INTERVIEWEE: Norman Gaudrault

INTERVIEWER: Elizabeth Blood, Salem State University,

with Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Salem State University

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LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 36:46

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

00:00

EB: Could you say your name?

NG: Norman Gaudrault.

EB: Norman Gaudrault.

NG: Yes.

EB: Let's start with a little history of your family.

NG: Perfect

00:15

EB: Why did they come to Salem and what do you know about your ancestors?

NG: Yes, so I was born here in 1936. My father is originally from here, from Salem. And my mother, I believe that she came from Keegan, Maine, in northern Maine. My father's parents are of Canadian decent and I also believe—I don't know as much of my mother's side as my father's, but my paternal grandparents are from Canada. My grandfather, I believe, from Chicoutimi and my grandmother I believe is from Eboulements. My mother's side is from northern Maine but I believe that they must come from Canada too.

My grandparents—my grandfather on my mother's side came down in this direction where my mother and father met and were married. They died when I was young. My mother, when I was eight, my father, when I was eleven. So I lived with my paternal grandparents, the Gaudraults. On St. Paul Street and on Salem Street, behind St. Joseph Church. I went to kindergarten here at Horace Mann, then a small school in northern Salem, the Sheridan school. And after my parents died I lived with my grandparents. They had moved behind the St. Joseph church on Salem Street, and I went to the St. Joseph's school from 3rd grade up until the 8th. And then, I won a small scholarship to go to the Assumption Preparatory School in Worcester. So I went there, starting from 1950 to 58' because I went to the prep school and to college. After having graduated—received my diploma—from Assumption College, I went to Boston University School of Medicine, graduated and received my diploma in 62'. And I did my residence, my internship, in Boston from 1962 to 1965.

3:24

EB: And you worked as a doctor?

NG: Okay, I went in to the Peace Corps from 1965 to 1967, and after I returned to settle down in 1967 in Topsfield, where I practiced pediatrics until the time of my retirement in 1999. And I have been retired since then, so I have been retired for about twelve years.

EB: Congratulations.

NG: Thank you very much! [laughs]

3:58

EB: So, why did your grandparents come to Salem?

NG: I believe that it was for the common reasons of that time, to find work in the factories, and my grandfather opened a small grocery store. My aunts—one of my aunts at least—worked at the Pequot Mill. I believe this is the typical story of my generation, but it was mostly to find work, mm-hm.

4:40

EB: And what was the name of the—your grandfather had a small grocery store in Salem?

NG: Yes, on the corner of Roslyn Street and Canal, not very far from here, yes.

5:01

EB: And have they told stories about the immigration Do you remember?

NG: Not really, but I could tell you that I went—My father was part of a big family, there were twelve or fourteen—my grandfather was the oldest, and I went with my brother and with one of my uncles of Canada to do—to spend 3 or 4 days. It was several years ago now because both of them are dead now, but we went to the Eboulements where my grandmother had taught. She was from the Eboulements. She had taught in a small school, a parish school, I'm certain, around 1916-17. We found the woman who had written a history of the little village. They had celebrated their 350th anniversary, so we went to the village store and the owner, the wife of the owner, was the historian and she had written a book of the history of the Eboulements. And she found the name of my grandmother who had taught at the primary school and she had made twenty-six dollars a year, if you could imagine. The salary was twenty-six dollars in 1916-17. She found this story and she also had the year when my grandparents had met and come here. I don't remember the exact year but they immigrated here to the United States for the common

reason to find work, I believe. It was a rather interesting story. I was with my brother and uncle. So for my uncle especially—it was—my father was the oldest and my uncle the youngest of the twelve or fourteen. So he isn't more than six or seven years older than me and we spent three or four days that were very, very, nice. Very, very nice. We found these stories and we spent a good hour and a half with this lady who wrote the history of the Eboulements, yeah.

7:50

EB: So your grandmother was a teacher, but when she came to Salem?

NG: She was at the house. She had a large family. She took care of the kids.

8:03

EB: So you have how many brothers and sisters?

