

**UNIVERSITY OF LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK PROJECT**

INFORMANT: Mary Alves

CONDUCTED BY: Maria Holden

DATE: February 23, 1981

A: = Alves

H: = Hobden

H: What's your name?

A: Mary Alves.

H: And what year were you born?

A: 1908.

H: Ah, do you know why um, why your parents left Portugal?

A: Well, they wanted to come to better themselves.

H: And um, do you still have relatives in Portugal that you keep in contact with?

A: I have some, but I don't keep in contact and they're distant cousins.

H: Have you visited Portugal?

A: I visited in 1974.

H: Did you find many changes?

A: I didn't find no changes at all because I don't remember it. [laugh] But ah, but ah.

H: That's right too, you were only 12 when you left.

A: But ah, that's right. It was beautiful though.

H: Do you have special family traditions at Christmas time and Easter?

A: Well, the only Christmas tradition we had is La-Pina, which is ah, what ya call it now? Infant Jesus. The way we used to do it in Portugal. And with all the fruit and things around it. That's what we do here at home.

H: I remember that. How many brothers and sisters in your family?

A: There's ah, you mean the whole family that were born all together or just what's living now?

H: Well, the whole family.

A: Oh, there was ten of us. There was four boys, and six girls.

H: Ah, what was your place in the family? Are you the oldest?

A: I'm the oldest of the girls.

H: Oldest of the girls. Can you describe a typical day for your mother when all the children were living at home?

A: Oh, yes.

H: Things you remember doing?

A: Cooking, washing, setting the table twice a day. Big dinners at noontime when they came from work at noon. And at night again another big supper. That was the way it was then.

H: How would you describe your mother?

A: My mother was a big beautiful woman. Always full of happiness. Always ready to do something to make somebody else happy. She never complained.

H: Sounds like a wonderful person.

A: She was.

H: Ah, what do you consider to be the most important things your mother taught you?

A: Obedience, respect.

H: Ah, did your mother ever work outside the home?

A: Yes, she did. Ah, she'd go to work say um, when the children were bigger. And then she'd come, the funny part of it, she'd get pregnant after six-months working.

H: [laugh]

A: Is that interesting? [laugh]

H: Ah, what kind of work did she do?

A: She was a weaver.

H: She was a weaver. And what mill did she work in?

A: She worked in the Appleton Mill. Also the Massachusetts Mills. They used to make ah, blankets? Yeah, I think it was blankets they make at the Massachusetts Mills.

H: And that would have been, do you remember the year?

A: Oh! Ah, just at the turn of the First World War.

H: Around 19, 14?

A: 14, yeah. Right.

H: How did her working affect her, and the children, and your father?

A: Well, I was already about nine years old, or ten years old at the time. So the little ones stayed at the neighbor's house. And then my mother used to do all the work in the morning before she left. And she'd come. At night she'd do the work again.

H: What did your father think about her working?

A: Well, it was good to help out, but, when any of us were ill he'd make sure she'd stay out of work. In fact there was quite an incident one time. She was working at the Appleton Mill. And one of us was sick. I don't remember which one. And he told her, "you go in and tell the boss that you can't work." So my mother went in. She told the boss she couldn't work cause one of her children were sick. He says, "you can't go out. You have to work." So my father around ten o'clock came in the room. He said, "what are you doing here?" She said, "they won't let me out." He said, "you get out." So she did go out. And my father lost his job. [laugh]

H: Your father lost his job. And your mother didn't lose her,

A: She did too.

H: She did too. Did you have special household chores as a child?

A: Yes I did. I took care of washing the dishes. And changing the beds. Was my part of work, after school, or before going to school.

H: Everybody had a little job.

A: Everybody had something to do.

H: Ah, did the boys in the family have similar duties, or were they,

A: The boys chopped wood. Brought the coal up from the basement. And that was their job.

H: Ah, what kind of work did your father do?

A: My father was also a weaver. He was in weaving until right after the um, weaving. Then he was a what you call it a mechanic. And then after the World War I. He went into his own profession trade. Which he did in Portugal. Which they called it a tin smith. Which is sheet metal workers now. I believe they call it. He went into that.

H: And when your father worked in the mills. Do you remember which mills he worked in?

A: He worked in the Appleton Mill and also in the Hamilton.

H: Hamilton?

A: Hamilton. He worked in those, those, I don't know if he worked in Massachusetts or not. That I don't remember.

H: Can you describe a typical day for your father? When you were growing up? What was his usual schedule?

A: Well they'd go to work at six o'clock in the morning. And then they'd come home for lunch at twelve o'clock. And then he'd come in the evening, and he'd go to the club and play cards with the men.

H: Which club was it? The Portuguese Club?

A: That was the Portuguese Club on Charles Street. I don't remember the name of the club now.

H: Um, How would you describe your father?

A: My father was a stern man, but he loved all of us. And he brought us up very strict. We were brought up very strict.

H: What do you consider to be the most important things your father taught you?

A: Again love, respect, and obedience.

H: What schools did you go ?

A: I went to the Charles Street School. Ah, nearest to Gorham Street. And then from there I went to the Coburn School on Lawrence Street.

H: How many years did you attend school?

A: I left in the ninth grade.

H: Was it to go to work?

A: To go to work at fourteen.

H: Ah, whose decision was it to leave school?

A: Mine.

