

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
SAAB CENTER FOR PORTUGUESE STUDIES
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: NORBERTO FELIX
INTERVIEWER: GRAY FITZSIMONS
DATE: 3/21/2023

N=Norberto
G=Gray

G: It's March 21. I'm at the Tewksbury Starbucks on Main Street with Norberto Felix. And thank you for agreeing to do the interview. I appreciate it.

N: My pleasure. Thank you.

G: So, I'd like to cover three things.

N: Okay.

G: First of all, a little bit of your family history, your background, your parents' background, and your grandparents. And then I'd like to cover your growing up in Back Central. That will be the second part. I'm really interested in hearing about your experiences in Back Central growing up, but also your perspective today on the neighborhood.

N: Sure.

G: And finally, what I'd like to talk to you about is your experience in the soccer world, especially with both the Reds Club, the Blues, but also Lusitanos.

N: Excellent. I'll do my best.

G: So, tell me a little bit about your parents?

N: My parents? Well, we're originally from the Island of Graciosa in the Azores. I was born there. We immigrated here when I was three months old.

G: And what year was that?

N: In 1963. So, I was born in December of sixty-two, and we immigrated in March of sixty-three. As a matter of fact, the nineteenth of March was sixty years we came to the United States. So, it's been, my whole life has been here just about.

G: And what village, or what town were you born in?

N: We were from the Village of Funchal, which belong to the main Village of Santa Cruz. But we were in a smaller village called Funchal. It's up on the mountain.

G: Okay. Is there a church there, a parish at Funchal?

N: I don't think there was a church there. They had what they used to call the Imperio, like a little chapel, but the church was down in Santa Cruz.

G: In Santa Cruz. Okay. And so, did your father and mother have relatives here in the states?

N: Yes, they did. So, my mother had a sister who was born here. My grandparents were immigrated here to the United States late 1800s I would imagine. And one of my aunts was born here. She was actually born in Lawrence. Then she went back to Portugal with my grandparents. The family grew there. And when my aunt got married, she came to the U.S. with her husband.

G: Oh, okay.

N: And so, she was the sponsor for the whole family to come to the U.S.

G: I see.

N: So, back then she sponsored all her sisters, and one brother, to come to the U. S.

G: Do you know if your family came here via the Azorean Refugee Act?

N: Yes, that's what facilitated the whole process.

G: So again, was there family here in Lowell? Why did they come to Lowell?

N: First of all, my aunt was here, and second of all, jobs. They had the mill jobs at that time.

G: I see.

N: A lot of people came here because there was work to be in that area.

G: Gotcha. What did your dad do before leaving Graciosa, before he came here?

N: When he was in Graciosa he worked in a store. It wasn't his business, he worked for an employer, but he ran a little general store. Him and one of his best friends growing up, they worked in the store together.

G: Okay. What kind of formal education did your father have?

N: Very little, I think. Just, you know, basic grade school. He could read and write without no problem, but he was basically, you know, just grade school. That was it.

G: And what about your mother?

N: My mother was illiterate.

G: Oh!

N: My mother never went to school. She just learned how to sign her name basically. My mother was illiterate.

G: So again, they came here in sixty-three. And what did they do upon arrival? Do you know?

N: My mother worked in a shoe factory.

G: Which one? Do you know?

N: Grace Shoe.

G: Grace Shoe, yah.

N: She worked there until her retirement. She worked there all her life till she retired. My father had a couple of other jobs in the beginning, but then he settled. He went to Commodore Foods, which used to be on Lawrence Street. He worked there for years. He retired from there.

G: Okay. So how old were they when they came to the states?

N: My mother, I believe she was thirty-nine, because it was right after I was born. My father was like forty-five, forty-six, in that area.

G: Do you know what his first job was in Lowell though?

N: I think he was working in a sneaker factory.

G: Okay.

N: I don't know the name of the factory. The Portuguese Community was called the factory of the sneakers. So, I think he worked in the sneaker factory.

G: Was it Simon do you know?

N: I have no idea.

G: Yah, because they did make sneakers there.

N: It could have been.

G: But soon after, I mean a few years, or shortly after, he went to work at Commodore?

N: Yah, Commodore Foods, and then he found his niche there. That's where he stayed. He was a machine operator.

G: So again, you were born in?

N: Graciosa in the Azores.

G: No, but what was your birth date?

N: December 16, 1962.

G: Okay. So, you guys would have come over here, and John Kennedy was President.

N: Yup! He was assassinated the following year.

G: Exactly, right. So, what school did you first attend in Lowell?

N: I went to Saint Peter's.

G: Oh, okay.

N: I went to Saint Peter's for eight years. Graduated from Saint Peter's. So, it was a local school. My aunt, who had been here in the United States, she had a daughter who went to Saint Peter's. So, you know, my mother would always lean on the advice of her older sister. So that's where I went. I went to Saint Peter's.

G: I meant to ask, did your grandparents ever come to the states?

N: When they were younger, they were here in the Lawrence area.

G: In the Lawrence area.

N: In Lawrence, but my grandparents on my mother's side, I never met them. They passed away before I was born. And on my father's side they were elderly. My grandmother on my father's side was blind. So, as we left to come to the U.S., she became blind. So, I didn't see her until I was, the first time I met her I was nine years old. She only remembered me as a baby because her world stopped. My grandfather on my father's side, I met him a few times when we'd go back to visit. He died, he was like eighty-eight, eighty-nine years old when he died. So, I met him a couple of times when we'd go back on vacation, but they never came to the U.S. None of the grandparents on my father's side came to the U.S.

G: But on your mother's side, they were here.

N: My mother's side, yah.

G: But they went back though?

N: Yah, they went back.

G: That wasn't uncommon for people.

N: I guess from what I hear, you know, the family history, my grandfather on my mother's side was out in California.

G: Oh, okay.

N: As a matter of fact, when he went back to Portugal, back to the Azores, they'd ask him where he had been in America, and he used to say California. But they could never, no one could ever pronounce California, so it was California. So, he was known as Tony California because that's where he was. And to this day it's still kind of known as the Californas, you know.

G: That's good. Let me ask you, what are your first memories of Lowell?

