

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

Aime and Aurore Foisy
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

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Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an oral history interview for the Mill Workers Oral History Project. I'm Andrea L'Hommedieu, and the date is June 23rd, the year 2005. And I'm here with Aime and Aurore Foisy. Could I start with you, and could you state your full name and spell it?

Aime Foisy: My full name, A-I-M-E-, Amie, Foisy, F-O-I-S-Y, Foisy.

AL: And where and when were you born?

Aime: February 21st, 1919.

AL: And where?

Aime: In Auburn, I lived on First Street.

AL: So you've gone from First Street to Seventh.

Aime: That's right, we went up the hill. It's a good way to go. So, after that, when I was four, my father left my mother for another woman and went to New Jersey, and my mother had to work at the Androscoggin to support herself, so she put the three of her children in an orphanage on Ash Street. It's still there; today it's a place for old people to go to die. There's a word for it, but I can't think of it now.

Then we, I went to the orphanage; I was four years old. I stayed there for seven years, and I come out of there, I can't complain about, nothing about the orphanage because the orphanage, the nuns were absolute saints. And when I was six or seven I think, they let my curly hair grow, oh yeah, about three or four months without giving me a haircut, and they cut it right down to the bald, and they took that one hair at a time and they sewed it on a doll made out of wax, and it represented the baby Jesus at Christmas. And I'll tell you, I've been lucky all my life after that. And I've been through hell a few times!

So after that, I stayed there until eleven, and I came out and I went to live with my mother and my brothers and sister, and I went to work for, I went to school until I was sixteen years old. They kept me in the seventh grade, instead of putting me in, when I was sixteen, with the other guys that were sixteen into the eighth grade. So I got mad. On my birthday, I was sixteen years old and kids were allowed to go to work.

I went to work for the Progressive Bakery down the hill next to the, it used to be there. Four dollars a week, twelve hours a day. But it's good money to be earned. A couple of months later all my friends were working in a wood heel plant and they asked me to come along with them. They paid eight bucks. That wasn't bad, and we only worked about forty hours, so that wasn't bad.

I stayed with that, and when I got to be eighteen I became the foreman, that's how well I got along with everybody. They had very nice people there working for, we were working for two men. One was Brownie, and the other one was a Jewish fellow, very nice person. I used to go on trips with them to Vermont to get some maple, hard rock maple to make heels for women's shoes.

Manny, Manny Mascot, that was his name. I'm sure that people would like to hear his name again, he must have been gone a long time ago. He was a very nice man, and he was a good guy to work for. I finally, finally they went bankrupt, they run out of money and closed the place down. So they, both of them, they took all the stuff that they could get in their car and got out and went to Massachusetts.

But we, somebody advised me to get ourself a lawyer and get our back pay, and we did. We got a nice lawyer, he was on Main Street in Auburn here, I remember, and everybody got their pay. So when it got to my pay, there was twenty-five dollars a week, so I had three weeks to come in. Seventy-five bucks. My wife and I went to Old Orchard with that, and we really had a good time for a couple of days there.

So after that, I came back, and then I was getting in the age to get drafted, and the draft came along, I got drafted, I went to Fort Devons and stayed there for a few days, a week, a couple of weeks I think. And then we, they didn't have the jacket that fit me just right, you know, so they kept me there and they had a tailor make my Army jacket. Boy, he made it a good job, beautiful job, the best piece of clothes I ever had on my back after then.

Then we stayed there, oh, probably three or four weeks and another thing happened to me. I had already had my shots two weeks earlier, and there was a staff sergeant, because I left after the guys, two weeks after the other guys because they had my jacket ready, and the guy just kept insisting, you're going to stay in Devons until you get your shots. So he gave me another set of shots, five shots.

Holy cow. I got on the, it didn't bother me, I thought, hey, I was going to live forever. So we got on the train and everything, and when we got to Pine Camp, the name of the town is, I can't remember. Anyway, when we got there, I got out and put my duffel bag in front of me, and I passed out right in the snow.

The next thing I know, I woke up, it was a day later and nurse was sitting in a chair watching me. And it was night, and the nurses were changing, and she was mad, what they had done to me, you know, stupid mistake like that. So as she was turning the corner to go downstairs, she said, they were going to hang that guy if you hadn't come out, or woke up, she said, you can be sure of that. So, hey, it didn't do anything. I was in, you know, half awake and half asleep, so it didn't make any difference. But I could tell that there was big trouble for that poor boy. Well, anyway.

AL: Was this 1942?

Aime: It was 19-, I was drafted in 1942, I was drafted February the 4th, 1942, yup. So it was just two weeks later that I got that double shot.

Anyway, they treated me real good. They gave me my Pfc. right away, and that's where it remained, because I shot my mouth. You know, I mean, you get mad at this top sergeant, pushes you around, oh, I hate people putting their hands on me.

