

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL

Memórias – Preserving the Stories of Lowell's Portuguese Community

Oral History Interview with Mario F. Veiga, November 21, 2016

Biographical Note:

Born on the Azorean island of Graciosa in 1946; son of Luzomira A. (Augusta) and Manuel J. Veiga; Mario F. Veiga was raised on the family's farm and attended school until age eleven; he continued to work on the family's farm until age twenty when he was drafted into the Portuguese Army; served two years in Angola, during the Angolan War of Independence; returned to Graciosa where he married Maria Natalia, whose father was born in U.S. and was therefore a U.S. citizen, but had returned to Graciosa (the home of his ancestors); in 1971 Mr. Veiga and his wife settled in Lowell, where she had lived, beginning around 1960, with her family; he immediately obtained a job in the Prince pasta factory in packing and as a machine operator; after nearly eight years at Prince, he opened a small grocery (Mario's Variety Store) in the "Lower Belvidere" section of Lowell; about three years later he sold the business and opened a furniture store in the "Back Central" neighborhood; run by Mr. Veiga and his wife, "Mario's Discount Furniture" proved financially successful and remains in business today (2018).

Scope and Contents:

Interview conducted by local historian Mehmed Ali; focuses on Mr. Veigas' family background, growing up on Graciosa in the 1950s and 1960s; his service in the Portuguese military in Angola in the late 1960s; his marriage and immigration to the U.S.; Lowell's Portuguese community in the 1970s; working in Lowell's Prince pasta factory in the 1970s; and owning and operating a family-run business in Lowell's "Back Central" neighborhood.

INFORMANT: MARIO VEIGA

INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI

M=MARIO

A=ALI

A: Okay. This is interview with Mario Veiga on November 21, 2016. And Mr. Veiga, thank you very much for sharing sometime today with us. So first I wanted to ask you a little bit of background information. Where and when were you born?

M: I'm born in Portugal, Graciosa.

A: Okay, Graciosa. (M: Umhm) And what year was that?

M: 1946.

A: Okay, good. And what did your parents do for work?

M: Work on the farms, farmers.

A: And what kind of produce did they (--)

M: Wine, wheat, corn.

A: Okay. And was there a certain type of wine grown in the islands?

M: White wine.

A: Okay. Now do the different islands have different kinds of wines?

M: Yah.

A: And do you remember the different names?

M: No. (A: Okay) No. In my time it was not like today. I'm fifty years later. So it's, Pico is different type of wines, Terceira has a different type of wine, Graciosa have his own wine, but you know, like I says, there's no names on those days.

A: Yah, yah.

M: Today everything is different.

A: Sure.

M: Everything is different.

A: And did you help out on the farm when you were young?

M: Yah, from eleven to twenty years old.

A: Wow. And tell us about kind of an average day. What would you be doing?

M: Work on the farm early in the morning till nighttime.

A: Really?

M: Yup, no Saturdays, no Sundays off, every day.

A: Really? Including on Sunday?

M: Yah. (A: Really?) Sundays sometimes a half a day off.

A: Yeah. Would you always go to church on Sunday?

M: Yah, umhm, umhm.

A: Okay. And where did you go to school?

M: Back home on same island.

A: A small school house?

M: Small school, yes. Small school house, yes.

A: And do you remember any stories from that school?

M: It's been a long time. (A: Yah) Well, go to school in the morning, every morning, every day Monday to Saturday.

A: Including Saturday?

M: Saturday morning, yah.

A: Okay. And then once you were done with school?

M: Went home.

A: And would you be working?

M: Oh yes, yup.

A: Did you guys have animals on the farm?

M: Yes.

A: What kind?

M: Cows.

A: Okay. And did you go up through high school?

M: No, only four years of school.

A: Only four years of school? Okay.

M: Yes. Eleven years old I was out of school.

A: Eleven years old.

M: I start to work full time on the farm.

A: Wow. Good. Now what did you do when you got a little bit older?

M: Same thing, work on the farm until I went to the service.

A: Okay. And tell us about that.

M: What do you mean? The service?

A: Going into the service.

M: Well the service was, activity is always good, but when you start it's not easy.

A: Yah. How old were you when you went in?

M: Twenty.

A: Twenty, okay, and where did you go? Did you leave the island?

M: Yes, I went to Lisbon and Angola.

A: Oh you went to Angola?

M: Yah.

