

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL

Memórias – Preserving the Stories of Lowell's Portuguese Community

Oral History Interview with Dimas Espinola, October 19, 2017

Biographical Note:

Born on the Azorean island of Terceira, in the village of Biscoitos, in 1950; Dimas Espinola immigrated with his family to the United States in the late 1960s, settling in Lowell's "Back Central" (predominately Portuguese) neighborhood; his father, formerly a furniture maker in Biscoitos, obtained a job as a loom fixer in the Wannalancit Mills; his mother worked as a dressmaker; Mr. Espinola received his formal education in schools on Terceira and, upon arriving in Lowell, he secured a work permit and, at nearly 17 years of age, he was employed in a manufacturing job in the Paris shoe factory on Bridge Street; at the same time Mr. Espinola, a communicant at St. Anthony's Church, began working closely with the pastor, Rev. John F. Silva; among his activities was translating English for Portuguese members of the community, which included various issues affecting the neighborhood, including a state-proposed extension of the Lowell Connector highway that threatened many homes and businesses in the "Back Central" neighborhood; in addition to his community activism and work with the church, Mr. Espinola also became involved with the Portuguese-American Center (and its soccer team), as well as the Holy Ghost Society; he remained in the shoe industry for many years, becoming a foreman and factory manager.

Scope and Contents:

Interview conducted by consulting historian Gray Fitzsimons; a large part of this interview focuses on the organized opposition (and Mr. Espinola's role in this opposition) to the Lowell Connector highway extension in the early 1970s and the threat of demolition of a large section of the "Back Central" neighborhood; it also contains some information on the family background of Mr. Espinola, the family's immigrating from the Terceira to the United States, the working lives of the Espinola family in Lowell's shoe factories in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as observations on the various businesses and cultures that would have been gravely impaired had the highway extension been constructed. The interview concludes with a discussion of the Carnation Revolution in April 1974 and Mr. Espinola's observations on the changes in attitudes toward mainland Portugal among Azoreans compared to those of Portuguese in the United States.

INTERVIEWEE: DIMAS ESPINOLA
INTERVIEWER: GRAY FITZSIMONS

D=DIMAS
G=GRAY

G: All right. We are recording here. So it's Thursday, October 19th, and I'm here with Dimas Espinola. And thank you Dimas again for joining me here.

D: Sure.

G: Just a few questions. First of all just a little bit about your background. Where were you born and what year?

D: I was born in the Azores Island, Terceira specifically, a little village called Biscoitos. In English, biscuits. [Both laugh] But it was one of the, probably one of the busiest seaports, fishing ports in the island.

G: I see, okay.

D: Yah, it's in the northern part of the island.

G: Yah, what year were you born?

D: I was born in 1950

G: Okay. You and I are about the same age. And then so when and why did you come to the U.S.?

D: We came to the states in [19]67, 1967. My, one of my uncles, my father's brother petitioned the whole family. He had finally become an American citizen. He was living in the country. He was living here. He first started living in Lowell and then he moved out to California. And because the lady that he had, the lady that he married was from Lowell.

G: Yes, yes.

D: So you know, they were living in back of, on Summer Street.

G: Yes, Summer Street. Okay.

D: By the South Common.

G: But they went to California for a short time?

D: Yah, they went to California and then from there (--)

G: Do you know where in California they were?

D: San Jose.

G: Okay, San Jose.

D: And they settled, they've been there. He's still alive. He's still there.

G: Oh, he's still there?

D: He's still there.

G: Okay, but he was here when your family came over, correct?

D: No, no, he was in California already.

G: Oh he was?

D: Yah. He came to the states maybe in late [19]50s?

G: Okay.

D: Late [19]50s and then he moved up to California at the beginning of the [19]60s. Because we came and he was already gone.

G: Okay. So did he come to the U.S. as part of that legislation that freed up immigration from Portugal, from the Islands?

D: No. He came (--). We do have relatives that came from that time, from the [Capelinhos] volcano [eruptions in 1957-58].

G: Yes.

D: But they went to Peabody. They were on my paternal grandmother's side. Her brothers settled in Peabody. And my uncle was (--). It started (--). There was my grandfather's sister, paternal grandfather's sister somehow came to the states, (G: Okay) and came to Lowell and she settled here. And of course in the community you know everybody. She was this girl, at the time blonde, beautiful and so was my uncle, you know. So they start writing each other. You know, my uncle became friends with the family. They started writing letters back and forth. And all of a sudden she ends up in a trip over there to the village where we lived. (G: Yes) And they got, and then they decided to get married. They got married and started (--).

