

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL

Memórias – Preserving the Stories of Lowell's Portuguese Community

Oral History Interview with Ilda Sousa, November 25, 2016

Biographical Note:

Born in the village of Fontes on the Azorean island of Graciosa in 1926; daughter of Antonio A. and Conceicao A. (da Cunha) Labao; her parents had immigrated to the United States in the early 1900s; her mother settled in Lawrence, Massachusetts, living with relatives from Graciosa and working in a textile mill; her father, who had immigrated from Graciosa to California, was a railroad worker, shoveling coal on a steam locomotive; they met and married in Lawrence; had two daughters, Noemia (who died in infancy) and Deidamia (born in 1910); in 1912 they returned to Graciosa to the village of Fontes and had nine more children (eight daughters and one son); the children, including Ilda Sousa grew to adulthood on Graciosa, but between 1950 and the mid-1960s a number of them immigrated to the United States and settled in Lowell; as a young girl Ilda da Cunha left school to serve as a domestic worker for a wealthier family in Fontes; there she met Aristides A. Sousa, who was born on Graciosa in 1918 and worked as a handyman; they married in 1950 and had one daughter, Marisa D.; in 1966 they immigrated to the United States, settled in Lowell in the “Back Central” neighborhood, and became communicants of Saint Anthony Catholic Church; Ms. Sousa obtained a job in a shoe factory (Grace Shoe), while her husband was employed as a machine operator for a pasta maker (Prince Pasta); she and her husband (who died in 2004, at the age of 85) were members of and active in the Holy Ghost Society and the Holy Trinity Society.

Scope and Contents:

Interview conducted by local historian Mehmed Ali; much of the interview focuses on the lives of the parents of Ilda Sousa, their immigration to the U.S. in the early 1900s and the experiences of Ms. Sousa’s mother in New York City and Lawrence, Massachusetts, as well as their lives on Graciosa, after their return to the island in 1912; through the translation of her daughter Ms. Sousa then describes her life growing up on Graciosa, her marriage there, and her immigration to the U.S. in 1966; included are descriptions of her work place in a Lowell shoe factory; her activities with the Holy Ghost Society, and her experiences in Lowell’s “Back Central” neighborhood.

INFORMANT: ILDA SOUSA

INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI

I=ILDA

A=ALI

N=Noemia

M=Marisa

R=Relative or Family Member of Ilda Sousa

[Dr. Marisa Ramos, who is affiliated with the Saab Center for Portuguese Studies, University of Massachusetts Lowell, served as translator and is a granddaughter of the interviewee; there were several other female family members and relatives present at the interview, but only one, Noemia Santos, a sister of Ilda Sousa, is identified. These unidentified women sometimes speak in English, sometimes in Portuguese. They are identified in this transcript as a relative.]

A: Okay, we're here up on Meadowcreek Drive. Thank you for having us everybody.

R: You are welcomed.

A: And we're going to interview Ilda Sousa, and today's date is November 25, 2016. And thank you Ilda.

I: Thank you.

M: Thank you.

A: So Ilda where and when were you born?

I: 1927. 26, 1926. 15 October, Graciosa, Azores.

A: Okay. Tell us about Graciosa back in those days.

I: She said where she comes from is a small village. Her mother had eight children, nine actually. Her mother lived here in the United States first before they (--) I mean, well her mother immigrated here before they were born.

M: My grandmother immigrated here and she landed on Ellis Island. And then she worked in New York for a little while. And then one of her brothers, no, one of her uncles, aunts or uncles, whatever, took her to Lawrence, and that's where she resided in Lawrence. And she worked at the mills as one of the mill girls. She met my grandfather who happened to be passing through. He was from California. And he worked on the, shoveling coal on the trains for a while there, to come down to this way. So that's how they met, in Lawrence at a dance. Okay, and then that's how the, that's how the story, that's how the story is here, okay. So when my grandmother then got married in Lawrence she had a daughter. Her name was Noemia, the first daughter that she had. And then Noemia was sick and she passed away. And then she had another daughter which is Deidamia, and she's the one that actually had, sponsored everybody to come afterwards, because after the Depression they were like kind of giving people money and telling people if they want to go back to their country, because it was so bad here. So my grandmother packed up and left and took her daughter, one daughter Deidamia. Then all of the others grew up there, were born there in the Azores, in Fontes, the town was called Fontes. And that's how they, they had eight girls and one boy.

N: I'm baby!

M: She was the baby.

