

**INTERVIEWEE: William Legault**

**INTERVIEWER: Elizabeth Blood, Salem State University with Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Salem State University**

**DATE: August 2, 2011**

**LOCATION of INTERVIEW: Salem State University, Salem, MA**

**LENGTH of INTERVIEW: 61:52**

EB: If you don't like the question, just—

WL: Fair enough.

EB: [laughs]

WL: *Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq—*

EB: Very good!

WL: My name is William Legault. Very prominent and well-known Point family. I am the only one that pronounces it Legault [pronounces it with a French pronunciation, no “t” sound at end] left on the planet that I’m aware of as far as my family goes. This, the family name in Salem over the years has been pronounced Legault [says name pronouncing the “l” and “t” at the end]. But my father one day—came home one day back in, like, 1968 and decided that we were non longer Legaults [with “t” sound] but we were Legaults [without the “t” sound]. And he’s gone now and I’m the only one that has stuck with the Legault [without the “t” sound] pronunciation, which actually confuses people in this town.

0:58

EB: Do you know why he changed his mind?

WL: He just decided—Somebody up in New Brunswick, which is where his family was from explained to him that we were mispronouncing the name. It was Legault [without the “t” sound] not Legault [with the “t” sound], that we were Frenchmen and that the French pronounced it Legault [without the “t” sound]. And he just came back from New Brunswick after that trip and decided that’s what we were. We were not Legaults [with the “t” sound]. We were Legaults [without the “t” sound]. And since he comes from a family of twelve children, eleven siblings—it was a little contentious at the time. But over the years I have stuck with it much to the chagrin of some of my older aunts and uncles.

1:31

EB: Okay. So, what do you know about your family's history and how they came to Salem?

WL: Not as much as you'd like to know. It's tough to track Canadian immigration. I tried it when I was in school. 'Cause to really—they didn't go through Ellis Island so to speak. They just came over the border. The way I look at it is, I am the product of illegal immigrants and I explain that to people all the time and they get kind of insulted when we're having immigration things because if you're French Canadian in New England, odds are your parents, your grandparents, your great grandparents came over the border and didn't tell anybody that they were staying.

My father's side of the family came down from New Brunswick. As far as we can tell, both sides, his father and his mother. We're unable to really track my grandfather. His family—he came down as a child. They were itinerant woodcutters as far as I can tell of some sort. They followed the construction around and they helped to make the lumber. And there's just no records. There's no birth records. There's no death records. There's no immigration records. So, the Legaults came down basically as laborers.

My father's mother—my *mémère*—not the [offers an alternative pronunciation], the *mémère* pronunciation, which I think is specific to northern New Brunswick—she was born in 1912, came down when she was about seven years old around 1917, 1918. They came down to go to work in the shoe factories: Manchester [NH], Haverhill [MA] and Lawrence [MA] specifically, and then from Lawrence came to Salem to work at Pequot Mills. Naumkeag, whatever you want to call it. She was in Salem by the time she started getting married and having children. They were—They met in Lawrence, my *mémère* and my *pépère*, and came to Salem sometime in 1920s and started having the twelve kids that they would eventually have.

EB: Including your father.

WL: Including my father. [He was] one of the younger ones. And on my mother's side of the family, my grandfather obviously was a Hussey. My *mimi*—we called her—she was a Tremblay. They came down from Quebec. But again, there's just really no records. It's interesting that my *mimi* and my *mémère*—my *mémère* lived and died in South Salem basically, where my grandfather from my mother's side and my grandmother, they lived in North Salem. My grandfather was a little more, a little more affluent. And my *mimi*—my mother's mother used to explain to me that I was a product of two types of French Canadians. The refined French—they were the ones who lived in North Salem and came down from Quebec—and then the other French. She never really defined them as—they weren't the refined, so I'm assuming they were the crude or the rude. They were from the wrong side of the tracks in South Salem. So, I was from the wrong side of the tracks but I got to visit my French Canadian relatives on the right side of the tracks frequently.

4:38

EB: So you have a little combination?

WL: We have a little. I have the refined French and the other French Canadian, which she never would be specific about what she meant by that.

4:48

EB: So, you grew up where?

WL: I grew up in the Point. I was born on Perkins Street which runs parallel to Congress on the Shetland side—on the manufacturing side. And then from there we moved to Ward Street, two different locations. A small year and a half period on Jefferson Avenue before we returned to our second home on Ward Street. So, we moved out of the Point about 1971 to Derby Street, into the Polish neighborhood. So, basically from 1960 to 1971, we moved five times. The majority of them in the Point: Perkins Street and then two separate locations on Ward Street.

We were there when the Dominican influx began and I remember that fairly well.

5:37

EB: Can you tell us about that a little bit because I don't think any of the other people we've interviewed were there?

WL: It's interesting, because some of the memories are not necessarily mine. I'm going to start with one that's not mine. I worked at the YMCA for seven years. I was one of the directors there. And a young lady that just graduated Salem State—[he says name but we should strike it because we don't have her permission]—worked—still works at the Y. And we were talking one day about—yeah, I'm a Point kid. You're a Point kid. There's forty years between us but—thirty-five years between us. And her grandparents were the first Dominican family in Salem. And I remember that. Probably prompted memories 'cause I was only, like, three or four, so probably prompted memories. I do remember that the first Dominican family lived in the big brick tenement behind the Pequot filling station, which is now Michaud and Raymond oil delivery place. Still in the same family, the Raymonds—the Michauds and the Raymonds. I remember that they lived there and during that same summer more families came, and every year more and more families, and they were basically all related, and all from the same one or two villages is my understanding. They all came from the same one or two towns, villages, whatever you want to call them. So Emily—her grandparents were the first ones and they're still here in Salem. So it's kind of interesting that Emily and I met all these years later.

So, while I don't remember that first Dominican family, I knew that it was on Dow Street, is where they first came in that big building because I remember that. Because in all honesty, it was like the martians landed. That's the only way to describe it. We've been invaded by these people. At the time though, "people" would have been a generous term. That's a fact and don't let anybody ever paint it otherwise for you. Because their memories are either flawed or they aren't

speaking honestly with you because they weren't looked at as people, especially when they started to come in in greater numbers.

