D: … home of Mrs. Narcissa Hodges, doing an interview on her experiences working in the Lowell Mills. My name is Diane Novelli. First of all, can I call you something besides (--) 

N: Cheza.

D: Cheza?

N: Yah, (spells) C H E Z A.

D: Okay, fine. Thank you. Um, I'd like to know a little about your family background, where you were born, and where you grew up.

C: Ah, you mean in terms of uh, what nationality?

D: Umhm.

C: All right. I'm of Italian extraction. Both my mother and father migrated to this country, or pioneered to this country from Italy. And uh, then I was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts. And at age one I moved to Tewksbury, Massachusetts. My mother and father bought a farm. And I went to the Tewksbury schools (D: Umhm) until age thirteen. And of course those days were not days of plenty. So we all had to work. So the only way you could get work was to go into the city, in Lowell to get work in the factories.
D: Okay. Let me ask you before we start into your experiences in the mill, did your parents come over here originally to work in the mills? Had they had textile experience?

C: No. My father originated here due to the fact that he had a brother, relatives in Haverhill. And they set up the Fantini Baking Company. So they (--) Why he left Italy was that he didn't feel that he could do as well there as he could in this country.

D: Umhm.

C: So that's why he came. He came here, and he and two brothers set up that baking company that is still in the Fantini name in Haverhill, but not, has anything to do with our family, you know.

D: Okay.

C: He gave that, that up to (--) He sold his share to his brothers so that he could come and buy a farm in Tewksbury.

D: Okay.

C: He was a landowner in Italy and he wanted to be a landowner in America.

D: Did your parents meet over in Italy, or did they meet here?

C: My father came to this country when he was eighteen. And he went back over there, and when he did he met my mother and married her, but he was only over there about a year (D: Umhm). Then he came back to this country.

D: Okay. Do you have brothers and sisters?

C: Oh yah, I had two brothers and five sisters.

D: How um, are you one of the older ones?

C: I'm the oldest girl.

D: Okay.

C: My two brothers were older than I.

D: [Unclear]. So when you came to be about thirteen (--) 

C: When, when I became thirteen I had to leave school and help my folks. So that's when (--) First, first I went and worked in a shoe shop for a summer or so, but I didn't like it. Ah, then there was a family nearby here that had some girls. Well they worked at the New Market Manufacturing Company, what used to be on Market Street where the,
where the complex is now? Where the old age home or low-income, or whatever it is, but that was the Lowell Manufacturing Company. And at that time if you didn't have somebody that you knew that could train you they wouldn't bother to hire you.

D: Umhm.

C: Okay.

D: Umhm.

C: Because they just didn't have any training programs. And it was not difficult to find anybody, you know, to train you, because everybody knew someone, you know. And so I (-- One of the older girls that lived around the corner down here trained me.

D: And what kind of job did you do?

C: I was, she trained me as weaving.

D: Oh, right off, right from the start.

C: Right off the bat, they train you as weaving. And then, and when you started, when she started training me at that time this is (-- I'm going back let's see, I was born in 1914 so that could, that's around 1927, 28, right around there. At that time they only used to run six looms. So we trained on six looms. So they, oh I don't know, they trained you for two, three weeks. And then the person that trained you would allow you, she'd give you a loom, you know, and she'd allow you to work that loom to see just how long you could go. And then the supervisors would take their information from the person that was training you, and you did not get paid for training. And the person that trained you didn't get paid either. No one got paid for anything, but when you were ready to leave, the person that trained you felt that you were ready to leave, (D: Yah) she would submit your name into the supervisor. And uh, of course when they did bring you in to train you, you were pretty sure of getting work there. Not always were you sure of getting work there, but I did. I got work there.

D: Okay. Let me ask you a couple of questions. How old was the person who trained you? Was she (--)

C: Oh, she must have been uh, she must have been about (--)

D: Just roughly.

C: About five years older than me.

D: Yah, had she been there quite a few years?
C: Oh yes, yes. She was there because she had older sisters and the sisters were in there ahead of her. She had older sisters. Sisters maybe ten, fifteen years older than she was. In fact, she was the baby of that family.

D: And how long did it take you before they let you on your own?

C: Well I was on training for about three weeks with her. Then they put me on one loom and I worked that one loom until they felt that I could go on to two.

D: Umhm.

C: And three, and four, until I could get up to six.

D: Roughly, how long did that process (--)?

C: Oh, it took about uh, six months.

D: Really.

C: Five or six months.

D: Were you getting paid when you finally went on to one loom?

C: Yah, we, we'd get paid, but my first week's pay was four pennies, (D: [Chuckles]) because they had um (--) You know it's very hard to work in silk. The weather, silk reacts to the weather. Uh, it uh, if it's damp and wet, too wet, it reacts to that. Uh, if it's dry and it's too dry, you know, like when you comb your hair (D: Umhm) and it's dry, and you know how it flies like that? Well you could never do anything with silk when that happens. It would balloon out, you know.

D: What could you do? Was there anything you could do to prevent that?

C: Well they had what they call a system, they call a humidifying system. And they used to spray you know, but it was very hard. You used to have to have weather per se, uh, seventy-five with a relative humidity of about maybe, maybe about fifty-seven to sixty, in order to get that combination to where those threads would lay without any not too damp and not to dry you know, you got that combination. (D: Umhm) Because when you sheds you open up, you know, they open up like that, they have a shuttle that goes in and then the harnesses close in the pick, you know, it goes one pick at a time. So uh, that was a reason they only got four pennies, because uh I was only, you know, I was only a new weaver and uh, I made a lot of seconds. And if you did make seconds they used to penalize you. They'd give you what you call a pink slip.

D: Umhm.
C: And uh, they'd charge you so much. So they took back all the pay I made that week, but four pennies. It was a disgrace, but I brought them home anyway.

D: Um, at this time what was the situation in your family? Had your brothers left home?

C: No, no my brothers, one (--) My oldest brother was, when my, after my mother had him she went back home to Italy to visit her folks, and she left him there.

D: Umhm.

C: Then she came back and she had my youngest brother. And uh, so he was only fifteen months older than myself. And uh, he didn't go to the mills. There was a dairy farm, you know. So he went to the dairy farm and he stayed there until he eventually went into uh, boys work, you know, mechanic, stuff like that, you know, farming. We, we did farm too. You know, we farmed. What spare time we had between mill, we farmed.

D: Umhm.

C: And uh, so.

D: Were you the first one into the mills then?

C: Yes.

D: Yah.

C: Umhm.

D: And it was with your parents' approval? They knew about it?

C: Oh yah! Umhm. They knew about it.

D: When you were thirteen you said you went into a shoe shop for a little while.

C: Yah.

D: Um (--) 

C: Well see, I was thirteen. I went into a shoe shop for a little while. At that time it was against the law to go to work before a certain age, okay. So if you could work, if you attended what they called Continuation School for one afternoon a week. So I had to do that until I was sixteen.

D: And I believe, were your hours shorter than normal? How long did you work there?
C: No, I, I worked the regular shift, because we used to start per se, if you started at five o'clock in the morning, you worked uh, only uh, because I used to, we used to, if you worked in the morning shift you used to have to work on Saturday morning. Then they'd shut down on Saturday morning and start Monday morning again, you know.

D: Umhm.

C: But then after awhile they didn't shut down at all. They went right around the clock. No, uh, we worked from uh, six to twelve-thirty or one, or something like that, or one-thirty. Then we got out and I used to go to Continuation School.

D: Okay. I'd like to talk more about your weaving in the silk mill, because I think that's really what we want to hear about. And I can picture, I know what one shuttle looks like from across.

C: Umhm.

D: How many shuttles did each of your machines have? Did they have just one?

C: Oh no! We had looms that had four.

D: All of your looms had four?

C: No, not all of them. The Jacquard looms, what they call a Jacquard looms had four, because there was, you see that plaid there now that he's got on?

D: Yah.

C: Well years ago the threads were dyed before they went into a warp, what they call a warp you know, in one of those big wheels. And say they wanted to make that pattern there. Well they first, before a warp is made it goes to what they call a warper, and it's got a big creel. It's like a big screen you know, and it's got a, you would put so many red ones, and so many blue ones, and so many green ones, and then repeat the same thing over again. Then when you draw these threads from the creel into what they call a reed, you know, they narrow it down. And they'd bring it down and they uh, put you know, whatever, ten red ones, and ten black ones, and three white ones, and two yellow ones and so forth. Then you'd start the same pattern over again, but you got to be very, very careful that you have the same amount of ends each time, because if you don't then your material becomes, you know, a second. Then, now that shirt there I would say has blue. Now that shirt was woven that way. That's an old time shirt. Now it has a yellow shuttle, then a green shuttle, a red shuttle, and a black shuttle. So that had four shuttles.

