

# UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL

## Memórias – Preserving the Stories of Lowell's Portuguese Community

### Oral History Interview with Priscilla Hilliard, March 2, 2017

#### **Biographical Note:**

Born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1947; daughter Mary C. (Freitas) and Alvaro Aguiar; the Freitas branch of the family from Azorean island of Faial; Aguiar branch from Madeira Island; Priscilla (Aguiar) Hilliard grew up on Central Street in the heart of Lowell's major Portuguese neighborhood and was educated in Lowell's public schools, graduated from Lowell High School, and later, Merrimack College in North Andover, Massachusetts; during part of her school years she worked in the family's bakery business on Central Street; and later she worked for Raytheon Corporation in a clerical position, followed by professional administrative positions with the Social Security Administration and with Health and Human Services in Boston; in more recent years she has worked as a real estate agent in the Greater Lowell Area.

#### **Scope and Contents:**

Interview conducted by local historian Mehmed Ali; focuses on Priscilla (Aguiar) Hilliard's Portuguese family and relatives; growing up in Lowell's predominately Portuguese "Back Central" neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s; Portuguese food and culture in Lowell; religious activities at Saint Anthony Catholic Church in Back Central; small, family-run businesses (hair salon and bakery in Lowell); and Ms. Hilliard's educational background and career.

#### **INFORMANT: PRISCILLA HILLIARD**

#### **INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI**

#### **DATE:**

**P=PRISCILLA**

**A=ALI**

A: So a little background information, where and when were you born?

P: Okay. I was born at St. John's Hospital, Lowell, and we resided in the Back Central Street area of Lowell and it was August 8, 1947.

A: Okay. And let me ask you a question which I've never thought of before. Were most Portuguese people born at St. John's verses the other two big hospitals of the time?

P: I think they would have been because Central Street was a concentration, large concentration of Portuguese people and St. John's was close by, and everybody walked.

A: True.

P: So I would think it was there.

A: True. Now let me ask you another couple of questions. When you went to the hospital or any of your family members when you were young, where would you go?

P: St. John's, always St. John's.

A: Okay. All right, good, that's interesting info. And where did you go to school at Priscilla?

P: Okay, I went to the Ames Street School, then to the Coburn Street, then to the Moody School, and then to Lowell High.

A: And these schools were primarily near the Back Central, South End right?

P: Well they were, Fort Hill, Moody is Fort Hill. That was maybe a twenty minute walk. Everybody walked to school, and on the way all the kids would join in, the other fellow students.

A: Yah, what's your kind of, what are some of your memories connected to specifically being Portuguese when you were young?

P: A loving family. Love family, meals that were outstanding. You know, so safe. It was a nice (--) Didn't have a lot of monetary things, but there was just so much love and attention given to children. It was great. I mean even now when I talk to people I think I was just so blessed of being a Portuguese family. I'm very impressed and pleased.

A: Now there's a little bit of a stereotype out there, but as I often say, the stereotypes are often created because there are some sizeable truths in them. The Portuguese community was very family oriented, wasn't it?

P: Yes.

A: And also how else would you describe the community?

P: You know, very religious, (A: Okay) centered around church. Everything revolved around church. And that's why we have all this processions and feasts, but it all emanates from the church. So they were very religious people.

A: What are your memories of the church as a youngster?

P: Oh, that we would walk to the church. You know, every Sunday you went to church. You went to Sunday school. I also remember helping my aunt [Rita V. Freitas], my mother's sister, when the church was being rebuilt. We went door to door asking for donations to rebuild the next church. And people were given envelopes and were giving so much money every week.

A: So when you were a very small kid they were still inside the old church?

P: No, the new one was already (--)

A: Okay.

P: I only have memories of the new one. So when I was small it was already the new one.

A: Okay.

P: And then my other memories was on a Sunday when you're walking home you went past your grandparents and they always had goodies to eat there waiting for us. So it was a nice way of seeing your grandparents on Sunday.

A: Yah, yah. Sunday school done in the Portuguese language?

P: No, English.

A: In English, okay.

P: It was English, done right after church.

A: And what about the mass?

P: Right after mass. Mass was bilingual at the time. I remember I was in the choir at the time. So I used to sing in the choir. I used to go to 9:30 mass, and that's when there was a choir and you'd sing. And it was bilingual, and it was very short. Oh, twenty minutes we were out.

A: Yah.

P: Loved it! Yes.

A: Who was the pastor at that time?

P: Father [ Rev. John F.] deSilva.

A: Okay.

P: And he was fast. Twenty, twenty-five minutes right out, we didn't have any homily then. You just say your prayers, sing and you were dismissed.

