D: ...84. My name is Diane Novelli and I’m here at the Lowell National Historical Park interviewing Martha Doherty and Blanche Graham on their experiences working in the mills. Martha, I'll start with you. Do you mind telling me how old you are, and when you came to Lowell?

M: How old I am now?

D: Umhm.

M: I'm 80 years old.

D: 80? And were you born here in Lowell?

M: Yes, right down in the corporation on Paige Street where the Merrimack Square Theater use to be. There's a row of cottages there.

D: Uh huh.

M: And my family moved to Sirk Street, which isn't there anymore, and it runs off French Street down to the Boott Mill.

D: Okay. Did your parents work in the mill, or one of your parents?
M: My mother did. My father didn't. My mother worked in the Boott Mill. She was a weaver, and her father was a overseer down there. And she worked for her father. He was one of the bosses.

D: What did you...

M: She used to put us in a Day Nursery so she could work.

D: Uh huh.

M: And then in between [doffs], when the baby had to be nursed, she had to come home and nurse it.

D: Uh huh.

M: The boss, her father was the boss, let her go home and nurse it then go back to work.

D: How many children in your family?

M: There was nine.

D: And where did you fall in the order?

M: Where did I what.

D: Were you older, or young?

M: No, I was the fourth.

D: So you were about right in the middle.

M: Umhm.

D: So you remember growing up in the mills really, huh?

M: Yes, right.

D: Okay. I'm going to ask Blanche just about the same questions, how old you are and were you born here in Lowell?

B: I'm seven, seventy-eight. I was born in Lowell. I was born on East Merrimack Street. And after a while they moved, my father and mother moved on John Street in the boarding house there, Mrs. Croteau’s boarding house. And they worked in the Boott Mill. And I can remember they had to work from six in the morning till six at night. And of course my mother would take me over to the Day Nursery on Kirk Street, Auntie O'Leary's place.
M: Next to O'Leary's home.

B: And leave me there while they worked. And then she'd pick me up at night and take me home.

D: Were those nurseries run by the mill owners or private...?

B: I, I don't know.

M: I think it was private.

D: Private somebody making a little bit of extra.

B: Yah, I don't think it was run by the mills, no.

D: Okay. And how large was your family Blanche?

B: Well there was only three of us, but they, my father says there was seven altogether but they died when they were very baby. (D: Right) Small. There was only three of us living, my brother, my sister and I.

D: And are you oldest, youngest?

B: No, I'm the baby.

D: The baby. (B: Yah) Okay. I'm going to ask you a little about your schooling, if you were able to get any schooling.

M: Oh yah. (D: Martha?) I graduated from the Immaculate Conception School, but I was at work at fourteen. I just graduated and got a job the day I was fourteen, right on my birthday.

D: Uh huh. How many... That would take you about eighth grades through about eight or nine grades.

M: It was nine at them time.

D: Nine grades. And...

M: And that was uh...today it's the first of high school, but in those days you had to go through nine grades and then four at high.

D: Okay. And how did you get your first job?
M: I just walked in with another girl. She was sixteen and she was going for a job. So I went with her.

D: Uh huh.

M: And the boss said, “How old are you?” And she said, “Sixteen.” He said, “How about you?” I lied. I said, “I'm sixteen too.” He said, “Good.” He said, “I need you.” So he put us right to work. And two days later he said, “Now you have to go get your papers at the City Hall,” you know, to show how old you were.

D: Yah.

M: So I went to the City Hall. I got a fourteen. And I come back, he was furious.

D: Oh.

M: He said, “Why did you do that? Why did you lie?” I said, “If I told you I was fourteen you wouldn't hire me and I need the job.” And he said, “Yes, but you could have got me in trouble, because I employed you on long hours,” (D: Umhm) which wasn't supposed to be.

D: Umhum.

M: I was supposed to be on short hours. And I said, “Well I'm sorry, but I do need the work.” So he looked at me and he says, “Your father Scotch?” I said, “Yes.” I said, “Are you?” He said, “Yes.” And he said, “Does he belong to the Scotch,” thing they had, I don't know, some kind of a club? I said, “Yah, he goes there.” He said, “Well I'm going to keep you.” But he says, “I'll have to put shorter hours for the next few days for the hours you put in that you shouldn't of put in.” (D: Uh huh) He said, “But you really could have got me in trouble.” So he kept me.

D: Okay. Now which mill was that Martha?

M: Merrimack.

D: And what was your first job there then?

M: It was in the card room. I’ll tell you, it was (sounds like roving) in the tin. I don't know what you would call it. It wasn't on frames or anything, but I had to lift it up.

D: Yah, go ahead and describe the job to me.

M: It was in a big tin and the (sounds like roving) use to go into it and circle around till it filled up, and then I had to lift that up and bring it over to the ones that had frames, but then I started getting lumps under my arms because it was too much for me. I wasn't able
to do it, (D: Uh huh) because I was too young and wasn't fit for it. So then he put me in another job just filling in bobbins in a box, and I was making $9.45.

D: Okay. That first job, were there other young girls in the room or were you one of the youngest?

M: I was the only one in that room.

D: Okay. Uh, how long did you stay at that job?

M: Oh I didn't stay...

D: The bobbins?

M: I only stayed about a year. Then I went to the Massachusetts and I learned how to spin a doff down there.

D: Okay, I'll come back to that if I can remember, and then I'll ask Blanche. This is a little different. We've not done two. So we'll see how we do.

B: Well the first school I went to was Kirk Street School, and I was... I left school when I was fourteen because I got married.

D: Really.

B: I lost my mother I was 12. And there was just my father and I, and of course he was a young man. He just didn't bother too much with me. So I, I got myself in trouble and I had to get married. So I, I couldn't go to school no more. I left school when I was in the 6th grade.

D: Uh huh.

B: And I had to go to Green School and they taught me how to cook and things like that just until I was sixteen. So after I had my baby they said, “Don't bother coming back,” you know. So I stayed home, and I worked in the, in the Boot Mill...not in the Boot Mill. The one before I got married, I was 12 years old, I use to help my mother. She worked in the Appleton Mills. She was a twister. Not a twister, a spinner, spinner. So I used to spend my vacation, you know, the summer vacation in the mill with my mother from 12 till closing time.

D: And did you actually work on the machines? Did she teach you?

B: Yah, she used to teach me how to do it.

D: And...
B: But she used to say, “I don't want you to come work in the mills when you get big. I want you to do something else.”

D: Yah.

B: It was hard work. We used to clean her frames for her and fill the bobbins in and she'd tie them up, because I didn't know how to tie them up.

D: And the bosses didn't care that you were there?

B: He was...no. To him, well I would have been alone at home. So rather than be on the street, or alone at home, my mother would take me in there and I'd spend the day with her, the afternoon.

D: You, you didn't make any money at that time at all?

B: No. No. No money, just to pass the time. And I enjoyed it. But when I did go to work in the mill I worked in the Boott Mill. This was during the 2nd World War.

D: Well we're getting ahead of ourselves (B: Yah) a little bit. Um...

B: But that's...when I was...

D: When you were first married and had your baby did you work?

B: No. No. No, because I wasn't old enough to work anyway. I was only fourteen. You had to be sixteen.

D: And how many children have you had in all?

B: I had five (D: Uh huh) in all.

D: Okay. Did your husband work in the mills?

B: No. No he didn't work period. [Laughs]

D: [Laughs] Okay.

B: I jumped out of the frying pan into the fire.

D: Into the fire, yah! All right. Okay. So I think we'll come...Blanche we'll pick it up where you first went into work then, unless while we're talking to Martha if you could think of anything, you know.
B: When I first went into work I was sixteen. They send me to work in the mill, huh, where the Wamesit Mill is there. I think that was the Suffolk, wasn’t it? Suffolk, Tremont? The Suffolk, down there.