NG: One brother and one sister. They are both dead. I don't know if I said my sister's name. I said my brother's name, perhaps not my sister's.

8:21

EB: Roland and Joyce?

NG: Joyce. That's her

8:26

EB: They are deceased?

NG: Yes.

8:28

EB: Very well, so what is—when you think of your childhood, your youth in Salem, were there memories of places that you frequented?

NG: The memories of my childhood, of my youth in Salem are very, very good. I have spent my youth until the age of fourteen. Then, I left for my education. So up until the age of fourteen I spend my youth at Palmer Cove playing baseball with the young boys my age. This was the focus, the primary one among kids of my age. It was a—we were—it was a time a little simpler than today. We used to spend our time and our days easily playing baseball very easily and other games. Monopoly and whatever. So I always keep good memories of my youth before leaving in 1950.

10:05

EB: It was always in the area of the Point?

NG: In the Point, exactly. On St. Paul Street, during perhaps two years we were in that quarter, during the 3rd and 4th year of grade school and then until the 8th grade it was in the Point, yes.

10:36

EB: And between friends, with the friends you all spoke French?

NG: English.

EB: English.

NG: Entirely English. But at the house, French because my grandparents only spoke French to each other. So we spoke French with a Canadian accent, of course, at the house and at the St. Joseph school we had half the classes in French. So it was Monday morning, for example, in English, the afternoon, in French and Tuesday it was the opposite, French in the morning and English in the afternoon. So it was a little like that, so we had a lot of French in our classes in grade school. So at the house and at school it was always in French.

11:32

EB: And with friends?

NG: With friends it was always in English

11:38

EB: And if you were in town shopping?

NG: In English. So at the school and at the house in French, and everywhere else in English.

11:54

EB: Interesting. And how was the school? Did you like the St. Joseph School?

NG: Yes I liked the St. Joseph school a lot. And I always say that the good sisters taught me to read, to speak and to write grammatically in two languages so I am always grateful towards the good sisters of the Assumption.

12:23

EB: And at the house were there French or Canadian traditions?

NG: Yes certainly. The Canadian traditions were strong. There was the church, certainly, it was the center of the community. So the religion was part of daily life. One had to recite the rosary, one had to kneel down to recite. There were religious holidays, Christmas, New Year's, and Thanksgiving. So yes, especially because I lived with my grandparents. If I had lived with my parents up until the age of eighteen or even fourteen that could have been a little different. I'm not sure, for example, that I would have been at the St. Joseph school, for example. Because I went to the Sheridan School near the Dearborn street in Salem for two years.

13:48

EB: And that was a school—

NG: A school in Salem, a public school. Public school, yes. So I don't know one could imagine what life would have been, but anyway I had the experience of the St Joseph School, yes.

14:07

EB: And you have made—you mentioned New Years day. Did you grandfather do the benediction?

NG: Yes, yes. He did the benediction, certainly. It was a big family. There were my uncles—my father is dead, deceased but there were my uncles and so for New Year's day, he did the Benediction of his sons and his daughters too—my aunt Berta and Anna—so he did the benediction. There were always the Easter traditions, for example. My grandfather, at noon on Holy Saturday—Lent finished at noon on Holy Saturday—he took out the bottle of whiskey to celebrate the end of Lent with his young drunk boys, I could say, because there was a lot of alcohol in the family, yes. So he took out the bottle at noon on Holy Saturday [laughs].

15:28

EB: We've heard from other people that the bars on Congress Street were very popular.

NG: Yes, the bars were often frequented by my uncles. Not really my father because he died young but my uncles frequented the bars in Congress Street, yes.

15:51

EB: It was this that you did when you were too old to play in the park?

NG: Yes.

16:01

EB: And you, you were married also, later?

NG: Yes, yes.

EB: To a woman—

NG: From Danvers. Evelyn, her maiden name was Lord, Evelyn Lord from Danvers. We met in the state of New Hampshire and we were married in 1962. So we celebrated our 49th anniversary two days ago [laughter].

16:32

EB: Congratulations! And do you have kids?

NG: Six kids.

EB: Six kids.