N: Actually, I grew up on Chapel Street. Right on the corner of Chapel and Elm. I mean we moved a couple of places before I ever had any recollection, but in that area of Back Central, on the corner of Chapel and Elm, that's where, I grew up there playing hockey, street hockey with my friends, you know. We used to go to the Superior Court House, to the parking lot there. We used to play on Sundays and Saturdays, when there was no (--) We used to play there. You know, that was my first recollection of going out, was doing that, playing stuff like that. Playing

baseball in the courtyard on the back side. That was grass. Kicking soccer balls around. And then, you know, you had the feasts all the time. So, my mother helped a lot at the feast. And my father, my father was the founder of the marching band in Lowell. My father was the founder of that band. So, you know, they were always involved in the community and the feasts. My mother would be at the Holy Ghost Park working in the kitchen for all those feasts. So, I grew up, through my recollections, going there before feast days and hanging out there on a Friday night while they were preparing the food. We'd be running around playing, while they were doing the food.

G: What are your early memories of Saint Anthony's Church?

N: The feasts. The feasts, going there, you know, for the processions and things like that. Participate in the processions. We used to get all dressed up and carried the statues, the little ones obviously, you know, for the kids, and stuff like that.

G: So, you did some of that too?

N: Yup, we did a lot of that stuff.

G: Were your parents' members of the Holy Ghost Society?

N: Yes.

G: Were they pretty active there?

N: Yah, they were. As I was saying a little while ago, my mother worked at maybe every feast. My mother was up there in the kitchen working. Every single feast she was there. Saint Anthony's Feast, The Lady of Fatima, The Loreto Feast. She'd be there. Whenever there was a feast day she was up there.

G: Right. Do you remember, you must remember Father John Silva?

N: Yup. The first priest I ever met was Father John Silva. As a matter of fact, he married my sister and my brother.

G: But he didn't marry you?

N: No, no, not me. He married my oldest brother, my oldest sister, and my youngest sister.

G: Actually, how many siblings have you got?

N: There's five of us total. I have two brothers and two sisters.

G: And how many were born here in the states?

N: None. We were all born over there.

G: Oh! So, were you the youngest?

N: I was the youngest.

G: Okay, I see. I thought you had a younger sister.

N: No, no, my sister was born, there's eleven years between my sister and I.

G: Oh wow.

N: My youngest sister is eleven years, but they all got married. Father John Silva married my sister Cecilia, my sister Deidamia, and my brother Tony.

G: And so, do you remember Father Eusebio?

N: Yup, Eusebio. Yup, I remember him very well. As a matter of fact, he knew me. He went on sabbatical for a while, and I ran into him. And he goes, "Oh, you don't recognize me anymore?" I and said, "Oh, Father Silva." So, he knew me and my family very well. As a matter of fact, my mother had an industrial accident at work, at Grace Shoe, when she was working there. She burnt her hand. She had to get skin graphs and everything. And Father John Silva would go with her to Boston.

G: Oh!

N: He would take her to Boston for her to get treatment and go see the doctors there.

G: Is that right? Really?

N: Yah, he would go up there with her like every, when she was getting all the treatments on her hand and everything, he would take her up there, because he spoke English. And my sisters were in school. And so, you know, my parents reached out to him. And he said, "I'll take you." So, he was taking them up there.

G: Wow. That's pretty remarkable. Interesting. So, and you also, you say you knew Dimas.

N: Yes, I know Dimas very well.

G: Because he would have, I think he came to the states from Terceira.

N: Yah, Terceira.

G: In sixty-eight I believe, or sixty-nine.

N: Yup.

G: So, you were a seasoned citizen.

N: Yah, we were already. We'd been here five years. I was just starting school. I was going into first grade. I was just starting school then.

G: Yah, because is he, he's a little older than you, right?

N: Yah, he's about, he's close to my brother's age. So, he's about, I think Maria is a few, Maria is maybe about four years, five years older than me. Ray is my age. Fatima, I think Fatima is a year or two older than me.

G: Oh, okay. So, let me ask you about when, I guess your teenage years, were you at Saint Peter's then until eighth grade? Is that right?

N: Yup, eighth grade.

G: And then where did you go after Saint Peter's?

N: Central Catholic in Lawrence.

G: Oh, you went to Central Catholic in Lawrence? Okay.

N: Yah, I went to Central Catholic. I was actually one of the first Portuguese kids around here from Lowell who went to Central Catholic.

G: Is that right?

N: I remember I went there. I went to Central. It was all boys at the time. So, it wasn't even coed. It was all boys back in seventy-seven. September of seventy-seven I started going there. Central would come and get recruits to go visit the school. So, they came to Saint Peter's, and they got all the boys from Saint Peter's in the eighth grade, we went for a field trip to tour Central. I liked it. I came home to my parents. I really wanted to try going there. And they were like, okay, that's fine. And so, you know, they did the aptitude test and I got into Central.

G: So, you started there in seventy?

N: September of seventy-seven.

G: Seventy-seven, okay.

N: Yah, I graduated in eighty-one.

G: Eighty-one, okay. As a teenager in Back Central, obviously you had friends in the neighborhood. What was it like as a kid, you know, teenager?

N: It was a safe neighborhood. The neighborhood was clean. A lot of the Portuguese people took pride in their properties. So, everything was cleaned up. You know, it kind of used to be a little joke. If you had grass, we'd put tar on it right away, hard top.

G: Yah, right.

N: Because you had to make room for the cars, you know, you had to park the cars.

G: Exactly.

N: But it was safe. You know, we would stay out until, you know, eleven o'clock at night without any issues. Whether we would be on Chapel Street, or down on Central Street, or anywhere in the whole neighborhood, you weren't very far from home. Someone always knew you. You had an aunt, or relative who lived close by. So, it was a safe neighborhood.

G: Did you ever have any run-ins with the cops, Lowell Police? Because Dimas said there were times when the cops would come around and say, "Hey, [words muffled-13:46]."

N: I remember, I was young, but I remember there were sometimes when the cops would show up and start, you know, giving the Portuguese people a hard time. You know, they would

give them a hard time, tell them to get out, especially if they were like hanging out on Central Street. We used to call it the corner.

G: Yes!

N: Right by the rotary there. You know, they would like, tell you to get out of there and go home, but I never had any issues with the police personally. But I do remember the cops giving some people a hard time.

G: Yah, I don't think he did. He didn't have a run-in, but he remembered being basically hassled by the, they were probably Irish cops.

N: Probably.

G: So, what was your house like? It was on the corner of Elm and Chapel, right?

