in mind.

A: What were some of the other groups that were around at that time?

L: Well there was a band in Peabody, another one in Cambridge, and another one in Fall River that was very good band called "Banda Nossa Senhora Da Luz". But those bands had so many willing musicians auditioning to get in that the leaders had the luxury of selecting the best ones. I on the other hand, had very few musicians and had to take whoever was willing to join. So, my job was a lot harder to do, than that of other band leaders.

A: Very democratic.

L: One day, I was very upset with my band and was venting my frustrations when one of my young players, a young Greek kid by the name of Chris Stamas said to me, "Mr. Gomes don't be so upset because at least you have a Portuguese band because we Greeks don't even have one." And I said, "You know, you are right!"

A: So at some point you had non-Portuguese in the band?

L: You mean in this one?

A: You had some non- Portuguese players in the band?

L: Are you talking about the Band Espírito Santo? (A: Yah) No, always had been Portuguese musicians, mostly Portuguese.

A: But you said Chris Stamas performed.

L: Oh yes, sometimes I had a few non-Portuguese players fill in for me like the Stamas brothers, Chris and Louise. Thank goodness for them because there were many frustrating and stressful times when my regular musicians wouldn't show up, like the time I told you I had to play the base drum and trumpet while also having to lead the band.

A: [Laughs] Cause they didn't show up or something?

L: They didn't show up! They didn't show up.

A: Now did you ever (--) John had told me there was like almost like battles of the bands?

L: Yes, there was something like that.

A: Okay.

L: For example, there was a band from Massachusetts or Rhode Island that was made up of mostly people from the mainland (Portugal) and there was the Colonial Band, and so forth. These two bands were very good. There would be concerts at the feasts and one band would play a song, and the other would play another song but same type of song. Then that band would play a different type of song and another band would respond with a similar type of song and so forth.

A: [Laughs] Now did you do (--) Besides the Holy Ghost Band did you have your own little band?

L: Yes, I had a private four-piece general business band where we played weddings, dance events, and so forth.

A: Based out of the reds? Is this the reds or the blues, sorry?

L: The small band was private and not associated with either the Blues or Reds clubs. However, the marching band was associated with the Blues club at that time.

A: The blues, sorry.

L: The Banda do Espírito Santo started at Saint Anthony's Church Hall, then moved to the Reds club and then to the Blues club where it remains.

A: On Central Street.

L: The Reds Club is called the Portuguese American Civic League and the Blues Club is call the Portuguese American Center. I left the Reds club because I had the dance band.

A: Okay. So tell us about the dancing band? What was that?

L: The dance band consisted of four people, my wife, two Sousa brothers, and myself. The two brothers were from a wonderful family.

A: What were the people playing? What was the names of the Sousas?

L: One brother, Denis Sousa, played the drums. The other brother, Lenny Sousa, played guitar and was the lead singer. My wife, Almeirinda, played keyboards (melody and base), and I played the trumpet, mandolin, did some singing, and was the band leader.

A: And what was the name of this group?

L: Luis and the Armstrongs.

A: Huh? What is it?

L: Luis (my name) and the Armstrongs, was a play on words. Denis painted a picture on his bass drum of a flexing arm with a big bicep. But soon we changed it to the “Luis Gomes Orchestra”.

A: Okay.

L: Lenny and Denis were wonderful. They were great musician and very reliable, never missed one job. I remember one day the drummer was very sick, vomiting all the way to the job. On stage, we placed him close to door and a couple of times he had to run out to vomit and would come right back and continue playing. My wife too would sometimes feel sick and she never missed a job either. Sometimes, I would play standing close to her so she could lean against me and I could keep a close eye on her in case she was going to pass out. We four were a good team. Very dedicated.

A: When did you form the band?

L: About the time I formed the Banda do Espírito Santo or maybe a year later. At first, I didn't want to start the Banda do Espírito Santo because I wanted to start my own dance band and knew it would be too much work. But they pressured me and talked me into coming in initially until they could find someone else to take over the big band and as you can see that didn't happen for many years.

