

**MILL WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT:
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE**

Maria Goranites
(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

MWOH# 045
June 5, 2006

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Mill Workers Oral History Project. The date is June 5th, 2006, and I'm at the home of Maria Goranites at 317 Turner Street in Auburn, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you start just by saying your full name, including your maiden name?

Maria Goranites: My name is Mary Goranites, my *(unintelligible phrase)*.

AL: And when were you born?

MG: I was born in Greece.

AL: And what was the date?

MG: The date, October 13, 1914.

AL: And so you were born in Greece.

MG: Yes.

AL: And how long did you live there before coming to the U.S.?

MG: Oh, I came, I was twenty, twenty-one.

AL: Oh, so you grew up speaking Greek as a first language?

MG: Oh yes, yeah. And I still, I mix it up, the Greek and American because my first language Greek, so I just stay there.

AL: And what made you come to America?

MG: Well, my father came before me, a couple of times, and bring my sisters here. And for a better life, that's all. Why you come in this country, everybody, for better life.

AL: So how many brothers and sisters did you have?

MG: I have four sisters, three and four with me, and two brothers. And one was in, a colonel in the army, in Greece, though, not here, my younger brother. And they all pass away. Just me left.

AL: Now, did your family all settle in Maine when you came to America?

MG: No, my, one sister, I came to Lowell, because my sister was one there. She's the one I suppose, she don't have any children. No, not just because children, it's that she wants to bring us here for a better life. So I came to Lowell, I stay a few months, and I came visit to the other sister in Saco, and all the mills

there. So my brother-in-law-say, why you sit there and do nothing, and you don't come here and work and make a little money. And that sounds good, so I just pack my suitcase, came to Saco. And I started to work Jacques Mill. I don't know if you know, that's the big mills there, there was, they're called Jacques Mill, in Saco.

So I find my husband, and I marry, and I came here. And, well I don't go to work right away, but after a while I went to Hill Mill. From Hill Mill, I don't work too long there, so I go to Continental. So the Continental, I think I work ten years on my life, and I have my family (*unintelligible word*). I lost my husband, and I stayed home for my children. So that's my, I like to work. I'm the worker, still, I'm the worker now.

AL: Now, what kind of work did you do in the mill, what was your job?

MG: I weave, weaver, yeah. Yeah, I make good money then.

AL: Yes, and how many years do you think you worked at the mill?

MG: Oh, I work in the mill ten years, yeah, for ten years. So I lost my husband, and I have to stay home with the kids. Because, you know, so I just worked the third shift, you know third shift? From eleven to seven. And there I, because the kids are small, they go to school, and I want to be here, to them, the time to go to bed and the time to go to school, and I sleep the days.

AL: And how many children did you have?

MG: I have five, and I take my niece, too, (*unintelligible phrase*), so that's six.

AL: That's a house full.

MG: And I used to sew all our clothes, everything, everything, I used to do that at home, and sew for the kids because those days, not everybody have the money to go in the stores.

AL: Right. Was there a strong Greek community here?

MG: Yes, well not big community but, bigger now, small, we have a church down on Lincoln Street for (*unintelligible word*), and now we have the church, the (*unintelligible word*), we build another one. Now all the, all together they work and we have a small church, but we have our church.

AL: So did you have strong ties with the other Greek people in the community, did they support you?

MG: No, no, oh no, we weren't a group, not a group. The Greek, they stick together because so many, so little, if they separate and have two churches or more. So we work together and, (*unintelligible phrase*), so they will work together. We don't ask for, what you belong to, no, no, no. So that's the main thing.

AL: And so having grown up in Greece, you probably learned to cook traditional Greek food.

MG: Yeah, I learn there, but I learn from my sisters and we learn from each other here, because I say, we all together. Anything you know, you go to the church and can make it, you know, your recipe or my recipe, all, you know, so we work together, we learn that. Because there, they all let the kids, the young girls work and cook and do all the things. So I don't know much before I came cooking, but I got two sisters here and they were excellent, and they're both workers. My one sister work in the Jacques Mill (*unintelligible phrase*), and the other, and the other one worked in the shoe shop. So I learn, and they

cook, they cook for the church, they cook for the family, they cook, they cook, and they will cook. I just start now, because I can do it.

AL: And what was your family name before you were married?

