

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

**Anne Marie Lemay**  
(Interviewer: Thomas Burian)

**SMWOH #57**  
May 13, 2005

**Q:** . . . interview project with Ann Marie Lemay for the Mill Workers Oral History Project on May 16th, 2005 in Lewiston, Maine. I'm Thomas Burian interviewing. Could you please state your full name?

**A:** My full name?

**Q:** Yes.

**A:** Ann Marie Lemay.

**Q:** Could you please spell it?

**A:** A-N-N-E, capital M-A-R-I-E, capital L-E-M-A-Y.

**Q:** What was your date of birth?

**A:** 7/15/34.

**Q:** So, July 15, 1934. Where were you born?

**A:** I was born in Lewiston.

**Q:** Okay, where did you grow up in Lewiston?

**A:** I grew up in the city of Lewiston, near Ritz Theater, Maple Street.

**Q:** Did you live in an apartment or a house?

**A:** An apartment.

**Q:** Okay, what were your parents' names?

**A:** Are you sure that's all right? Are you sure that's all right to ask all those questions? Okay, my parents' name was Mary Ann, maiden or married?

**Q:** Both.

**A:** Her married name is Gagnon, and Emilion Turcotte.

**Q:** Where was your mother born?

**A:** My mother was born in Canada.

**Q:** How about your father?

**A:** My father was born in Canada.

**Q:** What part of Canada?

**A:** Victoria (*name*).

Q: And your mother?

A: My mother was (*unintelligible word*).

Q: Whereabouts in Canada was that?

A: (*Unintelligible phrase*).

Q: Did your parents work in the mills?

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of work did they do in the mills?

A: My mother, I think she was in the spinning room, but my father was a business agent for the union.

Q: They worked in the mills (*unintelligible word*)?

A: Yes, he worked, before he got a job in the union he worked at the Hill Mill.

Q: (*Unintelligible word*)?

A: Yes, a business agent. When people have problem, they go to him and they work it out with the company.

Q: So he worked for the union full time?

A: Yes, after, after he work, from the, yeah.

**Q:** Do you have any siblings? Do you have any brothers and sisters?

**A:** One, two, I mean two, one twin sister, and one brother.

**Q:** Did they work in the mills?

**A:** My twin sister did, but she had to leave because of a rash from the yarn.

**Q:** What do you mean, can you talk a little about that?

**A:** Well, she had a rash, she was allergic to a special kind of a yarn you had to weave. My brother didn't work in the mill. My grandmother work in the mills. My grandmother, my mother and me.

**Q:** Where did you go to school here in Lewiston?

**A:** Jordan.

**Q:** Jordan?

**A:** Jordan School?

**Q:** Is that a public school?

**A:** Yes, well we moved to Auburn, I went to (*unintelligible word*) school, went to school, then we moved to Lewiston and I went to Jordan's, public school.

**Q:** And is that where your siblings went?

A: My siblings?

Q: Your brother and your sister?

A: My sister yes, but my brother, he went to a Catholic school, St. Mary's, St. Mary's School in Lewiston.

Q: And you said your brother didn't work in the mills?

A: No, no, he didn't, he had a job, a fireman.

Q: And how far in education did you go?

A: Me? Eighth grade.

Q: How about your sister?

A: Eighth grade.

Q: Your brother?

A: My brother, he finished high school, I guess, I'm not sure (*unintelligible word*).

Q: And where was the high school?

A: It was, it must have been Lewiston High, but I'm not sure about that. What was that, thirteen years difference in age, so (*unintelligible phrase*) all the time.

Q: And growing up, growing up in your house did you speak French?

A: Yes, yes, we spoke French. It was hard going to a public school, not speaking English. I learned it over there, but at the beginning it was hard.

Q: So you knew no English going to school?

A: Yes, I learned at the public school, and I learned from my next door neighbor, she told me different things, what to say (*unintelligible phrase*).

Q: Right at home?

A: Yes, well, I lived on top of Goff Hill, that's where I learned English.

Q: But at home you spoke French all the time?

A: Yes, we still do.

Q: Do you speak French with all your friends?

