A: That’s why I had to remember my place, because I couldn’t remember. First door was to go on Cabot Street. [Noisy] Second door was in the middle, and the third door was where you go in. On your right was the finishing room for the blankets. On your left you go in and see the machine for the pieces for the girl. The big motor in front of you and [unclear] my left near the wall where the machine was to clean the bobbin. So they, during the day they bring you box of bobbins. They’re broken. They couldn't be fixed. So whatever can be fixed they give to the girl in front of us, to be put together and make new, they work at piece work. And then whatever they couldn't do, well you put in the machine. And whatever the machine couldn't pull out, we had to take a knife and we'd sit on boxes, cut it out. But we had to be careful not to scratch the bobbins, see, because they cost a lot of money. They were three bobbins for a nickel. That was a lot of money in them days. Then we had to do so many then, and [unclear] like watch for the hour. We had the clock and had to, kind of a broom. They don't-call it a broom. A brush like with teeth. You pick up the waste. And did you know, a small brush, how you pick it up and throw that in one of these wheel cart. So they never threw nothing (anything) away. The mill, never, never threw anything away. Use whatever. They send it down to have it washed and whatever. They make some more thread out of it. And then as soon as I had to pass the [ropin] down. I don't know why that word comes, [ropin], but a big, after the card rooms there’s a big bobbin like this. I used to put them on top. I was too small. So the woman picked me up and put me in it. [All Laugh]. She had to. She went to [unclear], pick me up and put me, start to push me in and I couldn't reach. I was too small. So then I had to hurry up again and sweep the floor again. And then I did that for a while. Then they find out the owner is going to come up. So not being of age, the overseer (--) See now the overseer was looking for somebody. So…”So well,” he said, “You’re going to start the three to eleven, because then if you
see any straw hat, you’ll run. You’ll run down that door, you go to that circle of stairs and you go home. Don't talk to nobody.” I was too young. I was thirteen. I just became thirteen. And I remember one night, it was a beautiful night. I see a straw hat, but it was the wrong guy. [Laughs] They called me back to go to work. But then I had another machine see, and that machine was a, you had a (--) [Few word unclear] like this to bring the (--) I was too small you know. I need some help, because I couldn't push. These things was that… these things was about that big. Now these truck full of bobbins, see (- -)

D: About three feet wide?

A: And you got to push it. Huh?

D: About three feet wide?

A: About this wide. This is the width. But I couldn't reach the bottom. If I reached the bottom, my feet was up and my head was down. You know? So you pick up the bobbin. Then there was a machine, and you put it, there’s a groove to put around the bobbin see. And then, then you had to throw…because then there’s a scrapper at the end, and you put an empty box, cart, whatever they call them, and then they fill them up. Then you had to watch it, because they steal it, because that was, belonged to the girls, but some of the boys would come up for the card room. See they always, didn’t didn't have enough for everybody. See, that's another problem. Whatever you had, you had to fight for. We all had to fight for everything.

D: Why were they fighting for it?

A: Well there was not enough, because you work at piece work. If you want to keep your job you got to produce. It's up to you to be smart enough to watch all these things. So, if I was a nice pretty woman, or something like that, I would like to save it, put it aside, I’ll put a few other bobbins and say, “Hey, hey, hey, don't touch it!” you see, and give it to her.

D: [Laughs]

A: See. But I remember this Greek guy. He just came in from Greece. He couldn't talk in English. "Me want truck." Oh yah. Nope, nope. It was hot, like 80, 90 there. He had no idea. And he just had his supper, garlic, hard bread with linseed oil from the machines. He goes to the frame and puts it (he rubs his hands together). Oh, he spit in my face. That's why I never (--)

D: He was dipping his bread in the linseed oil?

A: Oh yah, yah, you put it in the frame, see, to save money. See, you buy the bread, you could buy five loaves for five cents. The old loaf they were going throw away, you
know. That's why they use to do. And the garlic, you take a bite of that in the summertime. Oh, gee, and they'd burp. [Makes sound]

D: [Laughs]

A: Oh. No, you have no idea. I, I almost threw up. Anyway, he'd come up. Ooh, nice boy. You nice? No. And then you'd see right straight from me, the overseer. The overseer was my very good friend, family friend besides that. I used to sleep at his house. So he would keep an eye on me. What do you want? What do you want, right away? “Oh no, he's alright.” I said, “Don't fire him.” Oh no, just like that, you know. They'd fire you for no reason at all. So at night we work, it was (--) Then we had these humidifier I guess see, every... they'd be one here, they'd be four here, spaced like this. I don't know how many feet. I would say twelve feet square. And then water sprayed, you know, like a spray. Well you can imagine we were all wet! And if you go outside, you're a little cold, you'd catch pneumonia.

D: Why, why did they have that in the mills?

A: Well now, the threads see, your thread, it's a, a variation, or this pressure, a wheel that's rolling on your thread and twisting. And there's only a certain way to do this. Now you talk about electronics. Now you figure, the little machine, that one thread goes through. I don't know all the detail of the wheel. Some are cloth, some of them are fiber, some of them are, are wood. Because, then you know like the big thread from the card room come in through, it's a twisting, it's a twisting thing the thread, see. Then it goes up. I think there's two, two kind of ah, ah you know, machine for spinning room. The spinning they call it, spinning room. One to reduce the thread, then the other one to finish it the way they like to have it. Now every machine, like every hour the second hand would come up and pick one from each girl. Well when you put your boxes right, that was yours. See, there was a code, and that was yours. So then they bring to the office and they always remember. They do have this at Lowell Tech on Aiken Street, a machine with a weight. And they put a bobbin, and the thread, when you put little pieces to see how much weight the thread can hold, not to break, see. That means if your machine's too tight, or not tight enough, see. They can tell by the pressure. And there's a way also, they would see. If you look like this, hold the thread and you can see one bouncing, that mean there's something wrong, see. You need some oil sometimes, because it's like dragging, like a brake on. [Unclear], there's no brake at all. See they have, you see, as the bobbin start with nothing, naturally when it goes up big and bigger, the machine got to a compensate for that. They had to make the space for that, see? All these little gadgets goes in between. So that's why you had to learn, before you can start to do doffing to know what your parts are to oil them and grease them. Now there's all kinds of grease. Grease for the heavy wheel, for, and there was fine grease, like white grease we call it for finer (--) No you couldn't throw oil on the thread. That was no good. So you had to be careful. That's why these oil cans, we had a small one with a small spout, and we had one with a longer spout to go in between, but you never, never stop the machine. You never stop production. But that's it. When you stop, you stop on Saturday noon. That was it, and come back Monday and work. But there was no such thing for
stopping the machine. You worked right through the clock, you know. And then at, from there on it goes to the weave room. And they had the battery boy, you know. The battery boy, it's a, like a u-turn. When you put the different colors of bobbins that goes into the shuttle, see. Then it went back and forth, back and forth, so that's it. Sometimes if, if a thread breaks then you had to stop it. And if the young man, like you start to be, we'll say a sweeper, that's when you start to learn the machines, because you can not throw your brush, or your broom. It was not broom, like you thread that thing you know to, to hit the machine and then you break something. I mean the thread, not to break the machine. You break the thread, because if you make too much wind you can break the thread, see. So then you go slowly and there goes all your parts. Then to do something you please somebody. The doffer, you ask them what's this, what's that, he'll tell you. That means well, if you want to go to the bathroom, you take his place to watch it you know, a thing like that, see. You have to, because that's the only way you'll learn. Nobody showed you nothing.

D: So you had signals amongst yourselves?

A: Oh, yah. Yah, I mean, well I don't remember them all, but I mean, if you put your hand or something, or the woman would have certain things to say. Well, it's almost time to do the doffing. Because then they give you so many machine at first, but at the end they'd end up with less people to make money. But no, you had to have team work. So that's why everybody had to help each other. Otherwise it was not a question of nationality. Oh no, everybody, lots of people you don't understand each other. Like the French do not understand the Greek, or the Irish. And the Irish like to speak French a little bit here and there. And the Greeks same way, you know. Comment sa vas? You know? How are you, and all this, you know. Okay. Okay was the word. Okay, okay. Everybody said okay in a way that's fine, you know. That was about the national word in the mill, you know what I mean? (D: [Chuckles]) But if something is supposed to, things would happen like that. If a young man would go out with a girl, and ah he wanted to be hard about it, and she don't want to listen to him, he'd cut his finger through the thread. That mean the machine got to stop, and then she's losing production. Then she could get fired for that, but she can't go tell the boss about that. They didn't care what the boy wanted to do to you. That’s nothing to do. You got to run your machine. It's up to you to run your machine. Oh no, you, if you did not run it, out you go. That was it! And there was thousands of people to take your job. There was no problem. So that's why the boy knows that. He'd take care of that boy for you. Oh no, you wouldn't, you had a code that ah, and a respect. Oh no, they respect the women. No, no, there was no. You know, you wouldn't (~) I never in all my life, like today, I mean, there was no way when the people come up, because no, it was easy to take you know, to kiss a woman or do something, you know. No way. No way. There was no such thing. You had to rush. It was time to go home, because you didn't have much time to yourself. You got to go home, especially if it's in winter. You got to start a fire. You got to start to put some water, to wash up. Then you start your supper. And by the time you have all this going, you got to go down cellar to get some coal, or get whatever you need. You had to fix up the oil lamp, put some oil in it. It's almost nine o'clock. It’s time to go to bed and get up at four-thirty, five o'clock, you know. It's hard. And then you walk. There’s no
transportation see. There was no, no taxi or no trolley cars. A trolley car could only go so far, but you had to walk sometimes a quarter mile to go to the trolley car. And I mean snow and everything. That was not that easy!

D: What time did you start in the morning?

A: For seven o'clock. Oh no, seven o'clock, ten of seven if they didn't see you, you were fired. You could get somebody else. He don't want to lose his production. I always remembered this. And on the third floor, right in the middle of the mill, I was right in front on a nice little machine, and he called me in, the overseer. He wanted to talk to me, because he was going to take me out with ah, me and my brother Leo, and he said “Wait.” So we wait. Oh yah, the little guy, he's still living. I seen him the other day. I saw him. Yah. I asked him, he, he, he took his place and I thought, this fellow worked seventeen years. He came from way up Pawtucketville, way up. He walked through the snow storms and everything, because he came in at ten or eight of eight or seven, he lost his job, because he says, “Well, I didn't think you were going to come so I hired somebody else.” “Yah, but.” “Go home. I haven’t got time to be bothered.” That was it. That was it. That's the thing, it was really slavery, you know. It was. If you cut your finger, or something, oh no, you fix it up the way you can. There was only a First Aid, a little thing on Suffolk Street that was the, half of it was the First Aid, the other half was for the watchmen, you know. And you had some parts I guess, for gears and things like that, but new thing. Brand new [unclear], but you had to have signatures, or [unclear] big man, because you couldn’t, you know, you couldn’t fool around with (- -) You had to fix whatever you do had to work with. And the First Aid was Mrs. Turcotte today. She’s living. She was one of the first nurse in 1927, '26, '27. I was in '28 me, '29. So she was a nurse, a nurse of the mill. It was quite a big deal, because you know, hey, you had to be somebody to be something like that. What they have? You could have everything on all of this here, that's all. That’s all they had. If anybody cut their arm or whatever it was, that was it. Then if something ever happened, they'd send them to the Lowell Corporation, St. Joseph's Hospital. That was part of the mill. But they had to be real sick. And then they only have ether to put you to sleep, or chloroform I mean. Ether was too dangerous at that time see. So if you ever cut your finger, put your hand where you're not supposed to. Oh no, you had to be real careful. There was no, no insurance. If you lose too much time at work, you lose your job. That was it. There was no ah, nothing you know. You say, well, too bad you know, we'll pay you. No, no, there was no vacation. No nothing. Then you had ah, on Thursday I think was pay day or Friday. Friday, Friday was pay day. And that's where up to the shift stopped and we’d go in front of the office, and we had a little brass, a tin thing, a brass thing there with a number. That was your number. If you lose your number you don't get paid. They’d pay you when it be ready. You don't go the next week. Your pay is three o'clock, or whatever time, but if you're not there on time, if you go to the ladies' room, or the men's room, you didn’t get there, you lost your pay till next week. Oh they didn't, they weren’t (--) Boom, boom, that was it. Right on time, everything, you know. There was no fooling around, because there was too many people, they couldn’t come to work to do what they want, you know. And then if you have some good ideas, and you do something good, oh yah, it was wonderful. Who got the credit? The secondhand, or the overseer. Now he's
proud, you know. He'd come up, he'd give you a cigar, or something like that, or a pipe or tobacco. Hey good, good job. Okay, you did a good job Alex, you know. That's wonderful, yah. Then you could see shaking hands with the owners and everything, but he got the ideas. It wasn't true at all, you know. At the end see, when they close the mill, this Bob Hireux's father, he took a whole floor. 100, you see the name framed, a hundred weaving machines to take care of, but you had to run. Him and three young men to fill up the bobbin. Ah, they were running around to save (--) (D: You had a hundred?) You got a ten dollar raise, ten dollar more and there's thirty to forty people less to work. (he laughs).

