Tape 84.06

P: The date is October eighteenth, and I'm here in Camille Theriault's house and we're going (--) This is Pamela Leman. We're going to be talking about his experiences working in the mill. Okay. We could just start. You're French-Canadian, are you, in your background?

C: No, no, not Canadian, French.

P: French.

C: Just French.

P: French.

C: But I was born in Lowell.

P: Born in Lowell. What about your parents?

C: My mother and father was born in, my father was born in Canada. My mother was born here in the United, in Lowell.

P: In the United States. Okay. Did your parents work in the mill at all?

C: Well my father worked at the Boott Mills. My mother used to work at the Suffolk Knitting (P: Uh huh) up in Lowell.
P: And when did she start working there? Did she work early, or did she start (-)

C: Oh she worked about ten years in her life, I guess. That's about the only, what I can
tell you.

P: And how did your father like her working? Did it bother him?

C: My father worked in the spool room and he was a, he worked on the automatic
winder. (P: Umhm) He worked there for fifty years at least. (P: Yah) Yah.

P: How did he feel about your mother working?

C: Did what?

P: How did he feel about your mother working?

C: Well my mother, those days we had to work. We had to put two to work because we
couldn't live on just the small pay we used to get. And I was the only son for a while.
Then I, my sister came along, and so that was more to feed.

P: So there were just the two of you? Just two children?

C: Yup. Yup.

P: And how old were you when you started to work?

C: I started at the Boott Mills, I was sixteen years old.

P: And what were you doing?

C: I started as a sweeper. I, then I promoted to a roving boy. That was to put the combs
on the frames so that the women would take to put on their machines, on the spinning
frame. And then I used to do that all day long. And then I started (--) My father -in-law
was my boss, Mr Bourgeault. And then I went to, in the supply room for a while. I
started to work on cork-rolls, they used to call it, to, that's a cork rolled to put up on the
spinning frames. (P: Uh huh) And then I used to re-buff them, re-fix them and test them
to see how even they were, ready to go on the frame, because every once a week or
something like that, we had to change. The fixer had to go in and change all the frames.
So they had new rolls to put on the frame, back, you know. We used to take the old one
out and put the new one in. And then the old one, I used to turn them down so they'd be
even. I had like a gauge to gauge it. And if there was a, like a head-space there, I had to
set my machine and re-finish it again because there has to be as even as it could be, you
know.

P: Yes. How did you like your work?
C: Oh, I liked my work very much. I liked my work very much. Then I was transferred from the spinning (--) From that job I was transferred in the supply room. (P: Umhm) In the supply room I worked there for about twelve years. I was, at the end I was a foreman on the second shift. And I had eight girls working for me and a boy.

P: And what did you do in the supply room?

C: The supply room, I used to check the parts when they came in. The people needed some parts from all over the mill, like spinning frames, or card rooms, or twisting rooms or spool room, or weave room. We had all the parts and it was a big, first floor, we were on the first floor as you go into the area. And then we, if somebody ordered some parts and they came in, well, if the truck came in, the delivery truck came in with that part on, why I used to call the one that asked for it or ordered it and we, they shipped it back to the room where they were supposed to. And that's the man, the fixer that was in charge used to put it on, [unclear], or a picket stick or any parts of the weave room for the frames.

P: Can you tell me a little bit about what the social life is like in the mill? Did you have a lot of contact with other workers there?

C: Well, I always got along with the people. We had some nice people, all kinds. They had Greeks. They had French. They had English. You name it, we had it.

P: Did you have any trouble communicating with all the different languages?

C: Well, no. Those days they could speak pretty good English. Some of them weren't, wasn't, but we got along all right. (P: Yah?) Oh yah.

P: Did you have good relationship with your supervisor?

C: Oh yah. I had to. My father-in-law was my boss. (P: Laughs) Part of it.

P: Kind of a prerequisite, huh.

C: Yah. Part of it, but that was all right. Oh yah, and then in the supply room I had, my boss was Johnny Baron. And there was, the big bosses were Arthur [Jennette?] from the office. Those were big shots. Arthur Jennette, Joe Higginbottom, Flathers, the two Flathers, I don't remember their first names.

Mrs. T: (In the background) Frederick, one was Frederick.

C: Yes. One was Frederick and the other one I don't remember. And they were (--) Then I used to communicate with the office for certain papers. They came in and requisition, or whatever. (P: Um hm) I got along. I loved, I loved the Boott Mills because the Boott Mill was very good to me and I (--) But at one time it didn't pay enough so I had better
money down the Merrimack. Well it was a strike. (P: Uh huh) The strike came in. The strike came in and (--) 

P: About what year was that? 