A: Okay, but the people, many people would kind of stick around and was there a sense of (--)

P: You know what? It was (--). Yes, on the way out you'd see people that would talk afterwards. The church used to be full. It was mobbed. That was the thing to do, both masses. I think there was a 9:30 and the 11:30. And they were always very full, the church full to capacity.

A: What other activities did the church sponsor?

P: Well the Feasts at the grounds was the biggest thing.

A: And you're talking about the Holy Ghost grounds?

P: The Holy Ghost Park, yes. The Holy Ghost grounds, you had your processions and then you had the Holy Ghost meal which everybody looks forward to. Even now I still go back for the Holy Ghost meals that occur so many days after the Lent begins. Very (--) And that was (--) And they'd be a lot of music and everybody used to go there. It was the central thing to do, because people were just, first generations were settling in this country and they were all together, very cohesive unit like any other, when you first come into a country and the newness of everything. And even on "Back Central" you had Barry's Pastry. Then you have Danny's Supermarket, which was Portuguese, you know. So you had a lot of things going on that was very ethnic oriented.

A: Now what street did you live on, or streets?

P: Lived on Central Street and I lived on Chapel Street, but primarily Central Street.

A: In different houses on Central, or?

P: Yes, yes, a couple of different houses on Central. Actually I think my family told me it was three different houses, and also on Chapel Street, but that was all within just a few minutes steps from the bakery [Barry's Pastry Shop, owned by an uncle, Manuel F. Barros, and aunt, Rosaria A. (Aguiar) Barros, a sister of Priscilla's father, Alvaro Aguiar] and from my mother's mother [Rita C. (DaSilva) Freitas) and sister [Rita V. Freitas] whom we spent a lot of time with. It was a very nice time. You know you felt very safe. You know everybody watch one another. And it was multicultural, and that we had some French people in there. You had different, but everybody just great respect for one another. It was a nice time.

A: Who were some of the other ethnicities that lived in that neighborhood?

P: French. We had French and I think, you know, right close by was French, but now that I come to think of it a lot of it was mostly Portuguese. I can think of a French family, and I might think of another family that could have been Irish up the street, but it was almost all Portuguese as I stop to think of it now.

A: Yah, yah. So did you go? Once you got out of the Moody you went to Lowell High.

P: Went to Lowell High, right.

A: Now were there any Portuguese teachers as you were going through the school system?

P: No.

A: Who were the teachers primarily?

P: When you say teachers you mean ethnicity? (A: Yes) I saw, I would say Irish.

A: Okay.

P: I had a lot of Irish teachers. Wonderful teachers, enjoyed school. I always liked school.

A: Yah. And then what did you do when you graduated?

P: Then I went to work for Raytheon in Waltham for about (--) Well actually when I was going to school, when I turned sixteen I started working at the bakery part-time.

A: Oh you did.

P: Yes, so I already started two days a week and on Saturday. I was working at the bakery when I went back to school. It was in the summer when I started, and then through high school I worked the bakery.

A: And tell us about the Bakery. And this is Barry's Bakery.

P: Barry's Pastry, yes.

A: Barry's Pastry, sorry.

P: Well it was my, it was owned by my father's sister and her husband.

A: What were their names?

P: Manuel Barros and Rosaria Barros, and they were very particular on their pastries. It had to be fresh. It had to be made from scratch. So it was quality, very quality. And what I did in the summers, I'd start at 5:00 in the morning and then I could work till 6:30 at night if I wanted, or 6:00 at night. And you know I did that a couple of days a week. Sometimes I'd just work until (--) I start (--) Actually when I graduated I was there for a while, and I worked every day. I started at 5:00 [am]. I would open the bakery, the front. I would handle all the customers in the front.

A: So when you showed up at 5:00 [am] they had already been there for a while?

P: Oh yes, my uncle, oh yes. They would start early, early in the morning, I mean probably about 3:00 in the morning, four in the morning. They would already be, because you have to raise, the bread dough has to rise. So you have to start that early. And there was one Portuguese fellow, the senior, that would arrive there at 7:00 on Friday night and work up until like maybe 10:00 in the morning, getting all the bread dough ready. And then my uncle would come in in the morning, and he had another baker that would also arrive early. It was a very early life to do the baker business. It's hard. Most people don't want to do it.

A: Right. And so the reason they would have the guy come in on Friday night was the Saturday was the big day of the week?

P: Big day, yes. Saturday was very, very busy. On holidays it was unbelievable. My uncle would sometimes work 24 hours nonstop. There were days he wouldn't (--) And by then I had already, after being there a few years, I was already a cake decorator. And I was already doing different, making different types of pastries and getting them ready for the store. Holidays as I said, standing room only, they'd go out to the street, you know, it was just (--) Because at that time grocery stores didn't have a lot of pastries there. So everybody went and bought fresh pastry. So you had to order your pies and you know they'd be several of us waiting on customers, because everybody came. Because he had, he had the best whipped cream, because it was fresh. He bought Shaw Farm's milk and he made his heavy cream, the heavy cream. It's, even I'm spoiled now. I have to make my own, because the imitations in the stores, I can't accept them now. And you know I baked a couple of times for different organizations and they notice right away, real whipped cream, you know, and I was surprised.