A: Wow.

M: I was there for two, was it two years? Over two years.

A: Okay. So you went to like boot camp and training in Lisbon?

M: Oh yah, umhm, Lisbon, Azores too.

A: Oh in Azores. They had a military base?

M: Yah.

A: Where was that?

M: São Miguel.

A: Okay, all right. And how was boot camp?

M: Not easy [laughs]. In the service nothing is easy.

A: Yah, of course. And did you train in a certain kind of vocation in the military?

M: What do you mean like?

A: Were you infantry, or?

M: Infantry, yah.

A: Oh infantry, okay. And you decided, or they made a decision you were going to go to Angola?

M: Well they decided that. Yes, I have to go. Two weeks before if it's a certain day I have to leave.

A: Wow.

M: It's a long time.

A: What did you, what were you feeling when you found out you had to go Angola?

M: It was not easy. In those days it was bad like same thing was like Vietnam.

A: Okay.

M: It was tough days.

A: Yah, were you out fighting?

M: Yah.

A: Fighting the independence movement?

M: Yah, I was a truck driver. So, but yah.

A: You were a truck driver, okay. All right, any stories that you remember from there?

M: Well we go night time to the farms. The guys was out. We sleep under the trucks. There's no beds, nothing.

A: Really, wow.

M: That's the way it is. In the service nothing is easy.

A: Yah, yah. Did you see any fighting?

M: No, I was lucky. I was lucky.

A: How about the other guys you were with?

M: Oh yah, before I went in there it was a fight and a couple of guys died. And I replaced the driver, the one who passed away. And but I was lucky. I was there like for three months and then spend the rest of my time in the city. So I was lucky too in that part.

A: Okay. So you were out in the field somewhere?

M: No, doing just in the city. Doing just short pick-ups and not go to the fields like, like before. It's hard to do it.

A: Yah. How did you get assigned to the city verses having to stay out in the country?

M: Well one time I was there for three months. When first I got there, like a week later they told me, "You're going to go back again?" I said, "There's a lot of people here that never went there. Why me?" And I don't know what happened. I never went to. (A: Okay, good) So I stay around.

A: Yah, good, good.

M: Because all the new people come in. So they send, first of all the new ones.

A: Were you scared or nervous at times?

M: Well things you have to do it. The day you sign for it you have to do whatever they tell you to do. That's my way to see it.

A: Yah, yah. When you were brought into the military was it volunteer or draft?

M: No, no. Everybody at twenty years old, everybody goes in.

A: Automatic.

M: Automatic.

A: Okay, wow.

M: On my time.

A: What did you think about the people fighting for independence?

M: Well in the end they give everything away.

A: Yah.

M: So we there for so many years and a year after I left, I leave there it was 1971, in [19]73 I think they give everything back to. Fight for what?

A: Yah.

M: That's what happened.

A: Yah, how did you feel about that?

M: That's not easy, because there was a lot of Portuguese there and they work hard, they have a good life, and they have to fly back home to the old countries. It's not easy. You have everything today and tomorrow they say you have to leave.

A: Just like that?

M: Just like that.

A: Wow, including people that were born there many generations right?

M: Yup, umhm. The ones afraid to stay there, they leave. The other ones they stay, you know, but most there left.

A: How about the ones that stayed. Were they okay?

M: I've never been back, so.

A: Yah.

M: But they still there. The family is still there.

A: Yah, it's interesting. So what did you do for recreation while you in the army?

M: What do you mean?

A: Like what did you do for fun after work?

M: Nothing. I'm not a (--) Like today, like me in business, I just come to work and go home.

A: Yah.

M: That's my way.

A: You don't play cards, or?

M: No, no, no drink, nothing at all.

A: Okay. Okay.

M: Never did that.

A: How about music?

M: No. In those days there's nothing.

A: Really?

M: Yah, yah.

A: There was no little bands?

M: Nothing. Well if you go to the clubs, yes, but I'm not that type of person.

A: Yah neither am I.

M: I like to stay with the family, that's my way. Even here, from here to the house, to work and work to the house, and then the weekends we go out altogether with the family and that's it.

A: Now were you married before you went into the military?

M: No, after I came back from the military.

A: How did you know about your wife?

M: Well we met before I went into the service.

A: Okay.

M: And she wait three, almost four years to get married (A: Really!) and I come to America (A: Okay) in 1967, [19]71 when I come to America.