D: Yah.

C: And you had to always be very careful, because you know the loom stops by itself. It has what they call a feeler on one side. And that feeler has to be set so that when there's
no thread in it, it touches the wood part of the bobbin and it stops the loom automatically. And then you got to be sure to put the shuttle back in the same place. And you got to be sure what color you want, because if you don't then you'll have to stop your loom and you have to pick out the things that are wrong, and you have to start it all over again. And if you don't start it right, you're going to make a mark, starting mark of some kind and you will make a second. That's probably a second. And I think at the time uh, what they call a roll, a cut is what they called it. I think at that time it was allowed to be only about a hundred yards. And you were only allowed maybe, ah, not anymore than a half dozen imperfections, and then after that it becomes a second. But it was a second grade one, two and three you know, and that's how they, that's how they did that.

D: On the silk looms did you have, did you tend to have a lot of patterns? I would, I picture silk as just one, mostly one [comment unclear]

C: Um, the only time you had a pattern is when you had four shuttles and you had a Jacquards.

D: Umhm.

C: You know? Then you had (--) The Jacquards, when it had patterns like that, they had like a cardboard box like with little holes you know, cardboard, and the chain would go up and down, you know, on the head of the loom. And that's also another thing, when you made a mistake, you used to have to roll the chain all the way until you come to the right spot, you know. You really, you had to know if you didn't know the Jacquards was very, very hard. And of course them days the Jacquards were run by belt. You know, they had the belt that used to run you know, the pulleys. And then later on and years went by they, they had more motors. And of course later on and the years went by they simplified them also, you know, but they were really difficult when they first started. There was very few people that really, but I liked weaving. It was intriguing. It was ah, you had to give it a lot of attention, and if you liked it you could do it well. (D: Umhm) And if you didn't like it, it was a hard job. Many people never became weavers. I taught, I taught I don't know how many weavers, because later on you know, when they used to give us pink slips, a lot of people didn't like the idea of paying the money back, because they felt it wasn't their fault, you know. And they kept all these pink slips. And finally they, they ah, pushed, you know, for (--) Well you got, the people started getting so that you know they'd go to their representatives and they went to the politicians you know. And of course these politicians as they kept coming up from one generation, ten years and ten years later, well that didn't, they didn't stay too long. That didn't last too long, because they finally got to where they passed a law that they just couldn't do that.

D: Take it so long.

C: Take it. So some of the people had saved their pink slips and they got all that back money, every bit of it.
D: Okay. Um, even a good weaver would have, would a good weaver have some seconds? Would every weaver have them. You just couldn’t help it?

C: Oh yes! Oh yes. Yes, a good weaver would have some seconds, definitely. Uh, because (--) 

D: What would be the number? Was there sort of [unclear]?

C: Uh, it all depends. Like this time of the year when the weather begins to change, right? In the spring when the weather begins to change, that's when anyone could have seconds. You could be the best weaver in the block, you'd still have seconds, you know. Not as many, because you would learn these little tricks that would help you, you know. And uh, and you wouldn't have, a lot of people would uh, spray, you know spray it [unclear]. You can't spray too much, because then it marks your cloth, you know. They'd spray a little water or ah, they'd uh, a lot of people used to spit in their shuttle, you know, on the fur of the shuttle. They had fur on both sides. (D: Umhm) They'd spit on the fur of the shuttle so that the threads wouldn't balloon.

D: Did the mill, because due to the weather, just due to those conditions, did the mills ever cut back on work? Or you know, did they say, well this is a bad time to (--) 

C: Oh no, no, no. They didn't cut back on it or anything. I mean you know, it would, the machinery would stop more often. I mean they would get less work, you know. The piece, because they went on piecework. And uh, they didn't cut back on it. The machinery would stop more often and they would get less. You would make less money, you know. But it's not because they did it. It's because, it’s the weather that affected the running of the mills. But as time went on, they, they ah, the systems were you know, they were updated all the time you know, and they had just updated them until it didn’t make any difference what the weather was outside toward, toward the, toward the end it was just perfect. You know what I mean? You'd enter a weave room and it would always be, be uh, you know, like as if you'd put, if you were in a house and you had steam, you know, if it was real dry, they’d have stem you know, to get a combination of both, you know.

D: Yah, that’s. I'd like to cover the changes you saw over the years. What I need to know is how many years you stayed at silk weaving?

C: Oh I was in it for about twenty-five years.

D: Okay. So you saw many changes.

C: Well uh, yeah I did. We started out that we’d run six looms. And then, you know, they had what they call a pick clock. (D: cannot comprehend, speaks too softly) That, that's a pick clock and they had, it has, it's like a little meter, you know, and it has shift one, shift two, and shift three, you know. So when shift one comes in you'd turn it, you'd turn the little pointer to one, and that means that that loom was going to register on that
first, first pointer, you know, to one. And uh, that's, that's how they, you know, made up the pay. Because then they would have an office girl go around on Saturday, Saturday noontime, whenever we'd shut down, these people working in the office, they would have special people, you know, for the weekend, to go and they would read all these meters. And uh, then they would set your pay up by that. And different materials, you got different price. If you were making just a plain taffeta, say like that, which was very simple and very fast, that was less money. But if you were making per se the heavy taffeta, the heavy satin that they used to use in wedding gowns, well you didn’t make as much as that, because that really was hard. You know I mean? There were many picks per inch. I forget what it was, a hundred and some odd picks per inch. It was way up, you know? Of course they were making, they were making satin, which is a very delicate cloth, very, very delicate. And uh, and the same time as we were going along they speeded the looms up. The newer looms, you know, kept coming with new speeds in them, new gears and they took it away from pulleys, and they went to motors, they motorized them. And uh, they uh, they gave us more than six. They finally gave us seven, and eight, and we, we went right up the ladder to about twenty-four looms. And that's, you know, and it was possible to run. Because uh, see at one time those looms only had one shuttle, but when they discovered that Jacquards loom with four shuttles could go so many minutes longer because it had four shuttles to work, right, they discovered they were better off with a double shuttle loom. So they put two shuttles in. And a bobbin that is filled with rayon or silk would last you twenty-five, twenty-five minutes anyway, you know. So if you had two bobbins, that thing would last you forty-five minutes, you know. I mean ah, forty, fifty minutes easy.

D: Yah.

C: So that they felt that that lasts forty or fifty minutes you know, that would give you a chance so that you could operate twenty-four looms.

D: Okay, I have a lot of questions just from what you’ve said. First of all, even when you started back on the six looms and as it increased, as a worker that, if you had seniority and skill, did you have a choice of what materials you were going to work on? Like you said, the taffeta verses, that’s easier, or did they tell you exactly what to do?

C: Oh no, you had to do what they told you.

D: Okay. Was there any preference to the older, more skilled workers?

C: No.

D: Given? You just did? Okay. And my other, another question is, because you had more than six or eight looms to watch, um, did they tend to mix the types of material so that like your time was a, like some were easier, some were harder so that your time you know, you know so that the total burden you had to do was small possibly?
C: Well the only way, the only way that the materials got mixed, there were some looms that they couldn't put some styles on, because they weren't wide enough, or they couldn't do it, you know and uh, but you see when they used to change styles, they used to change, say verses, they didn't say, well I'm gonna give this one so many and that one. That's not the way they did it. They needed to change the style. They needed that material right away. So what they did is, the first loom that the warp ran out, they would put the new style on, and so forth and so on, until they got all of that, you know. They didn't even out the styles, say we put uh, three here and three there, or three over here. They didn't do that.

D: At times then would some weavers have a heavier workload than others?

C: Yes, because (--) And then after we went along, you know, after, as years went by and they realized that there was dissatisfaction, because as people got to the point where they had a little bit of money and uh, there were more jobs around and all this and that, well they started, then they started speaking up and the dissatisfaction started to surface. And of course that's when the NRA came and that was an awful dissatisfaction you know. Well that all started to surface. And of course that's when the NRA came and that was an awful dissatisfaction you know. Well that all started to surface. So they compensated people by paying so much for this style and so much for that style, so much for this style and so much for that style. And this is how they compensated people. This is how we started getting a little recognition. So if you did have per se five, four, five looms that had a harder material to make, you were compensated for that because you were giving you more money per hundred picks.