But the holidays, I mean you know, we would just start in the morning and just go till night time, come back again. And until the holiday was over it was just a lot, a lot of work, but a lot of fun. You saw people you never saw all year long they were coming there. And even to this day, if I mention that bakery name, it doesn't matter who you are, what ethnicity, if you lived in Lowell you know that bakery.

A: So would lots of other ethnicities come?

P: Oh yes! Oh yes!

A: Okay, because what, what they baked wasn't just necessarily Portuguese items.

P: No. No, you had your cream puffs. You had your eclairs, Neapolitans. You had your chocolate cream cakes. You know, you had your Portuguese bread, you'll have your Portuguese roll, sweet bread, but it was just an American bakery other than that.

A: Okay, okay.

P: And my uncle had worked in other bakeries. So he brought a lot of their recipes he knew.

A: Yah, do you remember what other bakeries he worked at?

P: You know I was trying (--) I don't know if there was a Brockman's [Brockleman's] Bakery years ago or not in the area? If it was A & P?

A: There was a Brockelman's Market down in Kearney Square. They might have had a bakery there.

P: They might have had a bakery, because he was involved with them before he started his own bakery.

A: Okay. Now back to the Portuguese-specific items, were there certain things made during the holidays that weren't available?

P: Yes, the Portuguese sweet bread with the egg, cooked egg in the center. That was just made for Easter.

A: Okay. (P: Okay) And what was the Portuguese name for that?

P: Massa Sovada, sweet bread, Portuguese sweet bread. That's all that is, but it had the egg. You could get sweet bread other times of the year, but the egg was symbolic of Easter. (A: Okay) It was a cooked egg, hard-boiled egg in there. And that was primarily, that was primarily as far as that goes anything symbolic about the bakery, because other than that you would go right into a, just a (--) And that's why all ethnicities came, it was just an American bakery with products.

A: Yah. Any interesting or fun stories about the bakery?

P: Well it wasn't exactly the bakery, except that on Wednesdays if we got our decorating done early we went fishing down at Rockport. Every Wednesday in the summer my Aunt and I would go, and my uncle too sometimes, would go fishing, because, well Portuguese are great fishermen. And so what we would do is we'd cast right off the rocks. And I did that for a whole year. And then when we were done fishing we'd make a chowder right there; a fish chowder with the fresh fish. We'd clean them and make it right there. I remember that chowder never tasted as good as that there.

A: So your aunt was the leader of the fishing team?

P: Yes, and her mother, who was in her eighties, she would also go.

A: Really.

P: Yes, you know, it would be the three of us primarily.

A: So when I think about people going fishing in 2017 I really think of men.

P: That's right, we'd (A: But) be there every Wednesday casting out. And we would catch perch, we'd catch flounder, and we'd catch Pollack. One day we reeled in a, we got stuck on a trap, lobster trap came in. We got rid of that fast. But the best fishing was when it was raining. And I don't know if the fish associated that with something, but that's when you could catch the biggest fish, was when it was raining.

A: No kidding, yah.

P: And it was Pigeon Cove [on Cape Ann] and there's a lot of artist there. We used to go down there.

A: Sure, sure.

P: Haven't been there, but I spent one year we did that, great fun.

A: Was your family unique for having the women go fish?

P: You know, could have been, could have been. A lot of people, yah, because you know I didn't hear, I didn't hear of too many others that went, but could have been and we just didn't check, you know. I recall going fishing with some people when I was real small off the rocks, and it was women there too. It's just that we were able to go when we wanted to go.

A: Yah, right, right. Um, when you guys went fishing did you see other Portuguese families out there?

P: No. No one was there. They'd be other people that came of different denominations you know, but no, we were the ones, we were the ones.

A: So you worked at Barry's Pastry after you got out of high school. How long did you do that for?

P: I think I probably did it for a year. And then I got a position, a steno position with Raytheon in Waltham. And after that I came right back to Lowell to Social Security Administration (A: Okay) and worked there for about five years. And then I went into Boston Health and Human Services and did, you know, it was a program analysis, but we reviewed nursing homes. Went into nursing homes and checked them for federal requirements; covered the six New England states. And then afterwards I just left. And then I got involved with real estate.

A: Okay. And how did you get your position at Raytheon? Do you remember?

P: Yes, through the paper. There was an ad in the paper and I just applied and got selected. Social Security [Administration], I had taken all of the exams, was offered the job, took that.

