

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

Donald Caron
(Interviewer: Gretchen Grebe)

SMOWH #70
October 25, 2005

Q: Interview for the mill workers oral history project on October 25, 2005 in Lewiston, Maine. I'm Gretchen Grebe, interviewing. Could you please state your full name?

A: Donald C. Caron.

Q: And could you spell it please?

A: Donald C. Caron.

Q: What is your place and date of birth?

A: October 27, 1924.

Q: And what were your parents' names?

A: Jules Caron and Hanna Caron.

Q: And what was their background, where did they come from?

A: From Canada.

Q: And what were their occupations?

A: My mother was a housewife, and my father worked for the railroad.

Q: Did they speak French?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, they both spoke French.

Q: In your house, like when you were growing up as a child, what did they speak?

A: All French.

Q: When did you learn to speak English?

A: When I went to school. Well, we'd talk a little, but not much. When we went to school, that's when we learned the most.

Q: Did you go to school, when you started going to school, was it originally taught in French and then they had English as like a class?

A: Well, we went to French school first. St. Louis, but that burned down. Then after that I went to New Auburn.

Mrs. C: Yeah, but we had English in the morning and French in the afternoon. Half and half.

Q: Your family is also from Canada?

Mrs. C: My father and mother were born here in the United States.

Q: I see.

Mrs. C: My father went to war in World War I.

Q: So you speak English only?

Mrs. C: We learned to speak English after we started playing around with some kids and going to school. Because when we had the fire here in New Auburn, I was in, they called it kindergarten, well after that they put you in the first grade. Well, we had to go to the Lincoln School on Fifth Street, Sixth Street, because the school burned down. So we went to school there, and that's where we learned more English, because they didn't have French there, so we learned more English there. But when they built the school back, we went back to the school. So we had, in the morning was English and in the afternoon was French, so we learned a little bit of everything. Today if you go to English school, you learn just English and, yeah, you know. But in those days, back in the forties, 1933, the fire.

Q: Do you think there would have been any problem for you if your family hadn't spoken French and yours did, for a marriage, would there have been any - ?

A: No, no, no.

Q: It wouldn't have mattered?

A: Wouldn't interfere at all.

Q: In the family, who did what, who took care of the money and organizing of the family?

A: My mother and father, because he was the only one working, he took care

of it .

Q: So your father took more care of the money and the mom -?

A: My mother did.

Q: Money too?

A: Yeah.

Q: And where exactly did you grow up?

A: Right here in New Auburn.

Q: In New Auburn? Is your house still there?

A: No. It was right next door, in the driveway. It burned down in the fire, New Auburn Fire.

Q: Really, what was the New Auburn Fire?

A: Nineteen thirty three, in June. It was a big one, too. Everything burnt. Right up to the school.

Mrs. C: From Balsafur Street going right up to Brook Street, and First Street, Second Street up to Roak Street, and from Third Street to the church, it stopped at the church. This here burned down, here.

Q: So a lot of families lost their homes?

A: Yeah.

Q: What kind of relief effort was there? Was there, was there - ?

A: Just the Red Cross, that's all, yeah.

Q: And did people have insurance for their houses? Did they get them - ?

A: Well, they had some. Not too much, I guess. In those days, you know, insurance, there wasn't that much.

Mrs. C: But they went to, the Red Cross was at the -

A: That's what I said, the Red Cross.

Mrs. C: And they gave them, you know, a little bit of everything, what they needed, but not the whole thing. They had to buy new furniture and, but we were lucky, we didn't, we were living across the bridge on that side, so the fire didn't go there.

A: The only thing we saved was a small Philco radio, that big.

Q: Out of everything?

A: Everything burned.

Mrs. C: And their clothes on their back.

Q: Did the mills help with any money?

A: No, the mills couldn't in those days. Red Cross is the only one, and it was like, Red Cross is like Salvation Army, they donate most of their stuff. But it was kind of rough.

Mrs. C: And people would help each other.

A: Yeah, it was rough.

Q: So the community, my next question is, what was the community like at that time? It seemed like they helped each other do - ?

A: Well, they helped each other, they helped each other as much as they could. It was pretty good.

Mrs. C: Because where we used to live there, Mrs. (*name*), they had eight apartment house where we used to live.

A: Yeah, but you didn't burn.

Mrs. C: No, but they took in the Delectotes and the Moteal. There was two empty apartments, so people would bring some stuff so they could sleep on it until, you know, and they'd feed them. You know, everybody that knew somebody, they'd try to help them out, you know, to give them a helping hand. And I think they stayed there for about six months, downstairs from us. Until they built, and then they built on, one built on Riverside Drive and the other one built on Second Street. But everybody was pitching in to help each other, you know.

