INTERVIEW WITH

GILBERTE DESROCHERS BEAULÉ

AND JEANNINE DESROCHERS BERGERON

The shoe shop strike of 1937, and family life in a Lewiston tenement

Conducted by Claude Bergeron
at
Mrs. Bergeron’s home
230 Stetson Road in Lewiston

April 18, 1998
This is Claude Bergeron. I’m going to be interviewing Mrs. Gilberte Beaulé—maiden name Gilberte Desrochers, and with her in the room is Mrs. Jeannine Bergeron, who was Jeannine Desrochers. For the record, Mrs. Beaulé is my aunt, so you’ll hear me refer to her as Ma Tante, and Mrs. Bergeron is my mother, so you’ll hear me refer to her as Mom.

Claude Bergeron: The first question I’d like to ask you, Ma Tante, is about the shoe strike in 1937. You told me that your father, Adelbert Desrochers, my grandfather, happened to be a strikebreaker during that strike. Could you tell me anything about that?

Mrs. Beaulé: Well, we had, we came from a family of five kids, and you really had to work just to feed us and clothe us and keep us going. So, I believe the son-in-law of the shop owner—his name is Barrington(?) Abbott. I remember him coming to the front on the street, picking him up. He would pick up a few people that worked, including my uncle who used to live down the road. And he would take them to work and bring them back at nighttime. Just so they’d sleep, really. I remember that it was a time when we were all scared—very scared. We used to have a baseball bat behind the door because the people who were on strike, some of them were really, Mrs. Bergeron: Did they get to know where he lived?

Mrs. Beaulé: Oh yes. They knew where they lived. These were co-workers or, I think even people from other cities came—they belonged to the Union, you see, and they would come and they would get into riots, really. That’s what it was. Anyways, we had that, and we had er, I want to say red pepper—it must have been cayenne pepper—behind the door. And also, at nighttime, my father would get the closet door off the hinges and put it in front of the windows, because they would break windows. They would go to houses and break windows. Of course, there were three of us in our bedroom, and that’s what we’d do. It never happened. It never never happened.

Claude Bergeron: Was this on Blake Street?

Mrs. Beaulé: That was on Blake Street. And it was a tenement in the back. There was an apartment building in the front, and we lived in the back. And, ………like on Pierce Street—facing Pierce Street. And that’s what he would do because he was afraid, and Reggie reminded that…. 

Claude Bergeron: Reggie is your brother? Dr. Reginald Desrochers.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yes. That the cellar door, right close to our entrance, and before my Dad would come back from work, they would lock the cellar door going downstairs just in case somebody had snuck in. He could have been attacked. It was dark in that corner. So that’s what happened during the strike for us. And Uncle Paul, who is Jackie’s father, he was attacked by this man who came on the third floor.
Claude Bergeron: Who lived on the third floor?

Mrs. Beaulé: Uncle Paul. Paul Raymond. And he was attacked, beaten up quite a bit, and his arm was in a sling. He had it for quite a while. This man went to jail, by the way. I can’t remember his name. I remember his face, because it came out in the paper.

Claude Bergeron: Did it do something to his fingers?

Mrs. Beaulé: His wrist—his arm. This man came in with a billy club and it really, you know, let him have it. Because, today, they refer to it as scabs. They were strike breakers. It was a scary time.

Claude Bergeron: Were there other people in the neighborhood who worked in the shoe shops?

Mrs. Beaulé: Hum… Not that I can remember. No.

Claude Bergeron: Were there more people that were on strike than were strike breakers?

Mrs. Beaulé: Probably. Probably. We probably knew more people who were on strike. I don’t know. I think my father,… Working was very important for my father. I remember, one time, he brought home a check for $4. Alright. Our rent was cheap and all that, but four dollars wasn’t much. The only time I remember my Dad crying was, I can remember it was during the strike and he wasn’t working and he had no money to feed us. He was really discouraged.

Claude Bergeron: Do you think uh, religion had anything to do with it, or was it strictly economics?