H: It was your decision. You wanted to help out. Ah, did your parents want you to follow in a certain occupation?

A: No, my father said that no children of his would ever work in the cotton mills. So I went to work in the hosiery mill. [laugh]

H: [laugh] As a teenager do you remember some of your ambitions? What you wanted to do in your life?

A: No. I really didn't have much ambition for anything but to work and fall in love and get married some day.

H: Which you did.

A: Which I did.

H: Were you ever involved in other kinds of schools such as ah, such as classes [unclear] house, Y.M.C.A.

A: No.

H: Different programs.

A: No I wasn't but, when I started work at fourteen. We had to go once a week to the Continuation School to have um, English, and study a occupation. Which I took sewing. But it would be sewing and also I had English. Until I was sixteen years old. Then we didn't have to go any more.

H: Ah, did your family attend church?

A: Yes!

H: Which church did you,

A: Saint Anthony's in Lowell.

H: Ah, can you remember about the churches physical appearance?

A: Oh my God! It's changed quite a bit since then, [laugh]

H: They added, it used to be just a cellar,

A: The basement, yeah. And then they added the top to it. The last twenty years I think.

H: Was the minister or pastor local or from the outside?

A: Father Perry, he was local. I think.

H: What roles did men play in the church, and women? At that time?

A: Well they had the Holy Rosary Sodality They had the Daughters of Mary. And they had the Men's Holy Name. My father belonged to the Holy Name. My mother belonged to the Holy Rosary. And then we belonged to the Daughters of Mary.

H: Ah, what were you taught to believe as a child?

A: What to believe? In what?

H: Um,

A: We were taught to believe that we should go to Sunday School. To be First Communion, Confirmation, and go to Mass. That was our belief. And what was the other one now?

H: How does that compare to your religious belief today?

A: I find the same.

H: Do you still belong and worship in the home church?

A: I do.

H: Ah, what kinds of behavior were frowned upon? Or expected at that time?

A: Oh, not to go out with the boys. [laugh] That was very frowned upon. Not to go out you know dilly-dallying with the boys. That's my father rules, and my mothers rules.

H: And the rules also probably of the,

A: Of the church too.

H: What are the most important things you remember about your religious life?

A: My First Communion.

H: First Communion. Were you expected to earn money as a child?

A: No.

H: What was your first real job? And how old were you?

A: I worked at the Ipswich Mills running a knitting machine. And I was fourteen when I started.

H: How did you get the job?

A: A friend of ours got it for me, Marion Silva.

H: At that time. That's the way you got a job.

A: At that time. I got it through her. She worked at the Ipswich.

H: How old were you? You already told me you were fourteen. What did the work involve?

A: It involved putting um, transfer work they called it. We'd put a cuff in the machine, and then it would make the foot of the stocking. That would involve, and you'd run five, six machines. The same time.

H: And how long did it take like to make one of those cuffs?

A: It didn't take long at all. Didn't take long at all. No, it didn't take long at all.

H: Was it, did you enjoy working?

A: Yes, I enjoyed it cause it was sort of a freedom. [laugh]

H: What was your salary at that time? Do you recall?

A: It was seven dollars and something. I can't remember what, what exactly it was. But I didn't stay too long there. Cause I think about a year and a half, then my father moved up to East

Chelmsford. He didn't want me to travel back and forth. So I didn't start working till I was sixteen again.

H: You probably would of had to walk if you did.

A: No, they had the trolleys.

H: They had the trolleys and you would have been able to get the trolley to work on time.

A: To work on time, right.

H: Now what did you do with the money that you did earn?

A: I gave it to my parents and they gave me allowance. Twenty-five cents a week.

H: [laugh] And what were you able to buy with that twenty-five cents at that time?

A: I'd go to the movies.

H: Go to the movies and,

A: That's all because the parents supply us with everything else.

H: So to get into the movies you'd probably pay five-cents.

A: Five-cents.

H: And then you had money left over for some candy, and pop corn, and you still had money left over perhaps.

A: Right.

H: Very good. Can't do that today.

A: No you can't.

H: Was there a daily routine in your job? Can you describe a typical working day?

A: Yes, we worked eight hours. Ah, twelve o'clock we went home for lunch until five o'clock in the afternoon. But on Wednesdays we had till twelve o'clock to go to school at the Continuation School. And that's where we took up English. And I took up sewing.

H: And at that time the mills were working. They were producing socks.

A: Yeah, stockings. Was woman's, was men's, was woman's stockings too.

H: Do you know how many people were employed?

A: No, I don't.

H: How many shifts were operating at that time?

A: I believe it was just one shift.

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H: The day shift.

A: The day shift only.

H: And you were on that shift.

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A: Right.

H: Did you have to punch a time clock? What happened if you were late?

A: No, we didn't punch no time clock.

H: Was there anything said to you if you were late?

A: Never happened. I never was late.

H: Ah, did you ever take off from work without the supervisors permission?

A: Goodness gracious, no! [laugh]

H: Did you know, did many people ever,

A: Some of them did. Some did.

H: What would happen to them if,

A: Well, they had a good excuse. They were sick or they felt so sick and they was around and they'd go home.

H: So if there were a good excuse they wouldn't fire you.

A: Right. Specially the young women.

H: How closely were you supervised in your work?

A: Not too bad. I don't remember it being bad at all. No at that particular time it wasn't bad at all.