C: Oh I wouldn't know. I don't remember that. (P: um) The strike came in so I had to go look for a job. I went to work in a plastic place up in, Erwin’s Plastic up in Fitchburg. (P: Um) Over there I was, right away I got a, like a floor man. I used to, after the boss, I used to give the work to the people, you know, what they needed. It was station wagon toys, all toys, station wagons. You name it. There was a lot of toys there. So, and then I got laid off. I went to the Merrimack. I went to work at the Merrimack. At the Merrimack I was working in the finishing department. I worked for Jack Gallagher, which he was a wonderful man to work for. And then Jack Gallagher died not too long ago. He (--) I worked on the finishing. I worked on the [tenter]. The [tenter] was like a curtain-stretcher; a big long machine. The cloth used to go in there, damp, a little, so you could stretch it. If it was dry it would have split. So we'd set it at a width of thirty eight inches wide and we'd pass it through. There was a roller there and it used to go right in through the machine and come back dry and all stretched out, the real width. I worked there I don't know how many years, but I worked there for quite a while.

P: You mentioned the strike. Can you tell me anything? How did you feel about the union or (--) 

C: Well, the union, no comments on that. 

P: No comments, okay. 

C: No. No. 

P: Okay, we'll skip that then. I wanted to ask you, you said you went into the mill when you were sixteen? 

C: Yes. 

P: Were you out of school then? Were you finished with schooling? 

C: Oh yah. I finished school when I was sixteen. 

P: Yes. Did your parents have any hopes of you having more education, or had you? 

C: Had you? 

P: Was it economically necessary for you to go and work in the mill? 

C: No, no, no in those days we had to go to work, not at sixteen, but it wasn't like schooling today. (P: Yes) You work today, you can go up to anytime you want to school,
but those days we didn't have no money to send us to school. And there was not opportunity like we have today. Then and today is two different stories. Then we had to work. After school it was, we had to do something. So finally I quit at sixteen and I went to work at the Boott Mill.

P: Did your sister work at all?

C: Yes. My sister had small jobs. She got married young.

Mrs T: (In background) Well she was younger than you. She was a lot younger.

C: Yes.

P: What did she do in the mill?

Mrs T: (In background) She worked, not in the mills.

C: No, she worked in a shoe shop most of the time I guess.

Mrs T: Yes.

C: My sister worked in the shoe shop, and then she got married. They moved to, her husband was in the service. He was a chef-cook in Germany and she followed him. She died when she was forty-one. Thirty-seven? (Asking wife)

Mrs T: Forty-two.

C: Forty-two years old of a heart attack.

P: (Papers rustle) Ah, can you describe maybe a typical day on your job when you were in the Boott Mills?

C: What do you mean by that?

P: Just a typical day. What you went through at work; maybe when you went for lunch. Did you go with other workers to lunch?

C: Oh yes. We used to stick together. We (--) For lunch we used to go outside at the, outside at the mill. We had half an hour. Sometimes we used to get on the motorcycle and go to Lakeview for half an hour’s time, to take a couple of ducks. (P: Um) And then come back and all sweat up from rushing. (P: Laughs) And then we (--) 

P: Did they have one set lunch hour? Did everyone go at one time, or did you go in shifts?

C: Yes, most of them.
P: Yah.

C: Yah.

P: What did you do as far as vacations? Did you get any vacations?

C: Well we got vacations, but we didn't go anywhere.

P: You didn't go anywhere?

C: We couldn't go anywhere. Like today, today, well ---

P: Like your friend went to Europe?

C: Yah, yah. Us we go to Lake Winnipesaukee once a year, but we travel a lot. I mean, short distance, but we (--)  

P: There's a lot of nice areas around here.

C: Yah, oh yah.

P: Did they have, one time did they close down for vacations or did they stagger them?

C: Well, the Boott Mill used to close we'll say for a week or two. (P: Umhm) One week anyway, because today people have, depends on the years they're working. If they work fifteen, twenty years, well they get three or four weeks vacation. Like when I work at the Raytheon. When I worked, I worked at the Raytheon for twenty-two years, and I retired in 1980. And Raytheon was the best place I've ever been to. I've never been in (--) I never lived so good till I reached that place. Good money and good people and everything else.

P: How closely were you supervised at work? Were you more or less left to do your own thing, or did they really keep a close watch on you?

C: No. No. I had charge of the second shift when I was at the Boott Mill. (P: Uh huh) The boss would start from seven o'clock, eight o'clock till four-thirty or so. Some used to stay till five o'clock. I mean the first shift man now. They give me orders what to do during the night, to give my help the things that they had to do before quitting time. And that was it.

P: Umhm. What kind of rules did they have? Did they have rules about not eating in the mill, smoking, anything like that?

Mrs T: (In background) Oh we could do anything we want there. (P: Yes) But smoking might, I don't know about smoking though.
C: Smoking was off limits. (Mrs. T: We didn’t see no one (--) I don't remember of having any smoking rooms or anything like they do today. (Wife talking in background - unclear)

P: Did they have any rules about dress, or behavior, or anything like that?

C: Well yes, dresses, there was no way.

P: Yes.

C: You dress as you wish. I mean common sense. (P: Uh huh) Wear a dress, but sometimes the women didn't have, not the fully dress, you know what I’m (--) 

P: What was the temperature like? Was it hot and humid?

