



**LOWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT II**

INFORMANT: MARY ALICE LANS

INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI

DATE: 10/04/2003

M=MARY ALICE

A=ALI

Tape I, side A

A: Interviewing Mary Alice Lans. And it's October 4th, 2003. And again, thanks for coming down to the Mogan Center Mary Alice, to share your memories of the city of Lowell. So, first a little bit of background information. Where and when were you born?

M: I was born in Lowell at St. John's Hospital. It's now Saints Memorial. (A: Okay) January 16, 1930.

A: Oh all right, very good. And where did you go to school at?

M: I went to, first there was a little school around the corner, which is now a playground. And it was called, I guess it was called Miss Hill's, [or Miss Hale's] School.

A: Miss Hill's [or Miss Hale's] School?

M: Umhm, and we learned how to count with pencil. We used to take pencils. She was an old-timer. And so she used to say, "One pencil and one pencil is two," and so on and so forth. And then from there I went to the, I'm not sure of the name of the school, but it was on London Street. (A: Okay) It was on the other side of the tracks. We lived on this side of the tracks, the tracks, the bridge too, and that's where I went for the third grade. The forth grade I went to the Lincoln School. (A: Okay) Fourth, fifth and sixth I went to the Lincoln School. The seventh grade I went to the Butler. And seventh, eighth and ninth, and then tenth grade I went to Lowell High School. (A: Okay) And I graduated from Lowell High in 1947.

A: Okay. Great. And what neighborhood did you grow up in?

M: I grew up in the Ayer City neighborhood.

A: Okay. And could you describe that neighborhood for us? What was it like?

M: Well it was, I only knew a lot about what it was like, because when I got out of high school there were no jobs. So I packed my bags and moved to Cambridge. (A: Did you?) Yes, because I had an aunt that lived there. Her name was Grace Falcon. (A: Okay) And she was teaching school there. So I stayed with her. And then after awhile, afterwards I got married in 1950, yah, and then okay, that was in January. And then I got divorced in 1957. I think that was it if I can remember. (A: Okay) So then I finally, my mother's health was going down. She had glaucoma, and she had just come out of the hospital. So I moved up here, moved back in 1981. (A: Okay) And I'm still here.

A: All right.

M: And I have three boys. The oldest one is Roy, Roy Lans. The second one is Brian Lans, and the youngest one is Sean Lans. (A: Okay) Well Roy is not around. I don't know where Roy is. He had, he's a schitzo. (A: Umhm) So he disappeared, and only God knows where he is now. So Brian lives in Lowell, over there where, before you go into East Chelmsford, on Gorham Street.

A: Okay.

M: I forget the name of the condos. And then Sean lives out in Southbridge, umhm. (A: Okay) So that's about it as far as the boys go. (A: Yah) But my mom, we went to the church on Blossom Street. It used to be, which is now, I think, an Hispanic Church. (A: Okay) It was called Emanuel Baptist.

A: Emanuel Baptist?

M: Emanuel Baptist. And then they finally moved from there because there wasn't enough place for cars to park. So they had moved out to Chelmsford.

A: They did?

M: Yes.

A: To where? Is it still there?

M: Yes it's still there, but I don't attend there. (A: Yah) And I guess it's called Emanuel Baptist. (A: Okay) I'm not sure, because I don't attend there. (A: Yah) But, and so from there (--) So I go to the Salvation Army. During the week I eat my meals there. They serve meals. You can have your breakfast there if you get up early enough, because the breakfast is from 8:30-10:00. (A: Wow) Lunch is at 11:30 usually until 12:00. And then I leave there and come home.

A: Now your house where you grew up is where you're still living today?

M: That's true.

A: On Main Street, right?

M: Right.

A: And you described Ayer City, the railroad goes through Ayer City.

M: Railroad tracks, yes, umhm.

A: Is there a differentiation between one neighborhood on one side and the other part of the neighborhood on the other?

M: I really don't know.

A: Okay, but it was all mainly working families that lived in Ayer City, right?

M: That's right, umhm. Right, umhm.

A: Not too many poor people.

M: Well I don't know.

A: Not too many rich people.

M: No, I don't, wealthy, no, because I think they live in the Highlands. (A: Sure) Up in ah, over in, well some of the streets that I don't remember.

A: Yah.

M: But that's where I think a lot of them live, up in the Highlands. (A: Yah) Residential area. And then a lot I think live out in Belvidere where Ken lives. (A: Sure) Umhm.

A: So tell us about your parents, where did they come from?

M: My father came from Barbados. (A: Okay) And he and my mother divorced. And the only time (--) My brother, okay my brother went to Africa, because he married a woman from Africa. And they went to Zaire, which used to be called the Belgium Congo. And they live out in South Hamilton now, and they have three children, two boys and a girl. And it's nice out in South Hamilton. I was invited out there for Christmas last year. I had a very nice time. Umhm. Now he spent a lot of time in, he spent 43 years as a missionary in the Belgium Congo, (A: Okay) which is called Gomer now. (A: Yah) And so he's retired, and that's where they live up in South Hamilton, umhm.