Q: Did the people build the houses together or like - ?

A: No, their own. I mean, whoever owned the building, they took care of it as much as they could, they started building and, remortgage and build the building, that's it.

Q: What kind of activities were in the community? You said there's a church. Did the community also have a theater, did they have - ?

A: No, the theater wasn't -

Mrs. C: There was only one theater, it was Auburn Theater on Court Street. But after that, after they start building, they built a community theater right here, behind there. And where the Coca Cola Bottling, too, there. And we had the drug store on the corner, (*name*) Drug store.

A: It changed.

Mrs. C: It built up. But not like it used to, because all the buildings were just like Little Canada before they started (*unintelligible phrase*).

A: Everything's going down now.

Q: Where there any clubs? We read about there were certain clubs for Franco Americans.

A: No, there weren't really clubs in those days.

Mrs. C: Well, they had the Pastime Club in Lewiston, they used to play -

A: Yeah, but they didn't help the people out.

Mrs. C: I don't know, I don't remember that. But they had the Legion that was on, Post Twenty Two was on Lisbon Street.

A: The Legion i those days was very poor, they didn't have anything. It's not like today. Today they got a big club up here. Every city's got one now.

Q: Were people respectful of others differences? Do you remember hearing of any disrespect for people?

A: No, people was pretty good, I mean they get along pretty good. They respect each other as much as they could.

Q: There was more respect between young people and elders than there are now?

A: There were in those days, yes. The young kids in those days, they respect the elders. But today, forget it.

Mrs. C: Well, not everyone, but I mean you -

A: No, no, no, no.

Mrs. C: Because I remember once I went to the store for my grandfather to get him some cigars, and it was across the street. And there was a penny left, so he gave me the penny. So in the evening I says to my mother, I'm going to go to the store, buy myself a bubble gum. She says, where did you get the money? I told her my grandfather gave me that penny. She said, he needs his money, you should go for free. See, for just a penny, how it was in those days, you know?

Q: Now we don't even care about penny's.

Mrs. C: No, don't care about pennies. You can't do nothing for five cents either.

A: You want to hear a good one? I got a bill in the mail last week. Ten cents, it says, J.C. Penny. I said, that takes the cake. Ten cents, mind you.

Q: They sent you a bill for ten cents?

A: Somebody screwed up on the account or something. We pay every month. As soon as I get a bill, I pay for it. If I can't afford it, I don't buy it.

Mrs. C: It was thirty something, sixty four, and they charged us fifty four when they made their papers.

A: Ten cents. Can you believe it? We went over and paid it. To clear the credit, you know. Ten cents. Today, unbelievable, ten cents. Today they don't even bother to pick it up.

Q: No, definitely not. How would you describe the differences between Lewiston and Auburn?

A: About the same, Lewiston and Auburn's about the same.

Q: Were there any differences between class? Did wealthier people live in one area and - ?

A: Well, there was more rich people in Lewiston because it was bigger. It's bigger than Auburn. But you take Auburn, New Auburn and Old Auburn is just as big as

Lewiston, you come right down to it. Auburn is more expanded.

Q: And what's the difference between New Auburn and Old Auburn? Which, obviously Old Auburn was built first, but why are there two separate parts? Why is it not all Auburn?

A: Well, they still call it Auburn. Some people call it New Auburn.

Mrs. C: But when you see the sign that says New Auburn, once you cross the little bridge.

Q: So it's just where they, they ran out of room in Auburn and started to continue on the other side?

A: Like you said, one is older than the other one. That's the only difference.

Q: That's the only difference?

A: Yeah.

Q: What attitudes did the city have of each other? Did you, so there were baseball teams, like a Lewiston baseball team and a - ?

Mrs. C: There was football, together.

A: Football in those days. I know, I played football. I know what it is.

Mrs. C: November eleven was a big game for Lewiston and EL, both teams. Sometime it was here and sometime it was at Lewiston. It all depends. One year it

would be one place and the other year would be in the other place, but they always played November eleven.

A: I played a long time ago.

Q: How important was religion and religious holidays for you?

A: Just like any other day, but we had to go to church on the holiday. That's the only difference. When you're a kid, that's just how it is. There were four boys, five boys and one girl.

Mrs. C: Two girls.

A: Two girls, yeah. Lorraine and Julie. Father was the only one working so it was kind of rough, you know. Fourteen years old I was working, lugging ice on my back. I worked for an ice man, used to lug the ice. They had the old fashion ice box, you put the ice cake on top. That's what I used to do.

Q: That was your first job?