So, one morning I was driving the colonel, (*name*), oh, what a nice guy, real Southern gentleman, very, very nice. I never did know his first name, but I know it was Col. (*name*). So we were sitting in the jeep and he says, well, he says, we've made a choice now that we're going to send you to officers training school in Fort (*unintelligible word*), it's an engineer's school. I would have got myself a real good education free.

Oh boy, I made a mistake, but I lost my noodles anyway. So anyway, I said to the colonel, I don't want no damn thing out of this damn Army, all I want is out of this damn Army. Well, he says, I'll see to it that you don't get any more. And he did, I remained a Pfc. all the way. So that's the way it is, you got to

know how to have respect for people.

So anyway, (*unintelligible phrase*), I kept driving him, but he never said nothing and I never said nothing either, I was afraid he was going to take my stripe away. So anyway, we stayed at Pine Camp until we left in November. So I came home to get married in September, from Fort –

Aurore: (*Unintelligible phrase*).

Aime: No, no, no, I was in Texas then. There's a name for that fort. Anyway, I was in Texas, and I drove to Chicago. And then I drove back home, and I'd had nothing to eat for those eighteen hours. I was just nervous, getting married. You know how it is getting married.

Aurore: That's why he can't (*unintelligible word*).

Aime: Wait until we get to that, wait until you hear that. So, I got off the train and went home and met my mother and my brothers, and then I went, oh no, that's when I was discharged, eh? Yeah. That's not the way it happened.

I came home -

Aurore: On a three day furlough.

Aime: A three day furlough, right. And I went up to your house to talk about the wedding, that I remember. And we went to church, in that little chapel in, at St. Peter's, there's a little chapel in the back there, and we went to get married. So the priest turns around, he wanted to bless us, I pass out. I (*unintelligible phrase*) a girl to pass out, but a man? A grown man? Oh, I was mad at myself.

Aurore: I look at him, I said, what the hell are you doing? He was on the floor.

Aime: So that was pretty good, anyway. Then everything straightened itself out, we shake ourself up, eat some food, we'll be all right. Then we left -

Aurore: You went across the street with my brother to get a drink or something. And the priest was waiting for us.

Aime: Waiting for us to finish the wedding.

Aurore: He was, where's the groom. I felt like fainting myself, because I saw him. And then we went back and the priest, I said to myself, hurry up, hurry up, so we can get out of here.

Aime: But we got over that one, anyway.

Aurore: And then he went across -

Aime: Then I went back to Texas, we had to go back there. I promised, my word of honor, that I would not try to escape. Because we knew we were going across. So when I got there, two days later, on the trains and go off. We went to a camp in Massachusetts, not Devons, it's another one. Anyway, that was a camp that people left from.

The ship went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, they had to pick up a big convoy with aircraft carriers on it. It was one of the biggest convoys they ever put, we had three aircraft carriers with us. There was planes buzzing over us all night and all day, to make sure, because they had an armored division on it. That's expensive, all the tanks and everything, boy, they had to protect that. So anyway, we got to England

January the 12th. I didn't forget. January the 12th.

AL: 1943?

Aime: No, no, 1942. No, no, it had to be '43 because I was drafted, that's right, '43, January the 12th, 1943, right. Then we stayed in England at, I never thought I'd forget that little name. It was a small village on the outside of, not Bristol, some other one. We were only nine miles away from Bath. There's a Bath, England, too, that's where the Roman baths are, all underneath the big buildings there.

So we stayed in England from January until June 18th, when we went into, after D-Day. D-Day was June the 6th. Twelve days later, they had made a place to put an armored division in there, they couldn't take chances. So the infantry, they opened up the place, the 4th Armored went in. Then we all took each our way. We were engineer reconnaissance, myself and the lieutenant, and we went out all by ourselves. Once in a while they'd send an M18 with us, it's a very nice tank, it was fast. I tried to race one cross-country once, and he beat me. We'd do things like that, you know.

So anyway, we kept looking around for, to put our tanks across bridges that were safe. We had all kinds of instruments to test things, how good the bridge was and everything. And one other thing that was in France, France had a lot of crevices running through farmland. That's probably made by earthquake, or something, you know, and it's very dangerous for a tank. You get caught, and he's so heavy he'll go, he'll break the wall of the crevice and he'll go down.

So we used to bring a great big transom, it's to build bridges with, and you would put that across the crevice. And it would hold, a tank would go across and off they went. So that's what I did most of the time of the war, until I got captured going to a hospital. Something wrong on my insides. And then I was a prisoner of war for nine months.

And we, for the time that, we spent probably two weeks in a prison camp until we were trained to understand what the workings of being a prisoner of war. So after we settled in and everything, there was a tech sergeant, American, and he used to put guys to work. I went to work in Munich for a week, and I didn't like it very much and I told the guy so they sent me back to the camp.

