

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL

Memórias – Preserving the Stories of Lowell's Portuguese Community

Oral History Interview with Maria Pombeiro, November 1, 2016

Biographical Note:

Born in the Azores on the island of Faial in 1940; following the volcanic eruption of Vulcão dos Capelinhos on Faial, Maria Pombeiro immigrated with her family to the U.S. in 1958 and settled in Lowell in the Portuguese neighborhood of “Back Central”; her father obtained employment in a paper-tube factory in Lowell and Ms. Pombeiro soon found a job in a clothing factory, also in Lowell, where she worked until the 1970s; after this factory closed she obtained a job at the Raytheon Corporation’s plant in South Lowell and then Andover, Massachusetts, doing electronic assembly work; after being laid off at Raytheon she worked at a medical supply manufacturing company in Billerica, Massachusetts. In addition to her work in manufacturing, Ms. Pombeiro was married (at St. Anthony Catholic Church in “Back Central”) and raised a family in Lowell.

Scope and Contents:

Interview conducted by local historian Mehmed Ali; Ms. Pombeiro discusses the Capelinhos volcanic eruptions on her native island in 1957-58; her family’s decision to immigrate to the U.S. and settle in Lowell; her work and the working conditions in a Lowell clothing factory in the late 1950s, into the 1970s, and her subsequent work at the Raytheon Corporation plant in South Lowell. Ms. Pombeiro also discusses Lowell’s Portuguese community, businesses and shopping in the “Back Central” neighborhood, and Portuguese foods that she enjoyed in Lowell.

DATE: NOVEMBER 1, 2016

INFORMANT: MARIA POMBEIRO

INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI

M=MARIA

A=ALI

A: Okay, this interview is with Maria Pombeiro on November 1, 2016. So Maria thanks very much for sharing some time today with us.

M: You’re very welcomed, my pleasure.

A: Good.

M: Thank you.

A: Maria, tell us a little bit about your background. Where and when were you born?

M: I was born in Azores, on the Island of Faial.

A: Faial, okay.

M: 1940.

A: Really?

M: Yes.

A: I don't believe it!

M: Yes, you've got to believe it. [Both laugh]

A: Okay.

M: And I want to immigrate to the United States badly, because when relatives of my father and my mother, they came really earlier to California and all send pictures, they have cars, they have this and they have that. And we couldn't have anything of that. So I wanted badly to immigrate. And all of a sudden we have a lot of earthquakes, and the volcano erupt. [This refers to the Capelinhos volcanic eruptions in 1957-58 that led to the Azorean Refugee Act being passed in Senate in 1958 and renewed in 1960, sponsored by Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts and U.S Senator John O. Pastore of Rhode Island.] On that time I wished to be in another island or someplace else, because we all met at my grandmother's house when that happened because we thought it was going to be the end of the world, or every house going to fell down. So after that (--)

A: Merci garçon! [Speaking to waiter] Thank you.

M: Thank you very much.

Waiter: I'm sorry to interrupt.

A: Oh that's great. Thank you. Now when the volcano happened could you see it? Did you feel the earthquakes?

M: Yes, we felt a lot. During the night, the first night we couldn't sleep because it was constantly. It was shaking, the wind was shaking and we were so scared. In a while it stopped, but then in a while it started shaking again and we could hear during the night something fell, like rocks. We thought in the morning that where the cows used to live they're going to be all killed, because we hear something falling. And we could hear that, yes. And when the volcano

erupted it was a big shake. It was really a big shake. And then it started to slow down the shaking. And then the next day we heard that the volcano erupted. And then we could see the volcano, the ashes from where I was because the island is small. And I couldn't see the spot where it erupted, but we could see. We could see the ashes. And at that time we used to wash our clothes by hand, no machines to wash. And we put it in a line outside, and all the clothes was ashes on it, because it come on in the air, yes.

A: So after that happen did that make you want to come to the U.S. even more?

M: Yes, immigrate even more but we didn't have a chance to come, to come because no chance whatsoever. Then we heard, sometime pass by, and President Kennedy was a Senate in Massachusetts. So he asked to the President if they allowed some families to come to the United States, because on the area that the volcano erupted, every house went down or be in no shape for somebody to live in. And besides that, when the ashes came it came and covered, covered the houses was there. It wasn't in no condition for somebody to live then, but thank God nobody got killed because over there looks like it shakes even more and the police and the military people, they took all the people out before the big one and get to that. So then it was President Eisenhower and he signed for twenty-five families to come.

A: Only twenty-five?

M: Only twenty-five, but the twenty-five don't reach us because us we have just a corner of the house that fell. Like my house was just the corner, and some others had a little damage but we still could live in. So didn't get to us because they're going to get to the people who lost everything mostly. But then after that he signed for more people to come.

A: Okay.

M: And then it reached me. I was so happy to come over here.

A: Yah. So do you remember exactly hearing what happened, and did you, you had to apply I imagine?

M: Yes, we have to apply because my mother had two brothers in California. They came when they were little. One I think was eleven years old, and the other one probably fifteen. And both came by to anybody who wants to immigrate to the United States. And they, they went. My grandmother, I said, "I don't know how my grandmother let him, let them so young to leave," but they came. My uncle, the oldest one, he was a millionaire in California, because he was started in the farms and then he started buying land and farms, and farms, and farms and grew up big time. The other one did that too, but not as much.