A: Now when you worked for Social Security where did you work at?

P: Right on Palmer Street right here in Lowell.

A: Okay, all right.

P: They used to be on Palmer Street.

A: Yah, 26 Palmer. I used to deliver mail there.

P: Did you?

A: In the [19]90s, yah.



P: Oh okay! And what I used to do is I used to interpret sometimes when people came in and they couldn't speak English, you know, and they want to get a social security card, you know, just go up and help them.

A: And so what year did you start there? Late [19]60s?

P: Ah, it would (--) Yes, I'd say early, probably early [19]60s.

A: Early [19]60s.

P: No, I'm sorry. You're right. It would have to be, you know, I'm thinking it would have been [19]70s, early [19]70s (--)

A: Early [19]70s, okay.

P: Was probably when I started there.

A: And a lot of Portuguese people came in?

P: Yes. Yes, there were a lot of Portuguese people. And you know a lot of them had jobs waiting. One thing I will say that was, I always found impressive was how much my family loved this country. I once said to my mother's mother, "Are you going to go back and see Portugal?" She says, "Never. This is my country. I love this country." I was surprised. I was surprised. It was very surprising as I (--) You know, you hear of people now that go back and forth, but at that time, you know, she was very, you know, loved this country. And one thing I also noticed was the generation of people that were coming, that had come into this country that were my parents' age, they were all entrepreneurs. They were all starting their business. They were really go-getters, you know, and I see that. My uncle [Joseph Aguiar] had his (--) My aunt [Delia P. Aguiar] who had Dee's Debbie [Dee's Debbie Shop, hair salon, located in the Hildreth Building on Merrimack Street in Lowell's downtown] for over forty years, she was a professional hairstylist. Her husband also had a, delivered oil, had his own business, delivered oil.

A: Okay.

P: And he received the Purple Heart as well. He was in the Marines.

A: During WWII?

P: Yes. And I forget which war he was in, but he became a disabled American vet, but he started his own business. And like I say, I had my aunt and uncle. My family, my mother and father started theirs as well. You had a lot of, they were go-getters. Those people were really go-getters, very lovely, lovely people. I mean as I recall when I went to the grounds and met these people they were always so polite, hard working. I mean I remember I worked at the grounds when I was growing up, because as a teenager you always volunteered your services,

and I used to volunteer my services up there. Everybody did. It just was a nice way of doing things.

They had a lot of the Portuguese dances, a lot of people from Portugal. And even this first generation, they joined, they also had clubs where they all dressed up in the Portuguese outfits and they all did the dancing up there, which is before my time. So I never got to see it, but I heard about it.

A: Yah, yah. Within the Portuguese community were there different sub-groups that represented some of the different areas of Portugal?

P: There are differences. There are differences. You know you got your Madeira, like my father was from Madeira. My mother was, family was from the Azores [Faial]. Yes, so you did. You had Madeira and Azores, a lot in the Portuguese Community. Yes, you did have that.

A: Was that reflected in any of the (--)

P: Yes, I'll tell you. You have a Portuguese donut, fried dough okay. Now if you're from Madeira, it's malasadas. If you're from Azores it's a filhós, same donut okay. Now I just always see it malasadas I think is what they're calling it. But that was an interesting, you know, that was interesting. And they did make food a little bit different sometimes. They could add something. If you had marinated pork (--) Like Christmas Eve everybody went to the midnight mass and on way home you went to grandparents. You stopped in and it was always pickled pork marinated. Madeira put turnip in it. Azores didn't, you know.

A: Okay.

P: But it's very close. You know, they know a lot about wine. They're very, very good wine makers. They have a lot of yards that have grapes.

A: That's Madeirans, or both?

P: Both, both made, you know are very skilled in that.

A: You were just describing the pickled pork for Christmas. Were there other foods that were represented as of certain times of the year?

P: Yes. Well cod fish was also another one. You'd have cod fish sandwiches, and you'd have the marinated pork. And even when you go to the festivals, the feasts, you'll see codfish and Linguiça sandwiches, they're up there. Again, that's something that you will see when you're doing festivals.

A: Yah. So was there certain foods that were representative of the certain times of the year, certain holidays?

P: Just, the only one that I recall is the marinated pork around Christmas, (A: Okay) Christmas Eve.

A: Christmas Eve.

P: After the midnight mass. That was the tradition.

A: What else do you remember for holiday traditions?

P: Let's see. I'm trying to think. Well you know, Easter you have to go to church. And then you have the Holy Ghost meal, where you go to the Holy Ghost Park.

A: Then you have these processions connected to the certain saints?

P: Yes, yes you do. Yes, you have different ones for different saints. And in the summertime they're going to have, they'll have different ones. But primarily they're going to have similar food, you know. You can add, you can add a different fish dish or something, but primarily they're going to be the same.