C: It was warm, real hot in the spinning room especially. Spinning rooms and weave rooms and card rooms, and all those big places it was quite warm. But we had to lift up the windows. The windows, as long as the windows were open we were all set.

P: Umhm. (Speaking to Camille's wife) Where did you work Mrs. Theriault? In what part of the mill?

Mrs. T: I used to work in the twisting room.

P: And what did you do? What did that involve?

Mrs. T: We used to, what do you call that? Twisting.

C: Twisting. (Mrs. T: and bobbins) There’s bobbins (--) 

Mrs. T: We used to put bobbins, and when the bobbin was filled up, then (--) 

P: That was putting the yarn on the bobbin, was it?

Mrs. T: Yah. Yah. And then after I was a bobbin stripper for quite a while.

P: And was there a machine that you were in charge of for that?

Mrs.T: Yah, yah. There was a machine there and I used to love that.

P: Yah. (Mrs. T: Yah) How long did you do it?

Mrs. T: Oh, until the strike, huh? (Asking husband)

P: Do you remember what year that was, the strike?
Mrs. T: Gee I don't remember the year.

C: No I don't. That's lost.

P: And how large a machine? How many bobbins were there on a machine?

C: Oh well!

Mrs. T: Oh gosh, we used to put up oh, it used to go by minutes. Oh my, the bobbin was coming out all cleaned up, you know.

C: We'll say there was a slit like this here, in the machine.

P: Like down the middle of the table?

C: There was a big tray. Well the machine used to go down to a cab. A cab is a small, it's a truck.

P: Uhhuh

C: A square truck with four wheels.

MrsT: Four wheels.

C: Well, she used to put, no the slit is over here. Anyway, she used to put the bobbins in here. There was that much of thread on it, yarn. To take it out you had to pass it through here.

MrsT: Right here. Like this here. And it used to go (--) 

C: It used to go automatic.

Mrs T: It used to go all the time. Either standing up or sitting down, you know? (P: Yes, yes) You could do both of them.

P: It was fast work.

Mrs.T: Oh yah, oh yah.

C: Oh yah.

P: And where did you go after that did you say?

Mrs T: After that I went to St Joseph's Hospital. I worked there in the sewing room.
P: Have you any memories about the mill?

Mrs. T: I’ve been, I’ve been (--) Huh? The mills?

P: Any particular memories of the people you worked with?

Mrs. T: Oh yah. The people, they used to be very friendly.

P: Yes. It was close-knit.


P: Not like it is together.

Mrs. T: Not today, no. They used to help each other then. (P: Yah) Oh yah!

P: And how many machines were you in charge of?

Mrs. T: Oh, I only ran one machine.

P: Uh huh, and did you have a supervisor?

Mrs. T: I was working for my father.

P: Oh. (Laughs) Was he your supervisor? Your close supervisor?

Mrs. T: He was my supervisor, yah.

P: Yah. So that must have made it easier?

Mrs. T: Yah. Yah, but he treated us just like the others. (Laughs)

P: And what about your father? Did he come over from another country?

Mrs. T: No. He was born in Lowell.

P: He was born here. Yah.

P: Did the mill have any kind of (--) 

Mrs. T: We were raised on Moody Street.

P: On Moody Street?

Mrs. T: Moody Street.
P: Okay, I remember that name. Did they have any softball teams, football teams, any kind of recreational activities in the mill?

Mrs. T: No.

C: Well when I was a kid we used to play ball. Then after, like during work, after work we had some teams. We used to play ball, yah.

P: My father has a friend who was in the mill, and he has a big picture of the whole, they had a team, I guess a (C: Oh, yes) baseball team.

C: We used to play the Merrimack too, and then the Boott Mill. We used to play in some park in the Little Canada there, at the Aiken Street grounds. We had a lot of fun.

P: Yah. Did you play amongst yourselves? Did you play against other mills or?

C: Yah, yah, we played against (P: Yes) other companies. I was a first baseman. Always was the first baseman. (P: Yes) I loved it! Even as today I play ball with the kids, and I don't say I have the same first-base mitt that I had, but I had this one for about twenty years and it looks just as good as I first bought it.

P: Yah. Was there any hierarchy among workers? Was one job considered to be a better job than another?

C: Well in promotions there was like sweepers. Sweepers was the lowest job, but gradually you, you promote to, not big jobs, not from ten dollars a week. I’m just saying the money. We’ll say from ten dollars a week to fifty dollars a week, there was no such thing.

P: (Laughs) No.

C: Maybe a half dollar or a dollar more, or whatever. But like I said, I started from sweeping and I went as a roving boy. And then I went to ah (--) And in the meantime on my jobs I used to help the others. That's how you learn. (P: Yes) Like in the spinning frame I used to doff. Even the doff is (--) 

P: What did doff mean?