A: No, now we start speaking English, we speak English now. But in the beginning, before (*unintelligible word*) after I graduated there, there where different friends and we started speaking English.

Q: You mean different French?

A: I mean, not different French. I mean we didn't speak as much French as we used to. We started speaking English. Now it's mostly all English. But my husband and I still speak French.

Q: Do you teach your kids French?

A: They know a little bit, but not much.

Q: So they spoke English growing up?

A: Yeah, they spoke English growing up.

Q: So you spoke to your children in English (*unintelligible word*)?

A: Yes, we were starting speaking English, and they went to public school, so they learned English and they spoke English all the time. They hardly speak French. I don't think they know, they might know a word or two but that's it. I had six children. Working in the mill and have six children, that's pretty good. They were good at the mill. They had time out and then I could, they gave me time after the birth of the baby to return. I make a good living at the mill.

Q: How much time did you get off?

A: Oh, I was a weaver, so sometimes I worked three months pregnancy, then I took it off. They didn't say nothing because I worked heavy machinery and everything. So (*unintelligible word*) was justified.

Q: In other rooms you might have to work longer into your pregnancy?

A: Yeah, now my girls have to work until two months before they deliver. There's a big change.

Q: How many hours did you work a day?

A: Forty hours a week.

Q: Five days a week?

A: Five days a week. Saturday and Sunday off and we had, there weren't no Saturday and Sunday to work. Just on special occasion when they needed something, like for a war or something.

Q: Did you work all day on Saturdays and Sundays?

A: Well, we're home, yeah, but only the one, Saturday and Sunday's the ones that went to work. (*Unintelligible phrase*), but that was on special occasions, very rare.

Q: How old were you when you started work at the mill?

A: Eighteen.

Q: (*Unintelligible phrase*), how old where you when you when you stopped going to school?

A: I was about fifteen. I finished the eighth grade. Fifteen to sixteen. Oh, I had little jobs here and there. I had a job at the bakery, (*unintelligible word*) they called it. It's not there anymore. I worked there. Then I worked at the dry cleaner. I don't know what happened, why I didn't have any job. And my grandmother from Canada came and she said, you know, I'll pray for you. And she prayed for us, and we went (*unintelligible word*) work at the Hill mill for a job and they hired us.

Q: So you didn't have any trouble getting a job there?



A: No.

Q: They hired you on the spot?

A: Yeah, yeah, that was me and my sister together.

Q: What were your *(unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: On Saturday, no. It's way, way back -

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* forty years?

A: Forty, fifty, we'll say fifty years ago. I'm not sure, but around that, fifty years.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)*

A: Yes, yes, and what I like at the mill is that if you don't like our job they post a bulletin. The one that wanted a job put their name, and the oldest one in the seniority had the job. When they *(unintelligible phrase)* or something, they posted job instead of saying, well, we'll take you, we'll take you. They gave us a choice, the ones that wanted it.

Q: Based on seniority?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What were the most popular jobs in the mill?

**A:** I was a weaver back then. At the end I was the loom girl, and I like it, I liked loom girl. Was hard, it was like a puzzle with all those threads and everything, and I liked it. But I was a weaver most of the time. But I had another job at the Bates Mill, in the finishing room when after the bedspread, put them in the box and we sealed the bedspread. And I worked in there, the belt, putting in the box. And I worked in the warehouse a little bit. I been through a lot of departments. I went up in the spinning. Well, sometimes worked later.

**Q:** Did you make a lot of friends while you were there?

**A:** Oh yes, wonderful people. Oh yes. They were always so helpful, trying to help you. I still think of those people today. But at my age now, I see a lot of them dying. But they were wonderful. I think it was the people that made Bates Mill and Hill Mill, it was the people. They were so committed to their jobs.

**Q:** Did you talk to a lot of people while you were working?

**A:** Sometimes, yeah. Like weavers, we had time to talk and we had breaks and talked. A lot of them make a good living, they send their children to college and some are nurses and everything. All because they worked at the mill. It was a good place to work.

**Q:** Did you talk to each other in English or French?

**A:** French, but at the end we talked English. When I started up fifty years ago it was French, we talked French. But when our friends went to the Bates Mill we started talking in English.