D: That's what I thought.

C: For that (--) 

D: Yah, okay. Uh, as your work load started to increase because of the new machinery, the double shuttles and things like that, (C: Yeah) um, well what I was going to ask you, you started to talk about worker protest, was the workload increase accepted, or was there some organized protest?

C: Well, there was ah, as the workload increased it had to be accepted if you wanted to work. I mean you just uh, you couldn't say no, because if you said no, they'd just tell you to go home.

D: Okay. Do you remember a union? Any union activities [unclear]?

C: The only thing, the first thing that I remember is the National Recovery Act, the NRA. I think I have a pot boiling on the stove.

D: Oh, okay.

C: I had greens here.
[Tape was turned off, then on again]

C: I should have kept going.

D: No that's okay. It doesn't matter.

C: [Unclear]

D: No, that’s all right. So tell me about the NRA, National Recovery Act.

C: The National Recovery Act was during the Roosevelt days. Um, they went out on strike. You know, they wanted to get the union in and they refused to bring it in. And we went out on strike. And I don't know whether you have ever saw any pictures of it, or if you ever read about or anything, but anyway, anyone that belonged to the National Recovery Act, the NRA, they all got these white capes with the red lining. I don't know whether you remember it or not.

D: No.

C: But anyway, Market Street was like ah, like a rug of white capes and red linings. And we wore the white capes. And you would, the white capes, you know, come here and you'd, like the nurse's cape almost, you know. And you'd take one side of it and throw it over your shoulder so that the red would show through. Well anyway, that was ah, that was when they first started, you know, to get the union and that was the only way they, we all got into the union. That was the only way we got back in.

D: Was this just at your mill, or all, most all of them?

C: It was all over.

D: All over?

C: Yah, National Recovery Act. That was all over.

D: Okay.

C: And that was uh, Roosevelt was the first one that you know, brought it. He was the one that originated it, you know. And ah, oh I'm telling you, it was really something. They broke every window in that mill.

D: Did you, were you proud of this? Did you agree with what was going on?

C: I was right out there with them.

D: Yah.
C: Going on after they made me work hard and they made me, give me four pennies the first week, now I'm going to break a window too!

D: Okay. Specifically can you remember what some of the protests were? Demands, what the workers wanted?

C: Better working conditions, you know. Ah, now, and of course supervision. It was all right if you had a half way human person, but you know, in supervision you don't always find that. And ah, it was just demanding all the time. Demands, demands you know. And of course the working conditions you know, were bad and they'd give you more and more work. And it (--) Then of course they compensated you by you know, giving you those different styles and so forth and so on. But they would never, you know, it wasn't such a thing as you'd get a raise every six months, or every year, or something like that. No way.

D: How about other benefits at that time? Vacation and sick time?

C: They didn't have any.

D: Sick time?

C: We didn't have any. No benefits.

D: Do you remember roughly what your take-home pay would be then?

C: Well, uh, I think around fourteen, fifteen dollars a week, you know, after I got started.

D: And as a weaver was that pretty high?

C: Well at that time it wasn't uh, it wasn't bad. But then it seems like weaving, you know shoe shop work, people, fancy stitchers in shoe shops and stuff like that got more money than a weaver. But then weaving seemed to have you know, picked up and people began to make better money. And that was the reason for them, for the textile mills to attract more people than the shoe shops, because they started giving more money. See, this is how (--) The business people that owned the business, this is how they got their help back.

D: …for twenty, or twenty-five years. Was it always at the same place, or did you move around?

C: No, I moved (--) I started at the New Market Manufacturing Company and I worked there for about ah, two or three years. And of course New Market Manufacturing was a large place. I don't know how many hundred people worked in there. And it’s always
harder to work for a place with many people, because competition among people is much greater. And ah, not only that, if you weren't in the know, or a supervisor, or a foreman, or so forth and so on, you never got the chance you really deserved, you know. And so ah, for some reason or another I was going (--) There was another mill, Wannalancit Textile was starting up. And a man by the name of Alan Larter was the owner of it. And he at the time was looking for people to come to work for him. And ah, I don't know what happened. They used to have layoffs you know, at the other mills. So they had, they had a layoff I think. I think I got laid off, but of course we didn't have anything you know, ah like social security or anything like that hadn't been started yet. And ah, they ah, they were going (--) Oh, and I went to work somewhere, oh ah, yah, I did. They had a layoff. So I went to work on Jackson Street where they made jackets. And ah, I was in the inspecting department there for awhile, but I had been a weaver at the New Market Manufacturing. So one morning when I rode in with these people, I was standing in the hallway and I thought, I thought to myself; I do hear looms, you know. And ah, so I, you could see through a crack in the door you know. I could see them. And I said, “gosh, I'm going to find out if I can get in there,” you know. So I did! You know somebody came by and I asked him you know, were they looking for help, that I was a weaver. And they said, “yes.” So they told me to come back you know, the next morning. So the next morning when I went to work I left, just for a few minutes, I left because it was on the same floor. I left where we were making um, the jackets for Wolf's or, his name was Wolf, Wolf's Manufacturing. I left where they make the jackets and I went over, over to the Wannalancit, you know. And they hired me right away. I didn’t even bother going back to the jacket place. So they hired me right away and I went right to work, you know. And ah, and he was just starting out, Alan Larter was. So where I was already a trained weaver, that was ah, that was a plus for him, because he didn't have to train anybody you know. And then he asked me if I knew other weavers you know, and I told him, yes, that you know, we started in there. So then I had three, three, no two other sisters that were weavers.

D: Had you trained them?

C: Yah, I trained.

D: Yah.

C: I had four, but I had one sister was too small for a weaver. So Alan Larter had to use her for something else, you know. But I did, I trained them all (D: Um) and many others.

D: I was going to ask you that. Through the years did you train a lot?

C: Many others. In fact, I got paid for training people afterwards. Alan Larter paid me two extra dollars a week each time I had, I was training a weaver.

D: [Unclear]
C: Until I, I ah, like I say, it is a job that you have to like. In order to like it, and I did, I liked it because it was ah, it's a very um, it's very difficult. You have to like it in order to want to do it. And I trained a lot of people and ah, and ah, there are ways of looking at cloth that you can pick up imperfection just like that. You don't even have to have a good eye if you know how to, you know, how to walk at it, walk at it and shade it, just at the right shade. You can see anything. You can see the difference in shades, even whites, you can see all the difference and everything else. So I was, I liked it and I did it well and everything. So I finally became what they call a weave room inspector. To pick out anything that was coming through that wasn't right, as a second. And ah, and I did that for many years.

D: As an inspector do you walk around?

C: Oh yah.

D: As it's being weaved?

C: Yah. Yah, you walk around.

D: Yah.

C: You walk around and ah, as you walk around and you know, you have to have a light. You know, you got a light with you. And if you see something that's difficult really, you know, then you use the light. You need a strong light that helps you out, too. But ah, you keep walking around and ah, and you know weaving is funny too, you know. Ah, you know the higher the building goes the worse it is for a loom.

D: Why was that?

C: The higher the room, because as you go up with looms with the building, ah, there's a certain give you know, to a building, okay.

D: Okay.

C: And when a lot of machinery is going, especially looms and their banging back and forth and they're going this way at the same time, they begin to synchronize. And when it synchronizes you get what they call bars. And when that happen you're going to have to stop a few looms you know, and start them over again so that they won't synchronize. And sometimes they go for quite a few hours before they'd start synchronizing again, you know. And ah, but then after awhile they realize that and ah, they would situate their looms you know, according to the way the building you know, was made, and which way would be best for it so that the building wouldn't sway you know. You you wouldn't think that to be, but it is.

D: Could you feel that walking around in it?
C: Yes, umhm.

D: I never knew that. Um, back to when you were a weaver, before you became an inspector, did you set up your looms yourself, or did somebody (--) The original pattern, like.

C: Oh no, you had (--) A loom fixer does that.

D: Okay.

C: Loom fixer does that.

D: I'm not sure what I'm trying to ask.