H: Were there certain rules at the work place? Like no smoking, and talking, and the way you dressed.

A: We couldn't talk too much. We had to concentrate on what we were doing. And our dress code was not bad at all. Just what we wore on the street. We didn't even change cause it was clean work.

H: And ah, were there any breaks allowed?

A: No, not at that particular time.

H: The men didn't have one either.

A: No, they didn't.

H: Did you have a production quota?

A: Yes, we did. And um, we used to make the production quota. And they'd say we did meet it and that's all there was too it.

H: And if you didn't meet the quota what would happen?

A: Well, I really don't know. Cause I,

H: Every one always did.

A: I never heard of anyone not meeting their quota.

H: How quickly did you have to work? Was it fast?

A: It was fast. Was fast. We worked fast.

H: Did you learn short cuts in performing this work?

A: Yes, we did. In fact we learned short cuts where we could fill up three transfers at one time. Instead of just filling one at a time. Where we could just sort of rest in between.

H: Was the work dangerous?

A: No.

H: You don't recall any accidents on the job.

A: No, I didn't.

H: Can you describe your work environment?

A: Was clean. Very clean. It was all ladies. We only had mechanics that's all. Come and fix machines. It was all ladies working. There was no men working on the machines at all, just ladies.

H: And the working conditions, do you recall any odors or was it very hot or very cold or very noisy?

A: It was very hot. And it was noisy. Especially in the summer time it was very noisy. Because it was quite hot. It had to be hot on account of the yarn. You had to keep the yarn sort of damp so it wouldn't break. That's all there was to that.

H: Did you work alone or with others?

A: No we worked, every five or six machines they'd be a girl working with others. All in a row.

H: Ah, were there many black people? Or was it mostly whites?

A: I don't remember any black people there at the time.

H: Or other ethnic groups?

A: Oh, there was Greek. There was Italians. There were Portuguese. There was Germans. There were Irish. They were all mixed up.

H: And everybody got along well.

A: Right, we did.

H: Did you have contact with other people who worked in other sections of the mill?

A: No. We went straight home and that was it.

H: Was there any, do you remember any conflicts or jealousy between different groups of people? Skilled verses unskilled?

A: No I don't remember that because they were all young. So I don't think there was that problem at all. We were all about the same age.

H: Were some workers treated with more respect than others that you recall?

A: No, I don't recall that at all.

H: Everybody was treated about the same. Was there any competition amongst the workers?

A: Well we used to try to do it with a friend. I say, "well, I made so many dozen today than you did. Tomorrow I'll make more than you did." And that, but all in a friendly um,

H: Friendly manner.

A: Manner.

H: Did management promote competition?

A: Yes, they did. But they didn't give you any thing. They just, so that you could um, If you mean anything in monetary value, no. They didn't give you anything.

H: Would they promise like a better job or something like that?

A: No.

H: How were promotions arranged?

A: I don't really know. Cause like I said I was just a, fourteen years old going on sixteen. And than like I, I only worked for a year and something there and then I left. So I didn't have that much experience there.

H: Were you ever promoted to a higher position?

A: Nope. Not there cause I left. That's how come I left.

H: Was there any communication problems with people that didn't speak English and practiced both their own language.

A: Yes there was some, but, we got along by sign language and our hands talk an awful lot. And can do a lot. An awful lot. We'd get along by the sign language.

H: What did your mother and father do for social activities.

A: Well they'd visit. On Saturdays and Sundays they'd visit some other people. They'd come up the house five, six couples. The men would play the guitars the women would sing and serve something to eat. And that's how they passed their,

H: What did they serve to eat?

A: Well they'd make sandwiches and they'd make what we'd call Bloogs a cake. Portuguese cake and we'd have, Christmas time especially we'd have what we'd call Carne-d-Vinho-e-alhos. Which is marinated pork. And that was a very delicious thing. That was a Christmas tradition. To make Carne-d Vinho-e-alhos which is marinated pork

H: Did they have the La Pinha?

A: We had the La Pinha. And ah, I can't describe it. It was a very happy time. At that particular time when they had,

H: And there was the Baby Jesus,

A: The Baby Jesus and they'd make it in a ladder effect. Like with the Baby at the top. And then they had the fruit. And they had the nuts. They had all around the Baby Jesus. And then um, they'd pray every night. Not the rosary just praying. Not the rosary. and um, and sing songs of the Baby Jesus. Oh, my goodness! I can't remember the songs.

H: Do you remember the songs..

A: I wouldn't even sing it, cause I don't dare do that. But um, they'd sing all Christmas songs. And then we'd play too the Three Kings. They'd go from house to house. They'd go to the first house on the street. They'd get in and they'd sing what they call the [unclear]. And they'd eat something something there, and drink something there. And then those people that were in that house go altogether again with the other bunch they'd go to the next house. And they'd do a whole street at a time. First thing you know your the last house would have everybody in. And then they'd sing the Hize again and eat and drink. And each everybody went back to their home. That was one of the Christmas, up till the sixth of January.

H: Were there any New Year Celebrations?

A: Oh, yes! There was. Yes it was very, very good. In fact I remember my mother dressing up for New Years. She'd be cooking all day long, and then in the evening she'd, one evening she got out of the house and, and then somebody knock at the door and there was this big man at the door. And he said he wanted to talk to Daniel Fratis and, with overalls on and a big hat on, It was my mother. And we didn't recognize her and she started to sing songs to my father. My father couldn't make head or tails out of it. But my mother knew. [laugh]

H: And this was the New Year?