Mrs. Beaulé: Most of it was economics with my Dad. That’s what it was. He had children to feed, and he did it. Plus, he had saved $5,000 from the time from before he was married. You know, that was a lot of money, and everything went out. Because these were Depression years, and people would come. I remember when his brothers from New Jersey—some were from New Jersey—Uncle Paul, all those people. They would come and stay at our house, looking for work here in Lewiston. So that all that money was gone.

Claude Bergeron: Oh, my God.

Mrs. Beaulé: That was before, you know, helping out these people. So that by the time the strike came along, there was nothing left.

Claude Bergeron: Your mother wasn’t working.

Mrs. Beaulé: She wasn’t working. No. She had worked until the time she started having a family--five children.
Mrs. Bergeron: It’s not that it’s such a large family, but you should have seen the small rent we lived in.

Mrs. Beaulé: Back then, the mothers didn’t work.

Claude Bergeron: Okay. The women that worked in the mills, were they unmarried mostly?

Mrs. Beaulé: No. Some of them weren’t married, but they were the exception to rule. That generation was very much, the women would stay at home and take care of the kids, take care of the husband, the husband came back home from work, he was tired. He was sitting down. And the wife’s duty was to take care of the house and of everybody.

Mrs. Bergeron: That’s right.

Claude Bergeron: Mémère’s name, by the way was?

Mrs. Beaulé: Regina.

Claude Bergeron: Mémère wasn’t pregnant during the strike, was she?

Mrs. Bergeron: In ’37? Well, I was born in May of ’38. So it depends on what time of year you’re talking about.

Claude Bergeron: How small was this apartment?

Mrs. Beaulé: Two bedrooms and what was supposed to be the living room—the boys slept there. There was a couch and it opened up, and that’s where they slept. It was a tenement with no, no bathroom!

Mrs. Bergeron: We had a, a toilet. That was it. And there was a box for wood.

Mrs. Beaulé: Right. Right. And uh, it was cold. It was very cold. Because she heated the house with wood. It wasn’t well-insulated at all, so, what would happen in the wintertime, she’d close one room and move the couch in the kitchen for the boys to sleep. So. I can’t remember being unhappy though.

Mrs. Bergeron: No.

Mrs. Beaulé: We never never lacked food. Of course we ate some crêpes, we ate all kinds of sauces—white sauces with whatever she happened to have: eggs, carrots, string beans, whatever. Whatever, you know. And I’m sure she did about……. She worked hard.

Claude Bergeron: How many years do you think were hard years?
Mrs. Beaulé: Way up to the time when he stopped working at the shoe shop. Then it was the War years, and he worked at the mill as an electrician. He had started part time for Mr. Goudreau. Then he learned his trade, and then throughout the years, he was able to work.

Claude Bergeron: Which Mr. Goudreau was that?

Mrs. Beaulé: Archie Goudreau.

Mrs. Bergeron: His name was Archille, Archille Goudreau.

Mrs. Beaulé: He’s an electrician……….. They were born—no not born—but they lived in Thetford Mines together when Dad used to work there. That’s how they met.

Claude Bergeron: After the strike ended and years went by, was anything ever said to Pépère about whether it would affect his future in any way, possibly or negatively?

Mrs. Beaulé: Because of the strike? Getting work?

Claude Bergeron: Getting work. How people thought of him?

Mrs. Beaulé: I don’t think so. I don’t think it mattered one way or the other, really. You know, the shoe shops reopened, and I can’t remember his ever saying that he was mistreated by anyone because of that or, You know, I know that local people did take part in that strike, but a lot of people came from other states. Out-of-State people. So they went back home then.

Claude Bergeron: How old would have been then.

Mrs. Beaulé: I was seven—seven and a half.

Claude Bergeron: Do you remember most of this first hand, or,

Mrs. Beaulé: Oh yes. Yup. That was something that I would remember. Then it was the War years after that.

Claude Bergeron: What do you remember about the war?

Mrs. Beaulé: First of all, our father had, was registered. I can’t remember his classification.

Claude Bergeron: When did he get his citizenship? Was it soon after he moved to this country?

Mrs. Beaulé: No. No, no, no. I remember when. It had to have been.
Mrs. Bergeron: It was the fact that he married my mother who was a citizen that uh.....