And then that's when we went to (*name*), Germany. It's in the Bavarian Alps, and we didn't know at the time what we were doing. We were cutting logs about six feet high, and had to be at least six inches across, so we had a whole bunch of them. We found out at the end.

We worked there until, well, we got out of there in April, yeah. Well, we went through the winter, we started in the winter anyway. And it's funny, but a high place like that you'd think they'd get a lot of snow, but there wasn't that much. We could still work in the forest. I had my nice Army boots, too, and boy, that was good then.

Anyway, we worked there for at least two or three months, and once they brought us out to work on the railroad and the railroad station in (*name*), and all of a sudden a big American plane comes over, P51, and everybody's hollering, hey, there's Americans here, you bum. The poor guy, something happened to him, he crashed and he was all burned up.

So the Germans told us that he was a black boy. I didn't believe it, because I never knew that they had black boys flying those high priced airplanes. This fellow opens the casket, and he didn't, he just took out his hand and his hand was black, I could see it. I said, okay, okay, he's black. So (*unintelligible phrase*). After that day they treated him very well, as a German soldier, a nice little casket, and we were there to help the guys dig the grave and everything. Then we served as honor guard and we buried him. But the important thing was to know where it was, and it was a nice churchyard next to a Catholic church, so we knew where it was.

So when all of this baloney was all over with, the prisoner of war baloney, we went to Lucky Strike. They had four, they had the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the armored force, that's where we went, the armored force, the tanks, (*unintelligible phrase*) Lucky Strike. There was Chesterfield, Camel, what was the other one? Anyway, they were the names of cigarettes anyway.

So, we stayed there six or seven day. Not very long, and I was glad because I was coming home after that. But every day we had to go back to a tech sergeant and repeat everything that we, the information. And he kept (*unintelligible phrase*), you know, okay, okay, you're sure you didn't forget nothing, now. They were very worried about finding all the corpses so they could bring them home. It was the least they could do.

Well, she lost her brother there. He came home from North Africa, they brought him back home and he's buried in the cemetery, St. Peters.

Aurore: He died in the war.

Aime: He died in the war, a land mine. The sergeant with us said he stepped on a landmine. There was nothing left of him, no need of opening the casket or anything, he'd been dead for a year so there was nothing to see.

So after that, we came home. I went to Lake Placid for a month, the millionaire's Lake Placid Club gave that to the returning veterans. Well, they didn't give it to them, they just rented, they gave it to them, just let them use it. Nice big cottages and everything. We could use their golf clubs, they had horses. And that's where I learned how to run a sailboat. A friend of mine from Belfast, we got together, they had some sailboats, and boy, we sailed right across.

When they bombed Japan, all the people running down the street to go to the liquor store to get some liquor, so he said, come on, let's take a boat. (*Unintelligible phrase*) the first ones there. But at least we got a couple bottles anyway. We sold them when we got back, to make some money.

But anyway, we stayed there for about a week I think, something like that. Then they shipped us back to our original camp, which was Fort Belvoir, right outside of Washington, D.C.. I stayed there, and I drove a colonel to the Army place in Washington, D.C. every day. I'd park the car, I couldn't use the car.

But you know what was nice about Washington, D.C. when we were there? We could hail a cab and tell him where we wanted to go, and they'd end up charging us nothing. Never charged us nothing. Of course, we had our medals hanging on us, you know, and you know how it is with heroes. Baloney, nobody's a hero, just stay alive, that's all, that's what counts.

And that's true, you know, survival is the most important thing. It's (*unintelligible word*) in regular life, but it's even more important when you're a prisoner of war, believe me. At night we were trying to sleep, and the Germans had captured the Cossacks, great big swords and white horses. When they captured them, they brought them into their army and they made them, I don't know if there's a word for it, but they made them to catch the deserters from the German army. And they said, if they give you any bad words, cut their heads off. And that's what they did. We found one when we were going from our billet to the place we were working, we found one, it was down in the gully there. So we reported it to the guys that were working, the German guys that were working with us and they sent somebody to pick up the body. It was terrible. But those lousy Russians. Anyway, I thought that was the worst thing that you could do to a human being, cut his head off.

Anyway, after that we went back to Fort Belvoir, and I got discharged from that October the 23rd, October the 23rd, 1944, right. Jesus, that all happened in 1944? Anyway, I'm just asking myself questions, I mean, I'm not that good at it, (*unintelligible phrase*).

So then I went to Fort Belvoir and I stayed there maybe thirty days, until it was, I had eighty two numbers and you had to have eighty four to get out, so when they got to eighty two it was my turn to go out. It was October the 23rd. It was on a Saturday, I think, when I got home. I got all the way to Portland, it was about midnight at night, all the way to Portland on a train. Then all the buses were closed, it was after midnight, so I couldn't get home. I said, hell, I've hiked this before, thirty miles, that ain't that much. So I took my duffle bag and I started walking.