N: Yah, it was a three-family home. I guess the downstairs used to be a variety store, a small little store. My father converted it into an apartment. So, four families lived there.

G: Did he own the building?

N: Yah, he owned the building. At one point it was all the family who lived there. So, I had two aunts living in the downstairs apartments. We lived on the second floor. My other aunt lived on the third floor. So, it was all family. So, you were never locked out of your house because you could go in. You could go through the basement into, you know, to get into one house, or go through the upstairs, come down the front hallway. So, it was very, the whole building was family. So, it was like the main focal point. And when we got together for my family, my aunts and uncles, everyone would go there and meet there. Like on a Sunday afternoon there was, the focal point was there.

G: Nice. So, you said there was a variety store there at one time.

N: Yah, I don't remember it. I think when my father bought the place it wasn't even open anymore.

G: Oh, okay.

N: I think they just turned around, you know, he said we're going to make this an apartment. He made a little three-room apartment down there. So, it was kind of nice.

G: Did your dad hire people to do it, or did?

N: No, he did it himself.

G: Did he?

N: Yah, my father was jack of all trades. He would jump in and do a lot. I learned a lot from watching him.

G: So, he did carpentry and plumbing?

N: Yah, he did plumbing, carpentry.

G: Electrical?

N: He would hook up. Sometimes not the greatest electrical work, but.

G: He did it.

N: Yah, he did hook up electrical. He would hook up plumbing. I mean I remember going with my father many times to the lumber yard. You know, we'd go to Friend Lumber in Lowell, or Wilmington Supply up here in Wilmington, to get paneling, you know, and lumber. We would tie it on the top of the car and strap it down. And I would go to speak for him.

G: Yes.

N: He'd say, tell him I want this, this. Okay, I'd tell him what he wanted. They'd bring it out. He'd throw it on the car.

G: Did your father speak English?

N: No really. My father had a hearing problem.

G: Oh, okay.

N: So, it was difficult for him to hear. And he found English difficult, because, just because of the dialect here in New England. So, it was difficult for him. He could read it, and pretty much understand what was being said, but to speak it, it was hard for him. So, that's why I always had to go with him all the time to interpret.

G: I see. Interesting. And of course, Portuguese was always spoken in your home.

N: Yes.

G: Did you ever speak some English in your home to your siblings?

N: Yah, I'd talk to my sister. Sometimes we'd be at the table talking, and my father would say, "Hey, Portuguese." So, we would have to stop. He would get mad. But sometimes it was force of habit. Because, you know, growing up Portuguese and going to school, it was like I had to be English or American, you know, in school. And then once that got done, I had to switch back over to Portuguese.

G: Interesting. It's a dual identity.

N: Yah, it's like you had to change a chip. It was a fun time to grow up. It was good. I don't regret any of it, but it was that type of scenario where you had to think one way, you know, and then you got back, and then, you like, now you got to be this way.

G: When did you finally leave Back Central?

N: 1989. I bought a townhouse in Tewksbury, and I moved there. And I lived in North Tewksbury for like twenty-six years. And then recently, about six years ago, I moved to South Tewksbury. So, I'm on this side of Tewksbury now.

G: Yah, you're on Kehoe.

N: Yah.

G: Okay. So, what did you do after high school?

N: After high school I did a bunch of different things. I got a job at a bank. I worked in a bank for a little while. Then I went to work, like every other Portuguese person did around here, I went to work for Wang Labs.

G: Did you work at Wang?

N: Yup, I worked at Wang Labs for a short stint, about two years.

G: What did you do there?

N: I was a material handler.

G: Okay.

N: And I worked there for a couple of years after high school. I did some college.

G: Where was that?

N: I went to Middlesex.

G: In Lowell, or in Bedford?

N: Lowell. Actually, at that time it was in Bedford. I was at Middlesex in Bedford. And then I did a couple of, you know, different jobs. After high school I was in banking. And then I left there, and I got a job with Wang, like I said. And then at Wang I was offered a position working for an airline. So, I took a chance. And thirty-seven years later I'm still in the aviation industry.

G: No kidding. What's the firm?

N: I work for a company called Aero Mag.

G: What do they do?

N: We're an aircraft de-icing company. So, we basically, we de-ice airplanes. You know, take the snow and ice off the airplane. But I started working actually for an airline first. I worked for a company called New York Air.

G: New York Air, yah.

N: And then through mergers, we merged with Continental Airlines.

G: Oh yah, of course.

N: And then went through that whole, like twenty something years with Continental. And then they just merged with United Airlines back in 2010. Then I was working for United. And I had a pretty good job with United. I was the trainer.

G: Were you at Logan?

N: Yah, at Logan. My whole career has been at Logan. So, I was doing training at Logan here. And then I was offered a position with this company that I am with now. Aero Mag offered me a General Manager's position. So, I retired from the airline, and two weeks later I was back to work again.

G: And where are they located?

N: At Logan. We're headquartered in Montreal.

G: Okay. Canadian company.

N: Canadian company. It's worldwide. We're in seventeen different airports. So, we're in the U.S., the UK, and Canada.

G: Okay. Getting back, to Back Central, I want to ask you a little bit about some of the clubs there before we talk about soccer.

N: Sure.

G: What's your earliest experience say, with The Portuguese American Civic League, the club on Central Street?

N: Not much. I grew up with the other one.

G: The Blues?

N: The Blues Club.

G: The Portuguese American Center?

N: The Portuguese American Center, yah.

G: Were your parents' members of that club?

N: Yah, my father was actually a member of both clubs, but he hung out more at the Blues Club. And that's where I hung out there more than I did at the Reds. I didn't feel the Reds, back then the Reds were not as popular.

G: Is that right? Really?

N: Yah, as the Blues. The Blues had more of a, more of a foundation I guess, but they both had their strengths and weaknesses. Like I felt more comfortable going to the Blues Club, and that's where I hung out, and that's where I grew up, was there.

G: So, one thing I was wondering as far as the difference between the clubs, was there any difference in the membership in terms of like Madeirans were at the Reds Club, as opposed to the Blues Club?

N: Yah, I think so. A little bit. I believe there were more Madeirans at the Reds Club, and the Blues Club was more like people from Graciosa, Terceira, you know, more of the Central Islands were going there.

G: Right.

N: And I don't think that was by design. I think it's just the way it happened, you know.