A: And I cut ice up Taylor Pond one year, forty below zero, and I fell through. I know what it is. (*Unintelligible phrase*). Then after that I moved on Eighth Street and my dad was still, like I said, he was poor. And they built a big wood yard across the street. I was lugging wood, cutting wood and everything, at fourteen years old. But hey, today, didn't bother me.

Q: And the money that you earned went toward your family?

A: Well, oh yeah. I give it to mom and she'd give us so much a week and

that's it, so. We want to go to the movie or something like that, so. In those days, boy, fifty cents was a lot of money. But today, fifty dollars now.

Mrs. C: I used to babysit five for ten cents an hour.

A: I used to, well, when I worked for Croteau, it was fifty cents a day, that's all we used to get, fifty cents a day. You'd start at seven in the morning, and you go six o'clock at night. You'd have to wait in line to get paid on Saturday. I'm telling you, it was kind of rough.

Q: Was fourteen a normal age to start working?

A: Well, in those days, fourteen, sixteen, normal time. But then you, I can't forget, every Saturday night there was a woman on Main Street in Auburn, on the fourth floor, she'd call for half a ton of coal. Half a ton of coal is quite a bit. We used to take those big gray buckets, put them on your back and lug four full flights of stairs with it. Four o'clock, at four, five o'clock Saturday, you're sure she wanted it. Half a ton of coal. Fifty cents a day. But hey, what the hell, I survived.

Q: Wow, that's a lot. But it kept you focused.

A: Yes, this is why today, doesn't matter what kind of work I do. Doesn't bother me. I'm used to it now.

Q: Do you find people today are very different with regard to religion?

A: No, there's not too many religion. I mean, it doesn't change that much, but there's very few going to church. It's not like it used to. It's the only difference.

Q: So when you were younger, the entire family went to church?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, you had to go. You better make sure you went. I came back from service on a furlough one year, and I hadn't seen my brother for a year and a half, I guess. He was overseas too, and I was overseas. We came back and on New Year's, Christmas, Christmas Eve, they had a mass up there. Mom said, you got to go to church tonight.

Mrs. C: Midnight mass.

A: Midnight mass, everybody lined up.

Mrs. C: And they used to sell tickets in those days, because a lot of people would go to midnight mass.

A: Today, forget it.

Q: Sell tickets to midnight mass?

A: Yeah.

Mrs. C: Sell tickets to midnight mass. We had to buy our tickets ahead to go to church.

A: Otherwise you couldn't go in, no room. But today, you can count them on your fingers.

Mrs. C: And after that we'd go to his mother's house and we'd have a meat pie and creton and soup, pea soup, and then we'd unwrap our gift and be all together, you know. It was a lot of fun then. But now everybody's gone, so.

A: How's the food at Bates college, good?

Q: It's pretty good, yeah. I think they do a good job. They buy from some of the local farms and they do really good vegetarian and different things. It's pretty good. I miss cooking, I, you know, it's always nice to have it prepared for you, but I really like to cook.

A: Yeah, but you know, when you make your own, sometimes it tastes better. Same with us, we go out a lot, but now, most every weekend it's been raining, so she cooks. It's the best way.

Mrs. C: In the winter time you cook more too, you know. You feel, it's cooler and home cooking food is -

A: My favorite place is right here in Lewiston. Cathay Hut, Chinese food. I love Chinese. It's good.

Q: Have you ever been to the Thai restaurant? There's Thai Dish, and there's Pepper and Spice there?

A: The hot stuff, huh?

Q: Yeah, it's really good. How much, I'm interested, how much did the tickets to midnight mass cost?

Mrs. C: It used to cost fifteen cents.

Q: Wow. If you only made fifty cents a day that's pretty, that's a lot.

A: And they'd collect in church, and if you gave them a dime, they give you a nickle back. They had a man making the change in back. Cost you five cents.

Mrs. C: Ten cents for one collection for the church, and then five cents for the other, so it cost you fifteen cents for the two collections.

A: Forget it today, though.

Mrs. C: But it was packed in those days, you know what I mean? And people want to, really wanted church and everything.

A: But you know, it's not all they ask, it's all, (*unintelligible phrase*) the same wage everywhere. It changed so much.

Q: And how long did you serve in the army?

A: How long in the army? Three years.

Q: Three years? Were you drafted?

A: I was drafted, yeah.

Q: And where did you serve?

A: I was in the armored force in the 8th Armored Division. I was a tank mechanic, I used to fix guns, all the guns that, what the hell, you know, like if they jam or something. I used to go up front and fix it, come back, and that's all I used to do.

Mrs. C: And you doing the tank, too.

A: I drove a tank for a while, too, those big M4 tanks. Hey, had to go through, you had to go through. What can you do?