A: And he, when he was in the Congo did he have any problems with warfare or anything during the time he was there?

M: I don't think so. He could talk more about that than I. (A: Yah) Yah, umhm.

A: Now your father came to Lowell from Barbados?

M: My father didn't come to Lowell. My father came to Boston and my mother was in Boston going to nursing school, and that's where they met from what I understand.

A: Okay.

M: Okay. And then my father was like a longshoreman, and he used to leave, he used to leave my mother with no money. And so my brother was (--) I had like malnutrition, when my mother decided to come to Lowell, and she was pregnant with me at that time.

A: Really.

M: Right. Umhm. So my father didn't support us. No, he didn't support us at all.

A: So you never really knew him?

M: No, we thought my, you know, boys always want to know who their father is and see him, and my brother kept writing to my father's brother, (A: Yah) his uncle. And finally my uncle wrote Deighton and told Deighton that he had found his father down in Lincoln, Lincoln, Mass., at some kind of a picnic area. And so we got to meet my father. So my brother said to me, "Come on, let's go sis, let's go see our father." And I said, "What do I want to see him for? He never, he never did anything for me." And so my brother said, "Oh, don't be like that. Now let's go see him." So we went to see him, and he was living in Boston. And that's about all I know about him. Well finally I know he, when he passed away I had to bury him, you know, I had to do all the leg work because my brother wasn't here at the time. He was in Zaire. (A: Yah) And so that's about it.

A: What, what year did your father die, roughly?

M: Hmm, I think my father died in '57. (A: Okay) Umhm.

A: So now what, how did your mother decide to come to Lowell then as kind of a single mom of sorts?

M: Because she left my father because my father threatened to kill her from what I understand.

A: Yah.

M: And so she, when she came she was carrying my brother, and she was expecting me. And that must have been in December, because I was born in January. (A: Okay) And that, that (--) So I (--) When my mother, after my mother had me from St. John's, we came and moved with my grandmother.

A: Okay, so your grandmother was here in Lowell?

M: Yes, my grandmother was here in Lowell. My grandmother came actually from Pennsylvania.

A: Okay. And what was her full name, like her maiden name?

M: I think her maiden name was Mary Alice Jones.

A: Jones, okay. And what part of Pennsylvania did she come from?

M: From what I understand there's no name. It was so long ago that they claim that the name of the town in Pennsylvania doesn't exist anymore.

A: Oh really? Yah? (M: Right) Wow.

M: And my grandmother, my grandmother's mother passed away when she was young. (A: Okay) So she had to quit school, I think it was third grade, something like that, to help take care of her, I think she had two sisters. And so you know, my grandmother didn't have that much education. (A: Sure) But she was like a designer in the house. She could design. She could do beautiful things in the house.

A: Really.

M: Yah, right. Umhm. And ah (--)

A: And do you know what brought your grandmother here to the city?

M: Okay. My grandmother was married. Her first husband passed away. (A: Yah) His name was Sphinx. (A: Okay) And that's why I think he came to Lowell and married a Falcon.

A: Okay. (M: Umhm) So her first husband was Sphinx, but then he died?

M: Yes, right, umhm.

A: Okay, and then she married a Falcon?

M: Yah, she married a Falcon here in Lowell. (A: Okay) And I think they were twins with my other uncle who was, we called Uncle Thebeau. He lived in Billerica. (A: Oh

okay) And he used to come up in an old Model T car. And he lived to be elderly, real elderly. I think he was in his 90s.

A: Really? (M: Umhm) And you called him what? Uncle what?

M: Thedeau, T H E, Thedeau.

A: Okay.

M: Umhm, and he used to drive an old Model T until they really told him (--) He used to put wood on it, and he'd load it up so he could hardly see out of it. So they finally told him, you can't do that anymore, because you're going to (--) [Laughing] But he was stubborn. And so that way finally I think he went into a nursing home, (A: I see) or I'm not sure whether they found him dead in the house.

A: Okay.

M: That's, that's been years, eons that I remember. Umhm.

A: So what do you know about the Falcon Family? (M: Okay) They were here in Lowell for a long time?

M: I don't know too much about the Falcon Family, other than my grandmother was a Falcon. And then my grandmother had my mother and my uncle, who was Alfred John E. Sphinx. And my mother was Joyce L. Sphinx. (A: Okay) Oh (--)

A: So your mother descended from your grandmother's first marriage?