A: The New Years.

H: This was a traditional ah,

A: Yeah, they used to do those things like that,yeah.

H: They did that in Portugal?

A: Yeah, they did that in Portugal too,yeah.

H: Do you remember any songs that they sang at other times when the friends would visit and they'd play the guitar?

A: Oooo! Yes! They sang the [in Portuguese] and they'd sing the ah, ah how you call that? They'd sing the [unclear] and the Chalombous. Which is like a fast, like a little, they'd be singing, and dancing, and jumping up and down. They'd have a ball. And we'd try to follow suit as youngsters. That's about all I can remember now.

H: Ah, when your parents came from Portugal. This was Madeira Island?

A: Madeira Island, yes.

H: Were they able to travel together, or,

A: No, they didn't travel together. Father came in April. And mother came later in October. Father reached Boston in April the first. And he had quite an experience getting there cause first sight of Boston was all gray. It looked terrible to him. He felt so bad. He thought America was more shiny and more clear than it was. And then when he took the train to come to Lowell. The first experience he had getting off the train, some young boys there with snow on the ground. They made big snow balls and he had a straw hat. And they just knocked his straw hat out. [laugh] And he didn't think that was very nice. That was the end of the straw hat for him. But after that he liked the United States very much.

H: And your mother was able to come,

A: Mother came in October after my sister was born. And ah, when we left Madeira we stopped at Saint Michael, and from Saint Michael you had to take a boat to the United States. But, um the boats were not um, you had to wait for your time. We were there five weeks in Saint Michael. With my sister not even three weeks old. And I think I was about fifteen months or so. And ah, there she was with these two children. If it wasn't for Mr. John Ferreira he used to the ah, He used to have the Brady House on Central Street. So he sort of looked out for my mother. He also had a family, and I don't know what would have happened if it wasn't for him.

H: And where did your mother stay while she was in the Azors waiting for the boat?

A: Well,

H: Did she wait at a hotel?

A: They had us at a hotel. The agency had to supply them with a place to stay. That's how they stay at the hotel there.

H: And does your mother know any one?

A: No. All she knew was Mr. Ferriera and his wife. And that's a good thing she had them there. To sort of look after her, and both of us the two children.

H: And did your mother then have a pleasant voyage?

A: Goodness, gracious! No! I think the steward told her when they got, if for my mother I'd be dead. My sister would be dead. [laugh] Cause my mother just couldn't get out of bed. Just took care of my sister with her. And you know the cabins were one on top of the other. And I'd be sitting on the floor eating. And the steward would bring me the food so I could eat. And then I just would eat, anyone told me I could eat,

H: Seasick?

A: Seasick, right.

H: Your mother was seasick also.

A: My mother was seasick. The only one wasn't seasick was Julia the baby. But she was with my mother all the time. And then they had to take my mother and put her outside in the air once in a while. So she could get some fresh air.

H: And was she sick through out the voyage or,

A: She was sick right through out the voyage.

H: Do you know how many days it took?

A: I think it took two weeks. To get here. Two weeks to get here. But she landed in Boston. My father was waiting for her, and that was the beginning of her life for her. Then they came to Lowell. We came to a boarding house.

H: Do you remember where?

A: No, I don't remember where. But my aunt was here. They came to live with my aunt. And we stayed there, my mother said it was two weeks. My father found a little tenement. And then my aunt and my mother were to live together and my uncle. That's how we always, in fact we lived that way until they died.

H: And did your father have a job?

A: Yeah, he got a job in a weaving room.

H: When he landed.

S: When he landed he had a job.

H: And he had a job when the family arrived,

A: Right. He had a job then. And my uncle worked in the Picking Room. And um, that was in the um, they made a cotton to go in round circles. I don't know what it is. Any how, And my father went to working from the weaving room to machinist afterwards. Then it was during the

war, World War One that he left to work in sheet metal work. When we started better ourselves. He went to his own trade to work there. And my mother worked in the cotton mills. [unclear] but it seems to me every time she worked she ah, after six months she'd come home she'd be pregnant. So her time of work was very short. [laugh]

H: Do you remember if your parents spoke about the conditions of the mills?

A: Yes, they did. They complained about them an awful lot. They really went through things that were not too easy for them.

H: Do you remember what they were?

A: Well, I'd like to shut it off now.

H: Why was it that your father and mother didn't travel together?

A: Well the reason was that,

H: When they left Portugal?

A: Portugal, When we left ah, I came down with a bad case of eczema underneath my chin. And the people scared my father and mother saying that we'd never pass the immigration over here in Boston cause of the disease. I'd never pass it. So my father came first. And then we came in October. And by that time the eczema was all cleaned.

H: And I think you told me the name of the ship,

A: The name of the ship was the Rominic. Don't ask me how to spell it. The Rominic, [laugh]

H: Ah, your father left being a weaver at one of the cotton mills. You said either the Hamilton, or the Appleton. Your not sure which. To better himself as a sheet metal worker? He had learned his trade in Portugal, and he had an opportunity to get a job here in this country.