C: Doffing is bobbins. You take off the yarn from a full, a full bobbin, you stop the machine. Then there's two sides. We’ll say there's about a hundred and fifty, a hundred anyway; a hundred bobbins on the frame one side and a hundred on the other. Well you had to, if you wanted to make some money you had to hurry up. And sometimes well, the thread would catch someplace and you'd break. All right, when you'd start the frame back with all new bobbins you had to have help, or if you wanted to do it yourself we used to put a bobbin in (--) We’ll say this is a bobbin. We used to put a bobbin on our
neck (P: uh huh) and take the end of the yarn, or the thread, and push it on that because it was running all the time. So there's one gone.

P: You'd have your face pretty close to the machine there. [Laughs]

C: Well, yes. And then, like some women, it was mostly women that were spinners. (P: Umhm) They had the men spinners at night, plus women, but mostly on night there was only men. And our fixer, we had wonderful fixers. We had my wife's uncle was a fixer and a second-hand.

P: And what does fixers do? Do they go fix the machines?

C: They used to fix the machines and make sure that everything was all right. (P: umhm) And then they had, they had Joe Beaulieu who came from Dracut. He's dead today and so has my father-in-law died. My mother-in-law, also. And we had very good people. If you were stuck or anything, they call you, they ask you (P: um) what seems to be the trouble? They're right there to help you. (P: yes) Everybody was.

P: I suppose you said that you worked on piecework?

C: Well (--) 

Mrs. T: Well not all. It's only the spinning and the (--) 

C: Different jobs.

P: So if you didn't have the fixer there in time you'd be losing money?

C: That's right.

P: Did you learn to fix your machines yourself?

C: Oh no, no way.

Mrs. T: No, you couldn’t do it.

P: Oh, too complicated?

C: Not only that (--) 

Mrs. T: They wouldn't let you.

C: They had a man for that. You had to wait when the man comes in to fix it, fine. If he didn't, well tough, you had to wait.

Mrs. T: He used to be there right on time.
C: Oh yah. There was no problem on that.

Mrs. T: Because you had some other frame that was running, and [unclear].

C: That's right. (P: yes) You might lose half an hour on that but you gain it on the other one.

Mrs. T: You had about four, two frames. So that's four sides. So you’d, they keep you busy.

P: Yah, yah.

C: Some women, the Greek especially, the Greek people that used to work on those machines. There was French like anybody else, but I mean mostly were Greeks, and they were right on the ball, these

Mrs. T: They were very (unclear, in background)

C: They'd go from aisle to aisle to see if their frames were all right, their machines. There was one you see (P: yes), puts it right in and (P: yes) no problem.

P: Yes, when you said you were a sweeper, what did that entail? Did you have any dangerous areas to sweep in?

C: Well everything was danger, for hair especially. (P: yes) If you had (--) Not today but (--) 

P: We just, when we were getting prepared to do the interviews, we went down and just heard one of the looms. (Mrs. T: Oh yah) What a noise.

Mrs. T: One time a girl got her hair caught.

C: She got (Mrs. T: yes) sculled right out. (Mrs. T: Yes, right.) Her hair pulled out just like she had a wig. (Mrs. T: Yah)

P: Oh my goodness.

Mrs. T: After that (--)

C: The belt, like yours, like your hair. She went like this and the hair was (Mrs. T: yah, yah) knocked her right out.

P: Oh my goodness.
Mrs. T: She was in the hospital for quite a while. And after that you had to wear a hairnet.

C: Yah that was a must.

Mrs. T: Yah, oh yah, they were very strict on that.

P: I would imagine a lot of people would have developed hearing problems working in the mill.

Mrs. T: Ummh.

C: Any what?

P: Hearing problems working in the mill.

C: Well you say that today but those days that wasn't said. You know what I mean? Today, if you work where it's noisy a little bit you got to wear ear plugs or ear piece. (P: Yes, right) Just like a two-way radio. You put it on your ears and that's it. It stops the noise. You can't hear the noise. But those days there was no such thing.

P: They didn't think of (--)

C: No, no, no. We didn't know. Today there's everything else. What we eat is, sometimes is no good. In those days what we eat is what we eat, that's all. (P: Yes) Don't care what it is. But today there's different things that they find out in the laboratories and everything else. Yup.

P: Did you, going back you mentioned every job was dangerous. Can you tell me any (--)?

C: No. No. Not every job was dangerous.

P: Oh I see. What about sweeping? Did you (--)

C: Well sweeping was, the job was easy but you had to watch what you're doing on each side so you wouldn't (--) Like suppose you were working on these frames in that alley that I was going through. Well we had, like a mop. It's like a mop. We used to take the fuzz off the bobbin, like that by the rail. (P: Uh huh) With the mop it's good, but if you went up too high, you break all the threads, all the yarn. So somebody would say, would spot that, “Hey you!” you know?

P: Did that ever happen to you?

C: Oh yah, it happened once; once or twice. Always careful, always careful in my job.
P: What happened if you had a grievance? Some sort of a grievance? How were those settled?

C: Well those days it wasn't like today. We had no trouble. We had no trouble.

P: Um, let's see. Can you think of anything unusual that ever happened in your job?