G: Yes, they got married over there?

D: Yah, she got married over there. I was the chaperone. They stayed at (--). I was I think, I don't know, five years old at the time. And every place they went I had to go with them. [Laughs] And they got married, and she petitioned him. So he stayed behind.

G: Got you. And she came back to Lowell.

D: She came back to Lowell.

G: Petitioned and he came over and joined her.

D: He joined her. Usually I think in those days it took about two years for a husband.

G: Oh wow, two years.

D: Like it took my parents five years waiting time. [Comment unclear]

G: Yes. So why didn't your family move to California as opposed to moving to Lowell?

D: Because my mother, my mother's two aunts living in Lowell. My maternal grandmother had two sisters that came over in 1910 to work in the mills in Lowell. (G: Okay) So they grew up here. You know, they came at a young age. And they married and they settled here. One lived in Lowell. One lived in Dracut. So, and my mother used to exchange letters with all of them, with the both of them. And so she decided to stay here, because she kind of got, so especially the one that she got to know just through the, through the letters, you know, by correspondence.

G: So, and what did they, what did your parents do when they arrived in Lowell? For employment?

D: I think they both (--) See in those days you had to have a job guarantee. And then my uncle was responsible for whole family for five years.

G: Yes, even though he was in California.

D: Even though he was in California. He had to sign all that paperwork and everything went through the consulate like it does today. I think they worked for (--) Because I came six months. They came in January. I came in July. (G: Okay) But they started off like in the shoe factories. And then my mother went to Nathan Solomon right down the street here.

G: Bridge Street.

D: No, no, right here at the foot of, at the foot (G: Of John Street) right after the Bridge on the left there. That was Nathan Solomon.

G: Yes, okay.

D: Later Pajama Factory. And my father worked for Wannalancit Textile.

G: He worked at Wannalancit? Okay.

D: Yah, he was a loom fixer.

G: Oh no kidding. That's a highly skilled job.

D: Yah, he was a furniture maker in the old country.

G: Oh, okay. Okay. Well that's interesting.

D: So he picked it up pretty good.

G: So how many years did he work at the Wannalancit?

D: Most of his life.

G: Did he?

D: Yah, most of his life until they kind of phased down.

G: And how long did your mother work at Solomon?

D: Until she retired.

G: Wow. And you said, did they work in a shoe factory initially?

D: I think they worked at Grace Shoe, because when I came, when I got here in July they were already at these jobs. So they just like a try-out.

G: Okay, got you. Got you. Okay.

D: First thing, yah.

G: All right. And so, you went to public school in Lowell then.

D: No, I went to night school. I just went to night school just to (--)

G: Were you educated back in Terceira?

D: Yes, I went to school in Terceira. When I came I had what it was called, at the time it was called an associate's degree (G: Yes) if you compared the (--)

G: Got you, yes.

D: I learned English and French. I had three years of English when I come over.

G: Your English is very good.

D: Not in those days, because I was afraid to speak, because we learned the English, English is (--). The Queen's English, the pronunciation is different. So you know.

G: Exactly, yes.

D: It was funny, because when I started working they used to tell me to do stuff and I'd do it. I could hear him, "How does he understand everything we say, but he doesn't say anything back?" And I finally told this, my fellow there, because everybody was either Portuguese, Greek, or Puerto Rican. That was the nationalities that we had around in Lowell.

G: Of course.

D: Or Polish. And he was a Greek fellow, and I told him, "You guys will make fun of me if I talk, you know. My accent is different than yours." He said, "No, don't worry. Go ahead." [Comment unclear].

G: So you were about seventeen when you came here?

D: Sixteen, sixteen and a half.

G: Sixteen, and so what did you do when you first arrived in July?

D: I went to work. I got my worker's, you needed a working permit.

G: Yes, yes.

D: And I went to work in a shoe factory.

G: Oh you did? Grace or Carroll Shoe?

D: No, Paris. That was on Bridge Street. It's the last one that is being remodeled down there.

G: Yes.

D: That building down at the end.

G: Okay. And how long did you work there?

D: Thirteen years I worked there.

G: Fifteen?

D: Thirteen. The best job of my life.

G: No kidding.

