

# UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL

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

### Oral History Interview with Nomesia Iria, April 18, 2018

#### Biographical Note:

Born on the Azorean island of São Miguel in 1953; Ms. Iria's mother was a homemaker; her father worked as a chauffeur; similar to many children of this period, Ms. Iria attended public school through the fourth grade; eventually she married and had two children while living on São Miguel; in 1980 she, her husband, and two children immigrated to the United States, settling initially in New Bedford, Massachusetts; at the suggestion of her husband's brother, who lived in Lowell and worked in a higher-paying electronics job, she and her family moved there; for a short time Ms. Iria commuted to Lawrence, Massachusetts, for a job in a shoe factory; however, upon obtaining a job in the Prince Pasta factory, which was located in South Lowell and had nearly 400 workers, the majority being Portuguese; she began working as a machine operator close to her home in the city's "Back Central" neighborhood; owned by the Pellegrino family, Prince Pasta had a company union; in 1995 a group of Prince Pasta workers, including Ms. Iria, campaigned to affiliate with United Electrical Workers Machine of Workers of America (UE) and, in an intensely fought union election, the workers voted in favor of the UE; Iria was then elected chief steward; two years later the Pellegrino's sold the company to the Ohio-based Borden Corporation; soon thereafter Borden cut a number of employee benefits and instituted a 12-hour work day; despite union concessions Borden suddenly closed the Lowell factory; Ms. Iria joined with other workers, as well as city and elected officials in an attempt to save the plant, but to no avail; she subsequently worked as an organizer for the UE, before returning to a job as a machine operator at a beverage company; she remains involved in community work.

#### Scope and Contents:

Interview conducted by local historian Mehmed Ali; included is information on Ms. Iria's family on São Miguel, prior to her immigration to the United States; much of the interview covers her working career in factories, initially in New Bedford and Lawrence, and then Lowell; she discusses in some detail her experiences at the Prince Pasta factory, the nature of the work and the division of jobs by gender and nationality, the change from a family-owned business to a corporate-controlled manufacturing facility, as well as the change from a company union to one affiliated with the United Electrical Workers Machine of America; her role as a union organizer and shop steward is discussed, as well as her attempts, along with coworkers, to keep the plant open following the Borden Corporation's sudden decision to shut it down; she also discusses the tensions within her family stemming from the demanding roles as mother, wife, homemaker, worker, and union activist.

**INTERVIEWEE: NOMESIA IRIA**

**INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI**

**N=NOMESIA**

**A=ALI**

A: Okay. This is interview with Nomesia Iria? Is that how you pronounce it?

N: Yes, Iria.

A: Thanks. On April 18, 2018. Thanks again for sharing some memories today. I appreciate your time.

N: I will try to do the best I can.

A: Yes, I'm sure you'll be fine. Nomesia, first a little bit of background information. Where and when were you born?

N: I born in 1953, on March 27.

A: Okay.

N: Okay.

A: And where were you born exactly?

N: The Azores, Portugal, in the Islands. The Island is Saint Michael [São Miguel].

A: Saint Michael.

N: Saint Michael.

A: And there is, there is, in Lowell there's quite a few people from Saint Michael right? That live here?

N: They have more percentage from Graciosa.

A: Okay.

N: They have some "Michaeleans," but more are from Graciosa. They have some from Terceira, but more from Graciosa.

A: Okay. Is there any, how do I want to say it, you know, competition or something between the people that come from the different Islands in Lowell?

N: I don't think, because we all look for the same thing. The American dream, you know. I don't want to say that it's not a little bit rival, you know, between people. Oh my island is beautiful. My island is better. I cannot say that, because I only been in my Island. My island, the place I born in. The other islands, I don't know them.

A: Yah, okay.

N: So I'm planning to go this summer to Graciosa.

A: Okay, good. Very nice.

N: Because one of my kids is dating a girl from Graciosa, you know.

A: Okay. Very nice. Enjoy your trip then. That will be great.

N: I will try. I went last year after many years to São Miguel in the summertime. And that was amazing how beautiful it is.

A: Yah, nice. And what were your parents' occupations when you were growing up?

N: My mother was a stay-home mom. And my father was a driver.

A: Okay.

N: I always knew my father was a taxi driver. [Phone rings] I knew that's going to happen.

A: That's all right.

N: That will stop.

A: My phone might ring too. So don't worry about it.

N: Um, I always knew my father was a taxi driver. (A: Yah) And by the end (--) [Turns off phone] My phone never rings.

A: Don't worry about it. It's not an issue at all. So your father was a driver?

N: Yes, I always remember my father is a driver. And in the end his working career he worked for the government as driving, like what they say? What's the word? He usually (--) I'm going to explain. He used to go with the [agricultural] engineers that [helped], you know, for the farmers. (A: Okay) They used to (--) He used to go around the island with the engineers, you know, when they go teach something different. So that's what my father did.

A: Okay, to teach the farmers new techniques or something like that?

N: New techniques, or new medicine for, you know what I mean?

A: Um, um.

N: So that's what my father used to do.

A: Okay, good. And tell us about your schooling in Portugal.

N: I went to school when I was seven years old, and I come out when I was eleven and a half. Because back in my time was only, you only obligated to go to school to fourth grade.

A: Really?

N: And that's what I have.

A: That's it?

N: That's it, fourth grade. Today the kids go twelve years like over here, but after that your parents have to pay. And my parents before, you know, it was, especially back then, it was not enough money to go around.

A: Would they also, if they did have money, would families during that time send boys to further their education and not the girls?

N: It was kind of that, but that's not the case in my family.

A: Okay.

N: You know, I think I only have a cousin who went to the higher [schooling], you know.

A: So why did you decide to immigrate to the United States?

N: I was married. I had three kids. And my husband's family all immigrated to over here. So one of my sisters-in-law did all of the documents (A: Okay) for us to come over here. And we came on March 8, 1980.

A: 1980? Okay.

N: Yes. So that's (--) I came with my husband and three kids. (A: Okay) And after a year and a half, two years, I have my American girl.

A: Okay. So one of the children born here.

N: Yes.

A: And why, why were you as a family interested in coming here?

N: Because back then when you're talking United States, it was a dream. Everybody, you know, everybody had a dream to (--) Of course Portugal back then, even if you have the money, especially on the islands, even if you have the money to buy anything, you don't have nothing to buy. You know, there was not work for women back then. It was only man go out. So that (--)

And Portugal have I think forty-five, I'm not so sure, forty-five years was fascist. So the people was, even if they want to grow they can't. You know what I mean?

A: Yah. So the fascist government?

N: Yes.

A: Dictatorship.

N: Yes. So for forty, I think it was forty-five years. And they have a revolution 1974, called the "Carnation Revolution." You know, and that, when Portugal went through many problems but no bloodshed, that was one of the things. And that's when Portugal and the Islands start growing and be what they are today, which is amazing.

A: Yah, yah.

N: You know? So I not say, still have poverty like every other country, you know, but it's developed a lot. So I was surprised when I went there.

A: So your husband's family, were they here in Lowell?

N: One brother, (A: Okay) because he got married to a girl who immigrated to over here. And she went back and married him, and he came to Lowell.