Mrs. C: Yeah, he left March 17, St. Patrick's Day, 1943. And he came back February, my grandfather died February, I'll say tenth, when he came back, 1946. And we got married July 6, 1946, the same year he came back.

Q: Wow. Had you known each other before he left?

Mrs. C: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And in those days, they didn't give you engagement ring. He gave me a black onyx with a little chip in it. And my mother says, you know what that means? You know in those days, you know, she says, you're going to, you'll have to wait for him because he gave you a diamond. You know, mothers, that's the way they were those days. That's in Louisiana, in Schrevesport.

A: That's the tank I used to drive. I used to repair all those guns.

Mrs. C: It's in the bayous in Louisiana, where they had the hurricane and the flood and everything.

A: That's snake country. Forget it.

Q: Did you notice a change in Lewiston when you came back?

A: Oh yeah, there was quite a bit. A lot of fellas I knew got killed overseas, you know, or they were transferred. Some didn't come back, and some came wounded. It was rough, but what can you do?

Mrs. C: Him and his brother were lucky. His brother left in January, and you left in March.

A: I was there a year and a half overseas, so I was lucky. But I came out all right, so.

Mrs. C: He went to the Battle of the Bulge, you went to the Battle of the Bulge and -

A: Yeah, that was kind of rough over there, geez. We went through France, from France went back to the Bulge, from the Bulge we went up almost to Berlin. But on the outside of Berlin that stopped, and the Russians took over. That was it. I was glad to come back, oh yeah. I wanted to go back with my brother, but she didn't want me to so I didn't. She asked me to get married.

Mrs. C: Don't believe him. I says to him one day, I've got proof, I still getting some letters, you know, that you sent me while you were overseas.

A: It's kind of rough when you're all alone, you know.

Mrs. C: But you met Bob in, was it in France?

A: Yeah, sixteen months I haven't met him. I met him overseas in Germany. Oh, Jesus, we had a ball. It was nice, though. He came back before I did.

Mrs. C: Yeah, he came back in January and you came back in February. Because we had made a farewell party, because they were both going together. They didn't know they were going to furlough together, and they did have a last furlough together. So his brother was in Texas, and him, he was in Louisiana, Shreveport. And

his father was working for the railroad, and of course he had those tickets that he could ride the train for free. So after we gave them the party on Saturday night at our house, well Sunday morn-, Monday morning his father says I'm going to take you to Boston, I'm going down with you on the train to Boston. So he went as far as Boston, and him, he took the train from New Orleans and the other one took the train from Texas. And then they hadn't seen each other until they met in, was it in Germany or France that you met him?

A: Germany, Salzburg. It was nice, bigger change. My best friend I was with in the service, he was from Appleton, Wisconsin, he came to see me I don't know how many times. He was the owner of these Dairy Queen, all these Dairy Queen's, he was in charge of all of those. He came out of the service, his father passed away so they put him out of the service to run the business. Then he popped in. We were sitting on the front porch one day when an old Toyota, he had his own plane and everything. He passed away six months ago. Seventy two, seventy three years old. (*Unintelligible phrase*) too bad, though.

Q: Sounds like he had a good life, though, (*unintelligible phrase*)?

Mrs. C: Oh yeah, yeah. Because that last time that he came here he had to go in Topsham, the Dairy Queen they have on the left hand side going down to Brunswick, that's where he was heading for, yeah.

A: His wife sent me a letter not too long ago, there, she said, I miss him quite a bit. Well, he was in charge, him and her used to run the business.

Mrs. C: Yeah, and they were always together.

A: He went back to Germany I don't know how many times, he used to (*unintelligible phrase*). But he enjoyed it. Leipzig.

Mrs. C: And then the one that we had met there, in Massachusetts.

A: Oh, Maduras?

Mrs. C: Antonio Maduras.

A: Yeah, his father was, his brother was a cardinal down there. I met a lot of nice people down there.

Mrs. C: And then he went from Biddeford, (*name*) he died too, he was, you were all together.

A: Look at Caswell, Caswell and I were from Medway, Maine. There's one guy who used to live on Blake Street by the name of Roy, I never met him again. The guy I used to work with in the mill, Lionel Odette, he came, he was a super at the, when the mill closed, one of the end ones. Him and I left the same week, the same outfit, we never saw each other. Yeah, you think about it. It's a lot to think about.

Mrs. C: Well, we saw him at the Bates Mill when he was there.

A: Yeah, I mean overseas, I never, no.

Q: Were you working at the mill before you left for the service?

A: Yeah, I worked there a year before I left for the service. I went in the mill in 1940, '41, 1941.

Mrs. C: Forty two, Don.

A: Forty one, it was. I left Vince in '41.

Mrs. C: Wait a minute. My father died January 12, 1941.