So this big truck, beep-beep-beep. He says, what are you doing walking? I said, what else do you want me to do, there's no buses. Get in here, he says, where are you going? I says, I'm going to Lewiston. Good, well I'm going right by there, I'll take you home. Boy, did I praise the good Lord thank you. I didn't want to get caught walking.

Anyway, I got home probably about one o'clock in the morning I think, woke up my mother. She was glad to see me, one o'clock or not. And the next day, I just got to tell her about that, the next day, I used to live on 313 Lisbon Street, it's probably a five minute walk down to the Bleachery, that's where, and I knew she was coming down from upstairs on Birch Street, and come down that way. So I'm going to go right on the corner and catch her, so I walk over there. I waited not longer than two or three minutes, and there I see her coming down with a whole bunch of girls, it's all girls working in there. So I grab her and I -

Aurore: You didn't tell me when you're going to come home. I was working at Pepperell, you know, so I was walking with a girl, you know, and I saw him over there. I said, don't tell me that's him. Oh, my goodness, I didn't know what to do. I start running.

Aime: All the girls were laughing and clapping their hands, you know. Yeah, that was quite a rendezvous.

Aurore: He surprised me, he didn't even tell me that he was coming home.

Aime: I wanted to surprise her, you know.

Aurore: I didn't see him for two years, when he was in the Army, you know. (*Unintelligible phrase*) from a furlough, and I was living with my mother, you know.

AL: I think this is a good time to ask you a few questions and catch up to where you are. Can you say and spell your full name?

Aurore: A-U-R-O-R-E, Aurore. That's it.

Aime: Foisy.

Aurore: Oh, Foisy.

Aime: F-O-I-S-Y.

Aurore: It used to be Paradis.

AL: Paradis was your maiden name?

Aime: That's right, yup.

AL: And what was your birthdate?

Aurore: November the 28th, 1920.

AL: And were you born in the Lewiston-Auburn area?

Aurore: No, I was born in Canada, St. (*name*). I was two years old when we got down here, you know, and we were fourteen in the family.

AL: Fourteen kids?

Aurore: Fourteen kids. And we came back in a train, and we all (*unintelligible phrase*). And they put us on the paper that day, big family from Canada.

AL: What did your parents do for work when they got here?

Aurore: My father, he went to work at the mill, Androscoggin mill, and my mother, well she didn't work.

AL: Because she had fourteen kids, right? You better believe she worked.

Aurore: She worked at home, all right. So that's my life I guess. I worked at Pepperell for ten years, and I worked in the shop, and then I met him in the shop.

Aime: The shoe shop.

Aurore: He was a loom boss

Aime: Yeah, I was the boss of the ladies loom.

Aurore: That's where I met him, and I was only seventeen years old when I met him. Then I went out with him for about two years before the war, and then he went to the service and when he was in the service, I'd like to get married, so we got married on a furlough. And then he came home, he went to work at the mill.

Aime: Yup, right off. I came out on a Friday, and Sunday night I was on a third shift working in the Hill Mill.

AL: How did you get back into the mill so quickly?

Aime: My brother was working there, and he brought me right in. And as soon as the big wheel, what was his name anyway?

Aurore: Well, he was a loom boss, Joe.

Aime: Joe, well not then, he was a loom fixer then, but he did become an executive. Walmsley, came up, Mr. Walmsley, he was the super, and he came to me and he says, I understand that you were a prisoner of war. I says, yes. Well, he says, if there's anything you need and you can't get it from anybody else, come and see me. That's a good welcome home.

So, I did well at the Hill Mill, I eventually became a loom fixer, and then they brought in some new looms and they had the guy from Draper with me and he taught me everything there was to, about those looms, so then they took me as the instructor for loom fixers. I trained, oh, about thirteen, fourteen loom fixers in the Hill Mill in the period that I was there. I worked thirty-eight years for Bates, three years for Bates, when the Hill Mill closed, so I worked thirty five years for the Hill Mill.

So, anyway, that was very good. I used to make good money, and they couldn't pay me for being

an instructor, so what they did, they gave me four hours overtime every night. I didn't do nothing, I just stayed in the mill. But, boy, I had a pay out there, that's when I bought this place.

Aurore: Well, you was working two shifts.

Aime: I know.

Aurore: A lot of overtime.

Aime: Yeah, well, that's the only way to make money. Yup, so Bates treated me very well. Although I was a union officer for most of the time that the union was there, one way or another. I was shop steward for I don't know how many years, and I always tried to be reasonable with the company, when we went to the office to debate some certain issues, and I always made sure that we didn't cross the line. There's a line that you can go beyond, and that's insulting then, that you're not supposed to. You're supposed to inform them, and that's it. But there's a lot of guys that -

AL: What sort of issues came up over the years for workers in the mill that you took to management?