A: Now when you worked for the federal government, were there many Portuguese people that worked with you?

P: Only found a half-breed, half Italian and half Portuguese, one of my bosses. And we must have had two hundred people, no Portuguese. I was the only one.

A: Why do you think that's the case, Priscilla?

P: I think because of education. I think education, because in order to get those positions you had to have, you needed a college degree. And at the time it wasn't (--) And the other thing was, it was a job that historically males would take. A lot of females would go into the teaching sector. So you'd find them there, but you wouldn't find them in the business world so much. So that was a couple of things that were happening. Because now a lot of Portuguese children they're all going to college.

A: Yah. So back then were the Portuguese not going on to college compared to other ethnic groups?

P: Some of them weren't, but it wasn't in compared to others. It was a lot of people that weren't going to college. They just weren't for whatever reason. It wasn't so much ethnic, but you know, Portuguese wise, there was, there was quite a few. A lot of Portuguese women were very home-spun, great homemakers. My mother was the most professional homemaker I've ever seen. Loved being a homemaker you know. So that was the other things. Portuguese women are great cooks. They're great homemakers. I mean when they, when they cook fish you don't cook it upstairs in your house because there's going to be all kinds of odors. You cook it in the basement. You have a second kitchen with stove. I mean you know, they got this whole thing

mapped out, but they were (--). And that could have been another reason why, because they were just into family life a lot.

A: Hm, yah, it's very interesting. So any interesting stories about your time working for the government?

P: You know, when I worked for the government I just traveled, you know, I traveled around the six New England States visiting nursing homes. It was a learning experience visiting nursing homes. You know, and when I went to college we studied you know. I was in Health and Human Services. So we studied the end of life and things that could happen. So at a very early age I'm already being hit with this end of life and I haven't even started my life, but it was interesting. And then when I, I was in watching the nursing homes, you know it was kind of sad. It's kind of sad, because everyone wants to go and take care of pediatrics, but geriatrics nobody wanted. And it was nice when they put a physician as a medical director nursing homes so that people did get visited, you know, it was good to have someone over. And that was a very good time. I enjoyed it. It's just a very demanding job to try and be home and to travel all over, because you know, you could be assigned. I was assigned Concord, New Hampshire. Out of Boston I would go up to Concord. When I was doing six New England States, had to visit them. Very nice, but again, you know, it was taxing too.

A: Yah. So where in your career did you fit your college time in?

P: What I did was when I was at Social Security I started to go to college locally. And that's when I started, when I was local. And then when I graduated from Merrimack [College] then I went into Boston.

A: Okay, and what did you take up at Merrimack?

P: Health and Human Services.

A: Okay, good. Now were you a non-traditional student? Were you a little bit older?

P: Yes, yes.

A: Okay.

P: Yes, was older plus I was working too.

A: Yah, so you were different from most of your classmates?

P: That's right, because I was working. So I was a part-time student doing both.

A: Now what made you decide you wanted to go to college, whereas many people from your generation didn't? And women (--)

P: Advancement. Advancement, I wanted better jobs, better money. You weren't going to get it without a degree. So it was the best, great decision. I mean it just carries you throughout your life.

A: And your family was supportive of that decision?

P: Oh yes. Oh yes. Yah, because they always knew I liked school anyways.

A: Good. So let's rewind a little bit and talk about your first ancestors coming to Lowell, Mass.

P: Okay. Let me see. My first (--) [Grabs a sheet of paper] Let me see. Now let's see. Manuel Aguiar, okay, you know he worked at the Manufacturing Company, Merrimack Manufacturing Company and American Hyde and Leather Company. Now that was my father's father. Now my father's mother and they were born in Caniço, Madeira. (A: Okay) Okay. And she was a weaver in the New Market Manufacturing Company, Boott Mills, and Merrimack Manufacturing Company. They were (--) Okay, that was my father's side.

And let's see. On my mother's side, okay, Rita Freitas, and she was a Lowell seamstress. She worked in the garment mills, one of the mill girls okay.

A: Okay.

P: Let me see, that was (--) Okay, she came to the U.S. in 1915.

A: In what year was she born?

P: She was born in 2/21/1894 in Faial, Azores.

A: Okay, so she was about twenty when she came.

P: Yup.

A: Now how did your parents meet? Do you know?

P: My grandparents or my parents?

A: I'm sorry. This is your grandparents?

P: Grandparents, (A: Sorry) yes, these are my grandparents okay. They met here. They met here and I'm not certain if they met on the way over or not. But now the sad thing was that my grandfather died when he was only thirty-four years old out of pneumonia.

A: Oh really.

P: Yah, he was in St. John's Hospital and he was delirious and fell out the window because of the snow at that time.

A: Really?