C: No, it was always (--) 

P: The same thing every day?

C: Same thing every day, unless somebody got hurt or whatever but there was very few accidents.

P: What happened when, you mentioned that woman got her hair caught on the machine. What did the company do about that?

Mrs. T: Yah, I don't know because it was (--) 

P: Were there any changes made in the machinery, or you said they just told the girls to wear hairnets after that?

Mrs. T: Yah, after that (--) 

C: Oh yah, they put a notice on the wall, (Mrs. T: Yes) on the bulletin board. (Mrs. T: Yes) Nobody would work unless women that they wear a hairnets. They had to wear hairnets, which it was good (P: Yes) because especially in the summer when your hair is long, whatever. You go next to a belt or anything (--) 

Mrs. T: Well you had to start the frame right from the belt. You had to be there.

P: Yup.

C: So if you go too low, you bend your head too low, well there it is. A bobbin is nothing, but it's those (P: Yes) belts or whatever. And then they stopped the belt and they put motors up. They put motors so the, on the floors, so like that they just start the frame. (P: Yes) There's no danger.

P: Right. You also mentioned that you could open the windows. Now didn't that cause a problem with the (thread)? I remember learning that they kept it humid so that the threads wouldn't jam.

C: Yes, sometimes.
P: Did you ever get in trouble for opening a window?

C: No. We had a humidifier. All the spinning rooms had all humidifiers. (P: Uh huh) And there was a spray, a mist, at all times over you, or something like that. So it was okay. But sometimes they had troubles but they fixed that soon.

P: Were there any problems between workers? Any different groups of workers? Maybe any racial problems or?

C: No. No. Never did have. (P: Okay) Never did have.

P: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your home life? What things were like at home? What kind of hours? Did your mother and father work the same hours?

C: No. My mother, well my mother didn't work too long.

P: How old were you when she went to work?

C: Pardon?

P: How old were you when she went to work?

C: I don't remember, but I know before I quit she uh, I used to go after school for dinner. I had nobody home but myself. So I didn’t have no keys like they have today. They don't let you have a key or something like that. So I used to have, yes, a key for the (--) We had an apartment right next, across from us and we used to pay two dollars a week just to rent that because there was nobody in there. So instead of losing money they used to rent it to us or anybody else that had an apartment that was empty, you know. Like there was no furniture or anything. So I used to (--) When I would go to work in the morning, that was fine. My mother had put like a bag, like a, not a suitcase but like a handbag in the next apartment, and I used to take (--) After school I used to take that and go see my mother where she worked. It wasn't far. It was about, ah cripe, half a mile.

C: That's it.

P: Umhm. And your sister come along after. Did she quit her job and then have your sister?

C: I believe so. (P: Yes) I believe so.

P: What kind of hours did your father work?
C: My father used to work from three-thirty till eleven o'clock at night (P: Oh) at the Boott Mill.

P: So how, oh well of course, you said fifty years, right?

C: Oh yah, easy!

P: Yes. And what did he do? What was his [unclear]?

C: He worked mostly as a spooler, or as an Abbott-winder. He had a big long machine that was the latest then. Today it's a, if they still have it I'd like to see it. But it was all done automatic. Before you used to take yarn by yarn, piece by piece and tie it with a machine. And he was just as fast by hand than you did with his hand machine. So finally, one day they came in with this long machine, automatic. He just sat down on the chair, on the stool and went around. He stayed right there, and the machine was running all the time. (P: Yes) So there was one end that was broke. He used to tie it like that. Sometimes he used to take it by hand and tie it just as fast as (P: Yes). Then when a new machine came in, they just had to put the thread in there and that's it. It was tied. He didn't have no machine or whatsoever.

P: That speeded things up considerably.

C: To speed the things up. (P: Yes) Instead of we'll say, making, I don't know. They wouldn't call it this way, but if they had, instead of making three cases a day, they could make fifteen or twenty maybe.

P: Yes. (C: You know) Did you ever go in and see him at work?

C: Oh yah, I used to visit him once in a while. Because my job in the supply room, if they needed parts I had to go where it comes from, or where it came from. And if we didn't have it in stock, we used to order it, you know?

P: You said he became an Abbott-Winder after that?

C: That's the Abbott-Winder.

P: Okay, and what was a spooler?

C: The spooler was a small frame that they used to do the same thing as they did on the Abbott-Winder, but uh (--)

P: Oh the Abbott-Winder was just the updated version?

C: That's right.

P: I see, okay.
C: That's right. That's it.

P: Did you know anybody that went to Lowell Tech, to Lowell Technical School? I know they had a few people who went there, and then came in and tried to get a little more very efficient.

C: I went to study, to learn how to weave at one time. I stayed two nights. (P. laughs) I knew more than the instructor was showing.

P: Yes.

