

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**LOWELL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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INTERVIEWER: MARTHA NORKUNAS
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**M = MARTHA
H = HAZEL**

Tape 83.24

M: Well, first I'm going to ask about your family and where your parents came from.

H: Ah, you mean from the...?

M: . . .where your parents were born.

H: They came from Portugal. They were born in Portugal. My mother came from- they call it Graciosa. That's a part of Portuguese land. And then my father came from St. Michael's Island. That is - I don't know how far it is from where my mother came from. But they met over here in this country, in America. My mother came over before my father did and ... I don't know how they met but they got married and they both worked in the mill, in the Boott mill, in Lowell, and they had three boys and two girls.

M: And where are you?

H: I'm the baby (laughs). And I had - my three brothers worked in the mills-three of them. In fact, the oldest one, my brother Manuel, he passed away just two years ago, he was one of the foremen there, like a boss, you know, so

M: Did your sister work there?

H: No. She was always a sec-she went from high school into a secretary job at Myers' Thread Mill.

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M: And did you?

H: No. I, when I graduated from high school I went right into stitching, right into the boot mill, you know, stitching, because uh that's what I liked, you know, even though I had taken you know typing and shorthand and stuff but I just didn't care for that kind of work. I loved stitching and that's what I always did. I worked there for, I'd say, twenty . . . twenty-four years. Then they, uh, they went out of business. I think the imports from-was it China? or Japan? Their towels were much thinner but they were cheaper, you know. The Boott mills were noted for their towels. They were very, very good, strong but-they'll outwear everything-but there, that was-I worked until the very last day it was opened.

M: How did you feel when it closed?

H: Terrible. Just, you know, you make friends and you're there so long, you know. At first I started, when I was working nights at first but I was too young so some lady had to switch times, you know, she had to work nights because she was older.

M: How-did you have to be a certain age to work in the evening?

H: Yes, yeah. You had to be over, was it seventeen? I think it was.

M: And how old were you?

H: I was seventeen. Almost seventeen, you know, so it was just a short time. But then I stayed on days, you know. I didn't go back on nights.

M: How did you get the job?

H: Went in and asked for a job, myself.

M: Did your mother speak for you?

H: No. No one did, no. my mother was a spinner. That was a different part of the mill, you know. I don't know what my father did, actually I don't remember that. But, um ... they worked there for a long time.

M: Well, let me go back a second. When your mother first came here, did she come with her family?

H: No, she came alone.

M: Do you know why she left Portugal?

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H: For a better life, I imagine, you know. Because other people were leaving so she wanted to come too. My father, when he came he worked as a cook on a ship to work, to

pay for his way over. She, I guess she wanted to come over to America. Everybody, you know, I guess that's all they talked about was getting to America to work. How, I don't know why they came to Lowell you know, but that's where it was. They landed in Lowell.

M: Well, did they know people in Lowell?

H: They probably did. That's probably why they did because my aunts were all in Lowell too, you know. So they probably all you know congregated in Lowell because one after another came over and

M: Do you know who was the first to come?

H: Uh, yes. The oldest aunt was Ann and she was the first to come. Then there was one that, her name was Virginia, My mother was Rose. My mother was the younger one of the three.

M: So did she live with them when she-?

H: (Interrupts) No, no. They went into a boarding, there's all boarding houses whenever, I don't know where they were but that's where they used to go and live in a boarding house.

M: Do you know where?

H: Charles Street, maybe. I don't know. Now before I was born, they lived on Charles Street. My mother and my father and my sister and my brothers because I was born on Lakeview Avenue.

M: What section is Charles Street?

H: Uh, right off of-it's right off of-. It's right between back Central and Gorham Street. Charles Street runs right in between there-not too far from Saint Peter's School.

M: And what kind of neighborhood is it?

H: It was all Portuguese at that time mostly. Now it isn't but it was then, yeah. Now the Portuguese church is right up the street on back Central Street, Saint Anthony's Church. And then there was a place they called the Band, the Portuguese Band something or other on Charles Street and they used to have dances there you know and get together. And the Holy Ghost days they had those processions from the church. They used to walk all around the church and all around down Gorham Street and Central Street, you know, all around. Certain days for the church, holy days you know.

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M: Which days?

H: I know it's around May. Somewhere around in the month of May. Let's see, I've been living out here for so long now I forget when they have them. And then they have a place that they go, out on Route 38 almost where the High School, the Lowell High School Memorial field is. They have a big field there, the Holy Ghost grounds they call it. And they have a big building there and they really have a good time there.

M: What would your mother say when she first came? Her sister would have been here then.

H: Yes. Yeah, and what?

M: And then she came but lived in a boarding house.

H: Yes, they all did. They all did till they got married.

M: would she have lived in the same boarding house as her sisters?

H: I imagine they would, sure. Because they were always close together, close-knit.