A: That's the same year I left.

Mrs. C: And you were working there, and I was working for Mrs. Vincent.

A: Yeah, but I left Vincent and I went to work for Libby.

Mrs. C: Yeah, that's right, and then I left Mrs. Vincent. That's how we met. The Vincent Bottling plant that they, well, now it's not a bottling plant any more, but it's right on the corner of South Main and Mill Street, that big building. That used to be Vincent's Bottling plant, and he used to work for Mr. Vincent and I used to work for his daughter-in-law, and that's how we met. I was babysitting, she had only two then.

A: See, I always said, you asked me to get married.

Mrs. C: Oh sure. The tape recorder is on.

A: I don't care. I don't care if the recorder's on, there's nothing wrong there.

Mrs. C: The truth is coming out.

A: There's nothing wrong there, because you asked me.

Mrs. C: Yeah, so anyway, so we'd been going out ever since, and waited for him for three years. And then he went back to the mill again.

A: Yeah, I went back to the Libby. I went in, I started on the Libby in '42 and I got out of there, was 1970 or '71. Pepère died in 1969, Vincent.

Mrs. C: But you were working part time for them.

A: Yeah, but I mean full time, I'm talking about, when I left the mill.

Mrs. C: Because whenever he went for all the job, we always stick to the Vincents. They needed help. If somebody was sick or something, we'd always go back and work with them. So when Mr. Vincent died and Memère Vincent died, we always helped them out, you know, for food or help them cook, or do something for them.

A: After I left the mill, I left the mill to go to Leblanc's Clothing. Then he put me as manager on Lisbon Street.

Mrs. C: That was son-in-law.

A: Then after that, well, they expanded too much and they closed every store there was, so. I was the last one down the store.

Q: Why did you guys work in separate mills?

A: Well, me, I was a different kind of, I was a mechanic.

Mrs. C: That was a woolen mill, and Continental Mill was cotton. And he liked that over there and I, (*unintelligible phrase*), and like I say, we never did change job. If you went in, you like a job, you stick to the job, you know. And him, too, he liked it over there. But after that, well, they asked him to go for Leblanc's and that's where he quit Libby and then went back to Libby after that, when they closed the store.

A: Then I went up for the old chicken house, which Libby used to own. Where they made the curtains. Then they closed, so.

Q: So it's just, each mill had a different kind of fabric?

A: Different kind of fiber and different kind of work. I was mechanic in the spinning room, a fixer. Any kind of, any one of those frames would break down, I'd work on them.

Q: Was it a time constraint? Like did you have to try to fix it really fast?

A: Oh no, you fix it when we had a chance, as long as it was fixed, that's all they cared. But (*unintelligible phrase*).

Mrs. C: See, and the Bates Mill was more known to make bedspread and things like that. Us, we made cotton to keep the keep the guys from the war going, because we made heavy material. Khaki colors, or like when we were working weekends, we had to work on the khaki, they call it, wasn't white, so we, you know. And then the Androscoggin Mill was more like a silk. The bobbins were smaller. And the Pepperill, it was sheets, Pepperill, see, they made the sheets, pillow cases. And so each mill had, I can't remember what the Hill Mill was doing, they were doing cotton too, but different, but the Hill Mill, too. So we had a lot of mills and a lot -

A: The Libby was only strictly blankets. And at the end they were making curtains.

Mrs. C: Material for curtains.

A: Curtain, yeah, and we made some electric blankets.

Q: So if you didn't like working at one mill, you could easily quit and go to a different mill?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, you could. You could do, you know, it was all (*unintelligible phrase*). I was getting good money at the end, I didn't care, so, down the mill, so. But Leblanc gave me more, he put me in charge of the store, so, but they closed up.

Mrs. C: But the mill, every mill there was good work, yeah. And people were nice to work with, you know what I mean?

A: In fact, when I worked part time down Pontbriand, there, Paul Libby, one of the Libby's, he used to come down to see me over there. Buy his stuff from us down Pontbriand.

Q: So you had a pretty good relationship with all the Libbys?

A: Oh yeah. And it's not because it's the Caron family, but all the family from the Caron worked in there. My sister worked there I don't know how many years, my brother was an overseer there, I worked there, and my other brother Bob, well, he worked just worked part time and he quit, and he went to -

Mrs. C: And then Lou.

A: Jerry worked there.

Mrs. C: Yeah, the one's in Alaska, he worked there. Didn't work long, because he didn't like the inside cotton smell.

A: And my brother, the oldest one, well, he's blind. He lost his wife. He

married one that was working with him down the Libby mill, and they're living together now. (*Unintelligible phrase*).

Mrs. C: His picture was in the paper, when we went to the Bates Mill.