So the oldest one is just only one, one son and the son died when he was fifteen years old. (A: Oh) And when that happened, I said, "Oh, I'm going to, I'm going to write a letter to Uncle Manuel to see if he can responsible for me." And my mother even tell her brother to take me, because I want to go to the United States, but he didn't want. (A: No?) He turned me down. He said he didn't want the responsibility for a single girl to go there. Okay.

A: Yah, yah, and you were a teenager about this time?

M: I was at that time, when I came I was twenty. In that time I think maybe eighteen, because it took a while for us to come.

A: I'm sorry, could (--) Okay thanks. And so, so you were an older teenager and your, this was your uncle that refused?

M: Refused because he didn't want to have the responsibility for a single girl.

A: It might have been different if you were a man?

M: Maybe. Maybe if it was a man probably he would have the man to work on the farm and everything, but a single girl, he didn't want to have the responsibility if they get engaged, or if they get, then what? So this friend of ours, but not, not, what do I say, not a close, close friend. It was just say hi and bye when we passed to each other, but not in the house or their house, but he knew that I want to come to the United States. So he came because his sister was over here and responsible for them. So he came over here and he asked to his sister if they want to responsible for us to come, the family to come. And she said yes, because he couldn't be responsible for us because he has to have at least \$5,000 in the bank at that time in order to responsible for somebody to come. (A: Okay) And they didn't have because he was just arriving. So his sister made the responsibility for us and we came.

A: What were their names?

M: Their name was Boldeia, Boldeia, Jose and Maria Boldeia, was Mr. and Mrs. Boldeia. And then they responsible and we came to the United States, but we went to this brother's house, not to them. They just did (--) And but my mother and my father was kind of shy. They didn't want to stay too long in their house. They didn't want to impose because the apartment wasn't too big and we were six of us. My parents, me and my three other siblings, like my two brothers and a sister. So, and I think was in about maybe a week or two we found this apartment on Central Street and then we moved there, close to them.

A: And so when you first came you came directly to Lowell?

M: Yes.

A: Where was the first house that you ever lived?

M: It was in Lowell on Walnut Street.

A: Walnut, okay.

M: Yah, where this friend was living. And then we moved to Whipple Street, very close.

A: Okay.

M: It was just crossing Central Street and we went to the apartment there. It was a big apartment for six people, and we lived there until my parents bought a house on Central Street.

A: Okay. And what did your parents do for work when they first came?

M: My father didn't want my mother to go work, because she said we are a big family and we need the person at home to take care of us when we come home, and not just one come, go work and come. So my mother stay, stay home. And then what she did was babysit. Then people, Portuguese used to come and they like to have her, because not too many Portuguese people at that time in here [Maria appears to be referring to Portuguese Atlantic Islanders of her generation and not the earlier generations who had immigrated to Lowell] when we, when we came. And then when we start getting married and have our children then my mother take care of all the children.

A: Okay.

M: Yes. So she stayed home all the time. And my father and us four (--) My youngest brother didn't go to work because he was young. He went to school. And my sister still went to school for two years, because she came at fourteen. Fourteen? No, fifteen, but she stayed two years in school. And it was me, my oldest brother and my father that went to work.

A: Where did your father work?

M: My father worked on Paper Tube Company on Perry Street.

A: On Perry Street, okay.

M: On Perry Street, it used to be, yes, he worked there. And I don't know if, I think because it was closed or something like that, then he worked at the hospital in Methuen or Lawrence. I don't know the name of the hospital now. He worked (--)

A: Like Holy Family or something?

M: It's a different one.

A: Not Lawrence General?

M: No, it was the other one and is still are there, but they have now another name. They change another name.

A: Yah, I think either the (--) I think it's Holy Family.

M: Probably.

A: I think that's the new name. It might have been St. Theresa's Hospital or something like this before.

M: I used to know. It's under my tongue.

A: That's fine, but it's the Catholic hospital in that area.

M: Yes. Yah and he worked there for so many years until he retired.

A: What did he do there?

M: Cleaning, was cleaning, yah.

A: Okay. Now how about you? What did you do for work?

M: At that time no need too many things to go. It's just to go to a factory and say I want to work and we come in at that time. "You want to start right now?" And I get in. I work on Hathaway Shirts [the C. F. Hathaway Company, of Waterville, Maine, which established a factory in Lowell in 1950] for fifteen years.

A: Hathaway?

M: Hathaway.

A: On Jackson Street?

M: On Jackson Street, yes.

A: Okay. So tell us about the first day there, if you remember.

M: The first day there I was very shy. I was very shy and besides that I was very nervous, scared, because I don't know if I'm going to, because it was work that I never did. And besides that if I didn't know, I didn't know how to speak English to ask, "What should I do? I don't understand?" You know, very hard because we don't speak the language at that time. It was kind of difficult, but then I used to learn very quick. Just see what they're doing I learn very quick, yah.

A: Now was there other Portuguese people working there?

M: Yes. Used to be there Alvarina Braga. I don't know if you interview Alvarina.