M: And do you know how old she was when she came?

H: My sister said she thought she was eighteen when she came over. She got married very young too. It wasn't, she wasn't very old, I think she was about nineteen when she got married. My sister was saying that. See, I didn't know that. Naturally, I was-my sister's five years older than I. She remembers very little too; she was very small too. But she remembers her taking us to the day nursery. She didn't remember where that was but I was in a carriage and she was walking with my mother. And my mother'd go to work and then go back to the day nursery, get us and go home and cook all the meals, you know, for everybody and get ready for the next day's work, the same, you know, over and over again, the same thing.

M: Would she use, speak Portuguese in the house?

H: She did, yes, but not enough for me to-by the time my brothers got grown up and my sister they were starting to talk more American than anything else. So, that's why I don't know Portuguese at all.

M: At all?

H: Very few words. Very few words.

M: What would your parents speak between themselves?

H: Mostly American, you know. At first they used to talk Portuguese but they got away from it, you know. They got away from it. But it's a shame because I wish I knew. My sister was pretty good at it. I don't know if she still she's gone to Portugal a lot. My sister worked for Pan-American Airlines so she's gone to Portugal so many times and it was good that she knew how to speak it.

M: She learned it in the house?

H: Yeah, yeah. But I was the baby and by the time I grew up everyone was talking American (laughs).

M: I would have thought your parents would have continued to speak...

H: I wish they had but they didn't. They changed right over to being Americans too, you know.

M: Well, do you know how long she worked when she first came?

H: No. My sister, I asked her that. She didn't know. She worked quite a while though in the mill.

M: So she worked, she got married and she continued to work.

H: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. Like when I was a baby she'd take me to the nursery and my sister and go back to work and go get us and bring us home, you know. That's what her life was.

M: Did she take time off to have the babies?

H: Well, I imagine so. I was born right in the house, right on Lakeview Avenue. Same place. Lived there till I was sixteen.

M: Oh, yeah-when your parents got married, where did they move to?

H: Charles Street. They lived on Charles Street. That's where my sister was born, on Charles Street. And my brothers too, I imagine. I don't know if they had moved somewhere else before that, you know.

M: And your mother worked at that time?

H: Yes.

M: And what did she do with your brothers?

H: That I don't know ... whether there was somebody to take care of them there, I don't know. In the boarding house or whether they were in their own house. I know they were in their own

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house when my sister was born. She was born there. But I don't know if they were living in a boarding house when my brothers, you know, were born. That I don't know.

M: And then when you were born, from which house?

H: On Lakeview Avenue.

M: And what was that neighborhood like?

H: Irish, Polish, you know, all kinds. No Portuguese, that I knew of. There was some up on Christian Hill, up past where Dot lives, you know. There was some up there but other than that it was Polish and Irish all around there.

M: Why did your parents move there?

H: I don't know. They owned their home. They owned the house that we lived in. And there was a cobbler downstairs and we lived upstairs? Right across from the Polish church on Lakeview Avenue.

M: Saint Casimir's?

H: Yes, yes. Right on the corner of Fulton and Lakeview Avenue.

M: And there were no Portuguese people around?

H: No.

M: Did they own their own house on Charles Street?

H: That I don't know. I doubt it, I doubt it very much. But they probably did, I don't know. But they did own that one.

M: So then your mother worked when you were a child

H: Uh-huh and before that, I imagine,

M: And she would bring you to the nursery?

H: Uh-huh, day nursery.

M: Did she bring all the kids over to the nursery?

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H: Well, it was my sister and I at that time. My brothers were probably going to school at that time. Must have been-they were all older than US.

M: And how long did that last?

H: That my sister couldn't even remember.

M: But how old were you?

H: I was just a baby, then.

M: Until you were-

H: my sister was five years old.

M: And then when you started to school was your mother still working?

H: No. No. I remember coming home for lunch and she was there. So she, she I don't know just when she stopped working. I just don't remember that.

M: Oh, but then she-

H: But I remember she was home 'cause I'd come, I'd walk from school for lunch and go back to school. Walk to the Barnum school. I used to walk 'Up to the Barnum school.

M: Did your brothers or your sister go-did Saint Anthony's have a school?

H: No, no.

M: Oh, so there was no Portuguese school?

H: No, we just went to Sunday school. I made my first Communion there and Confirmation there and I got married there, you know, and things like that. But we always went to Saint Michael's 'cause it was close.

M: But if you had any services...?

H: Anything, it had to be there. And I used to go to Sunday school at Saint Anthony's because it was to make first Holy Communion and Confirmation, you know, you'd have to go.

M: Were the services at Saint Anthony's in Portuguese?

H: He would say it in English and Portuguese. The Gospel was always English and Portuguese.

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M: Do they still do that?

H: I don't know. I haven't been there for years. I think the last time I was there was when I got married. (laughs)

M: So would your mother drive you over there on -?