G: Exactly right. Growing up Portuguese, did you see any differences culturally, between say, Madeirans and Azoreans?

N: No, not really. I mean, yes, the dialect is obviously different, you know, but I mean that's about it. Because I had friends of mine who were from Madeira, and never had any issues. You know, I never noticed anything different. We were all kind of, we all thought the same, you know, it's just everyone had their own little dialect when they spoke.

G: Right. What about those from mainland Portugal? Did you see any differences there with those folks?

N: No, not really. I mean they were just like, you know, to say there was a cultural difference, they celebrated different things than we did. Like Azoreans Communities are very big into the Holy Ghosts, not so much in the mainland. You know, so I mean they participated here, because it's part of the culture where they were, but they didn't like, to them it wasn't as big a deal as it is in the Azores.

G: Sure. The other thing too, you know, Madeirans didn't celebrate the Holy Ghost to any great extent, actually until later.

N: They actually, here locally, was the Feast of Loreto. Yah, on Labor Day Weekend.

G: So that was more Madeiran sort of thing?

N: Yah.

G: But you did them all, right?

N: Yah, yah, because we're here.

G: So, did most people too.

N: Yah, we're here. So, there's nothing else to do. So, that's what we did, you know.

G: Exactly right. Were there any people at say the Blues Clubs that stand out to you as kind of notable characters, or notable men or women that you recall?

N: Yah, I mean there was a lot of people. I remember, like when I was growing up, some of the presidents that were there. I mean there was a gentleman, I'm sure you heard his name, Eddie Santos.

G: Yes.

N: Eddie Santos, I guess, was a big contributor towards the club being what it, you know, forming the club. You know, he was one of the (--) I don't know if he was a founder?

G: I think he might have been one of the founders.

N: But he was one of the guys who was there. I remember Eddie being around because he used to work for the Post Office. So, I remember him being involved in the community and stuff like that. Eddie, and there was also Joe Cordeiro.

G: Yes, Joe.

N: He was president of the club.

G: Coach.

N: Coach of the teams. Larry Astacio was a guy, another one.

G: I'm sorry. What was his name?

N: Larry Astacio.

G: Okay, Astacio.

N: He was always, I remember him being involved with the club. Yah, so those were the guys. When I was growing up those are the ones I remember. I'm sure there were other people before me, but I don't remember too much. I just remember Eddie, because he used to, Mr. Santos used to hang out at the club. You know, go down there to be with some friends and stuff like that.

G: Just a couple of things about the marching band. I have known, I don't know if you know John Leite, who is a band leader and he was with the (--). His father was one of the, they kind of reformed the Holy Ghost Band.

N: Okay.

G: This was back in the forties. So, it was the Portuguese Colonial Band.

N: Colonial Band, yah. My father played for them.

G: Did he?

N: Yah, my father played for them.

G: What instrument did he play?

N: He played the tuba and the trombone.

G: Okay.

N: Yah, I don't remember my father playing for them, because I was obviously young, but I remember my father making the first initial steps to form a Portuguese Band, because I think the Colonial Band went under.

G: They kind of went defunct, yes.

N: Yah, they went defunct. And I believe my father wanted to really have a Portuguese Band. So, he got a hold of a few other people who he knew, who were musicians back in Portugal, in

the Azores, and they started talking about forming a band here. And so, I remember my father going with, I'm sure you've heard of Manny Correia, and Sally Correia.

G: Yes.

N: I remember going to their house as a kid, because my mother and father, you know, and I'd tag along, because I was the youngest one. So, I had to go with them. And sitting down and meeting with him to talk about forming a band and trying to find a place for rehearsals. And I think the first place they got for rehearsals was the Holy Ghost Park.

G: Yes.

N: That's where they did their rehearsals until something went awry and they didn't want them there anymore. And then they left there and went down to the Reds Club.

G: Yes, was it the Reds Club?

N: It was the Reds Club. They were there for years. And then they moved to the Blues Club. And then that's when they became incorporated with the club. Because at first, they were in the Blues Club, but they were their own separate entity. And then I forget exactly when it happened, but they ended up becoming merged with the club, as part of the club.

G: Well, you know it's interesting, because the Portuguese Colonial Band originally owned the building where the Blues Club is.

N: Yes, exactly. As a matter of fact, because I was President of the Portuguese Club, the Blues Club.

G: Oh, I didn't know that.

N: Yah, I was. I was twenty-two years old. I became president of the club. And the charter that we had on the wall said Colonial Band.

G: Did it? Really? Okay.

N: I became president of the Portuguese Club in 1986, and 1987. Two years in a row I was president.

G: Twenty-two years old.

N: Yah, twenty-two years old I was elected president.

G: That's pretty remarkable.

N: Yah, back then I was pretty crazy. I didn't know what I was doing back then, but I survived it.

G: So, the Colonial Band was actually reformed I think in the forties. And one of the founders of the later edition was Belarmino Leite. And he had a son, John Leite, who's a very, very talented horn player. I mean really talented, and he's a professional musician. And he was active, he's a generation before us. Maybe two before you, but he just turned ninety. He's still

alive. So, you're right. I mean that band that reformed in the forties was active for about twenty years, and then you know.

N: Yah, it kind of fizzled out.

G: Yah, fizzled out.

N: But I believe the charter for, was the Pioneer Club. And it was the Pioneer Club and Colonial Band that kind of merged their charter to form, to keep that building.

G: That's right. So, was your father then, for a while was he actually the head of the group?

N: He wasn't the band leader. He was one of the founders. They hired Mr. Gomes.

G: Luis Gomes.

N: Luis Gomes, yah, who used to be a teacher at the high school. He was the Maestro of the Band. So, my father and him, my father went out, you know, got a hold of him, brought him in.

G: Interesting. Your father did the right thing.

N: Yah, to be the Maestro.

G: He's a wonderful guy.

H: And Mr. Gomes came back. He actually did two different stints of Maestro of the Band. And my father was there till, just before he couldn't play anymore. As a matter of fact, my father, when he couldn't march anymore, he'd march with them and not play. And then when they would go up to Holy Ghost Park to play their concerts there, he would sit down and play with them, because he could sit and do it.

G: And he was always a tuba player, right?

H: Yah, tuba, or the trombone.

G: Trombone, okay.

N: Yah, that's what he did. He kept it up until he was incapable of doing it anymore. Then he just stopped.