**Q:** Why?

A: We didn't want to talk French if somebody was English.

Q: So there weren't a lot of people who spoke English on your first job?

A: No, no, there was none, not that much, no.

Q: How many supervisors did you have at one time?

A: I had (*unintelligible word*) I was always on second shift. And -

Q: What are the hours on second shift?

A: The hours are three to eleven, second shift, and I worked most of the time second shift. Only when the mill closed, when I went at Bates Mill, the situation is changed and I was on first shift.

Q: Did you choose to work second shift or where you assigned?

A: No, I chose to work second shift. I couldn't fit another job on the first shift or third shift. And I chose second shift because I was home with my children, and my husband came home around four and he took care of the children at night and it was just right for us. We had a babysitter maybe for one hour. She lived right next door to where we used to live. We got along just fine doing that.

Q: And did you ever have much overtime?

A: Well, no, I didn't do much overtime, but I went on other shifts. Like on the third shift I went for awhile. Just the first shift, I was on first shift when I went for Bates.

Q: First shift is what hours?

A: Seven to three I think. I like it at Bates Mill.

Q: Did a lot of people (*unintelligible phrase*) overtime?

A: I guess so. Some of my friends where working overtime. I have a choice, if you wanted to (*unintelligible phrase*) and they asked them and they did it. I couldn't work overtime with a family I had.

Q: So the people that worked overtime, where they married or not married?

A: I don't know. Some where married, some were not.

Q: Did the men tend to work more overtime?

A: It depends what job. Some jobs was woman jobs, some jobs was men jobs. But the looms was a mens job. In looming some workers were men and some where woman. So they had a choice if they wanted to work. They asked the oldest. They go by seniority. But if they wanted to work, they had a chance, and if they don't, they don't.

Q: In your room, you said there were men, did they make the same amount of money per hour?

A: No. Well, the loom fixers were more, paid more than us because we were weavers. That's a skill, you know, a big skill to fix the loom. But we didn't know.

Q: So what did you do weaving? Can you describe what you did?

**A:** I work on plain fabric. Yeah, this come from Bates Mill. And I have a bedspread from Bates Mill. You want to see my bedspread?

**Q:** Maybe after the interview. You said you worked with plain and you had to turn it into -?

**A:** I've, hadn't stayed much on the bedspread, I didn't stay much, I don't know, I went to the other jobs. I didn't stay long with bed spreads. I did at the end, I worked on Bates (*unintelligible word*) being a loom girl, I had to work on those. Martha Washington, everything. Well, no regrets working at Bates and Hill. We had such (*unintelligible word*) and we had a good life.

**Q:** Did you like your supervisors?

**A:** Yes. If we didn't agree with them, they hear our cases and then they, the union goes there and they work things out.

**Q:** Were there a lot of disagreements?

**A:** Sometimes, yes. There were some disagreements and they, but sometimes it works for them, sometimes it doesn't.

**Q:** What were some disagreements about?

**A:** Sometimes for a job or something. I don't know. Over people's job or another shift or there's all different kinds. Or maybe their job was to (*unintelligible phrase*) they couldn't handle it. They were asked to (*unintelligible phrase*) and they go (*unintelligible phrase*) and see how big it is.

Q: Would you consider the weaving room safe?

A: Yes.

Q: So there weren't a lot of injuries?

A: No.

Q: You never heard of anyone getting hurt?

A: Well, I don't know. I think I may have done that. I hurt my head on a beam and they took me to the doctors and he stitched it up and the next day I was fine.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: I can't, it must have been Hill Mill.

Q: Did they take care of the doctor's bills?

A: Yes. *(Unintelligible phrase)* very good. I don't think we had to pay the insurance then. It was free.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: I didn't have to pay insurance because it was free for me, because I was here.

Q: But your family had to pay? *(Unintelligible phrase)*?

A: But we both had an insurance with the family. One of my daughters got sick, very sick and had ruptured pancreas. And she worked for *(unintelligible word)* Miller, and that's where I worked. They combined it and they paid off the bill. It cost almost, then it cost a lot of money. It was a thousand. That was a lot of money then. But everything was paid for.

