

INTERVIEWEE: Rene Cormier
INTERVIEWER: Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Salem State University
with Elizabeth Blood, Salem State University

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LOCATION of INTERVIEW: 3 Greenleaf Dr. Danvers, MA.
LENGTH of INTERVIEW: 44:41 minutes

OTHER: Sandra Anactasi (Rene's wife) enters for a brief time.

EDO: Tell to the camera your name and today's date. That would be excellent.

RC: Bonjour, my name is Rene Cormier and today's date is June 17th 2011.

00:10

EDO: So we'd love to start off asking you to talk about your family's history, as much as you would like to, or as little as you'd like to.

RC: I was born in Salem Hospital but I lived on Congress Street, 73 Congress Street. My father had a first wife and he had five children with her. She died because of appendicitis. I don't know the exact details. Then he married my mother probably around 1934 and they had one child, first a girl, Pearl. She died in infancy from bronchitis. Then I was born in 1937 and then I have a brother who was born in 1944. And I lived on Congress Street, went to St. Joseph's Grade School, and St. Joseph's Academy. Graduated from the Academy in 1955. My father was from a place called **Bouctouche** in New Brunswick, and it's an Acadian name, and there's a lot of history associated with the Acadians because a Longfellow wrote about it in *Evangeline*. They call it *le grand dérangement*. In 1755, Britain, having beaten France at a war, took over that part of Canada but Québec still remained part of France at the time. So my mother's from that part of [Canada], and my father's from Acadia. Those became the Cajuns in Louisiana. Go ahead—

02:04

EDO: And your mother is from?

RC: From a place called L'Île-Verte, which is along the St. Lawrence, north of Québec City. But her parents initially moved to Lowell, and then from Lowell they moved to Salem. Again, as you're aware, these people came down to work at the textile mills. From my understanding, the economy was pretty bad in Canada, at a certain point in time. So they just came down and worked in the mills.

02:37

EDO: So your mother was an immigrant from Canada?

RC: Yes, I'm first generation—Canada.

2:45

EDO: So she immigrated to Lowell and then to Salem?

RC: Yeah, she was probably about four years old, I think, when she came to the States. I forget how old my father was. He might have been more like a teenager when he came to the States.

2:58

EDO: Did either of your parents work in the textile mills?

RC: My mother worked in the Pequot Mills for a long, long, time. My father did not work in the mills. He had, I guess, various jobs. But the main job that he had for a long time was working as a truck driver for a company called Lynn Sand and Stone, which delivers cement and stone, and he drove gravel-carrying trucks. He did that till he retired probably at age sixty-five or so. He

passed away in 1971. I moved back to Massachusetts—I'll probably get to that—in '71. And I was happy I moved back in July—he died in July from cancer. But he had an opportunity to see this house. I was quite proud to make him proud—to see this house.

3:58

EDO: You spent your childhood in Salem. Are there any particular stories, or memories, or experiences?

RC: Used to walk from Congress Street—it's probably a five minute walk—up to St. Joseph's School. Used to walk to school and come home for lunch. Used to play football in the streets, on Dow Street. I don't think Palmer Cove Playground was established then. We spoke English in the streets, but in the home everybody spoke French. And in the school, if you were caught talking English, the nuns would rap you with a ruler. And, you know, I have always been very proud of being bilingual, and I've worked over the years to keep it up. We used to—this is just coming—as a child, in the summertime, we'd go to Palmer Cove at the wall. There's a wall—I don't know if you've been there or seen it—and that's where we'd go swimming—on the wall. At one point, they put a little pier out and we could be able to dive in the water. That was where we swam. We also hung out at Palmer Cove Yacht Club, and some of my friends had boats, and we used to do a lot of fishing from there. There was also a boatyard there and there still is a boat yard there. And we'd work in the boatyard as teenagers, and help paint boats, scrape boats, and everything. A little anecdote—one of the rituals of being a young man was to swim from there to the Marblehead side.

5:51

EDO: And did you do it?

