

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

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL PAGE

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F=FALANTE

P=PAUL

Tape 85.29

P: ...Falante, and we're at the Park Service, and we'll be talking about your work in the mills. And so to begin ah, when did you come to this country?

F: In 1920, I come on a ship. It took seven days to get here to Boston from Madeira Island to Boston, seven days.

P: Is um, Madeira Island?

F: Madeira Island to Boston.

P: As in Portugal?

F: That's right.

P: Why did you leave Portugal?

F: Because my father died, and ah my mother had seven kids, and there was no way to take care of them. So I had a sister over here in Lowell, and when I get to be a sixteen years old, she told me I could come over and get a job here and send little by little what I was making. That's what I did to my mother to take care of my sisters. So I was lucky enough when I got here. I got a job in the Tremont mills. When I started I was in the, was the machines they use to call them mill loom. Then ah, from the mill loom I was lucky enough they transferred me for the spinning room. See, different machines but was making the same kind of work almost. Use to make filling for the weave room. So when you get around nineteen twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, the mills started shut down, everything, I had no job. So I happened to be lucky enough to go to New Market, New Hampshire, and I got a job there.

P: But why did you go there instead of somewhere else?

F: Well, because I use to know a fellow that ah, used to work there in the card room. And he told me, he said, there is a job in the spin room. Like you spin, you can come they'll give you a job. So I got a job there alright. I worked nights. Then the spinning room shut down even in New Market, New Hampshire. Shut down because they use to make filling to ship them out. So the other mills were shutting down they didn't need no more filling. So the employment officers told me, he says, "Don't go anywhere." He says, "We need you." He says, "You go in the weave room and learn how to weave, and there is plenty of work there." So I went in the weave room. When I got in the weave room I meet a fellow of mine nationality, this Portuguese fellow. He was a supervisor there. He says, "Learn how to weave, then after stay long enough we give you a chance to learn how to loom fixing. So I was lucky enough I, after weave for awhile, he told me to go and learn how to fix looms. So I was lucky enough. I used my head a little bit and I studied, and I become a loom fixer. And I worked for a few years then. And when they had a strike in New Market, New Hampshire, they moved to Lowell, and I came back to Lowell again. [Laughs]

P: Did you find that there were many Portuguese people who were loom fixers?

F: Quite a few of them, yah. Those days if you was a loom fixer you was like we say, a big shot in the mill. He was a big guy, because they used to make little more money. And everybody used to respect them, because when he was a loom fixer you take the weavers, they had to like the loom fixer. So the loom fixer come and fix their looms, because those days they had to work piece work. And by working piece work, if you didn't get your machines fixed, hey, you don't make no money.

P: Um. Did you find that some of the mills were ah, would discriminate against people?

F: No, no, they were very nice to me. They were all very good.

P: Who would be the second hand man, or the boss?

F: Well I had, I forget his name now, in Tremont over here in Lowell. I, all, in New Market, New Hampshire my boss was Mr. Barker. He was very nice to me. Then when I moved to Lowell I had, Mr. (Avy) was a big boss here. And I got along to him too. But when the New Market Mills close down....

P: You mean the one in New Hampshire?

F: No, over here in Lowell too, (P: Oh, that's right, yah) when they closed down I had to go to Wannalancit Mills. So I work a few years there. Then ah, I was not too satisfied in the Wannalancit, because I had a like a second hand job. I used to help the overseer there, Mr. Cote. I used to help him to take care of bad loom, one thing or another, and tell the fixers what to do. Supervise it a little bit. But ah, had a little trouble because ah Mr. Larter ask me to go and run a section there because it was low. They wanted protection out of this section. When I got in sections to straight them up those looms, he cut my pay. I was getting paid like second hand, he

cut me to loom fixer. I didn't like that. So I worked a few weeks. I didn't see nothing done. So they keep in the low pay. So I finally, I told him I was going to quit. And I went to a United Plastic. And Mr. Brophy in United Plastic new me and I new him since New Market too. We was kids when we was up in New Market. So he was glad to get me because they was going to get new looms. He wanted to start up new looms and was a draper looms. Some fellows there, they didn't no too much about draper. So he was glad to get me to get those looms out. And I stayed in the United Plastic until at the end.

P: What is a draper loom?

F: A draper loom, there's different looms see, and they call draper looms, they run everything automatic. They get batteries. Now they get [unlear] fill entrapped in the looms. You've got to change the shuttle by hand, see. While the draper looms, it's a better loom to make production see, because everything is automatic.

P: How did you learn about, how did you learn about the draper loom?