H: - drive! They had no car. We walked,

M: or walk you over there?

H: walked, walked. Yes. We always walked. We walked everywhere.

M: So what would you do on a typical Sunday?

H: Well, a lot of times, uh, there was a very good friend of ours. He was like an uncle. He had like a-he was a carpenter so he had sort of a station wagon but it was one of those wooden ones that years ago they used to have them. And we'd all park into that. We'd go to the beach, Salisbury Beach, for the weekend. And we'd hire a cottage, you know. And I think the grown-ups, of course, there'd be my aunts, you know, there'd be a lot of people. And they'd play cards all night. And the kids would be across the bed this way, go to sleep, trying, you know, we'd be so tired we'd fall asleep. They'd play cards all night long, they used to have so much fun. That was their fun and that was their weekend. Another thing, they used to kill pigs. They used to keep-this same man that-they used to kill a pig and it was like a party. All the women would get together and you know, they'd make the sausages and they'd make all kinds of things that the pig, you know, they'd get it all. And it was like a party and yet it was work and yet it was a good time.

M: Did somebody have a farm?

H: No, it wasn't really a farm but well, you know what it was? It was Seneca Street up past, like across from the Edison cemetery, in that part up there off of Gorham Street. And it was kind of a little isolated there so they could have things like that and that's what they used to do. They used to kill pigs and really have a ball doing it and yet they were working and having a good time.

M: And were they roasted, or-?

H: No, at that time they would like take everything. Like some would be-what do you call it? Smoked, you know. And they used to make the sausages which is linguica, you know,

and that's a lot of work. And they would grind up all the meat and put all the spices in and the casings. And they would do that. And what else? Oh, blood, you know the blood, they call it blood pudding or something that's sausages too. Everything had something to be done, the part of the pig, you

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know. And they would smoke the rest, the hams and all that stuff. But they, you know, they didn't-that's all they did. But they used to use it all, you know.

M: And who would do it, men or women?

H: The men and women. The men would do the hard part of cutting then up and everything. Then the women would be making all the stuff to, you know, sausages and stuff. I used to help my mother even at home making those sausages. I even did it here with Bruce and I. Bruce and I -used to do it too. Used to buy the meat and stuff and the sausage. We've got one of those big grinders that you put it on the grinder and the sausages on there and the meat is going right into the thing. we used to do all that.

M: And would that happen a few times a year, or once?

H: Yeah, more like in the fall I think they used to. You know, at the end of the summer, like. It was good times and it didn't take any money. Nobody had too much money at the time. It just took-we just had good times and yet it was working and yet, we enjoyed it.

M: Would you eat a lot of sausage?

H: Yes we did. Yeah, we did. You know, that's another thing. I sometimes wonder, Martha, if like my mother-. My father died of cancer; my mother died of cancer; my three brothers died of cancer and I had cancer. I wonder sometimes. They say sometimes-is it the fat? They wonder if fat is not the culprit for cancer. You know, I think of that. My sister's the only one that didn't have cancer of all of us.

M: Is that some sort of Portuguese special dish?

H: Yes, pork, you know, in fat, you know. You put pieces of fat in that to make it tasty. And I have often wondered that because I've heard that because they think that has something to do-. Now why would a whole family die of cancer? Not all the same-my father was in the stomach, my mother the pancreas, my brother Arthur was the pancreas, my brother that died just a couple of years ago, that was the stomach and the other one was the liver and I had breast cancer, so there it is. And she's the only one that didn't-my sister's the only one that never had.

M: Do other Portuguese people in the community get it?

H: I think a lot of people have died of cancer, yes. That I - you know, when I think back and hear that they have passed away and what they died of, yes. I believe so, that that probably had something to do with it, what we ate. I don't know.

M: Would you have it at any special occasions?

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H: No. No. It was to eat, you know. Hams. Maybe all that stuff wasn't that great. You know, you wonder sometimes. But hard working they were and yet they never complained about it. You know, my mother worked awful hard. She worked all the time.

M: Did she take another job outside the mill after?

H: No, she never did, no. She died when she was sixty-two.

M: And how old were you?

H: I was married and I had my boys so I must have been in my thirties, maybe.

M: Well, would she talk about her life when she was young?

H: Not too much, no. I asked that of my sister and she says she can't remember her...They used to love to play cards. Some kind of a Portuguese game that I don't even know the name of it. But my mother was a whist card player, too. She was always going to parties, you know, whist parties, and winning prizes. She loved that, she loved movies.

M: Would she go with your dad?

H: No, she'd go in the afternoon, to the Rialto, when she wasn't working. Twenty-five cents or something, I think it was, and she'd get a plate or something. That was a big deal. They loved that.

M: And who would she go with?

H: She'd go alone sometimes.

M: Did she have friends in the neighborhood?