A: Yah, yah.

L: But later there were jobs coming in with my dance band that conflicted with the large band and I had to leave the big band.

A: Leave the, leave the big band?

L: The big band do Espírito Santo. But I was with the big band for about eleven years.

A: Okay.

L: While I was away from the Banda do Espirito Santo, there were several band leaders that came in including Johnny Leite, but none of them stuck it out because none of them had the patience to put up with all the crap. Anyway, when I was finished with my dance band, I was invited to go back to being the leader for the Banda do Espirito Santo. I didn't really want to but my mother-in-law loved the band and talked me into it. So, I went back to it and was there for more than 20 years.

A: Oh wow. So tell us about the small band. Where did you do performances?

L: Well we started at the Holy Ghost Hall at the Holy Ghost Park.

A: Okay.

L: It was our first job.

A: For a festival, or just for (--)

L: It was for one of those big feasts. Lenny and Denis had an uncle on the committee and he recommended that we play. We played and sounded very good, then it was basically word of mouth that got us more and more jobs.

A: Hm, and what type of music would you play there?

L: All genres of music. We had a few Portuguese songs for Portuguese events but we primarily played American music.

A: Okay.

L: American and Latin music, Latin-American music, which I like.

A: So what genres like Salsa music, or Marenghi, or (--)

L: Anything and everything... I'm going to tell you a story. We did a lot of weddings.

A: Yah, are you doing okay?

L: Because my English is not so good.

A: No, no, your English is fine. Are you doing okay? (L: Yes) You're not getting tired, are you?

L: We used to play a lot of weddings because people liked that we always dressed professionally and played a wide variety of music that was appropriate for any occasion. And, if we didn't have a particular song, we would figure a way to get it and do it. For example, there was an occasion

when a bride from New Bedford called me the night before her wedding and asked for a certain song. We did not have it and I was not familiar with it. So, I asked her to hum it for me, she did, and I wrote it down. Next day we played it at the wedding. Fortunately, this was possible because I have the ability to hear it, write it, and arrange it all in my head. I don't have to play the notes on a piano to help me hear it or transpose it for the different parts. I can hear all of the different instrumentals in my head, which made it easy for me to do what I did. There were many fine band leaders around but not many could do what I could do. But that could also be considered a problem for me.

A: Why?

L: Because often times it meant more work for me and more headaches.

A: Yah, so you're going to New Bedford.

L: Yes, we played all over New England including at some university in Boston.

A: Boston U, Northeastern, um.

A: Tufts, Harvard, MIT.

L: Harvard. Harvard.

A: Harvard.

L: Someone from Harvard called us to book a gig there and asked if we played different types of rhythms, like Tangos, Fox Trots, Boleros, Sambas, Salsa's etc. We said yes and booked the gig. I went to the music store and bought books for drums with different types of rhythms. I arranged a few songs of each type and music, we rehearsed, and went to the event. When we arrived, we saw lots of security guards with dogs and the dance hall was filled with hippies. We were wondering and worried about how the heck we were going to play music for these people because we didn't think we had music that these people would like. But as we're setting up our equipment, the hall cleared out and shortly after we were set up, the doors opened and couples beautifully dressed walked in. It was a ball room class. We were so relieved to see that. We played our music and they loved it. It was one of the most enjoyable gigs we ever did.

A: What were some of the clubs you played? Like you played at like (--)

L: Oh, I don't remember many of the specific names but you know, America clubs, American Legions, hotels, etc...

A: Like the Masonic Club, or the Shriners?

L: We played the Masonic Club. There was one in Tewksbury on Route 38, but I can't remember.

A: Okay.

L: I'm getting old.

A: Me too! Would you play at bars?

L: Yes.

A: Nightclubs?