D: When was this [unclear]?

A: Huh?

D: When was this?

A: Well right at the end on oh, '36, '37, I would say. In '39 you know, that's about the time everything closed down.

D: And you had to operate a hundred machines?

A: Me. Well, this no. This man did that, you know to try. He was, he became a little boss, and he became a little secondhand, third-hand. He was well liked, but he wanted to save money, but ah, it was almost impossible, because then, you can't you know, on a hundred machines or something, overflow, you know, by himself and he had to run, you know. I mean he didn't, but he can, I don't think he can do certain things, but that doesn't mean, it's not practical. That's what you find out, all these things today. But coming back to make thread, people have no idea whether it comes from Alabama, or Georgia. They come from to the factory here, go up straight, and turn right over there.

D: On the railroad tracks?

A: Go up over there. Then you go right across the canal and go right in front of the canal on Suffolk Street. And this big beam of black, about this much, that much, with the two door open and big [unclear]. They got a big, big one and go like this, and you pick it up. (D: Hook) And then the one guy cut the burlap to take it out and they throw that. They had a system too, not to lose time. Our time is very, very important. They don't talk, they don't tell stories and things. No way, you got to, then after this you got to run for this, you got to run for that. You got to get whatever container you need to put the materials in, see. And ah, if you break something, if you break a box, you step on something and the box is so old, oh boy. That was it. That was your box. So what you going to do? You know, you know there was nothing that that you got to go see, gee, can I borrow one of your box, and I’ll fix it up with you? Maybe bring in a cupcake, or something the wife would do, and bring it back, you know, or make a sandwich for tomorrow for dinner. Oh no, there was more people. I'm trying to find out to get some real people worked. To me I was too young. I just remember certain things, but I didn't
work on these machines. I was too small first of all.

P: How young were you when you started?

A: Thirteen. I was just been thirteen. I was thirteen in April, and I worked in June after school. [laughs] I was two months, thirteen and two months old. [laughs]. I wasn't supposed to, but I was so (- -) I don't know why I was so short. I mean I was really small, when I was small I mean, you know. And I was very delicate, and but see we were a big family and you know it was hard to (- -) We were seven boys you know, to buy clothing and food you know. They, you know, only (- -) My father use to go buy some suits. He'd buy four suits at a time, four overcoat, four pairs of shoes, and that's how we lived you know. Then we buy food. We don't buy to the grocery, because we go to a wholesale house. We buy 32 dozen of eggs you know. That was for one week. A big 120 pound of meat you know, and that was it. And we use to buy like twenty bags of potatoes, a 100 pound of each. Then we buy like two bag of rice, 100 pound of each. Then we buy two hundred pound of flour. You know that's how we lived, you know. And we'd buy a big bucket of lard, because butter didn't come by pounds. The only butter I remember by pounds was the Land O Lakes. Always like this. Never changed. Land O Lakes never changed, because as far as I know, but the other, like Kennedy has a bucket. Because see, we used to go around to pick up the wood. And this, this is a kind of wood we don't like to chard, because it we called it a spring. It's treated for water, and for humidity, and all kinds of things, you know, and it was hard to unfix it. Because you take an ax, and you hit that and it bounced in your face. Oh yah, you had to, no, you had to be careful you know. And a big barrel like this you know, this side, with the salt pork or corn beef in it. We use to go near the sewer and empty that in the sewer, because the salt in that would dirty the street, and the flies and everything, you know. So there was some very good things, but they were not, a lot of things were bad. I mean there's no way, I'm pretty sure the new generation of today, they would not appreciate to see the horse and buggy back, and in the street to see all they're doing, and the smell in the summertime. Oh no, no, you have a window, you couldn't sleep at night. You had to go out and clean up the street, because you couldn't sleep ah, it was like sleeping in the barn. Bugs of all kinds. You have no idea, in the dump. They didn't care about today, ecology. I mean where Lowell Tech, the dorm is, that's the dump. I use to go across there. See that was all open. [Unclear] I used to go on Martin Street, across that Lowell Tech field there. When Lowell Tech, when I was younger there was a big fence right, go around.

D: Is that where the running court is now, where they have the tennis courts?

A: No.

D: The field?

A: No, that's before that. Then on Textile Avenue where the Cumnock Hall, what do they call that, that hall there?

D: Yes.
A: Well that was, that was the field there where we used to play ball there. It was all a
fence and numbers of each year for graduation. And Doctor Montminy, the Optometrist,
graduated over there. He went in an old class. His father was a U.S. Senator. I mean no,
a State Senator from Boston see. Because where the library is, it used to be a big rock
and we used to be able to park and we used to go sit on that and we'd take, take a walk in
summertime after supper, to relax. There was a couple of things we'd do. Either you
come take a walk to the City Hall to buy some popcorn. The guy was making popcorn on
a little gas thing and ah, you had a free drink of water. Then you go, you come from
Moody Street and go back from Merrimack, or come from Merrimack and go back by
Moody Street. And all you go through Moody Street Bridge, right after the bridge you
go down to the river and come up on the White Bridge to Pawtucketville. And you cross
the street and go down again to go see the falls and where the fish goes up. So we
watched the salmon to go up. You could see the fish bouncing up to the river. But to get
a good view of all this and you looked at the Speare House, you get right in front there.
North Chelmsford, the [Unclear] they took out, but that used to be a barn like years ago.
[Unclear] making place for the engine to be repaired and fixed. Put water in it to get
ready to run, to move the freight around the area, you know, because freight used to go
up. Yah, it used to go up this street across Central Street where the Courier Citizen is
now. You go across where the Rialto is, especially on this side. I remember that. On
Saturday it was full of people. The traffic, trolley car, and the freight goes in [Laughs]
right across, and then [suddenly] there was a freight car right in the middle of Central
Street.

D: Now you were telling me about the dye room, that’s what you said. At the mill that
you remember the men working in the dye room and [unclear].

A: Oh yah, but this here, that was at the Lawrence Manufacturing on Cabot Street. You
go up on Cabot Street between the Hub Hosiery and the Lawrence on one side, you go
down the stairs two flights. Now I was in (--). In the wintertime, oh no, that was, I can’t
ever forget these [unclear]. I don’t know the right word is. Washing machine like, you
know, but all made out of wood. [Regan Lombard] see was a great asset to the mill,
because he built all these things. He said, whatever they need, like a round thing to wash
cloths or for because there was dye, see. So they were so bad, because they were put
down, way down. There was hardly no windows, nothing, you know, in other words.
And then they didn't have like today, overshoes and things like that. So you can imagine
a man. And then it was so hot see, because two, three hundred and twenty degrees heat.
See, after you wove all the thread, they put it, I don't know how to explain it, but it's a big
round, you know, about, ten. Yah, about this. It goes like this. And they go in that
steam house like, you know.

D: This is cotton?

N: The cotton to wash it and to purify it.

D: To spin it?
A: And then from there on they were, they knew how much to add you know. They had another piece of thread to hold it. Then that bunch would go to a certain green, or black, or whatever color. [Unclear]. And then when it was time to clean them up they opened up the back to throw it in the river. See that's why you don't see the black pipe anymore from the side. But I can show you where they are because you can see the mark where they put the brick. There must be at least six, seven of them up to the Boott Mill. You start from Aiken Street to the Boott Mill. You could see that when you cross the Aiken Street Bridge.

D: Those little pipes where they let out [unclear] dye that [unclear]?

A: Well the pipes were there, see. Whatever they, these [unclear] will clean up. Now if something break down, Reagan Lombard would come up, because there were gears. Because we tried to, if anything was any good we tried to get the wood to burn. Also, see there were all kinds of good things. You need some bolts, and nuts, and all kinds of things. [Unclear] that were made out of these things, too, to hold the wood. So if you want to make a little table or something, ah, you could use some of that stuff. But see there was, welding in them days it was not too, too, it was not the welding today, like today. The welding came much after that. It was cast iron things, see. That, you have to do a special thing for that, but then they came with stainless steel set-up. That's a different thing. That was much, entirely different, see. But these men, they were fixed. They were airtight, because you open them up and put them in, and they lock it up, and they were turning and everything you know. They were (--) But people walking...I see ice on the floor. You were just stepping out the door, you freeze to death. And inside you know, it was not (--) Any wider from that no, no from this, any wider than this and much lower see. The second basement.

P: [Unclear]

A: I'll have to bring you down and see. You have, it would be a good idea to make you walk on the car track like we used to do. And that was our good time. You know the car track see, [unclear] but one step, easy. You can walk a car track without looking. I saw the kid a little while ago do that. Yah, you used to make it naturally. Every tie is just one step, and we used to walk that. We used to walk that, you know, I don't know, in Wamesit. And we used to go there, (he laughs) walk for miles on that. And you can tell the vibration there's a train coming, you know. It would make you, it would vibrate a little, that's the time to get out. Oh yah. [Laughs] Then we'd go around the, the old Post, by where the Post Office is, there's a wall, the Post Office there, but there used to be a car track. See, you used to (--) See, the car track goes this, and you know, I don't know, like a "V" you know, like a check point like this, see. A car comes in and you back it up. There's always a couple of engines that was doing it then and there, all through the night, and everything see. Now where they, that was a very busy spot over there. So there was the Hub Hosiery. And there was Suffolk Mill. And you go up, you can go right through to, to the Lawrence Manufacturing. Then you come up and you go to Suffolk Street. Then over here, the canal is over there. Over here, then the canal is this way. The canal
goes this way, and it goes down, it goes this way. And then you bring the freight over there. Over here you used to put some, two or three car of coal. Then at the Hub, that was danger, because there was no floor. So you had to be careful where you walked, because you could go through, right to the canal and get drowned. And then the watchman watched you. And then I remember right aside where they built, where the Post Office is today, Courier Citizen, Courier Citizen over there, they built one, two, four more sections when I was a little boy. And I used to sit down and bring a sandwich, or two. My mother used to make me and my brother Leo. Sit down there, and we’d watch the boys working to fix that, for the mill see. And that's… There was new machinery coming in, new set up of manufacture. If I do recall, I'm not too sure, it's Roosevelt order for thirty mile of cotton to put on a road. They were trying not to [unclear], because they didn’t have all kinds of chemicals like today to make roads. And you were, somebody invented something with heavy cotton. Take cotton and mix with stuff from breaking the road apart you know, make it crack and everything, in the wintertime. So they order, when Roosevelt came in I remember that. They gave some mill, I don't know if it's the Lawrence Manufacture, the American Blanket, they only did blankets, but the Lawrence Manufacturing (--) 

Tape I, Side A Ends
Tape I, Side B Begins

A: … the U.S. Senate, the Congressmen. They had the Boott Mill see, and he, they, he tried to get the contract from the government for the hospital for all the bed sheets. That's why the Boott Mill got the bed, bed sheet. And then you had the, in every house, most people now, unless you were very, very poor, you had the rack on the door in the kitchen to wipe your hands see. And on the side it was red, see. That was, that was weaving. That was not painted, or anything like that. It was not. There was weaving through it and then you put them in see. And then used to sell racks to put this on and then it fit. Pillow cases, white, they had bedspread. And then the, well the Merrimack were corduroy, see. Corduroy was made for two things, for car, for General Motor and Ford, for the car, and for the casket. See, beautiful caskets. They make nice design, but when you open up…

D: How did they make that corduroy?