H: Not in the neighborhood, no, no. She had a very good friend, Rose Bettencourt, which I say that her husband is the one that had the pigs, you know. They were like sisters, they were very close, you know, even though my mother had two sisters. And they were close too. But this friend of hers was very nice. And they were always together.

M: Was she Portuguese?

H: Yes. She used to work for Harry Bass. I don't know if, you wouldn't know that. It was a clothing store on Central Street between the Strand and the Rialto, somewhere around there. She used to be a sales lady there? So, my mother would be alone most, you know, the afternoons. So she'd go to the show once in a while. And I'd say, "Go ahead. You go and I'll take care of the

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house." You know. I loved housework anyway and I'd do the housework. Lotta Saturdays I'd tell her to go 'cause I wasn't working on Saturday and I'd say go. She used to love that.

M: Did she expect you to go to work when you finished school?

H: Oh, yes.

M: Before you finished school?

H: No, no. She wanted me to finish school. And she didn't want me to get married. She thought I was getting married too young. We had a hassle over that.

M: But Bruno was Portuguese, right?

H: No. He's Lithuanian.

M: He is? (surprised)

H: Yeah, yeah, he is.

M: Oh, I didn't know that. Did that matter to your parents?

H: Yeah, I think so. I think that was what-not my father. My father was so, my God, he was so easy-going, you know. Anything I wanted, I was his baby. But my mother-. My mother didn't want me to marry a Portuguese fellow. She said they're too jealous. And God, I couldn't have married a more jealous man than Bruno. (laughs) It always works that way, huh? But we had a good life. We had a good life.

M: How old were you when you met him?

H: I was sixteen when I met him, sixteen. And we got married, I was nineteen, he was twenty.

M: How did you meet him?

H: Blind date. In fact, I think it was Mary ... Hogan. I think it was Mary Hogan. Or, if it wasn't her, it was another girl I was with. And it was a blind date. And I didn't like him at

first. But he kept coming around and coming around and finally-and he had no car. He used to walk all the way from Chelmsford to Lowell.

M: Because he lived in Chelmsford?

H: Yeah. He was born in Lawrence but he, I think he moved to Chelmsford even before he was two years old. So he lived in Chelmsford all his life.

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M: Did he do things-did his family do things differently from the way your family did?

H: No, in fact they-my mother-in-law lived in a boarding house, too. I guess that was the thing when they came from Europe, you know. That's what they used to do and she lived in a boarding house, too, until she got married. Then they lived up on the hill there where I used to live. They lived there quite a while. They both died while they were there.

M: Did his mother work?

H: Uh, I don't think so. I don't think she did unless before she got married, maybe, when she came over. See, that I don't know. But she used to work in the boarding house, you know, helping to cook and all that stuff. You tired?

M: Did you feel any sense of differences in your traditions when you started to go with him?

H: No. No.

M: Had he been raised speaking Lithuanian?

H: Yes, he could speak Lithuanian. No, we didn't think anything of it, that I was Portuguese and he was Lithuanian. Like I said, we always got along.

M: Did his family accept you?

H: Not at first. The mothers. The fathers, they were alright, but the mothers. But then, when we moved up over them, you know, up on the hill, we lived there fifteen years upstairs over them.

M: on the hill?

H: Up on the hill right, oh it's right near that little rotary there.

M: In North Chelmsford?

H: Yes, right across from the gas station there. And, ah, she was a diabetic. My husband used to give her, you know, the shots all the time. And then when he took sick, I had to do it and she leaned on me an awful lot. And, ah, I used to take her for her blood sugar tests in the morning, early in the morning, you know. I'd take a day off from work and take her and I'd take her to the doctor and I was the one she wanted to take. And she had daughters, you know. But I was the one she wanted all the time. So that's how it works out, you know. She was nice to me, very nice. It was just that beginning, I suppose. They thought we were too young, you know, to get married. But we kept on. We kept saying, "No, we're going to get married and that's all there is to it."

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M: Did you think you would stop working when you got married?

H: No, never. Bruno didn't want me to work. He didn't want me to work. He was like of the old school, more or less, you know. He didn't think that was right. And I said that's the only way we'll ever get anywhere is if we both work. And I did. I worked all the time.

M: Did it always upset him?

H: No, he got over that. He realized that it was right. And that was the only God, you had to. The pays were so small, you know. You never got much in work in pay and he used to work the farms like over weekends or something. He used to always-he was always working himself, too. So you see, he realized, you know, that it took the two of us to really. . .

M: What was his job?

H: He used to work in the mill. He worked as a fixer, they used to call it. He used to like, fix the big machines that, you know, broke down. He would do that, work at that.

M: In the boot mill.

H: No, no. In, uh, what was his name? It's Gillette's now but what the heck was that name?

M: But it was the mill in Chelmsford?