Aime: Well, several things. The insurance, they had a hard time to get that out of them, the insurance. That was very important to us. And that started people buying insurance for medical (*unintelligible word*). When the union boys had it, why not somebody else get it, you know? So it was a good movement. They had it at Pepperell, too, that insurance, that hospital insurance. And then naturally the hospitals were happy. Don't have to worry about guys who are working, they're making money, they got insurance. Oh, they always took good care of us.

Other issues, oh, when they put the unifills on. They used to, bobbins used to come from upstairs, in the spinning room, and they came ready, and they had a battery (*unintelligible word*), they used to put in a battery, great big battery, used to go around. It was a sixty-two, (*unintelligible phrase*) you had sixty two times, it came down and put it in there. The loom used to run about 180 pics a minute, and it's dangerous. Anything at all get that shuttle, look out. One hit me in the stomach and I fainted once, so, and it was my fault, I didn't push it all the way in and (*unintelligible phrase*). Anyway, those things happened.

What else. They put the unifills on there. Then there was some squawking about looms fixers fixing the unifills. Well, then we had to go to the office. So he says, I told the manager, I says, it's a good thing for you and it's a good thing for us, but we're not going to take the unifill. You call us the loom fixers, that's what we are. But we're not going to touch that unifill. You want to put one man on each shift that knows those unifills perfectly and can fix it.

Well, he says, I've given you everything else, I might just as well give you that. Okay. He was a nice person. Emory, his last name was. The last time I saw him he was -

Aurore: At the meeting there? The party?

Aime: The home we went to see, there.

Aurore: Oh, Schooner.

Aime: Schooner Fair, he was there, that's where he died, the poor guy. Yup, so he was a very nice person. He loved his loom fixers because they kept the mill running.

AL: Can you talk to me some more? Describe what your job was?

Aime: Well, I had a hundred and twenty looms to take, a hundred looms to take care of. They had to keep running all the time, and when they're down we've got to see to it that the boss knew about it and the weaver got paid for it, it's a downed loom. Okay, then we got to go over to that loom and fix it, and it takes, it's a good two years to learn everything that you should know about it. So after a while, it's a real nice business. I probably had six jobs in eight hours. It was real good.

They were nice, new looms, too, and I made sure they stayed new. Had to buy some parts. I told him a couple of times, that's been missing for two weeks, and the supplier, and this guy was getting mad at me all the time. But that's how I, we got the looms running and the weavers made their money, made the money they're supposed to make.

They made almost as much as loom fixers, the weavers. A good weaver could keep his looms going, and I had a young lady, she used to live up, she used to work with me on a weaver set. Very nice lady, too.

Aurore: And he was a loom fixer.

Aime: Yeah. So, he, well we did something, and I had a lot to do with, the Loom Fixers Association, you probably never heard of it, it's the Lewiston-Auburn, the Loom Fixers Association, it's a club of our own. The union was afraid that we were starting just a loom fixers union, and we kept telling him, I kept, and I was a good friend of Denis, I used to work -

AL: Denis Blais?

Aime: Denis Blais. You know him?

AL: Yeah.

Aime: You do? Is he still living?

AL: He was as, the last I knew, but I haven't known recently.

Aime: How long ago was that?

AL: Oh, maybe three years.

Aime: Oh, yeah?

Aurore: I don't think he's dead.

Aime: No, because I've never seen it in the paper.

Aurore: We would have seen it in the paper. I think his wife is dead, eh?

Aime: Oh, his wife is dead, I know that.

Aurore: I know she was sick for a while.

Aime: Oh yeah, she was very sick. Nice lady, too. So, but I went to Denis and I told him, I says, hey, they want to make a new job and I'm the one that's going to get it. He says, it has nothing to do with that, he says, they're not supposed to have any conference with you, they're supposed to have conference with us, in the office here. Another guy (*unintelligible phrase*), he was like the boss of the mill. Okay, we'll do it your way.

So when the agent, I told that to the agent, and he said, from now on you're going to make four hours overtime every night. Boy, did that make a pay. Oh yeah, so I stayed whenever I, all I did was go into the second (*unintelligible word*) and I'd tell him, hey, I'm working overtime tonight. Okay, put it down in his book, that was the end of it. Well, they were told to do that, there's no doubt about it.

Anyway, I think that Bates has treated me as well as they can treat any human being in any company, and I'm very grateful to them. And I always, serving as an officer in the union, I always took responsibility for my people, they were my people and I was going to take care of them. The same thing with the Bates thing today, they're still my people and I'm still going to do all I can for them. It's as simple as that.

So, when you put up your hand, you swear to do something, you got to do it. It doesn't stop just because it starts to rain outside. It stops when you die, that's all. You have an obligation for your life, just like the Army. You got an obligation for your life no matter where you are.

AL: Now, when you were both working, did you work the same shift?

Aime: Oh, no.

Aurore: Well, no, I worked at the, the first shift, and then, I worked ten years over there and when I had my daughter I quit, so he was working.