P: Yes. So my mother's mother was a widow for over sixty years and she brought up three children, two boys and a girl on her own.

A: Wow.

P: And she went through the recession because I heard about how things were tough in the recession.

A: During the Great Depression?

P: Recession, yah depression. Yes, Great Depression.

A: What stories did you hear?

P: Just that it was (-- Your shoes, you had to save your shoes. You had to watch the leather and everything, how it was going down. I mean they had to be so resourceful, you know, and I guess the communities just all banded together and that's how they went through those tough times.

A: Yah, because there were a lot of people out of work.

P: Yah, and you had to be, I guess you had to know quite a bit. And you know, I think at that time, being good housewives would have taken them a long ways.

A: Yah, especially if they knew how to you know, manage their money and the food.

P: Everything they made was from (-- Food was made from scratch. To this, we never had anything frozen, nothing. Everything was made from scratch.

A: No canned goods?

P: You know we had some canned goods. We did have some canned goods, but not (-- It was like vegetables might be to supplement, but the main meal and soups. They're fantastic soup makers. You know, main meals were always from scratch.

A: Um, interesting.

P: So you save. I mean when you think of what frozen costs, you just think, and how much healthier it was.

A: Absolutely.

P: You know. That was something there.

A: So all right. So that's your grandparents. (P: Right) And then tell us about your parents?

P: And then my parents met here, okay. Let me see.

A: Now both of your sets of grandparents were in Lowell? (P: Yes) Nobody went to New Bedford, or anywhere else?

P: No. Nope, my parents, both sets of grandparents were here. My father, he was born in Madeira.

A: He was?

P: Yah, he was born in Madeira, Caniço, Madeira okay. He came over to this country at the age of sixteen. (A: Okay) Okay, and he and my mother meet here in this country. My mother was born here.

A: So his parents weren't in Lowell at that time?

P: Yes they were.

A: They were?

P: They were already here. Yes, he was the oldest son and he had stayed behind with some relatives.

A: Oh really?

P: Yes.

A: So he was born there and then your grandparents move to Lowell, but he stayed behind.

P: He stayed behind and he came when he was a little older.

A: Why? Any ideas?

P: No, no. I often wondered and they just say he wanted to stay so they let him stay. And then he came like when he was sixteen.

A: Okay.

P: And I'm not certain what you know, when they came verses when he did.

A: And what's your father's, your father's name?

P: Alvaro Aguiar.

A: And what did he do for work? Now did he go to school?

P: His schooling was done over in Portugal, okay. Okay, after he was a proprietor of the grocery store for a few years at the corner of Central and Union, and then he became a Lowell, I mean then he became an arc welder for many years until his retirement.

A: Where did he work at?

P: Right on Tanner Street and I can't think of the welding company. There's a welding company on Tanner Street today.

A: Is it Scannell Boiler Works?

P: Yes it was. I think it was there that he worked.

A: Okay.

P: Yah, for many years. And then my mother, she was a seamstress in the garment mills, one of the mill girls.

A: Okay and she was born here.

P: Yes, she was born here and again they both operated the grocery store. And then she worked part-time afterwards as a seamstress in the garment mills.

A: Okay, what's your mom's name?

P: Mary Aguiar.

A: What's her middle name?

P: C Constance.

A: Okay.

P: Okay. And there was five of us. So there wasn't too much time for her to do too much work. It was just part-time, just part-timer. And then there was her sister [Rita V. Freitas] who again was one of the mills girls and she managed Record Lane Card and Gift Store on Central Street for many years. And then she was the proprietor of Rita's Cards and Portuguese Gifts on Central Street. And then after that she went to Raytheon Company in Lowell, and that's where she retired from.

A: Oh wow. Now what's the genesis of your parents' meeting? Any ideas? Did they tell you?

P: No. No. Well remember now Rose and Barry are from the bakery, that's my father's sister. So now everybody knows one another because you all live within walking distance. Everybody



lived on Central Street. So you were within walking distance of one another. So you get to know everybody. You know, so that was it. And then the only other thing would have been my Aunt Dee [Delia P. Aguiar] as I mentioned to you. She was a hairdresser for forty years, very successful right in the downtown area of Lowell. You know, I mean I went to her too for many years.

A: So tell us about the store. Was the store opened when you were young?

P: No.

A: It had already closed?

P: It already closed by the time we were born.

A: What happened to the store?

P: I don't know, because all I know is that (--) Like I was talking to my brothers and they didn't know either. We didn't know. We just know that it closed before we were born, you know, and even that was on Central Street too. But I would think if you're going to have a lot of children that it might have been hard to keep a store going.

A: Maybe. Maybe, but it does show their entrepreneurial spirit.

P: Yes, everyone, yes everyone was starting businesses and that. And you know, when you look at all the other groups that come over a lot of times they start their own businesses when they first come in.