A: Okay.

N: But also have a sister-in-law who married a kid also. Both of them Portuguese. They came over here and they went back to marry. And she went to New Bedford.

A: Okay.

N: And after that she make all the required papers to bring her mother, her brothers, you know, and that's why I'm over here. Myself, I don't have family over here. I have my kids, and my grandkids now, but my brother or sister [are not here].

A: Okay, I see.

N: You know, it's only me. So my husband said, "Let's go. Let's go."

A: Were you excited about coming though?

N: Yes.

A: Okay.

N: Yes, because before that I went to Canada for three or four months, visit my brother, because I have a brother. At the time I have a brother and two sisters in Canada. And I love it over there. So I imagine the United States will be about the same, you know.

A: Yah, yah. So when you first came to Massachusetts, to the U.S., did you come to New Bedford, or?

N: I came to New Bedford.

A: Okay, and tell us about that experience.

N: I came (-- I have a resume over here. I think it's that that you want to see.

A: Okay, great. Thank you.

N: I came to New Bedford and I went (-- I came on a Saturday. On a Thursday I started working in Cliftex Company [Cliftex Corporation, manufacturers of men's suits, founded in 1945, was one of New Bedford's largest employers, and closed in 2000] who do coats for men. And I was doing the liners.

A: You were putting the liners?

N: I was doing like a stitch in the liner, the jackets. And my brother-in-law went down there from over here, Lowell. And my husband worked in a company. I don't remember the name, doing something. It was electronics at the time. And my brother-in-law went from down here to visit us. And tell my husband, "Oh, you go." Because he was by himself over here in Lowell too. And so you guys all want to come to New Bedford. Nobody wants to come to live in Lowell. And my husband talked to him and he [the brother-in-law] said, "Oh, in the [Lowell] factory I work they pay \$5.00. And we at the time, we are making \$3.10. I think was the [unclear] at that time. I think it was \$3.10. My husband said, "Oh, find me a job and I go." So he find a job in the same factory. And my husband said, "Let's go." And "Let's go." I came to Lowell and I went to work. I find a job in Lawrence.

A: Okay.

N: Grace (-- No, it's not Grace Shoe. I have the name of the place.

A: [Reading from Ms. Iria's resume] Is it Lawrence Made?

N: Lawrence Made, exactly.

A: Yah, that's what it says here.

N: So when the (--

A: In a shoe factory.

N: Yes, a shoe factory. But I went, I was doing, they call them [unclear], with the back of the shoe.

A: How do you say it?

N: That's what they call them. I think was [unclear], which is the back of the shoe, you know, would stay over there by the ankle. And they don't have work enough. Every day I go in for seven. By 7:30 they were sending me home. That's no good for a person who tried to start a life. So I found a job in Prince Macaroni. I work over there maybe a month, if you want to put a month for all the days I came home, and I started working at Prince Macaroni, second shift.

A: How did you find out about Prince?

N: My brother-in-law worked there (A: Okay) you know. And my husband, he found a job for my husband over there. But my husband don't like it much. So he went. Also he left over there. He went to work at Carol Shoe. (A: Okay) You know, he worked at Carol Shoe. And I stay working second shift picking up lasagna, 1980. But the year after or so I started working with the machine, you know. And I worked with the machine for seventeen years. And when I left over there I think I was making \$11.11 or \$11.12. Something around that. I don't remember.

A: An hour?

N: An hour, yes. So that's in 1997.

A: Okay.

N: Because 1980 I start over there [at Prince Pasta] in August. And in 1980 I was making \$12.17, which is already a big difference from New Bedford at \$3.10 or 11 cents, you know. So it was good.

A: So what did you think about Lowell when you folks first moved here?

N: When I first moved here New Bedford to 1980 was a very nice and clean city. You know, the grass, the flowers, this and that. And when I came to Lowell I was shocked, because it was very dirty at the time, you know. And I remember I went towards that street, Fletcher Street. It's Fletcher Street. And I went over there because my brother-in-law lived that way.

A: Okay.

N: And I went over there and I see piles and piles of garbage on the street and I was shocked, and scared. So, but Lowell changed a lot in thirty years.

A: Yah, yah.

N: It changed a lot, you know.

A: Why do you think Lowell was like that and New Bedford was nicer at that time?

N: I think New Bedford have percentage of people (--) it was more established community, Portuguese people. You know, who they, who take very pride in everything they own and everything they do. And I think it was that.

A: So tell us about Prince Macaroni. What did it look like?

N: At the time, in 1980, Pellegrino was building the new building, you know, that part was all cement, no windows, nothing. So they were putting new machines, new technology at the time for 1980. For me, I never worked in a factory that big, and such big machines. It was a shock, you know, but we could see what we produced, what we did, and the community inside was mostly Portuguese. And after came the Cambodians, and some Spanish, and some white. So English people, I don't know what you call. So, I don't want to offend nobody.

A: No, no. I mean they could have been French Canadian, or Irish, or.

N: Yes. It was, they have (--) They have people, not as much, because the majority was Portuguese.

A: Okay.

N: Maybe 80 [percent] to 90 percent was Portuguese.

A: That many, (N: Yes) really?

N: At the time. And after the Portuguese still high, but was more, more Asians, you know.

A: Over, like by the (--)

N: Over the years.

A: By the time like (--)

N: By the time they closed they have a lot of Asians.

A: Okay.

N: Second shift was a lot of Asian people.

A: Okay.

N: You know. So. And because you move jobs, you know, down to first shift, down to third shift because they have three shifts.



A: So you had the old brick buildings, the old bleachery buildings.

N: That's where I started working, in an old building.

A: Okay. And so do you know like where the different departments were, and where they were located, what they did?

N: The old part, the first floor was office. When you went through the door.

A: Okay. They used to have a little museum in there I think.

N: Yes, on the left side. The first floor was office. You go one floor and you have the, we used to call them the tanks with the macaroni come from third floor. And the shakers fall in those tanks, you know, all ready to be packed. (A: Okay) They have the tanks. And you go back on the second, in the second floor. This was the first room. On the second floor you have like three spaghetti machines packing spaghetti every day. And you go to third floor, I think it was third floor, yes, and you have the lasagna machines, and you have the silos where they produced the pasta and they have the dryers drying, you know. And they produce that and the spaghetti will come. They will cut it upstairs and they will come down to the machines to pack.

A: Okay. And so how many floors were there total? Three?

N: I think it was three.

A: Okay. And then what about the newer building which still exists?

N: The newer building was three also.

A: That was three? Okay.

N: But much higher and much bigger each floor, you know. They have also, they have shipping/receiving on the first floor. The same thing as the old building. Shipping/receiving was on the first floor. They have shipping/receiving. They have the warehouse where they have the final product. They have a big machine. All the boxes used to come down to the line. And over there they were putting in [pallets]. The machine would do it by itself. The forklift will take it and move apart. And (--)

A: Was all of the packaging made on site?

N: Yes. Yes.

A: Now there was another company. I think it used to be called the Cleghorn Box Company down on like Washer Street.

N: I don't think was from my time.