C: So I said I don't want to waste my time there. But I happened to go in the weave room. They wanted a man. Those days after I got out of the supply room, like I said, you used to promote yourself. So they asked me if I wanted to go on the third shift as the warp-tying machine. That was a good job but you had to be experienced. (P: Umhm) Me, I was just a helper. I used to get the warp ready to be tied and the guy would tie it after a while, you know. I used to set-up maybe three or four warps, not at a time, but one after the other. Then he would tie it. Then when I'd go back to the one that he tied and pull them back, I had to pull them through, you got me there see, it's a wire about that long and it has holes. I think it was feelers or whatever. (P: Um hm) And I had to be careful so if there was a big nut that was going through there, it would break. (P. um) So the room-girl, they call her the room-girl. The room-girl, when it came to work the next morning and he saw all that, all broken, they wasn't too happy. So you had to be careful.

P: Right.

C: So I was happy on that. I was getting top pay. But I had a good man. But after a while the oldest, there was another couple of managers that worked together that had the authority to do the big jobs. Not us. We were told to do the towels. And there was the tweeds they were making. They had more tickets on the tweed than they had on towels. Well if they make fifteen a night, and me I do thirty a night, my job wouldn't pay as much as they did because they were working on tweeds. (P: Yes) Me I was working on towels. So I started to squawk and the first thing you know, that's all he could do. “Well, I said, that's all I can do too.” I'm going back to the supply room. So I asked my boss. He says, “Sure, anytime.” So on a Monday I started back in the supply room. I wouldn't go for that stuff. (P: Yes) So finally they had to hire a guy and it took him a very long time to learn. Like me, I used to go and see this and see that. Then I used to look how it’s made, or anything like (--) 

P: You'd teach yourself?

C: That's right. So that's why, if anybody was in trouble (--) And I had to know most of the parts in the mill because I carried them, you know what I mean? (P: Yes) It was right in my room where I had, they had bins, bins every aisle. They had, oh cripe about, the aisles were about twenty five feet long and bins on both sides. You had squares like that.
Whatever fits in there, you used to put it in there and sometimes the girls didn't know whether the part came. Well let's see the piece. So she used to show me the piece. I knew right away where the part came from.

P: It must have taken you a long time to (C: To learn that) learn [unclear].

C: Oh yes. Oh yes. Like the girls that was working there, I told them every time they got a moment to themselves, a minute to themselves look from aisle to aisle, go back and forth see what kind of parts is there. So if you come in you see this part here you say oh well. Oh I know where it is. You go, you were happy, you were proud of knowing, you know?

P: Yes.

C: So that's it.

P: Yes. Umhm. Can you think of anything to add? Anything like the typical day or any outstanding events came when you worked in the mill?

Mrs. T: Oh yah. The events were when the war came in.

P: Oh? What happened then?

Mrs. T: Well we were working and he was in the war.

P: Oh, you went to (--) 

Mrs. T: Yes.

C: I was in the Americal Division, one eighty second. We went to [Leyte]. We went to Bougainville. We went to Japan, Sibo City. Then I came back. I stayed overseas eighteen months.

P: And did you come back and go back to work in the mill or (--) 

C: Yah, oh yah. That's all there was.

Mrs. T: Yah.

P: Yah, and the jobs were there for you?

Mrs. T: Oh yes.

C: Oh yes.

P: What did you do while he was in the war? Did you, you worked at the mill?
Mrs. T: Oh yah. I had one boy.

P: Did you have to take on more hours?

Mrs. T: No.

P: No. What did they do with all the, there must have been a lot of openings after all the men were off to war?

Mrs. T: Well I don't know.

C: Well, those days and today is two different stories.

Mrs. T: That's right. Yes, we didn't uh, I don't know. They didn’t have nobody to replace you, did they?

C: No. Today there's a lot of opportunity. You can, like myself, I wanted to be an electrician. No way that I could learn to be an electrician. (P: yes) Like for yourself, you, you're an electrician and you get a job. And I'd like to be an electrician, then you can show me. But those days, electrician or whatever they were, they're, that's all. (P: Yah) You didn't, my father never done anything really to amount to anything. He worked in the mill. He was doing his job well, but outside of that that's all he knew. (P: Yah) Carpentry, today kids from four or five years old, they build a dog house or whatever, and it's well done. My time, there was no such thing. (P: yes) And we didn't have no money to get those things. (P: right) You know, like the wood or whatever. We were very, not very poor but there was no showing. (P: right) Today a boy at six or seven years old (--) I got a grandson that's sixteen years old now, he's got a car. He's got a (--) 

P: He's better off that I am.

C: He's got a motorcycle. He goes to school. He's going to graduate next year.

Mrs. T: Yes, he works nights.

C: He works, he’s been working four or five years. He works nights in a restaurant. And he's got all that. Today, and I had fifty-cents a week to spend (P: Laughs) when I was going out with her. (P: Yah) Fifty-cents a week, imagine that!

P: Did most of your pay go into the family?

C: That's right. My mother, I always brought my mother my check. It wasn't a check. It was money, an envelope. And that envelope wasn't opened either. I used to bring it to her and that's it. Today, et cripe, no such thing. (P: Laughs)

Mrs. T: To go to the show we had to wait two weeks.
P: To save up the money?