F: Well I learned when I was in New Market, New Hampshire. The draper looms didn't have no batteries. And the boss there, he told me, he said, if I want to work on the, mans come from the draper people, they was going to install those battery hands in those, batteries in those looms. I said, "Sure." So I was glad in the same way and the fellows from the draper company they showed me everything. They gave me gauges, everything out of sight. Everything, that is why I learned so fast, and I become, you know, a fair loom fixer.

P: When you first came to the country you were sixteen?

F: Sixteen.

P: So you were old enough to work then?

F: That's right.

P: Without permit from your parents?

F: Yah, I had a permit, I had a permit from the City Hall and everything.

P: And ah, how did you get your first job? You just went into?

F: Well my sister here new this fellow. He use to work in the mill room. He told me he was a boss there. He says, well if your brother come from your country I got a job for yah. That's what happen. I went to Tremont Mill when I started.

P: Do you remember how much you were being paid?

F: Oh I think, I don't remember. [Laughing] Four or five dollars a week. It was good money. Four or five dollars a week was good money .

P: Did you like... Was it good? Well how did you like working in the mills when you came here?

F: Oh hey. I didn't care what kind of work, as long as I had to work to make a little money. In those days everybody the same. If they had a job they would be happy. They didn't care how hard the work. Today is different. You don't like your job, you look for another one. But those days hey, you got a job, you're a happy man. And no ask questions either. Never ask how much your going get, or don't. You get a job, hey, you're happy.

P: Where did your sister work?

F: She use to work in the weaver room, yah. She use to work in Tremont. Was another part of the Tremont Mills. They use to call it Lawrence Section. It was part of the Tremont and Suffolk mills. It was a little over the canal there. So she used to work there.

P: And did she work at the same place all her life?

F: She did. Then when everything shut down, she went to the old country, because those days she had a few dollars. She got married, she had a few dollars. She didn't want to spend it. So she figured those dollars she had. She goes in the old country, buy a little farm or something. They did, bought a farm, nice place, little home and they live happy after.

P: So they never came back?

F: Never come back. They was happy, because was bad for years. Quite a few years was pretty bad.

P: Over there?

F: No, over here! Over here! Oh yes! 1928, 29, 30 ah, very bad. No jobs, no work, no wheres. You couldn't get nothing. No social security. No help from the city, or anything. Hey, you just suffer, that's all. I remember people use to get four or five kids. I remember my wife use to buy, we was pretty good, so we use to buy bread and different things for a neighbor of mine, that Mr. [Melean?], and we used to help him a little bit. But ah, it was tough. I remember those days 28, 29, the banks closed. People had money there. Hey, they couldn't get a cent out of it until President Roosevelt come. And he closed the banks after, well, they straightened everything up. Then they started this NRA, and started WPA. All these, put a different kind of job, so they help the people a little bit.

P: But you never...you always had a job through the depression?

F: Thank God I always had a job. I use to go from one place to another, but I had a job. Yah, thank God for that. Yah.

P: That must have been ... you didn't have any transportation anywhere?

F: I bought a little car, yah. I bought a little Chevrolet. Yah, I bought a little car when I was in New Market, New Hampshire, because when I... when they was in New Market, New Hampshire it was pretty hard to get anyplace. So sometimes I want to go to Dover, buy something, well I had may little car.

P: So when did ah, did you ever have a chance to go to school?

F: I did. As soon I come to this country, the following week I was in Green School on Merrimack Street. I used to go, I think it was two or three nights a week. It was nights that time, because I was working see. I had to go nights, but I wanted to learn english pretty fast.

P: Is that all they taught there english? Was that the only subject?

F: Yes, yes. I wanted to learn english that's why I use to go to Rialto. You don't remember, use to be a little show there. The Royal across, the street Rialto on the other side. You use to pay ten cents. In those days there was not talking movies, they use to show the pictures and use to write down on the board. And I use to read all the time what I studied. I wanted to learn fast, see.

P: Did you find many other Portuguese people in the city when you came?

F: Oh yes, yes. Up Tildon Street, all Portuguese there. Yah. And they couldn't talk english, and they been there for quite a few years. And after I was there for a little while they say, "Oh come. You talking alright english." I says, "I go to school." Those days they use to have a night school for anybody come across, you know? Like Greeks, or Portuguese, or other nationalities, they used to go to school nights. Anybody wants, they didn't force anybody, but ah, was good cause we could learn faster.

P: You probably... it probably be better when you got a job to be able to speak english?

F: Oh yes, yes!

P: So where did, where did you live when you first come here?

F: Huh?

P: Where did you settle in Lowell, in?

F: In Tildon Street, Lowell. [Loud car in background] That Tildon Street is gone.

P: Is it? Because I didn't know where that was.

F: Yah, yah, it's gone. They got post station there. They got... and Bradford Street too. They got the new Post Office.

P: Over here?

F: That's right. Used to be Tildon Street, Bradford Street, that where the boarding houses used to be. They all gone.