L: Yes, we played nightclubs including the Lithuanian Club.

A: Okay. Are you talking about the Lithuanian Club?

L: Yes.

A: And tell us about the influence of the Latin music you talked about? What that a certain phase that came in?

L: The influence on who?

A: On your musical styles. You talked about different Latin music.

L: I do enjoy Latin music very much probably because it includes lots of trumpet in that type of music and I love to play the trumpet, but I also love Latin rhythms.

A: What about tango?

L: Tango, I love it!!! Love it! I love to play music with a nice melody.

A: Okay, let's switch off of music, and I appreciate all that stuff. So tell us about why did you decide to come to the United States?

L: My wife and I had two small daughters at that time, a six-year old and a one year old. And we had my wife's brother here in the U.S. who was willing to sponsor us.

A: Oh that's right. You said who owned the upholstery business?

L: Back in Terceira we were beginning to see fewer and fewer jobs and my brother-in-law was offering me a job here in the U.S. in his upholstery store so it seemed to be the right time to move.

A: And then the educational opportunities for your children?

L: The main reason for coming to the United States was for our girls. Although I had a good title and social position, being second in command to the captain at the police department, the

money was not very good, and opportunities for improvement were bleak. It would have been difficult for my wife and me to send our daughters to the mainland to be educated unless we wanted them to be teachers. The opportunities in the U.S. were so much better and more affordable. Thus, why we came.

A: Where was your brother-in-law's business?

L: It was in Reading [Massachusetts].

A: In Reading, okay.

L: Reading, then he moved to Wilmington [Massachusetts]. No, it was in Wilmington and then he moved to Reading.

A: How did you like doing that?

L: Well it was a job, not an easy one, but I was grateful for it. When you come to a new country and you do not know the language or the ways of the new country, it is very difficult. You need to keep an open mind and positive attitude. You take what you can get to pay the bills and with time, you learn the language and you find your path to jobs or careers that you prefer.

A: Did you learn some English working on the base in the Azores?

L: I took two years of English as a second language back in Portugal, but it was not conversational English. You can know some English words and phrases but listening to people speak a foreign language in real time, understanding it, and being able to converse back is very difficult. In hindsight, I wish I had used the opportunity when I played in the American base to improve my English. But, the few times I tried to speak English with some of the American ladies that came up to ask questions or request songs, I found them laughing a little bit and I felt embarrassed, so I began to direct them to speak with one of the other guys in the band that spoke English better. By doing that I did not take the opportunity to practice and improve my English. But then at that time, I did not know that I was going to be coming to the United States in the future.

A: They were laughing at you?

L: Yes, and I was embarrassed, but many years later when I taught Portuguese as a second language at Lowell High School I would always encourage my students to speak Portuguese as much as possible. I would tell them, if you only know half a phrase say that half in Portuguese and the other half in English but try to speak as Portuguese as much as possible. Don't be embarrassed. It's the only way to learn. I didn't want them to make my same mistakes.

A: So how did you get the position at the high school?

L: There was a young Portuguese teacher who learned that I was Portuguese and had taught in Portugal. Apparently, there was a desperate need for Portuguese teachers in Lowell at that time.

At first, I was concerned with taking the job because my English was poor. How would I speak to the students and my colleagues? She said don't worry about that, we'll find a way to help you with that. Given, that upholstering was not what I had planned to do forever, I decided to try this teaching opportunity.

A: What was her name?

L: Her name back then was Miss Brazil, a very intelligent young woman. Since that time, she has gotten her doctorate degree and is now married. Unfortunately, her current last name escapes me. She told me that I first needed to meet a requirement. I needed to get my teaching certification here in the United States. She told me about a program at Boston State College, now part of UMass Boston, where I went nights to get my teaching certification. I then helped her start the Bilingual Program in Lowell and I started teaching different subjects in Portuguese to bilingual kids who did not speak English.

A: Where?

L: I started at the Seventh Street School in Lowell.