A: You're a big baby now. [All laugh]

R: Then got a name Noemia. The last one was Noemia.

M: Yes, because the first one (--) Yes, so when my (--) Of course then my grandmother, after having all of these children, she worked as a servant in the home of some well-to-do people down in the main town. And my grandfather was a, he used to paint, white washing the houses, you know, that kind of thing. And so then my grandfather died. My grandfather died kind of young. I think he was in his 50s. Yah, about fifty-years old he died of a stroke. And she was only three months old. And my grandmother was alone with eight girls, (R: Right there) eight girls and this is (--)

A: And one boy?

M: And one boy.

A: Oh my goodness.

R: We have the picture of all of them. That's the husband [unclear].

M: Yah, this is my grandmother. They already have partners. As you can see they are already married.

A: Yah, yah, they're the husbands huh.

R: Is your grandfather in that picture, or no?

M: No, no, grandfather, he's passed away already.

R: Okay, he's already passed away at this point.

M: Yes, this here is all of them married already. And this is my mom's and her [unclear]. This is Noemia right there.

A: Oh wow.

M: Right there. And this is my, is her husband [Ilda], right there.

A: Ilda, your house must have been popular for men to visit? [All laugh]

M: I know it, yah.

R: It was a small house. [Unclear] It was like one room.

I: Two rooms and a kitchen.

R: The guys were not allowed to go in.

M: The house that they lived had two rooms and a kitchen, and they had a loft, like a loft up at the top and that's where they slept.

R: And the guys were not allowed to go in to talk with the girls.

M: Of course not.

R: They had to talk on the street. God forbid if they passes a certain place. God forbid. [All laugh]

R: On the street she's saying, that's where she would talk.

M: On the street or out the window. A lot of thing that they did is they talk from the window.

A: Like Romeo and Juliet.

R: Yes. Sometimes on the second floor the guy downstairs with the [neck] looking down.

A: So Ilda did you go to school?

R: No. She went to work at nine years old.

I: No school.

A: No school. Did you go to school for a couple of years or not at all?

R: No.

I: Okay, she did, she did start. She did go to school at first, but then they ask for like a person, a girl to do errands and stuff like that. So she did. She went. She was nine years old and she was making some, take care of little kids, watch little kids; to go play with them and entertain them. She said she was sorry that she never was able to do that.

A: Well you still have time. [All laugh] So who did you work for when you started working?

I: He was a pharmaceutical gentleman that he, but she can't recall [unclear-all talking at once].

R: His name was Costa

M: It was Costa?

I: Costa, Costa.

M: Yes, Costa. Yah, he was a pharmaceutical and his name was Costa.

A: Okay. How did you like that job?

M: She said she liked it because all she did was (--)

R: They took good care of her.

M: She liked it. She said she enjoyed playing, because that's all she did was play with the children. And they took good care of her. They liked her.

A: Did you live at their house?

M: Yah, many times she would stay, not live permanently, but she would stay. She said the lady, the woman of the house used to make hats. She'd make molds for hats, for men and women's hats and she also did paper flowers. And she worked, they taught her. She said back in that era everybody wore hats back then. So she said there was plenty of that.

R: No pay nothing.

M: She said that she didn't get paid. I don't know that.

R: Free! Nothing.

A: Just for food? You worked just for food?

M: Yup. She said she would help them do that, but they wouldn't pay her, but they'd just give her stuff. She said she left there when she was twenty to get married. What she did, she started doing hats herself and then the woman got kind of upset at her because she was taking her place. [All laugh]

A: What did she just say?

M: She said she wanted to make some money so she [unclear].

A: So how did you meet your husband?

M: He worked for the same people that she worked for, the Costas. And so that's how they met. He worked at a mill place grinding cereals and stuff like that.

A: So Mr. Costa had different businesses?

M: Yes. Just that she got married and they didn't give her ... not even a gift. Twelve years she worked for them. They didn't give her nothing when she got married. [All laugh]

A: Not even a gift huh?

M: Nope. She says it's okay, I didn't need it.

R: She was already making the hats. [Laughs]

A: What did your husband do for work when you first met him?

I: He used to do a variety of different things, like labor, you know, and he would do, like go to different places and do different things. And he would also work, he was a very good, like a plumber type of thing. He was able to do that.

R: [Speaking in Portuguese.]

M: Oh, she's saying that for the wedding, for her wedding and hers, they got married eight days apart. Okay, so my grandmother I guess (--) My grandmother I guess bought a pig.

A: Bought a pig?