NG: Yes, the youngest will be forty soon and the oldest is forty-eight. One of our kids is dead and one of our kids is adopted. He is Korean. So we have five biological kids and one adopted.

17:03

EB: And your wife doesn't speak French?

NG: She speaks a little. She gets by. She is still a student of French. And I give her a lot of credit because it isn't her maternal language.

17:18

EB: Did you speak French at the house with the kids?

NG: Not enough, not enough. Now I have my granddaughter Juliette and I give her a lesson per week. We meet, she is in Derry, New Hampshire, and we meet in Haverhill, which is between the two. We try to meet in the bookstores, the libraries for a little lesson in French. She is eighteen months old, seventeen months. I believe that she's going to

understand. I recorded this morning before coming here her little lesson. I have already recorded but I want to make the addition of something so I will give the tape recorder to her mother tomorrow.

EB: Very good.

NG: Yes.

18:19

EB: So what interests me as a professor of French—it's why—so did you try to speak French with the kids when they were young or no?

NG: I did not do well for my kids, no.

18:36

EB: Because it was too difficult?

NG: It was a little difficult. I was very busy, I had my practice, I had a lot of kids, I had—there was not a lot of time. But—I can—it's not an adequate reason. You know, I should have done it. But I just didn't do it adequately. Now that I have more time with my granddaughter I can do it. I hope that Juliette will learn. And she knows—she knows several words that she doesn't pronounce but, "Where is the fan?" And she looks at the fan. Ah, the fan that turns. "Where is your tongue?" and she can show me her tongue. "Where is the lady bug?" and "Here is the ladybug." So she is starting to understand.

19:26

EB: That's good. So to come back to the subject of Salem, what was there—not in the Point neighborhood but in the town of Salem—were there some Franco-Canadian places that were important to the community or was it really closed?

NG: Very closed. The life of my youth took place in—I want to say—two hundred meters in each direction [laughs]. But one did not cross Derby Street. One did not cross the Italian quarter. It hardly existed. No, it was a life of youth that was very closed in, very closed in. It was the Point that existed from Ward Street up to Leavitt Street, from Congress to Lafayette. So between these points there was Palmer Cove, the ocean, and we played against other parks, Forest River, Mack Park. So we went that way to play against them but between us it was closed in a way that was quite—

21:20

EB: Quite strict?

NG: Yes, quite strict.

21:21

EB: So no contact with the Anglophones people of Salem?

NG: Not really. Except for the baseball games. I played, for example, against Mayor Harrington, Mike Harrington, who became mayor then, who became a congressman. So I played against them because we are the same age. But I didn't know him. No, we weren't friends.

21:54

EB: It was teams—?

NG: Baseball teams.

21:57

EB: Of the neighborhood, of the school?

NG: Of the neighborhood playgrounds. Palmer Cove against Forest Park

22:04

EB: It wasn't official?

NG: Yes, it was a little official because we had those who took care of—there were—they were called, counselor of Palmer Cove, counselor of Forest River. They organized the games between the playgrounds so it was—we didn't have uniforms but for us it was—for us, it was quite serious [laughs]. Yes.

22:43

EB: Very good. In regards to your identity, there are a lot of words, French, French-Canadian, French-American, or American—so if someone asked, which is yours—

NG: I am Franco-American. Yes, Franco-American.

23:08

EB: And what does that mean to you?

NG: I am American. I was born here, in the United States, but I am of origin—my parents my grandparents are of Canadian origin, but French. If we go rather far back in their history, we find that they came from France. I haven't really studied my genealogy, but I have friends and one in particular who has done a little study of the Gaudraults. He has found that it was a fairly common name in the region of Poitiers, I believe. So I am sure that—So, I am Franco-American.

24:10

EB: And is there anything else? Other questions? Do you have questions that you'd like to follow up on?

EDO: I understand

EB: Okay [laughs].

EDO: I actually have one. If we could just speak in English. My understanding is fine, but it would be easier for me to ask in English.

NG: Sure.

24:27

EDO: I'm curious about the playground situation. It sounds as though the playgrounds were organized by neighborhood. Because the neighborhoods were themselves organized by ethnic groups?