M: Is, is it down, down Cabot?

B: Down Suffolk Street, way down Suffolk Mill.

D: Yah. Yah.

B: But it was like a hosiery. I had to cut the neck of the shirts or something.

M: Oh the Hub Hosiery?

B: Well it must be something like that at the Hub.

M: Yah, the Hub Hosiery.

B: But it was down there I had to cut. And the scissors, they were big scissors to cut edges of a thing-of-a-majig. And they expected me to do a big job with that. I had blisters all over my fingers.

D: Yah, and you said you were sixteen?

B: I was sixteen, yah.

D: So then you pretty much stayed home and took care of your family?

B: Yah, but then the work didn't go good. So anyways I stayed home.

D: All right.

B: I started having another one, and another one, and another one.

D: And another one. Okay. So we'll pick it up Blanche from when you went into the mills then. So Martha, we left you, you switched from the, which the first to the...

M: From the Merrimack to the Massachusetts.

D: The Massachusetts. Okay. Uh, I'd like to know why you changed jobs and how you went about doing that?

M: Well I didn't like what...getting into a box and putting bobbins in. I didn't like that. As you said, I was the only little girl in the room.

D: Yah.
M: And I was by myself all the time that, that was too lonesome for me. I was a live wire. So.

D: Yah.

M: I went to Massachusetts Mill and they taught me how to spin. They were trying to teach me. And I kept trying to do it and trying...and the ends kept falling down. So one of the boys who was in the room, he was watching me. And he came over to me and he said, “Are you left handed?” I said, “I don't think so.” He said, “Well try it with your left hand.” He said, “You look awkward to me.” So I did. And it...the ends would stand up all the time. He said, “That's all that's wrong with you. You’re doing it with the wrong hand, you know. We had a nice boss and I enjoyed myself very much there. And then I, I got too good I guess. The boss put me upstairs where there was heavy roving with mostly men. And they needed somebody up there. So they put me up there on roving the blankets.

D: How, how old were you then?

M: I was fifteen.

D: Oh, still very young.

M: So I went up there and then I made good money. I started making $19, $20 something dollars. And then the state man come in and he wanted to know how many of my family, because we didn't...you supposed to make... you're supposed to tell state, bank statements or something on your money. And he said, “How many at home and who was working?” I said, “I'm the only one working now, because my father's had a heart attack, and my mother was home with the children.” “So,” he said, “Oh well we can't touch you, because your money has to go for the support of a house,” which it did, you know. So I had a real good time there and...

D: Okay, tell me a little about that job, where you working with mostly men.

M: What?

D: Tell me about that job where you went upstairs and you were working with mostly men did you say?

M: Yah, with the men.

D: That was a heavier type of work?

M: It was, you doffed.... You spun your own work and then you doffed your own frames off, but it was big bobbins.
B: Big bobbins.

M: Instead of small bobbins it was big bobbins. And I had three sides in which to keep. And it doffed every fifteen minutes. So it kept me running.

D: How many machines did you tend to?

M: Well there was three sides. That was three machines, but I had a partner on the other side. I’d have one side and she had the other. When she’d be doffing one side I’d be dofting the other. Ten we’d start the machine up fast so we could make more money, because you had a clock on the end of the machine and the more you kept the machine going the more money you made, but she was a married woman that I was on with. And she was nice. And she liked me and I liked her. So I could run around and help her more, because as I said, I was a live wire (both laugh). I [unclear] around.

D: Okay.

M: So we made good money in...

D: Was, was that considered mostly men's work?

M: Yes it was, but they didn't have enough men to do it then. So after awhile they put more women upstairs.

D: Now how long were your hours? How long were you working then?

M: Oh that was short hours, but then I went on 48 hours when I was sixteen. I stayed there. And that was 48 hours, from 7:00 in the morning till 5:00 at night. We had an hour for dinner, and we worked a few hours on Saturday.

D: Umhum. So you stayed up in that room for quite a while?

M: I stayed till, yah, I stayed right there till I, till they closed up. I had a good boss and they were real good the people worked we with. We had a lot of fun.

D: Yah. So how many years was that? When did they close?

M: What?

D: When did they close? Do you remember? How many years did you stay there?

M: Oh, I was married when I was 20, and I was still working there when it closed. So that was five years or six years. It was over... I was married and I was still working when I got married.

D: Umhm.
M: And it maybe was two years after I was married I was still there, because I didn't have any children until I was married for four years. So I still stayed there, but...and they closed up. I got through there, and then I went to a woolen mill which made more money, but that was out in North Chelmsford.

D: Okay.

M: So

D: What did you do out in the woolen mill?

M: The same thing, doff and spin, but it was on wool instead of cotton.

D: Was that harder?

M: No.

D: Easier?

M: Easier, much easier.

D: Why do you think that is?

M: I don't know. When the machine run longer and instead of me doffing one side we had about five girls in one side doing doffing. Then we'd run to another machine and five girls again. So it kept going like that. Then I had to go so many minutes and we could sit down in the meantime. And when that machine would stop the spinner would holler, “doff here,” and then we'd all jump and we'd run down and we'd start doffing the machines.

D: You sound like you enjoyed working?

M: I did.

D: Yah.

M: Very much.

D: At that time did you get vacations or sick time?

M: Oh nothing.

D: Anything at all?

M: Nothing.
D: Were you out sick at all? Did you have...?

M: Yes, in the Massachusetts Mill. Like I said, I had a man's job, and I had to lift bobbins, which was very heavy.

D: Okay.

M: And most of the men were pretty good to me because I wasn't too big, and they'd lift them up on the machine for me, but I got a ruptured appendix from lifting. And at that time you didn't get no compensation or nothing.

D: How long were you out?

M: Oh I was out about two months and almost died, because they didn't have penicillin in those days. And I got [corinitis] from it, because they had...appendix had burst.

D: Ruptured, yah. Were you able to go back to that job when you were better?

M: Yah, but not to lift. They didn't let me lift. They just let me spin. I could spin because there was no lifting.

D: Okay...

M: So they let me go back and they did pay for the operation and the doctor. The mill covered that but uh

D: Was that unusual do you think or would they have (--) 

M: No, they did it for everybody.

D: They would do that.

M: Yah.

D: Alright. Do you remember... Now these are your early days.

M: Umhm.

D: Do you remember any union activities at that time?

M: Never.

D: Not even a talk Blanche?

B: No.
M: No.

D: Not even like, uh, underground.

B & M: No, nothing.

D: Nothing. Any thought of it? That work could have been better?

B: No.

B: No, no thoughts of that.

D: Does it come later.

M: Yes, there were strikes later.

D: Okay, we'll definitely get to that.

B: Yes, there were strikes later on.

D: Ya, I'd like to hear about that.

B: And that hospital was (D: Go head Blanche) the Corporation Hospital.

D: Oh!

B: The mills had control of the Corporation Hospital.

M: That was, was St. Joseph's. (B: Yah) That was the Corporation hospital.

B: That's before St. Joseph took it over. See all these mills were incorporated you know.

D: Umhm.

B: So they had a corporation hospital for the...anybody who took sick or hurt they’d sent them there.

M: We got no coffee breaks.

B: No.

M: And we just had... at dinnertime there was no place to heat anything. We had cold sandwiches.

D: Umhm.
M: And we drink water unless you wanted to bring your tea and have cold tea.

D: Were you able to talk to the other women that you worked with?

B: Oh sure.

M: Sure.

D: While you were working?

M: Oh yah.

D: You could at least...

M: Yah

D: Was it very noisy where you worked?

M: Oh yah, very noisy.

B: But you could still manage?

M: We still could holler.

D: Yah.

B: Very noisy, and they wouldn't open the windows.