Claude Bergeron: But he did uh....

Mrs. Beaulé: It would have been in the forties. It had to have been before the war if he was then going to register for the draft--because I know that he was classified. But, of course he had five kids, and he was already in his forties, so. There was an outside chance that he could have gone, but he was never called. See there was ........ and Roy is my godfather. He was thirty-nine, he was single, he had to go. It was rough.

Claude Bergeron: Yuh.

Mrs. Beaulé: And then our cousin, Robert Dutil, went too.

Mrs. Bergeron: That’s, I think I kind of remember that, probably a Christmas Eve when we got together in our house on Blake Street. Somehow, I knew that he was missing.

Mrs. Beaulé: He was missing.

Mrs. Bergeron: He was there. And then, at their house, they used to hang these things in the windows with a star in it?

Mrs. Beaulé: That’s right.

Mrs. Bergeron: That meant that they had somebody in the service, right?

Mrs. Beaulé: Yuh. And if the soldier had died, there was a gold star. It was like a little flag.

Claude Bergeron: Where did this come from? Is this something they did all over the country?

Mrs. Beaulé: I think so. It must have been. It can’t have been just locally. Because just recently, I saw in the paper that if you find one--if you have one, it’s worth a lot of money.

Claude Bergeron: Oh, wow. Do you know if it was a church-related thing?

Mrs. Beaulé: No. Not at all. It would be more of a patriotic thing. What I remember about the war years? We had the blackouts. Do you remember blackouts?

Mrs. Bergeron: I remember some of them.

Mrs. Beaulé: Well, we had to buy like, double shades. We had the shades, and then we had those black shades, and then that would have to come down. Of course we always
knew it was a blackout. We knew ahead. But on the outside chance that it would happen
for real. The siren would go on, we had to pull down the shades, and then the wardens
would walk around to check and see what we were doing.

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh yes. That’s right. That’s the part I remember. The wardens with
their hard hats, and they had flashlights. But it ended when? In ’44 or ’45?

Claude Bergeron: Yes. I was fourteen. We weren’t all that old. Also during the war, we
had to wait in line to get tokens for sugar, for magarine. We had rations—coupons—
coupons for gas, coupons for nylons, coupons for butter, coupons for coffee, and of
course, I was twelve—I used to work. I did. I worked at St. Mary’s in the laundry.

Claude Bergeron: Oh! Was that against the rules? To be working in the laundry?

Mrs. Beaulé: Oh, in those days, people just, they didn’t bother with that.

Claude Bergeron: They didn’t follow the rules?

Mrs. Beaulé: No. No. You’d go see the nun, and if you had an honest face, they’d take
you.

Laughter from all three.

Mrs. Beaulé: It’s not bad, you know. That’s about it. Anyways, your mother and Uncle
Reggie too? Who would go with you? They had to stand in line to get coffee and
butter—and I used to love butter—and of course, I guess I must have taken more than my
share, but I would hear about it.

More laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: I didn’t drink coffee in those days, but butter I used to love. They also had
that type of margarine at that time—remember that kind with the—it was white, but it
had the little orange pill, to color, that you would mix up….. It forced me……

Laughter.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yuh, Yuh.

Mrs. Beaulé: We’d walk down to Reginald Cloutier, Fern’s father, down on Lincoln
Street, and buy horsemeat, which was steak.

Mrs. Bergeron: We had some of that.

Mrs. Beaulé: Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ah. Those days!

Mrs. Bergeron: Yuh.
Mrs. Beaulé: You know, we weren’t rich, but we had music.

Mrs. Bergeron: The piano came in,

Mrs. Beaulé: When was it? 1944? Pretty close to that.

Mrs. Bergeron: It had to be because…..

Claude Bergeron: Was this still Blake Street?

Mrs. Beaulé: Oh yes. I only live three years on Bartlett. I was twenty-two when we moved from Blake Street. I wasn’t born there—I was born on what was known as Glenwood Street. In the Depression years, people would help each other, and so, they moved, my parents moved on Blake Street when I was nine months old. I was born at Ma Tante’s, and Reggie was born—he wasn’t born there, but he lived there.