NG: Yes.

24:39

EDO: Effectively, there were ethnic groups competing against other ethnic groups?

NG: Exactly.

24:46

EDO: Was that—did you realize it? Did you think about it? Was that part of your understanding of what it meant to play baseball?

NG: Yes, oh sure.

EDO: That it wasn't just your neighborhood but it was in fact—

NG: Oh, absolutely. We realized that we were going up against those guys from the—the Irishmen from St. Mary's, for example. Yeah, exactly.

26:06

EDO: Were there any particular rivalries?

NG: [Sighs] I don't remember that it was that intense. It was serious enough but I don't remember that far back that it was the major rivalry. I think if there was a rivalry, it would have been between Palmer Cove and Forest River Park. I think those—that would

be the rivalry. But if you said, you know, who played for Forest River Park? What was their background? You know, that was the other side of the tracks. We had no idea, yeah.

EDO: My only other question goes back to your discussion about traditions.

NG: Yes.

25:48

EDO: I'm wondering if there were any food traditions?

NG: Yes. Oh, cortons was very prevalent around holiday time, and la tourtière was certainly part of the holiday festivities. It was—but it was a lot of basic stuff too. There was a lot of—I don't know—macaroni and cheese. It wasn't very fancy stuff. It was pretty basic stuff. But, yes, there was that French-Canadian cortons, certainly, which my wife learned from my—from one of my aunts, one of my cousins. And she makes it once a year and it's the best cortons on the North Shore [laughs]. Yeah.

26:37

EB: And the grocery store that your grandfather—

NG: Grandfather had, yeah.

26:41

EB: Did that cater to the Franco-Americans?

NG: Oh, I'm sure it catered to—that was when we were in St. Paul Street and that catered very much. It was a neighborhood grocery store, yeah. Then when we moved to Salem Street, he had sold the grocery store at that point. And he went to work for Audet's, Audet's grocery store which was on Palmer Street, and that now is a Hispanic—I don't know the name of it, but it's on the corner of Palmer and Salem Street and it's a Hispanic grocery store now. But it was Audet's at that time and my grandfather worked for

Audet's. In fact, my brother worked for the bakery because there was a bakery attached to the grocery store on Palmer Street and my brother worked at the bakery, yeah.

27:38

EDO: I have just maybe one more question. From your stories, it sounds as though, as a boy, most of your time was spent with other boys?

NG: Yes.

27:46

EDO: Was it very clear that girls had a life that was with the other girls and boys had a life with boys?

NG: Absolutely. It was totally with boys. Didn't know what girls looked like [laughs]. That's an overstatement, but all of—that was up to the age of fourteen, then I left. You know, I'm sure that if I had hung around longer, you know, my life would have changed. But up until that age, it was—Of course, I had girls in my class, some of whom were part of the La Salette Faith community. We go—we have our masses at the Topsfield fairgrounds and one of the members of our community is Lucille Bouchard. She was a L'Heureux and we were classmates and we're three days apart in terms of our birthdays. So whenever they ask for birthdays, and January comes around, we always get up together. And so we go back, just in a joking sort of way, to let people know that we went to grade school together and graduated in 1950 together. So, we probably had forty, forty-five kids in our class and it was a mixture of boys and girls. And we had our uniforms. I do remember that. You were asking about traditions. A tradition, when my mother died in 1944—I was eight years old and the uniform was—I don't know, trousers, a white shirt, and we had a maroon tie. But after my mother died, I wore a black tie for a

whole year. For a whole year. And then three years later, my father died, and I wore a black tie for another year. And that was—you know, that was a tradition that existed at that time, and yeah.

29:52

EB: Is there anything else that we—that you'd like to talk about—about your experience as a Franco-American in Salem?

