

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

Lorraine Brown
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

SWOH #038
January 22, 2010

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Shoe Industry Oral History Project at Museum L-A. The date is April 30th, 2010, this is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and I'm in Leeds, Maine with Lorraine Brown. Lorraine, could you start just by giving me your name.

Lorraine Brown: Well, my name is Lorraine Brown.

AL: And your name before you were married?

LB: Bazinet, Lorraine Bazinet.

AL: And where and when were you born?

LB: Auburn.

AL: And the date?

LB: South Road, in Auburn.

AL: And when were you born?

LB: July 27, '33.

AL: And so you grew up in Auburn, or Lewiston?

LB: Yes, I did, I did.

AL: Tell me about growing up during those years.

LB: Well, it was really nice. People would get together and they'd sing on porches, and have a good time, you know. And there was a lot of musicians, and every Saturday they know that it's music.

AL: Now where, just at somebody's house?

LB: At my grandmother's house, and then people would walk up in the streets, you

know, on the sidewalk, and looking at the beauty and talking to friends. And we never, never locked our doors, never. It was a great time.

AL: Now, what did your parents do for work?

LB: My dad, at the time, he had a business. But he passed away very young, he was fifty-two, and so.

AL: So your mom raised you?

LB: Yeah, I had a sister, which she was two years old and she never really knew her dad at all, but after that my mom, well, she was younger and so she got married and she had three children. And so that made four, because I was the only one working.

AL: But talk to me about your grandparents, your grandparents lived nearby?

LB: We were always there. Not my grandfather, my grandfather passed away just before the war, and we'd always be at our grandmother and our aunts and everything, you know, but it's always memere's house, you know, really. I really miss that.

AL: And so what sorts of things did you do in Auburn, growing up? I know you talked about the music in the evenings, with your friends what would you do?

LB: Well, we had bicycles and stuff like that. But then, when I was nine years old and we moved to Lewiston, so I had to make new friends. But all those friends from the kids that we were, even now, Pauline always, always sends me a birthday card, all these years, you know, and different things like that. We stayed close.

AL: And you lived in a neighborhood in Lewiston, in what part, do you remember?

LB: Well, yes, yes, on Huckin Street, in back of the MacDonald's, that street, you come up that street and that's where Huckin Street is on there. But they're not there now, they're at the other place.

AL: So talk about how old you were when you first started working in the shoe industry.

LB: Fifteen. And that was at Owen Lauden (*sounds like*), and I'm not pronouncing it very good, because it's been a long time. But the three of us, Lorraine and Marie and myself, we all got into the shop, and the shop was on Park Street, and where the people live now, the elderly people on Park Street, the Oak place, and I worked there three years, til I was eighteen. But this man that owned that shop, he knew that we wanted new roller skates and he came to us, he said, you says, you three girls, you're so nice, he says, I'll buy the three pairs and you can give me twenty-five cents a week, and

that's what he did. I'll never forget that. That's a nice person, you know, caring. And we were crazy, we were so happy.

AL: Roller skating was something you all did (*unintelligible*)?

LB: That's where I met my husband.

AL: Oh, where? Now which roller skating place?

LB: Beacon, the Beacon. And you don't know where that is.

AL: No, tell me.

LB: Okay, on Main Street, you know where Peck's was? Across the street, I think it's on, not the Park Street but the other one, there's a bank, a yellow building, a bank. Well the Beacon was on the third floor of where the bank is. So not, oh, well I'll say at least fifteen years, when that was all being done, and I did mention it to my husband but I was in the bank and I says, are you the owner of here, and he says, yes, I am. I says, you know what? He says, what. I says, well, we roller skated up here. Up here, he says? I said, yes, that was the Beacon, and I says, I wonder if it looks the same. I had all my kids, and now it's far away from that. And the mirror wasn't there and all that, so when I got home I told my husband, I says, hey, guess where I went today, and he says, what? I says, the Beacon. So, nobody really knows where that is.

AL: Right, well I'm glad you're telling us, though, because that's interesting to know. And so you would go roller skating. Was it just roller skating. Was it just roller skating, or other things too?

LB: Mostly just roller skating. I loved that. And you know, the girls – I probably shouldn't say this – but when I met my husband, I never really thought he would be, but anyway, and we were going roller skating in another place, and I said to Lorraine and Marie, I says, you know that guy? They said, no, never met him. And I says, you know what, I says, I'd marry him today if he'd want me. I didn't even know his name, I didn't know him at all, period. But anyway -

AL: And it worked out.