P: So you weren't far from Little Canada?

F: Hey, five minutes you was in Little Canada.

P: There wasn't any problem between the French and the ...?

F: No, no, no. As far as I know. I used to be alright on them. Probably somebody else did. I remember somebody used to talk about different nationalities. Sometimes they use to have little fights in the street, but I don't really, never got into that. I used to mind my own business, and go to work, and go to school, starting to read. My ambition was to learn english as fast.

P: So you planned on staying in the country?

F: Huh?

P: You planned to stay here even though your sister left?

F: That's right, that's right. But when I left the old country, my grandmother was a hundred years old, alright. She told me, she says, you're going over there, because those days people use to come there four, five, six, ten years. They make a little money, used to go back. So she told me, she says, "You're going to America. After you make a little money and send to your mother, take care of her, you're going to come back and see your grandmother here." Well, I was here five years, she died. She died one hundred and five years old. Never went to see her, and I never went back until ah, about ten years ago. Ten years ago I went and seen my place. I brought my wife and the boy who was born here. My wife was born here. So ah, I brought them over. They liked it, they like it. It's a pretty island there, Madeira Island, that's a beautiful island.

P: Oh, so you weren't on the mainland?

F: I was on mainland.

P: Well you weren't... but your family lived on the island.

F: In the island, that's right.

P: Was it farming that... ?

F: Oh, climate was beautiful. Hey, you can't find better weather. No snow. I never see snow. And I get in Boston in January the... I think it was January the 20th, if I don't mistake. When I get near maybe a day, or half a day before getting in Boston, I can't remember exactly, but I

know it was before I get into Boston, I see snow. I was telling the other people, "Where this come from?" Then when we got in Boston the back of the ship was all snow. I never see that before.

P: And you probably never saw ice before?

F: Well, I use to see little bit of ice, not much, but in the mountains, in the islands way up in the hills. Sometimes in the winter when it was about say, 60 degrees, 55, 60 degrees, sometimes in the mountains you see a little, little ice like, but no snow, no snow.

P: What would... what would you do on that island?

F: I tell you I was going to school. My father wanted me to go to school. And I was in the city on Madeira Island to learn to be engineer, because I was all done high school in the country. When my father died we couldn't afford it, because over there, that time we had to pay pencils, papers, and boarding, and one thing another. They couldn't afford it. So when I came to the village and I was be sixteen, I says, "Hey, I got to do something." So I come over here. But while I was there I was in school. I use to love to go to school. Too bad that I never had a chance like these fellows over here. I had a chance to go to college to learn something good. I remember when I use to study in school when I was a kid. Sometimes I use to go to sleep and I use to study while I was sleeping, believe it or not. When I would wake up, hey, I use to know my lessons. I don't know how it happen, but I use to love to study.

P: So where did you meet your wife?

F: In Lowell. When I come from New Market, New Hampshire, I started to come back to Lowell, I meet her then.

P: What year was that?

F: In 1932, around 1932. We got married in 33.

P: So where did you meet? [Repeats] Where did you meet?

F: I tell you it's a big story. [Laughs] After work sometimes I used to go up Moody Street, because I use to have a room when I come back to Lowell. I had a room, because I had no family here. I had a room. And after work I use to go up Moody Street, because there was a lot of Portuguese there. And they had a grocery store there, Perry Grocery Store. And she use to work in the Hub Hosiery. And all the girls come from there, they use to live downtown off Charles Street or Gorham Street. They use to some through Moody Street to go down. So I use to watch her, says, "Oh, that's my girl." [Laughs] Things happen.

P: So that's... so that's how you ah... ?

F: Meet her [unclear].

P: Did you ever go to some of the parks around here, amusement parks?

F: Oh no.

P: Not Lakeview?

F: I used to go up Lakeview, up Merrimack Park sometimes, Saturday nights, yah. I use to go. There use to be a park towards ah, Lawrence Boulevard, they called road to Lawrence. There used to be a park there. It was quite a park there. A beautiful park there. Those days we use to ... I remember seeing [unclear] there. They use to bring bands in, big people over there, yah. And I used to go up the lake sometimes, Lakeview. Was only two parks then. Was another park, but I never used to go very often there. Up ah, where is that park near [name unclear]? Canobie Lake, yah, Canobie Lake, not very often, but I used to go Merrimack Park. Everybody, Saturday afternoon, Saturday night, they all go over.

P: You never went to Revere Beach, [repeats] Revere, Beach?

F: Not... I think I went once or twice. I... it's too far, couldn't get...to get there.

P: Someone used to say they had a...they had a bus, a truck, or something, and they all pay the man who owned the truck a little bit of money, and then they go to Revere Beach.