M: Bought a pig and killed it, and cut half, half it was for one and for their wedding.

R: Quarter for me, quarter for her.

M: Quarter for her, oh, okay. So half was for her house, my grandmother's house, she gave one quarter of the pig to each of them because they got married.

N: Meat, linguisa.

M: Yes, sausages.

N: Yah, everything. Everything eat.

A: Yah, you eat the whole pig. [All laugh] Don't leave anything behind.

N: Black.

M: The pig was black.

A: Black pig.

N: Yah, had a black pig, oh yes. I'm back eighteen years old. I married eighteen years old.

M: She was eighteen?

A: Eighteen years old you married?

N: Yes.

A: And this is Noemia. I just want to make sure that the transcriber understands that.

N: Yah.

A: How old was Ilda when she got married?

I: Twenty-two.

A: Okay. So now where did you live? Where did you live after you got married?

M: A village called Fontes. Oh she said when she first got married she went to what we called Monte da Ajuda [a mountain peak, north of Fontes, with commanding views of Santa Cruz da Graciosa and the surrounding ocean], which is, it's like, it's where, like it's up on the mountain, like in a hill, very [unclear].

R: Where that picture is. It's right there.

M: Where that picture is taken from where, and you can see the whole town.

A: What's it called again?

M: Monte da Ajuda.

I: There's three churches.

M: Yah, there's three churches there, yah.

R: I have some pictures. You can look. It's in Philip's room. I have a big picture.

M: It's a popular place. It's a very (--). When you climb up to the top you have the view of the top. You can see all around.

R: And there's three churches up there.

M: Yah, there's three churches. And there also was on the Monte da Ajuda back then when there was whales they used to have the alarm. People used to look for whales up at the top of that mountain. They had the telescopes and they had this alarm that would go off when they'd see whales. And everybody that worked with the whales, they'd drop what they're doing and they'd just run to go capture the whales.

A: Wow. Okay, interesting. And so you went. This was your honeymoon for a few days?

R: No, no.

M: Yah. No, no.

R: Same place.

M: They stayed there for a while.

A: Okay. So you lived in your own house. You didn't live with your in-laws, or your parents?

I: They lived together with three [few words unclear].

R: Three months, three months with both of you.

N: I have a room, my bedroom for me, another bedroom for my sister. [Laughing] Long time ago. Long time ago. [All laugh].

M: They shared the expenses.

A: Sure, why not? Why not?

N: Oh my god. Oh my god!

A: I'm ready to live here if I can live here. [Chuckles] So tell us about the role of the church in the community back home.

M: She says the church played a very important role. [All speaking at the same time] She used to go to church. They all talk at the same time.

A: Yah, it's going to be very tough to be very tough for the transcriber.

M: She says, you know, they used to have a lot of processions and feasts. She'd like to go to the church. In fact (--)

R: First Communion. First Communion.

M: Yes, and back then they used to have a lot of priests. They used to say sermons, you know, and she liked to hear that. You know, that played a very important role for her. And of course each town, each has their day to have their feast, their processions, (A: Okay) you know, that kind of deal. Each one has a little, not a little church but it's almost like a church, but it's very small.

A: Like a chapel?

M: Like a little chapel, yes. Each town has their own little chapel, and that chapel has a feast related to that chapel. Then somebody else has it. So it's always, it's very (--). I don't know how it is now, how devoted these people are now, but back then it was very, very devotion, yah, in religion. And we like hearing the priest. Like she says, she likes to hear the priests.

A: How many (--) Did you have children born there?

M: She had three children. Two died and she only has Diane.

Diane: I'm the only one that's alive.

A: What happened to the first two children?

I: The first one died she was eight years. It was a girl, she was two weeks old. She died. The last, after Diana she got pregnant, but she had like a miscarriage. So it didn't happen.

A: Now do you remember World War II?

M: She remembers some of it. Actually Portugal never really participated in World War II. They were neutral, but they had all the soldiers, all the soldiers were prepared and ready. So they were away, like her husband was away four years. My uncle was away six years under the service. But based on things that I've heard, I remember this is my own, from my mother, that there was, they could almost see sometimes submarines on the ocean, you know like and they'd see planes fly. And at one time there was a plane that crashed in I believe it was either an English person or a Scotland person, but they said they came to get the body and they all played the bagpipes when they escorted this body that happened. So my mother had a really good vivid, you know, about that. And she probably doesn't remember. [Speaking to her mother about the memory] Yah, she remembers very well that too.

R: That's why they have that cross, that memorial.