A: Okay. And so you got married in?

M: In Portugal, in the Azores.

A: In Portugal. And then what made you decide to come to the U.S.?

M: Because there is nothing.

A: Really?

M: To work on the farms is not a life. (M: Yah) I like to do it when I was there, but always look for a better life. And we see people come to America and a good thing I got married, a good girl, and we still together with the two daughters and two, a grandson and a granddaughter.

A: The immigration process, how did you, how did you come? Did you come on your own, or were you sponsored?

M: When I got married my wife, she was an American citizen already.

A: Okay.

M: So three months, after I got married three months I was in America. That's the easiest way to do it.

A: So she was already here in the U.S.?

M: Yes, yah.

A: Well tell us about her? How did she end up here?

M: Because the father, I think he was born here. And because when she come to America the father, he was an American citizen, and she turned American citizen right away.

A: Oh, okay.

M: And when I come three years later I took my American papers and [unclear].

A: So her father was born. Was he born in Lowell?

M: He was born I think not in Lowell, in Mississippi I think.

A: Mississippi, really?

M: I think. I'm not sure, but I think it was Mississippi.

A: But then he (--)

M: My wife she knows better than me.

A: Oh yah, sure.

M: But she's not here today.

A: So he was born in the U.S. but then he went back to the Azores?

M: Yah, yah, in those bad days. The father took everyone back.

A: During the Depression maybe?

M: Depression, yes.

A: Oh okay, all right. I've heard that story from a few other families.

M: I am sure you do. Like Luis Gomes, he knows everything about that. He's a good man.

A: He is.

M: He is a good man.

A: So where did you meet your wife originally?

M: I was, before I went to the service she was there in Portugal to visit in the summertime. And I met her and she wait for me for three and a half years to get married, and I come to America.

A: So her father moved back to the Azores.

M: With the father.

A: With the grandfather right?

M: The grandfather, yah.

A: And then they moved back?

M: The thing is I think in 1960, [19]60 or [19]61, they all, they want American citizens so they come to America. (A: Okay) And my wife, she was fourteen or fifteen years old, and when she gets easy to an American citizen because she was under twenty.

A: Oh yah, okay, and her father was already a citizen.

M: Citizen, yah.

A: And where did they come when they first came?

M: To Lowell.

A: To Lowell, okay.

M: In Back Central Street. [Laughs]

A: Where all the famous Portuguese go.

M: Yah, yah, yah.

A: So your wife came here and went to Lowell schools?

M: Yes. (A: Okay) She was fifteen I think when she come. So it was a couple of years.

A: Okay, yah, yah. So during the summertime would they go back to visit?

M: Every year, every year.

A: Where did you first meet her? Where did you see her?

M: Before I went to the service in Portugal.

A: Yah, did you see her at church or?

M: On the Feast, you know.

A: At the Feast, okay.

M: On the Feast, yah, and she wait for three, almost four years.

A: Wow.

M: I was in the service for almost four years.

A: And how did you communicate with her with you were in the military?

M: No phones, just by letters.

A: Wow.

M: It was not easy.

A: Yah, and it's not very quick, or?

M: No, no, like once a month, once every two months.

A: Oh wow, yah. You guys must have missed each other. So you guys met back in the islands to get married there?

M: Yes.

A: No here?

M: In the Azores.

A: And then you said how long before you were able to immigrate?

M: After we got married it took ninety days (A: That's it) to get, to get to America.

A: Oh that's nice.

M: It was fast, yah.

A: And where was your wife living exactly?

M: Back Central Street.

A: Back Central where?

M: On Wamesit Street.

A: Okay, near Wamesit. Okay. And so you moved in with her family?

M: Yah.

A: Okay, and what did you do for work when you first came?

M: I used to work for Prince Spaghetti.

A: Oh you did? (M: Yah) Okay. Was there a lot of Portuguese in there?

M: All Portuguese [laughs].

A: Really? Okay.

M: All Portuguese.

A: So who got you the job there?

M: Friends.

A: Okay. And what was your first job inside Prince?

M: Pack, that's what we used to do. That's the hardest job. The last ones to come in get the last job to do it.

A: What were the other jobs in Prince?

M: Most is packing and run the machines, machine operator.

A: Was the machine operator a better job than packing?

M: That's right, yah, that's for the old ones. [Laughs] That's for the old ones.