H: It was the mill in Chelmsford-. , Right here, right up there, right 'Up on Princeton Street.

M: Did his father work there?

H: Yes. Yeah, his father worked there. Moore's Mill and well, even when the war started, they didn't even ask him if he wanted to stay working, you know. They just, well I don't know what they do. They let the department, the Army and all that stuff-they let them

know he was irreplaceable, you know, that they needed him. Because he was like a fixer, you know. And he didn't even know it because, you know, we had chickens at the time and he was trying to show me how to kill a chicken, you know, because he thought he was going to have to go . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

H: (Continued) . . . whether to stay or go in the service or not. So he was, he didn't have to go.

M: So it was the mill who pushed for him to stay.

H: The mill that did, yeah. And then he, until he knew that, he was you know, he figured he was going to have to go. And then he found out he didn't have to go. But, ah,

M: What's a fixer? Is that the-?

H: Machinist, you know. I imagine the machines, they were great big machines, wool-sorting and all that stuff that they did there. And he would fix them if they broke down. That's what he, that was his job. And he was, I guess, very good at it.

M: And what did you do at the stitchery?

H: What did I do? Stitching. I made curtains, tablecloths, diapers, window shades, and I used to write on babies' bibs. You know, I used to use that machine for writing and ah, God-we did a lot of things at the boot mill. Beautiful curtains.

M: What was the room that you worked in like?

H: It was very nice. It was painted white, you know. It was clean, very clean. It wasn't like the room that my mother worked in 'cause where she worked, the spinning room I guess was very dusty and everything. 'Cause she used to have it all in her hair when she'd come home from work. No, where I worked was very clean, all sewing machines, that's all and tables, long tables that they used to have cutters, you know. The men were cutting different things like curtains or tablecloths and all that stuff so.

M: And how many people would be in a room?

H: Oh, God. We had a good maybe seventy-five or eighty women there.

M: Did the men cut and the women sewed?

H: Yeah. They had machines to cut like, like, they're like electric cutters that cut along.

M: Did the women ever cut?

H: No, not that I ever saw. And even at, when I worked at the, oh God, where the heck did I work? Where they always make the sweaters.

M: New Knit?

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H: New Knit. They ran out at the-I worked to the very last day too and they ran out. I must be a jinx or something. They had cutters there too for cutting sweaters out and bathing trunks and all that and it's the same kind of a cutter, the big electric cutters they used to use. And no women did it there, either. But the women all worked on the sewing machines, really.

M: Did you get to be friends with any of them?

H: Oh yeah, a lot of them. I made a lot of friends. I had two Greek friends, girlfriends, that were very nice, very close. I worked there over twenty years too until... We went in one day, never thinking anything of it. This was in November. They said there's going to be a big meeting this afternoon and we waited for the owner to come up and he told us, "Pick up all your valuables", your own things, "we're closing the mill." We couldn't believe it. we're crying, the girls were crying.

M: That day?

H: Yeah.

M: That was it?

H: Yeah, half an hour. And we kept thinking, well, maybe they're gonna say we're not gonna get a bonus 'cause we used to get a Christmas bonus all the time. And things were getting a little bit kind of tight.

M: Yeah.

H: And we thought that's what it was gonna be. And it was that they had, they were closing the doors. Just like that.

M: Did people cry?

H: Oh, yes. I was getting ready to retire anyway so it didn't bother me. I felt bad for the men that have families and women that some of them were single, you know, and divorced or they're widows taking care of their kids. It was very . . . like a shock, you know. We didn't expect it.

M: Did you work with the same people the whole time?

H: Most of the time. Very few left or, you know. They stayed right with them.

M: And did you change jobs while you were there?

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H: Well, I did a lot of things. I did a lot of different things, you know. I worked on sweaters and I worked on bathing suits. Whatever they wanted me to do, you know. And I liked it. I always liked stitching. It was my work. It was hard work but it was good. I liked it.

M: And what were the other people like who worked there?

H: They were nice. There was all kinds, all nationalities, all nationalities, all different. There was a lot of French people there, Irish. But we all got along good, you know. Everybody - I never heard of anybody having any trouble with anybody.

M: Would the French people speak French with each other?

H: Yes. They always did.

M: And the Greeks?

H: No, French, I think only the French did that, of course, at the end, there a lot of the Puerto Ricans were coming in. They were no-they were kind of ill-mannered. They weren't, you know. But we just didn't bother with them at all. Like say, if we'd be at the time clock, ready to time, punch our card, they would come right in front of you. They didn't care, you know, they'd get in front of you. They had to be first or things like that. But we just ignored them and let them do what they want. 'Cause we, none of us was looking for trouble. And you have to work and you have to get along with people so we just let them do it. But all in all it was a nice, a nice group. We had nice

M: Would you go out with any of the people?