M: That's right. John Alfred did too. My mother and John Alfred were brother and sister. Then my grandmother married again and she had Ida, whom I understand, they said years ago she had TB. (A: Oh) So my grandmother didn't want to send her to an institution. So they had like a little house built on top of the roof so they could keep her out there.

A: Where was this?

M: On 85 Main Street.

A: At, at Main Street.

M: On my grand (--) It was on top of the roof, (A: Wow) because my grandmother didn't want to send her away. I don't think, I don't think in those years you could send them to an institution. I'm not sure. It was a long, years ago. So ah (--)

A: And so your aunt stayed up on the roof there?

M: In that little, in that little hot house. And that was way before my time, so I don't quite remember (A: Sure) a lot of it. But anyway she passed away. And so there's a twelve-grade lot at the Westlawn Cemetery, and there's a space in there for me.

A: Are you going to be the last one going in?

M: I guess so. I'll be the last one. When I go in it will be, it will be full. But that's how they, I guess that's what they believed in doing when they got married. They bought a lot. (A: Yah) Umhm. So my mother's buried there. John Alfred's buried there. Frederick Falcon is buried there.

A: And Frederick Falcon was your grandmother's husband?

M: Yes, umhm. And I guess they're all buried there. There's eleven of them there.

A: Now did your grandmother have any other children with (M: Falcon) Falcon besides Ida?

M: Yes, she had, yes, she had Grace. (A: Okay) She passed away when she was nineteen. And she had Lloyd. (A: Okay) And he passed away, he passed away before Grace, and he's buried there, and then Grace, and then my mother. And I guess that's about it.

A: Yah, well you do good with your family tree?

M: Well I'm trying to think.

A: Now what did your mom do for work?

M: My mother years ago she did housework.

A: Okay.

M: And then after we got old enough that she could leave us, my brother and I, we moved across the street. 85 Main Street was getting too full, because there were too many in there, in that house. So we moved across the street. And then when uncle, ah, grandmother, my grandmother died, my uncle said to my mother, "There's space here for you. Why don't you move back?" So my mother moved back to 85. (A: Okay) And that's about, where I reside now. Like I'm third generation.

A: Yah.

M: Umhm. So that seems to be all I remember you know, in that family.

A: Yah. Now did your mom go work at a job?

M: After that she got a job at Tewksbury State Hospital (A: Oh) as a nurse, because see she was, she came to Boston when she was, when she got out of school, high school. Well I don't think they had a high school here in Lowell. They did, but I think she went to evening school.

A: Okay, yah.

M: Evening High. And she was determined she was going to get, be a nurse. So she studied and got her degree. She was like a, what do they call them? Nurses Aide? Not a nurses aid. She wasn't a registered nurse.

A: An LPN?

M: And LPN, yah, she was an LPN.

A: Great.

M: And so she worked at, worked out in Tewksbury for about seventeen years. (A: Wow) And then she retired.

A: Did your mother ever talk about suffering any discrimination while she was working, or?

M: Oh yah, I think she said that she worked with a woman that came from Colorado. (A: Yah) And she kept talking about black people, and she wasn't using that name. She used the most degrading name. And so I guess my mother put her in her place in a nice way, because my mother always had a nice way about her. She didn't you know, she wasn't real harsh. She just told people in a nice way. [Told them to go home], to them, you know. And then later on they found out naturally what she was talking about.

A: Yah, and that lady cooled it down after that?

M: Somewhat. Somewhat.

A: Now tell us some more about the church your family attended over on Blossom Street you said?

M: Yes, umhm. I was baptized there, and I guess my brother was too. My brother went to a university. It [was in] a university, but it was called Providence Bible Institute. (A: Okay) And that's where he got a lot of his education. Then he came back from there and I think he went to Taylor University. I think that was in the south. And he came back here. He finally went to Gordon College, (A: Wow) and got his degree, his Masters Degree in (A: In [unclear] Theology, (A: Yah) in Theology. Okay. And I think he had, he was studying to get his Doctorate. I'm not sure he finished or not. (A: Yah) Umhm. But he doesn't do any of that now. He's quite active up there in the library in South Hamilton. And he, they put in what they call, some of the books, they're putting numbers

on the books so they can really find out who's got them and who hasn't got them, and when they should return them and all that.

A: Good. Good.

M: And he's now a deacon in the church.

A: Oh right.

M: I think he goes to church, Manchester by the Sea?

A: Is he still going to a Baptist Church?

M: Yes it is, umhm. Umhm.

A: Now tell us about Emanuel Baptist. Who was the Pastor out there when you were growing up, if you remember his name?

M: I can remember Pastor Edwards.

A: Okay, tell us about him.

M: He's, he's lived out, out in Danvers.

A: Is he still around?

M: Yah, he's still around, and he's had a lot of operations. His wife passed away I think about a year ago. And you know, he said that he's ready to go. (A: Yah) So that's about all I know. He's had, he's been a sick man recently. He sold their home, and their daughter Joyce keeps my brother posted as to his condition.