F: Yah, well they use to do that. Yah, they used to hire truck, and put everybody in the truck, used to go the beach. And another thing, I used to have a good time, play soccer. When I was in New Market, New Hampshire all those English people there, they use to love soccer. We had a big field, and we use to play soccer almost every night after work. Then when I come to Lowell, second time, I use to play. They use to have a Portuguese Club soccer team, and I play on them. I still got some pictures of that. That was a long time ago.

P: So you mentioned a store in your neighborhood. Is that where you usually shop? There's a store, where would you usually shop for food, or for clothes?

F: The Portuguese stores, yah, but I never use to shop until I got married. Before I used to go, when I use to live in a room over here on Hanover Street, I used to buy these... those days they use to have milk tickets. I used to buy...used to be three dollars I think, milk ticket. I used to buy, and I use to eat most of the time up Laconia, Laconia Restaurant, yah.

P: This was a meal ticket?

F: That's right.

P: Who, who...Was it the city that ... ?

F: No. I use to buy from the restaurant.

P: Oh yah.

F: The restaurant used to sell it, because see, three dollars, or three and a half, was like if you had to pay cash, probably was going to cost you about four dollars and a half. So you save a dollar, but the restaurant used to like that because sure that we eat there all week?

P: Oh, three fifty a week?

F: Yah. Sometimes I used to buy two tickets. Sometimes I used to use, they used to punch. They use to put the price in there, what we eat and they'd punch the tickets. Sometimes I used to use... some... like Sundays I want to have a little extra lunch, or something. I ... but I used to use one, one ticket, I use it.

P: So when your sister left, where... were you living in the same apartment? Did you live in the same apartment as your sister?

F: No.

P: Never?

F: No, no. I went in the boarding house because she didn't have no room. She had a boy and ah, those days they use to have just one or two rooms, see? One room on the kitchen. [Laughs] Those days they used to squeeze everything so they didn't have to pay too much, because if they had a big apartment, it cost more money.

P: So how was it like, what was it like to live in the boarding room?

F: Well I didn't like it. It was pretty tough. I'm telling you. I don't know if anybody ever tell you, but it was pretty tough. You take, especially me, when I use to get from work, I used to get to the table sometimes there was not much left, because everybody come first. First service. And the rooms, we didn't have one room a person. Sometimes two, three beds in one room, and two, three in bed. It was pretty tough, but at the end when I move to another boarding house, was not so bad. They had two beds in one room, and ah, the mills was a little better. Didn't cost me so much. I think I used to save half a dollar, or a dollar. Those days you save half a dollar, a dollar, it was something. And when I used to get from work a lady used to wait for me. I had my plate and give it to me. It was nice, very nice at the end. But the first boarding house I went was pretty tough. That was on Bradford Street. They used to call it Bradford Street.

P: Who use to run the boarding houses?

F: Well ah, some ladies use to run, or sometimes the man used to work, but he used to come home and help the wife, you know. But the most was the ladies. The ladies didn't go to work, so they use to take care of the boarding house, and take care of some babies. Some people those days, they had a baby, they had two, three weeks, hey, the boarding house. They had to go to work. It was pretty tough, pretty tough. No bathroom, nothing. I wanted to take a bath, I had to go in the barber shop. They had showers there. I had to go over there and pay a quarter to take a bath. They use to give towels and things. It was good. It was pretty tough.

P: Was it just a cold shower I supp...?

F: No, no (P: No, warm) it was pretty good. They put it as warm as you want. They had some kind of little tank, and one side brass. They don't make them no more like that, and they heat it up. You got those showers there, those stalls was pretty good. They had about three or four stalls in the barber shop, yah.

P: In the, were they kept clean?

F: Oh yes! (P: Yah) Very good, very good. And they give you new towels all the time. Yah, nobody used nobody else's towels. You're all done, put it in the basket. Somebody else come in he would get a new towel. It was not only me. A lot of the people had no baths, nothing! In these boarding houses, no steam heat, nothing.

P: Did the mills, did your boss at work always expect you to come in to work clean?

F: Oh yes, yes, yes, very good. See we use to go in, no matter if it was in the spin room and the weave room, we'd bring nice clothes in, takes the clothes off, put overalls. Like when you're a loom fixer you got to use ... I don't know if you've ever see, these girls something you'd see in the street, overalls, but was way up there. They had pockets where you put wrenches, screwdrivers and everything. And we would change our clothes. So when it was all done work, they had a little sink. I don't remember if they had any hot water, but even, I know it was running water, we washed good. They had some kind of soap, we wash and we dress up, we come out of work. Yah, we used to change our clothes. The only one thing they didn't change much was the ladies. Sometimes when they used to go to work, they use to put some kind of apron, or some kind of a dress over. Sometime they didn't want to, they didn't want to change sometimes. But the men, it was almost all of them that we used to change. Especially in the weaver room we use to get our hands full of grease. We had to wash our hands.