A: Pardon me?

D: How did they make the corduroy?

A: Well, corduroy, oh no. Corduroy, that's another operation and it's a very, it's like silk. It's all [unclear]. Corduroy, it's a piece of thread, see, then you, you do this. Then you go exactly where the thread see, we go exactly like this, see, with the thread. You got to, you can't see it, but you know how thread is with the corduroy, but you got to have a knife like this. I, I got some picture of a machine. The last machine it was, the fellow who invented the, what was his name? He invented a new knife, and imagine the
precision to cut the thread, every thread, every other thread, because in between there's a

D: So they cut the lines to make the corduroy?

A: No no, one thread and the others don’t. And one thread cuts and the others don’t, you
know? And then you cut, and then when you get two there's a kind of a brush to open it
up and then there's all kinds. I don't know exactly all the operation of that someday, I
don't know everything about the mills [laughs]. You asking me? No, but I know certain
things, but I knew corduroy see, it's heavy, it's tough. You know that was made for (--)
And they were (-- Then you have corduroy, then you start to make it for (--) See they
didn't have for people to wear. Then when I was a young man we wore corduroy, but we
didn't like it, because if it gets old, when you walk it makes noise. [Makes a swishing
sound]

D: Yah.

A: You know what I mean, between your leg you know.

D: Ah huh.

A: Sometime when you're young and if you wet your pants, or something, you know,
and then you walk and the girl look at you, you're all proud, everybody was proud; the
girls, you know, they’re all proud. But Saturday special, [laughs] I don't know if I could
tell you that. Saturday special you know, every (--) See we didn't have all of these soap
and everything to cleanup. So to wash your hair, you wash it with kerosene. Women,
everybody wash it, because the women had long hair see, and they roll it to make a round
thing.

P: Why did you wash it with kerosene?

A: And then my mother used to have a fine comb to comb your hair, and you couldn't,
you had to pick it one by one. Kill them with your finger nails like this (pick, pick).
That's the only way. [Referring to head lice] Oh my head. I remember that, gee. That's
why I got no more hair. No, but I mean they were, that was the thing then, the soap, what
kind of soap? [Unclear] There was a soap they sell at the pharmacy for sometimes if you
had sores. But they still, Castile? Castile soap. That was (--) But there was no... My
mother used to make soap, see. Yah. Your floor was black and then you wash it, it was
yellow after it was clean you know. You can see some kind of soap it was. I mean there
was no, oh no. They, they used to make like, I helped my mother. We fill up the tub see,
[one white and one blue]. So my job was to take care of the ringer, because my mother
passed, there's a certain way to pass the clothes, you know, and the shirts. See we wore,
my mother used to clean thirty white shirts a week, about eighty shorts and small shirts a
week for the family.

D: Wow.
A: Because when I…[chuckles] Then we had for dinner, well we had a bushel of potatoes, five pounds of steak, or something like that, nine chicken, you know what I mean? [Laughs] Fourteen pies, sixteen bread. That's only for one lunch, not for supper. Just one meal.

D: Yah.

A: You know. No, no. Dishes, if you don't think I can wash the dishes. I still wash dishes. I washed dishes last week. Oh no, I go to my children, I can wash and sweep up. As a matter of fact I took care of Saint John the Baptist Church for seven, eight years of minding, from the top, to the organ, down the basement, sweep. I take three days just to sweep up. Oh yah. I took care of that, waxing, and polishing, and washing windows. I remember we had a big ceremony. A cardinal from Canada was coming down. He's still living. I had to go and see him. My brother and his friend start to clean the window on a big ladder. So we come up where the priest are and he was there. And in the meantime the brother wanted to be nice so he had some cider. So I don't, I never drink me, but gave some to my brother and his friend. So I'm up in the step and the window is open, and this fellow is washing the window. I said to the brother, “It's about time we stop I guess.” [All laugh] There's no glass, no nothing and he's cleaning the window. That was so funny. And I saw his picture the other day and I got the, an album there, I like to, some old pictures. I got it in my (--) I want to give a [unclear] see. [Unclear]. You know there's a spot, that I don't know why the Park don't put a plate on Ford Street, near the canal where Truman came and played horse shoe. All right?

D: President Truman played?

A: Yah, yah. Truman came for his campaign.

D: Umhm.

A: And he played horse shoe with this Pass Temp Club.

D: Really.

A: There was a garage, and they had a stall for the club. Oh yah! And I can go right down and show you where it was. And he came back and oh, this is the kind of shirt the people wore. We didn't have no, no short. That's, that’s all. We’d roll it.

D: Yah.

A: In the summertime it was all there is. Very few. See there was another [unclear], overalls and short sleeve that was a mark of a slob, and you know. Anybody who would wear overall, we don't want to talk with that, there’s no head, you know what I mean. Overall was a class of a mill, you know, dirtiest thing, you know, but there was other kind too. There was the engineer like the railroad, the black one, with a smoke square hat
there. The other one was stripe you know, or the white one for the milkman, or the baker, you know. But the other, no, that was you're not smart enough. So they'd give you the dirtiest job to clean all the bucket and clean all around the building, under the cellar and all that stuff, you know.

P: So you could tell a person's position by what he wore?

A: Oh yes, yes, and you knew who you are now. If you, if your father and mother, or your father especially had a second job, we couldn't talk to you. Oh no, and you wouldn't talk to us. Gee, you're talking to me? You got money. You got a nice car. Well gee, I remember playing tennis once. [Unclear] We played at the North Common. Mike DeMoulas was the same way. Well he was in my class, because he didn't have no money. So Mike and George DeMoulas come and play, and [unclear] wife Mary, she talked French like I do. And ah, because she got a kick because John, John, well nice. Oh they're nice people. Oh no they were, and they said, “Do you remember when I gave you a back?” I said, “Oh yes, I remember.” She, she was (he laughs), “It's my turn.” She pushed me (he laughs). I went flying. That was so funny. And Ray Boisvert see, he's retired from the Bank, oh yah, he used to live on Bowers Street. And Turcotte, there’s another company, Bradt’s Crackers, see. The whole family of Turcottes. They would have money [unclear]. But Dick, Dick wasn't bad, but the others, oh, we don’t talk to these. And [unclear] the Turcotte. Oh boy! He would buy a new Cadillac like it was expensive in them days, you know, and that was something. You know, and people had cars and everything like that. Oh, and the girls would have, supposed their father worked for the city, it's only one thing, but if he was in charge of something, oh no. Or if your father was a doctor or a lawyer, like my uncle the judge. See, my uncle the judge when he graduated from Harvard, he, in them days you could wear the tuxedo color there.

D: Uh huh.

A: That means he was a lawyer. So, you know, get out of my way, you know. [Unclear]. My aunt, she's still living, because I want to take you down, because there’s some book I want you to see there. Remind me. I told Louie, because he told me, my uncle got all his books, all books we might find from Lowell, but I was talking to [the end of the] city there. On Aiken Street and Merrimack Street, that's the end of Lowell and as far as you can see, you can look right through almost to where the Alexander Market is, all field, all the fields, nothing else. No house, no nothing, just a big field. Chelmsford I guess it was, Tyngsboro or Chelmsford something like that, that was it. Then there was Tewksbury, and my uncle lived in Tewksbury. And ah, oh no it was (--)
A: Yah, but the city always (--) My wife was passing, because she was, she lived in the island all her life, because her father worked for the Boston & Maine Railroad see. And she was fortunate to travel because she had passes, but she didn't have no money. They didn't have no money. Big family, you know. Then we would get along like some of the Irish kids, the girls you know. They didn't have no money like us, okay. See, that's what we used to do, we go play tennis. All right. And then we'd say ah, to the boys, how much money do you got? Well we'd figure out. I got seventeen cents to put. So we'd go to the corner store and buy a tonic, ten cents, and a cake, twenty cents, and we'd split, everybody. We always, or we'd get an apple, we split each a bite, or something like that. We never, very seldom we'd see somebody to do something with themselves. That wasn’t, you know. And then he was known, and nobody wanted to be bothered with him, because we need help see. When you, you like I said, you start in the mill, you know, if you want to be sarcastic, or you're too pretty, and you know I'm somebody, well you're all by yourself, you know, that's it. Oh no, they had the (--) Well some of these women they had, some of them were pretty strong. Oh no, don’t you kid yourself. Oh ho! When you take a man and pick him up [all laugh]. “Leave me alone.” Oh yes! I see some young girls like you, you know.

D: You were telling me that when you were a kid you went around the mills looking for broken shuttles.

A: The what?

D: You were looking for broken shuttles.

A: Oh yah, yah, well we'd go around the mill, I mean you know. Well we, like today, see Saturday, the water goes down see. My father used to, well my father didn't want that, because it was illegal, but if you got caught. If you don't get caught it was all right, but if you got caught you know, you’re not, you're a bad boy. They used to come down, not there but on, on Suffolk Street. There's a way you can, it's easy to go down. You know the rock and you climb down. My brother Arthur, you see, he can't walk. He called me up little while ago. He used to go down and pick up. Me, I would go with my old red wagon, and you come up, you couldn't drown. See inside it was all freight [rail]. What you got in front of you is all freight. See if, if you see the width, all right. There's a freight coming to this building, there was a freight to that building, and there was a track to go through to the other mill, see. Nothing to stop, oh no. What an engine in those. If you could put this on a wall, on a slide, the engineering there is in this. You know you talk about making chip electronics small and everything. The benefit that Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill, number one the people that live here, they’re very intelligent and they think of a very delicate way they can do, not because they are smart, but it's in their blood, you understand. And they love it because their grand grandparents did, you understand. Their great grandparents when they’re moving, they have to and then it came from generation to generation to take care of certain things, see. That's why, when you come up, that's why Bedford in the world, the only brain of the world for electronics. The one machine they never talk any more is the Univac, right, on account of what happened with Kennedy and Nixon. They predict that Nixon was going to win,
and they did, but something happened of course. Anyway, but the Univac, that's why when the first astronaut went to the moon you didn't know exactly, only after a few seconds, either they'd stay on the moon for life, or that's it, you know. So they, in Bedford, that's the brain see. Then you, you, anybody smart and you got, start to study the mill, how is it built? You look up at the mill, it's all ledge. Number one, you ever try to dig a ledge? You know what I mean? You figure out. Ever try to take a shovel or something? How can you do this with dynamite and not to destroy other property, you know. Now in them days you got to go quite a few years now, but they did it. All hand work. And the ability, whoever designed that, he had to know the veins of the ground, where to dig a hole. Now where the water going to come from to turn that turbine? Now the question, what does he mean by a turbine? Because they didn't have hardly any electricity, it was only gas. So how to make that? And now, then the mill, the canal is built different height for different things. But at the end where near the, right down the end near the bank there, there's a big, big shoot for water. There's eight power plants in Lowell. I don't know if, I don't, I didn't read it, but I know where they are. I mean, I walked that many times. But they had eight power plants and the biggest one is the Boott Mill. Now the Boott Mill, I remember my friend taking pictures, they want to, they were, somebody wanted to do something, everybody moved out. So they decide, well, why don't we fix up from the ground up. We will go and find out for that part, guide, or whatever they call that. So he goes down and everything. Now, you listen to this, see, you talk about electronics ah, so accurate. These people, where did they go to school? And there was nothing, you know? All right?

D: Yah.

A: Because when I went to school they didn't have no paper, all right. We used one of those slate, I remember. It makes noise [Laughs]. You know, slate, and that's all, you know?

D: Yah. Yah. [Laughs].

A: All right. So, you get a thing in the Suffolk right now, I would say sixty feet long, the shaft, imagine it would take this room, right, out of wood! Now this, this is something. Now this is almost a hundred years ago, and they're still very good condition. At, at the Boott Mill, the, the, when they took it out, see naturally when you're running on a shaft see, if you know machinery and everything, it’s friction, if you run too much. So that's why you need oil lubrication, and you don’t need, you use, you got to use lubrication, no graphite so it won't make sand like to burn. It had to be freewheeling, we called it, it’d be easy to turn. So whoever invented that shaft, I don't think he had any more [unclear] I ever heard, but it's a [unclear], very big one. Well the wheel you see outside, you can imagine. Anyway they, they find out that’s all the time they use that, it was not worn out at all. Then they find out, the way it was fixed, the more you, the faster you go, the easier it would cool off by itself, self-cooling system. Imagine a hundred years ago, a self-cooling system of wood. In other words it was floating on water.
D: When you were… Do you think most people in the mills understood how they operated?