A: Right, because he knew already a little English. Where he could talk to the employees and, and do, follow instructions. That was his trade in Portugal. That's what he learned as a young boy, and he went through, So he went to work for Newton and Moulton. And they used to have a shop on Fletcher Street. And he enjoyed his work very much there. And also they used to go on trips to Buffalo New York, and too North Adams. He'd be gone for a week or more sometimes until he'd come back. But he enjoyed his work. It was just what he always wanted to do. And there he didn't have no problems at all. Even though his English was kind of a little broken but, he knew his work. And then from then on when Newton-Multon went out of business he worked for Kelly's it's still going on, on Fletcher Street. He worked a different company.

H: Kelly's Sheet Metal Shop?

A: Sheet Metal Shop, yes. Also when the um, the work slowed up and there was not much work, so they started work at, it used to be the back of Lowell Shop. And they were making ice boxes. So my father went to work there. Cause that's part of sheet metal work too. And ah, they were there for about a year, a year and a half. Then again Newton-Multon called them back so he went back to work for Newton-Multon. That's where he stayed most of the time. Working sheet metal work,

H: Working conditions were good.

A: Very good,

H: And they paid,

A: They paid his transportation when he went to Buffalo, North Adams and all that. They paid his transportation there.

H: And his hotel accommodations.

A: Right, that was all paid for.

H: Do you have memories of what Lowell was like as a child?

A: Yes I have. Cause we used to have a lot of fun at the South Common. Where they had the recreation and we used to have, the month of May we used to have a May Pole and dancing and different activities. Which I enjoyed very much. Also on Charles Street too, in the evening they'd have these instructors go there and we'd play ball. And ah, it was very good for the children around in the area.

H: Do you recall who were the people who sponsored,

A: They were just sponsored by the city. By the city.

H: Do you remember the names?

A: No, I don't. I don't. I don't remember the names. That particular time I don't remember the names.

H: How would you describe Lowell in your youth, in working years, and today?

A: Er, much better today. I can't ex, I enjoyed my youth though because um, I used to um, like I didn't do much dancing at the time. But I used,

H: Was there a place to go to dance?

A: There was the Commodore, but I never went there cause it was one of the rules of the house. We couldn't go to the Commodore and dance. But, it was suppose to be not a nice place to go

and dance at that particular time. So we weren't allowed to go out and dance at all. The only time

H: Were the boys allowed to go?

A: No, the boys not the kind that went dancing either. The boys weren't that much of a, but the only dance that we went to was from the church dances. That we enjoyed very much.

H: Where were they held?

A: They were held at the um, ah, oh, let's see. They used to have dances at the Odd Fellows Hall.

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A: In the back there used to be a procession, and then we'd all go there to eat. At that particular time. And those were the days when you had a lot of fun. But that's all that I can remember. As far as I can remember. That's all.

H: Ah, was there a bad part of town? Where you were afraid to go? And can you describe what it looked like?

A: Well the bad part of town we were not allowed to go to at night. Especially at Moody Street. They didn't want us to go there at night because, in my growing years there was a lot of Speakeasies. And I remember working at the Hub Hosiery. And we'd go by there at five o'clock in the morning start working at six. And we'd be all five of us together. Mary Barrows, Mary Mc Vey, Mary, and ah, my sister Oalla and I. And we'd all go together cause we didn't go there alone. Cause there was always somebody in corners trying to talk to you. We were not allowed to do that.

H: Boys,

A: Boys and men [laugh]. yeah. At that particular time there was that there.

H: Ah, can you define your neighborhood? And where you lived and ah,

A: We lived on a, the neighbor hood I remember quite well. It was back Central Street. At the corner of Tyler Street and Central Street. The tenement over the Chinese Laundry. Which is now going to Zayer's Market, Zayer's Stores. And we lived there quite a while. And then we moved to number twenty Tyler Street. Which was a great big house. My aunt bought that house. And we lived there quite a while. It was very nice. It was a good house and, it was very nice too there. And then after that we moved to East Chelmsford. I liked it. We lived on Riverneck Road for the longest time there. But then I was sixteen already and I was taking the um, the ah, let me see I was taking the trolleys to go to work at the hub hosiery. And I used to

walk almost a half an hour to get to Golden Cove Road. To take a trolley, to get down to the center of Lowell, to go to work. That was a lot of riding at that particular time.

H: That was sort of a rural area.

A: At that time it was very rural.

H: How many years did you live there?

A: We lived three years up there. We lived four years up there. Then we moved back to forty Chapel Street. That's where I got married from, forty Chapel Street. And next door my neighbors were the Martins.

H: What did you do for fun and activities at that time when you were growing up?

A: At that time we had a lot of activities from the church in the sodalities and the societies. We used to have picnics. And we used to go in trucks. And we used to put these benches on the trucks and the fam, you know we'd all climb into it. And it would take us to the grounds. One of the grounds we used to go a lot to was the Willowdale. We used to go there a lot. And there were others around in Woban. And around in the area we used to go. But ah, most of the time we went to Willowdale. It was a lot of fun there. They had swings, they had swimming. We did have fun. And then another time we used to go to the beaches. That too, we used to go on trucks one time. Then we took the buses after that. And that used to be a lot of fun. We used to take, and we'd, they'd hire two or three buses and all the families would pay so much they'd go, we'd go early in the morning and come home at night. And that's the only way we used to get to the beach. We had a lot of fun though, it really was fun! The Silvas used to go with us. The Gonsalves family, and the children, it wasn't the children, was kept right, everybody went. Even the babes in arms.