RC: Yeah, a number of us did that. It's a good swim. But always with a rowboat next to us in case we went down. We used to go fishing a lot. We used to go digging our own bait in a place called Collins Cove in Salem. We'd go out fishing and bring fish home. My mother would clean the fish. We'd catch eels. I wouldn't eat the eels. She would eat eels. She ate a lot of stuff that she would eat that I wouldn't eat. I didn't eat lobster or crabs till I left New England. So it was a great growing up there. St. Joseph's Academy, at that point, was a very small and they started a football team when I was a freshman. There was a coach, an Italian guy from the Italian section who became the coach—totally free. And we got to play all the way through high school. My junior year, the coach at Salem High approached my coach and me and said, "He's a great ball player but he's not going to be seen here. He should transfer to Salem High so he can get a college scholarship." And I said, "No." Even at that point, I was more interested in education than the scholarship. So I stayed at St. Joseph's and then I worked summers to help pay for college, and here's another interesting point. I think that's it—part of the story is that I didn't even have enough money, even working summers, so my mother became a house cleaner to help me pay for college. And my father would say, "What the hell you doin' it for? Why go to college?" At that point, sons were expected to go to work and help the family. So, thanks to her, I went to college and got various degrees and worked out very well.

8:07

EDO: So it sounds like it was uncommon among your neighborhood and your peers—the track that you took, which is to go to college?

RC: That's right. But another little side light of that is—and this is quite important, I think—is that the nuns, at the time, [if] they saw a smart kid in school—and I had good grades—they

would convince you that you wanted be a priest. So all the way from grade school, I was being tracked and I'm going to the priesthood. That was my career aspiration until I was a junior in high school at the Academy and I started going with a freshman girl, French Canadian, Colette **Belleau**. She was, like, 2nd generation, 3rd generation. And then the nuns took her aside and said, "What are you doing? You're gonna ruin a vocation here." And that really got me upset. So that was the end of my gonna be a priest. So here I am now, a senior at the Academy, no longer am I gonna go to seminary, and what am I going to do? So, they had a small library about the size of this room at the Academy, and there were books and college catalogs. There was a college catalog from Lowell Technological Institute, now UMass Lowell. I looked at the catalog—Oh, engineering? Yeah, I can do that. A hundred fifty bucks a year tuition? That's no big deal. So I went into engineering not because I was dedicated to being an engineer, but it was affordable, I could do it, and engineers made good money. You got a job. That's how I ended up at Lowell Tech.

10:14

EDO: Did your siblings go on to college?

RC: My brother—he was younger than me—this is quite an interesting story. My brother—I'm blond, fair-haired, blue eyed. He was very, very dark. And my mother attributes that to one day while she was pregnant with him, she answered the doorbell and she saw a black man there. And she attributes his being black to that encounter. She believed that. And my being the golden haired, blue-eyed smart, smart, kid, she didn't make him feel like he was that smart. And he, as a result, had some low esteem. But he went on to vocational school as an electrician and that's a whole other story as to what's going on there. He has an interesting story unto himself.

11:17

EDO: Could we talk to him too?

RC: He's not here. He's in Montréal right now. But he's good. Basically, he drank a lot, alcoholic, ended up having a lot of trouble with his wife. Lived up the street here for a while. Ended up—wanted to leave the country, so he got a job because of his French speaking ability with a contractor that built U.S. embassies abroad. And he was in charge of—in Burundi—in charge of the local workers who were French speaking, and through this he got a lot of jobs in very secret places throughout that. In spite of my affluence here—I have a college education—I think he has way more money than I have right now because of tax free stuff, and stuff like that, and getting paid a lot of money to do this stuff. Anyhow, so that's another story.

12:14

EDO: Very interesting. So I just wanna follow up, quickly—you mentioned at home you spoke French?

RC: Yes, we spoke French.

12:19

EDO: On the streets, you spoke—

RC: English

12:22

EDO: In school you spoke French?

RC: Yeah, at school we supposed to speak French.

12:28

EDO: If you were out and about in Salem—throughout all of Salem—were you speaking English? Everywhere?

RC: English.

12:34

EB: In the shops and everything?

RC: Yes, at that time. Although, I remember coming back with my wife, to visit my parents, and she went to the laundromat to do some washing, and she was amazed. She said, “The kids here”—a lot of people, young ladies, still speaking French, which I found amazing. This is probably in 1960.