C: And ah, then the pattern is (--) You're talking about say (--) The pattern has to be done by what they call a drawing-in girl. The pattern in a loom is in your heddles, in the harnesses. That's where the pattern is on your loom. And then it, naturally it follows into the reed and onto the lathe, and onto the, to the weaving part of it, you know. Ah no, that is done by a pattern maker, and that's a loom fixer. And ah, and then they have regular patterns. You've seen these patterns. These little papers, you know, (D: Umhm) with the little squares. Or [unclear]here, and you know, you mark the squares. Well then it is put onto the heddles and you have, say you have ten harnesses. Well you might have to put one end on the first harness, and two on the second, and then maybe you'd skip the third and go on to the fourth. It all depends what pattern you want to make, you know what I mean? And that's how they create this pattern. It can be a cross pattern, or it could be dots and dashes, or it could be little rows, it could be most anything, but that's how they did that.

D: Okay. So how long would it take you, one of your looms would be shut down while this was being done?

C: Oh well, when they, when they go to do that, I mean when they do things like that ah, they don't shut your loom down too long. Ah, they have these, this is already all drawn in and everything else. And all they got to do is just take out what runs out and put that one right in again, because you know, they like to do that as fast as possible. Ah, they want to do that as fast as possible because they want to get the yardage out. They do not want to lose any time. But as (--) They used to have layoffs, you know. And if they didn't have any orders and they had layoffs, well ah, they would let you stay there until all your looms run out. And then when you got down to only one or two, they, they just wouldn't keep everybody in, you know. They would let ah, a person stay in and let them run, run them all, you know.

D: Yah, yah.

C: And they wouldn't even, sometimes they wouldn't even let the weaver do that. They'd let the what they call a smash piecer. You know a lot of times, if you have two shuttles
they meet and they rip the whole thing out, right? Well you see the weaver doesn't have time to fix that. So they had what they called smash, smash piecers, you know. They, they're the ones that take care of that for us.

D: Would, would that traditionally be a man's job?

C: No. The smashpiecer, no.

D: Another woman. (C: Another woman) All right, um, I want to ask you about weaving as, was it traditionally mostly done by men, or a mixed, or mostly women?

C: Well, well it was done by mostly women in the day time. And of course at one time it was against the law to work women nights. So the night shift was always a man’s job. And I think the only time that law changed was during Second World War, I believe.

D: Uh huh.

C: Because when they came in with ah, with the idea that a woman could work the third shift because all the men were taken away, you know. And of course the women did take over in the majority of all jobs. We even took in the slashing, which was always a man's job.

D: What is that?

C: That's when they take the materials and they put ah, a sizing on them so that the materials won't separate, you know.

D: Okay.

C: But that's what that is.

D: Was that a man's job because it was hard to do?

C: It was heavy, it was hard and it was done by a slasher, which ah, is very, very hot. I forget what it was, boiling. Oh it was hot, two-hundred and oh it was real hot, you know. It just, because by the time the threads went into this, this ah, sizing, its like a starch, but not really, you know what sizing is?

D: Yah.

C: It's put on material. Sizing and it comes out of there, and goes on to these hot tanks, you know. But the tanks have to be, uh the first one is not going to be as hot as the second one you know, and by the time it gets to the end, it's so hot sometimes you can't even touch it. You know, it goes on to the big beam, you know. It just uh (--) So it really is.
D: Okay. When you were weaving, were you expected to do maintenance on your machines, and did you fix minor breakdowns and things like that?

C: Well that's, that's another thing that, you know, it's just like I suppose any other occupation. That you can learn how to do some things so as to keep your machinery going rather than stop. They never wanted to see a loom stop, because once you stop a loom you're going to make a bad mark, you know. But if, if it's making a bad second, you have to stop it. Ah, say if your, if your mat (--) If your filling, which is in the shuttle, is loopy, well you have to stop it, because it leaves little loops you know. Ah, but yah, you do. You can um, you can adjust your own shuttle sometimes, because it has a little screw and a little spring that sometimes might get loose or something. You can if you know how. A lot of people did not attempt it, but a lot of people never became weavers.

D: Um.

C: I mean I've taught a lot of people and I know some that never could have become weavers. They just didn't have it. That's all. I mean, it's just ah, it's a combination. It's quite a combination, because you've got ah, you must have seen looms run haven't you? All right. You've got the harnesses that go up and down right? And you have the threads coming in this way. Then you have your reed that goes back and forth. Then you have your picker sticks on the side that send your shuttle back and forth like this. Then you have your gears that are picking up. Then you have your material coming down. So you've got a lot of things going at one time, and it confused alot of people. They just couldn't, they just couldn't synchronize with it.

D: I bet when you were teaching weavers you could sort of pick up on who was going to be good and who wasn't.

C: Oh yah, you could. I could tell.

D: You knew.

C: Oh yes. Umhm. Really, you could tell. I mean and it, and a lot of people did not have the knack of teaching somebody. You can't take a person and bring him onto a set of looms and try to teach that thing all at one time. You confuse him. So the first thing to do, just one thing, is to teach them one thing until they've got that one thing down pat, so pat they're sure of themselves, they can do it with their eyes closed. Okay? So that is the first thing, was to change your shuttles. And then the hardest thing that people had in weaving was the breaking of the ends on, on the warp side. The breaking of the end in your shuttle is not that bad, because you can find the pick and everything else, you know. That isn't that bad. But it's the breaking of the ends on the warp side when they have to put their hands in the heddle you know, and get the hooks and bring them through and so forth and so on.

D: Umhm.
C: They had a hard time doing that. That was their hardest thing, you know. And then ah, after you got them (--) Once you get them through that and you know, you train them, and it's easy for them if they're going to be weavers. But some people never can be.

D: Did you sort of have to suggest sometimes that they think about doing something else?

C: Oh yah, you know, whenever, whenever I had anyone that I knew wasn't going to be a weaver, (She says to Diane, “go ahead, help yourself.”) I thought, I thought it was best for them to know, you know. And I think if you knew how to tell them it, it didn't bother them, because they could go on to something else. There was always other jobs that they could do. They had drop wiring in there. They had drawing-in. I know a girl who couldn't become a weaver, because she was a great draw-in girl. She was fabulous. And ah, like my sister, she was small, she could weave, but she was too small, you know, to weave. She was too short and too small. So she was a great drop-wire girl.

D: How large was the room that you worked in?

C: Oh it was, it was a good large, a good large room. It was really big. It was ah (--)

D: Roughly how many looms?

C: Oh, there must have been ah, four or five hundred.

D: Was, were you able to talk to the people that you worked with at all [unclear]?

C: Ah, we, we, ah to communicate, after they gave us twenty-five looms a piece, you know that's fifty looms. So that's almost one row of looms. So our communication was mostly done with our hands, you know what I mean? And ah, you finally, you finally could understand each other almost, you know. And of course when we got close enough to one another it was you know, we talked to one another. That is why you will find that most all these people, if you interview them that have been in the weave room, you'll find that they kind of talk loud.

D: Oh.

C: I mean because that's, that's the way they did it.

D: Yah.

C: You know, it's ah, you had to talk above the noise in order to make yourself heard, you know, if you were talking to somebody. But most of the time we did it with sign language. It was almost like being deaf and dumb, you know. I don't know whether I
could even ah, pick up on it. I suppose I could pick up on it if I had to again, but I've forgotten a lot of it.

D: What kind of things would you want to say to each other if you were all so involved in [unclear]?

C: Well, you know, there were times, you know. We used to have a break, you know. And of course them days they didn't have anybody come in, or anything. But there used to be a small place near us. So ah, well we’d say we want a coffee you know, coffee, you know. And they'd take the order down you know, because we didn't have time. We couldn't stop long enough to do that, because you know, if you have twenty-four looms and you have a thread that's only going to last about twenty-four minutes, that means, and then a lot of times the thread would break. I mean that means you had to keep going all the time. There was always something stopped, and you couldn't let them stop too long because if you did then your material would be a second. Because if you let a loom stop too long then you do get a bar, what we call a bar, a starting line. So we used to, things like that you know. And then we'd give them money. And ah, we always got our money in our pocket before we even started in the morning. So one person used to go out. So that one person that went out, they would go out say for one week, you know. Well that person that went out, all the other people that stayed in had to patch in and run that person's work, you know. (D: Yah) So that's how it was done. But you know ah, you know we even got up to where I could make eighty dollars a week. I mean, and that was good money.