A: No? Okay.

N: You know?

A: Maybe before.

N: Maybe before.

A: Maybe before they built that building.

N: Maybe, yah.

A: I thought that's where they did. But they did all of the printing at the (--)

N: Well they have the printing for the boxes. Yes, they still have a factory. They do the (--)  
Washer, I think Washer Street is the (--)

A: Washer, or Bolt Street. It's over near like Comcast?

N: Yes. So they still have that building over there making boxes.

A: Still making Prince Pasta boxes?

N: I don't know what they still do, but they still have a company. They don't belong, that  
company don't belong to Prince anymore. (A: Okay) Even when we still open I think they  
already sold that company to someone else, you know.

A: Okay. Okay.

N: Yah, they used to print the boxes for us, you know. And the boxes came to us and we pack  
whatever we have to do. When this come down to the first floor and will be ready to go to the, to  
the customer.

A: Okay.

N: And the second floor we have the packing machines. We have at the time, one, two, three;  
two, one, two, three, four, five, I think six or seven spaghetti machines to pack. And we have a  
machine with bulk. We were making like a ten pound bag, you know. You have that.

A: Was that for commercial?

N: For restaurants and companies want to do its own packing, you know.

A: Okay, yah.

N: And we have the macaroni machines. The elbows, the ziti, the shells, you know, the noodles. We have all that machines. And on the third floor was lasagna, was made and packed, lasagna. On the third floor, and it was the fabrication part was up there. And that will go in the dryers and they'll have a place. Also, that will be a hold on even inside the dryers. They call them something else, but I'm going to call them dryers now. That will stop over there like on a weekend if we no work. That will hold. They will stop production before time to see if we pack everything, but if we not they have like a holding to pack on a Monday, you know. So.

A: Now were some of the jobs, when you first start, more oriented towards females versus men?

N: Lasagna (--). That would not make a difference over there.

A: No?

N: But lasagna and cannelloni was more women job, you know.

A: And why was that do you think?

N: Because it was like packing. Like pick it up, the material itself, the macaroni itself and put in boxes and things. But usually they no make no difference.

A: No.

N: You know, if there's a woman needed to go pack twenty pounds all day in a thousand something boxes of twenty pounds, the women will go, you know. Because also we had the thing equal pay for equal work.

A: So that was in existence when you started?

N: That was in existence, you know.

A: Did they have to fight for that?

N: No.

A: Sometime before?

N: I'm sure they fought for that sometime before. I'm pretty sure they fought for that. If this job pays five dollars, and the men will do it, the women will come and get the same five dollars, you know. The only difference with certain machines pay maybe a little bit, a penny or two more. You know, if you go over there they don't give you that difference.

A: Okay.

N: You know. Like if I am [producing] spaghetti, I was a spaghetti machine operator. When I left over there I was making eleven something, you know. And if a person who came over,

because that machine ran out of work, if he comes over here and make only \$10.50, that's what they're going to pay. You know what I mean?

A: Okay.

N: So back then what I recall.

A: So if, if that wasn't your regular job they would still pay you your original wage?

N: Yes.

A: And so what were the different jobs that paid more or less?

N: It was only like the packers, between packers and machine operators. And the people who fabricate the material up there. (A: Okay) That was (-- Maybe, I'm not home. At home I had the contract. I don't know. I'm not talking about that.

A: So "entry" level position was the packing jobs?

N: Yes.

A: And that paid less?

N: That paid less. (A: Okay) And after you have a chance, because that's also they have like a bidding process.

A: Okay.

N: Who usually went by seniority. When they don't want to (trick) someone and to say, "No, this one come in before you," or this or that, you know. So they will have the bidding process. And the person who had most seniority, that's the one who is supposed to get, because they also have qualifications. When they have qualifications, if I decided to not qualify, I'm going to say you're not qualified even if you are more qualified than me. You know what I mean? So that's the tricks they have.

A: So the packers' job is first entry?

N: First step.

A: And then what would be next for more pay?

N: Will be machine [operator]. Will be, I think the spaghetti machines will be paid more, because most of them, they work by themselves and they take care of like two machines.

A: Or get paid commission?

N: No. No, it was one flat rate.

A: Okay.

N: And I think [the next] was the people who work on the silos up there. They make (--)

A: That would be the highest?

N: I think, really I don't recall, but I think was the highest was the ones who fabricate the machine.

A: Now you talked about (--)

N: And there was maintenance. Maintenance have a different pay than us.

A: And was theirs also maybe better?

N: Theirs was higher, yah.

A: And they fixed the machines?

N: Might be fourteen/fifteen dollars an hour.

A: Okay.

N: You know, so. They fix the machines. They have two guys with the rebuilding. If they need to rebuild they will pull the machine apart and they will rebuild. Sometimes they have a company, or engineer came and said, you'll have to do this or that, but.

A: Did you guys manufacture pasta for other labels besides Prince?

N: Yes we did. We did like Stop & Shop. Like things like that. The (--)

A: Did you guys do Purity Supreme? I used to work at Purity Supreme.

N: At the time yes, we did.

A: You did. Okay.

N: Purity Supreme, Stop & Shop. What is the other one? It's more like not stores we have in Massachusetts, but Price Shopper.

A: Oh Price Shopper, okay. Okay.

N: PetMark.

A: PetMark, yah. I haven't heard that in a long time.

N: We used to, yes.

A: I don't even know if that exists anymore.

N: I don't know. So we used to do, pack pasta for them, you know. Sometimes the companies, Prince was semolina. The other ones was fabricated I think maybe a little bit, it's not much semolina, because that part I don't understand, because I never work up there. All I know you have to change everything. Clean the machine off to pack a different brand.

A: So if they had semolina in the product that was more expensive?

N: I think our brand was, I don't know if semolina came in different grades, you know.

A: Okay.

N: I cannot say that. I don't know if semolina have, maybe have different grades, or have different something else, you know.

A: Now you talked about when you first showed up there was primarily Portuguese folks working there.

N: They have (--) Yes, primarily Portuguese, some whites, some, you know, they have a couple of Spanish, but not much. But the main was Portuguese.

A: And then say by 1995, or something, a lot of Asian folks?

N: Asians.

A: And then were they working at the, as packers predominantly, or?

N: No, they work just (--) Because they, they had the second shift. And when we leave, the second shift have to (--) Most Asian people at the time like to work off shifts, you know. And they work machines, and they work packing, and they work everything.

A: So mainly they worked at a different shift than Portuguese folks did?

N: They like (--) The Asian people at the time, they like I think because have kids or something. They like work off shifts, you know. They open a third shift for some machines and they have people over there. They have some Portuguese, but the majority was Asians.

A: Okay.

N: Because they liked it, to work. I started working over there second shift.

A: Okay.

N: You know, but as soon as I could I moved down to first shift. Second shift is good, okay. Your husband come home to take care of the kids, but you lose a lot of family [time], you know. So when I worked a second shift it was not, the kids at a certain age, it's not supper, it's supertime at mom and dad's house at this time. So I'll go later, you know. And after you come the next day and you see nobody has supper. You know. That's one of the things. Especially when I went to work for medical, my kids was already big, you know. And I lost. I went to work second shift also. And I lost a lot of that. I think it takes a toll on family, you know. It takes a toll on family. So.

