

**SHOE WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE**

**Jeannine Roy**  
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

**SWOH #051**  
May 12, 2010

**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview for the Shoe Workers Oral History Project at Museum L-A. The date is May 12th, 2010, this is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and today I am interviewing Jeannine Roy at her home in Lewiston, Maine. Jeannine, could you just start by giving me your full name?

**Jeannine Roy:** I'm Jeannine Roy.

**AL:** And where and when were you born?

**JR:** I was born in Canada.

**AL:** What part of Canada?

**JR:** St. Prosper, it's near St. Georges, it's a big city, St. Georges, but we were just about fourteen miles from there.

**AL:** And when were you born?

**JR:** May 7, 1935.

**AL:** Oh, well happy birthday last week.

**JR:** Last week.

**AL:** And so, do you have memories of living in Canada?

**JR:** Oh yeah, but that's one place I wouldn't want to go back.

**AL:** No? Well, tell me about your parents, they were born and raised in Canada?

**JR:** Yes, they were.

**AL:** And how many children did they have?

**JR:** Seven.

**AL:** And what did your parents do for work in Canada?

**JR:** Lumberjack. My mother wasn't working, but my father was a lumberjack.

**AL:** Now, did that take him away from the home a lot, or was he able to be home at night?

**JR:** Sometime. Sometime he used to be away the whole winter, because it was far.

**AL:** And so was it they that decided to come to the U.S. and they brought the kids with them?

**JR:** Yeah.

**AL:** And you were thirteen at the time?

**JR:** Thirteen.

**AL:** Were you in the middle, older, younger within your siblings?

**JR:** I'm about in the middle, yeah, I'm in the middle.

**AL:** And so did your parents tell you why they decided to come to the U.S.?

**JR:** Not really, not really, no. I guess my father used to work as a lumberjack in the United States, Flagstaff? And he decided to buy a place in Maine and we moved.

**AL:** And so did you move to Lewiston or someplace -?

**JR:** Sabattus.

**AL:** Okay, and so how old were you when you began in the shoe shops?

**JR:** I went to school in the Sabattus, we didn't understand a word English, not a word. I went, when I was fifteen, still the same way, eh? So I decided I'm going to go to work, so I went and apply for a job down Federal Shoe Shop, where Knapp Shoe used to be there, first that was Federal, and got a job there. At fifteen.

**AL:** Now, how many hours a week were you allowed to work, or did you -?

**JR:** Forty. Yeah, they allowed forty hours. I told them I was sixteen, though, but I was fifteen.

**AL:** And so what kind of work did you do at Federal?

**JR:** At Federal I used to get the work ready, put all the pieces together on the rack and give that to the stitcher to stitch, that was my job.

**AL:** Did they only allow you to do so many kinds of jobs at that age?

**JR:** No, I could do anything, yeah. But right there and then, that was the only thing to do, because they had enough people for all the other job. That was busy enough, to feed the stitcher, that job was, it was enough for one job.

**AL:** At that time the shoe shops were very busy in this area, would that be true?

**JR:** ( Oh, they were busy, oh my God, yes, you could quit your job every week and get in to another shoe shop. )

**AL:** And did that happen a lot, did people move from shop to shop?

**JR:** Oh yes, oh yeah. ( But not me, I wasn't the type to move. When I had a job, I stick to it. Just like down at Falcon, I went down there in 1970 and I'm still there. )

**AL:** Nineteen seventy?

**JR:** Yeah.

**AL:** That was forty years ago.

**JR:** Yeah, forty years I'm with Falcon.

**AL:** So you start at age fifteen with Federal, and then you moved around a little bit for a while?

**JR:** Yeah, and then I went, I don't remember if that place closed, that I don't remember, and Knapp Shoe took over, I don't remember. Then I went on Clark Shoe and I stayed there, oh, I don't remember how many years I stayed. Then I went Maine Shoe, that was right in back of Clark Shoe, I stayed there a few years too. And after that I went to Freeport, the FreeMoc Shoe, and I don't remember how many years I was there. Not that many, because I didn't like traveling. So I got a job, Androscoggin Shoe, it's right where Falcon is. Falcon was in one end, Androscoggin was the other end, it was father and son, so I went to work for the father. They closed, after a few years they closed, and Falcon Shoe, the boss, came over and got me to work, I didn't have a day off. And I've been there ever since.