13:05

EDO: To switch gears for a moment here, what was it like to live in Salem as a Franco-American when you were growing up? Was it something that you were acutely aware of? Were there places that were considered French-Canadian? You were living on Congress Street. So that area—

RC: You were aware of the ethnic neighborhoods. You crossed the bridge, the Congress Street Bridge, and you're in Polish country. Out by the railroad station was where the Italians lived. So you were aware of the ethnic—but there was never any tension between the groups. But growing up, you felt that if you didn't—even if you married another catholic, if she wasn't French-

Canadian or Franco-American, that'd be a mixed marriage [laughs]. And it's kinda carried on with me because then I met this girl at Salem State who was French speaking, and we got married. Then she passed away from cancer. Then my current wife, she's—There were three. My first serious woman of interest was Colette Belleau. She was my wife—Margret Moreau—Sandra Comeau—all “eau's”! Something is going on here! [laughter]

14:30

EDO: Living in the part of town that you were living in, was your family connected to that part of town? I mean, this was historically the French—

RC: Yeah, all the kids were all French. So, you went over their house, you talked to their parents in French, and they talk to you in French. And there was a lot of Franglais being developed. And one classic I have is, “Close the *porte*, *les mouches* are entering!” Close the *porte*, you know, *les mouches* are entering? Yeah. She [my mother] had a lot of Franglais. Interestingly, my son went to Dartmouth, spent a year in France going to the University of Toulouse. He would come back and I could understand him perfectly. We visit my mother—I have to interpret for both of them! Although he was fluent in French, she was French-Canadian. There was a lot of slang in it and so I had to interpret for the both of them. “*Qu'est-ce qu'il dit? Qu'est-ce qu'il dit?*” she would say. What's he saying?

15:48

EDO: So were there any—either in your memory, or stories that you heard from your parents, or older relatives—were there any particular places in Salem, businesses, locations that people frequented or that were important to the French-Canadian community?

RC: Yeah, l'associatives Saint-Jean Baptiste, maybe? From what I learned later, was an offshoot of a Canadian, Québec, Insurance Company. And they had a hall up on Salem Street that had functions. Then there was also a big—Le Club Klondike—on Lafayette Street. I gotta get a picture—of Lafayette Street to pass—if you're going up Harbor Street, take a right on Lafayette Street, just hundred yards on the left was Le Club Klondike, and that was a social club. There's probably a lot of records of the establishment. I forgot your question—

16:52

EDO: Oh, yeah, no. Just, were there places like that? Were there certain businesses? Were there French-Canadian owned businesses that people frequented or not so much?

RC: This is quite interesting—this guy just bought the house and he's building over there and he's Portuguese, so I see all the Portuguese trucks out there, businesses, same thing happening. You'd frequent French businesses, you know, wherever they were. That's how you'd interact with the community. There was a Congress Street Market. That was kind of the first, on a very small scale, what we consider a supermarket today. So that was built—a big French business—Congress Street Market. I would work for them and deliver groceries after I had my license. And you'd have these big boxes of these groceries and you have to take them up all these three deckers. And tips? I hadn't even thought about a tip, you know. You just got paid. And all you did was carry these groceries all the way up the stairs. It was quite an experience.

18:01

EDO: So you worked for them during the school year or the summer?

RC: Probably summertime and certainly—it was probably during the school year, as well—after school, after I got my license, so that would be after sixteen. I was sixteen, seventeen, so I was still in high school.

18:17

EDO: And it was owned by?

RC: French-Canadians. Can't think of his name—Caron? Two guys, and I forget his name. Then there was Audette's, was a big store, which is on Palmer Street. There was Audette's on the corner. There was Rouillard—was a nice little store, grocery store. Riard, on Palmer Street, a little down from Audette's Market, and I'd go play basketball at Saltonstall School and St. Joseph's Academy and I'd I go by Rouillard's, and I would buy my tabletop pies. So there were places like that. What others? Of course, always goes to say that the funeral homes, where we live, were all French—Levesque's on Harbor Street, and the one on Lafayette Street. I forget the name of that one.

19:35

EDO: Is it still there?

RC: Yeah, it's still there. And there's Levesque and another big name.

19:43

EDO: And where was St. Joseph's Academy?