P: How would you get the grease off? Regular soap wouldn't take it off.

F: They had ah, I forget. They had a can in some kind of powder. It was good. It used to take the grease right up. I don't know what kind of powder they called, but well they use it now. These garages they use that kind of powder, clean your hands good.

P: So what time in the morning would you go to work?

F: Oh, six o'clock, sometimes to five, six. In New Hampshire its six to six. Over here in Massachusetts it was six to five. But over there in New Hampshire we use to have the extra hour. We used to make sixty hours a week. Over here fifty before Roosevelt come in. When Roosevelt came they put a forty eight, and first thing you know...

Tape I, side A ends

Tape I, side B begins

P: Oh yah.

F: [Unclear]. I get one home, it's a small one, and a big one. They use to go in the stairs to go up (making a noise like an alarm clock). Everybody got to get up. No alarm clocks, you're right.

P: Like a cow bell?

F: Yah, yah, but bigger, little bigger. Yah, nice [unclear]. Oh it used to wake us up, right up.

P: In the boarding house what kind of food would they give you?

F: Well they give you pretty good food if you get a chance to eat. They use to give you steaks, and pork chops, and sometimes a little Portuguese soup. They use to call it [pouish?].

P: What is that?

F: Is some green stuff, I don't know what you call it. They use to ...

{Someone in background is describing the soup – speaks too softly}

P: Oh, it's just cabbage leaf soup?

F: Cabbage leaf, yah, cabbage leaf, especially in my boarding house. The Portuguese used to love that, because they eat a lot of that in the old country, and they used to love that. They put potatoes and piece of meat in there and everything and beans and all that sort of thing.

P: So that means you must have had a lot of Portuguese living with you in the boarding house?

F: That right, that's right, (P: Now) at first!

P: At first?

F: Yah, but the second time I come to Lowell, and I didn't live in the boarding house. I used to live in a room, then I used to eat in the Laconia lunch.

P: Yah, so was that unusual to have all Portuguese in one boarding house?

F: No, no because they understand one another.

P: Yah.

F: Those days, especially in 1923, 24, 25, before they closed these mills, they used to stick together. I tell the Portuguese used to live on Tildon Street, Bradford Street, Moody Street some.

The Greeks, Market Street, Broadway, all that. French, little Canada, they had, seemed to me that ah, where these French come from Canada, ah they come from, they used to get together.

P: Yah.

F: See you take little Canada. They named little Canada, because all the French people used to live there. The Portuguese used to live, they used to call them the Tremont, because it was Tildon, Tremont Street, and Bradford, and some up Charles Street downtown, way down. A lot them they used to back Central Street. A lot of Portuguese there, but those days seemed to me each nationality, they used to be together like, yah.

P: So does that mean you would ah, would you ever have, would you have parties together?

F: Oh yes, yes. The old people they had these, violins, ukulele and singing, and oh they have their own parties. Yah, oh yah. You take Christmas, New Years, oh they go from one house to another. Especially those Portuguese. They used to love to sing, play guitar and banjo and ukulele. Oh and they had those old songs from the old country. Hey, it was a good time. Now and then they used to, some groups they used make a little show. They use to put up in the theatre. They used to have a like, what the hell you call it? Opera House, down back Central Street. They tore it down a long time ago. But before they had an Opera House there. It was nice, nice little hall there. They used to have shows, they had Portuguese shows there. Some Sunday afternoon, or Saturday night, they had their own entertainment stuff.

P: Did you buy...did they buy the guitars here, or did they bring them?

F: Some they use to bring, and some they use to buy here. They use to sell here.

P: Yah. I wonder if there are any left from Portugal, the guitars or?

F: Oh they use to bring a lot. A lot of them, everything they used to come across they used to bring a guitar around their shoulders. Oh yah, they couldn't let that there. They used to love to play, oh yah. Used to play [unclear], you know, some of the musicians like in the old country. Hey, it was quite a thing you know. They didn't own no television like they get now to watch. No radios either that time. No radios.

P: Victrolas?

F: This radio come I think was nineteen, I don't know. Twenty-nine, thirty maybe, I don't know exactly what year, but somebody bought one. Our neighbors use to come in the house to listen to the radio. When the television come, it was the same way. First ones come everybody want to see, hey, hey! Something special, you know.

P: So when... When... What happened to the Portuguese people who lived on Tilden Street? Did they just, after they got more money did they move out?

F: When the mills closed down, they all gone. Well some they stay around, but the most they went to the old country. Yah, because they didn't want to spend the few dollars they had. They figured they had enough to go back. They went back, some they come back again, and some they don't. They get along over there.

P: But you decided not to go back?