Mrs. Bergeron: But I was born on Blake Street.

Mrs. Beaulé: The three youngest were born on Blake Street.

Claude Bergeron: Which street is that?

Mrs. Beaulé: Stewart –Stevens Street, Stevens Street. Yes.

Claude Bergeron: Out in the country.

Mrs. Beaulé: A mile and a half from Blake Street—that’s it, but it felt like we were in the country. They had gardens, they had fields, there were three houses on the road. Ma Tante made gardens, large gardens, she had flowers,

Claude Bergeron: What was Ma Tante’s name?

Mrs. Beaulé: Ma Tante Antoinette.

Claude Bergeron: Antoinette Dutil.

Mrs. Bergeron: Our big thing in the summertime was for Mom to pack a picnic lunch, and we didn’t have a car, so my uncle used to come with a truck, and we used to get in back of the truck, and we would go have our picnic on Glenwood Avenue, out in the country.

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh yes. Those were the ……. summer days.

Claude Bergeron: Uh huh.
Mrs. Bergeron: Getting near the water? Well there’s a spring.

Mrs. Beaulé: You don’t remember the one week, we’d go to North Harpswell.

Mrs. Bergeron: No, no.

Mrs. Beaulé: Again. It was my godfather, who was single, who had a little more money than the others who had children, and he would rent a camp. One summer, he had rented a camp for the whole summer.

Mrs. Bergeron: For the whole summer!

Mrs. Beaulé: The whole summer. But, in that camp, there was us, our family, there was Raymonds, my grandmother, and the Dutils. It was a large camp. It was a large camp. And the men would come, of course not my father, I mean he was just beyond the hospital(?) Yup. He’d stay. And the men would go to work, and come back at night.

Mrs. Bergeron: Really!

Mrs. Beaulé: Oh yes! Oh yes.

Claude Bergeron: Who had the transportation?

Mrs. Beaulé: Cousin Henri.

Mrs. Bergeron: Cousin Henry. The single guy.

Mrs. Beaulé: The single guy. He had enough money to buy a car.

Claude Bergeron: Things haven’t changed.


Mrs. Bergeron: That’s right. That’s right.

Mrs. Beaulé: We did have a lot of enjoyment that way. Like going swimming. You’d go swimming when you were allowed, up to your knees. You go in the water up to your knees, you don’t learn to swim that way.

Claude Bergeron: Mémère was she afraid of water?

Mrs. Beaulé: Afraid of water. So this is why we love the ocean. Your mother was little. You probably went just the last time that they had the camp.

Mrs. Bergeron: I was maybe two years old.
Mrs. Beaulé: You didn’t even stay.

Mrs. Bergeron: Where did I stay?

Mrs. Beaulé: Ma Tante ‘Toinette.

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh, Ma Tante ‘Toinette didn’t go?

Mrs. Beaulé: She came to visit.

Mrs. Bergeron: Okay.

Mrs. Beaulé: This time around, there was the company from out-of-town—from New Jersey—that side of the family who had rented the camp.

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh, oh, oh.

Mrs. Beaulé: They came. There’s a piano, there’s a hall there. There used to be a dance hall. It used to be quite a nice place at the time. You know in the time way back—before our time, naturally, and Pépère would take the wrench to tune the piano ‘cause it was off-key. And they’d bring Fortunat Lemay, who’s again a friend from Thetford Mines— ................. from Ste. Croix, Ste. Croix de ..........., where Dad was born. And he played jigs on his violin, and my father would play chords, chords, and they’d play, and the older people, the older people would dance. Not me, but the older people would dance. It was fun to watch.

Claude Bergeron: Do you remember any of those songs that they used to play?

Mrs. Beaulé: There was jigs. They used to play jigs. Canadian jigs. And of course, everybody spoke French.

Claude Bergeron: Back to the piano at the house. What? How did that change things?

Mrs. Beaulé: My mother played also. It brought a lot of happiness I think.

Mrs. Bergeron: How do you remember learning how to play piano? Who showed you?