Aime: Yeah, I was working on the first shift. Was I? I think so, yeah, when Libby was born, yeah.

Aurore: And you was on the second shift, and you liked second shift better.

Aime: Yeah, I liked second shift because I could work at home and sleep at the job. No, I'm just kidding.

Aurore: He would do a lot of work around the house, you know, when he was working second shift.

Aime: I did a lot of work on this. Oh, by the way, my wife lives downstairs and I live upstairs. That doesn't make you laugh?

Aurore: But it's true, except for dinner.

Aime: It's true, yeah, yeah, I come down for dinner. And my bedroom is right there, but I have to pay a lot of rent for it.

Aurore: No, he's got everything upstairs, you know, his tv and everything, you know. So, and then I can rest up and do my work and I don't have to bother with him.

Aime: If I want to pout, she says go pout upstairs.

Aurore: So, it's (*unintelligible phrase*).

Aime: Yeah, we've been having, I paid my mortgage in sixteen years, with all that overtime, so I never rented after that. My daughter was in college in those days, come upstairs, had a nice bar with a little booze on it, you know, good stuff, and all my friends used to come over and we had a good time.

Anyway, Susan come home with eight of her friends. I didn't have no beds up there, but they all brought their bedrolls. And I had a nice bottle, (*unintelligible phrase*) of Johnny Walker, and (*unintelligible*

phrase). They had a good time for three days up there, and I was glad. They all came back when Susan got married, and we had a lot of fun with them.

Aurore: When she married, they all came over here and they slept on the floor. They were all the bridesmaids, you know, (*unintelligible phrase*).

Aime: They brought their bedrolls again, but I had one bed upstairs then, so, I think they slept four in that bed.

Aurore: But (*name*) slept most on the floor, with all her friends from college.

Aime: Yeah, nice bunch of kids.

AL: Now, I'm really interested to know what it was like for you to grow up in such a huge family. Did you have a large house? How did you manage?

Aurore: Oh, we used to move, I don't know how many time we move, you know. There was some bugs, we have to move. There was some fire, we have to move. You know, there was always something. And we were all living on the fourth floor all the time. But I had a nice growing up, you know, I had a nice family.

Aime: Her mother was an angel, absolutely. That lady is waiting for us upstairs, I'm sure of it. What a wonderful human being.

Aurore: She is. I had my father and my mother all the time, you know, and I thought I had a nice life, you know.

AL: Did some of your brothers and sisters stay in this area when they got older?

Aurore: There's one went to live in Connecticut. He died about two months ago, there. And I have a sister in Quebec, and she died there. Most of them, they live down here in Lewiston.

AL: Did any of them work in the mills as well?

Aurore: Yeah, I have a sister -

Aime: Yeah, most of them. Not all of them, but -

Aurore: Armande worked in the mill, Androscoggin, and Pauline (*unintelligible word*), Pauline, too.

Aime: Yeah, she worked in Hill Mill for a little while there, when she was a (*unintelligible phrase*).

Aurore: And my brother worked in the shop.

Aime: Her brother used to work in the Continental.

Aurore: They worked in the shop. And Wilfred worked -

Aime: Wilfred was in Continental.

Aurore: At Continental for a long time. And Leo, well he died in the service, and Armand, he died in Connecticut, it was two months ago. But I still have Armande, Pauline, I still have two sister that's living, and a brother. They're all going, you know. And I had a sister that, another, she had died there, in two

months. There's one that died, she was in Rumford, a community home, she was, she died two months ago, she was 93, 93 years old. And they were all pretty old. Armand was 89. We still got three sisters and a brother left of the fourteen, they're all going.

AL: Now, you were a sewer, was that your job in the mill?

Aurore: I was a stitcher, a stitcher at Pepperell, you know.

AL: And can you talk about what it was like?

Aurore: At the stitching?

AL: Yeah.

Aurore: Oh, I used to stitch on the, the sheet, you know, the big end and the small end, and we had to, forty, we had to make forty -

Aime: Sheets?

Aurore: Forty dozen.

Aime: Forty dozen a day?

Aurore: A day, to make our minimum, you know. But I like it, I like it over there, I thought it was a nice job. But some people used to make more than that. I wasn't the fastest one.

AL: Did you make friends with the people you worked with?

Aurore: Oh yes, I made friend, oh yes, there was three of my friends that died there, Judy, (*name*) and Alice and, oh yes, I make a lot of friends. Lucille (*name*), live in, but she went to live in Massachusetts. So, oh yes, I like it over there. It was a very clean job, you know, work on sheet. It wasn't like at the shop. The shop -

Aime: All kind of cement.

Aurore: All kind of cement. But over there, I used to dress up, nice old dress, I didn't get dirty, you know. Yeah, it was very nice there. You know what they make over there now? They make camper -

Aime: Canvas, canvas awning. We bought one for the outside. They came over yesterday to measure and everything.