M: Memorial, yah.

A: So how old were you when your husband went into the military?

M: Oh, she said she was not married yet when he went in the service.

A: Oh okay, okay.

M: My uncle is older than her, nine years.

A: Okay, good. What about other stories from before you immigrated to the United States?

R: How about her children? Did you guys go over the stories about her children that passed away? Didn't one of the little kids, they rubbed lard from a pig that had tuberculosis right?

R: She's going to get upset about that.

R: She's not going to get upset.

M: She says that they were, you know, they were not well to do. You know, they were like poor, you know, and they were struggling. You know it was tough to get food on your table and to work. They did a lot of embroidery to make some money. A lot of people would go and do things at other people's houses that were well off, wash clothes and do things like that. My uncle worked hard. They used to work hard, you know, long days little pay. You know, and you'd be lucky to come home and get something, you know, callouses in your hands. She says although they were not well-off, she said there were others that were much worse than she was. She said, you know, they were able to maintain a decent type of life, you know what I mean? Nobody was going to die of starvation, but it wasn't something that they had of abundance. And she's saying they were lucky too in that aspect, but my (--). Yah, she's saying that because she had relatives here, my grandmother had sisters here, okay, and they would send clothes, a lot of clothes and things over there. So she said, that, they had an awful lot of clothes, because they would send. And she said they were fortunate for that aspect that they had that and because she said other people didn't even have shoes or anything like that. But my aunt lived in New Bedford, my great aunt actually. She lived in New Bedford. And you know something, my grandmother, and my grand aunt Katherina never saw each other.

R: Never met.

M: Never met.

A: They never met?

M: They never met.

R: No.

A: How did that work?

M: It worked that my grandmother, when she was young, she was also taken by, with her uncle and went to another Island called Flores to work with her godmother. So the other one was born, and she, from there, from Flores she immigrated here. In the meantime Katherine was already coming over here too. So one lived in Lawrence and one lived in New Bedford and they never met.

R: They never saw each other.

M: They never saw each other.

A: They never visited? I mean it wasn't like one was in California and (--)

M: I know, but then, then the other came, went back, my grandmother went back to the Azores and that was it. They never saw each other.

R: Unbelievable huh.

M: Corresponded to each other, always being helpful with each other meaning by providing clothes to their daughters, you know what I mean, doing things like that, but never saw each other.

R: As children we all met her.

M: Oh yah, we did, yah.

R: We all got to know the son

M: She says in that picture there, all those clothes are all like clothes from here.

A: Okay. So what was the name of the grandmother, and where did she live, and the name of the great aunt and where she lived?

M: My grandmother, her name was Luzia Constance da Cunha, okay, because this is weird, because they all have different last names (A: Okay) even though they're all in the same family. She has [name unclear], okay. My mother was da Cunha. My aunt was Augusta, the other one. They all picked like pieces of names, but they all were all in the same names.

A: Different fathers?

M: Yah. No, not different fathers.

A: No, the same parents?

M: The same, but my grandmother's maiden name was da Cunha. So my mother kept da Cunha.

R: So is my mother da Cunha too.

M: She [name unclear]. She took my grandfather's name.

A: Okay.

M: Okay. So it's like weird. So when you try to get connections with these families you get like what? Yah, but that's how, her name was, like I said, Luzia Constance da Cunha, because it was her mother, Ilda's mother.

A: Okay and she lived where?

M: And she lived in Lawrence.

R: In Lawrence.

M: Her father was Antonio August Labao, and they both lived in Lawrence. They got married in Lawrence. She had a picture of them, the wedding there.

R: Which one is that?

M: This one here, that's their wedding picture.

R: Oh, right here.

A: Oh that one, okay.

M: This is their wedding picture. This is their first child.

R: Is this the one that passed away?

M: One of them is a doll. This is a child, yah. This is a doll.

A: [Sneezes].

R: Bless you.

A: Thank you.

M: So that's my grandmother, that's my grandfather.

A: Okay.

M: Well this is my grandmother, his wife. I think she already had lost him. But that's their wedding picture. And she went, and I think she baptized, she got married and baptized her first daughter in a church called, is there a St. Mary's Church in Lawrence? I think there might be a St. Mary's Church in Lawrence.

A: Is it closed now?

M: I don't think so. I don't think so.

A: Okay. So, so your mother lived in Lawrence and then your aunt lived in New Bedford?

M: Yes.

A: And what was her name?