A: I agree.

N: So if you going to have (--) If you going to work off shifts, and if you have kids, from my opinion you better off to go to work on third shift.

A: Yah, after the kids are already asleep, right.

N: Umhm. So, and I did that I think five years before I retired. And that's when I was scared of third shift. And when I was really safe, this life is much better for family time then be on second shift, because the company I worked, the last company I worked I started 2:00[pm]. So if you have kids to school, they're just leaving school when you start working. And you're not there when you supposed to go to bed, you know. So after many years I went to third shift. It was by choice. I said, I'm going to try and I'm not going to go for good, but I'm going to try. So, and I like much better third shift than second shift.

A: Yah, that's good. That's good. I had never thought of that.

N: It is if you have kids, small kids, and you have to work off shift. If you have opportunity to go to third shift you'd be tired all of the time, you know. But if you have opportunity to go to third shift, it's much better than second shift if you have family.

A: So tell us about Joe Pellegrino, the older man.

N: I think I met him twice, or three times, but he was a kind of person "we is family." You know, he treat us good, you know. He show he care. He care about this product, but also he care about the family. He used to say it's my Prince family. And I met him, I think I met him once or twice, maybe three times when he go through the plant, you know. And I remember one day I was packing the ten pound machine and it was two bags inside each machine. I was packing and he got by me, he said, "That machine comes fast." And he said, "You've got to grab this and close this like you're hugging, like you're hugging one of your kids." That's what he tell me. I remember that forever, you know.

A: So he was around periodically and kind of check in on people?

N: Most I think was his son.

A: Okay. That's (--)

N: I have a very vague [recollection] of his son. It was other managers and supervisors most, you know. Maybe in the background he was there, but not (--)

A: Did the son come around and walk the floor like his father?

N: I think maybe once, you know, because after they give it to the granddaughter.

A: Yah? Who is that?

N: The granddaughter, I forgot her name. I'm not too good with names at all.

A: Okay.

N: And the granddaughter was the one who even work over there, you know, when she left school and did whatever, [words unclear] over there.

A: Okay. Was she pretty smart? Was she active?

N: I don't remember that, you know. I think she's the one who did, come up with idea to have a little museum.

A: Okay.

N: Okay. I not remember. I know she work. She was friendly. I remember she was friendly. If anybody talked to her she was friendly, but really I don't remember that way. Of course at that time I was not involved with nothing in the plant besides go to my job.

A: Sure, sure, sure.

N: I got really involved was in 1994, you know. So. I was working already fourteen years over there. And it was after Borden bought the plant.

A: It was what?

N: After Borden bought the plant.

A: Okay.

N: Because they bought it in 1987.

A: 1987.

N: Yes.



A: Okay.

N: Seven years after I started working over there.

A: Now do you remember the sale? Do you remember people talking about that?

N: It was not much telling to the workers, you know. That was like a hush, hush thing. And after I heard they bought it because they want to close. And they want to make Creamette, because Creamette was Borden brand. They want to (--) Prince was number one brand in the country most places you go. And they want to be number one. And they want to shutdown Prince and do Creamette. At the time, I don't know if it's true or not, even when the customers talk about Prince, they want to put Creamette upfront. They don't want Prince, you know. So of course they want to be number one. But when Pellegrino sold the plant I think and I heard in the contract he did during ten years you could not close the plant.

A: Okay. So there was a thing, kind of a clause in the contract?

N: A clause in the contract, yes.

A: Okay. So what do you think that clause says about the Pellegrino Family?

N: I think it says a lot. To say this is my people. This is the people that been fighting and working hard for me, and I don't want you to come over here in six months from now, you shut down. I think that's what Mr. Pellegrino had in his mind.

A: And would that be Mr. Pellegrino the son, or the father?

N: I think will be a combination of both.

A: Okay.

N: You know, I think will be a combination of both, because the father had really that on his heart. You have to remember Mr. Pellegrino come over here very young with twenty bucks in his pocket. I want to believe in 1900s, because he came very early. Twenty bucks was a lot of money, you know. So I think, I think he had that in his heart. And my opinion he never forgot where he came from, you know. So the son, he probably already born with the silver spoon in his mouth, and maybe a good man, but he no have that thing in his heart. I think the daughter had it.

A: Granddaughter?

N: The granddaughter had it. That's what I heard at the time. Had it because I think she was, she loved the grandfather, and really understood what the grandfather went through, you know. I think the granddaughter have that on [unclear], she don't have no backup, you know.

A: Yah. So what were the working conditions like?

N: After Borden bought the plant?

A: Maybe before and after.

N: Before was okay. You know, it was hurry up, hurry up, hurry up, hurry up, but was okay. But after when Borden come in he really tried to cut pay. He tried [unclear]. He tried, excuse my language, to screw the workers. You know, he no care who. You're only a number, you know. He changed health insurance. They changed everything, you know. They not invested one penny on the plant. I think for them any work, anything was only a number, you know. And that's what make people think about the union. They had like inside. Back then they have an inside union, which is not syndicated, which is not affiliated with nobody. It was only a group of people to say "We're going to get together, and we're going to have a contract with Mr. Pellegrino. And at that time the contract was not bad at all."

A: Okay.

N: You know, you have (--) You have, every three years you have, you know, a raise. You have this. You have that, you know, but after Borden came in they really wanted to, I think to make slaves out of the workers. [Borden's attitude was] "You don't have no value for me. You go out of the door, two will come in." That's what most companies think, you know, so.

A: What was the name of the union that existed when you first were there?

N: Oh, it was the company, they used to call them company union.

A: Okay.

N: You know, because I think before I come in, before I come in to the United States maybe was a group who I think I heard about that. I'm not, I don't know the whole history. It was a group or a union approached the plant [and distributed leaflets] to organize people. And I guess Mr. Pellegrino had a meeting with his workers, said, "You guys do much better if you choose a couple of people to sit down with me and negotiate a contract. Then you get affiliated with that." The thing with that was the people are [friends]. The people was, had at the time in 1994, they would care more about themselves than care about the rest of the plant, the rest of the people. So in 1994 when the union arrived at the place [and leafleted] everybody. At that time we already have since 1987 we have Borden, and we not treated well. What sometimes not even respect. They decided to organize, but because we had a contract with the company union the way we used to call them, we could not do nothing for a year, because the contract expire, I think expire in a year.

A: A year from 1987?

N: A year from 1994.

A: A year from then. Okay.

N: Okay. So (--)

A: So you guys were still using the company union in 1994.

N: Yes.

A: Okay.

N: So. And when the United Electrical Machine Workers of America [United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America], more short, UE, show up at our door and [leafleted] and that. People respond, you know, we got some information. And that's when we find out we couldn't even do nothing about it because we under contract with the company union. So we take that year and try talk to people, you know, what is your opinion of that? What's your opinion of that? And from that meeting we have to a year some of the leaders come out, you know, help. Because when you have, I think was plant workers was 300 something workers, you have to organize. When come to a vote we went for the majority. I remember that day like today. I cry, because I fought hard for that union.