Aurore: I haven't been there for a long time, and this week, we want to have a canopy put on, so I went over there and I saw a woman, stitching a, making canopy, you know. So I was surprised to see that place again.

AL: Did you have quotas that you had to meet, when you say forty dozen a day, did you have to meet that or lose your job, or how did that work?

Aurore: If you couldn't make forty dozen, that wasn't, they fire you (*unintelligible word*). But that was the quota, forty dozen, yeah. But, oh yes, but it used to go fast, you know, I had to be, we had to go fast.

AL: Was it easy to get injured doing that?

Aurore: No, I don't think so.

AL: Or did people sometimes -?

Aurore: Just like, did you ever sew? You never sewed?

AL: A little bit.

Aurore: Well, it's just like a sewing machine, you know. They used to come in a big rack, you know, I used to pull them like that and make them. So it's a stitching job, you know? That's about all, I guess.

AL: Is there anything else that you want to add about your time in the mills that I haven't asked you about?

Aime: Can't think of it. But, no, I don't think so. I mean, the only thing is, I was always grateful for my job at Bates, I made a good living at it, and I got along good with everybody that I met there, executives or workers, didn't make any difference. I got along just as well with the executives that I did with the union people, and I always liked to stay in the middle of it instead of taking one side all the time.

But we were there to protect the women's rights, too, you know. Sometimes they gave jobs to a woman that was a little too heavy for them, and stuff like that. And then if they didn't do their quota, well, the hell was raised, shop steward got in trouble. And then we'd have to go to the front office and discuss it with the agent.

And I worked hard for the elections of Democrats all the time, the union was for Democrats. And they used to take me out of the mill for months, and I'd work in the union office to get, whatever the union, let's say the union -

End of Side A

Side B

AL: We are now on Side B.

Aime: The election was very important to us, we wanted the right people in Augusta to support us when we get in trouble. No matter who it is, they could be two angels and they don't agree to the same thing. And people are the same way. You just have to make sure that you have a good argument when you go there. Just don't come up there and holler and call people names for nothing. That's stupid. So you got to be a good negotiator.

So when it come time for the election, they always took me out, I was chairman for the (*unintelligible word*) committee, that's the, for the Lewiston joint board, and I had my own little office and politicians came in, hey, say, you want to make a donation (*unintelligible phrase*)? Yeah, okay, we'll think about it. Well, I had to go see Denis before anything, he's the boss.

So I put it down on a piece of paper. At the end of the day, this is what the problems we have, I says, what are you going to do, you gonna help this guy? Jalbert.

AL: Louis Jalbert?

Aime: He was a bum, he was a bum if there ever was one. He was always in the office trying to get a buck.

Aurore: You know him?

AL: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I know who he is. I've never met him.

Aime: Oh, you've never met?

AL: I never met him.

Aime: But you've read enough about him?

AL: Oh, yes.

Aime: Anyway, he was mad when he didn't get his name on the bridge, there, he wanted to have it the Jalbert Bridge.

AL: Really?

Aime: Oh yeah, it was a hell of a row about that. Yup. Anyway, it was a good life. You were out of there, you forgot about it. You went back in there, you worked at it, that's all. They always treated us nice. I've yet to remember, there was one or two people, they always got in trouble.

The second hand, that's the boss, we call him second hand, the second hand tried to tell a guy what to do. And I'm not going to put his name in there. And every time, it was a fight. So, second hand come and see me, he says, I'm putting a complaint against that guy. Well, hold it a minute, I want to talk to him. I come up to try to talk to him, he says, get out of here, Curly, I don't want to talk to you, you bum.

See, you try to do something, and you, okay, I'll let them handle you. They fired him. So then we had to go to arbitration, get his job back, and we made him swear on the Bible that no more trouble with the second hand, or else you get fired permanently. The union is not going to help you after this. Okay.

The guy straightened out, he was coming in, and he had a few before he came in, and that was a lousy habit. So when you go in there, there's a lot of dangerous machinery and if you make the wrong movement you'll lose a hand. So, you know, you have to be, you have to take all of these things in consideration before making anything. And then, if you always go and defend these kind of people, the first thing you know, the company won't have any faith in you. And I wouldn't blame them, trying to slam something at them that they don't want. After all, they own the place.

So if you're reasonable, there won't be no fooling around. They'll treat you good, they'll give you everything you ask for, they're always open for ideas from the people, because they work at it and they know more about it than they do, so they were always wide open for ideas. They used to give rewards for somebody who would invent a small piece to put on the loom that would do something and would be of good use to the worker. Hell, they, I won three of them. Seventy-five bucks apiece. They're just little ideas, little things that you need to do to the looms. Because the looms were new, so we had to get used to it, you know. You learn a lot with new stuff.

So, to me it was a good life. I made enough money, paid my house in sixteen years. That's pretty good, you know, yup. And I've never had any trouble with those people. I certainly gave them my opinion a few times, but I always gave it with a smile, so that's the way to get along with people.