M: Katherine, well her married name was Goulart. Katherine, Katherina. Oh, there was another one. See I didn't know this one. Maria was in Lawrence as well. This is probably my grandmother's sister. And there was another one in New Bedford. Oh, Laurentina. Laurentina

was also in New Bedford. See I didn't know that. I only knew Katherine. So two of them lived in New Bedford. So there was two in New Bedford and two in Lawrence.

A: Okay. Now was your mother an American citizen before she went back?

R: We all came together [unclear].

M: No, she was not. No, nobody. She didn't (--) They weren't a citizen.

A: Okay. You had said before that somebody gave them money to return to Portugal during the depression.

M: Well this is the stories I hear. I heard from other people saying that during the depression that the government was actually offering people if they wanted to go back home.

A: The U.S. Government?

M: U. S. Government. Well yah, she came as a stowaway.

A: Who was that?

M: My grandmother on the boat. My uncle brought her as a stowaway. You're going to get arrested now? [Laughs] Yah, and that's when she (--) She's telling the story about when he came, him and, her and the uncle got on the boat, stowaway, then they came to Ellis Island. And then when my grandmother came here though she didn't like it.

A: No?

M: She didn't like New York at all, because she didn't know anybody and she went to work at a home as a servant. And she didn't really know anybody. She used to cry a lot. That's what my mother used to tell me. And she said one day somebody came knocking at the door asking for money, some lady, and she saw that my grandmother was upset and asked (--) They asked why she was so sad. And she said because she wasn't happy there. She didn't know anybody. She wanted to go home. And the lady said, "Who brought you here?" But I guess my uncle left her there, you know, just left her there. And then she said, well she told her the story. She said she had family in Lawrence and she wanted to come to Massachusetts to Lawrence so she could find a way. It just so happened that the lady said, "Oh my son works at the immigration office. Maybe we can track your uncle and find out where." And I guess they did manage to do that. That's how she ended up back in Lawrence.

A: Okay. Where was she working? In New York City?

M: Yah, in New York City, I think so, for a family. And she said that the uncle that stowaway her was living in California for a long time and he came years and years later, we were already here, came to visit us. And they hadn't seen, my Aunt Katherine and him hadn't seen each other,

oh man, years and years, and they like even took a picture in the paper about them reuniting after all these years. [Lots of children in background, noisy].

N: My father said to my mother [I have my money] in California. You don't have nothing. See, she's liar.

M: No, no, she's saying, what she's trying to say is that when my grandfather met my grandmother and they decided to get married, he said oh, she had some money and he said, "You pay for everything, because I have to get my money. It's in California. I don't have it." You know, so he didn't. He was fibbed.

N: Yah, you know nothing.

R: What? Are you talking about (--) Ah, great stories yah.

N: My father [unclear] nice, look good. Teenager, teenager everywhere. Very good teenager, my mother says, like her? She's married together, but no money!

M: Oh well.

A: You can survive.

M: Love conquered.

A: That's right.

N: No money.

M: She's just saying afterwards they were happy. They were going to have plenty of kids.

R: Yah, he had the coal miners lungs though, didn't he have? He eventually died from that.

M: Yah, well he had that, he had a stroke.

R: Oh he did.

A: So what made you decide to immigrate to the United States?

M: She said, "Well more or less necessity and to have a better life." She said this was an opportunity for her to give a better life to her daughter. And she worked. You know, plus [unclear-speaks in Portuguese] Yes, she had all of her sisters already here, well a lot of them. Like she had two of them here, which was Lurdes [Lurdes (da Cunha) Leandro] and Deidamia [Deidamia (da Cunha) Sousa, born in 1910 in Lawrence, Massachusetts]. Okay, Deidamia was the oldest one. Then in [19]63 "Bia" [Libia (da Cunha) Melo] immigrated. She came in [19]63, we came in [19]63, and then we immigrated to Lowell. You know, and then she came. We were [19]63. Me too, [19]63. [All talking amongst each other] Maybe [19]65?

R: [19]66.

M: [19]66. Okay, so they came in [19]66.

A: So you came to Lowell in 1966?

M: Yes, she came to Lowell.

A: Me too.

M: And I'll tell you in 1966 she came to Lowell and she lived on Elm Street, across the street from my house everybody would (-- Before they all came we would always prepare, try to find things to prepare their houses when they came. We would put like, get some furniture, get this, get that, and we'd all get together. And many times we'd see people throw away, "You're going to throw that furniture away? Don't throw it away, we'll take it." And when my aunts come we would furnish their houses with these pieces of furniture that they had. So they lived across the street from me for many years and it was good times. Even though, you know, we were struggling, she worked in a shoe shop. She worked in a shoe shop called Grace Shoe.