A: And this was in 1995?

N: I think was 1995, yes, you know.

A: And so the choice was stay with the original company union, or?

N: No, the choice was to [join] with the United Electrical Workers Machine of America, UE, you know, we were voting that union which is an [independent] union at the time.

A: Okay. So if people voted against that they would continue with the company union?

N: [Yes] If people vote against to say "no UE," I think the ballots I think even say company union [vs.] UE.

A: Okay.

N: So we win for UE a big, I think 90 percent or something. It was, I'm not remember but it was a big win. Big, big, win. I remember when I was counting that ballots, because was a group of people with the company present. We are counting that ballots and we see UE, we see UE, and the pile was this big, and this big. I cry.

A: Did you literally cry?

N: I literally cried, you know. And I remember, I remember the manager of the plant whose name was Jeff. And he say, "Why are you crying? You're not happy?" "No, I love that. That's tears for happiness." You know, because things changed. You know, we went to a

contract with Borden at that time and they try everything to put us down. You know, they even made the contract with the hours. You know, you work seven days a week. You have Saturday time and a half. Sundays double time. And what they did, they put us, after the contract was made, they put us on that terrible schedule.

A: Seven days a week?

N: Seven days a week, but the difference, they make the groups. This group work Monday to Friday. And you rotating, this week for three week you Monday to Friday. For the next week you Tuesday to Saturday. The Wednesday (--) So by the time you have a weekend off you will have three or four months without a weekend.

A: As it cycles around.

N: As it cycles around, yes. So, and we remember when we negotiated we were very clear that. And I remember the guy you negotiate [with], Mike Fermato, that was his name (--)

A: Negotiate from the company side, or the union?

N: For the company side. And we have our side also representatives from the union headquarters and have workers, one worker from each department, which was very different from the negotiations used to be with the company union. Nobody knew anything. And when they were in negotiation, if you ask anything, you don't have nothing to say. You don't need to know. Well this is our lives. We need to know, you know. So, and I remember Mike Fermato, when we were talking schedule, on his fingers he'd say, "You work seven days a week, Saturday will be time and a half, Sunday will be time and a half." Because at that time we work that I know some weekends. So what they did, they break our week. We go Monday, Tuesday, we have to stay home Wednesday. So they no pay. So, but because the notes they take, the union take, and the testimony, we filed a grievance. We filed a, what do they call?

A: Is it a grievance?

N: We file a grievance to say that and they denied. So we went to like a (--)

A: Is it arbitration?

N: Arbitration, yes. So we file two arbitrations. (A: Two?) We win both of them.

A: And was that with the federal government?

N: That's when I think the labor board comes in and they send one of their lawyers or their judges, you know. So we won both of them. We filed two. One was, on was for that and the other one I forgot what it was. And we in the right. We win both. And they were very angry because they have to pay hundreds and hundreds of dollars back to the workers.

A: In back pay?

N: In back pay, because that's, you know. So. And I think the union UE was the most hated union for a long time for that. So, but give us satisfaction.

A: So tell us more about the time leading up to the vote of bringing UE in. And were people starting to get upset with the (--) Why were people even thinking about changing the union representation?

N: Because we were not treated fair, you know, we not treated with respect.

A: How did that show itself?

N: Show itself is, you over there on that corner, and the supervisor start to say, "Hey, Joe, or Nomesia, come over here. I want you to go work over here. [Whistles] Like a dog. They would whistles, you know, like a dog. They not have no respect. They will give the overtime whatever people they wanted to. We don't have a good health insurance at the time. You know, they cut us pay. They cutting vacations. They cutting everything.

A: This is after Borden took over?

N: After Borden take off, yes. Because you have so many holidays they're cutting off. Instead a raise they give you \$500.00 instead of a raise. By the time you pay your taxes, you know, \$200.00 you receive, you know. And overtime pay, and everything, that makes a difference. Like I said, they tried to (--) If I think if they last longer we will be slaves, you know.

A: After Borden took over was there a change in the personnel on management?

N: Was some, but some stayed. But like I said, if you hire, if your manager tell the supervisor want this re-done, you have to do it or you go out the street. That goes down to the line. You know what I mean? So, because you have to change what you think you are used to, you have to pass on that to me, you know.

A: So even if somebody had respected you as a supervisor previously (--)

N: They have to follow orders, you know. Like the head is the one who tells the other head, and the other head, and the other head until it reach me. We understand, but we also understand Borden was the one who was doing that, you know. And when Borden came on board was to destroy Prince.

A: You think so?

N: We know so, you know, because we see many changes. And after that come out Mr. Pellegrino sold the plant [unclear] during ten years you can do nothing. You cannot work was one of the clauses. So that was showing us, you know. And then when they closed in 1997 is because they make, at the time we heard they make, they did the plant in Canada. They, you know, they invest all the money in Canada to produce Creamette, you know. So.

A: What did people think of the Creamette name?

N: Over here in New England was not that famous, you know.

A: Yah, yah.

N: I never bought the pound.

A: I don't know if I've even seen it in stores.

N: Back then, yah.

A: Okay.

N: But I think Borden exist. I think he sold all this plant or something. There's another company who do that, you know.

A: So how did you get involved in some of these issues?

N: Of course I was angry.

A: Huh?

N: I was angry too, like other people.

A: And what was your (--) What were you doing for your position in 1994 say?

N: A position in the company?

A: Yes.

N: I was a machine operator.

A: Were you part of the union leadership at that time?

N: No, not the company union. No.

A: No.

N: No. I come out as a leader was, when the UE, United Electrical Workers came up to our plant and [unclear]. And honestly, I don't even respond, but I guess some of my coworkers, when they went to [unclear], because the way they do it, is the leaflets, they have something you can respond. Make like you put your address, put your name, and you can send that you know. They go, or they be over there around the plant when you leave work to give it to them, the

organizers. And I think one of my coworkers probably give them my name, my address, and they tried to contact me.

A: Okay.

N: And that's why they start talking to me. They're starting teach me how to be a leader, you know. They tell me at the time, "You have a lot of things for a leader, what a leader needs." I don't want to believe that, you know, at the time. Honestly, I never value, I never see myself with the power to do anything. And honestly after that I started realizing, "Yah, I can do it," you know. Because like you said, like I said to you, I came from a country was fascist. You know, I have no voice, especially women back then. So, and I learned a lot. I learned God give me this mouth. I can speak up. Not I can never shut up. [Laughing] I got involved because I really believed in issues we had at the time. I have someone opened my eyes and say, "Yah, I used to have this. Now I don't have it." You know, I can do better. You know, yah, that's a job was five minutes from my house, but I work hard. I'm a woman and if they need me instead run a machine, packing 2,000 pounds, 2,000 boxes of twenty pound each, all day, eight hours, I'm going to be there, you know, with a break half an hour, fifteen minutes at lunch time, ten minutes of coffee time, for eight hours. We all can do better. If we look inside ourselves we always have room to improve. And that's what I did. I see I could improve. At the time I said, well, I find proof from a colleague. Of course in my idea, in my mind, I never asked nothing for me, because I know if I help you along the way, along the road, I'm helping myself. And it's a lot easy I ask something for you, then ask for myself. So that's the way I see things. So I start, you know, thinking about my own problems. And I start, if I have this problem, this and this and this also have problems. And people, we used to have meetings and everybody talked about it. And I was the one who have the guts most to come out.