A: I see. Now was there many black families at Emanuel Baptist?

M: When we were growing up? No. No.

A: Just your clan?

M: More or less.

A: And no other families that you recall?

M: Not that I know.

A: But you were all accepted by the whole congregation?

M: Right. Umhm. Umhm.

A: What did it mean to be African American and grow up in Lowell? That's kind of a broad question.

M: Well we weren't Afro-Americans then. We were called colored people, and negros. That African American didn't happen until after Martin Luther King died.

A: Sure, sure.

M: Right. So that was kind of an issue there.

A: Well what do you, what do you think your experience was in regards to race, growing up here before you left?

M: Um, you know I never had any problems.

A: No?

M: No. It's not until, it seemed like after I moved to Cambridge and I'd be riding the subway train, and after Martin Luther King died, that's when a lot of people would just stare at me.

A: Really?

M: Umhm. Umhm,

A: Why do you think that?

M: I don't know. I really don't know.

A: Now do you remember the ah, do you remember World War II when you were young?

M: Vaguely. Vaguely. Umhm. I know we used to have to pull the shades down because the wardens would be, the wardens would be out. This was practice I guess. Umhm. And that was about, that was about it. And when they declared war in the Philippines, [Haloito?] or whoever, he'd be talking peace, but then all of a sudden they turned the table.

A: Now living in Ayer City, do you remember the Harvard Brewery?

M: Oh yes. Yes.

A: Tell us about that.

M: You could just smell the hops. Yup, umhm.

A: Did you ever go down there for a free drink?

M: No, I was too young. [Both laugh] But I still like beer now and then, but I don't drink it, you know, I really don't.

A: What else do you remember about Lowell and it's economy? You said when you got to be of age there was hardly any employment around here?

M: That's why I left. Right. When I got out of high school in 1947, it wasn't, I used to work for Thomas the Cleaner. He was a furrier. (A: Okay) And I was working like after school, because I had to give up my music lessons, because I was taking piano lessons. And I had to give up my music because I didn't have time to practice. But so when I moved to Cambridge, I was working at Harvard University.

A: Oh okay.

M: And so they had chorals that you could go and practice in, but I never continued to do that. But there was a nice pastor at Saint Anne's here in Lowell.

A: Yah.

M: And I continued taking piano lessons with him. (A: Okay) And I was learning cords and everything, and everything was starting to sound like something.

A: Yah, yah.

M: Umhm. I don't remember his name. I'm sure he's not around now, but because he was an older man. But he was very good.

A: Yah. So now was your first job with Thomas the Cleaners?

M: Yes.

A: And how did you get that job?

M: My mother knew some people that lived in, a person named Bertha Finnegan, who was living in Billerica.

A: Okay. And the Finnegans were black people, right?

M: Yes they were, umhm. And I think some of them are still there, (A: Yah) some of the older ones. I should ask Kenneth. He would probably know. But ah, and she's the one that told my mother. And I went down there and I got hired. (A: Okay) And I have burns on my, well not anymore, I mean there's scars where you got burned because he had a cleaning business. (A: Yah) And some of those things they had were, were things

that were heated all the time, like pressers, that he'd sort of press the shirt over, or press a blouse over. And not being, I was kind of clumsy. I'd walk into them you know, and then get some bad burns.

A: Really?

M: Yah, right. But ah (--)

A: So what did you do for, was it Mr. Thomas that had the business?

M: Yes. Umhm. And he used to be right there on Prescott Street.

A: Was that where he was?

M: Yah right, umhm, on the same side. (A: Okay) Umhm. And then like I said, like I said, he finally went out of business. And so then that's why I had to find a job.

A: So he went out of business and then (--)

M: So what had happened, I had gone, my grandmother used to have chickens in the back yard. My uncle used to raise chickens. He had a hen, a chicken coop out in the back yard. And my grandmother sometimes [unclear], they laid eggs a lot of them did. A lot of hens laid eggs. And my grandmother would ask me to go to my aunt's house in Cambridge to take them on the train. (A: Okay) So I take the train and get off. You know, I learned how to go. And so my aunt had introduced me to a couple of girls from, they worked at Mass. General. And so when I left Lowell I got in touch with them, and they said that Mass. General was hiring. I got a job at Mass. General.

A: Good.

M: And I worked there maybe it's about five years.

A: What did you do for Mass. General?

M: Mass. General? I was working in the Social Service Department. (A: Oh wow) And we were doing typing and things like that. (A: Yah) All clerical work, umhm.

A: Now when Thomas the Cleaners closed up did you try to find employment in Lowell first before you went to Cambridge?

M: No I don't think so. (A: No) No.

A: Did you feel there wasn't even any opportunities at that time because of the economy of Lowell?