H: Oh, yes. We used-not at night, never at night. But we'd go out a lot of times, a bunch of us would go out to eat for lunch, you know. Things like that.

M: But after work?

H: No, no. I used to always come home, always come right home. That's the one thing my husband always wanted. And then, of course, after he had the stroke, he couldn't drive. And he had to get at work down there at the highway department as a watchman 'cause he could walk to work. And I would be getting home and he would be-it would be just have time to have a cup of coffee together and he'd go to work, you know. And that was a big thing to him so I'd come right home.

M: But would the two of you ever go out to eat with people that you knew from work?

H: Yes, we did. One of those Greek girls and her husband. Yes we did. He's also-she's a widow, too, also.

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M: And what would you do with the kids?

H: Oh, that was, that was when we were married, we were already married. We had only the, you know, just ourselves. That was in the last years, you know. But when the kids were small, we didn't go out too much.

M: Did you work when they were small?

H: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I had babysitters, not babysitters, because they'd go to school, you know, most of the time. Like there was a time that I had to work in the boot mill and I had to work at night and I used to get off at Saint John's church and walk all the way home, you know, eleven, eleven-thirty, about eleven-thirty, well, the last bus was eleven. I used to have somebody because my husband sometimes was, would have to work at night too. So we'd have some kid stay with them.

M: But when your children were first born?

H: Oh, no. I didn't work when they were babies, you know. Not, not-yes I did. 'Cause we lived, first house we lived was Union Street and that's near Saint Peter's School.

M: In Lowell?

H: Yeah. I think it's the street up from Charles Street, going up. And I used to have a woman come and babysit the boys. There was-eleven months apart, you know, so they were very small. And I walked to the boot mill and there was one time this lady couldn't take, she was getting, I don't know. She was going to have an operation or something. She was sickly. And I had to take and walk up past the courthouse and bring the two kids. I'd have a big carriage and put the two of them in and leave my kids up there and then I would walk to the boot mill and then after work, go up and get the kids again and come back, you know, to the house.

M: And where did you bring them?

H: It was past the courthouse, Elm Street up there somewhere.

M: To someone's house.

H: Yeah. Her name was Dottie something, I forget. But I knew her as a, when I grew up in Centerville. But she had married and she was living up there and she would take care of the kids,

M: Did she take in other people's kids?

H: No, just my two, at the time.

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M: And did she have kids of her own?

H: Yes, she had kids of her own.

M: And how long did you do that?

H: It was a few years doing that.

M: And then the lady would come in and mind them?

H: Yeah.

M: Afterwards?

H: No, that was before. And then after that, that was the time that we moved out to my mother-in-law's house upstairs, she made an apartment for us up there.

M: Before that you lived by yourselves.

H: Yes, yeah. We did live by ourselves really because she lived downstairs. It was a tenement, like, upstairs.

M: On Union Street?

H: No, this was up here in Chelmsford, up here right on the hill here. But when we lived on Union Street, we lived upstairs. It was a cute little house hut it was like a two-tenement house, too.

M: Did relatives live downstairs?

H: No. no, it was, um, he was a Lithuanian and she was Italian and we got to be very good friends. About the same age as we were and they had a girl, a daughter, the same age, you know. They were nice people, too. I would say we lived there a good two years, maybe, that I had to have the boys taken care of. I used to, oh God, how you could walk! I walked up that hill, bringing the kids and walked all the way to the boot mill and

walked all the way back up the hill again. I had no washing machine. I had to wash everything by hand, sheets, everything. You wonder how you do it.

M: So did you have to come home and cook?

H: Oh, sure.

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M: Did Bruno cook?

H: No, no. He never was. . . The only time, after he had the stroke and he couldn't do too much manual labor. He got interested in cooking, you know, and he had that garden and he used to make a lot of different things. Put things up and all that stuff. That was the only-that was the last few years of his life.

M: But you would take care of the house.

H: All the time, yeah.

M: Would he ask to have certain foods or-?

H: No, no. He was very, very easy to-and when I was ready to eat was okay with him, you know. Never, never any-we always got along good.

M: Who took care of the children mostly? When you were home in the evening, who took charge of the children? You did?

H: Although I was a little easy on the kids and he was kind of strict. And then when they were in grammar school they were getting to be, you know, about the sixth grade or something like that, they wanted to work and we got them jobs and they were working on a farm after, well it was in the summertime, you know, when there was no school. And they would come home and their T-shirts would be so, oh, wringing wet from sweat and everything. They'd be haying and everything. And I would be almost crying to see how they were and he, my husband would say "Never mind. That's good for them, it's good for them." You know, 'cause he was brought up that way. You know, he had to work all the time. And it was. They really knew what a dollar was, you know. They learned, learned to buy their own clothes, go back to school and stuff like that. So today they're better for it, for doing that.

M: Did they mind that you worked?