A: Oh no, no, no, no. No, no they didn’t have no idea, very few people. See, I used to bring the lunch to the watchman we would call it, watchman. He used to take care of these, like these round things, underground things, you know, the water goes under.

D: Oh, raceways?

A: Yah. Well these round things where the water goes through, you know, like ah, from here to Moody Street there.

D: Umhm.

A: But where the power is, you know, there's a slab of wood, you know with black. Well that's where the power plants are. So what they used to have, it's one of these, work like I told you. In summertime they have a rake to pick all the whatever (--)

D: Debris?

A: Debris of leaves and not to block the water, to have enough water to go in.

D: So it wouldn't go into the, go into the power plant?

A: Yah, it will go to that wheel to turn. And then in wintertime you had to break the ice so now you had to work all around the clock. You couldn't stop, you know. So they had like maybe two or three guys, but they would maybe knock off about a half hour to take a break maybe, something. Then through the night…sometimes I’d see this man, my neighbor, three days without going to bed, breaking the ice because the others wouldn't know how to do it, because you know it wouldn't take long to (--) You never see these kegs of ice when they start, you know, when you pile up. You can have five feet of ice like nobody's business. Then the Mill's in trouble. There's no…see. Five feet of ice is in the hole. There's only a quarter, twenty percent of water going through instead of the amount you need. And then it’s only that, but it goes too slow then it freeze inside. You got a problem you see. [Unclear] So that's why you knew you had to do this because you make ice inside. You didn't know why, you know, but the thing (--) Like ah, well you take [unclear] and you go up to little house there, coming down to the river on Suffolk Street, way down where the Lawrence Manufacture was. There’s another step there see, that you, you can stand. Sometime the kids would go swimming, but they weren't supposed to, because there’s a deep hole over there, right (--) You would walk about this much from the wall, and then there's, that's where the water comes in to make power see. It used to drop, and then they’d drop another step to the river.

D: When you were a kid did they let you hang around the mills to go inside?
A: Oh, no, no. You weren't hanging. I was on the sidewalk, but sometimes we sneak out. See, there was only one watchman. My watchman, you had to start from the Post Office, and ah, Courier Citizen, and go around the Hub, and come to the Suffolk, [unclear] the canal. I mean he couldn't see everything. So we knew what time he was, and was not. Oh no, we, we, my brother would watch it. We say well, let me see now. Okay, okay. Or he would do, he would buy him some cigar, and talk to the guy by the time we steal the coal [laughs]. You're getting me to talk bad there. No, no, but we weren't supposed to you know. See, we weren't supposed to steal. What we did, we'd take a rock and throw it on the, on the car, on the freight you know. So the, the coal start to come down. We wouldn't steal, we'd pick from the ground.

D: Uh huh. (She laughs).

A: But see that coal wasn't too good see. That's powdery see. The best coal was the Lowell Gas Light, the coke you know, because that would go into the little furno, but the other, that was too much, it was too heavy. Because, but, worst for worst what we do, was not what we were supposed to do, was put in the furno, we'd put some kerosene. And then sometime (--) You know people don't have no idea. God has been good to us, to all, everybody. Imagine in Lowell there was 120,000 people, divided by five and it will give you how many families, and everybody had at least five gallons of kerosene in the house, in every tenement. In every (--) You could have an oil lamp. And you need oil, you know, every time, you don't want to go down. If you lived on the fourth floor, you can imagine, it wasn't funny to go down the cellar to pick up your oil. So you have, you have this can of one gallon and the potato on top of it. [Laughs] We used to go get (--) See, like today, this would be all done. We wash up, we get ready now for Sunday. Sunday we go to Church. Saturday, Saturday night, well we listen to the radio see, but we had to help with supper. I pick up my coal down the cellar and bring it up to the stove. We had two, three, three stove and the furnace down the cellar, but the furnace down the cellar only heated up one room, not the whole house. No, no, upstairs we never heated it up. No, that's why we never fool around when you got up in the morning. Oh no, twenty, twenty-five upstairs, it wasn't too warm, you know. And like I said we would sleep three or four in one room. So once it was so cold. See they used to sell what they call, those who don't have enough money, linoleum by the square, cover only a part of your room. I mean a foot and a half around you had to paint, you know and different (--) Well if the girl was pink and whatever. The fellow, we didn't care. We didn't give a darn what color, but anyway. So this night was so cold, and then we had an oil lamp see. We'll say this were my father's room, my sister, I remember, it was my brother and I; I slept over there with my three brothers, Gerard, and [unclear]. And then my brother Arthur he had fixed it up the oil lamp to move in my room. So see I didn't listen, and he'd talk to the devil, he moved the light (he laughs) with, with a black thread. If we want to go to the bathroom and the door was closed. We wouldn't want to see the light, see. We couldn't see. So he'd closed the door about this much. I was half asleep. I looked up and instead of going through, he pushed the door, he tried to go through, he hit his nose. And he tried open the door, but the linoleum frozen, curled. He couldn't open the door either way. Oh, was he sore. Oh Jesus. Two o'clock in the morning. Oh, was he (--) He had a bloody nose and black eye. No, but I mean these at the time, you know. And like the
women you know, I mean oh, see a women in a night gown, I mean they were better dressed in a night gown than they're dressed today outside. I mean hey, you can be sure about that. Oh no, heavy, heavy wool. We used to have, Ma used to make us some wool night gowns, you know, had to, because we wrapped up your feet. We used to put four or five blankets and then we put a top coat and everything on top of us to sleep. Oh it was so cold. But the girls you had to, they make their own hat. You know they had, I never seen these little things. They had a wheel with silk thread and the girls used to make what they call that ah, ah, I don't know the name. (D: Embroidery?) Lace.

D: Oh lace, yah.

A: You know. And they used to make it pink and all that. Buy silk and make a hat, you know and you'd go to bed like that. Because see, like you, if you want to curl your hair, you'd take little rags and you put (--) 

P: Rag curls, yah?

A: Oh gee, you can imagine when you look. If you get (--) 

P: My sister used to do it when she was little. [Laughs]

A: With a little rag, you know. And then you’d put that bonnet on, see. Oh no, they (--) Then [unclear] the Suffolk Mill. They were on Cabot. The Suffolk was like at the corner of Ford Street and Suffolk Street, and Toni, Toni's Sandwich Shop. You know Toni on Lakeview, he had a candy store there, when he was a boy. Across the street there was another woman, a Yankee woman who had a candy store. But then there was Ford Street, the canal, and you'd walk right through. There was a light, I think right near the entrance to the Suffolk. There was another light in back of the mill, in back, the next street to the mill. So there was two gas lights for the whole street. But that was a nice street. It was well-lighted; two big lights. You know where Lowell Light, the Gas Light is? You see how small it is? Well that was the light for the two streets. In them days that was the light. So anybody who lived (--) See there was people living in back. When you go to church, you gout at night, oh, don’t worry, we got lights! Imagine that. Gee, when I think… On Cabot Street they only had one right in back of the mill, Suffolk Mill. There's a street there, because I used to walk there. And then there was a light there, and then there was Lawrence Manufacture. Now there was another light, way down the end, see. And then there was housing. And then from there on down to the canal there was the warehouse for the Suffolk to put the cotton. Now they have the buggy. Now when we were young, and time to have a lunch in the afternoon, well when we see these guys come in with these big, about two horses, or some times four, it all depends the weight of the bale, and in them days they have seats, big, big string to pull two guys. Two big men, you know, and they have a whip and chewing tobacco, and they were bringing some cotton. I don't know where, but they were (--) Sometimes, they bring some other places, see. They fill it up. So that means they come from Cheever Street, across the canal. Come on Ford Street. Come on Race Street. And they were going on Moody Street, or wherever they had to go, see. I don't know if they bring (--) See there was a big
warehouse, or a big old mill. The length of, oh yes, the length of all these mills. Oh yah, more. Right across, well they tore it down, right, right across the Suffolk they used (--) I remember they put that cat walk, because I was very young, and there used to be the warehouse to get some cotton. When you need some cotton for downstairs to make more thread or something, whatever they want to do. And then there was all warehouse. Then if you see, you know, you see some houses. [Unclear]. There's a big steel rod sticking out. That was for a pulley, see. They used to bring the pulley up, and two men would bring the bale.

D: I see.

A: You know, and there was a system, because if you didn't know, you'd go up with the bale. The bale came down, you'd go up. [All laugh]. Oh yah! That wasn't so funny, especially if you had a drink, a couple of drinks before, and you forgot yourself. Oh no, you wake up, because you got to, there's a twist (--) If you don't you (--)

D: That's why you think twice.

A: I'm not, you think I'm trying (--) It sounds funny, but I mean I'm telling you the truth. I mean I don't care whoever's going to tell you that, I'm trying to (--) I don't [unclear]. I'll tell him he's a liar, because I'm telling the truth, I know I've seen it. No but, see that's why the pulley see, and there's a way because ah, not to work for nothing. A Saturday. You can imagine a bale of cotton, you know. It would take that table, (D: That’s about 500 pounds) I would say about there and the width. Oh yah, there was no, no, that was a man's job, you know. Because [unclear] was right in back of that, see. And then we had a family of Portuguese people right near the canal. There was three houses see. And there was a gate there for the freight see, and there was another car track connecting to the main one to go to the Suffolk and come out. See, that was all, I don't know, like [unclear] freight. Oh, there was a lot of space. There was ah, no, especially when you go on Middlesex Street. You bring all the freight and all the engines down there to be fixed and overhauled.

D: Umhm.

A: They had a system and people didn't know how to read, didn't know how to write, but they knew, don't use that grease, don't use this, do this and then do that. And there was chewing tobacco, [unclear]. They’d say, oh, that's good. It will be okay. And you know you... And precision! This is the thing. The precision of the thing. Imagine, I wish I had a piece of that thread coming through there, the little wheel. I don't know how many wheel there is. There’s (--) That thick. It goes in and out, and twisting. And then the bobbin, it had to be just so to not to break it, you know. And you say a thread, you know, you, you take it and break it, you know. But then you, you make a piece of cloth and you try to break it. You see how easy it is.

D: You mentioned they had different types of grease.
A: Oh yah, yah, lubrication, see. I mean there was linseed oil see, but there were linseed oil because the speed count, see. Now you wouldn't put linseed oil where the thread are. You would put another finer grease like the two and one we’d say, you know. I don't know all the names of all the things, but the main, the big wheel, the guy who come out with a palette you know, a piece of wood, and when you run, you know, it make a noise you know and it would go all right through. Because you had to be sure because see, gears are like this see. You take this and turn it around. If you don't make it right you were, you went out, just a part of it and the inside. And the first thing you know, it was lopsided.

D: So they had to be greased properly.

A: The pressure [is on], and you don’t know what [unclear]. So you have to know what to do.

P: You learned to grease your own machines?

A: Oh you had to.

P: Yah.

A: Oh yah. That's a trade. These things, everything in them days they didn't even call it a trade, but today it's a trade. You had to know how to grease.

P: Yah.

A: Now if you think you're smart and you're going to fool the boss, and make believe, it won't take long, an hour or two, the bobbin would stop. They break then they whoop, whoop, they're hot. They burn. And see when you burn some seals, it expands and stops. It’s like a brake. Very simple. That's why I said, like I told you about the Boott Mill. See people don't understand. They don't know what I'm talking about, but those who understand the friction, understand. It's like a, a watch.