A: Okay.

L: It began with only Portuguese kids in one class but later they decided to integrate the Portuguese kids with the American kids. So, then I went to go to the Rogers School to teach and then to another school who's name I cannot remember right now.

A: What neighborhood?

L: Centralville.

A: Varnum? The Varnum School?

L: No, up on the hill.

A: Oh yah, McAvinue, or the (L: No.) Rogerson?

L: If you go on Route 38 you pass all those street and there is, it is on the right.

A: You can see it from Bridge Street right, (L: Yes) out on the hill?

L: Yah, yah.

A: I think the Rogerson isn't it?

L: I'm not sure.

A: No, that's, no that's on London Street.

L: But I don't think so.

A: Anyways.

L: But anyway, my English was improving...

A: So the first school you went to which was off of Bridge Street as well right? The Seventh Street School?

L: Seventh Street yes, after the bridge.

A: Or is it Sixth Street?

L: I think it was Seventh. (A: Okay) No, no, I'm not sure.

~~A: So there was only (L: Third Street) Portuguese? What's that?~~

~~L: Third Street. Third. No, no, because, no because (-)~~

~~A: Is it Coburn School?~~

L: It was the Robinson School.

A: The Robinson is the one on the hill.

L: Robinson is the one on the hill. (A: Yes) Yes, yes, yes.

A: I said Rogerson. It's Robinson.

L: Robinson.

A: But the first one you went to, it's the Tenth Street School.

L: You are right.

A: Yah, that's where it is.

L: You are right, Tenth Street.

A: The Tenth Street School, old wooden school house.

L: That's right, relatively small.

A: Yah. So that school had all bilingual programs?

L: It was all bilingual.

A: And but each class was different?

L: Ah yes.

A: It wasn't just Portuguese there, was there?

L: I think there must have been some Spanish students because there was a Spanish teacher named Victor Santana. But at the very beginning, I was the only male teacher there.

A: Oh yah.

L: So it was only Portuguese.

A: In the whole school?

L: In the whole school.

A: And how many different classes? How many different teachers?

L: There was another teacher there teaching English as a second language (ESL). She was Portuguese but was an American teacher.

A: So were there four or five different classes of Portuguese students there?

L: Yes and I guess it was because of the different ages.

A: Yah, okay, different. Okay, interesting. So how did you progress with your own career developments?

L: Well I went to Boston State College for my degree.

A: And so did you get a certificate there? Did you get a Master's Degree, Bachelor's Degree?

L: I got my Bachelor of Science in Education. I started going for my masters but soon learned that it would only give me an additional \$500.00 difference in salary. I didn't feel that was worth all that extra work and expense in getting that degree. Plus, I was very busy with buying a house with four rental apartments that I had to fix and maintain.

A: So at some point you got transferred to the high school?

L: Yes.

A: Tell us about that?

L: Yes, I was asked to teach bilingual classes at Lowell High School because I was the only male Portuguese teacher at the time in the bilingual program and the School Department thought it would be easier for me to handle the bigger and sometimes tougher kids than perhaps a female teacher. So, I went there and taught bilingual for a few years, but the Portuguese immigration population was starting to decrease. One day a student of mine asked me why don't I teach Portuguese as a second language like the other French and Spanish classes? I thought it was a great idea and ran the idea by the headmaster, Mr. Stamas.

A: Is it Peter Stamas?

L: Yes, it was Peter Stamas and he told me to give him a list of interested students. That same student provided me with a list of 30 students. So, Peter Stamas approved it. As interest continued to grow with students taking Portuguese as a second language, there was also a decrease in the number of students participating in the bilingual classes, but for a significant period of time, I was handling both types of class which was very hard work for me because I was the only teacher doing it all. I soon was teaching Portuguese I, II, III, and IV (for all four years of high school) along with the bilingual classes, so I had to prepare curriculum for all those classes and grade work for all of those classes. I never took a sick day, because it would be easier for me to do some of the work verbally than have to write down instructions for all of the substitute teachers to follow for all of those classes. When I retired I had about 300 unused sick days.