Q: So *(unintelligible phrase)* again?

A: Yes.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)*?

A: *(Unintelligible phrase)* I don't know what happened. It just plain does that.

Q: Did the company have any social events? Like the company sponsoring events outside of work for the employees?

A: Yes, yes, they had banquets for the employees about once a year I think.

Q: Where were these?

A: Well, in the hall, they rent a hall or sometimes it was at *(unintelligible word)*. One time they were in *(unintelligible phrase)* and one time it was at the Lewiston *(unintelligible word)* Hall. They had Maurice Chevalier, do you know who he is?

Q: No.

A: He's a singer. He's in the TV, singing. Was, he's dead now, but we had him for the baseball people.

**Q:** Was there anything else that the company sponsored?

**A:** Oh yes, I was shot for a, vaccination for the flu there, they sponsored that.

**Q:** *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

**A:** No, I wasn't there. That was the flu. Every season they had the flu there, they injected us.

**Q:** The company gave you your shots for free?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Where did you get the shots?

**A:** It was like a nurse. It was a special room in the mill. They gave us the shot.

**Q:** You said you were part of the union?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** All of the time you were working at Bates and Hill?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** *(Unintelligible phrase)?*

**A:** Yes.



Q: Did you go to the meetings?

A: No, never went to meetings. But I paid my dues, and if I have a disagreement, I would look into it.

Q: Were there any strikes while you were still working?

A: I know there were some before (*unintelligible phrase*).

Q: Well, were there any when you were working?

A: No, I can't think of any.

Q: And have they ever talked about striking?

A: Yes, I think there was one before my (*unintelligible word*) they were striking, in fact, up at Hill or Bates, and they had some people say they go round in circles with picket signs. But that's all I remember.

Q: You weren't a part of any other organizations, any religious affiliation, a charity or anything else?

A: Organization?

Q: Where you a part of any?

A: No, that's all we had.

Q: Where there any church organizations that you joined?

A: No, nothing. Everything was equal. Didn't matter about that.

Q: Did you meet your husband while working at the mill?

A: No, he worked at a shoe shop and the shoe shop closed and I found him a job at another mill. (*Unintelligible phrase*) and he liked it. But I don't think he would have wanted to come where I was working. Everything turned out fine. But nowadays, they had to get a babysitter. My daughter gets a babysitter, she had to pay almost two hundred and something a week for her babies. Geez, there goes a lot of her money. She has twins and another one there. The people make Bates Mill. Great people. Dedicated.

Q: When you and your husband went out, where did you go?

A: When out?

Q: Where did you go?

A: Saturdays and Sundays? We didn't go nowhere. We stayed home. I stayed home with -

Q: No, before?

A: Before? Oh, before I got married we used to go to the dance.

Q: Where was the dance?

A: One was at (*unintelligible word*) Hall in Lewiston.

Q: Where was that?

A: Lisbon and Chestnut.

Q: Was it (*unintelligible phrase*), did it have another building?

A: No, second floor.

Q: What was under it?

A: What was under it? Can't remember. Then I met my husband at the American Legion. We had a lot of places to go to then.

Q: When did you get married?

A: I got married, I celebrated my, fifty years ago, I celebrated wedding anniversary in September. September fourth.

Q: Where did you get married?

A: I got married at St. Mary's church where they had the (*unintelligible word*) that's where I got married.

Q: Where did you have your reception?

A: At the (*unintelligible word*) Hall. Where we go dance. They had all kinds of things there. They had showers, they used to have showers over there.

Q: You said you had six kids?

A: Yes.

Q: What are their names?

A: Paul, Morris, Joline, Angela, Tina, Nancy, four girls and two boys.

Q: Any of them work in the mill?

A: None, none.

Q: What do they do for a living?

A: One, my son Paul, he worked at National Semi Conductor, Oakland. And my son Morris, he worked in carpenter and my daughter Tina, she works at L.L. Bean. My daughter Nancy, she works at a nursing home in the cooking department. And Joline works in a nursing home, too. And Angela works at a, like a telemarketing, not telemarketing, computers (*unintelligible word*), well, she works with computers in an office. I don't know the kind.