G: What year did your parents die by the way?

N: My parents died in 2010.

G: Both of them in 2010?

N: Yah, both of them. My mother died in August, and my father died in December.

G: Okay, and they were in their eighties, is that right?

N: My father was ninety-two, and my mother was like eighty-eight.

G: Wow. You've got good genes. Let me talk to you a little bit about soccer now. When did you first get into soccer?

N: Well, I remember as a kid my brothers played soccer. One of my older brothers was the goalkeeper for the Blues, the Blue Lusitanos. And, you know, I always grew up idolizing them playing. I tried to play. I don't have the talent. I tried to play for a little while. Didn't have the talent that they did. So, I couldn't play. But I got involved with the club with soccer. In 1984 I was actually asked to become one of the directors of the club. Not the club, of the soccer team.

G: Of the soccer team.

N: It involved basically running the soccer team. You know, we had to go off, find coaches, find players, apply for permits for fields to play, and things like that. So, you know, you were basically running the day-to-day operation of the club, of the team. And I did that in 1984. And that's when, a couple of years before that, the Blues had gone into LASA. I think they had been in LASA already, maybe two or three years before that. So, in 1984, I became the manager of the Lusitanos, which was a Second Division Team. And we went out, and we got a coach, and we got players.

G: So, what year? That was eighty-six?

N: Eighty-four.

G: Eighty-four you became the manager?

N: Yah, the manager of the soccer team.

G: Of the soccer, of Lusitanos.

N: Of the Lusitanos, yah.

G: Yes, okay.

N: So, we went out. We got a bunch of young kids, you know, all kids like my age.

G: So, did you recruit essentially?

N: Yah, we recruited. We recruited players. We recruited a coach. The coach was a gentleman out of Lawrence. His name was Manuel Vascos.

G: Vascos.

N: Yah, from Lawrence. As a matter of fact, he's Joe Cordeiro's brother-in-law.

G: Oh.

N: So, he came to Lowell. He coached. And fortunately, things went well that year and we won the Second Division. So, by winning the Second Division you automatically advance to First Division.

G: Bumped up to first.

N: Bumped up to first. At that point I didn't stay on.

G: Okay.

N: Because the president of the club at that time, the one who asked me to be the manager was a gentleman called Umberto, I can't think of his last name.

G: It will come to you.

N: Correira. Umberto Correira.

G: Correira?

N: Yah, Umberto Correira.

G: Was he a Lowell guy?

N: Well, he passed away.

G: But was he from Lowell?

N: Yah, he was from Lowell. He's from my Island, from Graciosa too, and he lived here in Lowell.

G: Okay.

N: So, he was the president of the club. And he asked me to be the manager. I said, "sure!" I had nothing else to do. So, I took it. You know, he kept a strict eye on me all the way through.

G: Well, you were really quite young.

N: Yah, exactly. So, there were a lot of guys thought I was going to be like (--). Because it was mostly older people who were always like in their thirties and forties, would take over. And here I was, I think I was just barely nineteen. And I was like, yah, I can do this. And I did it. And, you know, like I said, we were fortunate, and we won the Second Division. I might have actually been in my twenties at the end. But anyway, we won. We won the Second Division. We got bumped up to first. At that point, you know, Umberto said, you know, we need someone with more experience because it's First Division. No problem.

G: I see, okay.

N: You know, I backed away, and they got somebody else. And they played. And he finished his term as president, and that was his second term. So, the By Laws only said you could run for two years in a row. So, this is eighty-five, he's done. So, eighty-six starts a new year. We're having the general election at the club. And nobody wanted to run for president. Big going on back and forth.

G: Do you know why?

N: Just nobody wanted to do it.

G: Nobody wanted to take the time to do it.

N: Exactly. So, there was one gentleman who stood up and he said he would do it, but he said, if I do it I'm going to disband the soccer team, because he was against it. He was an old timer. I think he was president of the club years before. Then he left. I think his name was John Silva. And old, older gentleman. And he was like, if I do it, I will disband soccer. Of course, you know, back then that's what kept the community together. So, the guys were all up in arms. No, no, no. And my friends all start saying, take it! Take it! Take it! I'm like, I'm not taking it. Come on, take it, take it. So, I ended up, one nominates me. Second one, yah, I second it, and blah, blah, blah. Before you know it.

G: Your president.

N: I'm president of the club. You know, I came home. My parents, God bless them. You know, they were like, what did you do? I'm like, I don't even know what I did. My brother, my oldest brother came home the next morning, walked into my mother's house. He looked at me and he goes, "You're a jerk."

G: What year was that?

N: This was in 1980, well the end of eighty-five. So, I took over in eighty-six.

G: Eighty-six.

N: Yah, so it was like December of eighty-five when they had the elections. You know, and then you started in January of eighty-six.

G: And that was a two-year term?

N: No, it was a one-year term. It was only a one-year term. So, I just remember looking, and I'm like yah. I don't even know why I did what I did, you know.

G: So, what was your role as president? What sort of things (--)

N: We ran the club day to day. We took care of the bar section, you know. So, we made sure we had the bar. We took care of the members.

G: Did you also have to do fundraising?

N: Yes and no. We kind of had a little, for entertainment purposes only, those poker machines, like they had at the club.

G: Oh, so that actually bank rolled.

N: That bank rolled a lot. Bank rolled quite a bit. Yah, so they had those there.

G: Was that on the QT?

N: Yah, that was on the QT. So, that's what kept the place going, you know, because the club cannot sustain itself. We never really did fundraising because we had that revenue source right there. So that's what kept the place going. But that was in eighty-six I became president. Like I said, then you know, we went ahead, and we would take care of the community too. Like we did, we'd rent the hall out to anyone who wanted it. We'd open up the hall for events, like

carnival season. We'd have the hall opened up for free for people to come in. We'd have food there for them to eat. We did an outing for the members. Actually, we took them to an amusement park. You know, took all the members for free, completely free. Took them out to the amusement park. So, we did stuff like that with the members and their families too.

G: So as President of the Blues Club, then you really weren't that involved with soccer at that point, right?

N: Oh yah, I was, very much.

G: You still were.

N: Because the reason why I took over was because we didn't want to lose the soccer team. So, back in that year, which was eighty-six, we made a conscious decision as the Board of Directors, again, a bunch of young kids, all in their early twenties. You know, I kind of picked, I had my older brother to be the manager of the club.