My actual own memories when we lived on Ward Street the two separate times. We lived at 38 Ward Street. As you come up Ward Street, it's the first non-brick house on your left. It's the first non-brick house on the street. It's still there and when we lived there at the time—which was probably 1965 or 1966—Ward Street was still mostly French Canadian, Caucasian. Definitely. Even all of the tenements. We moved away to Jefferson Ave for a year, a year and a half. We came back sometime in 1967. We lived at 22 Ward Street, which is now an empty lot. The house burned down sometime in the eighties. All of a sudden, that had changed. Ward Street was basically, almost separated by a border. 38 Ward Street—my previous residence—was the border. It was the first non-tenement, the first family residence, two family, three family. Basically about seventy percent of the residents on Ward Street, at the bottom half in the tenements, were Dominican. But, nobody called them Dominican. I never heard the word Dominican as a seven year old. They were all Puerto Ricans. They weren't Puerto Ricans but that's what they were. They were all Puerto Ricans. That's what everybody called them. "Those are the Puerto Ricans."

Peabody Street at the time was almost all Dominican. Maybe some Puerto Ricans at the time. The bottom of Ward Street was converting, and it was slowly creeping up. But all of the homes on the upper half of Ward Street were still family owned. I don't remember the name of the family who owned 38 Ward Street, but the next one, which was 40, was the **Dumeil** family. Forty-two was owned by the **Boltus** family. I have the numbers—I'm going backwards. The numbers go the other way. And then there was the Laplante family. And that was just the older folks. That would have been 24. 'Cause I lived on 22. Twenty two was owned by the Garretts. You had the **Awin** family. You had the **Engstrom** family, still all—not a French name, I don't think, **Engstrom**. Still all family-owned, Caucasian. That would change, of course, over the years after that. But they came in and it was—it was—I wouldn't say that it was confrontational but it was contentious. It was different. It was culture shock. These were island people. We have more of an understanding nowadays what the island culture is as opposed to the northern European white man's cold weather culture is. Different ways of looking at things. Different ways of living. Different ways of spending your idle time. Different ways of expressing yourself. And there was a culture shock there, and it wasn't always pleasant.

I was under instructions. I went to St. Mary's school—grammar school. Not St. Joseph's. My father's family, as I said, there were twelve kids and they were all—And here's an admission now: that there was welfare before there was Dominicans in Salem. We were on the dole. My grandmother was on the dole with eleven kids before she had her twelfth. My grandfather came back from World War Two. He went to World War Two as a drunk who had a judge look at him and said, "We're at war, join the Army or go to jail." He joined the Army. The three years he was in the Army in Europe driving fuel trucks were the only three years of my grandmother's adult life that she had a regular paycheck coming in because the Army sent it to her. Prior to the

war, he would go into the Les Canadiens Café on payday Friday, down on Congress Street, and probably not come out till Monday morning. And the money would be gone. He came back from World War Two and the situation was the same. So, she went to the church and asked for help and the church told her that they couldn't help her. She went to the state and asked for help and the state said, "We can't help you unless you get a divorce." She went back to the church—St. Joseph's—asked for help and they again said, "You can't get divorced. That's a sin. We'll excommunicate you." So she found herself in a dilemma, which is: get divorced and feed my children, or don't get divorced, be solid in the eyes of the good lord and watch my children go hungry. She got the divorce. She went to church still every day after that, but she never went to confession or got the sacraments, which probably broke her heart. But she got the divorce. Kind of an odd thing [in] 1946, 1947, to be divorced. And so, she was on the dole.

So, prior to the Dominicans, slash, Puerto Ricans, slash interlopers and invaders coming in, there were people at The Point on financial or federal assistance. And my grandmother was one of them. She really didn't have a choice. And all of her children went to either St. Joseph's—all of her older children went to St. Joseph's, again, on assistance. That's the one way they would help—on assistance from the Archdiocese. But the younger ones—my father included—St. Joseph's was full up with Legaults—or Legault [with the "t" sound] as they said at the time—so they went to St. Mary's. They went to the Irish school. So my sister and I both also went to the Irish school.

So, I kind of did a little walk around there.

13:13

EB: Is St. Mary's next to Immaculate Conception?

WL: It is the Immaculate Conception Parish. That's where I was baptized, confirmed, all of that. My instructions were: I was not to walk to school by going down Ward Street onto Congress. I had to walk up Ward Street, take a right on Lafayette, and go down Derby. I had to stay away from those "people" down there because who knows what would happen. Sometimes I would follow those instructions. Sometimes I wouldn't on hot days because it was a longer walk going around. But the white kids hung out with the white kids, and the Dominican kids hung out with the Dominican kids, and at the time never the twain shall meet. As the years went on that started to change a little bit, especially when I got into the public schools, after St. Mary's closed in 1971, and I started getting familiar with some of these kids. It was interesting that one of the attorneys in Salem, **George Vallis**, among the more prominent attorneys, would bring his housekeeper's family here. He had a place down in Costa Rica. He would bring his housekeeper's family up in the summer times and he would also put this one kid, **José Solis**, into the public schools for a couple of years so he could get a little more of an education. So here I was running around with this Costa Rican kid names José, which was fine but I couldn't hang around with one of those Puerto Rican kids or Dominican kids named José, at the same time.

And I was about twelve or thirteen years old and I was smart enough to say, I don't know. There's something wrong with this picture here. I can hang around with this José but I can't hang around with that José. José [points to one side]. José [points to the other side]. What's the difference? So we were advised not to—don't hang around with those guys. They're no good for you. They're not for you. They're not people you should be hanging around with. It was culture shock.

15:16

EB: And then, I'm going to skip ahead a little bit but did you—as you grew up—did you move out of the Point?