M: No, because it would break the...

B: The yarn.

M: The uh, the strings, and you'd like air, but you didn't get it, because it would break the cotton you know, the cotton.

D: Yah. So how many children Martha, did you have in all?

M: Three

D: And how... Were they pretty good about um, hiring you back when you go out and have ...

M: When, when I had children I didn't go back.

D: You didn't.
M: I never worked after I had children.

D: All right. Well, so where does that take us? That leaves us at the woolen mill in North Chelmsford (M: Umhm) for you.

M: Umhm.

D: And would that have been your last job at the mills then, because you started having children? Okay.

M: I didn't have my children close, but my husband still didn't let me work once the children come home. He said they need a mother. And of course he, his mother and father was dead and he missed I think homelife too, you know, a mother and father, and he says, “I didn't marry you to have you work.”

D: Right. What kind of work did your husband do?

M: He was a boxer maker. They made coffins.

D: Uhhuh.

M: You know, the plain wood coffins.

D: Yah.

M: He made those.

D: Yah.

M: Carpenter work.

D: He had pretty steady work?

M: Yes, he did.

D: Yah, okay.

M: Yah, I had a very good husband. He was good, one of the best.

D: Yah.

M: I had a good life.

D: Yah.
M: Thank God!

D: Okay. Blanche um, when did you first go to work?

B: Like sixteen when I went to that factory there.

D: Right, and then, but I mean after your children, after you uh, had your family?

B: Oh, I went to work, my children were grown up then, but when I started having children one after the other, I had five (D: Right) with a my first husband. I left him I was thirteen years after we got married, because I was badly bruised and... That picture there that [unclear].

D: [Unclear]

B: That was me. That was me.

D: Yah.

B: Yah. So thirteen years I stood it on account of the children.

D: Umhm

B: But then I left. But when I went to work here in Lowell, I went in the Boott Mill during the 2nd World War. I learned twisting from the second shift, three in the afternoon until 11 o'clock at night. We was making something for the Navy or the Army. I don't know what it was, but I was making that.

M: Parachute I think it was.

B: Yah, something like... Then from there when that slacked down I went to the other mill there on the foot of Suffolk Street. Tremont and Suffolk used to be, you know, before...The Wamesit was always there, but it was the Tremont and Suffolk mill down further, you know. So I worked down there as a twister too, but on nylon because that was for Parachutes.

M: Yah.

B: Yah.

D: Okay

B: Until the war stopped and when the end of the 2nd World War, I was, I went on stitching, making dresses, or jackets, pants, or lingerie, or something like that. Eighteen years on stitching.
D: Oh! That's a long time. Did you pretty much enjoy working?

B: Yes, but then my eyes began to go bad.

D: Yah.

B: So then I went to Symphonics, electronics, making radios and things like that.

D: Okay.

B: That was the end of my work. No, and then I left Symphonics and went back to Lowell Lingerie. And that's where I had to quit, because I was, my heart gave out and I had to give up working. That was the end of my working days.

D: All right. Maybe we'll get back to work a little bit later. Um, you've known each other all your lives.

B: Yah.

D: How did you... Do you remember when you first met? Was it at the Day Nursery?

M: Going to school together and playing hopscotch.

B: Yah. Well see, she lived on Sirk Street and I lived on John Street. So that was...

M: Right around the corner.

B: Two streets together. So we went to Kirk Street School. And from there I don't know what school I went to after that. I didn't go to the Green School. I think I went to the Immaculate. That's where I've seen you there too.

M: Yah. I went to the Green. I went to the Kirk Street School and from there to the Green. And then we moved to Belvidere. And then I went to the Immaculate. I graduated.

B: We left John Street, and we moved on Charles Street. And I went to the Immaculate Conception School.

D: The Green School, was that for girls to...?

B: No, the Green School over here.

M: Right up here next to the...

D: Boys, both boys and girls go to that?
M: Um hm, yah.

D: Because you mentioned they taught you how to cook and things there, right Blanche?

B: Yah, well they had...downstairs in the basement they showed us how to cook. That was just to pass my time to say that I went to school until I was sixteen.

M: When I was at Immaculate we, we didn't have boys mixed. There was boys and girls but not in the same room. We were separated.

B: The Immaculate, there was all girls, yah.

M: Yah, that’s it.

B: And then from there I went to Saint Patrick and that was all girls too. The boys started to come after I left Saint Patricks [laughs].

M: Well, there was boys in the Immaculate, but they were in a different building, and we didn't mix at that time. We mixed outside (D: Ya), but we didn't mix in school.

D: Now which one of you is Miss Lowell?

M: Not Miss Lowell. I was with Miss Lowell.

D: Oh, Donna told....I thought Donna told me that (M: Yah, we were...one day) one of you...

M: After work (D: Tell me about that) we were going to go to the Associate Hall to see who Miss Lowell was. And we had little... just a little skirt on and little white blouse, and we were going up to see who she was. It was free.

D: Uh huh.

M: And so they started to dance. They started to dance. They were supposed to pick Miss Lowell and we were waiting around. Then they said this dance is for Miss Lowell. And some of the girls were beautiful. They had nice gowns and they were beautiful, we thought anyway. But anyway, of course we didn’t get on the floor, her and I together, because we wanted to see who Miss Lowell was. And they didn't pick her. They decided that they'd wait for awhile. So they said when there was more on the floor they'd pick her, or something like that. So they started up more dancing, more music. And these men, they belong I don't know whether it’s the Kiwanis Club or some club, and these elderly members we thought, they weren't elderly, but to us they were you know. They were about 30, 35, but to us... (B: They were old) Yah. [All laugh]. So they come over and ask Mary with me for a dance. And we were glad to go on because we knew they could dance. We couldn't, but uh, we said yes. Well the first thing we know they’re
taking, they're getting near the stage and they go like that. And Mary gets off the floor with this elderly man, you know, and then after awhile the one I'm with, when I got over near the other time, he said, now thanks for the dance, and he let me sit down. They were eliminating you know.

B: [Laughs]

M: And she's up there and her face is so red. And I said, oh no, don't tell me she's going to be one. She's got to get up. And she had the little skirt as I said, and the little blouse. There's the other one, beautiful dresses and gowns. And uh, so they got them up there. And then it was between two girls, her and the other girl. And the other girl had a long gown. Because I thought she'd get it.

B: Yah.

M: But who do you think they picked? My friend Mary.

D: Uh huh.

M: And I said, "Well, that's something. I went up to see Miss Lowell and I didn't know I was walking with her." [All laugh] And she was crying and everything, but she was pretty. She was a pretty girl. So she got the wardrobe and different things. I'll never forget that though. She said if I had a known it I'd been dressed different, you know, but there we were, a little skirt and blouse.

B: It's not the clothes, it's the detail.

M: Yah, yah, that's what it was. They were really looking for a...

B: Pretty girl.

M: Pretty girl. And she had no makeup, of course. Just out of the... we didn't have, we didn't have the money to buy it anyway. But anyway, she was pretty.

D: What happened to her after that? Did anything come of that?

M: No, no we still...

D: Just a little bit of excitement?

M: Yah. Later on she got married and she moved away, and I lost track of her. But she was pretty. She had nice red cheeks. She’s a Polish girl. Blonde, blonde hair and blue eyes. She really was pretty.

D: Yah. Did you both always live right here in Lowell where you could walk to work and walk to...
B: Oh yah!

D: Yah.

M: Well, if I could walk to work...

B: We all walked. No riding around.

M: But not in North Chelmsford. I had to take...

D: You two would take...

M: The car, electric car, or a train. They had trains too that could get off there. They paid half fare for you if you lived in Lowell, because they needed help. So they paid half fare and you paid the other half.