A: Not yet. She has, she's going through some medical stuff right now. So hopefully I'm going to talk to her in a couple of weeks.

M: She was there, because she was there before me.

A: Okay.

M: So that was nice to go to lunch and have somebody to talk our language. Yah, and there was a couple other, a couple of other people.

A: So not a whole lot of Portuguese?

M: No, no, no. (A: Okay) It was more Greek people and the English people.

A: Yup. And what did you do there? What was your job?

M: I was stitching. I was stitching the side of the shirt. That was, because it was piecework and each one just did, it was like a conveyor, a line. One put the sleeve, the other one do the second stitch on the sleeve, and me was doing the first stitch on closing the sleeve on the side of the shirt and pass to the next one to do the second one, the second stitch.

A: Now you used an automatic machine to do this?

M: It's not really automatic, but it goes fast. So we don't, it's just the work was fast to the other one, because if we didn't go fast it piles up and then we start getting nervous, or a hard time to take a shirt from between each one, and we didn't do piece work. We had to do fast to keep going.

A: Yah, but you learned it fast?

M: Fast, yah. I learned it fast.

A: Any (--) How were the conditions there, the pay and the safety?

M: Well the safety was okay. The atmosphere in the wintertime and the summertime was not good at all, because they didn't have air condition and it was a lot of heat, because we were over the cooking, they cooking the cookies on the (--)

A: Oh, the Educator Biscuit?

M: Educator Biscuit.

A: Okay. [Laughs]

M: Oh it was so hot! They have fans and the windows opened, but it didn't do too much. And a lot of people pass out. When people pass out they close and the ambulance came so many times for people more weak, (A: really?) they pass out with the heat. (A: Wow) And they close sometimes 11:00, 12:00 because the heat was unreal. On the wintertime it was okay, because we have heat from under [laughs], from the Educator.

A: You must have smelled the cookies, make you hungry? [Laughs]

M: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Yup, yup.

A: Did they have a union there?

M: Yes, umhm.

A: And how was, how was the union?

M: The union was good because it protect us from something. So it was very good. We were pleased about that.

A: Any, there was no strike or anything while you were there?

M: There was one strike but it was when I went to Raytheon, (A: Okay) but not over there. Over there no strike, no, no.

A: And any other stories about Hathaway?

M: No. I was pleased there and then they closed [Hathaway closed the Lowell factory in 1975]. I was, I thought I was going to retire from there. I'm the person that if I feel comfortable in one place I don't like to move around. To move around I was very sad when they said that it's going to close. Where I'm going now to learn another job? But it was very good. As a matter of fact, it was a good thing they closed, because then my sister used to work there also, but when she was pregnant and Raytheon, she lives close to Raytheon, and instead of after she had the baby, instead of she coming back she wants to try the Raytheon. And she stayed there because it was close, she could walk.

A: Is that where?

M: On South, South Lowell.

A: Like Woburn Street area?

M: Yes.

A: Okay.

M: Yes, and she keep telling me to go there, to go there, but I didn't want to, because on piecework I used to make more than over there by hour. Over there it was by hour. So when they closed then I went there. But when I applied to go there was in the same facility that is before. They don't take somebody just like that. So I said, "Oh my God I have to find another job." So I went to UCI in Billerica. They used to make stuff for the hospital.

A: Okay.

M: I work there until they call me to Raytheon.

A: Okay.

M: Then it comes the time that (--) Because the bosses used to tell my sister, "Do you have any brothers or sisters they want to come to work over here," but that time I didn't want to leave. But the time that I left it's not that anymore. And then I went to Raytheon.

A: Okay. And do you know why Hathaway closed?

M: The Hathaway closed I think because they move to Puerto Rico.

A: Oh, okay!

M: They moved over there. They move to [unclear] and they think, we thought they made more over there, it was better to keep that one in there than hours, and they closed ours.

A: So what were your responsibilities at Raytheon?

M: The responsibility was just to do my job right and that's it.

A: And what job were you working on?

M: It was, oh the Raytheon?

A: Raytheon?

M: Oh, I thought it was the Hathaway. The Raytheon.

[Interview interrupted with people leaving and saying thank you and good bye]

M: The Raytheon was electronics. It was soldering some boards or making cables, because when [unclear] it's different from there, even though they have union, but the union protect the more seniority people. So they laid off so many times.

A: Including you?

M: Yes, but I never came to the street because they always find a spot for me in some other department. (A: Okay) That's why I did a few, a few jobs there, different jobs, because I moved from one side to the other.

A: That's good, and many Portuguese people working at Raytheon?

M: Yes at that time. Not too many, many, but there was a few people there.

A: Okay, good. And did you work there for a long period?

M: Nineteen years.

A: Okay, good.

M: No, more than that. I think it was more. No, it was twenty-five, twenty-four years.

A: Okay, wow.

M: Yah, I could stay one more year but then I said, "This is it. I'm not going to wait." Because if work until twenty-five years I have more benefits. And I said, "No, that's it," because they have a package. And it was a good package, and I don't know if they had another package. And I said, "That's it."

A: Do you remember any interesting stories or people at Raytheon?