A: And any interesting stories about Prince Macaroni?

M: I was there not for too long, (A: Okay) because I decided to open my own business.

A: You did?

M: Yah, back in 1978, [19]79.

A: Okay, all right. Did you do any other jobs besides Prince before you opened up?

M: Just Prince, yah.

A: Was there a union?

M: Not in those days.

A: Not in those days, later maybe?

M: I think so, later, when they closed.

A: Yah, I remember when they closed. It was too bad. Did you ever meet Joe Pellegrino?

M: No.

A: Okay, he was the owner over there. (M: Yah) Yah. What else can you tell us about Prince?

M: I work just for a few years, not a long time. It's a good place, and at the end of the week we'd have a check. Things we never had before. So it was a good thing about it.

A: How did you like coming to Lowell?

M: I always like to come someplace to make money to have a better life, and Lowell I think is the place. And back and then I opened my business, I don't know if you want to know. (A: Yah) Went to that back in 1979. (A: Okay) I started my business with \$1,500.00 of groceries.

A: Really? And what made you decide to open up your own business?

M: To tell you the truth it's always like business, always like to trade. I like to deal with people. And I started, my wife she didn't agree the first time, but after a while she decided to agree. And we started a business with \$1,500.00 of groceries.

A: \$1,500.00?

M: Of groceries.

A: In groceries?

M: Yah.

A: So you opened up a market first?

M: A market yah.

A: Not a furniture store.

M: No.

A: Ah! Okay. And where was this first store?

M: Concord Street in Lowell.

A: Concord Street, okay. All right.

M: I started with \$1,500.00.

A: That's it. Now was that money you had saved, or did you borrow money?

M: That's they only money I have.

A: Yah, you didn't borrow money in the bank?

M: No, no.

A: Okay, good!

M: I never (--) I've been in business all of these years, I never borrowed money for my business. I always get the money first and spend.

A: Wow, good for you. Good for you.

M: That's my way to do it.

A: Yah, well if you can do it that's great right?

M: Never went to bank to buy money to open the business, or to expand.

A: Yah, yah, good for you. Then you never owe anybody. So.

M: No. No.

A: What was the name of the store on Concord?

M: Mario's Variety Store.

A: Okay. And how did you like doing that?

M: Like any job I did, whatever I did I liked them. I don't get to work one day, two days. I work Monday, every day of the week. (A: Yah) Sundays too, it doesn't bother me, all the work hard, hard day and night.

A: Now back then you could open up on Sundays?

M: The grocery store, yes, (A: Okay) in the morning. When I, like three years later I sold the grocery, I started with getting some furniture, but in those days we didn't open on Sundays. The law was not (--)

A: Right, the blue laws.

M: Yah. I still don't like to open Sundays either.

A: Are you open?

M: No.

A: Oh, you close on Sundays.

M: Close on Sundays, just from Thanksgiving to Christmas.

A: Oh okay, you're opened during the holiday season, okay. So tell us about Mario's Variety, any interesting stories?

M: No, meet with the good people.

A: Was most of your business Portuguese people?

M: Mixed, (A: mixed?) yah, Spanish.

A: Spanish?

M: Spanish. There were a lot of Spanish in that area.

A: Okay.

Background voice: The story of the bread. The first day, it's a good story, the bread.

M: The bread.

Background voice: Remember?

A: The first day?

Background voice: The first day.

M: Oh the first day, yah. [Laughs]

A: What happened on the first day of the store?

M: The bread man came in and left me five little loaf of breads. I opened one. I eat it with my wife. You know, we opened one. (A: Sure) And the next one we had four left. And from there, two years, three years later we spent \$30,000.00 to buy bread.

A: Really? So you were selling that much more bread huh?

M: Yah

A: Good.

M: First day, one day, one bread.

A: [Laughs] So what made you decide you wanted to sell the variety store?

M: I owned the building. I used to own the building. (A: Okay) And somebody approached me to see if I want to sell the business. I said, "Yes, why not?" I did sell it to another friend, she was a Portuguese friend. And from there I bought another building. And I used to have the groceries and gifts.

A: Okay.

M: I sold the building with the groceries, I keep the gifts. I opened another building on Lawrence Street, (A: Okay) another business. And I start to sell. I bring the gifts back with me and I start to sell mattress.

A: Okay.

M: And after we sell mattress we started to sell frames, head boards, complete bedroom, a living room and my business start from there.