WL: We moved out of Ward Street in 1971. We got a house over on Derby Street. But I still went over there, still hung out with some of the same kids, but by then I was into the public schools. So now I wasn't dealing with the Dominican kids so much in my neighborhood, but I was dealing with them in the schools. And, you know, they mixed very well in the schools, actually. There were fights. There was that kind of stuff, but now you're kids. You're thrown in together and, you know. I think that—

EB: It was the sixties—

WL: We're into the seventies now, you know. And I'm not an expert on these things and I don't have the education that a lot of people have where they can break it down as to why things exist and why they are. I think, personally, that we are all born with a little bit of prejudice or racism in there. It's a tribal thing, you know. You protect your own. There's that group over there and you're this group here, and you're fighting for the same—you're both hunting the same rabbits so to speak, for dinner, and it's more important that you and I eat. We don't care whether they eat or not. So, we've all got that little bit of a tribal thing in there. But I think most of it, beyond that—you can pass that as you mix. I think most of that is developed by—it's upbringing. It's absolutely—it's upbringing. No doubt about it. It's upbringing. It's what do your parents tell you. I'm probably going to be the first person to use this word in your interviews. Maybe not, but I have a feeling that I'm going to. The operational word in 1965 and the early seventies for the Puerto Ricans [makes quotation marks with fingers], who were actually Dominicans at the bottom of Ward Street was, they were "spics." That was the operational word. It's still out there. Not out in the open as much as it used to be, but it's still there. That's what they were. No two ways about it. I heard grown men use it. I heard grown women use it. I heard eighty year old women use it. I heard—that was the word. That was what we called them, 'cause that's what they were. Whatever it meant, that's what they were. It's an ugly word. It was an ugly word. It's still an ugly word, but that's what it was. So—and they were different. That you can't argue, but we were different to them.

17:48

EB: So did your family have traditions that they tried to hold onto that were specifically French Canadian?

WL: You know, in some ways, food-wise, we have traditions. I still make *corton* every year. I make it for the Lobster Shanty [a restaurant in downtown Salem] for Thanksgiving every year. They have a little Thanksgiving thing and I make it. I like to make it not only as the spread but I like to make it as a stuffing for the bird. I don't make the meat pie so much, but a lot of people in Salem still make the *tourtière*. Some people make it all with beef. Some people make it with beef and pork. Some people actually throw lamb in. It's odd, and in a way I'm jealous of the Dominicans and the Spanish because they've made an effort over the years to hang on to their traditions and hang on to their language. And everybody talks about what a terrible thing it is. I don't think it's terrible thing. Yeah, you have to assimilate. It has to happen, and I think it's taken longer with the Dominicans and the Puerto Ricans, and all the Latinos because they've wanted to hang on to their traditions. And I see now, like my friend Emily from the YMCA. Her English is perfect and her Spanish is perfect. And if you were to speak to her, you wouldn't realize that she was a Dominican because there is no accent when she speaks. But she is probably third or fourth generation. I don't know if I have the counts right, where it's taken that long because they've hung on to their traditions.

I don't speak French. I went to Germany for three years with the Army and I was conversational in German in six months. I don't think you could make me conversational in French. My *mémère*—I don't remember particularly why—I talked to my father about it. I remember my father speaking French to my *mémère*. I remember all her children, my aunts and uncles, speaking French with her. But I don't remember any of us grandchildren speaking French. And to my knowledge, none of the grandchildren were ever fluent in French. Maybe dribs and drabs. My grandmother didn't want us speaking French. She didn't want it. In her mind, somehow she associated us speaking French with disadvantage. If you don't speak English as your primary language, if you speak French, you're not going to have all of the advantages that this country has to offer. There's something to be said for that, I guess. There's also something to be said for hanging on to your language, your native language. And maybe now we're finally at the point where there's a middle ground. 'Cause I wonder what Emily—when she gets married and has children—I'm curious, you know, when her kids are twenty, I'd like to still be around—not just for Emily in particular. I want to see how much of the Spanish language has survived. 'Cause it survived with Emily, but will her children speak Spanish? Because they're only gonna get the Spanish from their grandparents, or their great-grandparents. So, there's a middle ground there.

20:56

EB: So, did your mom and dad speak French together?

WL: My mom never spoke French and the refined French didn't speak French. I never heard my grandmother on my mother's side speak a word of French. Never heard my grandfather Hussey

speak a word of French. Only English. My *mémère*—she died in 1967—but she spoke French. Fast, clipped. She spoke French and she spoke with her hands [makes gesture in air with right arm and hand]. And when she spoke, you jumped. She was, like, four foot nine, ninety-eight pounds and—My father died a few years ago but when she spoke, he jumped, as did the rest of her children. But I just—we—we hung on—there were no traditions that we hung on to that were passed on to us really saying, “this is your tradition.” It just didn’t happen. And I wouldn’t say that we’re a lesser people for that. But that’s an advantage that we didn’t use. We should have hung on to some of those.

My father liked to go to New Brunswick to visit the relatives. So I went up there a few times as a kid and I’ve been up there as an adult a few times. So, I still have that connection up in New Brunswick whereas most of my family doesn’t have that. I can only think of one other of my cousins that ever goes up to New Brunswick to visit the relatives up there. So, we hung on to some relatives in New Brunswick. We hung on to the *corton* or—that’s a funny word because [it’s] *corton*, *gorton*, [a third pronunciation]. It’s like five different pronunciations, like *mémère* and *mémé* [mem[ay]. It depends on where you’re from and also how you make it depends on where you’re from. I put my *corton* recipe in *The Patch* [an online Salem newspaper] last year for Christmas—we do a little recipe thing in there—and got some interesting emails on that. Oh, you do? Yes, yes. [EB laughs]

EB: [to EDO] Are you looking for a recipe?

EDO: No, I got one.