A: Sure, yah, it's big. Um, so what else? Any stories about your parents, interests that they had, hobbies?

P: Well my father played a mandolin. When he went to these feasts he'd play the mandolin. And there's quite a few strings, a mandolin, you know, a big thing. And then afterwards my mother told me she played too. She didn't play as well as him, which I didn't, you know, at first I didn't realize that she played an instrument. So they played that. My father loves his cars, you know, when they got a car it was a great thing to have a car, because you know, there wasn't a lot of people at the time with cars. And then as I say, it was, you know, there wasn't too much you were doing in that time, because you know, no one had a lot of expendable funds. So you mainly were staying close to home and doing things close by. And we shopped at the grocery store that was just a block away. Everything was so close.

A: Were there, you know, each ethnic group sometimes has one of everything. So they had, you know, Danny's Market.

P: Yes, we had the Danny's.

A: They had Barry's Pastry for all of your bakery needs.

P: Right, exactly. Right, yes.

A: What other Portuguese? Was there a shoe repair guy? Was there a barber?

P: Yes! We had, right up on Central Street, yes, there was a shoe repair person that I remember taking several pairs of shoes as I was growing up there. Yes there was. And then you also had a fish market, and we went and got the fresh fish from the market. That was right across the street from Barry's Pastry.

A: And that was what? Became Martyn's?

P: No, because you're on Back Central, way up on Back Central.

A: How far back? What's the nearest sides streets?

P: Charles Street. (A: Okay) Do you know Charles Street?

A: I sure do.

P: That's where the Blues Club is.

A: Yes.

P: Okay, you just go right around the corner. You had Danny's. Right next door to Danny's was the fish market, okay. He had (--) Okay, so that was the fish market. We had, okay, we had the shoe repair, the bakery, I think we (--) That was (--)

A: Barber?

P: Yes, yes, we had, yes we had local Portuguese barbers. You know I don't remember them as much, but, and the other thing we had? We had our own Portuguese barroom. Johnny's Sousa's Barroom right across the street from where Silva's is now. Well where the old Danny Silva's was on Charles Street, (A: Yup) right across from him was the famous Johnny Sousa's Barroom. And that's where all the fellows would go was right there. So we even had that. You brought that to my attention. I wasn't even thinking about of that at the time. And then of course you had the Blues Club, and you had the Reds Club. They didn't call them that at the time. Like I said, Civic League, and I forget what the name was for the other. And it was much smaller too.

A: Okay.

P: It's been expanded considerably over the years.

A: One of them I thought was called the Portuguese Band Club or something like that?

P: That was it. That was it. The Blues used to be called that. And the other thing was music. You heard Portuguese music, always playing Portuguese music in the homes. People loved to listen to Portuguese music. My father loved to listen to Portuguese music, and my mother did too.

A: Yah. What do you thing the role of music is in the Portuguese Community back in those days?

P: I think it could just be (--) Well they loved to dance. They loved to dance. That was, you know, I remember in the grounds seeing all these people dance, and they loved to dance. Even today they love to dance to that music. So now if you're in the clubs they're going to be dancing to that music. And that's what it is, they like that music to dance too. And that's what I think is important in that, is the dancing aspect of it.

A: Any other stories about your parents? Did they go on vacations?

P: No. No, vacation wasn't something that was that important, you know, didn't seem (--) And then I'm trying to think.

A: What about other recreational activities?

P: Just trying to think, because primarily it was just being home, taking care of the house that was the most important thing that I saw. The neighborhoods, what was nice is, rather than going to a ball park, the kids used to just go behind and they used, on Back Central Street and there used to be this large play area and everybody would just play baseball right there. You didn't have to go to a park. You could just right there, play.

A: Where was that field exactly?

P: Okay. Where Barry's Pastry is, on that same side going up the hill, two houses up there was a driveway and right in between two sets of big properties, rental properties, there was a driveway. You could just walk in there and it opened all up, and that was a playing field for the boys. And the girls, you know, played baseball, kickball, all kinds of sports. And it was nice! It was nice you know. The other thing is, people used to just come on your doorstep and sit, and kids would play cards you know. That was another thing that was nice.

A: Was there certain Portuguese card games?

P: Yes.

A: What were they? Remember the names?

P: No, I don't remember it, but I remember playing. My father used to like to go to the club to play cards, not for money, just play. And I remember playing him, playing years ago cards with him at the house, because I used to like to play cards too. My brother knows the names, because my brother today goes to the club and he'll play cards with them.

A: Okay, yah. What about gardening?

P: We didn't have, we didn't have land because we were renting okay. So because we rented we didn't have land. Now my grandmother and my aunt on my mother's side, they had land where they lived. So they would put a small garden in, but we weren't really into too, too much gardening.