A: Okay, now where on Concord Street was Mario's?

M: 63 Concord Street.

A: Is that where Silva's is now?

M: Yes, yah, (A: Okay. All right) they knocked the building down. That's (--)

A: That's a new building, right.

M: That's the building behind the one they own right now.

A: And where was your second business on Lawrence Street?

M: 405 Lawrence Street right in the set of lights.

A: At Wamesit and?

M: And Robert Street.

A: Rogers?

M: Yes, right there in that intersection.

A: Okay, good. Now in those days did many people walk to the store?

M: Yes, yah, not too many cars like today.

A: Yah, yah, and that's not that long ago when you think about it.

M: That's true.

A: Thirty years or so, you know?

M: Yah, thirty eight years ago, (A: Yah) thirty-seven, thirty-eight.

A: And so the furniture side of the business did that start doing better than the gifts?

M: Yah, I bought a set of mattresses. I put them on the floor and start to sell them, a frame, a headboard.

A: Where did you get the furniture from? Did you get a wholesaler?

M: Yah, from North Carolina most of it.

A: Okay and how did you find them?

M: They find me. (A: Really?) Yah.

A: Oh yah! Okay.

M: They find me.

A: They called you or?

M: They, you know, any store opens up the salesmen they're not like today. Today most is by computers. In those days the salesmen goes around and find the doors open, and they walk right in and then you start to buy stuff from them.

A: Okay. Now what kind of gifts were you selling?

M: Capodimonte.

A: What is it?

M: Capodimonte from Italia.

A: What is that?

M: Ceramic.

A: Ceramics. Is it religious figures?

M: Sometimes some of those, yes, and vase and stuff like that.

A: Okay. Okay.

M: But that's just for a little while. I went to the furniture and the mattress. It's better. I went to the business.

A: Okay, good. Now when you first started out did you do advertising?

M: Never did advertise. (A: No?) No.

A: So how did people find out about you?

M: I have no idea. I have people come from everywhere.

A: Yah? So not just from the neighborhood?

M: No, from Boston, from Worcester.

A: Really?

M: From up New Hampshire, (A: Yah?) from everywhere.

A: So how is your prices compared to other places?

M: I try to be reasonable in prices, and no promise.

A: What do you mean no promise?

M: To be lowest than anybody.

A: Okay, but you try.

M: I try.

A: Good.

M: I try to be nice with the customers. Tell them the truth.

A: Now when you first started out was it just you working by yourself?

M: Me and my wife.

A: Okay. And your wife was always helping?

M: Yah, umhm, even today.

A: And how about the kids?

M: No, they're in school.

A: They're in school.

M: They are in private schools.

A: Did your mother-in-law watch the kids, or?

M: No, no, mostly us together.

A: Okay. Would the kids come to (--)

M: My mother used to watch too, but that's different. My wife, she's the one, she take care of everything.

A: Okay, good.

M: She used to take the kids to school, come to the store, pick up the kids, take care of them.

A: And did she do the books?

M: Yah, still doing them today.

A: Oh really, wow. The women are good with their money huh? Better than the men. [Both laugh]

M: If I want to know something I ask her and she knows the answers.

A: So you were on Lawrence Street. (M: Umhm) Now did you have enough space in the Lawrence Street location?

M: No, never had enough space, (A: No) even today. [Both laugh] And from there I come to Central Street, (A: Okay) to the rotary.

A: To the rotary, to Hosford Square.

M: Yah.

A: Okay. And what was in the location before you moved to Central?

M: It was a furniture store too, (A: It was?) but the guy I think went out of business and I bought the building and the furniture.

A: Was he Portuguese?

M: He was Portuguese too.

A: What was his name?

M: Gabriel, Gabriel Mello I think, but I owned a few more buildings in the area. I buy the store, the tall, the three story building. (A: Okay) I used to live right across the street. And I buy, I have another building a little bit down the street, all in the [rough of Hosford Square]. And I bought another one to the right side to the store so as to have apartments and the stores. Apartment, stores and the warehouse, everything there, (A: Wow) and I live there too.

A: Okay. And did you guys offer credit at the beginning?

M: They ask for credit. I didn't offer credit to anybody.

A: You never did?

M: But they [unclear], but I don't have to give them [unclear]. Most, in those days it was honest people, but later on in years new generations and it's not easy to do credit. I stopped to do that when I come to this store thirteen, fourteen years ago.