D: I was young. It was unbelievable. It was good.

G: What sort of work did you do in the factory?

D: I started working as a machine operator. And then I got, became like assistant supervisor.

G: Yes. Were there a lot of other Portuguese working there?

D: Yah, at the time yes. We had like, Paris Shoe had like four hundred employees at the highest. And I say close to half of them were Portuguese.

G: Wow, yah. So there was still a number of shoe companies operating back then too, including Carroll Shoe? Did you (--)

D: One year (--). One day I worked in three places. I quit Paris. I went down to I forget the name of one. Where Notini's was there was, the latest machinery and everything. So I quit Paris at eleven. I went over there and I worked until 1:30. And I said, "I can't go home. My mother is going to be upset." And so I went the Carroll Shoe. I knew the (--). Because you knew all of these supervisors. They weren't around. And I worked there until 6:00. And the next Saturday I went. He told me, "Do you want to come in tomorrow?" So I did. Then I come home. My mother said, "Oh, this gentleman called." She couldn't hardly say his name, which was the owner of the Paris Shoe and "He wants to talk to you. He's waiting for you." So I called him back. He asked me what happened. I told him. He says, "Come back Monday."

G: So they hired you back?

D: He hired me right on, he took me right back.

G: I understand that Carroll Shoe employed a lot of Portuguese as well.

D: It did, but then they were smaller than Paris.

G: Yah, right.

D: Grace Shoe has the largest. They had a lot of Portuguese people working there.

G: Yes, maybe more percentage-wise of Portuguese at Carroll then (--)

D: Then at Paris because we had a lot of Greek immigrants working there too. It was like half. Almost (--). And we had French Canadians, you know, from Little Quebec [unclear].

G: Of course, yah.

D: You know, in those days that was the way you would talk to each other. There was no political way. It's the way it was and we all loved it you know.

G: Yah. Well let me ask you. This is interesting, because you were involved in the Connector opposition. In the late [19]60s the city planners with the state proposed extending the Lowell Connector to basically smash through Back Central.

D: It would have done that, yah.

G: And taken out a lot of houses.

D: Over 400.

G: Yes, which would have virtually destroyed the Portuguese (--)

D: Yah, it would have gone through King Street, the back (--) By the parking lot of Saint Anthony's Church all the way to Elm Street. It would have taken that whole block all the way down to Lawrence Street.

G: Right. Right. So let me ask you though, why did you become involved in objecting to this?

D: Oh, at the time I was involved in quite a few things. I was, you know, involved in the church, you know, for affairs, helping out. And I was at the, starting at the Portuguese-American Center with the Soccer Team. And the reason I got involved was mostly to speak to the Portuguese people. You know, they would have these meetings, because the real movement beyond that was like the, were like the Father John Silva, who was the pastor.

G: So he was one of the major (D: Yes) opponents in (D: Definitely. Oh yes, he was) organizing in Back Central.

D: Yah, and the, I would say the first and second generation of Portuguese people living in Lowell, you know, the ones that the grandparents and parents came in the early 1900s.

G: Yes, and owned property, correct?

D: Yah, and owned property. At the time the Connector was there, now these people were like leaders, the kind, the community, the foundation of the community.

G: Yes, kind of like the community elders, right?

D: Exactly, because they had organized the social clubs, the Portuguese-American Center, the Civic League, the Holy Ghost Society.

G: Yes.

D: The church, and we kind of just came in and then the population, the community started growing, but they were the, the focal point.

G: Yes, they were the major force.

D: Yah, because the Portuguese people per say, especially the immigrants, they didn't care much about politics.

G: Ah huh. Yes, I wanted to ask you about that.

D: They never cared, and still to this day they don't care about politics, because, and I say because they didn't live the experience of the people after the revolution. Their relatives that were in the state back and never made it here, (G: I see) you know, that's totally different people than the way we were brought up.

G: This was the revolution in Portugal in the [19]20s.

D: No, no, no, in [19]74.

G: In [19]74. Okay.

D: Most of the Lowell Community came on the late [19]60s early [19]70s, before the revolution.

G: Yes, yes.

D: So they didn't, politics was nothing to them.

G: I see. They stayed out of politics.

D: They stayed out of politics. They came here just to try to go to work, send the kids to school, which was hard for everybody because there was no bilingual thank God, no bilingual. They learned English.

G: Yes. So, but let me ask you, why do you think this older generation was more politically active? The older generation?