MG: (*Name*).

AL: And how do you spell that?

MG: I can write, not to sp-, I have a pen.

AL: That's okay, we can do it after the interview, okay? That way you won't have to go looking.

MG: Well, I know where they are, but I don't have it here.

AL: So what was it like working in the mill?

MG: That was hard, it was hard. And work the third shift, it's hard. But I don't mind then, because I was young and I know I needed the money. My husband he don't want me to work, he said, that money you're going to put in a bank or you're going to burn it. I'm going to put the kids through the college. I don't have education, my mother died there and my father married again, and I don't have education, Greek education, just the fourth grade, but I don't want my kids working in the mill. That's (*unintelligible phrase*), I says, you going to learn to have a better job.

So she, so they all graduate from college, every one of them. My daughter, the oldest, graduate from University of Maine, a teacher. My son, (*name*), graduate from Berkeley, four years, that's the first time there was a term four years, because there was two before, Berkeley. My other daughter which lives with me now, she graduate from (*unintelligible word*), secretarial, in Boston. My daughter, the other daughter graduate from (*name*) State College and become English teacher, and my youngest son graduate from University of Maine. They don't go far from here, they like the Maine. Yeah, so he graduate from University of Maine, he went to law school there and become a lawyer, and now is a judge. So they all have something better for the jobs I have, I learn for myself. So that, and Olympia [Snowe] of course, she graduate from University of Maine, yeah.

AL: And she's a U.S. senator.

MG: Yeah, I have her there. And we don't have much, I will say we don't have much, but we are a close family, we're together. Anything come up, (*unintelligible phrase*) we solve it anyway, but that's the way I teach my kids. Anything come up, a problem, a good one, a bad one, just, you don't want to tell me, tell your sisters, your brothers, but not go on your friends. Because the friend's going to tell the friend, and the friend's going to (*unintelligible phrase*). So that's it, even now, they're very close, they're very close. With my five, and Olympia, six, they're very close yeah. She's in Washington most time, but just the same. She called me last night, from Washington. Yeah, just (*unintelligible phrase*) family, it's nothing, but we try to do it. And they all work for the church, all of them, all of them, no matter where they are, it's something for the church they give or they work there. They do the festival, everything, they all work there. And I mean, really, they're close, yeah, they are. Because (*unintelligible phrase*) a small group, and if you live close together, work together and be together, we're going to disappear. So this way, we have our church, (*unintelligible phrase*) at the school, (*unintelligible phrase*), try to keep (*unintelligible phrase*).

AL: Well, I wondered if there were many other Greek people who worked in the mill with you?

MG: No one.

AL: So you felt pretty much alone as a -?

MG: I (*unintelligible word*) Mrs. Bournakel, she worked a little bit at the Continental, (*unintelligible phrase*).

AL: If we talk about, can we talk a little bit about the people even if they've passed away now, who were alive when you worked there, some of the Greek people and what they did in the mill?

MG: Well, I don't think remember all of them, but I know the, Mrs. Maskovis, she work in the Hill Mill, and she put a bobbin.

Georgia Chomas: So they were, are they the same like you weavers? Were they weavers, Mom?

AL: I think she's saying this person was a bobbin girl?

GC: Was that separate from a weaver?

AL: Yeah.

MG: And Koula Maskovis, she's passed away of course, she's a weaver, she's a weaver. And who else (*unintelligible word*) people, Feretos, Mrs. Feretos, I don't know if you, Feretos.

AL: And what did she do?

MG: She do the, everything break down and then too much the weavers to do, they put them in (*unintelligible word*) and she come and fix it. And who else work in the mill? I say, it was so long.

AL: So long ago.

MG: (*Unintelligible phrase*), over there.

GC: Did you show her that, Mom? Did you show Andrea that book?

AL: No, not yet, not yet.

MG: Mrs. (*name*) –

GC: Why don't you tell me who they are, Mom, I'll write them down, maybe that will jog your memory. Who they were.

(*Break in taping?*)

GC: It was 1951.

AL: Can you tell me, now you went to work at the mills in 1951 until 1962?

MG: Yeah.

AL: And with your friend -

GC: Antigone Bournakel.

AL: Okay, and can you tell me the story about how you came to work in the mills with her?

