

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

**Rita Morin**  
(Interviewer: *Andrea L. Hommedieu*)

**SWOH #20**  
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**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview for the Shoe Workers Oral History Project at the Museum L-A. The date is January 23, 2009, and I'm at the home of Rita Morin in Auburn, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Rita could you start just by giving me your full name, which includes your maiden name.

**Rita Morin:** Rita Pelletier Morin.

**AL:** Can you spell that?

**RM:** P-E-L-L-E-T-I-E-R.

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

**RM:** In Lewiston.

**AL:** And your date of birth?

**RM:** January 29, 1919.

**AL:** Were your parents from Lewiston too?

**RM:** No, they were from Canada.

**AL:** Okay.

**RM:** Both of them.

**AL:** So did they marry and then come to the U.S., or did they meet -?

**RM:** They married in Maine. And they came from Canada to do like the others, find work and make a living out of it. He was working for the city, plowing roads at night, you know. In those days they didn't have the machines they have today. They done that with the horses.

**AL:** He plowed the roads with horses?

**RM:** With horses, the sidewalks. The bottom part of Lewiston, Lincoln Street and all around there.

**AL:** Wow.

**RM:** Yeah, so that's something children cannot imagine unless they went somewheres and they had those equipment.

**AL:** Yeah. So did your dad do that for many years?

**RM:** All his life. But as the time went by the horses went out, and back then the new machineries started. And I don't remember, he was not working on a truck or anything like that, just deliver, deliver work. He enjoyed his life.

**AL:** Did he ever talk about missing the horses once they were, once they got -?

**RM:** Oh, that I wouldn't remember because I was too little. I was just four or five years then, well then I forget, but he didn't talk too much about that once he was out of there.

**AL:** And what did your mother do?

**RM:** My mother stayed home to take care of the family.

**AL:** How many bothers and sisters do you have?

**RM:** Five brothers and three sisters.

**AL:** So there were nine of you?

**RM:** Yes. Nine plus them, that's eleven in all, which she had to do cooking in the morning and washing during the day, ironing, and taking care of the kids and cooking three meals a day. That was a lot of cooking to do.

**AL:** And where were you within the children? Were you older or younger?

**RM:** The second.

**AL:** The second oldest?

**RM:** Yes. I had a brother, which he works in the mill all his life. And the others were, I had brothers and sisters, the baby is a girl. Now I'm, just the girls are living, so we're still three girls. We lost one to, the boys are gone.

**AL:** But when you were growing up being one of the older children, you must have taken care of the younger ones to some -?

**RM:** Oh yes, that I did. Especially when it came at the last one there, she was a little girl and we still go, we are going out together now, still, I'm glad in a way that I still have her.

**AL:** Yeah.

**RM:** Well, we have four children, though, so. My husband went to war and was in the battle of Iwo Jima.

**AL:** He was?

**RM:** Yes. He got wounded over there, and got out of there and they sent him back on his way to Japan when the war ended. So then it took another six months before he was released from that. And then, well life began together as a family, starting a family.

**AL:** Right. So you grew up in Lewiston. What schools did you go to?

**RM:** St. Mary's. And I had to start working by the age of eleven, twelve.

**AL:** Oh, you started work then?

**RM:** Not work, I didn't work, I work at the house helping my mother with the other little ones in back of me.

**AL:** Yeah.

**RM:** So that was an experience which helped me later on when I had my own children too, which was nice.

**AL:** Yeah. So at age eleven you were in the home helping your mom for several years?

**RM:** Until I went to work.

**AL:** At what age did you go to work at the shoe shop?

**RM:** Oh, seventeen, yeah, I started as a cementing girl in the lasting room, and then when those children started there, well I quit working for, well my baby was eight years old when I went back to work. My sister taught me how to stitch. I knew how to make dresses and things like that, but in a shoe shop it was all different to me.

**AL:** Yeah.

**RM:** So I learned that from her, and I stayed there eight years. And then when they started talking about closing the factory, I went at -

**AL:** Which factory was this?

**RM:** Clark, Clark Shoe, And I went to Knapp Shoe and I asked for a job. They asked me if I could stitch, I says yes, I says, I was a fancy stitcher, but I know they don't have that over here. So she says alright, she says, come in, and then I went in there and I stayed there twenty years working on the lining parts of the shoes. So that was a very nice job, because I enjoyed working. It was something different from the house and my children were all in school, and the neighbors, in those days you didn't, were not afraid to leave your children. I go to work when they were leaving and then I came back at 4:00 in the afternoon. They had been out of school for an hour about. And that was it up to there.

**AL:** So you said one of your sisters taught you how to stitch?

**RM:** Oh yeah, she was a floor lady at Clark Shoe.

**AL:** And what was her name?

**RM:** Ida Blanc. And she really enjoyed her job and she stayed there until the factory, no, she retired before the factory, because it's just, now there's nothing more in the Clark, well.

**AL:** You're trying to think of the name of the shoe shop? Yeah, there's a lot of them.

**RM:** No, that's all, the only place I worked after that. I always worked, I worked there for twenty years, and then it was my time to retire. That's what it was for the shoe factory. But my sisters worked in the shop, and I had another, at Knapp Shoe.

**AL:** Knapp Shoe, yes.

**RM:** Yeah. My brother was working there, my brother-in-law, two of my sisters, and I.

**AL:** So you all really knew the shoe industry.

**RM:** Yes. I have a brother who worked in the mill, I have two brothers who work in the mill, and they both love it.

**AL:** Yeah.

**RM:** They stayed until the last minute.

**AL:** So did you and your sisters and brother, did you all do different types of things in the shoe -?

**RM:** Oh yeah, oh yes.

**AL:** Can you talk about the different things that you all did to make shoes?

**RM:** Well there was my brother-in-law, he was cutter at Knapp Shoe, and then from the cutting room it would come to the stitching room, starting at the stamping on the lining, but they have other job before but I can't name them all.