Mrs. T: To go, yah, we used to save to go to the show.

C: That's right.

P: Wow. Did all your money go to the family too?

Mrs. T: Yah. I used to give three dollars to my mother and keep a dollar. My mother used to give us a dollar, (P, oh) three dollars, four dollars. That was four dollars a week.

P: Yes. Did your mother (--)

Mrs. T: And with that dollar, we had to buy our stockings and what we'd need. But I mean if we'd need a coat or big stuff, or a dress, something like that, my mother used to (- -) But my mother used to make our clothes with old clothes. (P: Yah)

C: There were eleven, eleven children in her family.

Mrs T: Yah, there were eleven.

P: Wow! Did your mother work?

Mrs T: Right now we're eight girls and one boy living. I had three of my sisters over here.

P: Did your mother work in the mill too?

Mrs T: My mother worked. Yah, she works at the winding room. She worked at the Hub Hoisery for awhile. Then she worked at the Boott Mill.

P: For how many years?

Mrs T: Gee, my mother worked for quite a while. After we were all grown up she started to work.

P: Oh, it would have been hard to find someone to take care of the children I imagine.

Mrs T: Yes, after we were all grown up that's where she started to work.

P: Did she run the finances pretty much in the family? You say you brought her your paycheck rather than your father.

Mrs T: Yes, it was my father that was in charge. [Laughs]
P: Yes, the same thing with you, your father was in charge?

C: No, no, my mother.

Mrs T: Oh, no. It was his mother.

C: It was my mother.

Mrs T: His mother, my father.

P: Did she run the money and everything, for the family?

C: Oh yah!

P: Yah. I always thought that was the most common thing. That's the way it is in my family.

Mrs T: But it was my father.

P: Yes, he had a fairly big position, right? Your father did?

Mrs. T: Yah. (P: Yah) He always was the boss.

P: Yah.

C: He was the superintendent. (Mrs T: Yes) He worked in the Pequot Mill in Salem. (Mrs. T: Yah) He woke in Utica, New York and he was a weather-stripper. He used to work for a weather-strip company, (P: oh) his father, her father. (P: Yah)

P: What happened to the mills when the war came on? Did they have to close down?

C: During the war? (P: Yah) Oh, no, that was going full blast.

P: And there were people to fill the positions even though (--)

C: Oh yes. They had girls who were taking our place I guess.

Mrs. T: Yah. But when the war was declared, the day that you know, that they say, Germany, you know, that we took over Germany (--)

P: That the war was over, right.

Mrs. T: They all say the war was over, you know? They stopped everything.

P: Yah.
Mrs. T: And everybody was in the windows and outside. We were all hollering, you know.

P: I've seen pictures of that.

Mrs. T: But we, I wasn't too glad because I knew he was in Japan, and Japan was still at it.

C: We were still fighting.

Mrs. T: Still fighting, but everybody else was in Germany, you know.

P: My father was in Japan too, in Hiroshima.

Mrs. T: But I was saying, why are they, you know, saying that the war's over. I said (--)

C: Well it was over in Germany.

P: For you it wasn't over, right.

Mrs. T: It wasn't over but about a couple of weeks after, that's where [unclear].

P: Do you remember ever having efficiency experts come into the mills at all?

C: Oh, yes. There was, we had some once in awhile. I don’t know what they call them, but like you said, they used to check our work, ask questions and uh (--)

Mrs. T: Yah.

P: How did you feel about them?

C: Well, uh (--)

Mrs. T: They didn't bother us too much.

C: They didn't bother us too much because we, it was like I say

Mrs. R: It’s not like today.

C: No, no. Today there's ten guys working here, or the first thing you know, there's four of them left. Where are they gone? Well I don't know. They're all gone to the men’s room (P: laughs), or reading a book, or reading a paper, or (--) But today, yes, but then it was no such thing.

P: Yes.
C: There was papers, but they knew where you were.

P: Yes.

C: So if you stayed long too much, come on there Jack!

Mrs. T: Yes, they used to, yah.

C: It's time to go to work, or something like that. Or, when are you going to start? You know?

P: Yes. And what would happen if you [unclear].

C: Well if you too often, I'll see you later.

Mrs. T: Yah. If you were on piece work (--)

C: I remember, and I'll tell you this instance. There was uh, this boy that my father-in-law hired one time, well he was hired through the office, but he was shown to him. And so my father-in-law says, “You want to show him what to do?” That was a sweeping job. So I says, “Sure.” So me, I was going out. That's where I went to the cork roll machine. (P: umhm) He says, “Sure.” So the first, the second day I believe, that he was in there he didn't like it. So he says, “Camille,” he says, “Do you want to do me a favor?” “Sure, what is it?” He said, “I don't like my job, you know, but, I can have somebody to replace me,” “To replace you? How? You got to go in the office and all that.” (P: Yes) So finally you know what it was? It was his brother. His twin brother. And you wouldn't know the difference. You wouldn't know the difference. (P: Laughs) So he came in. He came in and he stayed out, the other guy. The real worker was out and (--)

P: So they had two working one job.