WL: There’s a lot of different ones. Some people use bacon fat. Some people use pork fat in there. The spice—the spices is where the difference comes in. Some people are really heavy on cloves. Some people are heavy on allspice. Some don’t use either. I tend to not make it the same way every year. I like to mix it up. I use cloves. I use salt and pepper, of course. I only use sea salt now. Getting hoighty toighty in my old age. I’ll only use spices that I grind myself. I buy the whole spices including the black pepper. I use allspice. And then, I mix it up every year. Sometimes I use ginger. Sometimes I use nutmeg as an additional spice. Sometimes I use cinnamon. And sometimes I’ll use a mixture of those three or two. I do it a little bit different every time. And I also spice up a little bit of garlic in there—really, really small—that a lot of people don’t do. Lot of different—lot of different recipes. Same things with the *tourtière*. You’re [inaudible]. I tried to make blood sausage one year. I wasn’t very good at that. Too much—way too labor-intensive. But I remember the blood sausage from when I was a kid. Going up to eat that. But you know, other than that, traditions—

24:15

EB: No songs or—?

WL: No. No. They—

EB: Holidays?

WL: No, they didn't survive. It's just not there. You know, my father's upbringing was difficult. My *mémère* was divorced. Remarried, had one kid with the additional marriage, and the twelve children have a very contentious relationship, and I think that contributed a lot to things not surviving. My father went to his grave not having spoken to one of his older brothers in thirty years. Actually two of them. A younger brother and an older brother. Thirty years. My instructions were, at his services, that if either of these two characters showed up, I was to escort them bodily to the door. Which I did not do and I would not have done. You know, I don't go putting myself into the middle of other people's fights. Even though he's lying there, it's—"I don't want these guys there." I said, "It's not going to be your choice." So, they didn't survive and I'm sorry about that, 'cause I kind of wish that they had.

25:50:

EB: And so, do you—Were there, as you were growing up in Salem, were there specific places in the city that you remember as being hang out spots for the French Canadian kids or the Franco American kids?

WL: Well, the Point when I was a kid—let me see—I'm going to start on Lafayette Street where Strega is now [restaurant at the end of Lafayette Street close to downtown]. Well, now Strega's sold now. It's gonna be—That was the Klondike Club. I'm sure you've heard that term.

EB: Yes we have.

WL: All right, The Klondike Club. You had—Now when I was a kid the ground level was the billiards hall. Willy **Mosconi** showed up and played one day. It was a pool hall. But downstairs there were a couple of bowling alleys which belonged to the Klondike Club, and I'm not sure that—She might have finally gotten rid of those bowling alleys because they were still there, like, five or six years ago. And upstairs was the Klondike Club proper, which was a French Canadian social club. So upstairs was the Klondike club. Which was, for all intents and purposes, a bar. Which is what the Point really was full of back then. If you go up the street to the left now, there was the Lincoln Café, which was in the yellow brick building which we used to call the Lincoln Hotel, which was all subsidized housing. And then, over where Major Magleashe's is now, I think that was the original Witches Brew and that wasn't—That was a hang out. They hung out at bars. You go down Ward Street, you had the Ward Eight Café which was a small bar. Owned by Ronnie Thibedault, and then senior, and then his son took it over and ran it for years. And then you go down to Congress Street and you had Les Canadians Café.

27:12

EB: When did that close?

WL: Les Canadians Café made it into the late seventies, early 1980s. I wasn't around when that finally closed. Then that was one thing or another for quite a few years, and then it became a very high-end dining destination for about seven years. The Love Noodle. High end, fancy dan, and that guy made a lot of money, and people have been trying to succeed there since then and they haven't had the right concept.

Further down the street on the right you had the Palmer Cove Café. And there was another bar right across the street from there. But that's—still, to me, what I remember is that's where the adults hung out. They hung out at the bars.

St. Joseph's Church now—very big social center. It was always a very big social center. That was my mémère's—the hub of her life even though they basically told her, "You can't come back." They let her go to church. They just wouldn't let her do the sacraments.

28:08

EB: So, the bars were basically for men?

WL: The bars were for—Oh, absolutely! Women didn't go. Absolutely. You didn't see too much of that back then. Absolutely they were for me. The women—You know what? Those were the days when you sat on the front porch and you sat in the kitchen. Some women were working. I remember some of my friends' mothers—usually they were divorced—they were working.

A big social spot actually was right on the corner of Peabody and Lafayette. That was Pricilla's Doughnuts. Pricilla's Doughnut Shop. My mémère worked there for a short time. That was—the men hung out there too. But that was where a lot of the women hung out. Coffee, doughnuts, pastries, read the paper, things like that. But you hung out on the front porch. The front porch, the back porch. You sat in the kitchen. Days before air conditioning, for all intents and purposes. So you sat where you could catch a breeze. You'd go down to Palmer's Cove. There was actually a beach at Palmer's Cove at the time. We actually swam there. We probably shouldn't have been, but then we also swam off the Congress Street bridge, which nowadays they wouldn't let you do. We were jumping right off the bridge.

So, the family center was St. Joseph's. It was going full board. You had the church. You had the grammar school. You had the high school. That was a big social center, absolutely. But family places? You hung out where you could catch a breeze. Especially in the summer time.

29:43

EB: Do you remember going downtown?

WL: Oh, absolutely. Essex Street was not a mall at the time. So, it was an actual street and—We would—we used to walk—My mother would take me uptown to Almy's, Almy's Bigelow and Washburn's, as the sign used to say. Woolworth's Five and Dime, I remember that. Kay

Jeweler's. Kennedy Butter and Egg. All of those places. I would walk up there with my mother when I was very, very young. She would always have to end up stopping and talking to somebody, and she'd always find a spot on my face. We'd be about to go somewhere and she'd take a look down, and I had a spot on my face, and that would bring out the handkerchief and this [mimes spitting on thumb and rubbing a small child's face in front of him], which you hated because then you'd be standing there and your mother's got the back of your head and she's rubbing like this [mimes someone holding the back of his head with one hand and rubbing his cheek with the other]. I'd say, "I have no idea what she's cleaning off of my face", but it's there and it's—[rubs cheek with thumb again]—off it would go.