H: Ah, you've mentioned that your first holy communion was an important occasion as a child. Can you describe the ceremony connected with it?

A: Well, the ceremony is almost like it is today. We used to um, go all together you know. In a procession to the church. It was really a very solemn affair. And we were so happy with our first communion. My sister and I made it the same day. And to our family it was really something big? We had a little party at home afterwards and all that. It was really great. But the ceremony is just like they do it today. The same way.

H: How were you dressed?

A: All in white. With the vale, and the long white stockings up to, er, dress up, below my knees.

H: Was the dress long to the floor?

A: No, no. Just below my knees.

H: And how were the boy's dressed?

A: The boy's used to be dressed all in white. With the ribbon, the band, a white ribbon band on the side.

H: Um, getting back to your father in the mills. Can you describe, ah, did your father ever describe any of the conditions in the mills?

A: Well, father was not much of a complainer about hard work. He, he worked hard. Sometimes he'd say something. One of the men did this or one of the men did that. But was nothing to ah, he didn't complain that much, no. He didn't complain that much.

H: And did your mother describe any ah,

A: Well, mother was in and,

H: complaints in the mill?

A: Yeah, mother was in and out of the mills because she'd have children. And she'd come home and have the children. Then she wouldn't go in for about a year or two later to work. And she'd never work that long. But the last time she worked was at the Massachusetts Mills. And um, she loved to go to work. Because they had at noon hour, at lunch hour. They had an hour for lunch. And then they'd, school teachers would come in and teach them English. They had classes. Mother loved that. She's not the only one. Most everybody took it. And every day for half an hour they took these lessons. And I think that was wonderful. That's what put my mother on to going to night school.

H: And this is how she learned to read and,

A: She learned to read and write in English. Right.

H: How has Lowell's physical appearance changed during your lifetime?

A: Oh, it's changed,

H: The buildings and streets and,

A: It's changed a lot.

H: Can you describe how it's changed?

A: Well, the district I used to live on Chapel Street one time was really very nice. And it was nice homes. And people took care of it. Then all at once it started decaying and it was really awful. But thank goodness it has been brought up to date again. And it's really nice again. But that's how it was there. And Back Central Street has changed a lot. Take where Zayer's Store is. That used to be Tyler Street. Used to be nice homes in there. There was Polish people liven there, Irish, there was Armenian. We had differences yes, but nothing at all what you compare to

some of the differences there having now-a-days. It was nothing like that. It was just because we didn't understand the same language. But we got along beautifully.

H: And what did your house look like?

A: My house looked like, [laugh] it's very bare. [laugh] When we were little, right. Well, the house on Central Street. You climb up the stairs. My father always wanted to live in a house where you only had one door for our family. He wouldn't move into a house unless he had just the one door for us. And we'd climb up the stairs, and they'd be a hall way. We're into the kitchen. It was a great big kitchen. And the wide oak floors, they used to be scrubbed every Saturday, be nice and clean. And to the right of the house was a living room. But we didn't have as a living room. My aunt lived with us. And she had that as her bedroom. Then we had a small little room that was like a little um, well like a little living room. Just a table and chairs, and that was it. The kitchen too was big table and kitchen chairs. A big black stove which had to be kept shining. And then the bathroom was like a closet, about five by five. Like that. And that's where the ah, bathroom was. And then out of that room there was another bedroom. Which was my mothers bedroom. But we slept up stairs. We had to go through this narrow hall way. Climb up the stairs. There was four bedrooms up stairs. And to go to bed at night, we'd undress by the stove downstairs. And then we'd put a blanket over us and run like mad upstairs. [laugh]

H: Cause it was so cold.

A: Cause it was so cold. Cause there was no heat what so ever upstairs. Mother used to put these um, hot bottles of um, oh, how you call them now? Ho water, er, brown, brown bottles. And she used to fill it with, clay bottles. She used to fill it with hot water. And she'd bring it upstairs before we went to bed. And she'd put one in each bed. For us to keep, when we got there the bed was nice and warm. And about a dozen blankets. You couldn't even move underneath the bed. That's how it was.

H: These were clay bottles?

A: It was clay bottles that they came from Portugal. They brought whiskey in them. They were sort of long. And they had, and they were clay. And that held the water good and hot. See, they bought these bottles from Europe, from Portugal. And mother had two or three of them. And she'd put them from one bed till we warmed all up.

H: And what was in the bottles when they came?

A: Whiskey.

H: Whiskey?

A: Whiskey. [laugh]

H: And so they were put to good use after that.

A: Right. Cause they were made out of clay. They were a brown bottle. Clay.

H: Very good. And what, how were the houses painted? Like was it a certain color? All of them or was it different shades?

A: No, they were papered. There was wallpaper and were painted. And um, the land,

H: Outside of the house too?

A: The out side, well we lived on, the one I'm talking about was a brick building. It was a brick building. And there was cock-roaches. But ah, it's a good thing that we had neighbors who were Portuguese right down the line. There was the um, Tescheras, there was the Silvas, there was the Fermange. And we all got together, my mother did. And they used to put this kind of powder on so they could get rid of them. But,

H: On the cockroaches?

A: On the cockroaches. And that's how we kept the place clean.

H: Can you describe the stores where you shopped, and your parents shopped?