G: I was going to ask you who the manager was.

N: So, the manager of the club was my older brother. He ran the bar side, the club side. The manager of the soccer team was my other brother. So, I was like, you guys, I'm not going in this alone. So, he managed the soccer team. I was the president of the organization. You know, each one had their roles.

G: Which brother was managing with you?

N: So, my brother Roy managed the soccer team. My brother Tony managed the club. And I had my brother-in-law was with me, part of the Board of Directors, and a few other friends that we had. We hung out together. We were like a bunch of young people, and we went ahead. And we made a conscious decision to try to win the whole shebang. You know, we're going to try to be the tops, the best in the league this year. And we did. Fortunately, enough, we won.

G: Yah, incredible.

N: Yah, we won. That was the first year the Lusitanos won the Division, and then they one with the [ASAVA]. A tournament within the season called the Cup Tournament. So, we won the Cup, and we won the league championship.

G: Did you guys expect to win, or was it a surprise to a lot of you guys?

N: We didn't expect to win. We expected to be competitive. But we had a team that was just incredible.

G: Who were the remarkable players that you remember on that team?

N: Yah, we had this English kid from England. His name was Steven Clark. He was unbelievable, the goal score forward. We had a mid-fielder. His name was Leo Figueiredo. He actually lives in Wilmington. Leo was a super talented player.

G: Mid-fielder?

N: Mid-fielder. Another mid-fielder, Lucio Santos from Taunton. He was up here with us.

G: From Taunton?

N: Yah, he was up here with us.

G: I was going to ask you how you recruited players?

N: Oh we, because we knew like you know, because the league being in LASA, you know the Lusitanos were already playing in LASA. So you know, when we go to these games, you obviously see who was (--) And then when it was our turn to, we went and recruited them. Hey, you want to come play for us. You want to come play for us, you know. The players were given a stipend.

G: I was going to ask you, were they given a stipend?

N: Yah, they were given a stipend.

G: How much? Do you remember roughly?

N: It depends. Some players, I mean for that time it's going to sound like a lot of money, but I had a couple of players making \$300.00 a week.

G: Okay. Whoa, a week?

N: A week.

G: That's very good.

N: A week, every game, but that included them coming to practice twice a week. Two practices, twice a week, and then game time.

G: And you guys played on Saturdays or Sundays?

N: Saturdays and Sundays.

G: Both days.

N: Yah, both days, Saturday and Sundays.

G: Okay. And how many games in a season did you guys play?

N: It was roughly like twenty something games.

G: Twenty something?

N: Yah, close to thirty games, because they divided the season in half. There was like twelve or fourteen teams. And they do play the first half of the season, and the second half of the season. It was a home and away series. So, you know, first half you're playing away. Next game, against the same team, we play at home.

G: Gotcha.

N: It ended up being like, the season would go from like April to November.

G: April to November was the season.

N: And they'd be a break in the summer. They'd have a little bit of a break.

G: I see.

N: But it basically started in April and went all the way till November, early November.

G: Okay. Did any of the players that you know go into the professional soccer?

N: A couple of guys that we had on the Blues team, they actually went into the North MLS. Francis Okaroh went to the MLS. I think he played for the Revolution.

G: Oh, did he?

N: Leo Figueiredo was a professional player.

G: Oh, he was.

N: He was. He played professional at different places, but at that time soccer wasn't getting as big as it is now. So, it was hard to form. So, Leo played a couple of different places, but indoor. Professional was indoor that he played. Yah, so a few of them did go up and become (--).

G: So, you know, as far as you know, paying a stipend, I mean for the club, I mean that's \$300.00 a week. I don't know how many players, but that's not easy money. So, how did you guys raise money to pay their (--)

N: Entertainment purposes only.

G: Anyway, that's a commitment.

N: Yah, it was a commitment. And we took care of the players. I mean we got sponsors for uniforms.

G: Were they local sponsors?

N: Yah. We had, my first year there we had First Bank. You know First Bank, Frank Carvalho?

G: Yes.

N: Was the president.

G: Frank Carvalho.

N: Frank was the manager of the bank. So, I approached Frank. Frank donated the uniforms to the Blues. We also used to have, when I was in, back in eighty-four, the Second Division, the Martin's Fish Market?

G: Yes!

N: They sponsored our uniforms. So, we always had, we had sponsors all the time. You know, we'd get a sponsor to sponsor the uniforms, sweatsuits, things like that. And then our commitment to the team was not only paying the players, but we would feed them. We

bought food. We had food. After every practice we had food. We had a big meal after the games, with transportation, because we would get the buses to go down to, you know, Fall River, New Bedford, Rhode Island, to play the games.

G: How far away did you guys travel to play?

N: Rhode Island was the furthest we went to.

G: Farthest.

N: We used to go to East Providence, Warwick, in that area.

G: What about Western Mass? Did you play up there?

N: Ludlow came in later into LASA. When they came in, I was already gone.

G: Oh, okay.

N: But we never went that far west. I think they went later on.

G: So, it was basically Eastern Mass and Rhode Island.

N: It was Eastern Mass, Southeastern Mass, yah.

G: Okay. I was going to ask you about the Reds Club. Do they continue fielding the soccer team?

N: They did. The Reds were competitive too. I think the Lusitanos won four years in a row, and then the Reds one a year or two after.

G: Did they?

N: Yah.

G: They did.

N: They also, they won some First Division Championships. The Reds were very competitive. As a matter of fact, the second year that I was president, which was eighty-seven, we won the championship against the Reds, because we were tied neck and neck the whole season.

G: No kidding.

N: And on the last day of the season, we beat the Reds, and that's how we won the championship.

G: Was that played at (--)

N: Cawley Stadium.

G: Cawley Stadium.

N: Yah, played at Cawley Stadium.

G: Was there a good crowd there?

N: Oh yah, we used to get some good crowds. Very good crowds.

G: Was that your home field, Cawley?

N: No, we used to play at the Vocational. Greater Lowell Voke.

G: Okay.

N: We tried to get the Cawley Stadium, but it was always the politics with the city.

G: Was it bad?

N: It was bad. They wouldn't give it to us. They'd say you're ripping up the field. You know, so we would go play after Pop Warner was playing there, and we'd say, look at the field? It's not us, you know. But there was always, it was always a struggle to get them to give us that field to play.