LB: Yes, yes, we went roller skating, and he was a very good skater. And so anyways, he went to Korea, and us kids weren't like the kids today, you know, ladies are ladies, you know. And so anyways, when he came back home, he didn't like writing anyway, and he went to Korea, and we were never, you know, he'd bring me home sometimes from roller skating, and I sent him a card while he was in Korea and I just said, your friend always, Lorraine Bazinet. That's it, on the card. So when he got home, after he got home, now I'm in my nineteen, eighteen, I'm eighteen, and he says,

he was across the street, I didn't know he was home. So, but I have to be cute, so anyways, he says, I'll give you a ride, instead of taking the bus. And the bus was only a nickel, you pay a nickel to go downtown, and they give you a spare fare, a paper to go to Auburn, stuff like that. But anyways, he says, I'll give you a ride, I'll give you a ride. So when I went with him and we were in the car talking, you know, and he says, Lorraine, he says, I was so afraid you'd be married. And I told my friends, too, I says, I will never marry unless he does, and if he does, I'll back off. And so that was in May, we got married in July, July 3rd.

AL: Oh wow.

LB: Yeah, and we've had a great, great life, great life. He passed away, and when he passed away, that was, it'll make nine years, and he says to me, he had cancer, and when they said that, they found a tumor in him and they just didn't think it'd be okay, you know. But anyways, I told the doctor, I says, I don't care, I says, I believe in God, and I believe he can do all things. And the tumor was so in the liver that they said you can't, you can't do it. I said, we're going to pray and something's going to happen, and that's that. So anyways, my husband says, Lorraine, if God wanted, you know, this and that. But anyways, when he came back, he let him wait two weeks to see how it was, and he, the doctor comes in and he took all the pictures that was going on, doing a lot of things, and he comes in slow, like molasses, you know, the doctor, and he sits next to me, and my husband says, now Lorraine, behave. So anyways, I says, I know it's good, I know it's good. He don't say a thing. I says, I *know* it's good, I know in here, it's good, nothing there. He didn't know what to do. He didn't know what to do.

But before that, before that my husband says to me, he says, Lorraine, I don't want to be here anymore. I need to go, get out of, you know, whatever, to die I guess. And I says, why honey? He says well, he says, there's going to be a war here, and it's so close I can't take it again. And so I says, honey, I says, God's going to come get us and we'll be all set. He says, well, he better hurry, because it's very close. He told me that in June, he died August on the 18th, and September, the buildings went down, the bombing and everything like that. And I thank God, I really do, when I pray at night I says, Lord, thank you for taking care of my husband.

AL: That's a beautiful story.

LB: It's a true one.

AL: Yes, yes. You went into the shoe shops at age fifteen.

LB: Yes, and that was the first one, well a couple was before.

AL: Just a little bit?

LB: Yeah, but I mean those places are gone, you know. Like we were going to

school, and we just put glue and stuff like that. But this is the first one. And then, the one who paid for the roller skates. And then I went to work and it was a place that you, I stitched pillow cases, seven hundred and fifty a day, twelve in each package, and I was there, what did I say, ten? I raised my children, my four children at that shoe shop. Well, it's not a shoe shop, it's a -

AL: It says "a bleachery."

LB: You know where VIP is on Lisbon Street, right across the street, that big building, that's where it was. We had the whole thing for that, and we made sheets and all kinds of stuff.

AL: Then you went to Libby Mill?

LB: Libby Mill, yes, because my husband says why don't you just don't work a while. So then I went to Libby, and there I stitched the binding on the, it's not a sheet, it's blankets and all kinds, and beautiful ones, all fluffy and everything. So I worked there five years. But that's where Kennedy was shot, when I was there, and nobody could work, we were all pretty bad. And then after that I went to Knapp Shoe. Knapp Shoe, I stayed there, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two years.

AL: Oh, that's a long time. Knapp Shoe, what did you do at Knapp Shoe?

LB: Boots, shoes -

AL: But I mean what was your job?

LB: Stitching.

AL: Stitching, so you were a stitcher, from on to the other.

LB: Yeah, blankets and sheets and whatever.

AL: Right, so stitching was your skill.

LB: Yeah, and I'm still doing it, on fire boots.

AL: Yes, at Falcon, yes?

LB: Fire boots, yeah. And L.L. Bean, I went one time, because they don't hire you immediately, you know, L.L. Bean, and it was too far for me to go. So, I don't know if you ever go to L.L. Bean, well you know that big boot outside? Well, I had to stitch all the sides so they can put the eyelets in.

AL: Really? That's kind of neat.

LB: And then Falcon.

AL: And so you've been with Falcon more than a decade as well.

LB: It'll make ten years, no, twelve. Because my great granddaughter, Briana, was born the day I went in.

AL: Well, tell me about Knapp Shoe, because you were there for quite a long time. Who were some of the management team?

LB: Well, there was five floors, and one is take care of that room and all that stuff. But we had fun at Knapp.

AL: What kind of fun, did you get -?

LB: Well no, we could giggle and, you know. Well, Bill Hall was my boss, of the place, but what made it easier for me, I got to cheat on that, because they knew I knew him a lot, because we all roller skated together, him and his wife and myself and my husband. And I didn't have my car or something, I said, Billy, I said, I don't have a car, can I have your car. So he goes, don't tell nobody. No, give me the key.