**AL:** That's okay.

**RM:** And then it came to us and we had to take the lining there, add it to a piece of tape that goes around the shoes like that, and this way, well I did that all day working on different kind of linings, you know, some it was only adding the little piece on the back there, (*unintelligible*). My other sister, she worked in the stitching room downstairs there, and she was working on those big boots there, putting the lining and the top of shoes, all around there, she done that quite a few years too. Because she works from sixteen to, until she retire, always working, having children. But I was the lucky one, my children were old enough when I went to work, so I enjoyed that.

**AL:** Now, did any of your children work in the shoe business?

**RM:** My son work, but he didn't like it. So then he went and worked for technology, for (*unintelligible*) those days. And he stayed there. He worked thirty six years over there.

**AL:** Wow.

**RM:** So the others there, well they all work in shoe shop, different things.

**AL:** Yeah.

**RM:** Yeah. Oh, he started working in the shoe factory too. He was a laster man, bed lasting. So, but the other two working there, I don't exactly know what kind of work they were doing. They were the youngest.

**AL:** Do you have any stories about the time you worked at the shoe shops? Were there incidents that you recall, or were there just social things that you did with friends who also worked there? Or -

**RM:** Well, we would go out. Everybody was busy and raising their family, so there were some outings but I didn't go to many of them because I had enough work to do at home.

**AL:** I always like to ask this question, because food is so important to families. Where there foods and dishes that your mother made as you were growing up that you continue to make for your family?

**RM:** Oh yes, a lot of things.

**AL:** Can you talk about some of those foods, because I know -

**RM:** Well, I haven't been cooking for a while.

**AL:** Did you make meat pies?

**RM:** Oh yes.

**AL:** Something called croton?

**RM:** *Des corton*,. Yeah, *des corton*, the meat pies. That was our dish for the holidays, the meat pie.

**AL:** What is *croton*?

**RM:** *Des corton* is something like meat pies. It's a, well they use in those days some kind of, I don't know how you call it in English.

**AL:** Yeah, okay.

**RM:** Pork.

**AL:** Yes.

**RM:** They use pork, and then they added another thing in there but I don't know the name of it.

**AL:** Okay, yeah.

**RM:** But we would put spice in there and that was all, that was all to it. And then the crust, well we had to make the crust from the start, you know.

**AL:** Right, yeah.

**RM:** Yeah.

**AL:** Well they are good. Those meat pies are very good.

**RM:** Oh yes. Christmas and Thanksgiving, those were special holidays, which always been. Even if we didn't have much toys like the children have today, at least we had food on the table three times a day without problem. My mother made sure we always had good food, milk, bread, potatoes, and meat and vegetable, so that's the way life was in those days. They made a garden, so everything was fresh.

**AL:** Oh, they did?

**RM:** Oh yeah, yeah, we had a little a garden and everything was fresh in those days. Not like today.

**AL:** Is there anything that I haven't asked you about your time in the shoe shops? What you saw, how you - because you probably saw the industry leaving the area a little bit during your time working?

**RM:** Oh yes. The shop was starting to close, you know. So that's how come I went to another factory to work. And now, well, that I'm out of there, I don't know what's going on. But Falcon is still going.

**AL:** Yes.

**RM:** So, but I don't know anybody anymore, because Roger was working, yeah, Nadeau.

**AL:** Roger Nadeau, yes.

**RM:** Yeah, I know he's the one who gave you my name. He's enjoying Florida anyway.

**AL:** As we speak. It's much warmer there.

**RM:** Sometimes it's not that warm. When it goes down to 30, 40, 50, then it's cold for them. Yes, everybody bundle up.

**AL:** Yeah, well great, thank you so much.

**RM:** The only thing, I have a couple of pictures, I don't know if you would like to have them. The group.

**AL:** Oh, now this is a group in 1977?

**RM:** Did I put the date on?

**AL:** Yes, 1977. This is a group of people you worked with?

**RM:** Those are, were all working around.

**AL:** And, was this at Knapp Shoe or Clark?

**RM:** No, I think we had gone all out, we all went out for a get-together, the group of the girls working all around, you know

**AL:** Right.

**RM:** That's a -

**AL:** That's a very nice picture.

**RM:** And this one, well, it was another time but I don't recall.

**AL:** Yes.

**RM:** You know we don't write things in the back, oh.

**AL:** Yes, you did.

**RM:** Stitching room, 1975.

**AL:** Now which shoe shop was 1975.

**RM:** Knapp.

**AL:** Knapp, okay. So then that would be the group you worked with at Knapp also?

**RM:** Yeah.

**AL:** But you weren't at Knapp, I under-, yeah?

**RM:** Yes, '75, yes, I was still at Knapp.

**AL:** Right, right.

**RM:** That's before I left, yeah. But, '97, oh, and that one is '95?

**AL:** Seventy-five.

**RM:** Seventy-five?



**AL:** Yeah?

**RM:** Yeah.

**AL:** Okay, well I will give these to Rachel at the museum. She will probably -

**RM:** These are hard to figure out, but these you can see all these faces. But that was the group were working around. And that was mostly all the group. I don't remember the occasion. So -

**AL:** Well great, thank you.

**RM:** If it's to help you, you can have it.

*End of Interview*

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