F: That's right. I love this country. I thought this country had more [unclear], schools. Different things, one thing another. I figure some day I get married, well my children can get something better. No, I didn't want to... I went there ten years ago. I don't want to go back. I love this country.

P: Did your wife work at all?

F: Yah, she did work for awhile. Now she is retired like me.

P: So were you working when you had children?

F: Not for awhile, I guess.

P: That was unusual wasn't it?

F: Everybody use to work those days. Even in 1933, 34, 35. But I was lucky she went to work, helped me out a little bit. And when I got my children, well I wanted to send them to school. The first girl I had, she wanted to be a nurse. She is a nurse today. My boy wanted to be a doctor, but he got hurt, lost his eye. He couldn't be a doctor. He is an accountant in Boston, but he went through Bentley College. So he is all set. I figure my father always use to tell me, I don't leave you anything, but I want you to be well educated. And he tried, but after he died he couldn't do no more. So I had no choice, I had to come back here. So I figured the same thing with my family. If I can give them school, I give school.

P: Now you were saying you worked in New Market, New Hampshire for how many years?

F: I tell you between New Market, New Hampshire and Lowell maybe I say thirty five, forty, thirty five, forty years and I worked in Wannalancit another five years. I worked little places that was just temporarily, like until I could get something better. Then I worked in United Plastic twelve years. It was last place I worked. I enjoy work there too. Yah, very good.

P: Where was the best place to work?

F: United Plastic. I enjoy work there. No bosses, nobody bothered me. I do my work. They... anything happen... boss you take care of John, you know him better than I. They knew that. So I didn't have to worry about anybody tell me to do this or that. And I used to like to do my work anyway. So they knew that, and I do the work well. Fixed right so the weavers could get a good running loads.

P: Did you ever have problems with any of the weavers in any of the...?

F: No, no. They all use to love me, and I use to love them. Oh yah, no trouble. When the weavers see me go and fix the looms, "Hey Johnny!" "Hey!" Only thing sometimes we couldn't talk to good, because the noise. We use to make signs. Sometimes the girls tell me to fix the looms, or something, they used to bang their hands or... But ah, they use to love me. I tell the truth. Sometimes some fixers used to work in the other section like, and the weaver says "Oh, the hell with them." So I use to, I never no trouble, no trouble at all. And anything I ask the weavers, hey, you do this, do that, so I can fix this and that. Hey, they was right there to, yah, very good.

P: And ah, your boss wouldn't... any bosses wouldn't cause problems?

F: Hey, they use to love me as much as I use to love them. No trouble with bosses, nothing. Especially last twenty years or more. They knew when I got in Wannalancit, the boss there, Mr. Cote, he knew what I was doing and he knew what I couldn't do. Hey, very good. Then I come to United Plastic, Mr. Brophy, hey, it's your job. Very good to me.

P: And what would you do on ah, on the weekends after work was finished?

F: When I get married I was busy. I build my little place, and I used to come out of work, work in my little place all the time. Build it up.

P: You mean your house?

F: That's right. Yah. I did almost all of my house. (P: Alone?) Well I had a few carpenters to build it up, the frame, put the windows in everything. But the other jobs around and outside [unclear]. I used to be handy for it. I used to watch the other people do it, anything like that, and I figured if they can do it why can't I do it. Use to take a little more time, but I use to have my level, my desk, and square. Hey, if one fellow do it, why the other fellow can't do it? Just watch it, that's all.

P: Um, did you, did you ever, did you go to church on Sundays at all?

F: Yes, every Sunday. use to love it. That's my... I like to go to church. I believe in God.

P: But, but the ah... did you, did the Portuguese have their own church?

F: That's right, we got Saint Anthony Church. Beautiful little church back Central Street. Beautiful church. It's way down, but we got the best floor any church you can find. All marble in the floor, beautiful.

P: Oh I've never been there.

F: Yah, they got new seats now. Oh, there's no church in Lowell, or any other place that got a floor like that. It's a beautiful floor. It's for life too! Oh it's a beautiful floor.

P: Who built, who built it?

F: Ah, Jesus, I don't know!

P: No.

F: I don't remember, because when I... I remember when they remodeled last time, but the first time I think it was some Irish people that used to have that church. I'm not sure, but the Portuguese they bought, I think, that church. If you happen to go up back Central Street, way up almost near the Gallagher Square, before you get there, see a little church on the side, beautiful. Nice beautiful house too. Yah it's nice.

P: Did, did um, did the church ever have an ah, activities?

F: Oh yes, yes. They got, they call it Holy Ghost Camp. Every now and then they have a little parties there. I got a boy, he is running bingo over there every Tuesday. He is the head one there.

P: But in, during the mill days, did they, did they have anything?