A: Okay.

P: You know, just thinking back it's been many years.

A: Well you're doing great.

P: Many years, you know. But I remember my mother's mother, she had oil. This was prior gas years, and I remember having to go out, fill the oil gallons and bring them in the house to feed the stove. And that was, that was something. I was glad when they converted over to gas. But at the time you didn't have that option. We had oil too, and we were on the third floor and we had to go all the way into the cellar, fill the oil containers, it was one gallon. Have to bring them all the way up, and then you'd have to put them in the stove.

A: Really?

P: We didn't put them in the stove, our parents did.

A: So was it kind of, like what size were the containers down cellar?

P: It was only, oh, I don't know. Oh, those were the large (--)

A: Like a fifty-five gallon drum?

P: Yes, right, those. Right yes. That was the days.

A: And there would be a pump on it or a spicket?

P: A spicket. I think it was a spicket. I remember those, because boy was I glad when we got rid of those things and went over to gas. You know the lines weren't in. Gas lines weren't in in those (--) So you didn't have a choice. So you're in the city, and when you're in the city, if it's not there, that's it. And another thing, you know, as I mentioned, we rented. Well we rented off of Portuguese landlords. We, you know, I can't tell you how nice landlords were years ago. We used to, my mother used to have one of us watch for when the landlord was coming home to pay him, because landlords didn't come to you for you to pay. You went looking for them. You know it's unbelievable. I, you know, I do rentals now and I say, you know, when I got into the rental I had a misconception of what things were like, because we stood trying to get a hold of the (--) I say, you know, things have reversed themselves.

A: [Laughs] In many ways.

P: But those were some of the things. Those are the things that I remember. Of course we walked everywhere. I mean when I worked for Social Security I was on Central Street by the bakery, just walked to work. That's all we do, we just walked all the time.

Now in Social Security I found one other person that was Portuguese in Lowell. That was the only (--)

A: Who was that?

P: Rosaline Camara.

A: Okay.

P: She was a claims representative in Lowell and I met her, but that was the only Portuguese person I even met [at Social Security] even in Lowell at the time.

A: Now did Ethel Eliopoulos run the show?

P: Yes, yes she did.

A: Tell us about Ethel. I've heard some interesting stories about her.

P: Ethel, let's see. Well you know, like I say, this is going back years. Ethel was an exacting person okay. She wanted everything done so. If you knew what you were doing, a wonderful person to work for. And you know, [I] had a great relationship from the beginning. I don't know if it was because when I came in Rosaline had been there and she already had a great relationship, but she was very, very exacting, very good person. A matter of fact one time we had a blizzard and Rosaline and I opened the office and nobody else showed up for work. Ethel calls in, she says, "I might have known you two would have been there." You know, we stayed, worked the day and then left. But if you showed promise Ethel was right there for you all the way. Promotions came like nothing if you were doing good work for here. I was very impressed with her. I liked her.

A: Now what if Ethel didn't think you were doing a 100% job?

P: If she didn't think you weren't doing a 100% job she probably would have let you know, and she'd probably have reason, because she was very good with her employees, you know. And if she had any reason no one else would ever know, because she was very professional. She would not, you know, you'd be called in her office but we'd never know, you know. And she, she liked to hear from your thoughts. I mean she'd (--). You know, she'd ask for opinions and you know, you could give your opinion very freely to her. So if she valued your opinion, you know, she would ask for it.

A: Okay. Good. Well Priscilla, do you have any final thoughts about your time growing up Portuguese in Lowell, Mass.?

P: Well like I say, I feel very blessed, because especially when I worked in the bakery, because it taught me that there's no such thing as a nine-to-five hours. You're there. Whatever you do in life you do whatever you have to no matter how much time it takes, and you always strive to do your best. And it just carried me. And when I think of Portuguese people in general, the ones that I knew that came at that point in time, jeeze they were such hard workers, always had good things to say about people, always had an open door if you needed anything. You know it just taught me a lot. I mean I often say, I said, "I think my mother was a saint," because in her life I never remembered her saying anything about anyone. And I'm saying, you know, there's not many people that you can say that of. And you know, my family just, and it was all my family, they were very, very hard working. I think when you're busy working and work ethic is at the root of your life you don't have time for anything else and you're just quite involved. And that was what I saw. Again, the Portuguese people, they didn't have a lot of money. Okay, finances were tight, but they had a lot of honor, respect, those are the qualities that make a good person. They were loaded with them. And you know, as I look and I've gone places and I've done a lot now, my background, I mean I'm very impressed that I had these kinds of people that I knew. And I think I miss them because I don't see that a lot. And that's just part of life.

A: Great. Well thanks very much for all of your time today.

P: Oh, you're quite welcome.

**Interview Ends**