A: Well, we shopped mostly in the Portuguese um, stores. Where you know, knowing the language well. Mother used to go there and shop. There used to be the [unclear] right opposite where we lived on Central Street. And he had the store there for a long time. We did our shopping there for years and years. Then he sold it to Mr. Souza afterwards. He took over the store then. The Souza's Market.

H: And where was this located?

A: Right opposite Central Street. On Central Street where there is a drug store there now. Right now there is a drug store there now. And also there was another Portuguese store we called it [in Portuguese] which it means Cooperate Market. And that used to be run by Portuguese people too. We used to do our groceries there. In fact that's where Danny Silva started to work as a young man. He worked there. Then for our clothing

H: Is he still in the food business?

A: Oh, yes. He has the Pioneer Market. He has the Pioneer Market. And then for clothing, we used to go to the store of Manuel Souza. He used to have a store on Gorham Street. And also he had it on um, I think Middlesex Street too. He had a store there. But then as we began to learn the language more, we used to, venture into the English speaking stores and buy our things.

H: Ah, who owned the house that you lived in? Was it a Portuguese person?

A: No, um, um my goodness. I think it belonged to the Floods. I think it belonged to, I don't remember exactly. But I think all those houses they used to belong to the Floods. There used to be a,

H: Were they well known people in Lowell?

A: Yes. They were well known people in Lowell. They were real-estate people. Ya, the Floods. As far back as I can remember, that's what I can remember. The name Flood.

H: They owned a lot of property.

A: Right.

H: Ah, did the people fix up their yards?

A: Yes. Yes they did. They did. Yes, they did, ya. They had nice yards fixed up.

H: Did they have gardens? Grow things?

A: Flowers. Not in food. My father on, when my father, this is years afterwards. When he lived on Back Central Street he had a garden in the back. Ah, during the World War 11, he built, he had a garden where he raised [unclear] and tomatoes, and lettuce, and potatoes, and even raised chickens. At that particular time you could do that. That was during the World War 11. They were told that the people could raise chickens in the city. And um, in fact when my brother was in the service he'd come home, bring a pal or two. My mother would go outside and kill a fresh chicken and make fried chicken for the boys.

H: And was this mostly for the use of the family?

A: Use of the family, yes.

H: Ah, do you recall where the children played at that time?

A: Ah, in my time we played in our own yards. And ah, like I said, like I think I said before we used to, they used to have these recreation on Charles Street as a youngster. And we used to go there and play. After six o'clock they used to have all these kind of different games. We used to go and play.

H: Supervised.

A: Supervised, right. And um, and the South Common too they used to go. But we were not allowed. My mother and father wouldn't allow us to leave the area. We had to stay home in our own back yards.

H: Did you have any pets? Or,

A: No. Cats. We used to have cats. But we didn't have dogs until way, way into my teens. That we had, ya, See I was the oldest of the family so there was not much, then the youngest start coming in and they liked pets. So as I was older too, I used to say, "come on get them a pet." Ya know. So that's how they got the pets. They had dogs.

H: Do you remember how you learned to speak English?

A: Well,

H: Did your speak er, Portuguese?

A: They didn't speak Eng, oh, they were perfect they were all Portuguese at home. We didn't speak, I didn't learn to speak English until I went to school I think. Because Portuguese was spoken at home.

H: Do you remember anything about how you, you know got along with the other children, that might have spoken just English? Or another language?

A: No, I didn't, most of us were the same ethnic group. And um, I can find a hard time to learn, to pick up the English language at all. I didn't find it hard at all. Cause,

H: Were there other children there that couldn't speak,

A: Yes, there was other child, yes there was other peo, children that couldn't understand,

H: Other nationalities.

A: Er, nationalities yes.

H: How were you taught the English? Do you remember?

A: Um, When I went to, I went to school was the first grade. And that was down in New Bedford. Cause we moved to New Bedford when things were a little hard here in Lowell. There were no jobs. My father moved to New Bedford. There my first school was in New Bedford. But ah, we didn't go every day to school. Because my mother, at that time didn't think, if we didn't want to go to school we didn't go. That was it, ya know. So I didn't get much class till I came back to Lowell. Then I started going to Charles Street School. On the side of Gorham Street. Used to be a Charles Street School there. And then that's when I started go. But already then I already had a spattering of English. Enough to pick up,

H: Wasn't it mandatory at that time to go to school?

A: Yes, yes it was. Yes it was,

H: Therefore when you were kept at home what did they do about it?

A: They used to call mother and um, and tell that we didn't go to school. Mother would say she was sick or something like that. And of course not knowing how to read or write, she couldn't very well give us notes to bring to school. But ah, they were not very strict. At that particular time as they are now. As when I got married and my children were at that, they were not too strict with the families then.

H: Did they feel that education was important? At that time, or,

A: My parents did. They did. But they thought that I was just too young to go. To school, my brother and I was too young to go to school. At that time.

H: How old were you? Do you remember?

A: Um, I must have been about six. When I started going to school steady, when I started to go to school steady, I started at six years old, yes.

H: Well did you start at an earlier age to go to school?

A: Was about five when I started.

H: Kindergarten.

A: Not kindergarten. It was first grade down New Bedford. I didn't get the schooling until I came to really going, until I came to Lowell. Back to Lowell. We were two years in New Bedford.

H: How did you and your family observe the Lenten Season?