D: Because they were born here. A lot of them were born here.

G: I see. Okay.

D: They were born here, the people. They were like, I would say second generation. Their grandparents came in the late 1800s. Then they have children and (--).

G: So they became somewhat accustomed to local politics. And so they (--)

D: That's what they were, yah.

G: Well speaking of involvement in local politics, this is Manuel Figuera.

D: Yah, he was, he was, on the Connector he was tireless this gentleman, tireless.

G: How do you pronounce his name?

D: Figuera. Manuel Figuera.

G: Was he also known as Raymond, because I've heard him called Raymond for some reason.

D: No.

G: No.

D: I think his son was Raymond.

G: Oh okay. Okay.

D: I know he has a grandson that's Raymond. I don't know if his son is Raymond.

G: Okay.

D: But he's Manuel Figuera, yes.

G: And what do you remember about him?

D: Great man. (G: Yes) Stubborn, but a great friend. Yah, very stubborn.

G: It's interesting.

D: [Figuera's view was] "I mean it's my way. This is the way we should do it. That's the way we got to do it." We love, everybody loved him.

G: Was he a fluent English speaker, or with some difficulty?

D: Yes! No, no, no, he could speak English. He knew all the politicians. He knew everybody downtown this guy.

G: And he was from Madeira?

D: Madeira, yes. He knew everybody. Anybody that had power in Lowell he knew him.

G: Yes. Yah. Okay. All right. Now interestingly I have a photograph. It's hard to see really, but a picture of you. And here you are at a meeting about the Connector and you are, you were the translator.

D: Yes. I was (--) This was at the, if I'm not mistaken, this was at the Rogers School.

G: Okay, okay.

D: At the Rogers School. The place was packed. Packed, packed, packed.

G: Yes, and City Councilor Brenden Fleming was there. Yes, yes.

D: Yah, and yes, I was the translator, yah, because as they spoke I was telling the Portuguese people what they were saying and what was going on.

G: Of course. Now the other thing is this is interesting. Dimas, this is a letter, this is an article you wrote for the *Lowell Communicator*. The newspaper the *Communicator*? I don't know if you (--) Do you remember writing this?

D: 1972.

G: Yah. It's basically to, obviously to inform Portuguese speaking people whose English was limited, the issues about the Connector. I don't read Portuguese. So I don't know (--)

D: No, no, do you mind if I (--) I don't recall this, The Communicator. I don't even (--)

G: Okay, what does the article say?

D: The article says, it's just putting, letting everybody know that there's going to be a decision made on the 27th of June.

G: Yes, 1972?

D: 1972, about the Lowell Connector.

G: Yes.

D: Everybody (--) We (--) Everybody thinks it's going to be a "no go". The decision will be not to proceed with the, with the Connector. This is what the people want. We don't want this Connector to be built.

G: Yes.

D: And then who's pushing for this? Certainly not the people in the area or in the neighborhood.

G: Yes.

D: But most likely the business people downtown in Lowell, there're the ones that are probably pushing for this because they don't care about the Lowell people up in, you know, up in this area who work. At this time they were already buying a lot of properties, '72, (G: Right), because as I say (--)

G: The city was buying property.

D: No, no, the Portuguese people.

G: Yes, okay.

D: The Portuguese people were buying, because they came, they rent, or they live with relative for like a week or two and then they find an apartment. As soon as they got a job they found an apartment.

G: And then they would have saved up money and buy property.

D: Yah, it usually would take about a couple of years for them to buy a home.

G: I see, okay, because Back Central was affordable back then, right?

D: Yah, my parents bought a one-family for \$5,000 while they could have bought a two family next door for \$3,000. [Laughs]

G: Yes, yes. Right, right.

D: Yah, yah, we work very hard for everything that we have. And it doesn't matter if we own, or we're renters, and even not be an American citizen, we can't vote, but that doesn't mean that we can't, you know, speak our minds.

G: All right. So that's an important point you were trying to get across to the people in the neighborhood.

D: Yah, just for the people yah.

G: Yah, right. So even if they didn't own property they had a stake in this.

D: Yes, because we lived in the area and we took care of the property.

G: Right, it was their lives right?

D: Yes, we don't want to go through. No one wants to go through, (G: Right) through the same hardships that we did when we first arrived here, you know, with not, not speaking English and not knowing anything. (G: Right) Because if the roads went through it would destroy the community and everybody would have to start (--)

G: Start over again.