G: I see.

N: So, we just leased the Greater Lowell Votech for our practices, and we played there. So, we did a lot of stuff up there.

G: But you did play a few at Cawley Stadium.

N: Yah we did. Occasionally we would get Cawley Stadium. I remember at one point I went down to the Parks and Recreation Department. And I was down there, and I was just like, listen, you know, we're representing Lowell. You know, even though we're Portuguese, but we're representing Lowell. They don't talk about it's the Portuguese Team for Lowell. They say it's the Lowell Team.

G: Exactly.

N: You know, so why can't we play there? They finally broke down and they gave us a series of dates that we could play there, but it took a lot of banging on that door and lobbying. It really took a lot. It took a lot because it was difficult to get them to give us the stadium.

G: And you were saying soccer wasn't quite as popular at that point too.

N: No, not then. As a matter of fact, it was the only way to get a lot of the old timers, you know, the guys would like to see soccer, they'd follow the teams, because they'd go there and watch. It was entertainment on a Saturday or a Sunday. As the leagues locally started IL and with the addition of cable, when they started transmitting the games from Portugal on Cable TV, guys would stay home to watch their teams. So, it's like, why go here and watch this when I can stay home and watch the pros. And that's when eventually it started to die down.

G: Yah, I was going to ask. So, what happened to this excellent soccer in Lowell?

N: I think it just wore out its course. LASA went defunct.

G: When did LASA go defunct? Do you know roughly?

N: Probably early nineties?

G: Early nineties?

N: Early to mid-nineties.

G: I would have thought later.

N: Early to mid, ah, yah, no, about mid to late nineties. Sorry, not the early nineties. Mid to late nineties.

G: Okay.

N: They just couldn't compete. And part of the reason, believe it or not, was the teams from the north. The teams from Lowell, Lawrence, Cambridge, who were in our league, because we were dominating. And what would happen was the teams from the south, from Southeastern Massachusetts, didn't want to come up here to compete, because they're like, we're going to lose. So why bother going up there.

G: Were you guys beating those teams down there pretty bad?

N: Oh yah. I'm not talking like, you know, major wipeout, but we were dominate them. We would just win, win, win, win, you know, If we lost a game it was like, ooh! It was a big scandal when we'd lose the game. But we were, the teams in the northern area dominated. As a matter of fact, that was the thing that the north did away with LASA. You know because they broke up LASA.

G: And then what happened to the soccer team at the Blues and the Reds Club? Did they just (--)

N: They just stopped doing them. I mean they still do like, they started doing after that like the over thirties, the over forties, you know, the recreational.

G: Almost like pickup.

N: Yah, recreational. They'd get into leagues. They'd get into over thirty leagues, over forty leagues. And a bunch of guys get together, you know, in the morning. They'd meet at the club. Go the field, play a game.

G: Have a few beers.

N: Yah, after the games, and stuff like that. That's what it became.

G: Okay.

N: That's what it ended up becoming then. Nothing organized like it was back in the eighties. The eighties were very organized.

G: It was like semi-pro.

N: Exactly.

G: I'll finish this up about the soccer. Do you remember any Brazilian players that played for you?

N: Yup, there was a lot of Brazilian players that played in Lowell. Some played for us. Under my time there Leo Figueiredo was from Brazil. It was actually funny. Everyone thought he was Brazilian, but he was born in the Azores.

G: Oh, okay.

N: But raised in Brazil. But he spoke with a Brazilian dialect. But I won't call him Brazilian now. There was another one, Manny Barboza.

G: Yes.

N: Very good soccer player, but he passed away a few years ago. Manny went through highs and lows with his life. He was a very good player. Then he got involved with alcohol. And then, you know, he basically, he fell off the wagon. He got back on the wagon. As a matter of fact, my second year as president we brought him back into the team, because he was like I want to try again. We brought him back in, and he was a very good player for us.

G: Interesting.

N: He actually continued playing for the Lusitanos for a couple of years after that. But he went through some highs and lows of his life, but a very, very talented player.

G: The Barboza name is a long-time Portuguese name in Lowell. Does his family go back you know?

N: I don't know where his family is from, but I know that he has a son and his wife I think up in the New Hampshire area.

G: Oh, is that right?

N: Yah, I think they're in the New Hampshire area.

G: Okay.

N: But there was also Decio Brito. Brito, he was Coach of the Lusitanos for a long time. He was Brazilian.

G: How do you spell his first name?

N: D E C I O.

G: D E C I O, Decio.

N: The father actually played for the Brazilian National Team back in Brazil. And I believe, if I'm not mistaken, I think he played with Pele.

G: Did he really?

N: He actually played with Pele a couple of games. He moved here, and he got very integrated into the Portuguese Community. And he was the Coach of the Lusitanos for a long time. His son grew up playing. Decio, Jr., right, he played for the Lusitanos for lots of years.

G: Did he really?

N: As a matter of fact, he's known as Joe Brito. They call him Joe, but his real name is Decio. He played for the Lusitanos for lots and lots of year.

G: This is great stuff. I got to tell you there should be something written about this, certainly the Lusitanos.

N: Oh, believe me there should be.

G: You should write it.

N: Probably, yah. But I remember, I think it was eighty-four, it was eighty-four. In eighty-four, when we won the Second Division Championship, at our banquet we celebrated the Lusitanos' fifteen-year anniversary.

G: Did you?

N: Yah, they were fifteen years old at that time.

G: Thanks to you, you gave me a bunch of scanned photographs from the Blues, the Lusitanos. I want to get back to you at some point, because we might want to actually include those in the Portuguese Archive. But I wonder, I think you said you probably had more photographs.

N: I'd have to look. To be honest with you I don't have that many anymore. Through course of time maybe I'd dig up (--)

G: Do you think there could be some at the Blues Club possibly?

N: There probably is. I'm sure there is. We used to have the teams, all the teams' pictures up there. I don't know what they did with them. They archived them. I don't know whether they threw them away, but there was a lot. We had a lot of different, all the trophies that used to be up there. I don't even know what they did with all those trophies.

G: Okay. For the Portuguese Club at Lawrence, we worked with them. We have a lot of the material now online, including some of the soccer photos, which are quite good. So, it would be great to have (--)

N: I think I've got at home, I have a picture of the eighty-six. Actually, I have a picture of the eighty-four, the eighty-six, and the eighty-seven team, the teams that I was involved with. I've got the pictures of those three teams. I can try to find them, scan them, and send them over to you.