D: Yah, that's another thing I was wondering. Was it fairly easy to find jobs? You could move around then?

M: Oh yes.

B: Yah.

M: You'd get out of one job and go in for another one.

B: You could come out of one factory and walk into the other one and get hired.


D: Nobody was really out of work, huh?

B: No, no.

M: Nothing said, or why did you have it, or ...

D: Really.

M: Nothing!

B: There was plenty of work.

M: Umhm.

B: They were looking for them all the time.
D: Did many people get fired maybe for...a
M: I don't think so.
D: Being lazy.
B: No.
D: [Unclear].
M: No, because if you go, if you're lazy you could...you didn't go to that job you'd go to another one the next day. So you didn't get fired, because you didn't come back. You know what I mean? You didn't come back to get fired.
B: And if you didn't like it, the job you was doing, you could leave it get hired in any other factory.
D: A little different than today.
B: Oh today, no.
M: You could, you could go back and get your pay or write out a line and someone could get it for you. You didn't even have to go back and face the boss if you, if you got through it.
D: How long did you stay at the woolen mill, Martha? About how many years?
M: [Counts] About two years.
D: Uh huh. Okay. Now you said you did remember some union activities. Can you tell me?
M: A strike, there was a strike. There was going to be a strike at the Massachusetts, I remember that.
D: Could you recall what year that was?
M: No I don't.
D: Roughly?
M: Let's see.
D: About how old were you?
M: Uh, I'm trying to remember if I was married or if I wasn't. I was married at twenty. If it was...could be in '24.

D: All right.

M: or 19, 1919, or 19 or no, 1923 or 1924.

D: Okay.

M: I was married in the year of 1924.

D: All right. So, and you were working at the Massachusetts Mill.

M: Yah, and they started going out on strike. And I didn't know what it was all about. Then the boss came over to me and he said, “They're gone out on strike.” And I don't know what they're talking about. And he said to me, “Do you want to go over and do so and so's job?” Some fellow I knew that was in there. I said, “No way.” And he says, “Well you have to do that.” He said, “Or there's nothing else.” Well I'll go out. So I went out too. So they settled it, but it didn't seem to be any... Whatever it was, it was settled right away. That maybe was the beginning of some of the strikes. I don't know.

D: Okay. But there was...was there an organized union before this strike, that called the strike, or was it just among the workers?

M: I think it was just among the workers.

D: So when you went out did you picket or strike?


D: You, you just didn't work.

M: Just went out.

D: How long did it last?

M: It didn't last... I think... I don't know if it last a week. It didn't last that long. It was only a few days I think.

D: Do you know what some of the grievances were? Why the workers went out?

M: No, I don't remember.

D: You couldn't see.
M: It was more among the men. And of course that's why I didn't go out, because he didn't take me off my job, but when he wanted me to do the fellows... Maybe it was more money for the men, I don't know. But when I went out the fellows said, “Ha, you come out too?” I said, “Well he was giving me your job and I wouldn't take it.” He said, I would have broke your neck.” [All laugh] So it was settled in no time. I think a few days later, whatever it was, because I wasn't mixing with my.... I wouldn't know what it was, but but there was a strike.

D: Did you think there was any hard feelings afterwards?

M: Oh no.

D: The bosses didn't hold it against you?

M: Oh no, they were fine.

D: Yah.

M: Great.

D: How about you Blanche, do you remember any strike or union activities?

B: No. Well when I worked in the, in the Giant Store we had the tele, telecron clocks on the top floor. We were making clocks there. Those telecron electric clocks, and small watches, and things like that we made. We pulled a strike up there. I was one of the stewardess. I remember that strike. We wanted more money, but they didn't settle. They just moved. They said, “This is going to be it.” They straightened it out with us, but then a few weeks afterwards they moved out and they went to Ashland.

D: Ah!

B: Ashland, Mass. They wanted me to go with them but I didn't go.

D: Yah.

Tape I, side A ends

Tape I, side B begins

D: Okay, Martha I'd like to know a little bit about your family's background. What country, how, you know, how many generations were there here?

M: How many generations?

D: Yah, like your mother and your father, what...?
M: My father comes from Scotland, and his people were all Scotch.

D: Uh huh.

M: And my mother was... He was born in Scotland and he came to America when he was a little boy. My mother's people come from Nova Scotia. And they were all fishermen up there, and they were Irish. And my mother was born here in Biddeford, Maine.

D: Uh huh

M: In America here.

D: Yah. Is that unusual to have Irish people up in Nova Scotia? That's sort of... or were there quite a few up there?

M: It was run by the Canadian government I guess, but they were Irish.

D: Yah.

M: And how they immigrated there I don't know.

D: Okay.

M: But my grandfather, he came from Ireland. And how he met her I don't know. Maybe on a fishing trip, or something. I don't know how they met.

D: That's okay. I just wondered if that was sort of unusual.

M: I...

D: All right. How did your parents meet? Do you know how your parents met?

M: You mean out here?

D: Umhm.

M: I don't know.

D: All right.

M: I don't know how they met, but...

D: All right. Did they come from large families? Were there lots of children in their...?
M: Oh, yah, my father came from a family of fourteen. My mother, my mother's family, there was five, four girls and a boy. My father was the last of fourteen. And most of his...most of them were married before he was born, but they didn't come out to America. They all stayed over there. In fact I guess they lost quite a few in some battle over there, but he came here with his mother, his father was dead, and she came on here and brought him with her, but I don't know how my mother and father met.

D: Um.

M: Because he worked in the machine shop and she worked in the mill.

D: Do you remember going into the mill to see her?

M: See my mother?

D: Yah.

M: No.

D: Not like Blanche who got to go in and work with her mother.

M: I was kept in the Day Nursery until she came after me and my father took us home.

D: When you first...got your first job when you were fourteen, remember you told, you said that you were sixteen. Did your parents approve of that?

M: No, they didn't know I was doing it. And because the boss got a hold of my father in the club. And my father didn't know I had told a lie, but like I said, we did need it.

D: Uh huh.

M: And he said, “You should always be honest.”

D: Uh huh

M: And I said, “I know dad, but you're not well.” He had a bad heart. So.

D: But he was, so he wasn't really against you working?

M: No, no.

D: Just that you lied a little.

M: No, he knew that you know, I was only trying.

D: Yah.
M: Yah, he was a very calm man, my father was. He was strict but he was calm, you know he didn't abuse us in any way. But uh, he taught us to be honest. That was one thing, you had to be honest and go to church. If you didn't you didn't go out.

D: Which Church did you go to?

M: The Immaculate. The Immaculate Conception.

D: Which is where you went to school too.

M: Yah.

D: Do you remember what you did in your free time back then?

M: You mean as children?

D: Yah

M: Oh yah, we went to house parties. They had pianos and what do you call the other, pianola?

B: Pianola, yah.

M: Yah, you know the...you put the roll on.

D: And it played, yah.

M: Yah.

D: Pianola.

M: And it would be a sing-a-long and we made fudge and cooked. We went to the YWCA. It's, it's torn down now. That was the young women's [unclear]. They had a gymnasium. We did that. They taught us how to cook and make fudge. And they let us have shower baths, which we had didn't have at home. We had to take a bath in a (B: Tub) galvenized tub. And but we could go there, and they’d let us go. Then we had a playground and we were taught how to play, how to sew, and get along with each other. And then one day a week we'd go up to Eliot Street to some...I think it was a Protestant Church, Eliot Church, and we’d have a shower there, too, which was good because it was better than getting into a galvenized tub.

D: Yah, yah. Was your house pretty small that you grew up in?

M: No.
D: Or was it...?

M: No, no. We had four rooms, which was very large. They're not like they’re built today. It was really large in the corporation, like a big dance hall. It was hard to heat, but we heated with coal and, but that heated good, you know. And wood, like you said, we brought the wood home and...but we were brought up that way. So we didn't mind it.