R: Grace Shoe.

A: Grace Shoe, okay. So how did you feel about immigrating? What were your impressions of the United States when you first came?

M: She said she had, it was a very good feeling. She was coming for something better, to be better, a better life. So she said she liked it, she really did. She liked it because I think she had family. She says she still loves it. She's been here for fifty something, fifty-two years. Fifty-two years?

A: Fifty.

M: Fifty, yah.

A: She came in [19]66.

M: Yah, fifty. I was going to say I've been here for that long. I'm fifty-two or fifty-three now. She said, but she would go back and visit a lot of times too. She likes it, but when they came he went to work for Prince Macaroni. Yes, he worked for Prince Macaroni. And she worked for Grace Shoe. She used to put the decorations on the shoes, like bows and things like that on the shoes.

A: And how did you get the job at Grace?

M: I'll tell you how. I know because it's (-- [All laugh] I can tell you how because no one back then, whoever came to the United States and was sponsored by somebody, you had to have

a job. You had to have someone, a place to work already. So when they all came they already had a job waiting for them.

R: The sponsor found the job for her when she came.

M: To get a visa you had to have that. She said she worked there for nine years. And she was excited because it was the first time she ever made a check, brought home a check for \$100.00. She said she worked on Saturday, she worked all times. So she said she had \$100.00. She laughed so much at work, and everybody was saying, "What's so happy?" She goes, "The first check I ever made that said \$100.00." She said she was so excited for having that \$100.00.

R: That's so funny.

M: She said and now they bring checks like for you know, the amounts of money, but back then you could buy a lot with that.

A: Sure.

M: She said, oh, there was good, life was good and she never went hungry.

A: That's good. So were there a lot of Portuguese there at the shoe shop?

M: She says yes, there's a lot. Yes there were a lot. Seems like that was the place where kind of people went.

N: That's why I don't understand English. I talk all the time, talk, talk, talk all the time Portuguese.

R: Oh they spoke Portuguese all the time they never learned to speak English. How funny is that?

N: That's why I understand a little bit. Maybe all the time I talk, talk, talk Portuguese, Portuguese, Portuguese. My son, my son speaks English. He speak Portuguese. My grandson, this is my niece. This is my niece.

A: So who else was working at Grace besides Portuguese people?

M: There were Greek people, there were some Italian. She says she's going to tell you a story about what she did to an Italian guy that used to work there. She would say, when the guy would sneeze she would say something like, it wasn't the God bless you or anything like that, it was something else. And the guy would always say, "Thank you, thank you." And it wasn't really (--)

R: She was really swearing or something deep down. She was saying something.

M: You know, saying something other than bless you or anything. And the guy didn't understand so he would say, "Thank you, thank you." [All laugh]

R: She cracks herself up. Look at her. She thinks it's so funny.

A: Why did you do? Why did you say that?

M: She said that she used to want to work. Oh she liked the Italian guy. I mean you know, she said she liked him. It was just a funny thing that they (--). It was a saying that they have like over there. You know how a donkey (A: braise), yah. Okay, well she would say, "bless you donkey," you know, something like that. And then she said when she wanted to work overtime she would tell, they would tell her what to say to the boss. And she'd go up to the boss and say, "work, work, want to make money, work." And he would say, "Okay, okay, go work."

A: So was there any problems between the different groups of people in the shoe shop?

I: Ah, no, no, no.

M: No, she said everybody was very nice. She says they liked, especially they liked a lot of the Portuguese people because they were really good workers. She says her and her other sister Emelia and some other friends used to work putting the bows and they all worked together, and they talked and laughed a lot, but they kept working. Okay, so the other people would say, "How come the boss never tells them to be quiet?" And the others they tell them "Because we never stop though, we were talking and laughing but we kept working." Oh she says when she was too quiet he would ask, "Oh Ilda, what's the matter? No talk, talk today?" [All laugh]

A: Why did you leave the shoe shop?

M: She said she got, she had back problems because she was standing up and she kept putting the pressure on. She got a bad back afterwards. She said but she really liked her job, but she had to leave for medical reasons.

A: So you had to push down on a pedal or something?

M: Yes, the pedal.

R: Yah, they stood up all the time.

M: Yah, and they kept pushing down on the pedal. So that the (--). Like a staple gun. So it would staple the design on the shoes, the bows or whatever.