M: It could have been.

A: Now tell me about, before you left Lowell was there many opportunities to date?

M: Not really.

A: Much social life for young black people?

M: No, no. No.

A: Why was that?

M: I don't think there were that many around. There were a lot of drunks around. Still are from what I can see. [Both laugh] Uh huh, but maybe I'm not in the right section of Lowell. Maybe I don't socialize with the right people. I don't know.

A: Yah. Now did you, did your family interact with other black families around Lowell?

M: I don't think so. There was a guy that used to live here years ago, and they called him Shorty Johnson.

A: Shorty Johnson?

M: Yah, and he was a real short man from what I understand. And sometimes I think they would come by to my grandmother's house for my grandmother to feed them, because my grandmother did a lot of cooking. She was a great cook. (A: Yah) And so my grandmother would say, let's hurry up and get these dishes done because we don't want any guests today, because when we go to their house they never have anything, they never have anything for us. So that was about it with that situation.

A: Did your grandmother and mother have friends around Lowell that came to visit often?

M: My grandmother used to belong to the Ladies Aid at Emmanuel Baptist.

A: Ladies Aid?

M: Ladies Aid. And like once a month they would, she would get out all of her best china and all of that, and they'd have a nice little tea I'll say. Umhm.

A: At the house?

M: At the house.

A: Really? Okay.

M: And there's still a lot of antiques in our house.

A: Oh really? Yah.

M: Yah, umhm.

A: And how about your mom, what did she do for kind of a social life?

M: My mother didn't do much for a social life at all. She had a girlfriend that they went to Evening High School. And the name was Ida VanDinter. (A: VanDinter?) Yah, she had married a German man from Germany. I don't think he was born in Germany, but he was, he lived in Germany. And they were good friends. (A: Okay) And every Sunday she would come by the house and they'd go to evening service on Sunday evenings.

A: Okay.

M: And then she would always go, I forget where, somewhere and bought a lot of ice cream, and we had cake and ice cream for dessert. Because after evening service it was like maybe around 7-7:30. So that's when we had, like to eat dessert. (A: Yah) And I can remember that. I remember that. Finally she, she and her husband didn't get along, and I think she might have had a stroke and she never recovered. You know he might have hurt her.

A: Did her husband worked at the Brewery, because there's a lot of Germans, right?

M: No, he didn't work at the Brewery. I'm trying to think of where he worked. I'm not sure.

A: And Ida, Mrs. VanDinter was from Lowell originally?

M: Yes I think so. Umhm.

A: A Yankee lady?

M: Could have been, umhm.

A: Now did you know any families that worked at the Brewery?

M: No.

A: How about other black people around Lowell. Did you know the Reverend Julius Mitchell?

M: No. Where was he?

A: I forget which church he was associated with, but one of the Protestant churches.

M: Umhm. I know there's a Mary Mitchell here in Lowell, and she lives on Howard Street.

A: Okay.

M: Of course years ago before they put the train station in it use to be all black people that lived down in that area.

A: Down in Hale/Howard?

M: In Hale/Howard, right. Umhm.

A: Were there a lot of families that lived down there.

M: I don't know.

A: But it was several.

M: My mother had a friend. My mother had a friend, that her name was Mrs. Woolworth, Woolworth.

A: Woolworth, yah.

M: And he used to always call my mother Joy. And she used to smoke cigarettes. So my mother didn't have too much time to take care, you know, keep company with her.

A: And this was a black woman?

M: This was a black woman.

A: What do you remember about her? Do you remember where she worked?

M: No. No I don't.

A: And now one of the Falcon's had an article that talks about he was a Boy Scout leader in Lowell. Do you remember which one that would be?

M: That was Fred. (A: Fred, you're right) Fred Falcon, umhm.

A: Yah, and who was that to your family?

M: He was like an, he was an uncle.

A: And uncle.

M: Umhm.

A: What do you remember about him?

M: Oh he said I was awful fresh, because he told me he was going to buy a bicycle, and he didn't buy me a bicycle. So I guess I told him off. But he always said I was fresh. But anyway, my uncle, before he passed away, he had bought 1966 Road Master Buick. And I was living in Cambridge then. So my mother let, after about six months she talked to the lawyer, and ask him could I drive the car (A: Yah), because that's the only way I could get up here to help my mother.

A: Your mother didn't drive?

M: No. No, she never learned to drive. (A: Yah). And my uncle used to like to go out on Sunday afternoons and just drive anywhere. Oh he would you know, behind the stirring wheel and he would drive. And he didn't like at first the air conditioning that came out in cars. But then after awhile he liked them, because he found that it was nice to have. He thought it was rather stupid for people driving with the windows up. And that was back in 1966. So today if you don't have the AC you're lost.

A: And how about the Wingoods? Were you guys friendly with them?