D: Good money? Was this before World War II?

C: Umhm. That was good money. I mean it really got right up. And that is why, that's why a lot of people were attracted to weaving afterwards. And the ones that couldn't do it, it was too bad you know, because that's what they wanted to do, but they didn’t, they couldn't. They didn't know how. Ah, they couldn't learn. They just could not get the idea that they was going this way, that way, and that way, you know, they just couldn't get it.

D: I imagine that sometimes that must have been frightening, by the noise and the pounding on the machinery?

C: Um, no, not really. [D: Unclear] I mean ah, the only thing we really had to, they didn't want small children in the weave shed for the fear of a shuttle flying out. Sometimes those shuttles do fly and they can hit you. And if they hit you they can hurt you, you know. And they were always afraid of, always beware, you know, they didn't want any small children in there. If there was any small children that come in they would always have to stay in the back of the room, or in a particular place that they had designated you know, to keep people to where they wouldn't go. They didn’t want anyone walking through a weave room unless they belonged in there.
D: Besides the flying shuttles were there any other dangers? Was your machine basically a safety, ah were there safety features built in? Was it fairly (--) 

C: Ah you would have to be very careful, yes. I mean per se if you had long hair you have to kind of tie it back or keep it, because your hair could get caught into that machinery going around you know. Because ah, see all the looms had a wheel on both sides and ah, they had ah, motors. And if your hair got caught in the wheel, if you had long hair, it would get caught in it and rip it right off.

D: Did you have any accidents yourself or ever get hurt?

C: Ah, no I had a shuttle glance me once in awhile, but not really got hurt in any way.

D: Oh, that's good! Did you have your own, did you need your own tools for what you did?

C: Yes.

D: Yah.

C: We had to buy our own scissors. And scissors had to be ah rounded on the tip so that when you went, you know, and you'd put your scissors with the round tip on the cloth it would slide so it wouldn't cut anything.

D: Oh.

C: You couldn't use pointed scissors, you had to have a headle hook and a reed hook and ah, that's about all you really needed. And you needed, we always had a little comb, you know. So that we could comb the fur inside. It was like real rabbit fur inside the shuttles that they'd put in there.

D: Umhm.

C: And ah, you used to have to have a little comb to comb that out. So that ah, and then you had a pick that was made of ivory. What they call a pick, because if you had say, say ah there was a malfunction in your material and ah, or ah, or harness broke and the harness, the loom, you know the harness didn't go up and down. Well in them threads would lay right on the lathe and they would not be in the weaving part of it. So you used to have to take all that out. So the further down that went, the more you had to pick out, you know. And when you did that, you had to be careful because you had pull everything back. You had to, you know, when you ah, had to break, you had to tear it apart. So you had to spread your things apart and tear it as you go down. And spread it over here and tear it as you go down. And then you took it all out and you got to be sure, you got to be careful that you don't shake any of that threads, because the more shake it the harder you're going to have to bring it back.
D: Did the harness breaking happen often?

C: Oh no, not that much, but some. It all depends, you know. And of course, ah the difficult part of, of looms is, it depends on your loom fixer. Some, some men were brilliant loom fixers and some were not. And this is where ah, you had problem. And you know, the sad part, I was ah inspector for many years in the ah, then I got married and I stayed home because I had my son. And Alan Larter called me up and wanted to talk to me. So I did, you know. And he said to me, he said “you know Chezza, I've got to do something. He says, my seconds are going up he says and I don't understand what it's all about. He says, “What is it that you did.” I went back to work after you know, and ah so I went in and talked to him and I told him. You know, I said you know. I said you know there are some people that are loom fixers, and I straddled two shifts at that time. I straddled the first and the second. And ah(--). So I said you know, that person there was fabulous for this type of fixing. This person was fabulous for that type of fixing.” And everybody had a special thing that they could do better than the next one. And ah, and he said, “Well how come, he said, that you did that? Did you ever tell anybody?” I says, “No, I never told anybody.” Because if this person knew that I was using him for a particular thing, and that person knows you (--) They would have a complete breakdown, right? And then the afternoon guy would come in and he'd be good for something, and then I would give him the duty, you know what I mean. And this guy would be good for something else, I'd give him the duty. So therefore there were all these people that you could use to their benefit not mine, their benefit, because they were all producing and they were all making good money. And then when the breakdown came they couldn't understand why there were so many seconds. I think he said something about he went up to twenty percent seconds. That's bad you know. And ah, so I went back to work and he gave me the job back. And then I got that back it was very nice, because ah, they didn't have to, because someone else had taken over you know. And he didn't have to take me, but he did, he gave it back to me.

D: So as an inspector then you were above the loom fixers? You supervised them?

C: Yah. Well it wasn't so much supervising over them as it was to ah, tag the machine, the loom that wasn't doing the work right.

D: Umhm.

C: And they had to honor whatever the tagging was, and they had to honor it.

D: So you sort of channeled the men to (--)?

C: Channeled, right, right.

D: That must (--) You need alot of tact for something like that?

C: Oh yah. Well first of all you got to like people. Second, you got to use your own head. This you know, you got a head here and you're not going to use it to tell this
person, “Well you can't do it right. This person can do a better job than you.” That ain't going to get you nowhere, you know. I mean and, and it was, it was of no benefit to nobody, and everybody was in there to work, and everybody was in there to make as much as possibly can. And I didn't feel that I should have disrupted it, you know. I felt well, this person can do it very well. So I'm going to, you know. When that person comes in, this needs to be corrected, but it will not make a second. If I knew it wasn't making a second and that needed to be corrected, I had a little slip that I kept back you know. Then when I made my rounds, well I would tag that one. I wouldn't stop it, I would tag it. And naturally the weaver was happy because it wasn't stopped. The loom fixer was happy because it wasn't stopped. He didn't have a lot of work backing up you know, and everything up. So everybody was happy.

D: Yah.

C: And everybody was making money. The owner was happy and he was making money, you know. And ah, and then when, after you know, when I did leave for a few years and he called me in and talked to me, he said, “You never told anybody.” I said, “No, I never did.” He says, “You never even told me, did you?” I says, “No, I never did.” I said, “I didn't think it would be of any benefit to anyone else but me because I was the inspector,” you know. And he says, “I think that's marvelous.” He says, “I think that's marvelous.” He said, “I don't know who I could.” And to this day his family is still friends of mine.

D: It's not like something you can teach somebody else?

C: No you can't.

D: How to deal with people.

C: No you can't.

D: Um.

C: But it gave us a good living, you know what I mean?

D: Yah.

C: Eighty dollars, eighty dollars a week. Around $80.00, you know. Oh some weeks you'd go down around seventy-five, seventy-five, eighty dollars. And there was three of us sisters that were weavers, and my sister Florence was a drop-wire girl. And ah, you take all these people, you know, into one family bringing in that kind of money. And ah, it wasn't during the day that you paid a board, you brought your money home, you know. And it all pooled in. So it gave us a good living. It gave us all a good start. It allowed us all to own property, you know. And I enjoyed doing it and ah, we all enjoyed because there was a feeling, was a very close feeling. It was just like one big happy family, you
know. And ah, and it did give us a like I say, you know financially, it helped us out financially.

D: What year did you get married?

C: I got married in 1945.

D: Okay. So you, you were at the Wannalancit for quite a long time, because you stayed there until you got married?

C: Yah, I stayed there until I got married. In fact I stayed there even after I got married a few years.

D: You went back.

C: Yah, I went back. And ah, then I left there about, I left Wannalancit about twenty years ago. I was about fifty years old I think when I left the Wannalancit.

D: Okay. Um, I'd like to talk a little bit about what a routine work day would be for you. What time did you have to get there? Did you punch in?

C: Oh yah.

D: Were you penalized if you were late?

C: Yah, they ah, they allowed you, ah, if you were late they only allowed you fifteen minutes for the week. (They both laugh).

D: How about you, did you make it? [Laughs]

C: Oh yah, we made it. Ah, the only time that we might have been late (--) See, we used to live down under the power lines. There used to be a big house down there. That's where I was brought up. And we used to have to work this road here.

End of Tape I

Tape II Side I

D: Okay. So you were saying you used to work in the morning.

C: Yah, we had to get up and go to work in the morning you know. And we walked down here, and we'd get the 5:30 bus. And the 5:30 bus would get us in town early enough to start work at six.