A: Okay. Okay. How were the working conditions at Grace?

M: She said in the summertime [it's torture] because it was so hot. There was no air-conditioners. Sometimes they put some fans going, but it was pretty bad.

A: Was there a union there?

M: No, no union.

A: Anybody talk about it?

M: No. No union.

A: So what did you do after you left Grace?

M: She became like a housewife. She stayed home. (R: Yah, started taking care of the grandkids) Stayed home and started, and then took care of the kids. Then she moved. When her daughter got married and had the kids, then she moved in with the daughter.

A: Ah, okay.

M: And then would watch the kids. Always was with her daughter, never separated. [Comment unclear].

A: Were you active in any clubs or organizations in Lowell?

M: She is a member of the Holy Ghost Society. She used to work in the kitchen as when they had, when the first early came they used to have the processions, the Feast of the Holy Ghost. And a lot, all of them would be invited to go and help in the kitchen. And they would cook, you know, like do all the feast and help cooking and doing all of that stuff. So she was part of that. I know that, what else? It was at the Holy Ghost that she said she did the kitchen. She would work, help. She was also a member of the Holy Trinity.

R: All church related organizations.

A: So there is or there was a Holy Trinity Society?

R: Yes, there still is.

A: Oh, okay. Do you guys know the history of that organization? I haven't heard of it before.

R: The Holy Trinity? Well the Holy Trinity is similar to the Holy Ghost. You have the processions. You have the feasts, and you have the crowns, you know the procession. I don't know if you're aware of the Holy Ghost, the crown. (A: Umhm) Okay. Well the Holy Ghost, the Pentecost is first, and then you have Trinity. And the Trinity is the same thing, it's just you bring the crown also. You do the processions. You have the feast at the Holy Ghost Park. But the only thing, the Trinity is different is that you pay. You pay a fee, like a fee, a membership. And there was at the end of the membership, the end of the year, they go out and they buy and they have the farms slaughter these cows for beef. What they do is they spread it all out in the Holy Ghost. You have tables, rows and rows and rows of meat, fresh cut meat, and they give

you wine, a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine and another loaf of sweet bread and a piece of meat. You take that home. That's what they give to each member of the organization.

A: And they still do that?

R: And they still do that.

A: Oh okay. I want to go. Do they do it next month?

R: No, they don't do it. They do it in the summertime.

A: Oh in the summertime, not in the (--)

R: In the summertime.

A: Okay. And so when you said at the end of the year it's the end of the (--)

R: It's the end of the (--) Meaning the end of, like you pay your dues and then when it comes for the Trinity Feast, the day before they will give you, they'll spread out all that meat, rows of tables, and then people, you go in and you get your, your portion. People just, they are just giving it to you because you're a member.

A: What month is the Feast during?

N: In June.

R: June or May. May, isn't it?

N: May?

R: They have the little prince and princess.

M: Yes! May, yes!

R: They pick a little boy and a little girl to represent the parade.

M: Yes, they have the Prince and the Princess, the Holy Trinity Prince and Princess. Yah, I think it's in May towards the end of May.

A: How many big feasts are there for the Portuguese Community?

M: There's a few. The biggest ones are the Holy Ghost Feast, which (--)

R: Holy Ghost.

A: Which is when?

M: Which is in May also. This is when every member of the Holy Ghost goes up there and eats. They have this big tent, and they'll have the house and everybody goes in there. And it's just you eat as much as you want. There's soup and meat for everybody. And it's free for some people. I mean, you're a member and you have the right to go, but if after they serve all the members and you want to go, you actually could go and have. And then after that is the Holy Trinity. And then they have, they have other feasts but not related to, to the church, but they have the Loreto [referring to the annual Our Lady of Loreto Feast], which is Labor Day Weekend.

A: What is it called?

M: Loreto.

A: Loreda, L O R E D O?

M: Loreto, Saint Loreto

R: [Unclear] Loretto [sic]. It's L O R E T T O, Loretto [correct spelling is Loreto].

M: Is it T T O? I don't know maybe.

A: And that's in September?

M: That's in September. That's the last feast that they have of the year outside.

A: And that's not connected to the church?

M: It is.

A: It is. (M: It is) Okay. And what's that Feast about?

M: That's the Feast is about Lady of Loretto.

A: Okay.

M: Okay and the story is that most of it is from Madeira Island.

A: Okay.

M: So that's what they (--)

A: And are there smaller Feasts and Festivals?