We'd go up there. Salem, for a few years—sixties or seventies—It might have been late sixties into the early seventies, after the malls opened up. The retail was suffering, obviously. The North Shore Shopping Center [in Danvers, MA]—When I say "the malls" actually, at the time there was just one, the North Shore Shopping Center, which wasn't even a mall yet. It wasn't all roofed over. Salem started having—it had to have been in July for historical purposes. I don't remember the exact date, but for a few years they had what were called Bastille Days. Celebrating the storming of the Bastille and it was a retail thing. The stores got together and they all had sales, small events. I think the intention was to try and turn it into a smaller version of heritage days, only focusing on the French Canadian people. Trying to get them to go downtown and do their shopping. So I remember the stores having the Bastille Day signs and they would just have sales. Restaurants would have specials. Only lasted a few years. That was a losing battle. You weren't going to beat the malls and the shopping centers. But I remember the Bastille Days. Walking with my mother up there [to Essex Street], there were certain places she always went. Kennedy's Butter and Egg was always a stop. They moved in a few locations. I don't know if anybody's mentioned them. It was a butter and egg, you know, cold cuts, prepared foods at the time, your eggs, your milk, your cheese, your bread. But mostly you shopped at your corner store, anyway. Pricilla's Doughnuts sold milk and bread. That's where I went. I would go around the corner with a dollar and go get a loaf of bread and half a gallon of milk. And I would come back with a loaf of Wonder bread, or Nissan, with a half a gallon of Hood's milk and change from the dollar.

I mean, everything was in the neighborhood. You had the doughnut shop. You had the **Lena's** Sub right there. On Lafayette Street, you had two drug stores. One of them had a fountain. You had—**Vallaincourt's** was up on the corner of Lafayette and Harbor, but that was just a drug store. They didn't have a candy counter. They sold medical supplies and stuff like that. But across the street in the Lafayette Hotel building—the red brick one, on Lafayette—that was **Lucia's**. Drug and they had a soda fountain. So I used to go in there for lime rickeys, raspberry rickeys, a milkshake. We didn't do frappes back then. It's a milkshake, people [speaks directly to camera]. I don't know where this frappe business came from [laughter from off camera]. And when they made—cherry cokes. Before they came out with cherry coke in a can, where they would take a paper cup—waxed paper cup—put coke in there and then add—Well, first they'd

put in the water, and then they'd add the syrup, and then they'd put the cherry syrup in there. And they sold candy bars and comic books. My twenty-five cents allowance—I used to go into Lucia's drugs with twenty five cents, buy a comic book, a soda, and a candy bar, and walk out with a nickel still in my pocket. Those were the days. Those were the days, yeah. A quarter was money. A quarter was money.

33:50

EB: And those were all shops that were owned by—?

WL: All family owned. You know, I'm gonna go—I said Lucia Drug building was in the Lafayette Hotel, which is 116 Lafayette Street. There was also, on the corner, there was a jeweler there, Richard's Jewelers. And he lived up on Jefferson Ave. Just a family—he was probably in his seventies at the time—family-owned jewel business. Pricilla's Doughnuts was owned by the Garrett family, **Blacky** Garrett. At the time, a pretty well-known Salem family. His son went on to be a Salem police officer, became a lieutenant. He's retired now. Blacky died—oh, not that long ago. He worked for the city. He owned the doughnut shop. Right on the corner of Ward and Lafayette, which is where that Casa Blanca debacle of a restaurant is. Now, you know, it's all closed down. They're all suing each other. That was a little place called the Fry Kettle. Fried fish and chicken. We used to go in there and get soda and a big order of french fries. You know, split it. That was a treat for us. Lena's sub shop, right in the middle. Those were all family-owned. Lucia Drug was family-owned. Vallaincourt's Drug was family-owned. Right in the middle of the Lincoln Hotel—that's the yellow brick building. That's one 117 Lafayette—there was a restaurant, a diner, called Mary's Lunch. Owned by the Leblanc family. Mary was the face of the place. Nappy, or Napoleon Leblanc, he was the cook, and I started working there when I was nine years old. Imagine that, nowadays. They'd all be in jail. I started working there during the summer. I'd go in and wash the pots and the pans from the steam table. I would wash 'em in a big sink by hand and lay 'em out on a bench, and then after I got finished washing them, I would dry them by hand. After they were air dried, I would dry 'em by hand. And then when I was done I would go out and vacuum the carpet. The indoor-outdoor carpet in the dining room. And they'd all be there. Nappy would be there, and Mary would be there, and their family would be there and their friends, and they'd all be smoking cigarettes and yammering in French. There'd be a cloud of smoke. A bunch of old folks, yammering, yapping in French and I'd have to vacuum around their feet. They'd pick up their feet. They'd move 'em but I'd have to vacuum around their feet. And I did that for five dollars a week at nine years old. That was big money. That was big money. I did that for two years before I asked for a raise. And they said "no" and I moved on. My first job action. I used to hate Tuesday nights because it was Virginia baked ham night. Brown sugar [mimes trying to scrape something hard off of a surface] made those pots tough to clean. That was family-owned. Like I said, the Ward Eight Café—which was behind the Fry Kettle—that was the Thibedeau family. That was family-owned. Everything was family-owned. Absolutely. That's just the way you did it. You didn't make big money but you made enough money, you made enough money to live on.

36:52

EB: So you left in 1979?

WL: I went into the service in '79. I was living on—we were living off of Derby Street, at the time. But I left Salem in 1979. I went off to defend the world from the godless hordes of communism. You girls [points at interviewers] wouldn't remember that. They were ten feet tall. Mean. Tough. Terrifying. [rolls eyes]

37:23

EB: So, from '79 to '91 you were just—

WL: I was in the service. I was all over the place. It is easier for me to name the places that I wasn't than it is for me to list the places where I was. So, yeah, it was a lot of fun. And when I came back out of the service, I didn't come back to Salem initially. I was living up in New Hampshire and working in the Merrimack Valley in Lawrence where again, I got my second long-term experience with the culture shock, so-to-speak. I was a machinist and I worked on Manchester Street, which is up in North Lawrence right up by Malden Mills. I managed a rooming house also for a friend of mine on the side. I got an apartment for free to manage the rooming house, to collect the rents. And I was there the night that Malden Mills burned down. I was sleeping. I got woken up by—I was lying on my couch taking a nap and I was having a dream about—I don't remember exactly what I was dreaming about, but these explosions worked their way into my dream. There were these explosions. And finally one of them woke me up and from my back window, I couldn't see Broadway. I looked out over the **Spigot** River but I could see reflections of all the fire trucks, sirens and lights. So I went out and saw what was going on. And from talking to people, the explosions that had worked their way into my dreams were the propane tanks on all the fork trucks. The flames would hit one and pop it open.