M: No. It was, it was a very good place to work. I didn't work as hard as on stitching, because I have more breaks. In Hathaway Shirt I didn't, never took the breaks, just the lunchtime because we have to take the lunchtime.

A: Did they shut the machines down during lunchtime at Hathaway?

M: Not the machines down, it's just if we don't run they stopped. So, until we come back.

A: Okay.

M: But we had to take the lunch. We couldn't work at that hour. But the coffee break in the afternoon we could work if we want to and I want to work because it was piecework. The more I did the more I have it. So yes.

A: Now you described making more money piecework than the hourly rate at Raytheon. Did that change over time?

M: They changed, yes. Then I used to make more money at Raytheon, because at that time that my sister told me to go there they just pay I think was two dollars fifty, or even less than that. And at that time I used to make four dollars, four dollars twenty-five. It depends on (--) So it was a big difference. I didn't want to lose that. And then on Raytheon it went up, it went up. And besides that at one time I used to have, I used to be a group leader. The group leader make even more, but then somebody from other plant, when Waltham closed or shutdown most of the departments, people from there come and bump us and bump me out of group leader.

A: Oh really?

M: Yah. But for some reason, I don't know what, whoever passes that, I never lost the pay of group leader. It was one time only. For some reason one time only and I still have the same payment of the group leader pay, yah.

A: Well we won't tell Raytheon in case they're looking for their money, you know? [Both laugh] That's good. When you were working either at Hathaway or Raytheon, did you ever feel any discrimination against Portuguese?

M: No, I never, I never felt that. I was really very accepted there, and besides that even when I was a group leader, because it was really young people, especially boys, and they used to talk a different language than me every time they, they talk they have to say that f word and I'm not used to hear that. And in a nice way, because we never know what kind of boys they are, but in a nice way I used to say, "Hey, boys, go wash your mouth first. I don't like to hear that." And it started with a smile, and then by a while if I went to the bathroom or to do something and when I start coming they said, "Oh, Maria is coming. Maria is coming." So they never said anymore that word. They tried to not to say it while I was there. And it was one thing very, very, things that I remember. This boy, he said one time that he used to go to school, to nuns school. (A: Umhm) And but okay, he got off to school he was like the others. And since he told me that, one day, I think it was his birthday, something like that, I bought a rosary and I put it on his desk, but I didn't say it was me. But he came and he said, "Oh, Maria, thank you very much. I know it was you. Nobody else would come and give me a rosary, and I'm going to keep it on my pocket." And years passed by and he got married and then had his first child. And then he came to me and he took the rosary from his pocket and he said, "I always keep this rosary in my pocket. Now I come to you to teach me how to pray the rosary because I want to pass to my boy."

A: Very nice.

M: I said, "Oh, it's beautiful, yes!" His name was Gary.

A: Now this was at Raytheon?

M: Raytheon.

A: And the, when the guys were saying swear words that was also Raytheon?

M: Yes, yes, yes.

A: Okay. Very good. Did you ever experience any difficulties as a woman in the work place?

M: No, no. I was really accepted. It was okay.

A: Good.

M: Yah, I was okay. As a matter of fact all the bosses liked me, liked my work, because one time we had a cable to make it. And they come to me to do that cable. And that cable was so many wires, so many things, so many things and I was kind of nervous to tell you the truth. I said, "Oh my God." But I knew a little bit how to understand and how to speak a little bit, but I was really nervous because it was so many. And many wires, if I had a mistake was under the

others, was very hard to fix it was the problem. And it took me a while to do that cable, but they, they give it to me because they knew that I do good work and with no mistakes. And I said, "Oh my God, now they're going to inspect it, see if everything go good." And everything went perfect with no mistakes. They even give me a paper, a certificate, was a perfect job. And when I decided to retire he said, "Oh my god." And even after that I did the retire they used to tell my sister, "Why don't you tell your sister to come, because we have another cable like that, to come back." [Both laugh]

A: So tell us a little bit about the Portuguese Community as you saw it when you first came?

M: The Portuguese community when we came wasn't too many. Maybe some I didn't know because they were born in here and they're more American than, or look like American than Portuguese. Some I didn't know, but then the immigration opened up because of the coming from the volcano. So people started being American citizen and they open for them to bring their families over here and a lot of people, Portuguese people start coming, coming in.

A: So when you first were here you and your family didn't really have a connection to the Portuguese that had come previously, like you know, back in 1910 or 1920?

M: Yes, we have connection, because we have the Holy Ghost and they made some Feast in there and we went to the Portuguese church and we see all of them in there. And then when they have the Feasts, we go to the Feasts and we meet some here, some there. And first when we come over here we met Mrs. Picanso, Mrs. Gladys Picanso. And Mrs. Gladys Picanso knew all the other, the other ones, and she was very nice to all of us, to the Portuguese that was coming.

A: Okay.

M: Yah, and she was a Head of the Holy Ghost and she always tells us we have a Feast, come in, and this and that. So we get along with the [unclear] ones that were over here, yah.

A: So Gladys Picanso was one of the people that kind of introduced you to the other people around?

M: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

A: Okay, very good. Tell us about the church. What is your memories?