D: Start all over again.

G: Right, right. Okay. So that's what you were writing about.

D: Yah, that's what, this is what I'm re-translating.

G: Yes, exactly.

D: That we all have our lives organized. We lived next to our families and friends, and if we wanted to go to the store, we just walked down the store. Everything is around us. Are we going to let all of this go because of the rich, rich people that wants to take advantage of the lower people, you know, today is the 1%.

G: Interestingly Dimas you put it in class terms. You kind of put it in part in terms of social class.

D: Yah, kind of now reading this, yah, I think I did.

G: Did you read Karl Marx when you were a young student?

D: No, I did not. No. No, I did not. No, I did not.

G: But it is interesting that you did point out that the wealthy could benefit from this at the expense of the poor people, or the less wealthy I should say.

D: Now we shouldn't let this happen, because if they, if they build the road a lot of people will be out of housing. They will lose their homes and they will have hard times probably finding a house. They wouldn't have probably hard time finding a house, but a lot of people didn't have cars. So that would have made their lives more difficult, because in those days everybody walked downtown to work.

G: Yes.

D: And then their way up they all stopped at the Pioneer Market. They did the food shopping there for the week. They'd cash their checks there. And Pioneer Market delivered. Two hours later, an hour later they have the food there like three vans going out all of the time.

G: Yes, where was the Pioneer Market?

D: At the corner of Charles and Central, (G: Okay) where, right across the monument there.

G: Yes, what's there today? Do you know?

D: Pioneer Liquors. A liquor store.

G: Oh okay. Okay, but that was like the key grocery store.

D: That was it. That was it. That was a small Stop &, there was a Stop & Shop in the plaza.

G: Yah, yah.

D: Where there's a fitness center. That used to be a Stop & Shop there (G: Okay) but everybody just walked up, stopped at the Pioneer Market, do their shopping there. They had full (--) I was (--) If you've heard about the first DeMoulas Store? It was even smaller than that, but

they had butchers there. They had everything. Everything was fresh. They had the best fruit in the city.

G: No kidding.

D: Yah, and they cut, they cut your steaks the way you want. If you didn't like what you see on the counter, you'd say, "I want it this way. I want it that way."

G: Wow.

D: They spoke Portuguese. They were Portuguese.

G: Yes. They were Portuguese, the owners, right?

D: Yah, yah. In fact one of them, Paul Silva, he might remember a lot of this stuff too. He runs, he owns the Whipple Café.

G: Café? He does?

D: Yah, him and his wife worked at the Pioneer, at the Pioneer Market.

G: Oh no kidding.

D: And when they finally decided they couldn't compete. Everybody started getting [unclear] and everybody started going out.

G: Yes, yes.

D: And the kids, they didn't want it. It was him and his brothers. His brother passed away, Danny. And then he, he bought the Whipple and he's been there ever since.

G: Okay. I've been there. I didn't know he owned it.

D: Yah, Paul. Great guy, him and Nancy. Great couple, great family. You know, isn't it true that human beings have more value than the cars that go across the (--)

G: Yes, is that what you wrote?

D: Yah, it's right here. [Reading] What can we do about this? Do the same thing that we did a week ago. Let's all go downtown to the meeting on the 27th when it's going to be decided if not, if the Connector is going to be built.

G: Right, right.

D: Let's all go down there. Let's bring our friends, our families.

G: It goes on down here.

D: Yah. We all need to go down there so we can help and stop this. I used to call it highway sometimes, the Connector to be built. Our lives are set. Hear our families again. This is about the same thing kind of, copies. [Reading from documents] Yah, they kind of overlapped.

G: Let me ask you though, is there anything else you want to say about the article and any other points you want to make?

D: No, that's about (--) You got the idea of what I said.

G: Yah, very good. And so apart from Manuel Figuera, were there other men or women? Were there any women who were involved that you recall in this opposition? Was it mostly, you know, guys like Manuel?

D: No, it was Manuel, but it was Eddie Santos, Joseph Camara. Mostly like the Board of Directors of the Portuguese American Center.

G: Okay. Okay.

D: Women wise I would say Gladys Picanso, because she was very well-known and respected in the community too.

G: Yes. Yes. So she was a key figure too in the opposition.

D: Yes, but the leadership came from Father Silva.

G: Yes, it really did. It came from Father Silva?