M: Yes. My, see now my mother and my Aunt Grace were friendly with them, because I think there was eight or nine girls, and Kenneth was the only boy.

A: Oh really!

M: Yah, umhm. So I think my Aunt Grace was the one that was really friends with them.

A: Okay. Any interesting stories about hanging around with the Wingoods, and around Ayer City?

M: No, no. I think my cousin Roberta used to hang out with Amy. (A: Yes) Uh huh, Roberta did. And they lived next door in the yellow house. Because my grandmother said to my uncle, "Buy that house." And he said, "Now what do I need a house for mama?" And she said, "You never know." And so what happened is he finally rented it to Uncle Lloyd, who was my grandmother's youngest son. And he was married to a white woman. (A: Okay) And so the rent used to be like \$15.00. (A: Wow) And then when Uncle Albert passed my mother talked to the lawyer, and the lawyer said, "Well that's, we have to make an adjustment here. Let's, rent is too low." (A: Yah) So when my mother had to go up on the rent, Marie Falcon, she, she didn't like the idea, and so she moved out. (A: Oh I see) And so she moved down to someplace in back of city hall.

A: Okay.

M: And that's all I know about that.

A: Yah. So that must have been one of the first, or earliest couples to the interracial marriages?

M: Right, umhm.

A: And how old, what year would they have gotten married roughly? Was this before you were born?

M: Umhm. No I guess I was a little girl.

A: Because this (--) He was younger than your mom, right?

M: Oh yes, he was younger than my mom. Umhm.

A: Yah. Do you remember the wedding?

M: No.

A: Would they have been married at Emmanuel Baptist?

M: No.

A: No?

M: No, I don't, I think they probably were married by the JP. (A: Yah) I'm not sure.

A: Yah, yah. And you think everybody accepted that interracial relationship?

M: Not her family.

A: No?

M: She had aunts that lived out in Chelmsford I think. (A: Yah) And no, they were against it. (A: Really) They didn't like it at all. No. They didn't like it. It happens.

A: Yah. What background was she? Do you know her maiden name?

M: I think she was Italian. Part Italian and part Irish.

A: Okay. And her name was?

M: Marie Shay.

A: Marie Shay.

M: Umhm.

A: Okay. Interesting.

M: She's buried in that lot too.

A: Is she? Yah?

M: Anna Marie, umhm.

A: Now tell us about (--) You lived in Cambridge for a lot of your adult life.

M: Yah.

A: How was that? How did you enjoy Cambridge?

M: Oh I enjoyed it, because I had friends (A: Yah), and I hated moving back up here, but hey, I had no choice. So.

A: Yah. Why did you hate moving back to Lowell?

M: Because all the people that I grew up with were gone. Umhm.

A: Yah. And so you're still living in Ayer City today. (M: Yah) Are there a lot of familiar faces around?

M: Maybe the people across the street, the [Mahrs], and yah, the Mahrs. And the people next door to me are new, the new neighbors, because the lady that used to live there was [Lajoie]. (A: Yah) And she passed away. And then her sister took over the house and her name was Mabel. (A: Okay) They were all Irish. (A: Yah) Mrs. [Lajoie], we used to have a store, a little store that we used to go and buy candy I guess, and whatever.

A: Who owned the store?

M: Mrs. Lajoie.

A: Oh she did huh?

M: Umhm.

A: So you used to go hand around the store, buy candy, or whatever when you were kids?

M: No, not me.

A: No? Why not?

M: No, I don't, because my mother didn't let us go out in this, let us go out with any of the kids in the neighborhood. (A: Really?) She kept us close to home (A: Oh) Umhm.

A: So Cambridge was a lot of (--) What neighborhood did you live in? Cambridge Port, or up by Harvard Square, or?

M: I lived in Cambridge Port.

A: You did?

M: Umhm.

A: There were a lot of black families down in Cambridge Port.

M: Yes there were, right. There were a lot of black families, umhm.

A: So was there a better sense of community down there?

M: A better sense? Well like I said, I, I'm one that usually stays by myself. I didn't mix that much with different people for different reasons, you know.

A: Yes.

M: And so the community was, it was okay. I got a job at Harvard University.

A: Good. Did you work there for a long time?

M: Twenty-three years. (A: Wow) And that's where I retired from.

A: I see.

M: Umhm.

A: What did you do for Harvard?

M: Oh well first of all I was working in, the first fifteen years I was worked in the School of Education. And then after that the professor wasn't going to, they weren't going to renew his grant. So I moved to Holyoke Center. That's the big building in the middle of Harvard Square. (A: Sure) And that's where I retired from.

A: I see. And you did secretarial duties?

M: Secretarial duties, right.

A: What kind of work did you do? Did you work on grants for the professor?