AL: Now, most of the people who worked in the mills were Franco-American, but there were other smaller groups, weren't there?

Aime: Oh yes, there was some Polish people, there was some Lithuanian people for a while, there was Irishmen, there was a bunch of Irishmen, especially at the Bleachery. The Bleachery, a whole bunch of Irishmen working in the back, honey, where we went in to see the awning, they used to work in the back,

the Irishmen.

AL: Were there Greek as well? Small?

Aurore: There were some Greek, one of my friend at Pepperell was a Greek.

Aime: Oh yeah, yeah, that's right, that nice girl, right.

Aurore: Simolis?

AL: Simone.

Aime: Simone, right.

Aurore: She died about five years ago.

Aime: Yup, yup, buried in that cemetery at the end of the street. That's where I go to take my walk, it's about a mile.

AL: And Olympia Snowe's aunt worked in the mills, too, I believe.

Aime: Olympia Snowe?

AL: Her aunt.

Aime: Oh, her aunt, oh, could be.

AL: Maria (*name*)?

Aime: Could be, Maria, oh yeah, it could have been. But I didn't see the upstairs. There was a lot of women worked in the spinning room, things like that, the card rooms and all that stuff. That was for boys, but -

Aurore: They were pretty all mixed up, you know, there was a -

Aime: Yeah, there was some people, they weren't all Frenchmen. The majority was Frenchman because they had a lot of family, so they (*unintelligible word*).

Aurore: Sure, all kind, you know. It wasn't just French. There was a lot of French, though.

Aime: There was a lot of French, no doubt about it. But what the hell, they're the closest ones, it's the closest foreign country so it's bound to be. And then in the mills in Massachusetts it's the same, there's a lot of mills, cotton mills in Massachusetts, too. They're all a bunch of Frenchmen working there. And New Hampshire, yeah, where my grandfather comes from. He came from Canada, he went to that little city, I can't think of it now, and then he came to Auburn. His house will be right on top of the hill there.

AL: Were there social activities that centered around the mill?

Aime: Yes, we had a picnic every year, we used to go to Lard Pond, up on, oh hell, anyway, different places we used to go. And they'd buy twelve, thirteen cases of beer, stuff like that. You had to make people happy. No booze, though, just beer. And when it was all done, well, there was probably one case left, well, it went to the guys who did all the work, they took it home. It was bought, you can't bring it back.

Aurore: At the PW meeting, there, we used to go to a meeting all the time.

Aime: Yeah, but that had nothing to do with the mill, that was a, oh, the PW, oh yeah.

AL: What does that stand for?

Aime: Prisoner of War. I was commander for the Prisoners of War.

Aurore: So we used to go to meetings.

Aime: So we used to go to Boothbay Harbor for our meetings. That nice place, boy, it was a very nice place. It was the Legion Hall in Boothbay Harbor. Very nice, they treated us like princes. And we had a lot of nice people. It was, the ladies from Boothbay Harbor used to make the food for the lunch and everything like that, you know, cost us less money.

Aurore: But we used to go everywhere, where the people used to live, we used to go to where they used to live and have a, we go to restaurant over there. So it was nice. We used to meet a lot, we met a lot of people from all over. So, we did that for ten years?

Aime: Oh yeah, at least ten years, yeah. So when everybody got into their eighties, nobody wanted to serve for officers, I was the only one left.

Aurore: So we shut the place down.

Aime: We shut the place down and we had seventeen hundred bucks in the bank, we sent it to the -

Aurore: Museum?

Aime: The museum in, the prisoner of war museum in Georgia. There's a name for it, but I can't think of it now. But anyways, we sent them that. They were very grateful, they sent me a nice letter and everything. And now it's all done. But they didn't replace me as commander, so I'm still commander.

Aurore: So you want to know things just about the mill?

AL: Yeah, you know, any social activities that you did. Weren't there sports teams and things (*unintelligible phrase*)?

Aime: We used to have Bates hockey team. They were champion once when they went to Europe, to, was it Finland they were again? Anyway, they once became the champions for hockey. Yeah, oh, there was a hell of a row about that, but I had a lot of fun with that. Everybody was really doing it. It was a big thing, it was all a bunch of amateurs, those guys. I mean, they worked for a living in the mill, and then they put time in to get the hockey team going.

Oh, they were very, and the bosses were all for it. Oh, they had publicity, publicity, Bates name is in the paper all over the place, you know. They want that. It cost money to put your money in the paper.

Aurore: So, why do you want to have that done, you want to have that put in the paper?

Aime: It goes, it's going to be put into a museum.

Aurore: What?

Aime: All of that. The recording will be there, they'll play it, they'll listen to me talk. They'll all say, what

a handsome dog that man is. I'm 86, too.

Aurore: He got a big voice.

AL: Thank you both very much.

End of Interview
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