A: You stopped the credit.

M: That's the best thing I did.

A: Yah. You lost some business, lost some money?

M: I lost (--) I lost a lot of money. Work hard for nothing, but I built my business. That's the most important thing.

A: Yah, you can't worry about every penny, otherwise you go crazy.

M: Yah, I built my business. Not too many people stay in business thirty-eight years like me.

A: Yah no, for real, especially in a city that's not that rich, (M: Yup, umhm) you know, a lot of poor people in Lowell still.

M: I never complained about business. Always do enough to pay my bills, and to buy real estate.

A: Yah, and that's what you got right there, right. How did furniture style change over the years?

M: A lot of change, a lot of change.

A: What are some examples of how it changed?

M: Because at first I start most of the stuff was made in the United States. Now everything is import.

A: Okay. Is it cheaper now, or?

M: It's cheaper, but quality is different.

A: Yah, yah.

M: But that's what everybody sells, every store.

A: You don't buy any domestic-made stuff? It's kind of expensive right?

M: It's kind of expensive. I try. I try. I have [unclear], but they used to make here. Now they import everything with American-made name. So.

A: Oh yah, yah, right, even if the company is here right, they source it out?

M: Yup.

A: Did peoples taste change over the years?

M: Yah, they always complain things are not good, but if you work hard and you know [unclear] you can make a living. America is a good place. I come here with nothing. I started my business with \$1,500.00 of groceries. Today we have 45,000 square feet building.

A: Yah, okay. Now you were on Lawrence Street for how many years?

M: To be honest with you, three, four years.

A: Okay, that's it?

M: Yah, and I come up to Central Street.

A: Okay, yup. Right.

M: In one of these buildings.

A: Right in the square there.

M: One of these buildings here. I don't which one that is.

A: This one right here, right?

M: Yah. Now this is where I used to live, but there's a store, see this one here.

A: This one right? Right, right.

M: I own that one too. I bought that one there. I start in the green one right there on Concord Street.

A: Oh yah, that's the old one, right.

M: And I used to have a store here, four-stories. I used to have that two-story with all furniture. And this one here I opened it up just to the basement in the back. And then this one, where's the other one, the warehouse? 711, oh, it's right here.

A: That one? Yah.

M: There used to be a big garage in the back. (A: Okay) [Phone rings loudly---cannot comprehend a few words]. I have everything on the square there.

A: What's this one right here, the one that's old fashioned?

M: That's Lawrence Street.

A: Oh that's the Lawrence Street location?

M: Yah, yah, yah.

A: General cleaners and dyers. That's before, before you changed it huh?

M: Yah, umhm.

A: Oh that's a good one. Excellent. So what made you decide to come out to Gorham Street?

M: Well looking for space, park, bigger space. See there it was four buildings. One building was for storage, the other ones too, the other one is across the street, another warehouse across the street. So I say, well I have to find something to be one location.

A: Yah, to centralize things?

M: Yah, yah, yah.

A: Now McGoohan's had been here for a long time?

M: For forty, fifty years I think.

A: And was it still (--)

M: It was closed.

A: It was closed.

M: After the old man died, McGoohan's, the place was closed for ten years. It was a mess. He had trees grow inside.

A: Trees growing inside?

M: Yah. [Laughs]

A: Oh really?

M: And I bought it for a good price. It was a good price.

A: Yah, yah, yah.

M: But I pay \$120,000.00 for the whole, for the whole area and I spend a million and a half dollars to fix it up.

A: Wow! Wow! Did you know Mr. McGoohan?

M: I used (--) I come here, yah, yah, yah. Not big ideas, but I remember them.

A: So when you were looking around this place caught your eye?

M: When they closed, when they closed, when the old man passed away I want to buy him. They asking me \$500,000. I said, well for \$500,000 with a lot of work to do, I says, no, but I was after this building since then you know, after he passed away. The building was empty for ten years. And to come to the point, they went down \$150,000 - \$200,000. I say, well I'll give you a \$100,000 for the building. So decide to do \$120,000. That's what I give him too, but I spend a lot of money.

A: Yah, because you need all new plumbing, (M: Everything) wiring, (M: Everything) okay.

M: I spent a million and a half dollars without go to the bank.

A: Without, yah, that's pretty amazing.