M: Yah, I worked on grants, and then in like I said, before I transferred to Holyoke Center, when I was working in the School of Education, the person that, the professor that I was working for, his grant wasn't renewed. So he passed away. I forget, maybe about five years ago.

A: What was his name?

M: I'm trying to think. (A: Okay) I can't think of anybody's name was. Mike.

A: Yah. (M: Umhm) And how did you get over to Holyoke? Did you take the T over from?

M: No it was just, Holyoke Center was just around the corner. (A: Okay) Epping Way was where the School of Education was on I believe.

A: No, I meant from your house?

M: From my house?

A: Did you go up to the T, or did you drive over?

M: I used to take the train. (A: Yah) And I used to get on in No. Billerica. (A: Oh) Before North Billerica was changed over. (A: Sure) Now it's all new. (A: Right) I used to park in North Billerica, and I used to drive there in the morning. I got, I almost, I got almost arrested one morning because a police car was watching me weave in and out going down Gorham Street. (A: Yah) And finally he pulled around the corner, and pulled up to me. And I said to him, "Do you want to get by?" He said, "No, I want to see your license." So he said, "Okay. I'm not going to give you a ticket, he said, but please don't do that anymore, because there's a lot of traffic at that hour." It was like around 7:00, 7:30 in the morning, because I would catch an early train.

A: What, were you half asleep driving in the morning?

M: No, I was in a hurry!

A: Oh!

M: Yah, I was in a hurry, umhm, so I could get there in time to make the train. Umhm. Because once, once I just pulled in and the train was in, it just pulled in and I was locking up my car. So the conductor saw me running and waited until I could get up the stairs to get on the train. Umhm.

A: Now you said you moved back to Lowell in what? '81?

M: In '81.

A: To take care of your mom.

M: Yes.

A: And how was it to move back to the old house?

M: My mother and I didn't get along.

A: Okay.

M: And well (--)

A: Did she find difficulty as she got older?

M: Yah, because she had, she had glaucoma, and her eyesight was going. And finally she had to go to the hospital and have, she had surgery. And when, after the surgery they told me at the hospital that she's going to need 24-hour care. (A: Wow) So that's when I put her, kept her in the nursing home. Yah. Umhm.

A: Yah. Where did she go? Which nursing home?

M: The nursing home, Northwood. (A: Okay) Umhm.

A: And how long was she there for?

M: Oh about ten or eleven years. (A: Oh boy) She passed away there. (A: Yah) Umhm.

A: So she only died in the last ten years or something?

M: Yah, she died, she passed away in '99.

A: Oh wow.

M: Umhm.

A: And what, what year did you retire?

M: I retired in '95.

A: Okay. And what have you been doing with yourself since then?

M: Oh not much.

A: Relaxing.

M: Plenty.

A: You go to Salvation Army.

M: For my meals. And then I usually come home and take a nap. (A: Good) Or I go in and do the things I have to do, my errands and (--)

**Side A ends
Side B begins.**

A: We were talking about the Salvation Army.

M: We have trips and usually I take, go on trips. The last trip we had was a couple of weeks ago we went to see *Driving Miss Daisy* in Connecticut. (A: Oh) And the lady who's in charge of, they call it SAGE, she drove all the way to Connecticut. (A: Really) Umhm. We got home around, we left around 9:15 in the morning, and I think we got there around 11:00. (A: Umhm) And yah, it was about a two-hour ride. And then we left there around 4:00, quarter of 4:00, and we were back by 6:00.

A: Okay.

M: Umhm.

A: And so you saw a play?

M: Yah we saw a play, *Driving Miss Daisy*.

A: How was it?

M: It was very good. Very good. It was three people, but it was a three-person play. But they did all the parts, made you think there were more than three people.

A: Yah. I know the folks that are at the Salvation Army in Ashcraft, Major Ashcraft, (M: Right) they've been active with September 11th.

M: Oh yes, 911. Umhm. They drove down there and one of the other girls that works there, Kelly. She went with Mrs. Ashcraft, because Mrs. Ashcraft can drive the bus. You have to have a certain license to drive a bus, mini bus. And Mrs. Ashcraft has her license. And one of the other girls that works there went with her to hand out a lot of things when they got there.

A: Did they collect donations from here, for down there?

M: If you wanted to donate, umhm.

A: Right. What else do you guys do at the Salvation Army?

M: Well exercise. (A: Really) Like usually, okay usually Tuesday mornings I leave Betty around 8:30 and Major Ashcraft, he brings the, he drives the van. So when he drops his kids off at school, he brings the van in, and we get in, Betty and I get in the van and we go to Hannaford's to pick up all the day old bread. And a lot of it is not day-old, it's fresh bread, and we bring it back, or they use that bread for the lunch program.

A: I see.

M: And there's cakes and pies, whatever they have. (A: Wow) Umhm.

A: So you help out with that?