A: We observe it, we observe it, my mother was strict on that. With us and my father. We used to go to the stations of cross every Friday um, during Lent. And we used to observe fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays. No fish what so ever these two days. And we had to give up something which we liked very much. We had to give that up. And um, and then on um, Holy Thursday we'd visit the churches. By walking we didn't have cars then. We were just youngsters. We didn't have no cars. We'd go either to five churches, seven churches, or nine churches. We made seven most of the time. And that was too,

H: An odd number?

A: An odd number. It had to be an odd number. I think that's superstitious but that's what they had. I had to be an odd number. And we used to go to Saint Peters, Sacred Heart, and come down. We used to go to the Polish Church on High Street. Then go to Immaculate Conception. Then come all the way down to the ah, Saint Jean not Saint Jean oh, Saint Jean Baptiste, and then to the Shrine in back of the five, Saint Joseph. We used to go. As long as we made five or seven. And then back to Saint Anthony's, and then back home. And that's what we used to do on Holy Thursday. Now nobody does that now-a-days.

H: I guess it's a little different. And you also said that you went to the Franco-American. Um, where the orphanage is. And you would say the stations.

A: Ya. That was a treat to go there. And ah, we'd walk too. On a Sunday afternoon. That's the only time we could get with the family. We'd walk up there. And we'd say the stations of the cross. It was beautiful then. It was really nice. You can go up to the top of the stairs to the cross. The crucifixion. We used to walk up there. I know my mother made a promise one time. She walked on her knees up there.

H: Up to the cross? How many steps?

A: Oh gee, I don't remember. There's quite a lot of steps there. [laugh]

H: And is it still like that today?

A: It's still there, yes. But I don't think it's, there as new as they used to be.

H: The stations of the cross are still there?

A: And the crucifix is still up, is way up. It's beautiful.

LONG PAUSE ON TAPE

A: After I was working at the Hub Hosiery for sixteen years. I left and went to work in the shoe shop. And um, I worked there till 1978. In shoe shops. Grace Shoe was the last place I worked. Now in 19, what year was that, that they came in, the Cubans? The Cubans start coming into Lowell.

H: The first ones.

A: The first ones. And ah,

H: Was that 1940?

A: 1940. I think it was about 1940 they came in. And ah, one day the Personal Manager came upstairs and he asked me if I spoke Portuguese I said, "yes, I speak Portuguese, and read a little." He said, "come downstairs, I need you downstairs." As we were going down he told me I was going to speak to Spanish people. I told him I didn't speak Spanish I spoke Portuguese. That's all right he said, You'll understand. So when I got down to the office there was about six ladies there. And I felt so sorry for them because they were nice looking ladies and they were all excited too. So I told them. I said, in Portuguese, and half Spanish. I said, "No habbla est Spaniol, habbla Portuguese." They were very glad to hear that. But then um, I start speaking to them. And I asking their names and so forth and so on but I think the most um, international language is the hand language. It really can do wonders. And from then on I learned quite a bit

of Spanish. By asking their names, who they were and so forth. And these people really suffered a lot coming over and um, after that I used to go down there practically every day. I'd be down the office. Or upstairs where I worked translating for them.

H: What types of jobs would they take?

A: They took stitching, they took cementing, they took pressing. They did everything. And these people, the first people that came from across, from Cuba. They were not just ordinary people. They were people that were educated people. The people were lawyers and people who, girls who worked in the ah, in the courts typing and all that. And they came and they worked. Really hard and they tried. And it was a pleasure to see these people get on so good.

H: And they left their own country with better jobs,

A: With better jobs, to

H: To come to America.

A: To work in the shoe shop. Which to them was a big thing, ya know, for them to do. In fact one of the ladies was pregnant. And we used to laugh at her because, she'd be working and then she'd decide to sit down for a little while and do a little knitting. [laugh] Till the boss came over. He told me, he says, "will you tell her that during work we don't knit." So I had to go over and tell her in Spanish that, er Portuguese and English and hand language that that couldn't be done. She said all right. And she started to work. She understood that they couldn't stop whenever they want to and do their own thing. And then there was another case where I felt awfully bad for the lady, She had a baby that was six months old. And this baby was born in a cave. While they were waiting for transportation to come over. So you see that these people suffered awful lot waiting.

H: She was born in a cave, in Cuba? Or,

A: The baby in Cuba was born while they were waiting to come over here. **THE BABY WAS BORN IN A CAVE.** So that she didn't go to the hospital or anything. And that baby was here in the United States with her. I thought that they really went through a lot these people. They were very brave. In coming to a New World not knowing the language. And all that, I thought it was wonderful of them. And I enjoyed translating for them. And I had, I don't know why because maybe I came from an ethnic group too that I felt akin to them.

H: You mentioned the N.R.A.

A: Oh, in 19 um, 192, I can't remember the date now. We had the N.R.A. come in. Where they raised the wages. From practically nothing, which in a shoe shop and in dress making places where they call them sweat shops. They had to pay them twelve dollars, almost thirteen dollars. They raised the rate up to that a week. They had to pay that much.

H: And what were they getting prior to that?

A: Oh, I was making seven, eight, and nine dollars a week. If I worked a full week. Cause we didn't have much work then too. Work was very slow. But as long as we were in the mill or in the shop they had to pay us. Or else send us home.

H: And the N.R.A. was a government,

A: Was a government sponsored thing, we had at the time.

H: To protect the workers.

A: Protect the workers.