D: All right. Blanche, do you remember anything different from your childhood, or sound about the same as Martha’s?

B: Well like I said, I went to Kirk Street School. And when I got a little older from being in the nursery like that I couldn't speak French. And my parents were French. And I learned English. So my mother talked to me and I wouldn't know what she was saying. So I’d say to my sister, “What is she talking about?”

D: Uh huh.

B: So they sent me to St. Joseph's Convent at Pawtucket and School Street there, you know. I was there about five years or so to learn French.

D: Did you live there, or just go during the day?

B: Live there.

D: You lived there.

B: It was all girls.

D: Un huh.

B: Yah, it was like a boarding house for girls, you know. I went to school there and everything. Stayed right in there.

D: So your parents were French.

B: Yes.

D: or French Canadian?

B: Both of them, yah. They come from Canada, both of them, a little town called [Marten], and my father, he was a Canadian Indian and my mother was French.

D: Umhm

B: And there's Scotch mixed in there on my father's side, because he's....he was a French Canadian Scotchman. My, my grandmother was a thoroughbred Scotch woman. She
came from Scotland. She had red hair. I could always remember that my father said that's where I got my red hair from. He had red hair. And my grandmother was a Scotch lady from Scotland, and she married Mr. Pelletier, the Canadian Indian. So that's how the nationality...My mother, I don't know, she just plain French and they lived in a small town like that. It's in the Providence of Quebec. So how they met to get married, my father from the time he was thirteen years old he lived with his uncle, which he was a priest. And he was brought up in a priest home. So he was going to become a priest. He went to a Seminary, and before he could take his last vows he fell in love with a pair of shoes. He used to go up and down the hills. There was a wall around the Seminary and all he could see was these shoes (D: He didn't have the calling, huh?) walking up and down six o'clock in the morning, come back at night. And he fell in love with them. So when it came time to almost take his vow the priest had a good talking to him. He told him, he said, “The only thing I could see is these shoes that go down, they bother him every morning and comes back every night.” He said, “It would be better for you to go out and meet them shoes, and marry the woman because with that in mind you wouldn't make a good priest.” So he did and that's how they got married.

D: Yah, that's a nice story, huh?

B: And he was, he was a strict man. Oh my father was very strict when it came to religion too.

D: Uh huh

B: But I used to ask him years afterwards was he sorry that he hadn't taken the priest vow instead of getting married? He said, “No, he was satisfied with what he had.” So like I said, there was seven of us, supposed to be seven children, but they mostly died as babies. There was only three of us that really lived. My brother, my sister and I. He was a weaver in the Boott Mill, first class weaver. When they used to come from out of town they'd ask for my father. My mother was a twister, a spinner. A spinner. I mean a spinner. And she was a very good spinner too. So when they used to come from other towns like New Hampshire, they'd come down and visit the mills down here to see if the could get some good workers to take up there.

D: I was going to say who was it that was coming down?

B: It was other mill workers. So they'd talk about my father and of course the boss would talk with my father, and if there was more money in it or something he’d take off and go up there. And by the time we'd go up there they'd have a boarding room place for us when we got there, and he'd go to work for the mill and my mother would too. So we, that was... we went to [Salmon Falls], New Hampshire and I went to school there for maybe 3 or 4 years, 2, 2, or 3 years there anyways. So then after that we went to Newmarket, New Hampshire and worked. But he was always somebody interviewing him to go someplace because he was a very good weaver.

D: Um, do you remember going into watch him work?
B: No.

D: You worked with your mother, but not with your father.

B: I went in the room once or twice. It was so noisy you couldn't hear yourself think. So I'd come out, but I was mostly with my mother in the spinning room.

D: More noisy where your father worked?

B: Oh yes, the weave room...

D: That would be about the...

B: Was a very noisy place.

D: The noisiest.

B: Yah, very noisy, because I worked one time in the silk mill on Market St. where the, the uh, mill uh...

M: Silk mill

B: Where the houses are now, the Market Mills, uh, houses. I worked in there in the silk mills when I was a, well I was married. I was a grown woman. That was before the silk mill left and then they took over, somebody took over, somebody else. But then like I said, the convent that, to learn French and English. Then when I come out we moved on Charles Street, and I went to Immaculate Conception School. And we didn't have no buses. I had to walk from Charles Street to the Immaculate Conception. Go to school morning, every morning. Snow, rain, sleet ...

D: A long walk?

B: There was no buses for us (D: Yah) in them days. And there was snow, rain, they very seldom rang the bell no school. We had to go.

D: What were you going to say Martha?

M: I was going to say we use to go out to Lakeview. There was dancing out there at Lakeview Park and also roller skating. And we'd go out there. And sometimes we'd hire a bicycle for 5 cent for the day and that's how we'd get out there. We'd hire a bicycle.

D: Uh huh

M: From the Moody Street. Do you remember that place on Moody Street, 5 cents for a day?
B: Oh yah.

M: Well we'd borrow that day, but then we'd take it back till the next day, but we'd leave it outside. And the man didn't mind because he knew we'd got it back, you know. But that's how we got to Lakeview, and we danced and roller skate out there, swam. There was swimming out there. And on Sunday there was amusements. You could go out there for 5 cent on the electric cars, you know, something like they have now, the trolley there, but it was on a...

D: Now could you go without your parents?

M: Oh yah.

D: They'd let you go?

M: Oh yes, it wasn’t no danger in those days.

B: The McManus's picnic.

M: Nothing, nothing. You could go on it and uh, there was not petting, nothing. There was really something. I don’t know how to explain it, but we all got along. We liked each other, and still it wasn't any loving or petting.

D: Uh huh

M: And we danced. We'd rollerskate together. We swam together.

B: People were more friendly.

M: I don't know what it was.

B: We all tried to help one another. That's the way people... I've noticed that when we were, no matter where you lived, whether she was Polish or Greek or anything, we’d...one another.

D: Yah.

B: Today, they don't do that.

D: At work?

B: At work.

D: At work you were...
B: Even in the neighborhood if you lived... Somebody was sick you'd, you'd try and help them out. And if they didn't, you know, if you'd make a big pot of stew and you had too much you'd share it with somebody else.

M: Or bread

B: Yah

M: We made bread.

D: Were your neighborhoods mixed as far as the nationality?

B: Oh yes.

D: Pretty mixed?

M: Oh yah, we were mixed.

B: Then, then when I moved from Charles Street, I moved on Adams Street and I've been on Adams Street ever since. I was ten years old then. My mother died when I was twelve. I went to St. Patrick's school there, but there it's all Irish American. I was the only little French girl in the Acre.

M: It was mostly Irish then.

B: It was all Irish. So they used to say I was the best looking girl, French girl in the Acre. I was the only one. So they had to...

M: I didn't know she French because she talked English.

D: Uh huh. So I know your mother was dead Blanche, but, and your father was still alive when you went into the mills. Did he protest that at all? Did he not want you to go to work? You were pretty much on your own. How did you get your jobs, did you go right to the mills, or to unemployment?

B: No, I went to the mills and got hired from the mills, but I didn't...That was after I got married and... No, before I got married I went down there. And after I got married I didn't have no time for the mill. My children were growing up when I went to the mill. My father was wasn't here. He was living with my sister in New York.

D: Okay.

M: You didn't have to have anyone speak for you, like I said, you [unclear].

B: No.
M: If you didn't like the job here you could go next door.

D: Yah. I talked to one other lady last week who said she always used, she always went to City Hall to get her jobs instead of going right to the mills. Did you know...? Like it was like an employment agency. Are you familiar with that?

M: She did. I never did that.

D: You just went right to the mills.