NG: Well, see, I go back to only to age fourteen. Now, if you are interviewing other people, they spent their life in Salem, pretty much. And so I left for my high school, college, medical school, internship, residency, Peace Corps. So I went from fourteen to thirty-one. I came back to Topsfield at age thirty-one and I was in practice from 1967 to 1999. So I've lived in Topsfield since 1967. I've never wandered very far away from Salem. And my brother lived in Salem until he passed away a few years ago, and so I would come back to visit my brother and my uncle Raymond, the one that we went to Canada with. He lived in the Morency building for subsidized housing. And so, you know, I'd make my Salem rounds even though I was living in Topsfield. So, I have great affection for the city.

31:07

EDO: It seems as though your move away at the age of fourteen was unusual amongst your classmates.

NG: I think so.

31:14

EDO: Do you have a recollection of what your classmates were doing or what the common practice?

NG: You know, we parted. You know, our lives separated at that point. Our lives separated but I've come back to this group of people, for whom I have great affection, because one of these guys organizes us, Francis Pelletier, at Bertini's right around the corner from here. Twice a year, April and October, he sends out a postcard and it says, whoever can come, you don't have to RSVP or anything. It says come Tuesday, noontime, on October 12th or whatever, or April 10th. Just show up. And I usually go. And there are about thirty people who show up and some of whom I grew up with, you know. I think this Rene Cormier was—I met him—I probably met him at the last meeting.

EB: Yeah, he mentioned you.

NG: Yeah.

32:11

EB: Well, I guess that's it for us, unless you have something else?

NG: Well, you know, I've kept—I've kept the French interest. I think if you were to ask me what your main preoccupation has been since I retired. We've done—my wife and I have done a fair amount of traveling, and what I've taken upon myself as a project has been to write a book in French. And I'll give you a copy.

EB: Oh, good. I saw it at Orille's house last night.

NG: Did you see it? Well, I'm happy to give you a copy. I'm happy—

EB: Excellent. We would love to see it.

NG: Yeah, and I'm happy to give you a copy. And this has been an all-consuming task, to put this together.

33:03

EB: And this is a book that you—

NG: Well, I wrote it. I started it in 2002 and completed it last year. And I wrote the story and then I brought a French friend along. Well, I wrote it and then I sent it—he's—George is a teacher from forever. He taught forty years at the lycée and we had met in Tunisia in North Africa when we were Peace Corps volunteers, my wife and I, and he was a teacher there. And we stayed connected. This was in 65', when we first knew each other. And two of his daughters spent summers with us back in the seventies. And so, and our kids went to visit them. A couple of our kids did too, not for extended periods, but visited with them. The point being that we stayed connected, and so when I completed what I had written, I sent him a couple of chapters and he absolutely ripped them apart. You know, and—

34:07

EB: Grammatically, you mean?

NG: Well, grammatically and expressions, and revisions, and eliminated stuff, and added stuff, and so forth. And I said, "Well, okay that's fine." But I guess I came to realize that French was my second language, not my first language. And as I got into this, and rewrote and so forth, and visited them, and spent a fair amount of time visiting with George, in France—I spent a couple of weeks in Grenoble. I spent ten days at their summer place on an island near ***Genac***. He became—he became part—a co-author. For me, to just cite him as for acknowledging his assistance would have been plagiarism because so much of this is his—although most of it is mine, I guess, but a lot of it is his. And so I brought him along as a co-author, and he's been very good about it. And it cemented our relationship too because this has taken place over a period of a few years.

So, we—it was published earlier this year. I'm happy to say. My wife and I went to Paris in March and participated in a Salon du Livre. I never knew what a Salon du Livre was.

EDO: There is a big Salon du Livre in Paris. In the north, there is a very big salon in Paris.

NG: Yes. Yes, in all the subway stations, there are, from March 18th through the 21st, there is the Salon du Livre at the Porte de Versailles. So there were twenty five hundred authors. There were—I want to say—No, there were two hundred, no, five hundred publishers, twenty five hundred authors, and a hundred thousand books, and two hundred thousand pedestrians who visited this enormous room. It's like the Bayside Expo. A real thrill to be part of that. In fact, it was just a marvelous experience. And the task that we had was to—[showing photo]—there's your buddy, Orille. We had a reception at our place on April 10th and Orille came.

[Video freezes here]