Tape I, side B ends
Tape II, side A begins

A: Remember this, this, you got too many good beautiful lessons for the new generation. What I’m getting mad about is this. People like her have it, or my daughter, all the opportunity to get for free to go to school. Now at Lowell Library, and any library, they’re dying for a person like you to go ask for a book that they don’t have. They would do anything to get you the book. I mean I’m talking common sense. I’m not talking foolish thing, you know. Not to get a book about modeling, or something like that. I’m talking about educational, you know, something worthwhile; whether it was about building a mill, building a wheel, or whatever. Do you know how much work there is to make a gear? And do you know how to cut that? I worked at U.S. [unclear], and they were making these diamond die. Well do you know how long it takes to cut? It takes a
diamond to cut the diamond die. Wire is the same thing as to make cloth. You got to be full. And if there’s a little knick, you make a scratch. And by the time you get through, there’s something missing in the [wire], and the voice jumps up and down. That means a wire is scratched somewhere. The same thing with the project, if you have a weak (--) When you’re using (--) Frame something over here to the wall there. Now you can get, put your eyes, and when you’re used to it you can put your eyes and your thread’s got to go, everything like a waterfall. It’s like a butterfly you might want to say. But when you look at it you see a big, maybe I don’t know, four, five hundred pound of cotton, all dirty, stink, you know. Then they throw that in the machine. [Makes sound] do their thing you know. You go upstairs, downstairs, upstairs, downstairs, and you go up to the last floor, beautiful blanket. Well you ever stop and say, “How many people work to make these machines first of all?” Oh, another thing so far we made that nobody ever did, sell suction to pick up the waste. You don’t remember, know. They had the big house on top of the Suffolk, right on Cabot Street and the canal. Way up, a big, big section, [they had a pipe] to pick up (--) Because the waste, it was fine, and it goes to your nostril or your throat. That’s why people would chew tobacco, a woman would snuff, you know, because you had to have something for, because you couldn’t stop to go drink. Now they had two kinds of water; water for the boss and water for the help, because it cost too much money. So they had the water from the river directly. For what, hot. They didn’t care if you died, or nothing. I mean the water was it. It was hot. Oh gee was it. And the other one was a little better. See then refrigeration, they didn’t have none. It was an ice box, see, ice box. [Chuckles] You know you had a card, and you put .25 cents, .15 cents, .75 cents, and whatever size you put in, that’s on the 4th floor, they guy, a piece of ice, by the time he talked to everybody, the piece of ice was pretty small.

A:  Oh no. There was (--) You know, and then they, the lunch box, that’s quite something. There’s two (--) There’s a basket, open up this way and that way. About this big, see. And the women would make, whatever. Give you an apple, banana, two or three sandwiches. Then they always figure to give you something warm, like a soup. Now most of the men were, like I said, they were team work. If you had, there was a lot of steam piping and everywhere. They would put their container with your name on in it with, with scratch you know, on the pipes. And when it was time for dinner to eat, it was pretty hot soup.

D:  Steam pipes would keep it hot.

A:  Oh yes, yes. You (--) Oh no, it was hot. Oh you wouldn’t know. There was not, there was not (--) You burn yourself a couple of times when you’ve been down, you’ll find out you’re behind you know. You have a couple of blisters. You know you don’t bend no more. You know, you watch out. Oh no, you had these machines, like the weave room, you know. Bang, bang, bang, and you were in front of one of them, you’ll wake up. Oh yah, you’ll go flying. You gather a whole bobbin, you pick them up, and look up in the air there. Oh no, you can’t sit down for a couple of days. You know, I’m not joking you know. I mean, hey. And there was the language of all that. We could tell
after, the way you walk, that was it. You didn’t have to ask no questions. Oh no. No, I
don’t want to have to go in details. Because that was pretty rough. [Unclear]. I don’t
know about you.

D: You mentioned the other day about the smell of the cotton.

A: Oh yah, yah, but this is something, you know. That’s the thing, you know. You go to
a hospital today, before gee, you smell ether, or you smell chloroform, but he mill had
their own smell. It wasn’t that good, especially when you had (--) Imagine the heat there
is, all the windows. Now you get cloth, and the floor is all oiled, see. And all of your
machines are oiled and greased, and everything. You can imagine in the summertime
when the sun hits that all day long for weeks. And the cotton, you know, you should take
some cotton and put some oil. You should make your own test, you know. There’s an
old saying in life, you know, a man can talk and people can talk, but prove it. That’s
another thing. And you can prove it to yourself too. And I’ll tell you how you can do it,
you know? Take some cotton and put some oil in it. That’s how you can tell different
oil. Now you can tell how it’s made, if it’s made from fish. If it’s made from corn, or if
it’s made from linseed oil, from different variety of vegetables, you know?

D: What would be the difference in them?

A: Well there’s no ah (--) I mean hey, I’m not that technical. I got no education.
[Unclear].

D: You have a lot of experience.

A: No, no, you get the notice, see. There was a notice thing. I don’t know where they
make it. I thought they were (--) I don’t know. There’s an odor with me with fish. I
don’t know if it’s fish or figs, what it was, what it smelled. I mean it’s hard to explain.
That’s why you snuff, or you use certain things to get that smell out, because it’s hot and
stuffy, you know. That’s why I can tell in the summertime. I told them downstairs, the
beam would smell that. The wood would still smell all what the work they done on it.

D: What did they use? They used different oils for different fabrics?

A: Oh yes! Yes. No, no, no, for different machines, for speed. (D: Oh I see) You see,
speed. See now, a machine, you see, first of all you know, maybe I’m talking a little too
much. I mean hey. No, but I was lucky to know like the overseer, you know, and he
used to bring me home. And his father owned the mill, and he owned the plantation. So
naturally it used to bring the attic, we called it a trunk, and he had different things of his
father. He said, “Pa, you remember this?” “Oh yah,” he said. We used the oil for this
one. We used the oil for that one. Do you see the difference?” He pulled the thread. At
that time I was small. And I just remember with the oil lamp, you know, I don’t
remember sitting down. I’m watching them and it’s all Greek to me. I mean I didn’t
know what the heck you’re talking, but now it grasps on me what it means, see, because
the pressure, see. They were trying to find a way to make the machine faster, in the same
time not to pull. See, to make the thread the right way. Do you understand? More (--) In other words like [unclear].

D: It’s not strong enough?

A: You understand? Do you know what I mean? I don’t know if I explained. But you see, your machine, friction, whatever it pulled, it’s no good, you know. You have a piece of cloth, especially corduroy. You should have a piece of corduroy. That’s very interesting, you know. The precision! But the precision see, on the other stuff you can’t see it. You got to talk about it. But you, you know I think you could have a piece of it. I think this place could get from the mill, from old, from the bobbin we put in up to these old wheels. I don’t know. There’s a special name, see, because if something happened. You see, that’s why these old wheels would need some kind of Vaseline, like. See that’s why Vaseline is a pigment. You don’t make Vaseline. From Vaseline, see pigment, you don’t make that. You can’t make pigment. I mean you find it in the ground. It’s like oil, you don’t make oil. From oil you make all kinds of things. See, but the same thing with oil. That’s why it’s so important. [Unclear], that’s why certain things are refined. Something [unclear], because if you have an oil with graphite, well that’s bad because you’ll wear out your machinery. It’s like sand after a while, you know? [Unclear] The first thing you know, your gears (--) 

D: Now you told me that a lot of men had to work their hands in the oil, and also in the dye room, all by hand.

A: Oh yah, yah. Oh yah, they had no gloves. They didn’t have no (--) Now the rubber, even when I went to school, there was no such thing as rubber coat. They did have something, but they didn’t have canvas, like a canvas thing, you know? But the men had to take (--) Imagine 320 degrees. I don’t know much about all of these things. You ask me numbers, I know, because see there’s a number and the guy, the next guy come in with a [unclear] to look at his (--) He said, “Well.” He said, “Good. You good? Okay. Okay.” That’s how they did it, because you had to what? See, he didn’t know, he didn’t know the number, but he knew, he put a sign himself. We have a code like I said, you know? If you come to see me, you say, “Now hey, I want this over here.” Okay, I take it. I won’t, I make a mark with it. Some are (--) Mine goes there, that’s it. If I come along, oh no, he told me (--) And that’s why, so that’s why today we still got people come to work at Alexander, you know. You know, they won’t do, they won’t help you unless the boss tells them. If I tell them, no way! They’re so used to do exactly. You don’t look, you don’t look there, you don’t look there. You look here and that’s all. Never mind what she does. She could be naked, and whatever. [D: Chuckles] That’s got nothing to do if you want to eat. That’s the thing now. Now you got to remember this. If you want to eat this is what you have to do, or you don’t eat. And you can’t say you’re going to get it from me, because I don’t have enough, or she don’t have enough. This is the thing. That’s why we spoil the kids of today. Go to school, ah! You know. But when you want to do something, see, to learn something (--) Now my brother-in-law went to Lowell Tech. Oh it was quite a thing. That’s why he had to learn lubrication. He had to learn electricity, but in them days they didn’t have all of these shut-offs. He
had to learn about power, where the power comes from. Now because if they ever cut circuit in the line, that will not give you enough power to run your machine. Suppose somebody don’t know much about electricity, they put something, some seal around it, and that seal is using the power too. But you go downstairs, the power is going on, sure, but [unclear] going back through the the (--) Do you understand? That’s why after awhile there, today you got all of these automatic things. Okay, but then they didn’t, see. And then he wondered not to work for nothing. To find out exactly. So you got to start all over from the beginning up, [unclear]. And then you find out that, first you try your machine. There’s a certain way to find your gears, you know. If it’s a little loose, you push up and down on the shaft. Now if the shaft is worn out, you’re out of business. That’s the worst thing is the shaft. You know the shaft, that’s the site, the canal. That’s another one. That thing is lopsided or worn out, or one way, forget it. Throw it away. No good.

D: Now would you have to wait for one of the [unclear]?

A: Oh no, no, no. They never wait. That’s what it is, see. Like I said, Lowell was self-containing. You know what I mean? And just like that you have what you need. That’s what is very important. That’s why they never talk about it. That’s why it gets me mad, because we didn’t have to go to nowhere. We take care of ourself. I know we could build a big wall around Lowell, we could take care of ourself. We didn’t need nobody. Understand what I mean? You know what I mean? Your cotton came by freight, that’s all. Your cotton came from the field, and we ship it all nice in boxes and ready to use, from nothing. Now if anything breaks, we fix it up in Lowell. We didn’t go to, we didn’t go to Waltham. We didn’t go to Chicopee. We didn’t have to go to Rhode Island. We didn’t have to go to New York. Lowell. Something, call John over there, near the canal there. Always near the canal. That’s number 1, the canal. Oh yah, I think that should be right at the end of the canal, on your right, on your left. That’s it. Not in front of you, because the water is there. Well we’d say it to somebody we don’t like. Yah, go right straight near the water and take a dunk. Or we’d say, “Drop in sometime.” You know, that was the joke, you know, meaning, “Get out my back.” [All laugh] Especially these old maids. [Unclear]. We had these old maids that were oh, oh, oh oh! You know, they were saying, you know, to go fast. Well in English it’s not the same, but in French, somebody always (--) [Unclear]. So they know they used to go around, and they used to make the bloomers, you know, the pant for the lady. You know, today, it’s not like today. No way. They were like parachutes. [All laugh] So they used to go up. A fellow would ask if you got enough thread, you know. There were different threads, see. Everything is as much as there were certain thing in there. A person was doing one thing, and then the next one, and after awhile it was automatic. You don’t have. You just do. But he, you show me to do it, and I’ll do. That’s it, I won’t go wrong. Don’t mind what she does. Never mind then. That, you get confused and that’s it, you know. You get all balled up, and you’re in trouble, but you do what (--) My job is to do what you’re supposed to do. I’m all set. If I start to do a little bit more I’m in trouble, because I don’t know what you know. See, you’ve been there for a long time. Experience now, that’s what counts. See, experience is better than schooling. I’m going to tell you this right now. I don’t care how much schooling. For that I can prove that many a times. So
you know what I mean? So this guy goes up and he goes [to hit this old maid]. You get thread in your pants, or threaded, or something like that in French. She turned around, “You dirty old man.” [Laughs] She’d slap his face. “What’s the matter with you?” “I don’t know. I asked you to change some thread, you slapped my face!” “Yah, but that’s no the way to ask.” No, but you go fast. [Unclear]. Time, time is precious. You understand? Time, you don’t know. Time, time, but so you didn’t make no move. That’s how, you’d be surprised what I learned to, when you do printing, it was the same way. Not to walk on that thing, mix. Today, the same thing. The more you can walk around to go to the boys’ room, back and forth, coffee breaks, you know, that’s out. And then they said (--) You have to remember now, if I need, if I need a certain bobbin, or if I need some little oil, or if I need some grease, or whatever I do, sometimes it was the bobbins that were a little too tight. But if you put a little grease inside, it wasn’t easy. And then you got to figure there was heat, the heat of the machine. So by oiling that, it would expand a little bit, it wouldn’t be so bad. It would be easy to take it out. See, there’s all kinds, there was all kinds of certain things. These little things, you know, you put a thing like this side-by-side, just enough of a bobbin, and it’s round, thin. You know you get your knuckle too big you lose them. Then you have time to [unclear]. You got 32 frames to do. I had to do sometimes 32-48 little carts, whatever they’re called, trucks. No, oh no, they were small, and some of them were very big. Like I said, and I had to go and pick the last one. I mean you know, you haven’t got time to fool around. Sometimes, we’ll I don’t want to lose my friends. You know, hey, I was too small. I signed in, and I had to get out, fix up my fan, and the machine is empty. “What’s the matter, the machine broke?” “No, no.” Oh no! They would do just like that. You don’t know where they were. The least little thing, they were right on back of you. Oh no, you wouldn’t fool around. If you were sick, stay home. We’ll get somebody else. Too bad, that’s all.