But I had my second long-term experience with the Dominican influx, so-to-speak. I worked at a place that was all white. There was about twenty employees. We were all white. A lot of French Canadians but Lebanese owned it. They were Lebanese guys, all brought up in Lawrence that owned this company. Two Lebanese guys and a French guy. All three brought up in Lawrence. Two of 'em lived in Windham now in New Hampshire, and the other one lived up in Chester, New Hampshire. And I ended up living right there and I belonged to a—I ended up—in the building that I managed, there were two Dominican social clubs. **The Associations Civicas**, which I ended up joining there and going in there. Actually, I ended up working there as a bouncer a few nights here and there. And I joined the smaller club upstairs called **Los Tatros** which I never quite—as far as I could tell, a *tatros* is a big purple bird of some sort. I still have the coat from that. I was one of two white guys that was a member of this club. And so I experienced—I still have a lot of friends up there. So, that was my second experience with the—I hung out a lot of these guys and drank beer. I learned to put Clamato in my beer instead of a lime. They would put that stuff in, and as long as it's cold it tastes good, it's not bad. Once it gets

warm, you gotta drink the beer fast for the flavor to be right. But that was my second experience. I was up there for seven years. And it kind of reinforced my experiences from the Point, in that the people that have a problem with the Dominicans are just—they're just jackasses. I mean, yeah, they're different. They do things—they're a little louder. Definitely, a little louder, a little more boisterous, a little more exuberant when they're celebrating but overall, what's the difference? What's the difference?

If you're gonna live in a neighborhood—I lived in that building. And I was managing the building, and I had two social clubs, so I had three choices. I could just accept the fact that I lived in a building that had—where there was going to be a lot of noise and music and happy people all the time. I could fight it and lose the fight and end up having to move. Or, I could get a big stick with a nail in it and go through the building and start swinging it at people. And you know what? Not very productive. Short term satisfaction. Success. But in the end, you're the one leaving. So, you adjust to the neighborhood. And they adjust to you. Before I joined—the way I joined the Tatros club was, I started going in there and saying “Hey, its three o'clock in the morning. When do you guys close? I need to get some sleep.” And it led to conversations, and it led to friendships, and it led to my joining the club, and it led to them toning it down a little bit after a while. You know, Bill's got to go to work. He goes to work at five in the morning. And it also led to me maybe being at the club 'till three in the morning a couple of nights myself, making as much noise as everybody else.

42:15

EB: So why'd you decide to come back to Salem?

WL: I came back to Salem in '98, '99. I was a machinist in the printed circuit board industry, which was really booming in this region for a long time. And then, like everything else, it started going overseas. And I specialized—I worked with companies that specialized in prototype printed circuit boards, which means you're building them directly for the engineers. Small runs. Ten boards. A hundred boards. Two thousand boards. Up to maybe ten thousand boards. We had the Wayne contract which went down the toilet. We had a Digital contract. We had a contract with MIT and BU [Boston University]. We were making boards directly for them. But the jobs started becoming scarce. Companies were closing. I worked for all these small-to-medium sized companies. You know, you're talking three or four million dollars a year to ten or twelve million dollars a year in revenue. But they were starting to close, so one friend of mine ended up being a production manager at a place down in Florida and he offered me a job. And I said, “You know what? I'm gonna go to Florida. I've never spent any time down there.” And I came back to Salem to tie up some loose ends.

EB: Never left.

WL: And here I am. I'm still sitting here. I just—I'm still here. Never made it to Florida. So.

43:35

EB: Are there places now that you go to in Salem where you see people from the neighborhood that you grew up with?

WL: It's funny. Most of them are—they're not around. Actually, there's one fellow here that's on your [Salem State University] police department, **Hangstrom**. I mentioned his family early on. Michael Hangstrom, he's on the SSC—but I don't—I haven't seen him in years. A lot of these guys are gone now. A lot of these guys are gone. Not gone, dead gone. They've moved on, Danvers to New Hampshire. They're all over the place. I think that Salem amongst the French and the Irish, it's interesting. If you go around and talk to people, there's two types of people that I went to school with. Those that stayed in Salem and never went anywhere. They don't go anywhere. They might go to Aruba every couple of years but they don't go places. And when they do go places they only go where it's very controlled circumstances. Go to Aruba where you're gonna sit on the white sands, and the only guy that's not like you that you're gonna see is the one bringing you your drink with the little umbrella in it. That's a fact. And then those that left. I'm an anomaly. I left and came back. There's not a lot like me in that respect. There's people up—

Facebook has really brought this to bear with me 'cause I've tracked down a lot of the people that I remember, and they're in New Hampshire, they're in Vermont, they're in Washington State. They're somewhere else. And you talk to the people who are still in Salem, and they've never gone anywhere. They're here. Including—In reality, I look at it as part of the problem that Salem's having. I don't know if you follow city government. It's part of the problem. You have these en[trenched] sorts that are digging in their heels and saying, "I don't want things to change any more than they've already changed." As a matter of fact, they want to change some of that stuff back. You have guys like that on the City Council. They've never been anywhere. They've never experienced anything else. The only culture—the only different cultures that they've experienced is the cultures that have come into Salem, and they don't like it. So, a lot of the people—the people that I would like to see in Salem, they're not around in Salem anymore. Not that there's people in Salem that I don't like. There's quite a few of them. But I have this one friend of mine—yeah, I guess he's still a friend—he's basically, you know, he's almost a street person. Social Security disability, subsidized housing, and he's not a Dominican or Puerto Rican or one of "those" guys. But he had a tough road to hoe almost from the beginning. He's about the only one I run into on a regular basis. And that's because I work a couple of shifts at my friend's liquor store and he's in there all the time. The Ward Street guys other than—Duba is what we call him. His name is **Dubielle**, we call him Duba. He's really the only one from the Ward Street crowd. The one kid—not a French name, **Nutiller**. I saw him last year only because his mother died and that's really where—you know how that goes. You only see certain people at weddings and funerals, and I'm kind of in between wedding stages. I'm waiting for all—the kids have all been married now. I'm waiting for the grandchildren to get married. So I've got another ten, twelve years before I start getting into one of those wedding jags. So, I'm on a funeral jag