A: Ruth and Silvio.

Mrs. C: We went together, and if you see the picture, he's (*unintelligible word*) and she's below him. Yeah, Ruth and Silvio Caron.

Q: You began at the Libby Mill because of your family that was already working there?

A: No, the pay, I mean, it was a better paying job from the (*unintelligible phrase*).

Mrs. C: (*Unintelligible phrase*).

A: Yeah, but it was better, that's why I went in there. But hey, it was a good job so I didn't mind it. A lot of people that didn't like it. Hey, it's their job, what can you do?

Mrs. C: Like I say, you change clothes, you know, you bring your clothes, you used to work in overall and tee shirts so you had, you know.

A: Yeah, grease up to here, but what the hell, (*unintelligible phrase*), wash up, that's all.

Mrs. C: But we didn't wear the same clothes in and out. You'd change over

to come back home and go to work.

Q: How long did you work at Libby Mill?

A: Nineteen forty two til 1971. That's quite a few years.

Q: And how were you, like how long did you work there?

Mrs. C: At the Continental Mill? We'll say from 1948 until they closed, and I can't remember the year they closed.

Q: It was like, 1971?

Mrs. C: Yeah, cause we were still living here, we used to live in the brick building here, before we bought here.

Q: That's not a very far move. That's pretty - .

Mrs. C: No, well I was born on Mill Street, right across the little bridge there, that big green building there, I was born there on the third floor. And then in 1941, after my father passed away, we moved over here. We always lived on the same floor as my grandfather and grandmother, and she was the one taking care of us after school. And when we moved over here in '46, we always stayed on the same floor again. And then, well, my grandfather and grandmother passed away and my uncle and aunt, so my mother was sick, so we decided we'd buy here. It was for sale, so we bought here. So we bought here in May, and she died September 30th, so it's been thirty five years that she, 1970.

A: Do you think (*unintelligible phrase*) thirty five?

Mrs. C: I don't think so. I'd be too old, I wouldn't want to live that old.

A: Not at eighty one years old, I don't want to go any further.

Q: That's very impressive. Let's see, what else I can ask you. Oh, you were talking about childhood memories. Perhaps you, what did you do for activities when you were a child?

A: When I was a child?

Q: Yes.

A: Oh geez, you got me there.

Mrs. C: Skating. He played hockey for awhile.

A: Oh yeah, I played hockey. We both used to go skating quite a bit, you know that, and I played football. I didn't play very long, though. I got knocked out a couple times, that was it. But I kept working mostly.

Q: Did you play football for school, or just with like neighborhood kids?

A: No, we stick with the neighborhood mostly. Used to live on Eighth Street up there, and all the neighbors (*unintelligible phrase*).

Mrs. C: Yeah, but it wasn't with the school then.

A: No, not with the school, just with the kids.

Q: So most of the other kids that you played with, their parents also worked in the mills?

A: Yeah, shoe shop and the mill.

Mrs. C: Well, Armand's father used to work in the shoe shop. My father used to work at the Cushman Hollis. Now where Denny's is, and it used to be a big shoe shop there. That's where I worked, Shapiro, and they tore that down. But then Shapiro moved where The Barn is on Minot Avenue, and that's where Shapiro closed for good. I was working for big John then.

A: I haven't been over there for years now that Barn. I got to go see what they got there.

Mrs. C: So anyways, but there was a lot of shoe shops, too. Like you said, you could go from one place, if you didn't like a job you could go from one place to the other. But today it's altogether different. There's nothing left. It's too bad you know, because -

A: But you know, they keep closing these bases and everything, what the hell's people going to do? Look at the one in Brunswick there, going to close. That's too bad, you know.

Q: Yeah, it's all going overseas.

Mrs. C: Yeah, everything goes overseas.

A: That place is going to go to hell completely, Brunswick, oh boy, whew. Too bad. Well, look at the one in, not Portsmouth, but where we go there. That mall, in New

Hampshire. What's the name of that base they closed over there?

Mrs. C: Oh, Pease.

A: Pease, Pease Air Force, they closed that.

Mrs. C: In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, they made something else out of that.

A: It's too bad you know, lot of people out of work.

Q: What do you see for the future of Lewiston? Because there's no more mills, there's not a lot of work. What do you see happening?

Mrs. C: I don't know.

A: People are moving out of town. The kids, I mean people at that age, (*unintelligible phrase*), they get married or something like that, they got to move out. There's no good jobs, no paying jobs.

Mrs. C: Because my niece, Don and Sue, their daughter's in Pennsylvania. She went to college and found a better job over there, so she stayed there. So she's not coming back to Lewiston or Auburn.

A: You guys stick to college.