M: I did without a [card] and got in trouble, but that's... I got my first job.

B: No, you went to City Hall to get your working papers. That's it, but you could go in, anyone, in the mill in the office and get hired.

D: Yah. That’s what I would have thought.

M: Unless she went and asked for working papers and if there was any place...

D: I think that she used to get the leads.

M: And they’d maybe call up and maybe they took her like that, you know?

D: I think that was it.

M: But I just happened to be with this girl who was 16, and I asked where she was going and she said she’s going to try to get a job. So I went with her.

D: Yah. Yah.

M: When, when she said 16, he said, yah, we want them for 16. So he said 16 I knew I was out. So he says, “How about you?” I said, “Yah.” (They all laugh).

D: Me too, huh?

M: Yah, but it turned out all right.

D: Uh huh.

M: He was a good boss and he realized, you know, that I was only trying to help. I wasn't trying to do anything wrong, but.

D: So within, within the mill um, did you have time for... like I had asked you a little bit earlier, to think about sometimes a birthday party, or somebody that was going to have a baby. Did you have a chance to do anything like that at work?
B: Well you know, different mills they would, in the summer they would run excursions, remember, on the trucks? They'd have big trucks and they'd run excursions, like to the beach, the mill people.

M: That was in later years, not when I was there.

B: Yah, yah, and they'd have benches all along the big trucks and you'd get on the trucks and go to Revere Beach.

D: Uh huh.

B: And uh, for the day, and then they'd bring you home. That would be a certain mill would do that, but on the weekend, a Sunday or mostly Sundays.

M: Now they didn't have showers and things like they have today.

B: No.

M: We, we made things ourself. We had what they call a hope chest. And we crocheted a lot. And we'd buy a lot, hoping I guess!

D: Yah.

M: That's why it's called a hope chest. But by the time you were married it was really full.

D: Yah.

B: And baby clothes, you had to make your own.

D: Yah.

B: Because there was very little baby clothes in the stores them days. They didn't have the clothes like they have today, or even the furniture was just plain. Everything was just. plain wood, plain this, nothing fancy. No linoleum and things like you have today, no. But you bought the material, like the flannel to make your diapers, because they didn't have the diaper service either. You had to make your own diapers. And of course you'd buy little shirts and things for the baby. And most of those that could sew, they'd make little dresses for the baby. Because everything was, even though it was cheap, it was expensive because you didn't make big money them days. You were lucky if you'd make $10 dollars a week working.

M: You'd get 25 cents to spend.

M: Two could go for the show for one.

B: Yah, 5 cents, 10 cents.

M: Bring your friend for 5 cents.

D: Uh huh.

B: Go around picking up whiskey bottles, sell it to the ragman to get money to go to the show. And rags, pick up rags.

M: 1 cents, 2 cents, it added up.

D: Oh, yah! How long did most of your friends stay out if they were going to have babies and then come back to work?

B: Oh!

D: Do you have a feeling for...

B: Maybe a week and they were right back at work.

D: Really. That short, huh?

B: Yah. I've seen Polish women have a baby and be able to work the next day, have somebody take care of the kids.

D: Would people sort of help her out a little bit?

B: Well the neighbors, yah.

D: Would she'd be able to rest? No, I meant at work. No, at work.

B: Oh, I don't know. Well everybody was really helpful.

M: Yah, everybody helped each other. If the work was bad and your work was good you always helped out.

B: Yah, we’d give a helping hand to everybody.

D: Okay. I'd like to ask you a little bit about first of all your machinery. I'm going to ask you about, uh, were there a lot of breakdowns? And then I'm going to ask you about
what you were expected to do as far as maintaining your machinery. We'll go, we'll get through all of this. And then I'd like to have you think about if you saw a lot of changes in the machinery as the years went along. So, why don't we start with Martha and sort of try to remember was it very frightening when you first went into the mills? Was it difficult to learn? Ah, dangerous? You know...

M: It wasn't difficult to learn, but you didn't get paid. You had to work for almost two weeks without pay to learn. And if you jacked up in that time you didn't get any money.

D: Jacked up? What does that mean?

M: Well if you stayed for a week and then you didn't like the job...

D: Oh!

M: You didn't have any money.

D: Okay, now I understand!

M: So you had to work two weeks to prove you could do it and you liked it. Then you stayed and then you were on the payroll.

D: Okay. Martha, even if you were experienced, would that still hold? Say you went into a new job and you could show you knew what you were doing, would you start getting paid right away then?

M: Oh you'd get paid right away. Yah, you were experienced, but if you were learning something, you had to learn for nothing.

D: Now let's see, you did spinning and dofting. Did you do any other jobs within the mills?

M: No.

D: No more skills. Okay. Did you ever want to try to learn something new but they wouldn't move you or?

M: No, because you were tied, too much tied up with it and the hours were long. You didn't have time to learn anything else.

D: Okay.

M: By the time you got home you were tired, and we did more going out on the weekend then we did when we got home from work, because you were too tired. And you had to be for 9 o'clock.
D: Said who, your parents?

M: Yah

D: Oh.

M: There was a curfew. They blew a bell. You had to be in for 9 o'clock at one time.

D: Would...was this decided by the mill owners, the mill people? I mean...

M: The whole city of Lowell. I don't know who.

D: So everybody did the same.

M: It was the law.

D: Really!

M: Yah, it was a curfew.

D: I didn't know about that. Even if your parents didn't care that you, you know, what time you came home, you just had to go home?

M: At that time all parents did.

D: Yah

M: They don't today. There's no limit to stay out all night. But if you're going to a dance, or something like that, and you could prove your going, well that was all right. You didn't have to be in for the curfew, you know. But you'd be picked up if you were out after it, and your parents would be fined. Your parents were to blame for anything that you did in those days.

D: So you lived in mill housing? We're getting... I'm getting a little away from the machinery, but we can get back to... You lived in property that was owned by the mills? Is that it?

M: Years ago?

D: Yah, like when you were still with your parents?

M: Yes. Yes, it was run by the Boott Mill. It was Boott Property.

D: And your parents had to pay rent to them?
M: The rent. They had to pay the rent. They used to send the man around weekly to collect the rent. You didn’t pay in the mill. You paid to the, an agent they’d say come around and collect the rent.

D: Same with you Blanche?

B: No, we used to pay the lady in the boarding house.

D: Oh, she owned...her husband owned?

B: Well she, the room and board you know. So we’d pay her. And I suppose she made arrangement with the, (M: She paid like we did to the mill, the woman) she paid the mill.

D: Was there any thought about your parents wanting to buy their own house? Saving to try to buy?

B: They didn’t have no money/

D: It was out of the question.

B: Out of the question, yes.

M: It was hand-me-downs then, never mind save.

B: No. They wouldn’t know how to go about it.

M: My first coat went to the one after me. They were smaller. Or they’d put another thing at the bottom of my dress to make it longer, because I was growing. Things were really bad in those days. But nobody minded because we were all in the same...

B: We were poor, but happy. Today...

M: We didn’t see no difference. Everybody was the same so

B: Yah

D: All right. I'll get back a little bit, back to the machinery and we'll see if we can remember anything. Were you warned about the dangers of the machinery? Any...go head Blanche if you remember.

M: No, they told us you know, to watch out you know, the belts.

B: Yah, because there was one woman...

D: Go ahead Blanche
B: My mother told me she was working in the mill, she had long hair and her hair got caught in the belt. Took her scalp right off of her.

M: Yah, you had to wear a net over your head.

B: So they use to wear a net, yah.

M: So it wouldn't get caught in the belts.

B: Then you had to be careful when you were, you had to clean your machines, you know. So I used to clean my machine and got up to clean one of the top part, and the gears, you know, they were going this way. I got my finger caught in it. It's the little finger and I almost lost the little finger. [Laughs] I got scared then.