Q: Did any of your kids go to college?

A: No.

Q: (*Unintelligible phrase*)?

A: Two, I think they, my son got his education in the army. He got a scholarship free in the army. He got himself a good education, so he's all set.

**Q:** Where did they go to high school?

**A:** Lewiston High.

**Q:** *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

**A:** No, because of, they went to public school before, they didn't know what, and that's why I want them to go to St. Dominic.

**Q:** Where do your kids live now?

**A:** They live in Lewiston and Auburn and Turner and Danville.

**Q:** So they're all fairly close?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** How many grandchildren do you have?

**A:** Twelve. No great grandchildren yet, no, yeah, one great grandchild.

**Q:** So your grandchildren, do any of them work in the mill?

**A:** There's no mill. How can they do anything at the mill? There's none. The mills are all gone. They don't know anything about the mill because it doesn't exist any more.

**Q:** Any of them go to college?

A: No, no. But they do pretty good in their jobs.

Q: Where do they live?

A: One is in Turner. She's the one that works at L.L. Bean.

Q: No, I mean your grandchildren.

A: My grandchildren, they, I don't know where.

Q: But most of them live fairly close?

A: Yes. Yes, that's the story of my life.

Q: I know I've asked you about (*unintelligible phrase*). Where did you go to church?

A: How did I -?

Q: I mean, how often?

A: Every week.

Q: At which church?

A: St. Mary's, and then when we got married it was St. Joseph's. We'd go up in (*unintelligible word*).

Q: So it didn't matter what church you went to?

A: Well, it matters to us.

Q: Is that why you go to St. Mary's?

A: St. Mary's? Well, St. Mary's isn't there anymore.

Q: When did you go to St. Mary's?

A: We moved to St. Joseph's. We always went to St. Joseph's.

Q: Why did you go to St. Joseph's?

A: Why? Because we go there to praise the Lord once a week.

Q: I mean why didn't you go to St. Patrick's or -?

A: Well, because we liked that one.

Q: Why did you like that one?

A: Because it's small, and because we can hear the priest talk loud enough so we can hear. Too big, sometimes we can't hear nothing. When I was young, fifteen, sixteen, we used to go shopping. And was it busy down Lisbon Street, oh was is busy. Going to Peck's department store, where L.L. Bean is. We used to like to go shopping. It was wonderful.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)?*

A: Yes, yes, no cars over there, too.

**Q:** Did you ever go to small stores?

**A:** Small stores? I went everywhere. They used to be a Kresge's, there used to be a (*unintelligible word*), there used to be a, two more stores, I can't remember. But when we were (*unintelligible word*) there, that was nice. It was cheerful. A lot of people. Busy, busy.

**Q:** Do you have a lot of extended family here?

**A:** Extended family?

**Q:** I mean -?

**A:** My aunt? Oh yes, I have one living aunt on my side. And on his side he has three brothers. That's all.

**Q:** Do you like to go back to Canada on trips?

**A:** I wish I could. It's been so long that we don't know anybody there any more. Even on my father's farm, we don't know anybody there any more.

**Q:** When you were younger, did you used to?

**A:** Yes, we used to see my grandmothers in Canada. One in Victoriaville and one in LaPlane. It was good memories.

**Q:** While you were growing up there, were your parents originally from Canada?



A: Yes, *(unintelligible phrase)*.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: Sometimes, at the mill there used to be some people from Canada come in to work at the Hill. I remember that.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: No, but there were some when I was there. They put an advertisement that they wanted Canadian people to come and work.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: I don't know. I think it lasted six months. I remember working with them *(unintelligible phrase)*.

Q: Did they go back to Canada?

A: Some of them went back to Canada. I think some of them went further down like in *(unintelligible word)*.

Q: Do you know why they went further down?

A: For better jobs, I guess. I don't know. They were good workers.

Q: Was it mainly men?

A: Families. I know one family did and (*unintelligible word*) from Canada. Do you want me to say their name?

Q: No, that's fine. So did most people get along in the mill?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you get along with the people you worked with from Canada?