A: Why was that?

N: I don't know. It's like, like I said, it's easy to do something for somebody else than do it for yourself, because if you do it for yourself people are going to think you're selfish. But if you do it for somebody else it's much better. People have the tendency to believe you better, because you put your interest behind, but you know along the road you're going to benefit from that. And that's what I did. I did thinking about my kids. I did thinking about my coworkers who have kids too. And if we leave this world a better place for everybody, we'll be better, you know. So.

A: So in 1995 you had the election for the UE Union.

N: In June, or May. No, April 4.

A: So at that stage did you become part of the official union leadership?

N: Yes, I did.

A: And what was your role, specific role?

N: Just a steward.

A: Okay. And at that time was there many women involved in the union?

N: I think was, was people involved, but women, Portuguese women is have that thing of responsibility, and their husbands don't let them do whatever they want. I have many fights with my husband.

A: How come?

N: Because instead of me being home making supper, doing things, I was fighting for things for the union. I had many problems. I no hide. Never did, you know, but I really appreciate my husband. Thank God I still have him. I really appreciate my husband to help me out, you know.

A: June of 1994.

N: Okay. So it was [19]93 we start organizing the union and we have (--) And it's April 1994 when we have the vote. We have that [unclear]. That's all.

A: Okay.

N: So in [19]94, because I remember we had our first district meeting as a union in Vermont. Was June 10. I think was 10 or 12. So that was first district meeting with other locals. They get together every three months.

A: And that was after the vote?

N: That was after the vote, because the vote happened in April 4, 1994. I was confused with the date like I said.

A: No, no, no. That's great. You have great memory, I'm telling you.

N: You know, I try my best. Don't ask me names, because I'm terrible.

A: That's fine. The union, the company union before that time, were there women involved in that?

N: One.

A: Okay.

N: It was one woman, an American woman.

A: Okay.



N: She worked already over there I think for twenty some years when she was involved. She was the only one. And my understanding she was told to shut up many times, you know.

A: Really.

N: By other members, most men, and they're practically from only one department, what was shipping. The place, they were making more money beside maintenance.

A: Okay.

N: You know. When there was meetings, union meetings, or anything, she was told to shut up many times.

A: Did she join you in the new union?

N: I think she was sick at the time.

A: Okay.

N: She got hurt in one foot, and I think she was not (--) I'm no remember, but I don't think she was there anymore.

A: So the folks that were in the company union, they mainly represented the shipping department?

N: When there was meetings (--) On UE they would try to have a person from the production upstairs. They would try to have a person from packing. They would try to have a person from machine operators. They will have a person from maintenance. They will have a person from shipping, because like that, if I work in shipping, I know what is the problem.

A: I'm sorry, and so it's (--) I thought it was first, I thought you were saying shaping.

N: Ah shipping! I'm sorry.

A: So shipping, (N: Shipping) like shipping and receiving?

N: Shipping and receiving, yes.

A: Sorry. At first I thought it was part of the pasta design and reshaping. Sorry about that.

N: No, no, no, no, shipping/receiving.

A: Shipping.

N: They would have a person from that department, because that person know what is the problems. The person from packing, they know what is the problems they have. Person from machine operators, they know what is the problems, you know.

A: But the previous union, the company union (--)

N: Was more shipping/receiving people.

A: Okay. Interesting.

N: Okay. So what does the other people if they ask anything? We no have no value for that, you know. And we only, at the time we tried to put the UE in, organizing, we have to fight against the company union.

A: Were they upset?

N: They were upset.

A: What happened?

N: You know. They were putting things was not true about the leaders, the new leaders who was organizing.

A: What were they saying?

N: Like they tell me I had a big mouth. I was a liar. I was this, you know, they were attacking us. And they were using the boards, the company have posting boards, they were using that when we not allowed, you know. The company allowed them to post on the bulletin boards, but we not allowed, you know. They were allowed to have little meetings with this person. Little meetings with that, but in company time, but we not allowed. You know what I mean? Anything we did was outside the plant, not inside the plant. You know.

A: Did you guys ever get in trouble for doing something that they considered you were doing in the plant, or on the clock?

N: I try not to. And I advise everybody who was more involved with the union, "Please don't do anything you're not supposed to when you are in the plant. Please be the perfect worker, because if you the perfect worker they cannot use it against you," you know. And that's what I did. That's what the other ones who were involved did also. And we tried to choose people to be leaders who have no problems, [attendance], or anything. That's was we organized and put our minds to do. And we have a lot, a lot of the other workers behind us, you know, to tell us any information, you know, what we need to know. What's going on over here, what the supervisor said, or this and that? And Jeff, the manager of the plant, almost every week he had to call everybody in the cafeteria and blah, blah, blah, talk about this, about that. And our job was to come out and talk to the workers and say, "this is not true here." Show them he was not saying true things. UE, that will not happen, you know, because we have the organizers

inside the plant with the workers, like person like me, but we also have from headquarters from UE the organizers, organizers, who try to get, to go on the computer to get information, you know, try to get due diligence, you know. So.

A: Sure. Where was the UE based out of? Boston?

N: They had a Local 262 in Boston, but they were based in Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

A: Okay. And what was, what was the union, the Local 214?

N: It was us.

A: Okay.

N: Local 214, we call ourselves 214.

A: Okay, so that was the UE though.

N: The UE, yes.

A: Now was there other unions aside of the company union vying for membership?

N: I think the United Electric Workers, what is, it's not the same union but they sound like the same.

A: Okay.

N: Okay, the name sounds like the same. They try to come in too. When they see the union put this work on it and it was doing good, I think the company union is the one who called that union in to see it.

A: After UE had been voted on?

N: No, before.

A: Before.

N: Before, but they don't want to put the time because to have workers, the organizers who coming from headquarters organize the work, because we spend money, they don't want to put work in it the way the UE did it. So automatically this tells us this is a union is solid, you know, because they only not over here because they want our dues, but they want to fight for us, you know. They also teaching us, you know, by law you can do this, or do that, you know. It's up to you. They can do nothing if you do this. They have all the information from the labor board (National Labor Relations Board], what can be done, what cannot be done, and they would pass it on to us, literature, things like that. So.

A: So with the UE was there other women involved in the leadership?

N: Yes.

A: Okay.

N: Most women were involved, but they no want to do things after the meetings. They would say, "Oh, okay. I will give this paper to so and so," but they don't want to put the face up like I did, you know. They all (--) The excuse all the time was, "Oh, I have the kids." "Oh," this. "Oh well my husband." Oh, you know. Instead me, I'll fight with my husband. [Both laugh]

A: Tell us a little story about you and your husband clashing.

N: My husband accused me to not care about the kids, not care about him, because a lot of times when I leave the plant I go by my house, because I used to live in "Back" Central Street. I go by my house, I don't even enter. I'll go straight to the local [union] office, the little office we used to have on the rotary.