RC: It was on the same grounds as the grade school. I think the grade school's been raised and I think the Academy may still there as a building.

19:55

EB: Around the Saltonstall?

RC: No, no, up on Harbor Street. Right by where the rectory building is. Right in back of the rectory.

20:03

EDO: On the corner of Lafayette?

RC: The rectory's on Lafayette and Harbor. One's down Harbor Street, right by the rectory would be—I think it's still there—L'Academie Saint-Joseph. There were thirty-seven kids in my graduating class. At that time, there were only two courses you took. You're in a classical course, which was a college prep course, I guess, and the commercial. And most of the commercial course were women—would be trained as secretaries. And some of the guys were there too. So, there were eleven of us in the classical program. I would say, out of those eleven, I would guess at least half went on to college [door to the right opens] or nursing. We'll introduce Sandra. Come on in, Sandra!

SA: I am. I'm just trying to get this to work here.

RC: You might want to close the door because it changes the lighting. Just close the door afterwards, please, cause the lighting's set up.

SA: Close the door?

RC: Yep. So this is—

SA: Oh, I'm sorry.

RC: No, come on in!

[Sandra walks on camera]

RC: Common, say “hi”.

[EDO and EB stand up to greet Sandra]

SA: [Hi,] I’m Sandra.

EDO: I’m Liz

SA: Lisa?

EDO: No, Liz. This is another Liz.

SA: Hi, nice to meet you.

RC: Her maiden name was Comeau. I wanna talk about this. In an interesting way, she was born in Ottawa. Not in Ottawa but in Windsor—

SC: I am a French-Canadian.

RC: She’s a French-Canadian.

SA: We had a little discussion about that—

RC: But at that time in Ottawa, if you wanted to advance you wanted to be more English? So her parents sent her to English speaking schools in Ottawa.

EDO: Mm-hm. Interesting.

RC: But French was spoken in the home. And her father was only the progressive guy like that. The rest of the families, they would look upon her, you know. Oh, you can tell the story. Go ahead. Why, they would look down on you guys cause you guys—he was sending you to English schools.

SA: They didn't look down on us. They thought we were snobs.

RC: Snobs, yeah.

SA: Because we spoke English. I mean they were truly French-Canadian. My mother's family, she was one of eleven, and she was the only one who—Well, no, she had a sister who went to Windsor, so her children were also English speaking. So we became very close but there were a whole myriad of cousins who are—[laughs]—don't speak a word of English and who don't particularly care to know myself or my cousin in Windsor [laughs]. But it was just the way it was. I'm sorry, I'm making—

EDO: No!

SA: I didn't want to get in the way of the picture, so—

RC: That's all right.

22:47

EDO: On a slightly different direction, I'm just curious—speaking about—we just heard a little bit about early childhood. Are there memories you have or traditions that your family had that were uniquely Franco-American or French Canadian? Growing up, what sort of rituals or traditions?

RC: Some of the foods were—there's a food called *corton*. Are you familiar with it?

EDO: Mm-hm.

RC: In Québec, it's pronounced *creton*. And I've taken cooking courses recently and I make pâté. And I made a pâté recently and I started [inaudible]. It's a cheap man's pâté! You know, it really is. It's actually a very easy way to—it's a cheap man's pâté. So, she made these *cretons*, and there was a distinction cause my father's mother lived with us for a while till she passed away, and the Acadians had their own recipes, different from the people of Québec—some of which were what my friends would call gray balls because they were not—their mothers were from Québec. And gray balls—you take potatoes and you on a rasp, cold potatoes and you—have you heard of them?

EDO: I've never heard of them but I—

RC: You do them like that, and then you put cubes of pork inside of em'. Then you make a ball, and you get cloth, and you wrap it in cloth, and you put a bunch of these in boiling water, and cook them. And when they come out, they're gray! The potatoes have turned gray. So my friends who were not from Acadian background, they called 'em gray balls [laughter].

24:28

EDO: So *creton* was one. Were there any others?

RC: *Creton*—some of the recipes—*pâté chinois*, right Sandra?

SA: *Chinois*. It was a shepard's pie

RC: Shepard's pie.

SA: My mother called it *pâté chinois*.

RC: And we had *crêpes* for breakfast—standard. I never had a pancake in my life till I left Salem. So *crêpes* were quite common.