A: Yes. Even though they're not from Canada, you still get along. Because you know why? Because they felt secure. They had their job and they know nobody could take it from them. So that's why we were secure. Like somebody from in the shoe shop would come in here and you know they won't take our job because you signed for it. It's our job. If you go in the shoe shop, anybody can go do your job. You have nothing to say. They were nice people.

Q: Would anybody make fun of you for being Canadian?

A: No. No. No. Just when we moved to Auburn, I was about ten, eleven years old going to public school. We talked French and the teachers couldn't understand. My sister wanted to go to the bathroom, she left, the teacher didn't know what she was saying. They put us backward another grade and the children used to call us French fries. I remember that. It hurt our feelings. But after a while they got over it and everything was well.

Q: You made friends with them?

A: Yes. But it hurt when someone calls you names. I still think of it today. I think I'll always think of it.

**Q:**     *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

**A:**     The new people?

**Q:**     Yes, Somalians.

**A:**     Well, the ones that I saw were very nice and gentle. I didn't see them too much. When I went to the doctors, there was a Somalian with two children and they were so well dressed and very, very nice. It felt good to see them healthy and everything. Everybody had their right, just like us.

**Q:**     So your *(unintelligible phrase)*?

**A:**     Yes. I -

*End of Side A*

*Side B*

**A:**     ... didn't work out so I went to the Bates Mill and they hired me.

**Q:**     So, do you each have a pension?

**A:**     Well, no, not much of a pension. I have a pension but it's one of the lowest pension because I was always sick, I didn't work half of the time.

**Q:**     Why were you sick?

**A:**     Sometimes I was laid off, or laid off, I was laid off. I was always one of the last ones. They go by seniority, the last ones are to go. So I was laid off and I

collected my unemployment from the unemployment bureau, and then when Bates Mill called me when they were picking up. They could call anybody else when you was laid off because *(tape blip)* when the Hill Mill closed, they gave us a chance to go to the Bates Mill and keeping our seniority. But I didn't go right away because I wanted to stay with my children. So, I stayed home about a year, a year and a half. Then I started another job, didn't like it, then I went to Bates Mill.

Q: What was the other job?

A: The other job? One was at the *(unintelligible word)*. I didn't like it. No place like home.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: I went to the hospital to try nurses aide and that didn't work. I wasn't suited for it. It wasn't in me. I couldn't do a good job. Then I went to Bates Mill and I stayed there. But being one of the last ones, you're laid off a lot.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: No, no, I retired from Bates Mill. How long does that list last?

Q: What do you think about the project we're doing?

A: The museum? It will be nice for the children to know what people went through, our fathers and mothers went through. It will be nice for the children.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: Part of what I made, yes.

Q: Do you have a lot of the bedspreads ?

A: I had the two bedspreads. I gave one to one of my children. I have one here. I'll show it to you.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: The employees had a discount when they buy through the Bates Mill.

Q: Was there a store?

A: Yes.

Q: Was it employees only?

A: No, but the discount was employees only. A lot of people are gone. Those wonderful people.

Q: *(Unintelligible phrase)* ?

A: We always went to church with our parents.

Q: Which parent made sure you school and *(unintelligible phrase)*?

A: My mother.

Q: Did you do that for your children?

A: No. My mother didn't come up to say our prayers every night. You do it.

All I did was (*unintelligible word*) to church every Sunday. I don't (*unintelligible phrase*).

**Q:** So you didn't (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**A:** No, just watch the TV, and I like the (*unintelligible word*) of the TV. That's what I'm interested in, they, the TV is our companion. We watch a lot of TV.

**Q:** Do you still see a lot of the people that worked in the mill?

**A:** Yes, I know a lot of people.

**Q:** Do a lot of them live here?

**A:** Yes, yes. There's one, she's seventy, I think she's seventy four, seventy five, and she still works at the Bates Mill. They have a little group now at Bates Mill. They have about three looms, three or four looms, and she still works there.

**Q:** (*Unintelligible phrase*) ?

**A:** She's been in the mill all these years. She's still there working. I don't know what they would do without her. She knows everything about that building.

*End of Interview*

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*(End of tape)*