AL: So it was friendly.

LB: Yes, I've had nice people, nice people.

AL: And who owned Knapp Shoe at that time? Do you remember who owned it?

LB: No.

AL: That's not what you remember, you remember the friends.

LB: Yeah, but I mean the highest ones to take care of the rooms, they didn't own that. But Knapp, you know. Anyway, it was there for a long time, Knapp. And it started, oh my gosh, my girlfriend started way before me, Marie, and it was on Spring Street in Auburn, and I think now they changed it for older people, you know, there's a big store there. But then they moved to where I went, when I went in. But it started there, also.

AL: And now you're still employed in the shoe industry, which is pretty amazing because there aren't that many places left, considering how big it was before. Has the way you work changed since you've been at Falcon?

LB: Well, it's a lot of different ways.

AL: Has technology changed how you work?

LB: No, no, I mean, well they want it done good, of course, but when we work, well for me anyways, I just work, work, work, work, and I'm not a talker anymore, talking, I mean like we were giggling and everything. Because right now, the work is different, it has to be put out at a certain time and things like that. Like today, we passed what we needed, and so we add that for the next day, or stuff like that, to put what they want. But they're very nice, they're very nice.

AL: What did you see happen over the years with the shoe shops? I mean, they started closing, and that was your profession, stitching was your skill, were you worried?

LB: Well, I went to GE, GE on Poland Road, I was living there then, and before that it was a place to have cookies, they made cookies in that place. And I says, oh gee, I don't know. So anyway, I went and asked and they says, yes? And there's only three or four that goes and asks, you know, and I thought, my four kids, and they're in school, my husband drove the trucks, and I'd have to go in and out, and I was working at Knapp when I went to ask. So I could have been going there, and the one near the airport, they changed the name, Tambrant (*sounds like*), and there was around seven (*unintelligible*). And I says, but it would be hard for you folks, though, if I'd have to leave for my children, because they're sick in school or whatever, and I said, I don't think it would be fair, sir, really, I says, I'm really – it's how you talk to people, too, you know. It's just like, him, this first, the one who paid for the roller skates. Well I had to get a job, for my mother, so I go, I take the one o'clock bus and, do you have an opening, sir? Oh, no, I'm sorry. Okay, thank you. Next day, next day, two weeks I did that. You're coming in Monday. Oh, my gosh. I think of that now and it's kind of funny.

AL: And were there ever any pranks, did anyone play pranks or anything during the workday, or was it pretty much business?

LB: Well, some were kind of, wise up a little bit, you know, but it wasn't bad really. Well, I'm not one to get involved into anything, I mind my own business. But I mean no fighting and stuff like that, no-no, no, no. And just like in Falcon, they're very nice, very nice. I got along with everybody, so what can I say?

AL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think is important to add, in terms of the things you did over the years in the shoe industry and what you saw happen to it?

LB: Well, some had to close their place. Well one time I was working there, and I went home to eat, I come out, I'm sorry, we're closing. You know, he hadn't been there long enough and probably wasn't, so you go to the unemployment and get a job. It's hard today for people, it really is. But it was so nice, though, growing up, and even married and everybody was so – for one thing, you don't eat together anymore, people.

I've noticed that for a few years now. Anyway, I complained to, what's her name, not Snowe, what's the other one?

AL: Susan Collins.

LB: Yeah, well I went to the office, and it's on the corner of Lisbon Street, but it's not her there, but I was getting really uptight on things, you know, because people working twelve hours a day, twelve and twelve, I says to him, it was a young man around twenty-eight, twenty-nine, and I says to him, I says, you know, young man, it's not your fault, I know it's not your fault, but I don't like what they're doing here. And I told him, I says, are you married? No. I says, just think now, you have two little children, and your wife has to leave at seven in the morning to come back to seven in the night, whatever, and you're on something else, you'll never see each other. I says, they need to see their – and I had written some stuff. But meaning, it's true, they're destroying the life today.

AL: It's very hectic.

LB: It is, really, really. And my daughter, she has to work two jobs.

AL: Yeah, it's hard.

LB: It really is, it really is. Just like myself, they say to me, well before my husband passed away he says, Lorraine, he says, I know I won't be here, and he says, if you find somebody it's okay. (*Whispers - unintelligible*), nobody's going there, ever. So, he says, well keep working. Keep working, because you're going to go downhill.

AL: And so your hours, what kind of hours did you have in the shoe shop?

LB: Always days.

AL: Days, so like eight to four or something?

LB: Seven or eight, seven, and we'd get out around three-thirty or four o'clock, and Friday and Saturday and Sunday you're free, unless they need extra help. And I've done that, I mean we're not babies.

AL: But you're saying you really had more time to do the dinner and sit down with the family.

LB: Well yes, you get home and you make a good meal, and they know, five o'clock, I want all these feet here.

AL: Well thank you so much.

End of Interview
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