24:53

EDO: Were there any traditions around holidays?

RC: Not really, not as much as there are in some other families. I think she had more of those typical Canadian traditions in Canada than I ever had here. But I think maybe some families did, but I was not aware of them. In terms of the father giving the blessing to the children on New Year's Day—I never had that.

25:22

EDO: You belonged to St. Joseph parish? What role did the parish play in your life or your family's life?

RC: Outside of providing a school, not much. Cause I don't ever recall going to church with my parents. My mother would go to church. My father probably didn't. And I would go by myself when I was in school. I don't recall going with my mother. She would go to church. I would go to a later mass, probably. That's it—I don't know.

26:00

EDO: Did you all visit relatives in Canada?

RC: Yeah, there were relatives. This is cute, too. My father's brother, Cyril, would play the banjo. He'd come over Sunday morning and they'd played the banjo. We lived right above the

café Les Canadiens. That's Canadians Café on Congress Street. It's still there. Now it's called a different name. And the Leclaires who lived in the next house owned the thing. So you're not allowed to sell liquor on a Sunday, but my father would call Leclaire up, they'd go in the back door, get some booze, go upstairs, they'd have their shots, and the music would play. Yeah.

26:56

EB: Sorry—would they sing French songs?

RC: French songs? Oh. Some of the songs that my mother—my mother was a *ribalde*. R-I-B-A-L-D. Some of the songs—she can't believe—Sandra can't believe—

27:57

EDO: Are there any that you would like to share with us?

RC: All I know is little diddies. In fact, I used one the other day. It's "*La fille d'Angleterre n'aime pas les pomme sde terre mais il aime les petites carottes qui pousse au culot.*" [laughter]. My brother probably remembers more. Yeah, these are some bad stuff—not bad stuff but there was a song called, "Marie Calumet" What was this line? It's salacious. "*Marie Calumet avait en l'airé*—and you probably know what that means—*avait en l'airé trois petits négres qui la chatouillait.*" She had in her butt three little *négres qui la chatouillait*. These little rhymes I pick up. There's a bunch of these things. So my mother was a jokester. My friends would come over and she would say to them, "*Veux-tu voir la lune?*" Do you want to see the moon? So, she did this to new people, new kids. Oh yeah, so she'd take her coat and open up her sleeve, and she'd go outside and they'd look up the sleeve. And she would pour water down there [laughter]. She was a jokester.

28:52

EDO: Now did she ever speak about or tell any stories of her own growing up in Lowell or in Salem, or were there any family stories that we passed along?

RC: Not really, only to the extent in Lowell. I was just thinking about that. I guess, they must of lived next to a Syrian population, and she remembers saying that they were they were mean or dirty or something like that. That's all I can remember. *Les syriennes*. What do I know about Syrians? No, it wasn't a close family. It was not a close family. So I don't have much closeness.

29:29

EDO: So there weren't really any trips to Canada?

RC: We did one trip to Canada to my father's birthplace when I was about twelve years old, thirteen years old. We did go visit. He had a brother still living up there, Edouard, Edward in Bouctouche. I have some pictures of that, and I remember going up there. The life in Salem, at that time, for people who worked was quite common. They'd come home and sometimes you didn't even—so I don't remember eating with my family. My father, he would go downstairs and get zonked, and my mother would have to go get him, sometimes carry him upstairs, cause the barroom was right downstairs, 73 Congress Street. So a lot of males—it was hard work and that's how they survived, I guess, whatever.

34:34

EDO: It sounds like at least your parents social relationships were within the confines of the French-speaking community?

RC: Yes. We had some relatives nearby and we'd see them occasionally but unlike—speaking to Sandra about her relationships and that, she had a lot more gatherings.

SC: Yeah, the family relationships were all within the family. I think that generation—there was no television. They would come and visit and play cards. Hearts is what they always played
[distortion of mic]

31:15

EDO: Now, obviously you don't live in Salem anymore. We were sort of curious about your decision to either stay in Salem or not stay in Salem.