F: In the mill days they had it in the same place, but was just a little shed. But now they got a beautiful home up the camp. It's up Village Street, up Rogers Street. And ah, they got a nice beautiful hall. Oh that's nice place. A lot of parking and everything. But they used to years ago, the old timers, they used to run Holy Ghost Fiestas. Like in different things, but they didn't have a house like that. They had just a little shed like. But they started the old people, the ones started that place, but these young people come up and built that up.

P: And did the mills have any, anything, any social activities?

F: Oh yes. They use to have soccer teams. The mills used to play against one another, yah. They use to have picnics, we use to call picnics. They use to take trucks and trucks full of people, bring some fields somewhere, hey, they have a good time. Every year they use to go picnic there.

P: What mill? Who would do this?

F: Any mill!

P: Oh really?

F: They use to go to that years ago, yah. The Tremont used to do that. They had ah, even Massachusetts had one of the best soccer teams there. They had a boxing hall there. I don't know if you remember Al Mello? He started over there in boxing. He started in Massachusetts Mill. He use to have good soccer team. But ah, mills used to run every summer a picnic.

P: They'd supply the food?

F: Yes, yes! The mills used to pay everything. Oh yah, they used to, transportation, food, all you can eat, corn.

P: What, what day of the week was that?

F: Oh, like Sunday. Was a weekend. They didn't want to stop the mill. Yah the weekend. It's only one day they couldn't have that off. Like now we never had a week or two weeks vacations. Those days, those old days they didn't have no vacations, nothing. You had to work every day. The only one day we had off, like of Fourth of July or some holiday like that.

P: The mills must of been hot in the summer?

F: Hot! I remember sweat, sweat, sweat and they had these humidifiers. Little things like that. Humidifiers they spit water all over the place, and wet!

P: Hey, they used to have that especially in the weave room. (P: Yah) Because they used to make the warps humidity a little, but makes it run a little better. The size they used to put in the yarn, it used to stick together a little bit. Did you say hot? Even in the winter. Hot in the summer. Hot in the winter. It was always hot. We couldn't open the windows, nothing.

P: Why couldn't you open the windows?

F: Because used to, used to bother those humidifiers we had. So they didn't want nobody...they used to lock it and put nails so nobody could open. [Laughs] Hey, it was really tough, but you get use to that.

P: So no one, no one got sick or injured?

F: No. Well once in awhile sometimes somebody got sick. Like now, you know, you never know. But hey, sick or no sick, people want to work. They got to work. Was afraid to... they stay out too much they... When you were sick you had to stay out, but if you stay out to often they put somebody else in your job, you're gone. [Laughs]

P: So eventually that changed though so that people wouldn't loose their job if they were sick.

F: Oh yes, yes. Oh yah, it's different now. Everything is different. Even those old days we had no protection at all. Today [unclear], some fellows up Virginia, South Carolina where they get these cotton mills, they get these masks, everything protected. They're pretty good. Even the ears in the weave room, they got some protection. See I still get trouble in my ears. I went to the doctor, I told him I can't hear to good. He ask me where I work. He says, just forget it. He says that's from those [makes noise sounds] all day. Yah, in the weaver room especially, those looms they used to bang, bang, bang all day. Gets in your ears if you can't take that off. Yah, went to ear doctor, Dr. Brady, he told me ears perfects, but that, can't do nothing.

P: You were saying that on Merrimack Street when people were let out of work, out of the mills, they'd crowd the streets?

F: Hey, you couldn't go by [laughs]. So much people all at one time. Like they use to come from the Tremont, from Lawrence Mills, from Merrimack, Boott Mills. Everybody use to come through here on Merrimack Street. Hey, sidewalks was too small. See they use to come out at the same time those old days. Jeese, they all gone. Yah, they all gone.

P: What were some of the stores here on Merrimack Street? You don't remember? Pollards?

F: A. G. Pollard, Gagnon, Gagnon was a good store too. And A.G. Pollard was good store. And they had Five and Ten Cent stores. No more, well it's still there.

P: Woolworth?

F: They use to call it Five and Ten Cent store. Everything you buy, five cents, ten cents, no more Five and Ten. [Laughs] They had pretty good stores. You see, they didn't have these supermarkets there or have these stores outside, malls and everything. They didn't have that. Everything was right in the city. You wanted get anything, you come down in the city.

P: How many Portuguese stores were there?

F: Jesus, I can't tell but there's quite a few thousand people there.

P: Well no, I'm saying just stores, Portuguese stores?

F: Just stores? Well they had one Charles Street, Peter. They have Madeiros store on Tilden Street. They had quite a few stores. They had a shoe store. They had a clothing store. Portuguese store, Mr. Souza, he had a clothing store. They had quite a few stores, but all the Portuguese use to go over there.

P: Yah. So you wouldn't usually go to an Irish store for ... ?