D: Um.
C: And ah, then we'd get the bus again after we got out. I think it was about two something we used to get a bus out of Lowell, come back out here and walk back home, you know. And that was to do every day, you know. Of course we used to get, I think Alan Larter gave us two weeks vacation with pay. And Alan Larter set up a bonus, and I think it was one percent of your pay for the first year. The second year it was two percent of your pay, and you went up as far as five percent of your pay for the fifth year, for Christmas. And the last bonus I got was something like four hundred and fifty dollars or something like that for Christmas, you know.

D: Now with a vacation and bonus were other mills doing this, or was something special he did?

C: No. No. Ah see, the union never got into Wannalancit Textile, because whatever the union did, he always raised the pay one or two cents more per hundred picks (D: Umhm) than the other mills did, (D: Umhm) because he didn't want to be bothered with it, because there was a lot of paperwork, and so forth and so on. So he always said that to him it was worth it to keep the paperwork out of it, and everything else. So, and I remember one time, you know. The place began getting bigger and bigger too, you know, and of course it got much bigger even after I left. And I remember one time they wanted to collect for Christmas to give him a gift and he heard about it. So he was a very, very proud man. He died when he was a young man, and then his son took over and his wife, you know, but he was a very proud man. And he called his wife and told his wife to come down, and called me in. So he could (--) She called me in and said that Al did not want the gift. He, he was, he was elated to think that they'd want to give him a gift, but he does not need the money. He's got everything he wants and he thinks you people deserved the money more than he does. And he made me give it all back. [Both laugh] I didn't have it, but the girl that had it, he made me tell her to give it all back. He didn't want it, but he was really overjoyed to think that they wanted to give him a gift.

D: Yah, he sounds like a good man.

C: He was, he was a good man. But ah, God took him ah, I think he was only fifty-eight years old. (D: Yah) It was sad. But he was, he was a good guy. He owned that Wannalancit Textile. And I think that's where that, on, oh what's the name of that street? You know down ah, where ah, Dobroth and Fryer and them boys are in there now. You know down by ah, down by the canal as you come off the highway, down where the Archambault Buildings are, you know? (D: Yah) Just ah, not too far from where the dormitory is for the University of Lowell. Isn't that the male dormitory?

D: It's mixed. That tall, tall one?

C: Yah, the tall one. Yah.

D: It's mixed. They don't separate them anymore.

C: Uh huh.
D: Um. So you say you punched in about six in the morning?

C: Yah. As long as you punched in by six, and boy many times we made it just six.

D: Yah.

C: But we were there.

D: All your sisters worked at the Wannalancit too?

C: Yah, right, they did.

D: Yah, yah. Is that still, it's not still running is it?

C: Oh no. It's been sold. (D: Yah) It's been sold.

D: All right. Um (--)

C: They have the museum in there though. That's where the (--)  Yah.

D: Yah, I've been in there. As an assistant, as a weaver, did you have assistants like ah, younger girls maybe to help fill, to help you to check the looms?

C: Yah. They have what they called smash piecers, you know. There was probably a smash piecer in this room, a smash piecer in another room. Well when there was no work for them, they were, they would walk around you know, and they would ah, walk around and whatever that was wrong, if the loom was stopped, they used to start it. And the loom fixers did the same thing. Some of them didn't. Some, some did. Most all of them did, you know. Not, not continuously, but they all did. You know, if there was something stopped they would start it. So, that was, there was a feeling with people that was different than it is today, you know what I mean. Ah, it seems like people, everybody knew that everybody had to work. There was no question about it, because things weren't that easy them days, you know what I mean? And a lot of it was, and everybody in them days I think was more or less family oriented. You know, we came from a big family, we were very close, we're family orientated. Other people and most anyone that worked in the mill was more than one from each family, you know. And this group here would be family oriented. So we were so family orientated that it spilled over into our work. That carried it right over into work. Whereas today you don't find that. Today you don't find it at all, hardly. You might, maybe some places you might, but you don't find it. So I wonder if we're better off or worst off for it.

D: Right, right.

C: I mean that's, that's ah for the future to find out, you know. But that was the type of, it was just (--) And you know, like every Christmas Alan Larter had one floor that was
C: And he had it sanded and it was beautiful, you know. You didn't even have to wax it. That oil had been in there for years and years. And ah, so he had it sanded. And then he would take some of us after, if we wanted to volunteer we could stay over. And then when it gets right time to Christmas you know, he'd have us go up there and decorate that. He'd buy all the stuff to decorate it and he'd have a caterer come in and he give us a Christmas party. And ah, it was really a good place to work in. The feeling was good amongst the employees. The feeling was good between management and employees, and it was really great. It was really a nice place.

D: During the depression years did you get laid off during that (--) 

C: Oh we got ah (--) I never got laid off but one time. And that's not even when I was working in the mills. And ah, I got laid off at the, at the, well I did get laid off at the Lowell Silk Mill. That was during the depression years when I went to work for wool. But I wasn't out. I wasn't out hardly any, not even, because if you wanted to work you could find work then too, you know, but you had to want to work. And ah, and of course you had to have the attitude that when you went to work you were not the boss. You had a boss over you. So I mean and you had to work, because if you didn't work they wouldn't keep you. And then there was no (--) And ah, of course you know, they would always let go the person that did the least first. There was no such thing as seniority.

D: Seniority? 

C: You know, what I mean. So that's (--) Therefore if you were strong and healthy and could move around, so forth and so on, you had a better chance of being kept on than the person that wasn't as strong and as fast and being there on time. All that, all that counted. And you know, if they're not careful, that's all coming back. You got to watch out. I mean you know we're not all born fast.

D: Um, let me ask you about nationalities at work. You say you're of Italian descent. Did you, did you have a feeling that certain jobs were for certain nationalities, or was it all mixed in by the time you got?

C: Well, when it came to the mills I don't think it had much to do with nationality. I think you had French, you had Polish, you had Portuguese, Italian, you know. When it came to the mills you you were all right. But there were other areas I think of employment that if you were Italian you couldn't break into.

D: Like what? Can you think of any?

C: Well I think if it was, if it was a town, if the town jobs, office jobs, if you were (--) I mean here at Tewksbury Hospital if you were Italian you couldn't get in. No way!
D: The mills were not like that?

C: The mills were not like that.

D: Okay. How about within the mills, certain jobs? Jobs that paid less, or had less status, did those jobs go to any certain people?

C: Oh yah! Even in the mills I mean the jobs with, you know, with English people, Irish people, they would be the first ones to get supervisory jobs.

D: Okay.

C: Very few Italians, or French, or any of them ever got it, you know. There might have been a few French, but not that many. But as far as Italian people, they never got you know, supervisory jobs. They always got the working jobs, because they all were work horses anyway, you know. And the Portuguese people were the same way. They were always work horses. You know, they never got (--) But you take you know, hey I remember the supervisor Charlie Lovitt. That don't sound like no Italian name, does it? Ah, Roy, Joe Roy. I mean these are all English and Irish people, but I always found the English much better to work for than the Irish, you know, at that time. But of course ah (--)

D: Tell me about how you got along with your bosses, or supervisors in general, because you sound like you were a very skilled, valuable employee. [Few words unclear]

C: I always got along. I got along with them real well all the time. I always got along. I was the type of person that always minded my own business. I let do, you know. I did what I had to do. And I knew my job and I knew my place. And that's how I was, you know, brought up. If you know your job, you know your place, you ain't got no worries, right. The only thing that I, that I objected to was if I got in to kind of a[ type], there were sometimes when a supervisor might come along. There were a lot of times I don't know how these people got into supervision, but there were a lot of times they knew less than the people that they were supervising. And that's the thing I objected to. You know, I object to that. And of course when you start objecting to that then it time to move on, you know what I mean. You just don't, because the supervisor is supervisor and they have (--) So when that time came well I figured it was time for me to move on.

D: Did the people move up from the ranks? Like you were a weaver and then you became an inspector?

C: Right.

D: Would that have then been possible to become a supervisor on up?

C: Well.
D: Is that how it worked?

C: Most, as (--) You know in the earlier days you know, if I would have been able to do that in the earlier days, per se maybe twenty years before that, when I first started at New Market Manufacturing, I think possibly you could have, yes. But as time went on you couldn't. [phone rings].