MG: We came, we were both, I say, were friends, and another lady, (*unintelligible phrase*) after that.

GC: Who?

MG: Mary Barbalisa. But she don't go, she don't, and we decide to go to a mill and give our names, and if they have a job to call us. So there was (*unintelligible phrase*) and they hire me, because I have experience from Jacques Mill. Little bit, not much, I don't think I have. But they, we came home and I, and called me to go for interview, to see what that, what can. So I went, they hired me, and I went in.

GC: And then what happened?

MG: And I have, I work. I work for third shift.

GC: What about the story how you tried to, you had to convince, you women had to convince your husbands that you were going to go to work together.

AL: Yes, tell me that story, because I don't have that on the tape yet, the story about having coffee with your friends.

MG: Yeah, with friends, and we decided to go find a job. So we, the three of us, the next day or the same day, we go to Continental Mill and give our names.

AL: And how did you convince your husbands to do that?

MG: Oh, that is easy. It's easy, because he don't want, I say, your husband, (*unintelligible word*) I don't want you to go to work, because I have enough, I make enough money to eat. But I say, I want for the kids, to go in the college. They was young then. And he say, well, you promise me you're going to take your pay and you put it in a bank, I don't want to spend nothing of that pay, because you said you're going put it aside to go the kids, the kids in college. I don't make that much, but anyway, I make some.

GC: Was it about fifty dollars a week, Mum?

MG: Well, I make more.

GC: Oh, more than that.

MG: Yeah, I make more, weaving.

AL: Weaving is paid better than most other (*unintelligible word*).

MG: Oh, it's a hard job, you're running all the time, from (*unintelligible phrase*).

GC: That's what happened with her loom.

AL: And so the money that you made at the mill, did that go towards paying for college?

MG: Yeah, the money, I, we put the money in the bank, we buy this house (*unintelligible word*).

GC: No, you already had this house.

MG: That's right, we had this house. But we had the money in the bank.

GC: You bought the house in '44, you went to work in '51. So you put the money in the bank. Did you ever spend any of your check?

MG: No, I didn't, I have, I buy some bonds.

GC: Every week she had an amount of money taken out, right?

MG: I bought some bonds and I just, they come handy now.

AL: That's amazing.

GC: She saved the bonds.

MG: Yeah, I have twenty two bonds, eighteen dollars a bond then, and that's, I cash them now, it's double the money, three times the money now, with the money I paid, \$18.75.

GC: Some of the details have just (*unintelligible phrase*).

MG: So that's -

GC: She never spent one cent of her paycheck in eleven years of working in the mill, third shift, and it was, all went to college tuitions. She educated every one of her children.

MG: So that's the story.

AL: That's wonderful.

MG: That's the story. I put it, I promise to put the money in the bank, but he don't know, I leave enough to enjoy.

AL: And what year did your husband die?

MG: 1962.

AL: Oh, the year you stopped working.

MG: Yeah.

AL: Yes, because you stayed home to take care of the kids.

MG: And I worked afterwards, I would go work in the mill, I would go in the front as a seamstress. Front of (*unintelligible word*), you remember the front of, a store? So I worked, repair and shorten, you know, I don't sew, make the suits, but we, I make other things, yeah. We, to sell them, they're going to fit good, to make it fit good. So that's -

AL: And what did your husband do?

MG: A barber, it's the best barber in the state of Maine. Yeah, she was good, he was good. That's why

she was saying, I make enough money to give food.

AL: Did he have a shop downtown, his own shop?

(Note: MG uses 'she' when referring to her husband - I've typed it as said.)

MG: Yes, own shop, she have (*name*) and Main Street and (*unintelligible phrase*) there, the corner there. They change it so many times. And after she move across the street, near the bus terminal. So she make a building there, well make it, I don't know exactly, she make her own barber, she have their own barber shop, but they was good barber.

AL: Did he have a name for his shop?

GC: The Terminal Barber Shop.

AL: Terminal?

GC: Yeah, it was at the bus terminal. Any, it was, you know, he went to Boston, had somebody come up here and he had the absolute latest, I remember they were green chairs. This would have been in the '50s of course. And (*unintelligible word*) one of those on duty shoeshine boys (*unintelligible phrase*).

AL: Oh, that's neat.