D: Yes it did. He pushed. He pushed. He didn't like to be upfront. Like I'm pretty sure I did this because of him. He told me to do it.

G: Oh no kidding.

D: Because he wouldn't do it.

G: I see. Okay.

D: He was there.

G: He was there?

D: He was there.

G: But he wanted you to be (--)

D: Yah, because I was the one, at that time I was already doing the readings in Portuguese at mass.

G: Oh.

D: Because he started late, that you know, the second council that allowed the (--) To do, say the mass in Portuguese, he started it late. He started in the early [19]70s.

G: Oh, okay.

D: He used to do everything in Latin. [Both laugh]

G: Before Vatican II.

D: Yah, before Vatican II. And it was, it was kind of, in the late 60s it was kind of tough for him to change, but he changed.

G: Yes. That's interesting.

D: Yes, yes.

G: Yah, so he changed.

D: Yah, he changed.

G: But you helped (--)

D: I would say he was the (--) For the neighborhood there, him and other, and other leaders of like other communities, because there was a lot of Polish people around that area too.

G: Yes, there were Polish people, yes.

D: And he was kind of the central (--) At any social organization, like there was the Italian Club there too in Central Street.

G: Yah, right.

D: All those people, everybody just kind of, the whole neighborhood got together.

G: Yes, okay. Okay. Well that's interesting, because I wanted to ask you too, it really, it required (--) To defeat the Connector it required (--)

D: One of the individuals that did the most to stop the Connector was Ray Rourke. I don't (--) I think he was a City Councilor at that time.

G: Yah, okay. So I was going to say it required alliances across ethnic identity right?

D: Yes. Mr. Rourke, even more than Father Silva, was the big pusher too, the big force behind the "Stop the Connector" movement.

G: Do you remember, was Dick Howe Sr. also? Do you remember him as being involved in fighting?

D: I don't even (--). Was he in the city council in those days?

G: He was.

D: I, see that, I (--)

G: But you remember Rourke and Brenden Fleming.

D: I remember, not as much to the Connector now that I see his picture here.

G: Yah, okay, but (--)

D: I don't even know. Was he a city councilor?

G: He was a city councilor, yah.

D: Because I know he was at one of the big affairs for our church. He was the mayor.

G: But that's interesting. You said that Rourke was really (--)

D: Ray Rourke.

G: Yah, you remember him as being (--)

D: Mr. Rourke was, because he lived in Back Central Street, Lawrence, somewhere on Lawrence Street back there.

G: Okay.

D: He was, and he knew all the, Eddie Santos, and the Camaras, and the Costas.

G: Oh okay.

D: He knew all of these people knew him.

G: Yes.

D: And he was, he was the force. The force [unclear].

G: So in some ways he represented the Portuguese Community in city council.

D: Yes he did. Yah, he kind of did, yah. And after him was [city council member an later mayor of Lowell] Tarsy Poulis you know. [Both laugh]

G: Yes, I remember Tarsy.

D: Yah, but Mr. Rourke was up to the [Sampson] Connector Mr. Rourke was always involved. In fact they tried a second time to put the Connector through.

G: Yes. Yes.

D: And Mr. Rourke at that time, I think he was Secretary of Transportation. And he had enough pull then to squash the Lowell politicians that wanted that done.

G: Yes.

D: I don't recall who the governor was, but I remember them, he's coming to one of our meetings to say, "Do not worry. It will never go through this community again. I'll make sure of that."

G: Okay.

D: With the governor [Francis Sargent]. (G: Interesting, yah) Somehow, whatever they did, I don't know. Everything has to be legal. Forget the Connector.

G: It must have been Dukakis right, or maybe even before Dukakis?

D: Probably before Dukakis.

G: Okay. All right. Let me ask you, just to shift gears a little bit, two things. One, you don't remember the Lowell, the *Communicator Newspaper*, do you, or who?

D: No, I really don't. I don't.

G: Okay. That's okay.

D: But in those days I already read (--) I used to buy the paper every day, because that's how I picked, you know.

G: Well you know what? Interestingly, this was (--)

D: Better my English with that.

G: This was often in stark opposition to the *Lowell Sun*. That's one of the interesting things about his newspaper. Virtually everything the *Lowell Sun* supported (D: Oh, they were against) the *Communicator* opposed.