M: The memories of the church was really, really right. The priest was Portuguese. I got married in there. When I have my daughters, they baptized, they did Confirmation in there and everything. And I never thought when I came there were a Portuguese Church. And when I find out there was a Portuguese Church my, all my family and me was so happy, because we don't know any English to go to other church. So it was very good, very good. It was a nice surprise and a nice experience.

A: Good, and what else about the Portuguese community? You talked about the Holy Ghost. Do you have any stories or perceptions about the events, or the festivals, or the (--)

M: Yes. We used to go, and when my husband came over we used to go there all the time when they have dinner, dinner dances. We used to go, because Mrs. Picanso have a table special for us. We have the same table all the time. She gave that table and she said, "You fill it in whatever friends you want." So we always filled that table. And we used to go there all the time. So we started to feel very comfortable like a home when we came

A: Yah, yah, good. What about music? Was music important to the community?

M: Yes. We used to have a Portuguese band at that time.

A: Okay.

M: And they used to have a lot of things Portuguese, like group folklores.

A: What is it?

M: Folklore group. Folklore group.

A: And what is the Folklore group?

M: The Folklore group, it's a group that dress alike. The women make a round and they all dance at the same time with the music.

A: Okay. Were you part of that group?

M: No, I was part of that (--). That group was on the senior club, because the senior, Mr. Gomes started that with his wife, started that group and I was in, in that group.

A: Okay, good. What else about music? Did you go to watch American music? Did you go to any nightclubs with your husband, or?

M: No, because we have our own. And then when we start having a car and know how to go to the other places, we used to go to Fall River, because Fall River has more activities than ours, because it was, 90% the people was Portuguese. And they have a lot of restaurants, Portuguese restaurants and things like that. We used to go to Providence, to Fall River, to New Bedford, different places. So we didn't need to go to the American. The American, the American music and the American festivities we feel like lost, no friends there, nobody to talk. So we were more to the Portuguese.

A: I see. Okay. So how did Lowell fit in with these other Portuguese cities around the area?

M: Like the Portuguese? Lowell fill in? I think they fill in very good, because when we start coming over here the Central Street was a good street, but wasn't the houses very nice. So the

Portuguese people start coming in buying houses, fixing, painting, putting flowers in the gardens, was really nice to go by. They knew it was Portuguese people or some other culture that was over here. Yah, so the city I think they love it because everything was clean and nice looking.

A: Yah, yah, the Portuguese are famous for this really.

M: Yah.

A: How did you meet your husband?

M: I met my husband over there before I come here.

A: Okay.

M: Okay, but then it wasn't for too long. And, but was interesting when I came with my family to come to the United States he came on the same boat to go to the mainland to go in the service.

A: Oh really? Okay.

M: To go in the service. And at Terceira we took the plane over here and he continued on the same boat to the mainland for the service.

A: Okay.

M: So then I went there to marry just on the Justice of the Peace in order to make the papers for him to come over, because he couldn't come over because he didn't have any, anybody. And at that time, I think at that time, the immigration closed. He couldn't come. We couldn't make the papers to responsible for more people to come. [This was likely between the Azorean Refugee Act of 1960 and the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. During these years Azoreans were again limited by a return to more restrictive U.S. immigrations laws.]

A: In what year was that roughly?

M: At the end of five years. I really don't know when that happened, because I know he couldn't come.

A: Okay.

M: He couldn't come. I have to go there to do that, but I didn't want to marry in the church there, because all of my family, I have family there, but my important family was over here. And I wanted them to be on the ceremony to have that. That's why at the end of two and a half years the immigration, the small immigration house that we have over here on High Street used to be Mrs. Deolinda Mello. Deolinda Mello used to be there. She, she was Portuguese and she said, "If you want to go now it's the time, because it's going to pass a law that for husband to wife, or wife to husband, they can make the papers without being American citizens."

A: Okay.

M: Okay. "So if you want to go there to make in Justice of the Peace, then you can make the papers for him to come."

A: So there was a timeline that you had to kind of beat?

M: Yes. So I went there and I did that, but I (--). The time came for me to become American citizen on the end of five years before that law passed. On April made the five years and I apply for the American citizen. And on June I owe to have the papers and that law passes on the end of the year. So for me it didn't help at all, but that's okay. So then I went to Boston because over here in Lowell they didn't do the oath.

A: You didn't do the oath?

M: Because in Lowell they make just twice a year, or once a year and it wasn't that time. So I have to go in Boston to be faster. And then on the same building I think was a floor above I went there and I brought the papers right with me, and I make the papers right in there to send to my husband.

A: The same day?

M: The same day. The same day, and he came on July 15th.

A: Oh, so just a few weeks?

M: Just a few weeks. It was so fast. It was great. And we got married on July 31st.

A: Oh, okay. No time wasted.

M: No, because I was preparing everything. So when he came we didn't need to wait for any longer. And my father was very strict. He didn't want to live in my house, in my house because he don't have a house to go, without us being married.

A: But technically you were married by Justice of the Peace?

M: Yes, but it didn't mean nothing for my parents.

A: Okay, that's interesting.

M: No, no. Yes.

A: So where did your husband go for the few weeks before you had the church ceremony?