A: Huh, wow!

L: I work hard.

A: Yah. So when you started offering Portuguese as a foreign language were most of the students Portuguese ethnicity?

L: The Portuguese as a second language class started with about 70-80% of the students being Portuguese, but as time went on those students would bring their American friends and so more and more American students would take my classes. I always tried to be a fair and helpful teacher. My goal was to help students as much as possible. I understood how difficult it was for me to learn a second language, so I took that understanding into consideration when grading papers and tests. For example, if the lowest grade on a test was an 85, I would make that grade an A and scale all the other grades up respectively.

A: We're almost done. Do you remember what year you started teaching ESL?

L: [Thinking]

A: Well you said you worked three years at the upholsterer.

L: Oh, you mean at the very beginning? (A: Yah) Oh, it must have been (--)

A: You came in what year? [19]68?

L: [19]69.

A: [19]69.

L: [19]69, and then I worked for three years, [19]72, maybe [19]73, about [19]73 or something like that as an upholster.

A: Okay. And how many years did you end up teaching? When did you retire?

L: Twenty-eight years.

A: 2008?

L: No, no, twenty-eight years.

A: Oh, twenty-eight years?

L: With twenty-eight years of employment, I would be able to retire with 70% of my salary.

A: When you first came to Lowell what was your impression of the Portuguese Community?

L: Well, I didn't know anyone and at that time the community was mainly a blue-collar community from the island of Graciosa. A lot of the people were not educated but they were proud and hardworking.

A: Why is that?

L: I think people from different islands wound up migrating to different metropolitan areas in New England. I think people tend to migrate to places where they may know people or go to where there are others who have things in common.

A: And Lowell (--) Did different cities have different islands represented?

L: Yes, I think so.

A: And what was the representation?

L: Well, the reason is they are coming to where their relatives originally came to so it perpetuates that way. The reason I ended up here, although I am not from that island, is because I came to live in Billerica with an in-law and then when the teaching opportunities opened up for me in Lowell, my family and I ended up staying here.

A: So what island were most of the people from Lowell?

L: Lowell, from Graciosa.

A: Okay. (L: Graciosa) And then how about other cities?

L: For example, Cambridge has a lot of people from Faial which is where I was born. Fall River's majority of Portuguese people are from São Miguel, and so forth.

A: Okay, interesting. And then did you see the Portuguese Community change over time from when you first came to later on?

L: Well it was difficult in the beginning convincing most of these parents to allow their kids to go to college. Their mind set was that they didn't go to college so why should their kids to go. It took a lot of convincing and persuading on my part along with other professionals including my wife. We would try to schedule meeting with the parents and even go knocking on their doors to be able to talk with them. However, oftentimes we were more successful in talking with the kids at school and showing them how much more money they could make in white collar jobs and how improved their life styles would be, and they would then convince their parents. Later as a few would go off to college to become engineers, bankers, lawyers, and so forth, other parents would start to see the value and slowly the community began to let their children go onto obtain a higher education.

A: Was that easy to do?

L: It was not easy, but it was worth it. For those kids who wound up going to college, many came back and thanked me for my advice, encouragement, and support. That is the ultimate reward for being a dedicated teacher. And I would tell them, now it is up to you to advice and encourage the next generation.

A: Any final thoughts about your time here living and working in Lowell?

L: Lowell is my community and I love Lowell! I remember playing in my dance band in places that were two or three hours away from home, driving back at 2:00, 3:00 AM, and as we arrived back in Lowell, I would say to myself, "It's good to be home!"

A: Good. Okay, thanks very much for your time this afternoon.

L: I apologize for my English and for rambling on.

A: I think it's very fine. So thanks again.

L: My pleasure.

Interview ends