D: I'm surprised I don't have any copies. I was looking through my attic. I don't have any of that stuff, because at the time I was living at my parents' house. So I couldn't carry everything with me all of the time.

G: I'd be glad, if you want I'll make you a (--) I'll send you (--) I sent your sister a file, a pdf electronic version of this. I can send it to you if you'd like?

D: Yah, if you don't mind.

G: I'd be glad too, sure.

D: I'd appreciate it.

G: So the other thing is, again, changing gears a little bit. You were a young man at this time. And as far as you and your others of your generation, what did, did Lowell have much to offer in terms of jobs, or finding a partner, or you know, dating, or?

D: There were lots of jobs. I mean there were factories everywhere. There were like six or seven shoe factories. The dress factories. Shirt factories. Pajama factories. The Wannalancit Textile, Lowell Manufacturing. There was the Commodore Food, processing food, fish. Commodore Foods processed fish.

G: Yes, yes.

D: Like Talapia, you know, fish would come in. They'd process all of that. (G: I see) Can it and everything. There was lots of jobs. And you know, there was the church, which is you know, if you look around Lowell, where there is a church there is a community.

G: Yes.

D: And we were lucky enough that the people before us, when we came our church was built. social clubs were built. The Holy Ghost [Park] was built. And everybody hung around together. There would be a couple of affairs at the Holy Ghost, and that was it. That's what everybody did.

G: Apart from the Lowell Connector, the opposition to that, were there other issues in Lowell at the time that you were involved with, or that the younger generation was active in to make some change in the city, or not so much?

D: No, not at all. Like I said before, we never got into politics.

G: Okay, because I was going to ask you. Interestingly enough, in the early [19]70s just about the same time there was a movement to have rent control in Lowell. And you know, obviously this affected a lot of lower income people and there were, you know, a number of large land holders in Lowell, landlords, Greek, Portuguese, the Silva Brothers.

D: Yah, Silva Brothers owned a lot of (--)

G: Of course Louis Saab.

D: Yah, they owned a lot of property.

G: They owned a lot of property and you can imagine they fought this initiative tooth and nail.

D: Again, people might, we might have been involved at that time if it's what you say, late [19]70?

G: This was like [19]70-74.

D: [19]70 to (--). At that time again, it would have been through the same process, through the Eddie Santos, the Santos Family, the Costas, the Camaras, you know, they were kind of (--). The newer immigrants were getting involved. Little by little they were getting involved in this stuff, (G: Okay) but they were never, we were never politically (--). We would do phone, phone banks out of the Portuguese-American Center. We'd take turns like an hour every other day when there were elections.

G: Oh really?

D: And call the people that, Portuguese people that would use the words citizens, that could vote and remind them to vote.

G: I see. Now did they tend to be more Democratic than Republican, or?

D: Oh yah, they loved Kennedy. They loved Kennedy.

G: Of course. So they tended to be?

D: And they still to this day.

G: Yes.

D: To this day.

G: But those involved in making phone calls and things, they tended to be Democratic and not Republican, is that?

D: I would say so.

G: Okay.

D: I would say most of them, yes. And if there was an issue that we wanted the, a city, probably at that time we did call people just taking the list. Father [de]Silva would provide us the list of people from the church and the club who'd have the membership. And you know, everybody had a phone, and the phone was in the phonebook. So we just, you take that street, I take this street and we can (--)

G: So for example, like a local thing like to improve a local school in Back Central, you might get people to call?

D: Yes, because Camara, Joseph Camara, he's still alive, he was a school teacher. (G: Yes, yes) He was a school teacher. Eddie Santos was a mailman, you know, and Leo Sousa was a mailman. And Mendes was a police officer, you know? So all of these people were the ones, you know.

G: Yes. They knew how city hall worked. So yes.

D: And Mr. Vieira was the attorney. Everybody new Mr. Vieira because he spoke Portuguese. His parents were from Madeira.

G: Yes, he was an important guy too, wasn't he?

D: Yah, yah, because he, you know, as a community.

G: Let me ask you, did you (--). The only person, Portuguese person I found, I'm sure there were others, but who supported this rent control was a fellow named Joseph Mello, Jr. Joe Mello, M E L L O.

D: Joe Mello, or John?

G: Joe Mello. Joseph.

D: Joe.

G: Joseph. Well that's his, you know, given name. But he was also the secretary of the Lowell Central Labor Council, and he was the Head of the Clerks, the Local Clerks Union.