D: Would you lose your job if you were sick?

A: Oh yes, yes, yes! Oh yah! Oh no, there was no such thing. Or maybe a case, if you were very good worker, they might give you (--) But they were, they were very tough. They were… No, no, that was not easy. That’s why you make it (--) See. You had to work and make friends. So that’s where the melting pot came in. Who you are doesn’t mean a thing. Are you Irish, French, or Greek? It doesn’t mean nothing. I need you, you need me, so let’s be friends. Right? Never mind that you look crazy, or stupid, or smart, you’re not smart; you’re intelligent or not, if you can help me I’ll help you, but don’t cross me. But that was easy to get even. And everybody is in trouble. So there was a theme, you know, cooperation. And then when you go out on Saturday, “Hey, how are you? Oh boy, we had quite a week, huh?” And this and that. Well next week I was going to go back, but next week he wanted to help me with his box there. You know, that’s why the box is, you know, you have a box about this high, and then your bobbins. I don’t know how many. I would say five dozen, 60 bobbins, maybe more. Maybe 100 bobbins, but empty, and maybe 60 when they’re full, see. And if I see your [knees are] meant to move it, not to lose time I’ll go and push box with my foot, put the other one in then do my work, and then you do the same thing to me. So that at the end of the day you’re okay, there’s two people. But when you got 2000, or 15,000 like this, there’s
7,500 people beginning in maybe two weeks, or three weeks work they don't have to pay. You see, that's what count. That was the money saved. Oh no, you all had these guys you know with pencils, oh yah. Then, you know like I said, they check your work. You couldn't you, no, no, they were (--) You don't do bad work. Now what do they do with the bad work? They have stores. Not the corduroy, the corduroy, yah. Yah, we had corduroy. You sell corduroy, but the Lawrence Manufacturing, now oh yah. I might be able, or Hub Hoisery, if this guy wants to, he worked all his life, about fifty years on that machine. I think there's five thousand needles. I don't know, somewhere, enormous needles to make the shirts you know. And then they were making, also they, I know they call it shirt for the women, you know. In them days there were all kinds of clothes for women, also they were making that too see. But they all went stretch you know, and then there was a place to cut. Anyway, but he knows the needle and all these names, you know. There is names. Suppose you want a part. You can't say to ourselves, no, that part goes in there like this. Well the guy [chuckles], tell me what it's all about and I'll give it to you, see. So that's why these parts you had to be (--) Like, it's like a club. If you take, you go to see this you wouldn't believe it. You, you go downstairs when you put that cotton you look at big machines. Like that machine had to be just right, to pick up, to make that cotton roll like a ball. It's amazing, you, you take a small piece of cotton from a piece, put together, (he claps his hands) you throw a bail of cotton that weighs about six hundred pounds, you throw that in the machine, and now first thing you know, you go on the other side and you have big, beautiful ball of cotton. That wasn't too bad until it starts to go into the machinery, and the smell starts. You know (--) You know you, you get this in your nostril there, and you go home you don't feel like eating, you know. Especially in them days, it was not like today, refrigeration, ice box. That's another thing. You go home, you forget to take the thing of water under the ice box. And the guy downstairs, he’s mad at you because his ceiling is all wet. [P: Laughs] And the other guy downstairs from him, he's all mad at the other guy upstairs because he, and it's not his fault because you the one upstairs. If you don't think it was funny. Oh no, you see, you know you say, “I'm going to go out for the weekend.” It's either you had no food in the refrig, in the ice box, or you can't go out. Or you have somebody to watch it. You understand? See? You know, there was a lot of inconvenience. Then if you didn't have enough oil, or if you had kerosene, you can't leave the thing, because then at the end, your burner, your kerosene smoked. So if you forgot to put a nut and you go into your bedroom, it would stink like a son-of-a-gun, you see. So I mean, you know, and it's bad for your throat. It's a wonder we didn't have so many disease, and sickness, and all that, and big fires. But the thing at the mill is the teamwork. And still when you try to be well-educated, you, you can live (--) And I can name you people with millions of dollars in Lowell, like the undertaker Albert. He has so many people that died he didn't send no bill. He couldn't afford it. He didn't have time. There were too many people dying. He believed in it. And that's how they all started. Archambault started from him. Laurin started from him. Bilodeau started from that guy. When he died he left three hundred fifty thousand. That's what he left, but he had more. He didn't [owe] no money. He'd go to church, and that's how, that's how most people. It doesn't matter. I could be the French, or the Greeks. They go to the store. How much is this? Well take the money. They know one thing, that this is more than this, and the dime you know. And the penny was, but they didn't know how much. More people got robbed. Oh! No, no, that's
another thing, sign papers. Sign papers, you know. That’s why I laugh, because me, I got nothing, but you know people would give their life away, sign the wrong paper. See people would get you, the old, to trust one person, like John or Joe, like Joe Sullivan. Well he learned, he went to be a printer. He worked at the Lowell Sun with some French people. He was talking French like me. Me and Joe, we’re great friends me and Joe. Oh, Joe Sullivan, oh yah. Before he died he gave me his picture, the picture of the family. I went downstairs in the parlor and I got his picture. Oh yah. And Joe, the son there, and then Walter, and the other one. I’d go in. I know them all. But he’s another one, he was selling fish to take care of his family. Imagine, you know you (-) Now I, in ’34, they came up, you could buy coal in a bushel, in a bag, twenty-five cents. Kindling, fifteen cents. You know what kindling is?

P: Yah, just like plywood.

A: Yah, oh well, that's okay, but kindling in them days, you go to Pratt and Forrest, you go where they’re making wood, you know, where they were selling wood. So that's where the wood come in by slabs and you cut it, and all the end, they would (--) So Braden in ‘30, ‘29 I would say, yah, right on the corner of Hall Street and Aiken Street, he had (--) The City of Lowell came up with two or three blue wagons with the horses. Now they had four wheels. The city had a wagon with two wheels and four wheels? The two-wheel was to pick up the garbage. And there's a guy (he laughs) dressed, and he had a, I don't know what he had in front, some kind of a rubber mat or something with a, on his neck.

P: Leather apron?

A: No, it was no apron. No, no. No you had to see it. He had in, they put two or three pieces of rope in. [All laugh] No, no they didn't have the (--) And then the other guy, threw out the garbage, you know, and they talk. [Unclear] That's why they they're chewing tobacco, see, that changed the smell. Oh no, and they step on that, push it. And he goes in and sees this. Oh yah, yah, it’s something good. You'd be surprised. I don't know how people (--) But they did it, and I've seen it, you know. You know, and then like I said, the mill had the wagon. And I've seen, the wagon they have on the wall about this length from that table over there too. And they have four horses, or two, some of them. And the four horses, oh they were, they were big wagons. Now where Notini is, that was a way out. Right outside Notini’s. From the sidewalk, the car track was on that side, but the sidewalk and then you go in where the wagon and horse is. Did you ever see horses back up? Oh Jesus. And he’d get mad with a whip. Those poor horses. You know I see, [unclear] because someday they would run away. Oh, when they start going, watch out. The wagon, the guy goes up in the air.

P: [Laughs]

A: [Laughs]. He stopped at Hall Street, he almost killed himself. Anyway, but they back up and then the cotton over there. They made this, this code number. I think they were trying out. If that was all right, they would order some more. It's like a warehouse
you would say. And then the empty freight after the Suffolk, they push it right to the end on Aiken Street almost. There was a restaurant in a car, lunch cart, right near the Aiken Street Bridge, was the lunch cart, and then they had that post to hold the freight. So we used to go and play in that, you know, when we were kids. Some, at that time we used to play cowboys, you know, [unclear]. But we were not supposed to go on top, because if you ever fell down, you'd fall in the canal and kill yourself. Oh yah, hey, things we did. People swim. I don't know how they went up on Suffolk Mill. I know where they went up, and run like a son-of-a-gun to jump over that and go into the canal. Imagine if you miss where you hit the fence right through your head. Oh no, there were (--) Then the chimney see, the chimney, there is a ring missing on the chimney at Suffolk Street. Most of the chimney cut down, because at the end, naturally they didn't use it so much. They had to fix, all the chimney they didn't fix cause the one on Middlesex Street, I know the guy I went to school he worked on, but on Suffolk Street they (--) There's a big, you know there's old fencing like a ring, like a thing like round, you know, but that thing is gone. And I would say there's a good forty feet missing, or fifty feet on the Suffolk chimney.

P: Umhm.

A: Now if you, I can bring you in back and you can step inside, open the door. That's how they used to clean it, you know. You can go by inside too, but the chimney moved, I don't know, an inch like this. Well this guy, I'm telling you, goes up two guys and they're talking, walking around. You couldn't hardly see them way up the chimney, you know. I go up and see them. On the other side the street I'm sitting down with my head on the curb watching them boys. [D&: Laugh] You know, you people think that, well you know this is, it's like a fairy tale to you people. I can see what you thinking. You think the old man is telling, but I'm telling the truth. I can go to the CCA, some of the old guys over there, if I can get this old guy who used to work, he, he finished up over here on Middle Street. Yah, on Middle Street there's a, where, where the park is, there used to be a little place there.

D: Oh yah, right.

A: There was a mill like.

D: Uh huh.

A: And they used to do special work by hand, weaving by hand. I went over a couple of times to see him.

D: Oh.

A: And there was special pieces that were going to be made and

D: What's his name?
A: Oh, Dube. Anyway but you know there's all kind of contraptions that, you know to me was beautiful cause you know, you start with nothing, you know you get from the ground and it's all dirty and everything, put it in one machine, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom. They there was no conveyer system. You know what I mean, it's not like you press a button. You expect that, but not…And the people. Leo Ducharme was my size, you know he died last year, he worked. And Leo was running. You wait in the car. He used to bring me the truck. He was old. He was the same age as my brother. So he used to help me.

D: Uh huh.