Mrs. C: Well, that's what they're doing, too.

A: You better believe it.

Mrs. C: Get a good job.

Q: Yeah, so now people have to move from Lewiston?

A: That's the problem. And you know, if you move too far away, the price of gas, the price of everything, they can't commute anymore. It's terrible.

Mrs. C: Yeah, I remember when we bought our first car. Were married in '46, we bought one in '48, it was a second hand car, and gas was six gallons for a dollar.

A: Not today, not today. Almost three dollars a gallon. The oil's the same way, heating oil, it's the same thing, two fifty four, two fifty eight. This winter's going to be tough.

Mrs. C: But it's altogether different from when we were brought up from today. You know what I mean? You need more money to live, everything is expensive. But, you do the best you can.

A: I'm going to heat the stove downstairs this winter. I got a wood stove. You can't eat just banana's, their too costly.

Q: So, you were a mechanic at the mill. How did you get your job?

Mrs. C: Fixer, he was a fixer.

A: A fixer. Well, see, I was a mechanic in the service, that's why when I went back in the mill they knew I could do the job, so

Q: So then you had an actual, did you work the same, what kind of hours did you work in the mill?

A: In the mill, from six in the morning til two thirty in the afternoon.

Q: And where there vacations?

A: We had one week vacation.

Mrs. C: Not when you got married, you had to take it on your own, they didn't pay you then. When we got married, we took our vacation on our own, without no pay, and no vacation time, and no sick time and no nothing. But today it's different.

Q: Were most people with the mechanic position, where they mostly men?

A: Yes, mostly men. They were all men as far as mechanics down the mill. Because a woman couldn't do that kind of work, it's impossible.

Q: And where there any restrictions for age? Did you have to be a certain age?

A: No, if you could do the job they gave you the job, you know, but you had to qualify for it. You had to go take a test, and if you do it all right, if you don't, well, you don't get the job, that's it. But I did pretty good. I can't complain.

Q: No injuries?

A: Not today.

Mrs. C: You were injured at the mill.

A: I was injured once in the mill. See, those fingers don't bend. They get caught in that wheel, twenty ton. And there was some spikes, this way, coming through. My had got caught in there, my wedding ring caught in there. Pulled my hand right in there and pulled the belt out. And the guy that pulled the belt out passed out. I walked out of there and they took me to the hospital. I was out for six months.

Mrs. C: You were there, the hospital for thirty one days, and then -

A: Then I went to Portland.

Mrs. C: Boston, at the rehab.

A: Boston, rehab. See, in those days,

Mrs. C: And he was out of work for a year.

A: The only thing that hurts, in the winter, shoveling snow or something.

Mrs. C: From the cold, cold. But he was lucky.

A: I keep good gloves.

Q: So what happened when you didn't work for a year?
Did the mills do anything to help you?

A: No, no, no.

Mrs. C: No, those days they just payed the bills for that.

A: They just paid the bill, the insurance payed the bill and that's it. But, live on your own, that's it. Hey, what can you do?

Mrs. C: There was no insurance in those days or nothing like that.

A: Today you get compensation and you get help. Today, there's nothing now.

Mrs. C: But when he was in Boston, every two weeks he could come down here. So they'd pay him his fare to come home, and the following week I'd go up. I'd take the Flying Yankee, that was on Bates Street, that was a train station there, and I used to take the Flying Yankee at seven thirty, and at quarter of nine I'd be in Boston. And he'd be waiting for me.

A: They gave me a room over there the size of my bathroom. Just a bed and a bureau and two hangers to hold your clothes, to hang up your clothes, and that was it.

Mrs. C: But it was better than nothing, because he had to go to the rehab. They didn't have any like that around town here.

A: And I was in the colored district, mind you.

Mrs. C: Yeah, but that wasn't that bad then.

A: Wasn't bad, though, no.

Mrs. C: Because we walked the street, we, I usedo to go, when I used to go see him -

A: In the afternoon I'd take off, I'd go the movie or something like that, you know.

Mrs. C: They'd give him tickets to go the movies, and tickets to go eat, you know, they had their own cafeteria. And when I'd go down we used to stay at the Bradford Hotel on Tremont Street, because it was closer for the rehab for him and closer for me to come to the station, the North Station.

A: There was one guy there, he was there for three, four months I guess. He was supposed to come in, to get out, you know, the Sunday. Damn fool (*unintelligible*) he got out on a Saturday night and he got drunk and fell down the stairs, I guess, and he broke an arm. They kept him.

Q: Most injuries at the mill had to be sent to Boston?