D: Those individuals didn't hang around with us.

G: Okay. He would have been a bit older than you.

D: Yah, but he wouldn't hang around with us.

G: Why do you say that?

D: Yah, there was, there was a lot of people that kind of (--) The community had kind of two people. The people that went to church and hung around the church and welcome. Immigrants, we had a hard time fitting into community. It wasn't as easy just as walking in.

G: Interesting, yes.

D: I mean the church is fine, but then when you try to get into the organizations, that's my land, that's my thing. I did this. I built this. What are you guys doing in here?

G: So it was harder to break in?

D: Yes, it was very hard. Very, very, very, hard.

G: Yah, right.

D: Very hard. I was lucky enough because of all the work I did through the church, you know, teaching Sunday school, and getting involved in the festivities, and all that stuff.

G: Again, so even within the Portuguese Community it was hard to break in to some of those established clubs.

D: Yah, but there was a lot of people that were born here wouldn't care much for the newcomers.

G: I see.

D: And I'm saying if this gentleman that you're mentioning, he was a union guy. Forget it. He wouldn't (--) I don't recall him. I know Mellos, but he wasn't one of the neighborhood, you know? He wasn't one of us.

G: Well let me, just quickly about trade unionism, because you know, back in the 60s unions were still relatively strong in Lowell.

D: Yah, I fought the union. Again, in Paris Shoe they tried to get in there.

G: Yes, yes.

D: And because of the large amount of Portuguese people we, they lost. They didn't get in.

G: What role did the Portuguese people play in defeating the union dry?

D: I just told everybody that it was no good.

G: Okay, okay.

D: You don't want that because you do what (-- You know, you pay them a fee.

G: Yes, a dues.

D: And you do what you're told.

G: An annual dues, yes.

D: Yah, you know, you do what you're told. You do what you're told. You know, and it doesn't matter, you all make the same money. Nobody gets, nobody makes more money than them.

G: What? Do you remember when was the union trying to break into the shoe factory?

D: Well they tried all of the shoe factories. (G: Yes) And I don't know if Simon Shoe, if they got into Simon Shoe, or Lowell Shoe. I don't think they got into any shoe factory.

G: Yes.

D: But they were trying very hard at Paris, because they had a lot of employees.

G: Yes.

D: But they (-- I don't recall the time but it's probably at that same time that you, that you were mentioning.

G: Let me ask you too, because of the you know, Salazar and then that regime was ousted, there must have been (-- I gather that most of the Portuguese community were very glad to see him out. Is that fair to say?

D: I don't, no. I don't think. No. The way the Portuguese people were brought up in our country, you respect authority. You respect the people that are in charge. You respect your elders. You respect the people in charge. We didn't know any better. I mean it's just like growing up in Cuba and Castro. That's what you know, that's what it is.

G: I see.

D: And that's what we knew. Because like when I lived overseas that was in the village, one of the largest villages on the island, maybe four or five people had a radio. It was the rich people that owned the vineyards or the, you know, the land, most of the land where they grew the corn and the wheat.

G: Yes.

D: Those were the people that had radios. When my paternal grandfather passed away I guess they split up whatever he had, and my father had enough money to buy a radio. So we bought a Grundig. [Laughs]

G: What was it called?

D: A Grundig? G R U N D I G, (G: Okay) a Grundig. It was a German radio, short wave. Short wave.

G: Grundig, yah, okay.

D: And when he came to the country he sold it for the same money that he bought it, that he paid for it. That's how good the thing was.

G: Yes.

D: He'd listen to music. Listen to the news.

G: Yah, but I gathered when Salazar was defeated, when he was ousted in the military dictatorship group (--)

D: We, most of the Lowell Community had been out of there for ten years.

G: Yes, so did it mean as much then?

D: No.

G: No, it didn't. Okay.

D: I mean I went back a year after the revolution in '75. I had been here for nine or ten years. I went back. I could not believe the way the kids that went to school with me, the way that my uncles, the way that every kid spoke about politics. In one year those (--) And that one year of the revolution, how the mentality of the person that couldn't even read or write, how it changed.

G: How did it change?

D: Oh unbelievable. I mean they, they, because they wanted, they wanted everything now, because you know, he was gone, Salazar. To them it was worth a lot more than to us here.

G: To people here, yes. Yes.

D: Because we, you know, we come here and we struggle here (--)

Interview ends