A: I couldn't talk very good English you know. I couldn't talk at all so. Oh no, hey, you know, you know there's nothing worse, and I'm going to tell you something and don't forget it. Nothing worse for a person to think he’s so smart that the other one, if they don't talk good, or (--) But you'd be surprised in life who can help you. Let me tell you this something. When the war declared we had to get in line to get tobacco, or butter. In the meantime I get in line to buy cigarettes. I don't smoke. I give it to the other guy. And you'd be surprised the guy who asked me that when I was [unclear] he wanted to beat me up. You know what I mean? It’s funny, life, you know. You never know when you help people. There's an old saying. When you help people, what I’m doing to them, I’m not doing anything for them, I’m doing for myself. Because whatever you do for somebody, you do for yourself, because you don't know, somehow, someday, that you get sick or something. And who helps you is somebody that you helped. And you know that’s (--) The mill was one thing, big family like, you know. Nationality, it was not, you know we are, oh no, we had friction. No, the French and Irish were fighting, or the Greeks and the French. But see now, on my street, all right. We had Mr. Turner from boarding house. Macheras, Alex, Alex the Greek, the lawyer, [unclear] at the corner over here on Central Street there. He got a whole floor. Macaronis. His sister and, and they were very beautiful girls you know, but the mother, woo, they were strict. And we were talking. I told you to get inside! She wasn't well-dressed. She had (--)

Tape II, Side A ends.
Tape II, side B begins

A: I seen him when I was a little boy, but I don't (--) If I can get that picture, that's something I can not understand, why Lowell never have ah, that house where [unclear]. That house is still there, because if you take the clapboard, there was a strip around the window like that. Because the old man Davis was, he weighed over three hundred pounds. He had two small, two chairs to sit. So when he got time, he was very sick to die, my father said they didn't have no hospitals sort of like today. So we went to put two rope across the room so he can lift himself to give him a rub down and everything you know. But ah, Mrs. Davis, oh was a little smaller than you. Betty Davis is not bigger than you. Oh no. My sister will be seventy, she's seventy-five. My sister will be seventy (--) Oh no, wait a minute. My sister will be eighty, she's eighty, yah. Arthur is seventy-two, Ernest, seventy-three, Leander seventy-four, he'd be about eighty. My
brother will be eighty-two. Oh yah, here's something I want to show you. Yah, I forgot about these pictures. I want to show you a picture.

P: Oh you have a tintype.

A: And this is what I'm talking about. Well see this is my brother. Now this picture is about eighty years old, but ah (---)

P: Did all your brother and sisters work?

A: Pardon me?

P: Did all your brother and sisters work in the mill too?

A: Oh no, no. No, they, my brother work at the Heinz Electric. Oh yah, one of my brother worked to make the needle for the Victrola, you know, for the records you know. You had to crank everything, and the needle was good sometime for one, or two, or three, sometime. At the end they were making needle that was good almost for four records.

P: Uhhuh.

A: But every record you'd change the needle. And that you usually get [few words unclear] needle. But at Heinz Electric they were making needles for the RCA people. But ah, now there’s another operation [unclear]. Lowell, like I said it, it can't be beat for fine work and delicate work. You know, you know what I mean, precision. Now when you talk about electronics and this and that, you, naturally, you, it's all numbers and everything ah, computers, you know. Well, I'd like to see, put you there and put the one that can run a weave room, or run a spinning room like it should, who's the smartest, right.

P: Um.

A: Think about it, you know what I mean? These things been running good still, and still running good the way the fundamental thing was made. And still you, you still got to have the shuttle to go in between cloth and still have the humidity. You still have to be tested right. You still have the good quality, because see cloth, it all depends where it comes from. If you had cotton, and the field was soggy, or something. It's like any, like food. If it was not good, good cotton you know, you (--) They could tell you know. People, you know, it's so funny. You think you see guys, and ah, throw that all away. And the old man now, like I told you, this old guy when they closed the Merrimack, before they closed the Merrimack, he was right outside, see. I can see through (--) He, he never spent his pay. For thirty-two years he always did some odd jobs to work. Now he wasn't cheap, no, no. He had four meals a day. When I say four meals a day, breakfast, egg, bacon, whatever you want. Nice beautiful cake, coffee, tea, whatever. Then ah, ten, ten-thirty a lunch, and then dinner, then lunch and supper. And then another lunch at
night before you go to bed. He used to call me, me and my brother, we would come sometime. Anyway, he used to burn all the wood and everything. So he was in charge at the Merrimack. All the certain bales of cotton, whatever they, it wasn't cotton, it was for the corduroy. I mean I don't know what kind of material it was. So, and he used to every night he goes around and everything. He knew everything about [unclear]. That's where he showed me where the water and everything. I used to bring his lunch, you know and he used to cut the ice. There's only one of these things in Lowell I've seen. It's over here, [few words unclear] on the wall. The big long pole like a "T", but there's two things like this. And that's to break the ice, you know. And then if you don't watch it, you can go over that, because you see by breaking the ice, if you break a piece of ice, a foot, that's where you find out the weight see. That's where you find out about things. Half an inch, or an inch. You're going to say, "Oh the ice. Oh it's about an inch, or two inch. You can tell by the way you pull, because when it comes to four inches, you can go right through. Because that pole would go in and you'd go with it. Lose your balance. But that's why near the canal every, every place, every place where the water goes under, underground, there's like a, a "V" thing, you know? There's like the wall and there's a thing, a cat walk. You walk on that so they can break the ice to go to (--) Because break they don't want the ice to be formed. So they can break the ice over there, and they can break the ice inside. Two, you know, there's two guys, sometimes three. You keep going until because, when you get on ten, or fifteen, that's, that's really cold, you know. You know these are the are important, these people. And this guy, he used to come up and get the bale, bale of cotton, whatever. So at the end, he'd say, well the guy worked for forty-nine years, he's worth something to the company. He said, you'll want to be smart. So they, so okay, we appreciate that. So we'll give him a gold watch, a whole year pay, give him three month vacation okay. So he come home, and everything. And he come home. So he never, he never dressed up. When he dressed like this, he dressed up when his wife died. He dressed up like this when he got married, I'm guessing that's about the size of it.

D: [Laughs]

A: I mean oh no. Anyway, he jumped a fence. “Mr. Eno, Mr. Eno, look at this, look at this.” He said, “Look at my beautiful watch.” “Yah, but you know.” “What's a matter?” “Yah, but I'm all through working.” “You're what?” “Yah.” “What happened? You did something?” “No. No, no. They give me a whole year pay.” “Oh that's nice, wonderful.” “No, no, if I knew the job wasn't steady I wouldn't have taken the job.” [Ladies laughs]. That's (--) This is as true as I'm telling you. I look at my wife, she looked at me. Forty-nine years, he says if he knew the job wasn't steady he wouldn't have taken it. [All laugh]. You know what I mean? This is the kind of people you work with. All conscientious. Oh no, forty-nine years. That's why we say that sometimes, you know. Or sometimes I say, well I want a job. I come to Alexander’s. I says, “I want a job.” He says [unclear]. “You pay me for what I'm worth. Oh, the second job, no, I don't work that cheap.” [All laugh]. Oh no, no. No no, we (--) Oh, and then another thing what they had after the mill closed at suppertime, they used to, on Saturdays like now, after, after the sun goes down, we used to have different people would come. Some guy would come with, we have Arabian people with music, hats, all kinds of little bells;
accordian, a violin, the flute. And then we had at the corner of Moody Street and Suffolk Street, the old truck, you know with the drill you know, on the side, that was, you were (- -) And he had a parrot. For five cents he'd tell you your future. And the parrot picked up the cards, you know? [Laugh] There was all kinds of gadgets like that see, but then, oh yah, there's fun things that we should have over here. This old little bird, have you ever seen that, with a string?

P: No.

A: It was something, with a piece of bamboo wood.

D: Oh yes, I do know what you’re talking about.

A: Yah, bird.

D: But you were telling me, I want to, I asked you before, you were saying when you were a kid you used for tops.

A: Oh yah.

D: What did you use for tops?

A: Yay, well we used the shuttle thing, you know. We put marbles here, [unclear], with marbles. There were two kinds of marble see. Maybe that's what I was telling you. Mrs. Kokinos, the wife of the dentist, we had a banquet at Speare House and she talked French like I do. And right where the house on Andover Street, right across the street there was a park. And I got to be careful. [Unclear] the bar over here, and Mello, you know the guy that got caught there, McCormick's, stealing the (--) 

P: [Laughs]

A: You there, you're getting involved in something. [Yells] Oh, oh, I'm going to jail for good.

D: [Laughs] We'll take that off.

A: Yah, you better. No but, so to play marbles see, he was a thief who steal the marbles. See, he as saying that in French. And her husband asked me see, “What are you two talking?” He said, “Well, I'm talking about when we lost our marbles.” [All laugh] It was true you know ah, Mary St. James, Dolores, we play marbles, and we had glassies, see. So to win a glassie you got to hit it you know. But see, now you think, [unclear] I don’t want to tell you this something, that's for sure. Oh no, no, but I mean.

D: Well we're pretty much done [unclear].
A: You know, you know, there was things like the top see. We, we saved things, see. Now this man would go to the Merrimack Mill okay, now like ah, Reagan Lombard, when you break these slabs you know, it's like a, you know, it's like one of these roll-top desks, but they were big, you know.

D: Uh huh.

A: But see, that's how we learned things, see. I never knew what a rivet was. Do you know what a rivet is? Your male and female, it's a, it's a little piece of round thing coming out and the other one goes inside, all right. Now if you have a piece that moves a lot, you use a rivet, because other things [unclear]. You got to understand, you go around. So you cannot use a bolt, or something over. You had to be even to the wood. Matter of fact sometimes you had to push it down. So what you had to do, you had a piece of steel, you know, and you had a hammer and the rivet to put the wood together and the thing where you see. And you have a strip, and here's the hole. So you put whatever the first one, inside, then you take a hammer to wedge it, see.

D: Yah.

A: And that won't come out. And then pass your finger. On feeling, now this is, this is very important. Everything in the mill, even with making wires is feeling, even paper. I can (--) Paper, you can mix all that paper you want, and I'll separate without looking. I'll tell you it's thirteen pounds, sixteen pounds, twenty-four, thirty-eight, or thirty-two. Thirty-two pounds for ledger, twenty-four for high-class printing for letterhead, twenty pounds of regular wood for people use, and sixteen pounds we use for duplicate sheets, and thirteen pounds was for circular, was for the [bowling] sheet. I mean (--) So there's all feeling there. You see everything is too important. I mean it's not, it's not what I'm saying, we’ll take this, throw it in the machine, the machine does the work. Like today when you press a button, see. Because that's why they got electronics. It goes so fast, yet the people don't know nothing about it. And just to take a code. And see the yellow? Press the yellow, press the blue, press the pink and this, and then you get oh, look how nice, but you didn't do nothing to make it fast for everybody. But in our days we had to do it, see. And that's why when you have these, all the wood come in we'd say well we saved that wood, because we make toys, or we make repair. If we have some furniture, he make me a beautiful desk of all the wood I had from the Merrimack Mill. Yah, it had draws and everything. The Venire wood. See we didn't have the plywood like today. Venire, that's all the wood you had. At the end they were shipping stuff in Venire box. And he would take them up. We don't rip, we take our time. You know it's amazing you know, to take the nail, and he saved all the nails. At the end of the year he'd sell at least $400.00 worth of nails, of all kinds, to the different people. And in the summertime you'd straighten them out, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, you know. You know what I mean, people wouldn't want to do that today. But he died at the age of eighty-five and he, he, like I said, this man did not write or read. He got a letter from his son at the war, during the war, and he went to one of the island. So Red Cross, because the Red Cross wanted, the Army wanted to know why he didn't write to his son. They thought it was kind of, you know, kind of rotten, but they didn't know and, and his mother now.
You had to see it. Disformed a little bit, and short, because she fell down when she was very young and she didn't grow up. And when she talked to you she look like this, you know what I mean? So at that time, you know I (--) So she said, “Camille, “Camille, what do you want with this, what this?” He's dead, he's dead you know. Oh gee. And you know what I've been through in my life. I mean I (--) So my wife said, “No no, he want to find out why you didn't write.” “Oh!” You know he said that. “We don't know, you know, don't know how to write.” “Well I'll write telling him how you are, see.” All this, because he had an accident, something happened. It was not in a fight, but fighting the Japanese, but where he was, was a place. I don't know if it was Hiroshima or what, but he got hurt and he had to come back. His back was (--). He was one of the first ones come back from the war in Lowell. So anyway I mean, things like that they used to come to us to see me, because my uncle was a judge. See, I helped a lot of people with their will. People, you know, were so scared on account of me. They believed me. They know I was no thief. Today, anybody call me a thief, they'd have something to do with it. “Oh!” You know he said that. “We don't know, you know, don't know how to write.” “Well I'll write telling him how you are, see.” All this, because he had an accident, something happened. It was not in a fight, but fighting the Japanese, but where he was, was a place. I don't know if it was Hiroshima or what, but he got hurt and he had to come back. His back was (--). He was one of the first ones come back from the war in Lowell. So anyway I mean, things like that they used to come to us to see me, because my uncle was a judge. See, I helped a lot of people with their will. People, you know, were so scared on account of me. They believed me. They know I was no thief. Today, anybody call me a thief, they'd have something to do with it. I don't care what the (--) But I had to tell people, but there are certain things you do in your life, and other thing you don't go any further. You don't want to know personal things about people. You know like in the mill see, you know a woman had some kind of sickness, you had pimples or something, you know you don't get personal. You know what I mean? You got not to shame people, you know what I mean? They didn't have (--) See, the only thing you had in our days was Noxzema Cream or something like that, or castile soap. That's all. There was nothing. But you had to, to take care of yourself, you know. And then everybody is proud. Everybody would like to, and nobody liked to see their parents drinking, especially the old man, you know being a boozer. But they're all the same. My father was a boozer. My mother was a drinker, my uncle, everybody. I can (--) Name me somebody that didn't drink and I'll give you five bucks, how's that. Put it that way. You name me a person that didn't get drunk every week, because you only knew, you know. Like today is Saturday. I come home and I got four daughters and I got four boys, they need shoes, they need undergarments stuff you know. I would like to, they're nice, good looking. I would like to give you something different you know. Where am I going to get it? So here I am. First thing you know, whoop, I'm sleeping. A quarter will buy me a quart. The pain, I might have a backache you know, what am I going to do? I have no medicine for that. You understand? You know you (--) Like I'm saying to you, I had fifty cents a week when I'm going out with my wife, all right? My brother-in-law, we're talking, he has fifty cents a week too. Sometimes maybe more, sixty, sixty-five. And his brother-in-law, Nappy, he's crippled now, we're the same. So for instance like, the night we meet my wife's house, my sister-in-law, him, Nappy and his, my brother and sister. So we make a sign. We had signs, the sign language. So then you would go out. How much money do you got? Now let me see, I got seventeen cents. Oh, I got a quarter. We go to the corner store, buy a dozen hot dogs and a dozen frankfurt rolls, and that was our weekend special, that's all. We walked and walked, that's why we know the canal, because we walk, and walk, and walk with a bag of peanuts for five cents. If you don't think I eat peanut in my life. That's why I got no more teeth. [All laugh] Oh no, no, we'd buy peanuts. I walk the car tracks and go to the depot. And when a certain train come up, then it's time to go home for supper. Or I walk from my house to the Christian Hill, to the water works, and I go look at my uncle's house, across, then come back and go home. Or I'd go to my uncle's. I used to go to my
uncle's a lot. That's why Louie, oh you wouldn't meet Louie. Luigi. [Laughs] What a
guy. But you know, but my uncle see, now I, I know he got [unclear]. I got to call my
aunt. I got to tell her I have, I wouldn't say a very pretty girl, ah I don't think she would
like that. I wish I would bring you a secretary, or something. [Laughs]. I better bring
Louie down. (He laughs)