M: Yah, I bought (--) I went to the bank to buy money and that building right there where I live (A: on Andover Street?) to finish \$250,000.

A: Really? Wow, that's a nice house.

M: And when I opened it up this building is paid, it was full of furniture, that on Central Street was paid and full of furniture.

A: Okay, good. And then you also added on a new building?

M: New building two years later.

A: Did you rip down an old building?

M: No, that's a new building.

A: It had parking?

M: And it was parking space, yah.

A: Okay, good. And how did business change when you moved here?

M: Better. (A: Better) Better.

A: Because more traffic on Gorham Street?

M: More traffic, yah, more space. More inventory.

A: Uh huh. Now who do you sell to today?

M: To everybody.

A: Yah.

M: To everybody. People come from far away without no advertises at all.

A: You still don't do any advertising?

M: No, I don't want to do it.

A: Newspaper?

M: Nothing.

A: Nothing, wow.

M: We have the website since that last four or five years. My daughter did that. (A: Okay)
Now I pay somebody to do it, because things getting better.

A: Sure, sure, sure. That's fine.

M: I have good website right now. (A: Great!) It helps. It helps.

A: Yah, definitely. Do people say they found you on the website?

M: Yah, umhm.

A: What else about the business? Anything else you want to talk about?

M: The business is great. Never complain about business.

A: Why?

M: Never complain, always make enough to live.

A: Okay, good.

M: And never have big plans, just take care of the family, work the family.

A: That's it huh. Yah. Now have you been involved in any community activities?

M: No.

A: Church?

M: Church, yes.

A: And you go to St. Anthony's?

M: St. Anthony's.

A: Okay. Has the parish changed over time?

M: Yes.

A: How so?

M: We don't get Portuguese priest anymore. No, we have one, we have a Brazilian one right now. I didn't see him yet, because he goes to another church too, but hopefully we're getting better.

A: How do you feel about no Portuguese priest here?

M: Well it was not easy. The church went down. Less people go to church. And the thing is people my age and older than me, some pass away, some move away from Lowell, the youngest ones, you know, it's like probably another communities. We hope to get a good Portuguese priest. I think we have one right now. I saw him before but I never went to church with him, because he works, he goes Saturdays. Saturdays I work. I usually go to church on a Sunday morning.

A: Yah, yah. Now have you seen a lot of Brazilians come in for (M: Oh yah) the store?

M: Oh yah, yah.

A: And are they moving in to this neighborhood?

M: This area, yah, everywhere. They moved to Haverhill, and then they moved to Lawrence, but most is in Lowell, (A: Okay) most in Lowell. They give us a lot of business.

A: Okay. Now who else lives in this neighborhood around here, the Grove and the Bleachery?

M: Mixed Brazilian, Spanish. Not too many Spanish. Mostly Brazilian and some Portuguese still live Back Central Street. Years ago when I was there it was all Portuguese. Now it's different. The old ones passed away and the real estate, the family they live someplace else. They sell the real estate. I still have my real estate here.

A: Who is living in Back Central now?

M: It's mixed. Mixed, some Portuguese there too, but when like, when I was there in the store there was all Portuguese, Chapel Street, Central Street, North Street, Lawrence Street, Concord Street, Pleasant Street, they all Portuguese. It was like a family. They all family there, people

that I know, but most of them passed away. I'm seventy, and the ones older than me, they passed away.

A: How about the Asian Community? Are they coming here?

M: Oh they're giving me a lot of business. (A: Okay) Oh yah, oh yah. When there's an immigration that comes in I take care of them. I try, but I do my best to take care of them. That's the ones come here to start a life, and they're looking for something. First of all they start to buy the lowest price. Later on they buy better and better. They're still doing today.

A: So do you offer different price ranges here at the store?

M: Yah, yah.

A: Okay. And you always did that?

M: Yes.

A: Okay. Did crime ever impact your store over the years?

M: No. I have a break-in one time on Lawrence Street, a long time when I moved to Lawrence Street, but that's it. (A: Okay) A broken window, car accident is the way it happened. (A: Sure) But it's not that big, not to come into the store, just an accident on the street.

A: Sure. Well any final thoughts about your time doing business or living here in Lowell?

M: Well to live here in Lowell that's the best thing that happened to me.

A: Would you consider moving somewhere else?

M: [No comment-emotional].

A: Yah, good. Well thanks very much for your time today. Appreciate it.

Interview ends