M: Mine, mine wasn't dangerous.

D: Blanche, what kind of machine was that?

B: That was um, a twister machine, you know? A twister. It was a twister. So I was up cleaning the gears. And the gears were coming around like this and my little finger was stuck out like that. I had a habit of keeping that finger out like that and it got caught in the gear. Whoah! I pulled it out quick. It was squashed. I came down. I seen stars. I came down and showed it to the boss. He said, “Oh my God, what happened?” I said... “Well you had no business getting up there!” [Laughs]

D: Did you have to clean your machine every day?

B: No, I had no business getting up there, but there was something caught up there and then I had to...

D: Yah, that too, why were you up there?

B: I was up there trying to get it out you know.

D: Instead of...

B: Yah, that's how I got the finger. He said, “You shouldn't have done that.” Now, he said, “I'll let you go home and see what you can do about it. So I went home with the finger, showed it to the nurse going out.

M: I didn't worry about the machinery. They had to come looking for me sometimes to see where I was.

D: Well where did you use to go? What were you...
M: I'd go in the rest room and sit down. And somebody else would come in and we'd talk. And then the boss come looking for me. What are you doing in here? Your machine has stopped? [Chuckle]. They wouldn't fire you because they needed the help. But he was kind, he was good. He understood.

D: Yah.

M: He had a family of his own I suppose.

D: Yah. Ah, did your machinery break down often?

M: Yes.

D: Was that a problem?

M: Well especially in hot weather.

D: Do you have, why would that be? Do you have any idea?

M: The yarn would stick. (D: Oh) The heat, (D: Okay) you know, they'd stick and then ....

B: It would break down.

M: They'd put more sprays on the top like for humidity you know, so that the yarn wouldn't break.

M: Then if you opened the windows, if you had a breeze that'd blow them all down. But that didn't worry me anyway. [Chuckles]

D: It didn't stop you.

M: It go, it go, and if it didn't, it didn't

D: Yah. Was your pay strictly calculated on how much work you put out?

M: In some jobs. In mine it did. It was piece work, but there was a clock on the end of the frame. If it stopped you’d stop the clock, stop, but if you kept it going it would add up.

D: Okay.

M: So as I got older and could make more money I paid more attention, but then I got a little more to spend.
D: You could always...did your pays vary a lot from week to week as far as what you'd take home?

M: Well, not too much. About a dollar sometimes. A dollar was a lot, but you know, now that you think of it, it wasn't too much.

D: Yah. Then it was! Martha, with breakdowns, did you fix the machinery yourself sometimes, or?

B: No

D: No?

B: No, they always had, they always had men.

M: They had a loom fixer that did it, but mine was pretty good. [Unclear].

D: Would...when you needed someone to come fix it were they, did they came right away, (M: Oh yah) or did you like stand there for along time?

M: Yah, because they wanted the production out.

D: Right!

M: They had to get the production out. The boss wanted the production. That's why he wanted to check the frame, you know.

D: That makes sense.

M: Sometimes I'd get worried and I'd take off [she laughs]. Then he’d come looking for me. “I know where you were.”

D: When... Would your machine stop by itself at a certain...?

M: Yah, when it was waiting to be doff. It would stop by itself automatic.

D: Okay, Now I, I asked you to think about, as the years went by, did new machinery replace your old? Did you have to keep learning new machinery?

M: No.

D: No. Did you have any knowledge? Like maybe in other parts of the mill they would be trying anything out more modern machines?

M: Never knew it.
D: No. All right. So basically you worked with what you had.

B: Once the machines were put in there, they stayed there. They were well made and they were drilled right into the floor.

D: Uh huh.

B: And into the ceiling, because the belts used to go up and go through one room to another.

D: Okay, I'll ask each of you this. Blanche, I'll start with you. How large was the room that you worked in, roughly how many people were in it?

B: Big rooms.

D: Hard to (--)

B: They were hard to describe. A room in the middle there was hugh.

D: I should say so.

B: Yah, like as long as from one block to another.

D: Uh huh, one street.

B: One street to another, yah. (D: Like [unclear] street.) Because the machinery itself was big. Every frame was a big frame. (D: [Unclear]) And maybe one woman would, would have five or six, or maybe ten frames to run. There might’n be that many people in that room but a lot of machineries. And it was a big, big. You'd go in any one of them, of those mills that’s empty, even down at the Wamesit there you'd see how big them rooms were. They were big rooms.

D: Did you pretty much, were you happy with your bosses?

B: Oh, they were (D: Blanche) pretty good, yah.

D: They were okay. Did you have any um, did you meet like the higher ups? Did they come around very often?

B: Oh they'd come around and look the machinery and uh, and talk about this and that, how it was running, it is running all right or something.

D: So they'd talk to you.

B: Yah
D: Once in a while they'd stop around.

M: If you had any complaint about the boss, you only had to tell the head one (B: Yah) and he would take care of it.

D: Okay.

M: I didn't have any complaint with him. They'd have to complain on me if he wanted to make it.

D: Yah, the other way around. Uh, did you have a feeling that there was some workers who uh, took a lot of sick days. I know you said sometimes they'd walk off a job if they wanted to, but sometimes did they just take (--)  

B: Never, no.

D: Never huh? That wasn't expected?

M: No, because you didn't get paid for when we were out. Like it could be Christmas and if Christmas came on a Thursday, well you were out Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Well you lost three days pay, (D: Yah) which was terrible.

D: Wow.

M: Yah, because the only think you had only a couple of days pay for the following week. And instead of having money for Christmas (--)

Tape I, side B ends

Tape II, side A begins

D: Well I had a reason for asking you about, like were other workers out sick? What I was thinking about is I was trying to get a feeling for a usual day when you (--) In other words, when you went into work did you always know how many machines you were going to be working with?

M: It was all the same machines. Nobody [unclear words].

D: Okay. If they were very short, like say a lot of people were sick, say there was a flu epidemic or something, were you given extra work? They just would shut down.

M: They would shut down. You couldn't, you couldn’t handle any more.

D: Couldn't handle. You were about to the maximum of what you could do.
M: You couldn't take another machine on. And if you were sick you went to the first aid to see if uh, you know, she could help you.

B: What was wrong.

D: Unhm

B: They'd, they'd make sure you that you weren’t sick before you left the hosp, the, the mill, otherwise you couldn't have left it.

M: She had to say you were sick. You couldn't go. If you did then might be fired if they thought you were playing it. (D: Yah) But uh, I know I was, one day I was drinking an awful lot of water and uh, my face was flushed. And the boss came over to me and he said, “Don't you feel good?” And I said, “No, I don't.” I suppose he noticed I wasn't jumping around as I usually did.

D: Sure.

M: He said, “You're going down to first aid. And when she seen me I had a fever.

B: (Unclear)

M: What's when I took the flu. That was during the First World War.

D: During the First World War.

M: So when I got home (--) They were dropping right and left from the First World War.

B: Influenza.

D: Oh.

B: The influenza

M: Yah, and uh, it was hard to get a doctor and everything, but my father got one. And he said, “You'll have to keep her soaked in whiskey.” And uh (--) 

D: Go ahead, tell me about it.

M: I heard him. I said, “I never took a drink of nothing.” “This is one time you gotta be, you’re going to be,” he said. There is aspirin and uh, what was it? There's another name instead of aspirins. They had them in the war. I forget. It was a pill.

B: Quinine.
M: Quinine. Quinine and whiskey. And he said, “Isolate her from the rest of the family.” So they did. They isolated me. I was in a room by myself. They’d come in and you know, wash me and things like that, but none of the rest of the family go it, only me.

D: Umhum

B: And they were dropping like flies all over the place.

M: When I come out of it, many of my friends were dead.