[Tape turned off, then on again]

D: Okay. As a, as a weaver was that (--) I asked you this before, but I'm not sure, was this more a man's job, equal men and women? It didn't matter as long as you did your work?

C: No it really didn't matter you know, but it seems like very few men worked during the day hours. They always worked at night. And of course like I said, women could not work at night until they put an amendment to the law during the second world war.

D: Okay.

C: Then women could.

D: Was there any feeling that the men should get better the better jobs because they had to support families and things like that. Did you ever get, run into that type of thing?

C: No, I don't think so. Not in weaving. I mean most any man that went into weaving, always went in weaving with the idea of going up higher than a weaver. He always wanted to end up loom fixing, or running, or going into slashing, or you know, other things, into the machine shop. Ah, that was their stepping stone to something else. It was almost like a career ladder, up the ladder, you know. That's what was in back of their minds when they took, took that job.

D: That was not for the case for women then. Women didn't become [unclear].

C: No, women didn't have any where to go. The only thing that women could have done was inspecting in the inspecting room. The women didn't have much of an opportunity in the mills.

D: Okay. I just have one more question on the sex roles. You, did you train mostly young girls in weaving, or did you train young men?

C: I trained both.

D: They would train both. It wasn't that they stuck women to the women.

C: No, no, I trained both and they were successful in keeping more women than there were men.
D: Do you think one was better weaving than the other? Did, did you have trouble training the men?

C: Ah, the men were more, ah, like I say ah, they, they, they were more, rugged. They had a rugged hand and so forth. A woman had you know, weaving would almost be in the line of crocheting, weaving, knitting, and stuff like that. You know women could do that. There are some men that are good at it, right? And there are some men that were good in the mill, but they went into other jobs. They went into ah, ah other, knot tying and stuff like that, you know.

D: Okay.

C: They went into (--) Like I say, for them weaving was a stepping stone to something else.

D: Okay. Now were you still at the Wannalancit when World War II started. Did your job change any? Did you get extra hours?

C: Oh yah, we worked over time a lot. And I ran the slasher, you know, because we didn't have people running the slasher. And ah, you could work nights, which I didn't. You know I never, very seldom ever worked. I don’t think I ever worked on the third shift. And ah, but they did have women working on the third shift, you know. First I worked the second shift, but I never worked the third shift.

D: Okay. Did the production in the mill change at all because of the war needs, or did you just continue making the same thing?

C: No, we just continued making the same thing. Of course, another thing with third shift, in a lot of cases there was no transportation, because you know, the buses only ran. So, and so we just didn't have the transportation. So we could only work during the hours that we could get transportation. So some of the people that lived near the factories are the ones that went into the third shift, because the third shift always got a differential pay.

D: So you took a few years off when you got married in 1945.

C: Yah, uh huh.

D: You had your son. And then you went back as an inspector. Um, had things changed in those few years? Did you notice any?

C: Yes they did, they changed, because some of the older people had been working there for years started, you know women started getting married. Some of the older people left you know, and everything else. And some of the supervisors changed. And I don't know what happened. Alan Larter, you know, as he got money he was getting bigger and he
was setting up. So he got a comptroller, and he got a superintendent you know. And all these people that he got, you know, were bringing in new ideas. Some of them he accepted and some he didn't. But during the time that this was going on, that was a transition you know, from one to the other. Ah, there was, there was misunderstanding between the help and these new fellows. Because like I say, I don't mind talking and working with someone that could teach me something, but when, when they're supposed to be over you and they talk and they don't know any more than you do, well that's the time, that's where I draw my line.

D: Yah. There was a textile school in Lowell right? The Lowell Textile School?

C: Oh yah, the Lowell Tech.

D: Did that have any effect on bringing young people into the mills that came out of school, but didn't have experience?

C: I don't know.

D: Do you feel that?

C: I think, I think a lot of, a lot of the students that went to the Lowell Tech were mill workers. And I think it helped them out to some extent, you know, knowing a lot about the mills because it was a textile school, you know. But I think they went there to get educated and I don't think they stayed in the mills. I think what they did, I think the Lowell Tech had a lot to do with getting people into dying industries, and so forth and so on, you know what I mean? The finishing, finishing of the product. And ah, so there was more money in that. You know they went into dying. At one time, I don't know whether you heard about it or not, but at one time they said that this part of the country is about the only part of the country that the colors would come out right due to the fact that the water was what they needed to mix the dyes those days. Whereas now it's different, because you have so many other chemicals that you can adjust your water. You know, if it needs, whatever it needs, acid or whatever, I mean they can add the chemical. But one time they claim that our water in New England here made a brighter color than a lot of others. That's why you found alot of mills that were here. And they (--) The materials they made was beautiful! I don't think you'll ever see them again.

D: Um, did you start to feel the effects of the mills leaving this area and going down South?

C: Um, well by the time the mills were leaving this area and leaving the south, we were prepared for it, because the mill had, you know, it was a struggle, but it was a struggle that had to be accepted. And if you accepted it, you weren't in no problem, you weren’t in no trouble, you know what I mean, you had no problem. Because you know, we had to make a living so it had to be accepted. And ah, and from childhood I was always trained, it's not how much you make, it's how you use what you make.
D: Umhm.

C: And ah, my family, my parents were very thrifty. And ah, so there was no problem when, whenever the mills shut down and left. We had no problem.

D: Okay. You stayed at the Wannalancit until into the sixties I think, right?

C: Oh yah. It must have, easy.

D: And then you went and you worked at [unclear]?

C: See I worked during the Second World War. So, that dog gone fly. I got married in '45. Then I had my son. And then I went back to work. So it must have been in the middle fifties you know, sixties, around there.

D: Okay. And then you went to Lowell Lingerie I believe?

C: Yah, I went to Lowell Lingerie and I stayed there for about nine years.

D: What kind of work did you do there?

C: We, you know it's funny, you know Otto Lehman owned the Lowell Lingerie, but you know Lowell Lingerie was part of Wannalancit Textiles at one time. And the reason it became part of Wannalancit Textile was that Alan Larter made some satin one time for wedding gowns. And the people that ordered it didn't want it, because we had a hard time making it and we spotted it. And they wanted, they would have taken it if he would have dropped per se ten cents a yard, you know. So he came back and he says, “I can't do that.” He said, “I just can't do that.” He got us all together and he told us I can't do that. He said, if I do that I'm going to lose my shirt. So Otto Lehman, he had, he had met Otto Lehman in New York. Otto Lehman is a Swiss fellow from Switzerland. And ah, so he hired him and he made Otto his comptroller. So then Otto, he said to Otto, he said, “You know what we got to do?” He said, “We're going to pull all our cloth back on from the New York market. We're going to bring it back here and we're going to start making some lingerie with it.” So they did. They hired a girl. I think her name was ah, her name was Gertrude Entwistle. They hired her, who was a friend of Otto's, she was just a neighbor of his. While they're in there and they got some patterns, and they put all of this material on the table. They spread it, they cut it up and they started making gowns, and slips, and all that stuff. And he sold it that way and he made a fortune. But then, the stitching plant got to be about fifty stitches. So we were making the materials and sending it into New York. What New York wouldn't buy off of him, he'd pull it back off the market, bring it in and sew it into garments.

D: Umhm.
C: Because he could always, you know, if it's a second piece you can always cut out the second, right? If it's a bad salvage, or something like that you know, you can always cut that out if you're making a gown, you know.

D: Right.

C: So he bought all that back and this is how this man became a multi-millionaire. And finally they got up to about fifty stitchers and, you know, stitching plants are very easy for union to get into. And ah, it's a rough racket. So, but ah, Alan Larter and Otto Lehman together had a brain, a brilliant brain, two brilliant brains together. You know they were great together, and I liked both of them. And ah so, but they had a disagreement. So Otto Lehman decided he would buy Lowell Lingerie and he would accept the union. So he did, he bought it, accepted the union, and he stayed in business right up until the time he died. In fact, I think his business is still going on. Lowell Lingerie is still in Lowell. But he was another good man. I liked him very much. I liked Alan Larter and I liked Otto Lehman. And ah, and then when that happened I went working with my sister in a store. We put up a little clothing store, you know for a few years, and then she had a baby and we closed it.

D: Umhm.