C: No. no. There was only one. (P: oh) We'll say the real one didn't come in that day. I had to meet his brother outside. But when I saw him I thought it was him, (P laughs) but it wasn't, it was his brother; and the same identical thing. (P: yes) So finally they, I never said anything but somebody (--) 

P: Someone found out?

C: Somebody found out and they threw him out.

P: Yah. You said that your father worked on one job and then they got a new machine and he was doing a different job?

C: Yah.
P: Was that an efficiency expert that did that? Or how did they decide to change the name?

C: Well, we didn't know because they said that the thing wasn't going fast enough or it wasn't promoting enough.

P: Yes.

Mrs. T: And he used to take people, a couple of people out too.

C: Oh yes. They used to take the job of two or three.

Mrs. T: Yah, it takes only one person to run that.

P: And what happened? Did they just have more machines? Did somebody lose their job because they (--)?

C: Well, they placed them somewhere else.

P: Yes.

Mrs. T: Yes.

C: Yah. There were always, if you were a good worker there was no wages. You could try to get out of a job (--)?

P: There were of jobs?

Mrs. T: There were only two machines running, huh?

C: There was two like this. They took the place of three. Three people a piece. So that was six people.

P: Can you remember any other instances like that? Where they found more efficient ways of doing jobs? New machinery?

C: No, no. They, like today, they promoted machinery. A machine came in or somebody, some salesman would go and say, well, I can beat this machine or something like that, then we got up-to-date and you could work better and whatever. So they sent one of our executives to the plant where they had them. So they, they're satisfied, they come back and they tell it to the head office. (P: yes) So that's why we wanted to buy it. So they bought it. Roger Flathers was the other one.

Mrs. T: Yes.

C: Roger and Freddie Flathers. They were very nice people but (--)
Mrs. T: If it wouldn't have been for the strike, I think we would still be there. [Laughs]
P: The strike really changed it?
C: Yah, killed it all.
Mrs. T: Yah, oh yah. That's when they closed down after.
P: Yes.
C: So they closed down nine months to a year.
Mrs. T: Yah.
C: That was the longest strike there'd ever been in Lowell.
Mrs. T: Yes. The Union came in and (--) 
C: They didn't gain anything. Me, I worked there. So I mean I went to work down in Fitchburg. And then when I got out of there in six months I believe, I went to the Merrimack and I stayed there. I never went back to the Boot Mill.
P: It did reopen though after that?
C: Oh, yah, after nine months to a year.
Mrs. T: [All speaking at once – unclear]
P: What happened to the people who went on strike? I don't suppose they found a job again?
C: Well, they had to find something or go on the welfare. That's it.
P: Well I think we may have covered everything unless you can think of anything you want to add?
C: No. And all the office, all of the office help, like Miss Sweat, the two sisters. There was two Sweat sisters that worked there, and Miss Mitchell the nurse, and May Boyd another Nurse, and Miss Sweat and (--) .
P: My grandmother was a nurse in the mills, but that was quite a long time ago.
Mrs. T: They're all dead now.
C: The nurse was Miss Mitchell. Miss Mitchell and May Boyd was, they were very nice people. Very nice, all over, (Mrs. T: Oh yah) all over. You wanted to know something, they'd tell you. (P: yes) Like, when was it? What I didn't like is one time when I went in the service, I went two years. And when I came back I stayed a month out; so to get my thing together and so on, whatever. And I went back after a month, a month or two months, two months anyway. So when I went for my job back down the Boott Mill, and Miss Mitchell says, “Camille,” she says, “It's about time you came in.” She says, “You've been gone, we'll say, two months. You've been here. You came back two months ago.” “Well” I said, “I took a rest because I needed it.” She says, “All right.” And the following week was vacation time. So she says, “All right, she says, not next week, come the following week. You'll get your job back.” So I went the following week, but she didn't like that because I stayed two months out.

P: Oh. Did the mill provide medical benefits for you at all?

C: Well, yes. They had the hospital. We had the St. Joseph. We had the outpatient up there, and something else huh? There was, I don't know. I don't remember exactly, but they used to own, the Boott Mills used to own the St. Joseph Hospital. They sold it for a dollar, the Boott Mill and the Merrimack, I believe. They sold that to the St. Joseph Hospital for a dollar. (P: laughs) Not as it is today. It was poor then. (P: Yah) You know what I mean, the building, (P: Yah) St. Joseph Hospital. But St Josephs Hospital bought this for a dollar, those days. So that's it.

P: Yes, and so if you got ill or something?

C: You got over there.

P: St. Josephs? (C: Oh yah) And would it?

C: They'd pay for it, because (→)

P: The mill paid for you?

C: Yah, oh yah. They pay for what you had.

P: Umhm. Well I think that covers everything that I can think of to ask you.

C: That's all I can tell you I guess.

Interview ends