D: Oh.

M: My girl friends, they had died and I was lucky I came through it, but uh, I took sick in the mill like that.

D: During this epidemic did they shut down the mills at all because so many people were sick?

B: No.

M: No, not that I know of.

D: Did they think maybe that you were passing it in the mills?

B: Well, when I was going to school I had to wear a catheter around my neck, a catheter bag, you know. That prevented me from catching it.

M: I was the only one in my family.

B: I’ve got laryngitis

D: Yah, do you want some water?

B: Ah!

M: I was the only one in my family that took the flu.

D: Oh

M: And to this day I get it every year.

D: Really still.

M: Since then. That was 1917.
D: Yah, okay. I've heard (--) Back to while you were at work, I heard about speed-ups. Were you affected by that at all in your work?

M: No

D: Were other people that you knew of? Did you hear talk in the mill?

M: Not where I worked. I used to hear them say in other mills they did it, but not where we worked.

D: Okay

M: Because if they'd speed my machine up I'd make more money. And if they speed it up too much it would break the ends down. So they had to leave it the way it was.

D: So you pretty much knew when you went into work what your day was going to be like.

M: Oh sure

B: Oh yah.

D: Which I can imagine might be nice in a way. (M: Huh?) That might be nice (M: Yah) to know what to expect

B: Yah, you had your frames.

D: What time

B: You worked on it and you knew what you had to do. And the boss never bothered you.

M: If you were out sick, like you said, nobody touched your frames.

D: Oh.

M: They were yours.

D: All right. Did the mills stay open day and night? Were there different shifts?

M: Not nights

D: No

M: No night work at that time. Not in the mills.
B: No

M: Not when I was working.

D: So when you shut down for the day that was it?

M: You were done, yah.

D: Martha, did you (--) I don't think we talked about (--) Maybe we did, but we'll do it again. Um, your maintenance, did you tinker with your machines at all?

M: Did I what?

D: Tinker with your machinery at all, uh, a little bit minor repair work?

M: Nothing

D: You didn't. How about cleaning it? You knew how to maintenance?

M: Oh yah, we had to clean it. It was uh (--) 

B: They showed you how to clean it, but that was it.

M: You had to get the cotton off. If it didn't it would stick to the ends, then it would break the ends down.

B: Yah.

M: So they had what they use to call a board.

B: A shuffle board

M: And you'd push it through like that to get the cotton out. And then when it get to the end, then you'd push it off and push it off into a bucket that would be there. Then you had to clean in between the big roving that would be there, because if it got stuck in the uh, the stem, it would stop it and that would break it again. So we had to be sure now and then to clean it.

D: Okay.

M: But most of the time I'd do it at meal hour, during the hour that I was supposed to be relaxing (D: Uh huh) I'd clean that so the frames could go good so I could take off like you said.

D: Yah!
M: I'd kept that frame going clean, it would run clean. (They laugh) And if I didn't clean it, it would stop.

D: Yah

M: And of course all the ends would come down then the boss would come looking for me, because the ends break down, the bobbin wasn't filling up.

D: Who, who you'd take your lunch breaks with? Were they mostly the people you worked with or (--) 

M: Yah, we all sat together at lunch.

B: Sit along the windows, the windows there.

D: Where would you go?

B: There'd be a bench or something, you'd sit there and eat your lunch.

D: Did you go outside in the summer if it was nice?

M: Huh

D: Did you go outside if it was nice out?

M: No we didn't, because uh

D: Sit outside?

B: No

M: I was up five flights of stairs and that wasn't too good to walk up and down. So I stayed put there.

D: Yah, once a day. Yah.

B: No, we'd sit there and eat our lunch and (--)

M: And all get together and talk.

B: And rest and talk. (M: That’s when we’d get together.) Then when the motors start, you'd get up (D: Then you’d know) and go to work.

D: Okay. Um, you've known each other all your lives. Did you ever work together?

B: No
M:  Nope

D:  You just, it just didn't work out that way.

M:  No

D:  Martha, what (--)  During the war years were you raising your family?  You didn't go back to work when uh, at that time.

B:  First World War?

D:  No, the Second World War I was thinking of.

M:  Oh no.  I was still with my family.  I never went back to work after.

D:  Okay.  Why I asked, because I had heard the money was so good during the war for women, you know, a lot of women went to work because the jobs were [unclear].

M:  Yah, they had night work.

B:  Second World War yah, I worked nights in the hosiery there onnylons, twisting there because they were making stuff for the parachutes

D:  Yah, and it was good money I heard.

B:  Oh, yah.

M:  Yah, they make good money then.

B:  I worked on the second shift.  They had two shifts.  I used to go in at 3:00 and come out at 11:00.

D:  When the war was over were you expected to give that job up, give it back to (--)  What happened?

B:  Well uh, when, when it started to get better they didn't need us no more.  They just closed that part down, you know.

D:  Um.

B:  So I didn't (--)  The war was over I went on something else.  I went on stitching.  I had two sons in the service then.  My two older sons were in the service then.  Then they both passed away now there.  I only got one son, and one daughter left (D:  Umhm) out of the five.
M: My two sons went in the service too. One was in the Marines and the other was in the Army. But uh, my girl, she died at birth, my first baby. I was married four years before I had her and then (D: She died) I lost her. She only lived 20 minutes.

D: Uh huh.

M: Because I had a hard birth.

D: Uh huh. Did you have her at home?

M: Yes.

D: All your children at home?

M: Yah, but it was [unclear]. By the time I got her she only lived 20 minutes.

D: Yah.

M: So we were kind of heartbroken over that.

D: Yah

M: Because we waited so long and that happened.

D: Yah, then you went on to have, how many, two?

M: Two sons, yah. One's out in Colorado now. The other one's here in Lowell.

D: Uh huh. Have you been out to see the one in Colorado?

M: Oh yah, four times I've been out there. It's beautiful out there. Beautiful climate. Healthy and nice. I got a granddaughter out there and a grandson. He's in college in a California, Stanford College out in California.

D: Yah. That's a good school.

M: And she just graduated herself. She’s got a Master's Degree. And my other son is here with three, three boys. I can only have the one granddaughter, and she's out there.

D: Uh huh, uh huh. So you have some family around.

M: Huh?

D: You have some family around in the area.

M: Yah.
D: That's good.

M: I only had the one girl myself and she died, and I have the one granddaughter and she's away out there.

D: Yah.

M: But she's great. She writes to me. She's always sending me something. She’s really nice, a nice girl.

D: Good.

B: My first baby was born in the Corporation Hospital.

D: Was that unusual or were women having (--) 

B: No. Well it wasn't the only one they had. There was the Corporation and St. John's, and uh, Lowell General was still here. Yah, but the Lowell General was a small hospital at the time. I went to the Corporation Hospital, had my first baby.

M: It was unusual. Like she said, we always had them at home.

D: At home

B: Yah, but I, I was living with his folks. So I went to the hospital. I had all my children at the hospital.

D: Uh huh. Was there one hospital? Like you called it, the Corporation Hospital, was that for the workers? Was there another one like for the mill bosses and owners, or was there any division of wealth?

B: No. St. John's, Lowell General, or the Corporation, anybody could have went to it, but I mean the Corporation (--)

M: When you worked in the mill you went to the Corporation.

B: Yah, you worked in the mill you went to the Corporation.

M: Because they paid for it. (B: Yah) If you worked there they paid for that.

B: It was in their name. But then St. John's took over after my second baby was born. St. John's was just being taken, transferred to St. John's.

D: Well.
M: I think we'll go because (D: Okay) I got to go downtown and get a few things

B: Yah.

M: We're going to the Farmer's Market.

D: All right.

M: Nice meeting you.

D: Thank you very much.

M: And as we enjoy (--)