H: Yes, they kinda-they didn't-they wanted me to be home. They didn't like it when they'd get home from school and I wouldn't be home, you know, I'd be working. I'd get home later on but-. Yeah, they didn't like that,

M: Did they tell you?

H: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. But I had to explain to them that I had to, that there was not enough money coming in.

M: Did you ever expect them to go out and get jobs and contribute to the household?

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H: No, they never did. They never did. They could keep their money. They kept their money. But they bought clothes, shoes, see. But that was my husband's doing. That was the way he was brought up, you know. See, my mother was very easy with us and she didn't, uh, we didn't have to work, my sister and I. Not until we finished school, you know. Then, of course, that's what everybody has to do. Go, go to work. But, uh, I think it was a good thing that-I had to keep my mouth shut, I couldn't say, "Oh, the poor kids, they're so dog tired", you know, haying and everything. Held say, "Alright." And now, I have a son, Jerry, and his two boys, they're working for Hart Farm in Chelmsford and they start at six o'clock in the morning and they're all sweaty and everything. And see, now, Jerry said, "Ma, that's what we had to do and it didn't hurt us." So they're making the kids do it, too.

M: He thought it was a good idea, then.

H: Oh, yeah. They knew it. We had no car then or anything. We had to walk wherever we went.

M: Were there any young kids in the Boott mill when you worked there?

H: Some were my age, some were older. There were some girls that had come in too around the same time I did.

M: Did you give your money to your mother when (unintelligible)?

H: Every bit. Every bit.

M: But you didn't expect your kids to?

H: I got fifty cents.

M: Spending money?

H: Mary Hogan and I used to go, we used to walk around. That was our fun. Get a pickle from Renla's Market, a big dill pickle and that was what we'd eat and we'd take walks, her and I. We were always together, Mary and I.

M: How did you know her?

H: I got to know her in school, I guess, and we were inseparable. She'd stay at my house, I'd stay at her house, you know. That's the way it was. we were always together.

M: And that would have been Saint Michael's School?

H: Yeah. She went to Saint Michael's. I went to the Varnum and Greenelge. Well, first you go, I went to the Lakeview Avenue school, which is not even there anymore. And that was first,

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second, third. Then I went to the Greenelge and that was fourth, fifth, and sixth. And the Varnum was seventh, eighth and ninth. And then over to high school. That's how they did it in those days,' But I got to know her-no. Well, she lived near me in the first place, you know, but she went to Saint Michael's. we were always very close, always together, very good friends.

M: Did she work?

H: (Pause) I can't remember her working. I remember on Saturday nights we used to go over to Immaculate Conception Church and we'd go to Confession and then we'd have a soda. That was like a ritual; every Saturday night we used to do that, or like, say, four o'clock in the afternoon.

M: Why the Immaculate Conception Church?

H: I don't know. That was downtown, you know, up on East Merrimack Street. I don't know (laughs) that was something we always did. But I don't remember Mary working. I don't know if she did or not. You know, when you get to be sixty-seven, Martha, you're not going to remember too much. It's terrible, oh it's awful, the thing you forget. Some things, you know, you can remember. But not too many things. But, ah. . .

M: Did you ever want to just quit and stay home with the boys?

H: No, I wanted to work because we needed it. We wanted a car someday. We bought a Pontiac from our milkman. You know, an old car that was the first car we had. My husband used to borrow the car from the priest from Saint John's to teach me how to drive. We didn't even have a car! He was teaching me how to drive. I got my license, didn't even have a car. And ah, finally, I got, we got that one and then we started taking the boys out to the beach and all this and that, you know, like kids like to do. All in all, it wasn't too bad. I mean, I know some people had it a lot easier but. . .

M: Do you think Lowell has changed -much?

H: Yes, I think it has, yeah. You know, years ago you could walk anywhere and not be afraid. Like I said, I used to get off the bus at Saint John's, sometimes at the, right down where the mills are down there, you know, city line, and walk all the way

M: It's a good mile and a half.

H: Nobody would bother you, nobody, nobody. A girl alone walking, you know, no way. I never was scared, never. And that would be around eleven-thirty, between eleven and eleven-thirty. Never any trouble. You can't do that today. You can't even walk in the city streets in Lowell.

M: Do you think the city would have been different if the mills hadn't closed?

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H: I don't know. It's the people that's changing us really, you know. I don't know. It's hard to tell., I think the times is, you know, the reason for all these changes.

M: Was there any status associated with working or being a working mother?

H: No. No. I think every one of us was working, you know, that had kids. I think every one of us did. It was just the thing that everybody did, you know. Money was hard to get and that's, you had to. Just to survive, to live.

M: So women at that time,, most of the women you knew worked?

H: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

M: And where, where did they work?

H: Well, most of them worked in mills, There was a lot of mills in Lowell. There was the Merrimack, the Hub Hosiery,

M: They worked in all the different mills?