nowadays. So, I see these people at funerals. I have my places that I hang out but I tend to hang out with a younger crowd, I guess. Not that I don't hang out with people my age but I tend to— When I came back to Salem I worked in the restaurant and bar industry. I'm not a big drinker anymore but I hang out with generally, a younger crowd. So, I don't see all the old guys from the neighborhood. They're not here. They left. They left. The ones that stayed probably should leave. Or they should have gone somewhere once or twice. Spread their wings a little bit. I had the advantage of Germany, other parts of Europe, Japan, Philippines, Thailand, a little bit of the Middle East. I got to experience all these different things. I got to be the outsider. You know, I went to Paris where I walked into a shop, and the people in the shop kind of went [mimics horror and disgust]. They treated me like—I didn't like Paris because of that. Did not like Paris at all. We left Paris. We were treated rudely because unlike in Germany where when you try your German out, they try their English out on you. I'd go to Paris and I'd try my rudimentary New Brunswick, Northern New Brunswick French Canadian out on them, and they look at me like I have two heads, and they won't even talk to me, you know. But, I got to experience that in different countries. I was never treated more rudely than I was treated in Paris. I don't know but I think that had to do with being a G.I. also. Where, in the opposite vein, go up to northern France, up by Normandy, say “hello”, they can't do enough for you. Good memories. Where in Paris—I'm probably going to get a little political here—in Paris you still have a lot of people who remember—and I don't want to offend when I say this—Paris basically bent over. Said to the Germans, “Here we are, we're going to bend over. Do what you will.” Where in northern France—not that there wasn't resistance there, [but] in northern France they fought. They resisted. And I think, from talking to some French soldiers in Germany, they said that the Parisians are still very sensitive as to the—What was the government?

EB: The Vichy.

WL: The Vichy. The Vichy government and the accusations of collaboration. They're still very sensitive to that, and that they're still sensitive to that and American soldiers tend to remind some people of that. So, when you go up to northern France you don't—it's just the opposite. Not that everybody in Paris is like that. We had a week in France and we were going to do two full days in Paris, and we stayed the one night and left the next morning. We left early. We got on the train and left early the next morning. We were not happy at all with the way we were treated. But, you know, so maybe I felt like a Dominican on Ward Street in 1965. So, what goes around comes around.

50:14:

EB: So, in all of your travels, if people asked you to identify your ethnic heritage—

WL: Oh, absolutely.

50:28

EB: Was there a particular term you would use to describe? Would you say French Canadian or Franco American or just American?

WL: I said French Canadian. I remember—That Franco American term, I remember when—I don't remember that Franco American term until Jean Levesque [former Mayor of Salem. First mayor of Franco American descent] got elected mayor of Salem and then he was the first "Franco American mayor." I said, "Franco American?" Franco American to me was a really, really, bad canned spaghetti. I say French Canadian and I specifically—When I say New Brunswick, I specifically say, "Up on the coast. Northern New Brunswick." Not down there with the English-speakers. Up there with the French-speakers. When I went up there as a little kid, you, they wouldn't speak English to you even though they could. And they wouldn't put on—they had English TV channels. They wouldn't put them on. I always said French Canadian. And very specific: New Brunswick French Canadian. Because, you know, I'm kinda proud of that because [they were] working people. Tough life. And there was a—This didn't happen to me. My brother was telling the story one day and—My brother is a little shorter than me. Built the same. He's with the Park Service. He's a Smokey the Bear with a gun. And he was—after I went in the service, my mother packed him up and went to Arizona, and he was brought up in **Kingwood**, Arizona. And he was up in Flagstaff doing something with the Park Service one day, and I guess there is a pretty big—I don't know if that is the University of Arizona. I'm not sure. There's a big anthropology department there, and he's there having a conversation with somebody and this woman with four or five students around her just walks up and starts talking about—They're having a conversation and she said—She looked at my brother and she said, "Do you mind if I use you as an example?" And he just says, "I don't care." And she starts pointing out physical features on him and she said—She basically pegged him as northeastern Canada. The thick chest, the short arms, the short, squat legs. We were trollers. We pulled nets up, you know. She basically pegged him. He said, it blew him away. She basically pegged him as—She couldn't quite narrow it down to New Brunswick, but she basically pegged him as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, the Maritimes. We've always believed that we were more Norwegian than French actually. We've got a lot of Norwegian in there. But she basically picked out—by looking at his build—which blew him away. And that always impressed me.

I was in Germany and I was going to fly back to the States on a civilian flight so I called to get—I can't remember the name of the German airline now—

EDO: Lufthansa?