A: At the rotary, at Hosford Square.

N: Yes. So I used to go straight over there [to the union office], get what they got for me. Was any papers that, and was papers because most Portuguese, we have to translate, you know, tried to translate. I did most of the translation at the time, because it's funny, I cannot write English, but I can read it and know what it means.

A: Okay.

N: And do the best I could. I was not the perfect translation, but to save money, because at the time we don't have money. We don't have no dues to pay for anything, you know. So, and we [leaflet] that, we give that to our workers. This is what's going on, you know. So, and we have a year, and we come. I'm proud of that even after three years we have to close down the plant, but it was because Borden was so starving. He no want to do nothing to the plant, no. Was not because of the union. It was because people, one of the things I asked my co-workers, keep working hard. Don't let them say, "Oh, because we have the union, now we don't want to work." No, you're still being the same good worker you were till now. Work hard and till the day we closed the door I'm proud to say we worked hard. It was not sabotaged. You know, because sometimes many people, I never really did that. I want to do this. You know. That's one of the things we ask all the time, because that will go with you for a next job.

A: Sure. Sure.

N: You know? So.

A: Were there any attempts to break support away with the different ethnic groups?

N: We tried to bring everybody together, because if the meetings we have we always say, “This is not the Portuguese thing.” This is the Portuguese. This is the American. This is the Spanish. This is the Asian Community. We have to come and be the only one, because that’s the only way we’ll have power. Because if we divide ourselves between the ethnic groups the company will have a ball. Because the companies over here to divide us, and our job is to be only one.

A: Did the company try to do that?

N: Tried.

A: How did they do that?

N: Well through leaflets. Talking to some of the leaders because every community becomes a leader, you know. And try to, “Oh, this one looks like it’s the leader from the Asian.” Let’s talk. Let’s call them. Let’s (--). And we advised people, “You do whatever you want. You are free to do whatever you want, but have this in mind.” So, and that’s what you did. We bring the community. Spanish, whites, Asians, Portuguese, we try to have a close knit with everyone, and give everyone the same way, you know, and listen to the problems the same way, you know. That’s what we did. I think the most important thing I think is us representing ourselves in the face of the company. We not [different] ethnic groups. [We only one.] And that’s what we did.

A: You mentioned earlier that Borden never really invested in (N: Money) improvements into the plants, the physical plants.

N: No, they run it down.

A: And did that start impacting the manufacturing process at all?

N: It did, because machines broke down a lot, you know, and they never really to say, “Okay, let’s rebuild this machine.” Let’s do this, or let’s do that. They never did. They never really cared. That’s why it was so hard when we come out of the plant, to buy the plant. Everything was hard because it will cost a lot of money to recuperate everything. We have machines, decent machines. It was very hard, you know. I don’t remember what was the study back then, but the dollar amount was high, you know. So.

A: So do you remember when you first heard rumors or stories about potentially closing?

N: Yes. We heard many times. In 1997, I think that time in 1997, I remember it was still cold outside. I think it was in the start 1997, the first month, January or something. We start to hear rumors, “Oh, Borden is going to close.” “Borden is going to close.” And myself and a group of other people reach personnel. We went to personnel, the lady in personnel. We said we heard that, and we have union meetings once a month with the manager, and the lady from HR [Human Resources], and we ask: “We heard rumors Borden is going to close.” “Oh, you guys crazy. We’re not going to close.” This and that. So one day (--). That happened many times. One day we heard that rumor in the morning around 1:00[am]. And I went down to HR again. We hear people calling in from second shift, say, “You guys going to close the plant?” “Oh, no way! No

way! No way!” So I remember I was in the office having that conversation when someone called the lady at HR, which I and somebody else was having a meeting with. And he said, “I’m sorry. I have to cut this short, because I have to step out.” So he went away. So what happened is, was the people from second shift bring a piece, bring the paper from Lowell SUN where Borden was announcing they’re going to close. Even before they tell us anything, they announced to the paper, the paper, they’re going to close. Even before they said to the city of Lowell, “We planning to close,” because usually [unclear] would say is there anything I can do for you? I can help you with this. [Unclear], this and that. They not said nothing. So when this come out, I don’t know what happened, or if it was the city. I know all the next day we have a meeting with everybody from the City of Lowell, they were there.

A: And that was at here at City Hall, or?

N: No. That was at the plant. (A: Okay) The union was there, because the city said, you guys got a union. You have anybody over here from the union? They will call us. The chief steward and the president. I think at the time I was a chief steward. And the president, and we asked to have a representative over there from the headquarters, from the union, from UE. And they allowed that. And they went. And that’s the time they said they’re going to close. I’m sorry we not announced to you guys. And the union, the city was very upset. The representatives, [U.S. Representative] Marty Meehan was [at] the time, they were very upset. They said, “You know, you don’t do business like that. We give tax breaks. We offer you this. You should approach us and say if anything we can do for you.” I remember I sat at that (--) When Marty Meehan finished that I said, I asked, “A little respect for the city,” he said. I said, “Respect for the city? How about the workers? We have people who work over here for forty-five years. And one moment to the other you not have, they’re going to close the doors and they don’t say nothing to you? They don’t announce to us. They don’t said nothing.” And at the time I think Marty Meehan is the one who called the news, the TV News. And they called the *Lowell Sun*. I think it was his initiation. I’m not sure. And when we left the media, all the (--) They already knew they were going to have the meeting and they want to know. I don’t know how that went really. I don’t remember. And when we come out, was the TV, was the *Lowell Sun*, was outside. And Marty Meehan have a say, and we have our say, you know. We said, “They don’t respect the city. They don’t respect us. We have people who work over here forty-five, fifty years. We have four hundred people over here. People in the office, people in the plant, and this plant represents the City of Lowell, and they have no respect for us.” That’s mainly what started everything, because I think what shocked the city of Lowell was the way they did it without announcing to nobody. I think Borden thought they going to do this hush-hush and one day we’re going to get the deal and we not have no plant to work. So.

A: Yah. So what happened after that first couple of days after the announcement was made? And what was, what was the timeline to the closure? Do you remember?

N: It was, I think was like six months, because I remember it was cold outside when that happened, but by the time it closed I know it’s July 11, 1997. You know, I don’t remember the exact date when that come out, but if you do any research probably in *Lowell Sun* will have that article for you.

A: Sure.

N: I don't know how to do it. I wish I could.

A: Any time you want to learn let me know.

N: And anything, anything I had from, you know, people who cut piece of paper and bring it to us, and clips of the paper, and TV clips, it's like I'm not a person who I think about myself. Oh, I think this is important for me. I can show this to one. No. I'm not humble, but I don't like to call attention to myself. So, and I think when I move I throw everything out.

A: Okay, that's all right.

N: So I no have (--) I have (--)

A: I know the newspaper article still exists [unclear].

N: I have this.

A: Yah, let's look at those in a couple of minutes.

N: You know, I have this. I have (--) I think it was Frank who give it to me. I don't know what it is.

A: Frank Sousa?

N: Yes.

A: Oh yah, okay. Good.