H: Yeah, there was a lot of mills then, you know. They were all over Lowell. And there was the Worsted, the Abbott Worsted. Now that was more like Middlesex Street somewhere. I don't remember. I think it was down there. And now that was wool and cotton. Now, out to Dracut, there was that, oh God, that place, they used to make beautiful cloth. The Navy Yard Mills, I think they called it. There was mills all over. It was-look at that whole row of mills where the boot mills was and everything and the Merrimack. It was all mills. That was the biggest thing, you know. of course, that's what it is today. They say-I'm going to have to go down to the Suffolk. Have you gone down there to the Suffolk and gone through to see those pictures and everything of the women working? My sister, the one that came from Florida, she and her husband, they went through it. And they said it was marvelous. They enjoyed it so much. And, uh, then I

guess on Market Street they have a lot of pictures there to see and everything. And then, I was telling her about you, about Kay. She knows Dot Dempsey but she was saying, I was saying it was her niece and I was saying how you were taking, had the grant and everything. And she said that there is, if you went to the library in Lowell. Did you ever go in there? And there's a room like, in back, and you can look up anybody's name and what they, how old they were when they came and when they got married and all that stuff. She said it's all there. She said they went to see my mother's name and all that stuff there, you know. She says she thought maybe you'd find out a lot more. But you like, you like to find out more personal things, is that it? What you're trying to do?

M: Yeah.

H: Yeah.

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M: Just what you thought about working and how that affected your life.

H: Yes, yeah. It did. It was the thing to do. Everybody else was doing it. Everybody else was working. My husband didn't want me to. He didn't, you know, he wanted me to stay home but he saw it was the right thing to do, you know, if we wanted to get anywhere, which we were trying to save. We had nothing when we got married, nothing at all.

M: When you were working, did you think of it as a, your own career? Did you take a sense of pride in your work?

H: Yes, I did. I did. Because I was a good stitcher. And I was well-liked by my bosses. In fact, I was making more of the samples at the New Knit than anybody else. I was the sample girl then, you know. So that was it. They would show me what they wanted me to make and I would make it up. So, I was proud of that because I knew I was doing good work. And they knew that, you know, that I enjoyed doing it, too. So, yes, I always, I always made my own clothes and I always saved money there that would come to half the price of what you would go to a store for. I liked it, I liked stitching.

M: Do you think your mother felt the same way you do?

H: Yes, I think she did. She worked because she wanted to help out. Her job was a lot harder and dirtier, you know. I never worked in the mill there, you know. The Boott mill that, the room that I worked in was beautiful. It was all white walls and clean, it was all sewing rooms, sewing machines that, you didn't get dirty. But my poor mother used to come home with her, dust would be all in her hair from the threads, I guess, or something, I don't know just what it was. But she used to be tired, too, I remember that, her being tired.

M: And your father didn't mind that she worked?

H: No. My father was very easy-going and if she said she wanted to do something, he would never say, you know, no. And I imagine he figured it would help, too, another pay coming in. But they all did. All those people worked. I don't think that anybody stayed home at that time, you know. That's why they had that day nursery where they could bring the kids. And they used to have those boarding houses. They probably, maybe my brothers went there after coming home from school. I don't remember that. I wasn't, I wasn't born then. I don't know what happened at that time when they were the age when they were going to school and I know my mother was working. So they must have had some way of somebody taking care of them or whether they stayed alone, I don't know. But, you know, at that time, we didn't get sick. Kids didn't get sick. Today, I mean, you see them getting sick now and it's, it's, it's such a worry. I've seen my grandchildren, you know, have different things and being so sick. I don't remember ever being sick. I had my tonsils out, I remember that, but that was nothing, I remember that, but we were healthy, see, really healthy. And we didn't have . . . desserts and stuff like that. It was just food,

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you know, just plain food. Food that would fill you and your stomach. Just hard-working people. That's all they were. And yet, they didn't even think that, I don't think. They just did it because everybody else did it. That was the way of life.

M: Were there different social classes in Lowell?

H: Not that I know of. There must have been though. There must have been because there were people who had money in Lowell. Now that Mr. Brigham there, his mother was a business woman, a very nice lady, I hear. Now they always lived up on the Highlands, you know, and years ago he had a swimming pool. Now, you didn't hear of anyone having a swimming pool, you know. So there's your different, right there. He didn't know poverty at all. His father-I think she, she was a businesswoman. I don't-I think she worked for a while I think but I didn't ask him too too much about it. But I heard from other people that she was a very, very nice woman. Now there it is, there it was, a different, see, he knows of a different life altogether.

M: But his mother still worked?

H: She did. I think she did like in an office. She was a businesswoman, yeah. And his father was, had a very good job too so . . . of course, he went to college and he run Prince's store. He had, he owned, owned the store and that's his way of living.

End of Interview