WL: Lufthansa. I was going to get a Lufthansa flight because they treated you really well. Lufthansa always treated G.I.s well, and you could get a good price. So I'm on the phone now, old school phone, a handle with the little thing coming off the end [indicates a cord]—1987, maybe '88—trying to book a flight and I give my name to the woman on the other end who has sort of a British accent. I said, "My name is Legault." She goes, "Legault?" Spell that." I said, "L-E-G-A-U-L-T." She goes, "Oh, no, no, no. That's not Legault. You say that Legault

[indicates a soft “g” sound rather than a hard “g” sound]. I said, “Excuse me?” [She said] “Well, your name is Legault [again, with soft “g” sound].” I said, “No, no, it’s Legault.” [with hard “g” sound]. She says, “No, no.” And she told me that she was from northern France somewhere and she’s explaining to me why it’s a soft “g”. So I had a pretty good twenty minute conversation with her before I finally got my ticket. And I was laughing my ass off. Sorry, because I said my father’s going to have a heart attack because I’m gonna correct him. So I get back to the States. I go to see my father in New Hampshire. I said, “Dad, this Legault [with hard “g”] business—” He goes, “Yes.” I said, “You know, I was born a Legault [pronouncing the “t” and with a hard “g”] and then all of a sudden I was, like, nine years old, I was a Legault.” [without pronouncing the “t”]. I said, “I accepted that. I adjusted to that and I pronounced the name the way you want me to pronounce it now, and I always will except we have to make one minor change.” I said, “You said it was really mandatory—it was required that we pronounce the name correctly.” So I explained the whole conversation to him. He got all red in the face. He said, “Pfhh. That woman doesn’t know what she’s talking about. It’s Legault [with hard “g” sound]. You need to call her up for me and I’ll correct her.” I said, “Nah, I don’t have the number so—” He was very sensitive as to the Legault thing [with hard “g” sound].

After that, a couple of times when I was with him, just to tweak him, if I introduced myself or introduced him to somebody, I would say Legault [with soft “g” sound] just to get a rise out of him. Which it always did. But she corrected me. We were supposed to be using the soft “g” and not the hard “g”. But that was—I kind of went around in a circle to get there. But I like the French Canadian. French Canadian. Very specific. New Brunswick. Northern New Brunswick, north of [inaudible] just east of **Caraquet**. So that’s where we were—Those are the only French Canadian relatives I ever met, except for the ones in Montreal which actually came from there, so.

We were—my grandmother was a Millet [pronounced with the “t” at end] or Millet [pronounced without “t” at end].

55:50

EB: That’s pretty much what we have for questions unless there is anything else you want to tell us about growing up French-Canadian in Salem.

WL: You know, it’s overrated and underrated at the same time. The Point was a great neighborhood. It was very urban. There was no grass. There was no greenery. Nowadays, there is more greenery down there than there ever was. You had to go to Palmer’s Cove for your greenery. You know, we swam on a little spit of sand surrounded by the boats at the Palmer Cove Yacht Club. It was pavement. It was cement, hot top and brick. But we did okay. We played a game called halfball. We didn’t have a big enough field on Ward Street to play baseball, so we got broomsticks and pinkie balls, tennis balls, and we cut them in half. And you’d grip it like this [indicates holding the ball in circle made by connecting thumb and fingers] with the flat,

hollow part underneath and you'd throw it sidearm. And you'd swing a broomstick at it. We played street hockey. We didn't have ice. It was not a bad place to grow up. We all did okay. Most everybody is still around and having a decent life. But it wasn't this pristine piece of French-Canadian heaven. They didn't—not everybody hosed down the sidewalks. Not everybody took care of their property. There were nasty people there like there's nasty people everywhere. There were bad people there like there are bad people everywhere. It wasn't a perfect world. There is no perfect world. But it wasn't a terrible place to grow up and I feel, in reality, that I was fortunate that I experienced the melting pot for real when the Dominicans came in. It was a good experience. It wasn't perfect, but it was nice. We all grew up. We all moved on. And here we are.

57:58

EDO: Can I ask one more question?

EB: Sure.

58:02

EDO: Which is—I'm curious about your interest in wanting to be interviewed for this project.

WL: Well, it wasn't that I *wanted* to be interviewed.

EDO: Why were you willing to be interviewed?

WL: I wrote an article for The Patch, which I think you read [points at EB].

EB: Yes.

WL: And I usually do musings. I will be musing on my memories of Heritage Days for this Saturday. And then you got in touch with me [points at EB] and asked if I was willing. I said, "Sure. Number one, I don't mind talking. Number two, oral histories—I'm currently working on a book that's based on oral histories, from the sinking of a destroyer in World War Two. Oral histories are important. People should put their memories down there. But also, I get so tired of listening to all of these people say what a wonderful place The Point was when the French Canadians were there and the Dominicans screwed it up for everybody. No, they didn't, and I know that I'm one of the few that will actually speak to the other side and say, "No, it wasn't terrible. It wasn't the end of the world. It wasn't." There were good French Canadians before the Dominicans came. There were good French Canadians after. And I dare to say it, there were good Dominicans." At The Point in 1964, there were good people that came over here to start a new life, and it's been three or four or five generations—I lose track as to exactly what a generation is—and I know a lot of these young people. Salem State has a lot of these young people. They're good people. I like to get the other side out because I was afraid. I said, "Boy, they're talking to people about The Point. I can only imagine some of the things that they're

hearing from some of these people.” We didn’t all hose the sidewalks down. We didn’t sing the supper song at quarter of five. Come out and go, “Okay, all you good French Canadians” [swings arms as though dancing] let’s sing the supper song.”

59:55

EDO: What’s the super song?

WL: There is no supper song, but it’s just how I make that point because they make it seem like it was a musical. We weren’t living a musical. We were living real life with real problems, with real people having trouble dealing with it. We had drunks, and we had drugs, and we had the motorcycle gang at the bottom of Ward Street, the Devils Disciples. All white guys. They used to come out when it rained sometimes and take their clothes off in the middle of the street. It was real life. It wasn’t a movie. This isn’t *West Side Story*. When the knife comes out, people died. Not that we had a lot of that, but we had it. It was rough. It wasn’t perfect, but we all did well. It was life. I’m gonna say it again. It wasn’t a movie and I get tired of these people presenting it as the good ship lollipop. There is no good ship lollipop. It never existed. Shirley Temple was a character played by an actress. We weren’t actors or actresses. We were real life. The Point was and is life as reality. It was a good place then. It’s a good place now, full of good people. And people need to back off and let ‘em live. That’s all it is. Let ‘em live. All right, you got me going here. You happy?

EDO and EB: [laughs] Yes!

EDO: Absolutely! Bravo! [claps] Bravo! Great!