F: Well if it was something that really ah, you needed, you would go there. But they, seem to me the Irish [unclear], like the Greeks, they used to go on Market Street. Hey, the Greeks had everything there, but sometimes they couldn't get it in Portuguese store. We knew they had it in the Greek Store, but we used to go over there, but not very often. But the Greeks, they use to go in their own stores. They own Cafes there outside, and everything. No more.

P: You probably had different foods from the Greeks, or did you have the same?

F: At Market Street and Salem Street, all those, Broadway, all that, all Greeks. They had their own stores, and they had everything. Clothing stores, agencies, everything. Tailors, they had everything Market Street. They owned cafes and everything.

P: When you were ill would you go to St. Joseph's Hospital?

F: That's right. There's only one place we could go, because not now, for years, but the old timers, when we use to work in the mills, like when you work in the Tremont, Massachusetts, to Appleton, there's only one place. You had to go up St. Joseph's. That St. Joseph's uses to belong to the mills. They use to call it Cooperation Hospital, or something like that. And they changed to St. Joseph. Now you go over there you got to pay. Those days those mills use to run that.

P: So you could go for free?

F: That's right.

P: And was your medicine for free?

F: Oh yah. They use to give everything there. The mills, they use to take care of that. All the mills use to pay.

P: Did you ever know the owner of the mill that you work at?

F: I knew a few of them, like Mr. Gallen, New Market Mills. Ah United Plastic, I just forget. Wannalancit, Mr. Leighton...Larter, Mr. Larter use to own the mill. I used to know him pretty good, and I knew Mr. Gallen at New Market Mills too. I use to know the boys and everything.

P: Did you find that the children, if they inherited the mill, would usually not be concerned about the mill?

F: No more.

P: The children usually would let the mills fall apart once their fathers died. So that's one... that's why the mills would have to close down, because the kids... the children didn't want to run the mill anymore!

F: Oh no, no, no, you're right. I tell ya, they didn't like, the people in Lowell didn't like the mills shut down like they did, but when Raytheon come in, all the other industries, they was glad the mills get out of here, because no future for these young generations in the mills. Working hard like I did, and the other people my age did, so you didn't want to see their families get mixed up, that's all. This ah, electronic things come up, people, they work better. They get better pay and they don't have to work so hard. Hey, I think this was good they move out of here, but those days when they moved we didn't wanted them to move, because there was no jobs. But they build this city pretty good. I give you credit for these officials in the city. They have been doing good job. They build this city up, know when you was like I say forty years ago, or forty five or fifty years ago, and you see now you ought to be proud to live in Lowell. And they getting better and better. You know what I like to see now in the city of Lowell?

P: What?

F: This canal open all up and see the boats come in and outside the canals, put like in France and other countries, little hotels, little cafes and everything. Hey I'd like to see that. If they do that this city will be beautiful. And they can do that because the canals right there. They just open up a little more or fix here and there and they come right through, right in the center of the city. They use not only outside, it's inside the city. It would be beautiful. You take Central Street, they fix the little bridge on one side. When you look the buildings, make the memories come back, but you see the view. I remember the views I had when I use to work in the mills. I used... if I had a chance to open a little window, some little hole and see the canal, but now it's all open. Put a few boats there, run around and go as far as a [unclear] and out that way.

P: Too bad the, how come the mill people, mill owners in back fifty years ago, how come they didn't do this then. I wonder why they didn't use the canals for that then?

F: I hope they get some money and built these canals. That's the only thing I wish now. These buildings, buildings, buildings, that's alright, it's beautiful, but I think the the canal and the city of Lowell that brings memories for the old people. Even people fifty, sixty years old today, they still remember a few things. Hey, this is, I hope they do that.

P: So would um, I have, I was wondering if the Portuguese mostly went to work in the mills?

F: That's right, that's right. They mostly, and if the mills close down some of them they went construction work. It's the only one job they could get. Pick and shovel, they didn't have these machines they get now. They used to work open streets, roads here and there, shovel and pick. They used to be like mosquitos. So many people working there, because today they don't need that. They got these machines, they break all these roads and everything, but those days 1930, 31, 32, hey, people was like mosquitos on the job, because everybody throw a little shovel here and there. I remember when they started WPA. Roosevelt put these people to work. Hey, had to go to work, clean canals, brooks here and there, clean the streets. Hey, it looked like mosquitos in there.

P: I guess we should call it a day for now, because I know you want to go get, you want to go shopping before the stores close. Okay. So you'll be having another interview in a couple of days by another person, another interview I think. Someone is going to try and contact you. So I may be able to come back and ask you more questions.

[Wife is talking in the background]

F: It's part of my life, yah!

P: Okay, thank you.

F: You're welcome.

Interview ends