M: In my house because he had no place to go, (A: Okay) but don't put that in a book.
[Chuckles] But one day before I go to work was early in the morning. I just opened his door and I said "bye". And my father said, "You don't have to open that door. You're not married yet."

A: [Chuckles] So your father wouldn't even let you talk to (--)

M: Talk to him, but he was in bed. Not for me to open the door and see him in bed.

A: [Laughs] Well, you know, some of those social rules were there to protect young women, you know, at the time.

M: Yes, yes, it was very strict in my country when I was grow up.

A: That's funny.

M: He never came into my house. We started being boyfriend and girlfriend for a year before I came here, but he never went into my house. He talked to me out in the street and me at the window.

A: Okay.

M: It's not only for me. (A: Everybody) It was everybody like that. We grew up like that.

A: Yah.

M: And just in case of raining, it's just a little bit of the door so he don't get wet. Yah, that's the way. That's our culture.

A: Yah, yah!

M: Yah, yah.

A: So from the time that you went to the Justice of the Peace to the time you got married in the church, how long of a period was that?

M: It was (--). Well I went there with two and a half years, and I have to wait for five years to get American citizen, and plus from April to July. April, March. No, April, May, June, July, so it was two and a half years more plus three months. So it was twelve, six, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one months after.

A: So twenty-one months you had. So almost two years?

M: Yes.

A: Wow. And did you write to our husband, (M: Yes!) or telegram, or?

M: No, that time it was very, very difficult, because in wintertime it was by letters, and we used to have a letter like every month, or twice a month, that's about it, because it takes a long time. And in wintertime it was even worse because we don't have airplane port in every island. It was just in two islands. And if it was very bad weather, because sometimes in the islands its very bad weather, even the boats or the planes didn't go, didn't go. One time I thought he didn't want anything more with me, and he the same thing because he didn't receive a letter from me. He thought I change my mind. And one time to me I thought the same thing, "Oh, he change his mind," because I don't receive any letter. And we didn't know why. We couldn't (--) This [unclear] at a little convenient store and the little liquor store next to it. He had the phone, but I couldn't phone. I just on five years all this time I just phone one time.

A: Why is that?

M: Just to tell that I send all the papers, all the papers that you will receive pretty soon, so for him to expect that. Because when we make phone the phone doesn't go direct there. They go to some other place, and then they will tell me when I can talk to him. When the lines open for that line, that line, it could be at midnight. It could be 3:00 in the morning. It could be during the week, during the day anytime. And I said if I'm working it doesn't do any good. If I'm asleep it doesn't do any good either, because well, then if we hear the phone ring, but at the beginning we didn't have a phone.

A: You didn't even have a phone.

M: We didn't. I don't know when we get the phone but when he came we have phone already at that time, but I don't know how long it took for us to have a phone. But in the beginning we didn't have a phone.

A: Where would you go make a phone call if you needed to before you had a phone at the house?

M: Maybe somebody's house, but would cost a lot of money. So then I don't know how much to pay that person, because it used to be outrageous for the phone. One was the reason, two that I couldn't make it. But the most reason was not to know what time we could connect. And he has to pay the phone. Probably it wouldn't be as much if we talk, because the more we talk the more it would be, the price would be, but it was very, it's not like now. Now it's a piece of cake. It's just to make the phone and that's it. That time it was very, very, very difficult.

A: Now when your, when your husband went into the service you said he went to the mainland.

M: Umhm.

A: Was he stationed in the mainland?

M: Yes, umhm.

A: Okay. So he stayed there. He didn't go anywhere else?

M: No.

A: Okay.

M: And then he finished in Faial. He went there for quite a few months. And then (--) Not in Faial, I'm sorry. The Sao Miguel was another island. He finished there.

A: Okay. Okay. And where did you pick him up? Did he fly in, or (--)

M: He fly in.

A: Okay, and you met him in Boston?

M: In Boston, yah.

A: Do you remember your reaction?

M: Oh yah. Oh yah, very, very, oh, very happy. Because waiting five years, it's a long time.

A: Yah, absolutely.

M: That's a long time. It looks like those five years never end. Yah, yah, it was very, very emotional, very happy.

A: Now you folks had children?

M: Two, two children.

A: And so did you stay out of work for a while, while the kids were being grownup, or?

M: Not too long. Not too long, because my mother was the babysitter.

A: Okay.

M: If my mother wasn't the babysitter maybe I would stay longer, but my mother was the babysitter. She was, she was so happy, was the first child, grandchild. And even my mother used to make the supper for when we come from work. "Oh, you going to eat over here. You going to eat over here." So we ate over there. "Oh, so you don't take Elsa home now because," especially on wintertime, "It's too cold and to bring her in the morning, she's already over here. So okay, she stay over here." And was like that. So I was very comfortable and lucky to have my mother taking care of my children.

A: Did you, did your family shop at Portuguese stores, or use Portuguese businesses?

M: Yes.

A: What's your recollection of some of the stores that you might have went to?

M: At the beginning when we arrived they have the Dennis Store over here on Central Street. Now it's a liquor store. (A: Umhm) And all Portuguese was working in there. People that was born over here and we could speak for them to give the meat, how much meat we wanted, how much chicken we wanted, and this and that. And all the rest we put it in the carriage, whatever, and we pay, and they put it in boxes and they delivered to us.