Mrs. C: Well, it all depends. See, him, it's because on account of his hand, he couldn't -

A: See, they had this all tied up with a coat hanger, coat hanger with duct tape right here, and the coat hanger was like this, and they tied all these with elastics to the coat hanger, so I couldn't move my finger, try to move them.

Mrs. C: Because you could see the bone and they'd do, they'd put some kind of solution every day and powder so it could heal.

A: The Doctor in Lewiston, Dr. Green, he said, I'm going to cut your fingers. Then Dr. Goldman said no, he said, we're gonna save them. And they saved them. I thought sure they were going to cut all four of them. But no, otherwise, see, I can do

most anything with them. You could ask her. The only thing, like I say, when I use my snow blower in the winter, I got to make sure, I got a good glove, because it gets cold. Goes with the age, too. But I can't complain.

Q: So you, after your year of rehab and everything, you went back to working?

A: I went back to work, down the mill.

Q: And you weren't scared?

A: No, no, I kept going. That's the first year we got married.

Mrs. C: No, the second, '48. We got married in '46, and that happened in '48.

A: And I kept going. But hey, you got to keep going.

Q: Yeah, you got to, huh? That's what work is, I guess you have to. Let's see, what else do I want to ask you? Were there any differences between the bosses and common workers, did you notice any discrimination?

A: My brother was boss (*unintelligible phrase*).

Mrs. C: He was one of them.

A: I was one of them, but no. They, in fact, when something would happen the boss from the office would come upstairs and give us a hand and this and that. No difference at all. You know, that was one thing that was good about it, the boss would join with the other fellas. They needed help, they were there to help them. Look at

Lemieux, that's the way, Arthur Lemieux.

Mrs. C: Arthur Lemieux, yeah, he was a good boss, too.

A: Look at John Libby. Paul, he'd come up and help us, he's the owner of the mill, he'd come up and give us a hand, take his shirt off and let's go. Oh yeah, they were nice people to work with.

Q: Was being a mechanic, was that a higher position than other positions?

A: Well, it is, mechanic is a higher position than a spinner or something like that.

Mrs. C: It's a fixer, Donny, not a mechanic, it's a fixer.

A: It's a fixer. A fixer and a mechanic, it's the same thing.

Mrs. C: Well, it's a fixer.

A: But I enjoyed it.

Q: Where you paid more money?

A: Oh yeah, I was getting more money than the other people.

Q: Do you feel, looking back, do you feel that you might have been over worked?

A: No, I can't complain as far as over work. Work, and I'd put in my eight hours and that was it, so. I was never pushed around, I mean, you know, to do this and

do that. In fact, I'm the one they helped, the last set of frames we had over there, they bought them in Italy. The guy that put them up, he couldn't talk English and I couldn't talk Italian, so that was nice you know. That was a job by itself. But, we got it done.

Mrs. C: Yeah, they got it done, they set it up and it worked.

A: And the bobbins was this big, the bobbins was that big when I got done and that high. I know, I worked on those. That was (*unintelligible word*), I liked those frames.

Mrs. C: Is that the one they moved out, in the south, no?

A: Max Miller bought those. The motor on the end of that was that high, and you could speed it the speed you want to. They were big. But, hey. You think of that, you got a lot to think about. Brings back memories.

Mrs. C: Because we always, all went together, Julie, Sylvio and Ruth, Don and I when they had -

A: At the Bates Mill, yeah.

Mrs. C: At the Bates Mill.

(Break in taping.)

A: It brings back a lot of memories.

Mrs. C: It's altogether different life than today, you know. We wasn't afraid to walk the streets then, and go to the movies and come back when it was dark. And now

we don't dare. But -

A: That far back (*unintelligible phrase*) the mill. These two probably weren't even born yet.

Q: I don't think so.

A: I'm nosy, anh?

Q: Well, thank you very much for your time. It was very interesting, yeah, it was so interesting, yeah, thank you.

Mrs. C: You're welcome.

A: It makes a change, anh?

Q: It's wonderful to be learning about Lewiston and Auburn, because it's really, so many colleges have just a college town and no history, and Lewiston and Auburn have so much history.

A: There is, there is.

Mrs. C: Yeah, there is. Because we were always, you know, Lewiston and Auburn were always together. And because we didn't have no store in Auburn, we had to go to Lisbon Street to go shopping.

A: Did you go see our new college on Lisbon Street there?

Q: No.

End of Side A, copy

Side B, copy

A: It's a business college, down there.

Mrs. C: Yeah, can't remember the name now.

A: But it's changed, you know, everything changes, what can you do?
Change for the best, they hope.

Q: I hope so, too. So, can we take your photos?

Mrs. C: You think it's going to come out good?

Q: Yeah, shall we do them separately, it's probably better for the two tapes,
okay.

End of Interview

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