N: So I don't know if this, if you're interested that's the copy, but I have nothing else.

A: Yah, we found this together actually. So I have this. [Unclear-noisy].

N: Okay, so.

A: What about the records from the Local 214?

N: They went. We sent everything to Pennsylvania.

A: Okay. Okay. So they are preserved there.

N: Yes, whatever they, if they still have, whatever was important, they have everything. Because when we closed shop that not belong to us.

A: So you found out about the closing, and your idea at that stage as a group was to do what?

N: To see if we can do anything, you know, together with the organizers where they have a lot of experience, because they have other places probably close, or you know. And we fought. We did rallies. We talk about it. And Marty Meehan came to the table too. We went to him to talk about it, and we come up with ideas for the employees itself, bought the plant. But we don't have no money, you know. And I don't know who reached us. This company called Boston Macaroni called themselves, or they came out with the name Boston Macaroni. They come to us and said, "Hey, I'm over here. I will be able to get together with you guys to buy the plant." I think they did their due diligence, you know, got all the information. And I think they even spent some \$1,000,000 doing something in the plant. You know, I think it was like inspection, what they need, what they not need to do. Even when we closed down in July 11, we have that thing maybe, you know, maybe we going to win this. But it come out it was too expensive, because Borden never agreed to sell a brand name with the Prince. And Prince was number one on this [unclear] for many areas, you know, in New England. So they never agreed they said that, no way. And then the private brands, we could not make enough money to have that.

A: Okay.

N: Because I don't know, I don't remember really the way it work. This company come out with the money to buy the plant, come out. We work. We have our pay. And the same thing, the same way we own shares, stocks, whatever it was, the way it worked back then. I don't remember everything, you know. Of course you see my English today. Back then was a lot worse. [Both laugh]

A: Okay. Well that's great today. So.

N: You know, so.

A: So tell us about the last day at Prince Pasta.

N: Sad day, but it was sad, but at the same time we come out with some kind of, how you say?

A: Saving face?

N: No. Faith? Faith? Like you want to believe.

A: Yah, faith?

N: Faith, yes, we going to win this, you know. We come out and we say our goodbyes, but even some people stay behind, like about seventy people stay behind. He wants to finish packing. He wants to clean this, clean that, for another month or two, but the majority come out. And before they closed, the city, or social security, probably have another name, but they come out and start having school to try and teach some English and some of the basics to other workers so they more able to find a job, you know? Myself, I was laid off for six months. I went to school over there. For that six months for me was (--) Because most of the things they were teaching I already know. So it was not much value for me, but I stay for the six months, you know, [at least



opened my thing]. And after I found a job. The union offered me a job as an organizer, to help organize. And it's not a job for me to be, with my husband, four kids, and a lot of time go stay out of the house.

A: Like did you have to travel around?

N: Umhm, yah.

A: Where did you go?

N: Vermont, New Hampshire, Taunton, this, that, you know, different cities when they tried to organize. It was not really a job for me to be out of the house all of the time. So I quit and I find a job at one of the Pepsi Cola [plants].

A: Okay, where?

N: Ayer. It was a division of Pepsi Cola. I think it was like a sub-contractor, but the main name was Pepsi Cola. And I work over there with the labor machines. First was with the bottles [unclear]. And the second was the labor machines. I work over there for five months. It was second shift also, and I went to make eleven dollars, eleven something, to make eight dollars. With a shift differential I think it was like fifty cents. It was eight dollars and fifty cents. I was working, and before I went to work over there I put an application in medical in that company in Woburn.

A: In Woburn.

N: In Woburn. And they don't call me. So I find that job and after five months I was there they called me. And at the time they were paying me like thirteen, almost fourteen dollars an hour. And I said, "Well, let me see." When I went to interview in Woburn I remember I look at my car, twenty miles. When I went to work in Ayer I remember twenty miles. Second shift. Second shift. Okay, this one gives me more money.

A: No brainer.

N: No brainer. Because sometimes you make a dollar more, but that will stay on your car on the gas, on the streets, and not worth it, you know. So, and on top of that if I work second shift on medical I'll have 10% shift differential. And if I work for Pepsi, then I'll have no shift difference, you know. So it was good pay.

A: Where did most of the people end up going to work after Prince closed up?

N: Oh, they worked in the factories at the time. A lot of them they take cleaning. They went to, was a, is a company on electronics. It was Luis Pedrosa? So he hired a lot of people in there.

A: Okay. Was he kind of around and conscious of the Prince story as it was happening do you think?

N: I don't know.

A: Okay.

N: I don't know. He's a Portuguese guy. So really I don't know that, but I know he hired people from there. And people went to work in cleaning. Some people own little business cleaning. Some people went to work healthcare, you know, like hospice, this and that. So what I found sometimes when I see someone is already stop working, and other ones, they're working healthcare. Then other ones work in factories. And other ones stay home, take care of the rest of the kids.

A: Well today is what?

N: Today is the 17<sup>th</sup>, right? Or 18<sup>th</sup>?

A: No, it's the 18<sup>th</sup>. But what day of the week is it?

N: Oh, Wednesday.

A: And what is Wednesday?

N: Prince Pasta Day. [Both chuckle] Yah, I remember we look. I remember we look on a fight to buy Prince Pasta, we looked for Anthony.

A: Okay, Anthony.

N: And he have a rally in the front of Market Basket in Tewksbury, on Route 38. So, and he come out. Anthony come out, help us, you know. And we have a bunch of signatures to save Borden, save Borden, save Lowell. And we opened that. We put all together all the papers with the signatures. We taped everything together and we had them in a bunch. And we opened in the front at Market Basket. We did that. Anything to say, "Hey, I'm over here and I fight. I not fight for [unclear]. I fight for the job," you know. Because if he go to the CDA, no, I no work. Give me some. No. You fight for a job.

A: So Nomesia, do you have any final stories or thoughts that you'd like to share?

N: Only wish we win, you know. We wish we win that fight, but it's a fight, even if we no win, and I feel bad for my coworkers, it was a fight. I was proud of the Portuguese community. I was proud with the city at the time, help us too. I was proud at the time from carrying [Kennedy], you know, because they come out many times. And I was proud, because that was bigger than me. That was bigger than my coworkers, you know. And I think we did it somethings we never thought we could reach out to do, but we did it because we have people behind us. You know, and we, my face, like they say, my face was there. But with my face I have a battalion of people who work over there behind me. If I no have that, I no have that push to say, "We can do it." You know, if we stick together we can do it, and that would not happen. For me that shows the

workers when we get together we can do things we never even thought, or dream. We can do. I remember someone, I think was one of the TV stations, ask me, “When you are in your country you ever thought you going to be in United States, a different country, and you’re going to be upfront in a fight as big as this?” Even my dreams, when I come over here I come with dreams have my family together, have work, go to my house and be in peace. Nobody bothered me. Be an honest citizen of the United States. That’s what I thought about it, you know. And I advise everybody who have a problem, come out, show what is the problem. And when you try to do something don’t think about yourself. Even if not going to benefit you today, down the road maybe that will benefit you.

A: Very well put. Thank you.

**Interview ends**