A: Really?

M: It was so nice!

A: And what was the name of that?

M: Dennis Store.

A: Dennis?

M: Dennis, Dennis Store. I think I used to know the last name of the store.

A: Now was that at the corner of Central and Charles?

M: Yes.

A: Okay.

M: Yes.

A: Was that at one time the Colonial Store?

M: If it was, it was probably after that, because when I came it was Dennis, Dennis Store.

A: Okay. It could have been actually before you came.

M: Or before, yah, yah, because they had the barroom on Lawrence Street that crossing (--)

A: Like Rogers Street and Wamesit?

M: Yes.

A: The Whipple?

M: Probably the Whipple.

A: Okay.

M: The Whipple. The owner of there was the son of that Dennis over here. He used to, he used to be over there working on the store and he used to come to my house and other houses to deliver our shopping. Yes, it was very convenient, because we didn't have a car at that time and just to buy the things, be in the boxes and later on they come and go to upstairs. And we used to have two, and another man that used to bring, we used to buy the milk in the bottles. He used to deliver the milk. He used to come and drop there. And then when he come the next time we, he brings the empty bottles.

A: Yah, yah.

M: Yah, it was very nice.

A: What about other Portuguese businesses?

M: Um, Portuguese, they have the Barry's Bakery. When we need bread and some other things we used to go there.

A: Okay.

M: Ah, what else?

A: What about like insurance company, or barber shop, hairdresser?

M: Yes! Barber shop. Barber shop was, oh my God, Freitas. Freitas Barber Shop over here in Central Street. It used to be there, a barber shop, um, yes, and probably more. I don't (--) And we used to, because we used to live (--) Used to be on Whipple Street a barroom. And we used to live over the barroom. And next to that store on the corner of Whipple and Central, Whipple and Central there used to be that store used to be there when we came. And they have a lot of, a lot of things. If we need, so we don't have to go to the Dennis, we go there and buy it if we need to buy it.

A: Like a, almost like a convenience store?

M: A convenient store.

A: Not a full service market.

M: No, no, no. And they're still there. They're still there. The owner already pass away, but the sons continue with the store, yah.

A: Good. Is that Frank and Ernest? Is that the one?

M: Umhm, yup.

A: And that's been there for a long time right?

M: Yes, a long time.

A: Other stories, or ideas about the Portuguese community? Has it changed over time?

M: Well yes, they over change. Like when the Portuguese people is a very people that work a lot. And they all work a lot. And they didn't have as much when they came over, and they like to have some things. They bought a lot of houses in here, but then they like to buy houses, better houses, like a single house. They started buying houses out in the skirts. So they started moving, moving there was, they made a lot of change. Some others they start with business. Not over here as much as other places that I know. The Portuguese in other places, depends probably on the Islands, like some Islands is more bashful people, more scary people. My father was a farmer and he was very scary person. He's content with that and he's afraid to move to another bigger business. He stays on the same thing. But a lot of people they have another ideas. Let's try. If it gives, okay, and if it doesn't give that's okay too. So a lot of people started going for bigger business. Yes, they change a lot.

A: And you talked about a difference between the islands. What are some of the islands and their differences in your opinion?

M: All the islands to me they have their own beauty. They're all beautiful. Some are small, some are a little bigger. [Clears throat] Excuse me. The one, it's very beautiful to me, it's São Miguel because of the nature. They have nature there that's unbelievable. They have volcanos there. They have the water boiling constantly, and people do their boiling dinners in there.

A: Really?

M: And it's really tasty, different from what we do in the house. They have a lot of beautiful nature things, and it's big, huge. It's beautiful, but all the others have something, something that's beautiful.

A: So how about the people from the different islands? Like even in Lowell, did they have different kind of ideas, or different kind of ways of doing business, or have relations in the community?

M: Well probably different island they have different little things. Even on the food. They have some sweets that one island does and the other islands never did. Or even for the food. So they still continue their things. I like the [alcatra] from Terceira. We never did. We did roast beef, but we never did [alcatra]. Alcatra it's a really different taste and I love alcatra.

A: And what is alcatra?

M: Alcatra it's the same, a little thing. It's close, close to roast beef, but not as close because it's made in a clay, not claw. Maybe it is. It's a clay dish, it's a brown dish. It's like a round thing and it's tasty on that kind of material.

A: Okay. Is it like netting?

M: No, no, it's barro, barro. It's made of barro.

A: Take your time. Think about it. We're not in a rush.

M: Yah.

A: You know the Portuguese word, but you don't know the English right? So no problem.

M: Well, but I knew the English. It's under my tongue.

A: Well just describe it for us.

M: It's a thing that they mold. They mold as they do the dishes. They can do a cup like this, or they can do a thing like round, and then they make the alcatra in there.

A: Is it like a clay pot?

M: Clay! (A: Okay) Clay pot, that's it! That's it, it's a clay pot. And it taste than if I do (--)
Because if I do alcatra, because I asked for the recipe. If I do alcatra on the same thing that I do
the roast beef, it doesn't taste as good. It doesn't look like it's alcatra. But alcatra in the clay
pot it's more tasty and it's made with all wine, nothing else. All wine. It tastes different.
Everybody loves that. So it's a specialty from Terceira.