M: Right. Umhm.

A: That's great. That's great.

M: Bob, do you have any other questions that you'd like to ask Mary Alice?

B: Yah, let's take a five-minute break and then we'll kind of recap.

A: Sure, okay.

M: Okay.

[Tape is turned off, then on again]

A: Mary Alice you were telling us that you've done some traveling over the years. (M: Yes) And what was one of your favorite trips?

M: Oh when I was living in Cambridge I went with the Salvation Army to Hawaii. And they [unclear] in charge of the Salvation here. She remembers those people that had sponsored the trip.

A: Really. Yah.

M: So my mother, and my aunt, and myself, we all went to Hawaii. And my aunt paid my way. I guess my mother paid her own way, I forget. And we had a nice time there.

A: Was it an expensive ticket to go to Hawaii.

M: \$99.00.

A: \$99.00!

M: That's right, because you know that was quite a while ago. And we were, we had (--) We were in a hotel right on the water. Well a ways from the water, because in the morning we could hear the tide coming in. My mother and I would get up, and get into our bathing suits and get out there in the water. Oh it was really wonderful [unclear].

A: Now when you were growing up, or when you were working, was there some older people that you feel gave you a sense of inspiration to do some different things [with yourself]? Maybe somebody that you looked up to?

M: Um, I know once I wanted to take a, take a test for the IBM. (A: Yah) And with, who are the people that do that test, that do your income tax?

A: The IRS?

M: Not the IRS.

A: H&R?

M: H&R Block. (A: Yes) Yah. And oh, I was talked down against it. How can you do this, and you're not able to do that, and blah, blah, blah. So I never took it. I never did.

A: So somebody discouraged you in that instance.

M: Yes, right. Umhm.

A: And do you regret listening to them?

M: Sure, because I wanted to do it. But anyway, then I could do my own taxes. But however that's something I guess I'll never do. Too old now.

A: Well no, you're never too old to do nothing.

M: Well something like that, you have to remember figures, (A: Yah) and a lot of other things.

A: Now was there a young person that you worked with at Harvard, or at Mass. General that you helped and that they looked up to you, and taught them a lot?

M: No. I don't think so.

A: Okay. What do you think has been the greatest change in Lowell since you were born, to a time like this, we're here today?

M: A lot of the streets, and a lot of the ways to get downtown. (A: Yah) Umhm.

A: What's been the biggest change? A lot more cars?

M: Oh yes, definitely. (A: Yah) And then Gorham Street has changed quite a bit.

A: Yah. Did you folks have a car, always have a car in the family, or a couple of cars?

M: My Uncle Alfred did. My uncle did, and that's before I learned to drive, because I learned to drive I guess in '57. (A: Okay) '67.

A: When you were in Cambridge, or?

M: Yes I think so. Umhm.

A: Now were your sons all born in Cambridge, or some born here?

M: They were born, yah, they were born out in Brighton (A: Okay) at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital.

A: What did you think of the civil rights movement that came out in the 50's and kind of came to a crescendo in the 1960's?

M: Civil rights movement?

A: Yah, with Martin Luther King.

M: Oh yah, that was terrible.

A: What did you think, before he was assassinated what did you think about Martin Luther King (M: unclear) and Malcom X.

M: Well not so much Malcom X, but Martin Luther King, because he was a God-fearing man. Umhm. And anything he wanted they'd march for.

A: Yah. Was any of your family ever active in the NAACP?

M: Definitely.

A: Okay, tell us about that.

M: I don't know about (--) My Uncle Fred was.

A: He was?

M: Yah, umhm. (A: Okay) I think he was president one year. (A: Really) Yah, because Kenneth came by the house and wanted me to get some pictures of him in, (A: Okay) you know, and I did find something that he was able to bring down and copy. (A: Okay) Umhm.

A: Okay. And how about yourself? Did you ever go to any of the meetings?

M: Yah, just last year. I told Kenneth, see, they meet in Salem, Lawrence. Lawrence. And so Ken picked me up and took me down, and I met a few of the gentlemen that were on the board. Umhm.

A: Okay. Good.

M: And the main thing they were talking about was the Folk Festival. (A: Okay) Yah, and I didn't go to the Folk Festival this year. It was too hot.

A: It was very hot this year, right. Well any other final thoughts about your time living here, growing up here in Lowell?

M: I guess I couldn't have grown up in any better place.

A: You like it?

M: Well compared to some of the other places like Dorchester, and Roxbury, (A: Yah) Lowell is a lot better.

A: Yah.

M: Umhm.

A: And did you feel that Lowell was basically a welcoming community?

M: Well I never had any problems.

A: Yah. Any other final stories you want to share with us today?

M: I don't think so.

A: Okay. Well thanks so much for sharing so much of your time today.

M: Okay.

A: All right.

End of interview