M: Yah, there is Saint Anthony's. They have Saint Anthony's, but usually this is now happening at the church parking lot. They have the Fatima also, the Lady of Fatima. They'll have the Feast of the Lady of Fatima there too.

A: And they do it at the church, not at the Holy Ghost Park?

M: Yah, they do it at the church park, the hall, parking lot.

A: And Saint Anthony, and I'm sorry, the other one?

M: Lady of Fatima.

A: Lady of Fatima. And when are those?

M: They're all in June I think.

R: Didn't Holy Ghost Park bring out their schedule too.

M: I don't know, but I it's, Saint Anthony's is in June.

R: Yah, and don't forget San Juan right?

M: San Juan, yah, they have that too, but I don't know, Saint John's. But that's, they go Saint Anthony's, Saint Juan, they go like right after one another. And it's mostly, mostly in June.

R: I guess the way to do it is to find a schedule. We'll give you all the feasts for the year.

A: Okay. Yah, that would be interesting.

R: Yah.

M: Yah, they're mostly in June.

A: And the Feasts (--) Are some of the Feasts more representative of different islands?

M: Well the Loretto is more representative of the Madeira Islands, okay.

A: Okay.

M: The Holy Ghost is really Azorean, okay. (A: Okay) The Azores really have the history of the crown, the crowning and the Holy Ghost.

A: Okay. And the Madeirans are the folks that came a long time ago to Lowell?

M: Yah, a lot of the Madeirans came a long time ago. And a lot of people came from Faial first too. Faial was where they had the volcano.

A: Right.

M: And I think it was in the 60s they opened the immigration for those people to come. But they had, there was a lot of old, older people here like Gladys Picanso, all those people that were here and they had these traditions already in place, you know, and we just keep going with them. But they really worked hard to keep those traditions and I admire that, because they weren't born in the Azores. They were born here and they had that desire to keep those traditions going. And for me I thought that was very, very important that they put their (--) They really did, they worked very hard to keep these traditions going.

A: Yah, interesting. Ilda, what did you think of Lowell in total?

M: She said she liked it. She said it was a nice town compared to what she had, you know, it was big and then she had a nice house. She says a total different life. Oh yah, they used to have (--) She said when they first, when they used to leave work there used to be like a supermarket called Danny's. It used to be, it's on Central Street on the corner of Central Street where I don't know if you know where the Veterans, Portuguese Veterans thing is. (A: Umhm, Charles) Okay, across the street is a liquor store. (A: Yah) Well that used to be a supermarket owned by Portuguese people called Danny's.

A: Danny's, okay.

M: Yes, and everybody used to go buy groceries there. So she says she would go there Friday nights, go stop there, buy here groceries, a big thing loaded with groceries. They would deliver it. She said, when her daughter was little she would take chocolates, grab everything that she liked and put it in the carriage. But anyways, she said that she would just leave her name, her address, her stuff and then they would just bring the groceries home.

N: Fifteen dollars, sixteen dollars!

M: And a big cart full.

N: Now two hundred dollars!

A: Absolutely, more for your dollar.

N: Yes, yes!

R: Honest to go right, honest to different times right.

M: She says the rent was sixteen dollars.

A: Ilda, any, any final thoughts about your time here in the United States?

M: She said this was her life here. And she said that gave her everything that she needed, she wanted. She couldn't get a better life than she had. She said she lived here as an immigrant. Nobody ever did anything to her. Nobody ever harmed her, or ever said anything you know, that would do anything. So she said this was great. And she said sometimes she thinks, she doesn't even know where she is, she's so peaceful in her life. So she's happy. She says before when people would say that you know, they'll go by black people sometimes they could be mean, you know, so [unclear].

A: I'm sorry I couldn't hear you.

M: Black people. She'd say well this person of color, you know, don't go by them. Cross the street, you know, they'd be afraid because they put these things in her head. And she said, but she didn't. She said she'd walk right by them and she'd say "Hi," and they'd say "Hi" back and she said they never harmed me, never did anything.

R: You know, but Central Street was like the hub, wasn't it? And [unclear] everybody went to Central Street, no cars. Everybody just walked up and down the street.

M: She's just saying a friend of hers would walk by them and she'd always cross the street and hide her bag. One day she was walking, they grabbed, took away the necklace. They grabbed her necklace. She said if she had been nice and said "Hello" and kept going. You never know.

A: Well thanks very much for your time today.

I: You're welcome.

M: Well I hope you can decipher any of this. [All laugh]

A: It got better.

Interview ends