RC: Well, I went to school in Lowell. When I was a senior, I joined ROTC at that point, because Korea was just winding down, and I couldn't see myself being drafted in the army. The draft was still around, and having to shoot people at people with a gun—So I joined ROTC and then when I graduated, in my senior year, they said that you had to serve three years on active duty after because they paid you in your last two years. So they said, “Do you want to go to a graduate school for a year? It'll count for one of your three years of active duty.” I said, “Sure” and I said, “What am I going to study?” They said, “Oh, meteorology.” I said, “Oh, okay. That'll work.” So my career choices have always been pragmatic. The first time was—I'm not going to be a priest anymore, what I am going to do? Okay, so I became an engineer. So then, in this case, I'd be a meteorologist. They sent me to St. Louis University, as a meteorologist, and got trained there. Got stationed over Delaware where two of my children were born. Then got out of the Air Force, went to work for Scott Paper Company in Northern Wisconsin, as a chemical engineer. Really wanted to further my education, so I left them and went to work for the Navy as a research meteorologist in Virginia. They sent me back to St. Louis University for a master's degree, came

back for a couple years. They sent me back to St. Louis University for a Ph.D. in meteorology, came back. This is 1971. The group in Norfolk, Virginia was moving to—that I was working for—to Monterey, California. I did not want to move to California with three children cause California, at that time, had a very strong drug image. It was wow, whatever. So we chose to come back to New England because there was a famous research laboratory at Hanscom Air Force Base called The Air Force Cambridge Research Laboratories that had meteorological research. So that's why I came back to Massachusetts in 1971, having left in basically 59' when I got married. The story about getting married was quite interesting. The only reason I chose meteorology was that there were only seven schools in the country that taught it. MIT was the leading one. In my naiveté, as a second lieutenant, figured obviously the Air Force is going to send me to MIT cause it's close. Well, one day in early June I get my orders—St. Louis University. I come home with my orders. I go down to Forest River Park where I knew my girlfriend was at the beach there. I said, "I'm going to St. Louis University. She then had finished her sophomore year at Salem. So we decided to get married in the fall. That's how.

34:34

EDO: Then you got married in Salem?

RC: No, in Fall River. She was from Fall River, and a French girl, and a French school, French church, St. Rock. Then, what happened after that? So we went to school, back and forth, and then moved up here. I encouraged her to pursue her education. She ended up with a master's degree in guidance counseling. Quite interesting. Her background was Fall River. Similar idea but she took the commercial program because her parents—you get a job. So, when she graduated from high school, the only college that would accept her was Salem State because she

had taken a commercial secretary education. Of course, Salem State had a secretarial education program at that time offering a B.S. So that's how she ended up in Salem. Ended up parlaying that and then when they stopped teaching secretaries, she, by that point, was a professor at Middlesex Community College. She took sabbatical for a year, learned accounting, business courses, and computer courses, and came back after the sabbatical and taught computer sciences and business sciences. Passed away at sixty, just after retiring one year from ovarian cancer in 2004. Sandra lost her spouse in 1999 from colon cancer and he's a retired navy captain, retired plastic surgeon, but never had a colonoscopy. I knew the family. We knew each other. Our kids knew each other—went to school together. They knew that Sandra was not a floozie. They were more worried about me than her because they said, "Dad, you be nice to her cause she's quite a lady and Sandra is quite a lady. So, we've been married since 2006 and it's good.

36:00

EDO: You mentioned one of your sons learned French. Did you speak French with your children?

RC: Only when we didn't want them to understand what they were saying. But I pushed the language. So at Dartmouth he took courses in French and then spent the university at University of Toulouse, and then stayed on another semester. So he's quite fluent in French.

37:12

EDO: Do your children consider themselves—

RC: Both my daughters took French in high school. Both went to Fenwick, Bishop Fenwick, and Nan started in French, and then was gonna do Spanish. And then her teacher said, "You're

not language hopping!” Kind of an interesting—so she took French and is quite into it. She’s revived her interest in French. She went to France last summer and did some prep work in French.

12:10

EDO: And one of the things, as we’ve been talking, there’s all these descriptions or identity language floating around—Franco-American, French-Canadian, French, Québécois, all of these different phrases. Is there a particular term that you use or way that you describe yourself? And if so, what does that mean, or what does it mean to you? Why did you choose that?