**AL:** And so what work have you done over the years?

**JR:** Stitching.

**AL:** Stitching is what you became good at.

**JR:** Yeah, yeah. When I went to Freeport there, FreeMoc Shoe, they taught me how to stitch, because I didn't know how before. They taught me how, and after that I been a stitcher ever since.

**AL:** And did it help you in terms of pay, was it more money to do that?

**JR:** Oh, stitching, yes, there was more money in stitching, oh yes, yeah.

**AL:** Can you talk to me about sort of the art of stitching? I mean it's a talent and a skill, can you describe for me what it takes to be a good stitcher?

**JR:** Oh, my God, when I went down Falcon, they taught me all the stitching job, all of them, all of them. So then they put me to training the people that was coming in, new people that was coming in there, I was the trainer, to teach those girls how to stitch. It's tough, it's a tough job, stitching.

**AL:** So talk to me about Falcon, you've been there for forty years.

**JR:** Forty years.

**AL:** What were the owners like, your bosses, over the years?

**JR:** Oh, they were very good. We had quite a few, I liked them all, oh yes, oh yeah, they were good, very good.

**AL:** And what's the man's name who was the owner, at the time?

**JR:** At the time? Ted Johanson.

**AL:** Yeah, tell me about him, did you get to know him a little bit?

**JR:** Oh yes, oh yes, he was so nice, the nicest man in the world. He was. You got somebody that works in the museum, too, that used to work with us for years, Roger Nadeau.

**AL:** So really, can you talk about, did you ever do things socially with the people you worked with, were there any types of social activities? I'm thinking like bowling or anything like that?

**JR:** Oh no, no, no, we didn't, no. They used to throw us parties, you know, but to do something like that, no, we didn't.

**AL:** So can you remember when it was that jobs started getting a little tighter to get? Was there a time when the shops started closing?

**JR:** Yeah, yeah, but me, I didn't have to, you know, to look for work. I knew all the shop were closing, and I loved it at Falcon, I wasn't about to quit there.

**AL:** It's amazing that so many closed and Falcon is still going.

**JR:** There's only Falcon left now. All the others, there used to be Allen-Edmonds there, and I heard they closed a couple weeks ago, there's only us left.

**AL:** So can you talk to me about I guess your impressions of the shoe industry in the city, can you describe for me what it was like? There were so many shops, and so many people worked in the shoe shops. What are your memories? I mean, was the downtown different then?

**JR:** I guess it was, it was different. Because, hey, you could get, oh my God, my God, you could jobs any time, any time.

**AL:** And did you do a lot, I mean did people do a lot of their shopping downtown, like on Lisbon Street?

**JR:** Yes, they were, everything was on Lisbon Street then, all the shops were on Lisbon Street, you could go shopping.

**AL:** And there was a store called Peck's?

**JR:** Peck's, yes.

**AL:** And what was that, a department store?

**JR:** It was a department store, they used to sell clothes, children, women, men, they used to sell furniture, down Peck's.

**AL:** And were there any restaurants or diners downtown that you recall?

**JR:** There was a restaurant. Oh my God, I don't really, oh God, I don't really remember the name.

**AL:** Well, that's okay. So another question I have, because you came from Canada as a young person, and your family did, were there churches you associated with in town, or social organizations that were geared toward French Canadians?

**JR:** Not that, no.

**AL:** As we're talking, is there anything that I haven't asked you about, in terms of your time in the shoe industry, that you think is important to add? Maybe something I left out?

**JR:** (*Unintelligible*), I don't know.

**AL:** Okay, well thank you so much.

*End of Interview*

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