A: Okay. Terceira, that's the one who does this all the time.

M: Yah, so different islands they have their different specialties.

A: What's something unique from Faial?

M: From Faial I don't think they have too different, too much different in Faial. To tell you the
truth I don't see too much different. No.

A: Now you talked about certain islands having people, this is in general terms, not you know,
everyone of course, but being more bashful than other islands.

M: Yes.

A: Which islands compare to which other ones?

M: I think, I think maybe Graciosa was more bashful. Probably not now, because everything
now it's open, it's more open, but on my time. (A: Yes) On my time and over here, like
Graciosa people at that time, because now it's young people that already was born over here
that's different, (A: Sure) but at that time they won't go to a restaurant. No, they won't go. They
said, "Oh, why do I go to a restaurant if I can do that at home and save money, or so like that.

We can, no.” Faial, I don’t think it’s that open for that, but it’s more open than Graciosa. São Miguel, yes, because São Miguel, it’s more, Saint Michael it’s more people in Fall River. Fall River it’s more people and they have a lot of Portuguese restaurants. And they go, they go out. They go out socializing. Graciosa is more, more in, more in.

A: Okay, good.

M: Friendly, very friendly, but not to go to restaurants, or socialize, yah.

A: Interesting, okay. Do you have any other stories you want to share about the Portuguese community, about your time here in Lowell?

M: Maybe I have because I’m over here fifty-six years. [Both chuckle] Fifty-six years, but (--)

A: You came to Lowell before I did. I came fifty years ago when I was born here. So.

M: Six years before you was born, yah. Yah, I don’t (--). Maybe I have it, but I really don’t remember right now.

A: Okay, any final thoughts that you want to share with us today?

M: Um, that I’m happy to be over here in this country. That’s what I say. I always, the first minute I put my feet, because that’s where I want to come, and I love this country. I’m so happy and thankful to God that I came over here, and all my life over here. I never regret. I love my country. I love to go back. I love to see them, and I never forget where I come from, but the acceptance of everybody to us I never have anything, because I heard some people have difficulty on that. It’s not very acceptable over here. Like Brazilians, I heard them to talk about it, but me, I have no complaints about that because on my mind I want to come over here. I’m glad and I’m happy and that’s it. And I have a better life. Now I know over there they have a better life than when I was there, but I never knew that there. So I’m so happy to be over here.

A: Good. Well thank you very much for your time Maria.

M: Okay.

A: It was great. (M: Okay) I appreciate it.

M: My pleasure.

[Recorder is turned off and then on again]

A: Okay Maria, you wanted to share another story?

M: Yeah, it’s like after [unclear], God called me to visit the prisons.

A: Really? (M: Yes) And you’ve been doing that?

M: And I did that for almost seventeen years with my husband every week. Every Wednesday we used to go to Shirley Prison to go there and help the, because they have different programs. And I went there, because before that I used to say, "Why do good things for the prisons?" And one, I see a lot of prisons have TV Guides to watch TV. I said, "Why is that?" Because I'm working and I don't have one to see it. And God said, "Hey, you're wrong, because that's my sons and my daughters. I love them as, like I love you and anyone else. You have to know more about the prisons." So when I got out from [unclear] I anxious to visit them, to do things for them. I didn't think the same way as before. And I went there for seventeen years with my husband.

A: And which prisons did you go to?

M: Shirley.

A: Shirley, okay.

M: Shirley, Mass. Shirley, Mass. And I went. And if my husband was alive I was still going, because my husband loved going there also. And we learned so many things with them. And we learned that if I had the same parents they have I would be one of them inside. They don't have the same education that I had. That's why I wasn't in there. They need all our respect and prayers, and pray for them for them to come to the reality and be converts. And I been asked somebody to go, because me with my age and alone at nighttime, especially on wintertime, it's hard for me, but I miss going there. I miss going there. And I want to do some prayers to evangelize some people. And I go to the University of Lowell on the Portuguese Program on Saturday morning with Jorge Coelho.

A: The radio program?

M: The radio program, and at 7:30 to pray a decade of the rosary and to read some good story. And at the beginning, at the beginning people and music, not prayer. People, they say, "Keep that women there, because my husband not used to pray, but with her he prays." And I go every Saturday. I used to go to the University of Lowell, but now I can do it by phone.

A: Okay, wonderful.

M: By phone. But when I used to work at Raytheon in Andover I used to lose two hours of work if I work on Saturdays to come over here and to go back, because no way to go on the phone. So I used to leave. I said, "I don't care if I miss two hours," but I go over there.

A: That's great. So are you still doing that?

M: Still doing that. Yes, still doing that. Even if I go far away, I call from where I am. And if it's something wrong in the University, the phone doesn't work, he calls me and I go there.

A: Okay.

M: I go there, yup.

A: Great, okay.

M: That's the story.

A: Great! That's wonderful. I didn't ask you what your activities in the community. So thanks for sharing that.

M: Umhm, okay.

A: Thanks again.

Interview ends