RC: Franco-American was a term that I was brought up with. We had Franco-American history as a course in grade school or high school? I forget which. And there were books published that that captured that history. I don’t know where they are now. But after I left this area, I didn’t use the term because most people would not relate to it that much. I would say I’m bilingual, of French extraction. My parents are from Canada. I would not use Franco-American typically unless they were similar people.

38:44

EDO: If you were to describe yourself today would you use Franco-American?

RC: No, I don’t think so. I don’t think I’d use that term. No, just French heritage.

EDO: So clearly you feel some connection to your French speaking past and your ancestry.

RC: Oh, I love it. I’m proud of it. I’m very proud of it. When we were taking History of Canada, mine was different from hers. Her history was in an English school. My history was taught in the French School. English were the bad guys. When we read about the French General Montcalm

losing to General Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham, we learned from the French standpoint. That was not good. Her history was from the English standpoint. Totally different. The bad guys. And, you know, the Québec license plate, "*Je me souviens*." There was a time when I was leaving to move up here from Virginia, I looked into moving to Canada, to work for the French Meteorological Service because, at that time, they were trying to bring it up a lot of bilingual people when they officially went to a two-language country. But I never pursued it. But I was ready to do it. It's kinda cold up there [laughs]. But I've used the language a lot. I remember being a small café outside Notre Dame in Paris, and talking to the waiter, and obviously there was a gentleman next to us that overheard us. "Oh", he says, "I love the way you speak. You're using some of the words my grandmother used." And the lilt the language is so much nicer than the staccato of Paris, whatever. So, I've always enjoyed the language.

41:09

EB: I have just one follow up question. Earlier you were talking about the different ethnic neighborhoods, the Polish, the Italians, the French-Canadians. I've been reading a lot of Franco-American literature and they talk about—not conflicts with other ethnic groups—but with the Yankees.

RC: Yes. Yeah, there was more conflict, not conflict, but they looked more down upon us—the Yankees, the English speaking—I don't know if they were Irish or what. But maybe it was they were here a little before us, so they went through their own problems in terms of assimilation into the community.

41:48

EDO: Did you have any personal conflicts?

RC: No, never had any fights with them or anything like that, with the kids. No, you didn't feel bad. You didn't feel like second-rate, maybe because the nuns made you feel like your language was equally important, and it was great to be bilingual.

42:13

EDO: I actually have one follow up question as well. I'm interested in your mother and her work at the Pequot mills. You don't—

RC: I don't know how many years she worked there, but it was right down the street. There's a related story there cause they would work in the mills, and there were the Polish people, all side by side. So I started hanging around with a friend of a couple of us, Polish kid. And she would say, "You know, I work with them. They're nice people, too."

EDO: This is in fact what I was hoping you would talk about. Her experience must have been incredibly ethnically diverse.

RC: Yeah, so there was not any clashes.

43:05

EDO: I think we have covered quite a bit of territory here. Is there anything else? Any other story you think of? Or anything else you'd like to share with us?

RC: No, but you if you wanna—I'm gonna e-mail you the genealogy, and you may be able to do something with that, or maybe use that as a piece of something. You may want to cut off the—I bet you'll be able to trace the patterns and the dates of people.

EDO: That would be great

RC: I have your email address.

EDO: You do?

RC: Yeah.

EDO: We'll give you business cards before we leave, as well. Thank you so very much for your time. This was really excellent. Thank you.

EB: Thanks.

RC: If there's any follow up—whatever you want. A good friend of mine is Paul Madore and he's quite popular in the community.

EB: We'll have to get in touch with him

RC: Oh yeah, you need him. He was a year ahead of me at St. Joseph's. I think he's openly gay now, but at that point I knew he was different, but we didn't know what the hell what gay was. But I don't know about that for sure, if he's openly gay.

44:16

EDO: Do you go back to Salem now, to places?

RC: Outside this Bertini thing that just started going to, and I'm thinking of looking into the club Richelieu. They have luncheons, but they don't have them in the summertime. So I told the guy, let me know when your next luncheon—I guess they have a luncheon every month at the hotel Hawthorne.

EDO: She's the vice president.

EB: So I can give you information.

RC: Okay. All right, yeah.

EB: Okay, great!

EDO: Wonderful! Thank you!