G: Yah, okay. I appreciate that. Great.

N: Yah, definitely.

G: Norberto, let me finish. I've got a small grant to do a study of the Back Central Neighborhood, looking at it over time, but including the current condition and what people perceive of the neighborhood. You left the neighborhood in the late eighties you said, right?

N: But my parents lived there until they died.

G: Yes.

N: So, I would go there all the time.

G: Oh, okay.

N: So, up until, you know, the mid 2000s. You know, 2010, eleven. My parents died in 2010. My sister lived there, like till 2012 or thirteen. So, I was always still going there quite often.

G: So, let me ask you. This is more of an abstract social question, but what do you see as kind of the major changes that have occurred in like the last twenty years in the Back Central Neighborhood?

N: The kids that I grew up with there, we all moved out. We moved out.

G: Why move out?

N: I think we just, we wanted something different, you know. I'll be honest with you, like I grew up in Lowell, Back Central, and I had friends from Tewksbury who went to Saint Peter's with me. And we would come to their house in the summertime, and it was like, why can't I have this? Because you had land. You had greens. You had grass. You know, it wasn't a triple decker.

G: Yah, the houses are really close together.

N: Exactly. But of the flip side of that coin, there's nothing wrong growing up the way we did, because we had fun. We made things happen with what we had.

G: There's something about an urban lifestyle which is very invigorating, yah.

N: Exactly. We would play kickball in the street, and the cars were coming, get out of the way. You know, then go back into the street and play kickball.

G: Right, exactly.

N: So, but I think my generation moved out, you know, in search of something different, whatever that might have been for each individual, you know. They moved out. And I just think as the older generation, like my parents' generation, started passing away, the kids didn't want to take care of the property. We're guilty of it. We kept my parents' house for like ten years after they passed away.

G: Oh, did you really?

N: Yah, until we finally said, you know what?

G: Yah, you didn't want to be a landlord.

N: No, it's deteriorating, because we can't spend the time to fix it up. The people that are there, you know, they don't take care of it the way we did when we were there. So, let's just get rid of it. It's time to move on.

G: So, as far as the people that have come in, in more recent years, from your perspective, what are their backgrounds? I mean who are the major people in the neighborhood today?

N: Today? There's a lot of Southeast Asians there. I think there's a lot of Brazilians there now too. I just think that, you know, the difference that I see is that there was pride in the Portuguese Community in their property, and I don't see that as much now anymore. And I think that's what led to the, I don't want to say downfall, but the decline I guess is a better word. The decline in the neighborhood, it would be that the pride that was there before is not there now.

G: I wonder too, if there are more renters in the neighborhood, say now, than there was say, thirty years ago?

N: I would say so. I would definitely say so, because most of the people who would buy those houses, fix them up and live there, but I definitely think that there are probably more renters now than anything else.

G: Sure, okay. Let me ask you, this is sort of a personal question that would relate to your church affiliation. Do you still attend Saint Anthony's Church?

N: No, I sometimes go to Saint Anthony's, not as often as I should. But I was never really registered at Saint Anthony's. Because when I moved to Tewksbury, I would go to Saint Anthony's. At that time, I was registered, but I think I've fallen off the books. It's been a while. Sometimes I go to Saint Williams here, because it's local, it's closer, but I mean I still consider Saint Anthony's as my church, believe it or not. Even though I don't go there, I still consider that's my church.

G: But you are still going there for special events.

N: Yah, if there's a feast there, or something, I'll go there.

G: You know, I've interviewed Joe Mendonca. We talked a little bit about the Holy Ghost Society. And he talked about the changes too, and the fact, this is what he said, most of the members now are life members, which means they don't have to pay dues. So, it's struggling financially. But he said too, that he felt similarly, the younger generation was not filling the ranks.

N: Yah, I remember as a kid, I know you've heard of her name, Mrs. Gladys Picanso, Leno Picanso, Joe Camara, his wife.

G: Patricia.

N: Patricia Camara, all these people. When I was a child, these were the mainstays of the community. Sally Correia and Manny Correia. I can't think of his name now. I can see his picture. Joe Mendonca. Mr. Mendonca.

G: Oh yes, of course.

N: He's still alive. He's from Madeira. Him and his wife, they were involved with the Holy Ghost Park. These were all those people who, they were the mainstay of the community. And as, you know, they stopped getting involved, not many younger people got involved.

G: Yah, their kids, that younger generation, didn't get involved.

N: Now there is, at the Holy Ghost, I think there is younger people in there now. I don't even know who the president is. I think it's a woman if I'm not mistaken.

G: Yes, it's Elizabeth Candida.

N: Elizabeth, [unclear 55:25]. So, I mean kudos to her because she wants to jump in there and take over. It's a lot of responsibility. It's a lot of work. No good deed goes unpunished, right? Because you hear everything, that you're in it for personal reasons and stuff like that. But I don't believe that because I know what it's like. Because I was involved too, you know, with the clubs. Kudos to them for getting involved. Personally speaking, for myself, I'm at a point in my life, I don't want to do that. I think that's great that they're still doing it because she's younger than I am. So, it's good. That's good that they're doing that.

G: I did notice that there are a few. Mello, his sister. John and his sister Stephanie are active. Let me conclude with one final question. What musical instrument did you learn?

N: Zero. Yah, it's ironic, you know. None of my brothers, none of us played a musical instrument. My father was, loved music, you know, and he played, but we never got the knack for it. My father was, you know, even back in the Azores and I hear the stories, music was his life. He would just play. Go to the band, go to the band, go to the band. The band was his life. A lot of arguments at home sometimes with my mother about that stuff, but that was his (--) I remember my dad getting up at 4:00 in the morning, driving to Ludlow, to go pick up two players and bring them to Sunday practice, and then driving them back. All on his dime.

G: Incredible. He was very devoted.

N: He was, but he never had the patience to teach us. He taught the grandkids.

G: Oh, did he?

N: Yah, he taught his grandchildren how to play. For us it was always, he didn't have the time, because he was wrapped up into, you know, do, do, do, not teach.

G: Exactly. Well Norberto, thank you so much. I really appreciate it very much.

N: Well, thank you. It was a pleasure meeting you.

Interview ends.