MG: That's the story, I mean, the older people, they work hard. They don't recognize the Greek people, the beginning, (*unintelligible phrase*). But now, they go out of their way to meet you if you were here, you're Greek. I have a few people. So, yeah, so it was -

AL: Can you talk to me about a couple of traditional Greek dishes or meals that you made? Some of your favorites in the family?

MG: I make the Greek bread, I make the custard pie, the pita, we call them, we make the spinach pie, we make the cookies, make a lot of times (*unintelligible word*), baklava, you know, (*unintelligible word*), you know, a lot of it. I made it, and the kids know how make some. The one thing they can't make is the (*name*), you know, the, it's a, just the egg and butter, and flour, and (*unintelligible word*) but you have to do (*unintelligible word*) because they burn right away. And you throw and make it, you know, just like a, I don't know, so, and put honey after. That was good. Nobody can make it now. (*Unintelligible phrase*). So a few of us, even for the festival, we brought them, make a (*name*).

AL: Now, when you worked in the mill, do you remember if there were any strikes?

MG: Yes, for the union. But I don't, I stay neutral, I don't go with the, no, I don't want to go.

AL: So you weren't involved with that, no.

MG: No, no-no-no, I don't go. I don't (*unintelligible phrase*) but I'm not. I don't believe it, (*unintelligible phrase*) they come every, every Friday they have your pay, they take some money from your pay. The dues, that's the way they, yeah. You don't pay dues (*unintelligible phrase*), the men come over, take so much, they, I mean they say they give it, so you pay. And I don't believe it. I work hard for my money, and I don't want somebody come, that's my, I was stupid.

AL: When you worked at the mill, the people who were supervising you, how did they treat you?

MG: Good.

AL: No problem?

MG: No, no. If you work, you work, no matter what you are, you work, they don't bother you. I don't have any problems anyway. (*Unintelligible phrase*), but I don't have any problems.

AL: Now, I know that there were a lot of Franco-Americans that worked in the mills.

MG: Yes, oh gosh, a lot of them, yeah.

AL: And was there a language barrier, was it hard to communicate with them sometimes?

MG: Yes. For them, too, it's hard to communicate. But somehow I manage, yeah, to, in a mill (*unintelligible word*) you don't have the college education. You work, because you work, they like you because you do a good job, or (*unintelligible phrase*) there, and you don't go for talk because of work, I just work.

AL: Did you make any friends with any of the others at the mill?

MG: Oh yes, I make friends. Now I don't know where they are.

AL: But tell me about then, how did you become friends with them, and who were they? Were they outside of the Greek community?

MG: Well, yeah, from Lewiston-Auburn.

AL: But were they like Franco-Americans, some of them?

MG: Yeah. They were, a lot (*unintelligible phrase*), so these, I like you, you like me, and we have coffee together, because we have half an hour for lunch, and some, we take everything and go in a place and sit there and eat and talk. I don't know how much I understand, but I (*unintelligible phrase*).

AL: Is there anything that you feel is important to talk about the mills and your time working there, or raising your family, that I haven't asked you that you'd like to talk about?

MG: Well, I say, I work in the nights and sleep days, and that's (*unintelligible phrase*). Somebody call for me, I say, (*unintelligible word*) sleep, I work nights and sleep days. So that's my name, then, yeah. I don't have much, I don't stop to do for the church people, the community affairs, but I don't, after, outside that I don't know.

AL: Well, it was quite amazing for you to raise six children.

MG: Yeah. Yeah, that was. It was another lady work a third shift with me, but I don't know if (*unintelligible phrase*).

GC: What was her name, Mum, the lady (*unintelligible phrase*)?

MG: Priscilla.

GC: Priscilla, oh yes, Priscilla, she made a good friendship with Priscilla.

MG: Yeah, she have five kids too, and she work the third shift.

GC: And she came to visit a lot.

MG: And she used to come here, even after. But now I don't know what happened.

AL: What's her last name? Do you remember?

MG: I don't know.

AL: It's hard to remember, isn't it.

MG: I (*unintelligible phrase*) we call by first name, they call me, hi Mary, hi Mary. (*Unintelligible phrase*).

GC: I knew there was somebody she met that awfully kind, good to her over the years.

MG: Well, anyway, that's the -

AL: Great, thank you very much.

*End of Interview
goranites.int.wpd*