D: Yah.

A: No, my aunt is a very nice woman. Now he got, he, he, I know he got some book
about the canal. There's other picture missing, but like I'm saying this, if you could have
a space, there's a lot of space here, as far as downstairs, there's a lot of things missing, a
lot of things missing. I mean it wouldn't be much to put a, a, some more, but, everybody
come to Lowell should have a bobbin. I would make bobbin if you'd give them away
with the name Lowell, Mass. on it, because bobbin, that's that's (--)

D: Souvenirs.

A: That's the trademark.

D: Is it, yah?

A: And the cotton, little bale of cotton. You got some little bale, but if you cut up a big
bale of cotton that you can pull out, and people feel, and after awhile it would smell.
[Laughs]. Oh yah, it would smell. Yah, I wanted to tell you, the burlap see, that's (--) See,
everything, sense you know, the burlap smell one thing. Now the shuttle you got
downstairs, I don't think they were made for the mill. They weren't made for burlap
thing. They were too big.


A: See, because it weren't for the cloth. They're very, that big, but they were (--) 

D: Smaller [unclear].

A: Smaller. You see, now here's something. Imagine now, you see the machine
downstairs, you see how strong and massive and everything. Now you got a thread going
through. It don't take much to break a thread, right. Now what I'm getting is this. The
engineering there is behind all this. You look at that machine, you got, this is heavy.
And you got that thing going up and down like this. This is heavy and you got the other
thing jamming with piece of steel at each end, right. You see, you talk about electronics,
you know, precision. What do you call this? Then the thread, it had to be made right,
otherwise it would break. You know what I mean? Do you see where I'm getting? Now
you need a strong machine to hold all this. Now you, you look at the part that the, you
know the little piece of tin there. Well they used to make that where the former
Bourgeois Hall, that used to be a mill over there. And they used to make all these part
for the bobbin to go in, the whole wheel. Sometime we were use it to make old, well we
used to use that with matches to make a little toys out of it, you know, old ones, whatever we could get, you know. But there was all kinds of things, but they would make, they had to be precision. You know, you figure well, well what is it, the weight you know, they used to put your finger and then you could tell. If one too much that means there was, they'd file it, or whatever you had to do. And you had to know not to take too much. And you know, the people, no education. No, they could hardly read, but they know this wouldn't work. And they, and they go. You can mix it all up. This is good. This is good. I see guys. Well one he tells me, why don't you go with John, or Joe, whatever, clean up the box. What do you want me to clean? I don't know what the heck I was doing. You know here's this guy come up [he hums], [Ladies laugh] gee, you know what I mean? You know it, it sounds so silly, but that's what it is, see.

P:  Yah.

A:  Touching, and the feeling, and to observe. So that means when you work in the mill you can't see oh, what a pretty girl over there, wow! No way. That was not done, all work. If you don't stay there (--) 

D:  You had to keep your mind on what you were doing?

A:  Oh yes, because you don't know, but usually there's something over there going bad. And you have sometime a whole aisle. Now you might have four girls. Let's see, in my days, one, two, three, four, eight, twelve, sixteen of them to run. Sixteen of these things, I don't know how many bobbin, there must be ah, gee whiz, there might be a hundred and some odd bobbin each one of them; two hundred, sixteen times two hundred. So you mean to tell me you're going to fool around? Ha! Oh boy! And one guy too. Oh no, everything had its space. You could tell the hour just by what's going on. You would not, you know you would tell (--) And then you could tell the temperature and everything, because the thing goes bad oh, it must be starting to rain. It's going to be cold. It's going to be this, it's going to be that. Oh no, it's (--) There's so much. It's hard to (--) The more I try, I remember, because you know fifty years ago, hey, you know. You were talking about a pretty girl, it would be much easier, like Betty Davis or (--). [All laugh] When you go up there, you know, because you see everything. You know, because to me, you know (--) Now this is like me, all right. I have no education. I can't write or read, but I can remember. I don't know the last names, but I can remember faces. I don't know, but I know who they are. See, then I used to watch and the guy used to talk, this gear there. And when he came up he said, “Well we better speed it up.” Well you see, now I understand, because I'm much older, but I don't know what he meant. And I can see the machinist there. He said, “Well, gee,” he said, you know, not to the (--) You never, you never talk back to the overseer. You get to do it, or go home, you know what I mean? He said, “Well, you see, you know he said, the shaft would take it. But to me you know, what's a shaft? The light comes on, what's a shaft? You don't know maybe what's a shaft? You see that's the main spindle in the middle that turns the whole thing. It would be strong enough to take it, but he was talking about these little wheels. Are they going to jump? You see the weight of the little wheel, each one, see, you go (--) That's why I like (--) Oh you'd be so interesting. To a person who would come up, see I like to show
the water, show this. That's one very small part to me. It's hardly ten percent of the mill, because you're talking the mill. When you're talking about the mill, you're talking a fantastic, it's like electronics. To me you're talking like a shuttle going up in the air. It's about the same size, don't you kid yourself. If you, if you start to read and find out how to make thread, how to weave, how to, how to warp, that's something you should have. You know what a warp is?

D: It's a large roll with [unclear]?

A: No, no, it's a piece...when they start the machines see, but it's a big, about this long and they have to, two or three men. Each thread, I don't know, five... See, see there's a number, there's six thousand threads, a hundred and something like that you know, and each one. And at each one you got to go, and these little piece of steel in the wheel and everything, before you start. And they only allowed maybe about this much weaving to throw away, you know. Oh hell, you [unclear].

P: Just about an inch?

A: Yah, you...

P: Just about an inch or so?

A: Well, just enough to see you know, all the threads. See you got thread this way, and you got thread this way, you understand. You see then, if you make a design, well gee whiz. Now that's something, make a design in cloth. How can you do that? You know what I mean? You take a, today they print it, boom, one shot. It's all print, or you go four times on the machine, it's all four color, everything is okay, but not, no, no. The Boott Mill they had the strip, all red. What time you put the red on the white? How you do that, you know? And it goes fast, see? These are all towels, see. Oh no, this place would have a places where you could buy pillow cases, and buy blankets, to buy material that was made in the mill. Oh no, even if you don't sell them, at least you could have some of it to show them what, and the [unclear] you know, put around there like a, the Nashua Blanket, you know, the stock, you know. That was the big, big stock with a bow holding the blanket with a baby, you know. That was right at the corner, see, and the Merrimack Manufacturer, or whatever. That, that (--) This is something. Oh no, when you take the Suffolk Mill (--) You know you go to the Hub, you're making shirts. Oh well, you know, you're all set, you know everything. You go to the Lawrence Manufacture, yah, but you go this way, the other one goes around [Laughs]. Oh, what's the difference, you know? The other one, bobbin, it's not bobbin, it's spools see, at the Hub Hoisery, it's all spools, you know. And it all depends how many different things you need. So you got to have what, what to put it. So, then you hooked it up, it's [unclear]. Then you go to the corduroy, you got knife to cut it. Then you come to the Suffolk, that's another thing. Then you go to Boott Mill, there's a (--) Then you go to Massachusetts Place. Then you go to the Mohair Plush. And then you go back to the Hockmeyer Place. With Hockmeyer you make fussy, you know, like velour. [D: Unclear] Ah that's another thing see, velour see. See they make cloth and then they got the machine to, to cut ah, I
don't know how you, how (--) I can't. I shouldn't try to explain that, because I'm going over my head. It's your fault, you know, you made me talk about lots of things, hey. I remember, because my nephew by marriage, my cousin by marriage, he worked Hockmeyer, he graduated from Lowell Tech. When they were talking about no more zipper, it would be a stick, just stick two things together like shoes now.

D: Umhm.

A: They were talking about that twenty-two years ago, I would say, they were inventing. And then they say, "What do you mean?" You don't need no zippers, just put together. You need shoes, no shoe laces, nothing. That's what they got today, you know. And it [unclear]. But see, the other thing, the, oh I mean I can't go no more. I never, no. Like I said, the mill over here, but over there were Mohair Plush and Heinz Electric. And then when you come back there was a shoe shop. You know, and when you come back, but where the church was it was all mills. They tore down a lot of mills. Oh know, all this was mill over here. And when you say you live on Market Street, you know what they’d say? You live at the jail, because the only one else on Market Street, that was the jail house.

P: Oh. [Laughs]

A: So I live… Someone says, “Where do you live?” “On Market Street.” “In what cell?” That's what it is, you see. That was the only jail see. So that's (--) There was no (--) On the mills now, there was no houses to live. Houses started on Andover Street, like the Greek, you know. Oh yah, but no, no. They, if people could (--) Oh no, it would take time. I don't have time. It takes time to start. No, we got the mills. You got the (--) This is wonderful. And then you start the operation we say, “What's the operation? What's the number of operation?” Well we’ve got to have cotton. Okay. We talk about [unclear], okay we got cotton. Cotton, okay. What happened? Where did you get it? From Canada, did you get it from Mexico, or what? See? So you get it from the plantation, and they show them. Oh no, [unclear]. You know, I seen, I went to the World's Fair [unclear] and they were showing different things through the glass, and it's almost three dimension. And they showed people in the fields, whatever. You see but, to show the cotton, and especially the smell, it gave you a much, much different story, oh!

D: I think you have a lot of good ideas and I hope we use a lot of these [unclear] mills.

A: Yah, but I mean I hope I'm not going to get you in trouble. I can see that, I can't stop talking. You're too good listener.

D: I know you have somewhere to go, (A: No, no, I mean) and I'm sure the tape is probably [unclear]. Pretty well so, yah.

INTERVIEW ENDS

jw