C: Ah, but during the time I was in the store I got a call from Otto Lehman and he said to me, he said “Will you come in and talk to me Chezza?” So I said, “Sure I'll come in and talk to you.” He says, “Will you come back to work for me?” I says “Otto, I don't know a thing about stitching.” I says, “I'm a weaver Otto, you know that. I don't know a thing about stitching.” He says, “I don't care if you know nothing about stitching, he says I'm going to train you.” He says “I just want you to come to work for me, that's all.” Because you know I worked with him too you know when I was weaving inspector. I worked with him, and he accused me one time of being the only person in the whole forty-eight states that he could never find a pattern to me. I says, “No you won't.” He says, “I could tour the forty-eight states and I'll never find another one like you, Chezza.” I says, “No I don't think you will either Otto,” you know. He, oh but he was a good guy. He was a good guy. Just like almost he, you know, almost felt like I was his sister at times the way he'd talk to me you know, he owned the place and he'd talk to me like I was a sister.

D: Umhm.

C: But he was a good guy and I went back to work for him afterwards. And he was real glad to get me. And ah, so I stayed there for while and then I ah, things got a little slow, you know. And I had always thought about going into the state, you know. I said gee, you know, I worked enough for the Federal government now. I said I can get a federal government pension. Then if I go for the state, I'll get a state pension. Because I did want to enter Tewksbury one time and become a nurse, but like I was Italian and it was so hard to break in there. And I couldn't break in. I wanted to be an R.N., you know, but couldn't break in there. And so I had to take another way.
D: Yah, so you switched.

C: So now I'm down in there now, you know.

D: Yha.

C: And this lady that just called up, this friend of mine, she's an LPN there, you know. So I don't mind because when I get ten years, I'll have ten years in next year and then I can retire with full vestment at the state. So I'll get, I already get a Federal pension, you know. So I'll get that pension too, you know. Then I'll just retire. Because me and my husband bought twenty acres of land here, and we built this little house about thirty-five years ago. And ah, now we're in the process of remodeling our kitchen and everything else.

D: Did your husband work in the mills at all?

C: No, my husband's a southerner. He came from a gentleman farm area.

D: Oh.

C: His father was a gentleman farmer. He had several thousand acres of land. And when daddy he died he left us some. And then of course we bought here. And my husband was a barber. He was in the service, and he came out and he was a barber. That's the trade he learned in the service. And ah, he retired about ten, twelve years ago. And he, we run a pigery back here. We have about two hundred or three hundred pigs. We got about twenty-five cows. So we're kind of just coasting along. And I worked in the dietary department. It's very easy. There's nothing hard about it. And I figure I'll work another year.

D: Yeah.

C: Then after that I'll retire, if I find it in my heart to retire. I don't know, you know, us working people never give up.

D: Yah, I just have one more question. Was it hard for you to leave weaving? It sounds like you loved it.

C: I did!

D: You were very proud of what you did.

C: Right!

D: Was it, it must have been hard to decide to, especially even going from a weaver to an inspector where you still were [unclear].
C: Well I was still in the weaving, and the inspecting was more of a challenge than just weaving was, you know. Ah, because there were errors that had to be fixed you know, and it was more of a challenge. So I didn't mind it at all, because I liked it. The challenge that was in it was, I accept it and I didn't mind it at all. Ah, and I look upon the whole thing as a fun time. I liked it and there was just (--) Well maybe it was a good thing I did like it. It was something that had to be done anyway, you know. And I think I would rather, I had worked for a little while in the stitching plant where I had just a short while, just a few, and I had worked in a shoe shop which I didn't like at all. So weaving was something that I liked a lot better.

D: Umhm.

C: It was a challenge. It gave us a good living. It gave us a chance to save. And ah, it wasn't bad at all. I mean not as bad as (--) All right, it was in the mills, but there are just as many bad places today to work in as there was then. I mean I didn't mind it. I liked it.

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

C: I was ready for a change, because everything around me began, began to change and I was ready for it.

D: Yah.

C: I was ready for anything. It, my sister and I put up a store for a few years. Then she didn't have any children. And she'd been married for thirteen years and then she had a little girl. So we closed it, you know. And that's when I went back to Lowell Lingerie. And then from Lowell Lingerie they laid everyone off. And I was off two weeks, and I got the job down in here. They were glad to take me then.

D: Yah.

C: So ah, I've been down here ever since. And I'm not sorry, because everything changed and I went along with the change. You have to accept the change in everything, you know. And ah, I didn't mind it. Broaden my knowledge in a lot of ways. I didn't have a chance to go to school like I would have liked to. But I think all the experience, the practical experience I got in everything broaden my knowledge. And it didn't make me bitter and I love life and I like people. So I'm going to be as happy as I can be from now on. Well that's part of it, but it was great. It gave us a good time. It gave us a little money to buy us some nice clothes. I wonder sometimes if I hadn't seen the best of America. I mean today people don't (--) You'd go downtown Lowell and you couldn't tell the rich from the poor, because poor people, we had three sets of clothes. We had one for the house, one for work, one to go back and forth to work, and your best. So that's the way it worked you know, them days.
D: Was your father very strict, having so many girls? Did he [unclear]?

C: My father? I was brought up by a wonderful, wonderful man. My father was not strict. Yes, I can't say. I'm going to say that my father was very firm, very kind and very lovable. He was great. My mother was a hard working lady. She was a hard working woman. She was a good housekeeper, a good cook, and a good mother, and a good woman, but my father was a sweetheart.

D: Yah. Having so many daughters he didn't put down a lot of rules? He pretty much trusted your decisions?

C: No, when it came to making the daughters probably worldly wise or something, he let my mother do it.

D: Uh huh.

C: And ah, but he loved his girls. He loved them very much. I had two brothers.

D: Yah.

C: And many times his boys (--) My father brought my brothers up like he brought the girls up. He told them that they, you know what I mean? As far as a boy being a boy and not worrying about what he was going to do, that wasn't his idea of a boy being a man. He wasn't um, I remember one time my brother had a difficult time with him, because he didn't want to marry a girl. And the girl thought she had been pregnant or something, you know.

D: Yah.

C: My father said, “I'll break every bone in your body. If the child is yours, you'll marry her.” This, this is the type of man my father was. He said as far as he knew there was never going to be a Fantini that wasn’t going to be without their rightful name. This is the type. He was way ahead of his times. I mean he was never afraid of a smart (--) He always used to say, “Never be afraid of a smart woman. Never.” He says, “A man, a man that is a man is never going to be afraid of a smart woman, because together they can be fantastic.” I'm telling you if he could ever had lived till today and sees what's going on in the political scene, a woman going for vice president. He would say, he would say, “I always told you a man should never be afraid of a smart woman!” See how far ahead of his times he was?

D: Yah, yah.

C: He was just a great, great person. He was a great man. He was loved by everybody that knew him. He would help out anyone. He was a great man. So I've been very lucky. My father-in-law was just, just as equally as great. So how lucky can I be.
D: Yah.

C: I have a son and a daughter. My son lives next door, married with four little girls. Those are my little grandchildren. And ah, my daughter is not married and they're ten years apart. My son will be thirty-eight this year and my daughter will be twenty-eight. But my daughter's got her head in the clouds. She's a lovely girl. She’s got her head in the clouds, because she thinks she's going to be a movie star someday. She's a big girl. She’s tall and she's a big girl. And she's a very smart girl. She never went through college. She only went two years, but I think the reason that was that it just didn't have for her what she wanted. And ah, she just, she’s involved with these short films and all this stuff. I'm telling you, and she's the type of girl, she’s the type that if she makes a hundred dollars she'll spend a hundred and one. And ah, then when she does it forty or fifty times, then she's looking for a loan from her father and mother. She usually comes out on top. She gets it. And ah, she promises to give it back, but very seldom is it paid back. But she hasn't left home yet. So I don't think she will for awhile, not until she gets her big breaks so far (both laugh), so she says. (D: You never know) I don't know. She is a comedian.

D: Uh huh.

C: And ah, if she does get a big break it'll be a comedian they're looking for. So, but she's a brilliant girl. She has a good brain. She's smart, but I wish she could use it in other ways besides the way she's using it. But that's all right, maybe her time will come. I, I think that's probably her problem is that she's never had to worry about her meals, or her (--)

D: It's a different generation.

C: Yah, right.

D: It really is.

C: And the both want to stay home with mom and dad. So mom and dad can't be too bad.

D: Right. [Laughs] I'm sure you're not. Where is your husband, is he out?

C: Yah, he's off.

Interview ends

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