Mrs. Beaulé: Mom. Mom showed me the notes.

Mrs. Bergeron: What I remember is you and our sister Rita showed me.

Mrs. Beaulé: We showed you. Right. But then, when we had company come over, and in the whole Desrochers family, there’s always been music, because there’s always been somebody who could play—and singing. There’d always be singing. And as we grew older, and we had company, we had neighbors sitting on their porches, and they’d say, “Wow!” we had nice musical evening. It did. It did change a lot—and personally, when
Uncle Bert, who is Bert Desrochers, started to play the trumpet, we started buying music for the piano, and he was playing the trumpet, so they did that for a while, so that got me used to reading music. And then after that, we started playing duets—piano duets.

Mrs. Bergeron: You also took lessons.

Mrs. Beaulé: After.

Mrs. Bergeron: It was after that? I took lesson only when I was in High School.

Mrs. Beaulé: By the time we moved to Bradford Street, we were out of school and both working, and come home at lunchtime to play the piano. We worked, we didn’t have enough time. Pépère would say, well, “Go play the piano, I’ll help your mother with the dishes.”

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: But whenever, I guess, when we were growing up, we had the radio. That’s all we had. We didn’t have the TV. We didn’t have anything like that, so we needed something to entertain you. And the radio, where our parents weren’t really speaking English, they were really just listening to musical stuff.

Mrs. Bergeron: Pépère used to listen to the Canadians.

Mrs. Beaulé: The Canadians. A lot started, then we’d lose it just when it became interesting. That, and the boxing matches. It wasn’t in French, but he’d listen. Oh yes. I can remember. Jerry Lewis—not Jerry Lewis—er, Joe Louis! He was uh. He was a fan.

Mrs. Bergeron: But I think it’s only when you and Reggie and you started to get a little older and started to understand English more that probably they went as far as the Charlie McCarthy hour and you know, that type of show?

Mrs. Beaulé: No, you know. I’d listen to Perry Como. We had him on the radio. The Firestone Hour, Frank Sinatra—somewhat. The operas. We’d listen to the operas on Saturday.

Mrs. Bergeron: Everything was very much around music.


Claude Bergeron: What kind of music?

Mrs. Beaulé: What kind of music? Some were popular tunes.

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh yes.
Mrs. Beaulé: As much classical as we could get, I think. We belonged to the concert association. We could get a ticket for the whole series for six bucks. I remember going there at six o’clock at night with our homework—still in High School, and doing homework before the concert………….would have a……..

Claude Bergeron: What years were those.

Mrs. Beaulé: I must have been in High School by then. I graduated in ’48, so it was between ’44 and ’48. It was at the armory, so the acoustics wasn’t very good, but…. We went to the movies, again I didn’t start very young. It must have been er, well we had the movies at school for a nickel.

Mrs. Bergeron: Once a month, or?

Mrs. Beaulé: It must have been maybe once a week. We couldn’t always afford to go, but once in a while we’d go.

Claude Bergeron: What school, at St. Cross(?)?

Mrs. Beaulé: At St. Peter’s. And any kissing scenes, they’d block it out. Ha! Ha! And, you know, it was Shirley Temple and things like that.

Claude Bergeron: What do you remember about school? About St. Peter’s?

Mrs. Beaulé: Well, for one thing, I remember that my mother had made my collarless smock. It was uniform black uniform with a white collar. We’d wear the same uniform all week, but they’d change, they’d make different collars, so that she’d wash them. Uh. I was supposed to go in one year, and that’s probably the year where they decided your birthday could be October or whatever. And, uh, all of a sudden, I couldn’t go. And then, a cousin of ours was………..(laughter) because supposedly, the father was, had done favors to the nuns…. (laughter) because supposedly, the father was, had done favors to the nuns, she was able to go—her birthday was a whole month after me. The following day, my father came and put me in the ranks, and that’s how I got into the school.

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: I went in. I was able to follow the others. You know, I knew my prayers, I knew my letters, I knew my numbers, so I did okay. But that’s how I started school.

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: I had fairly good marks. I probably wasn’t at the top of the class all the time, but I…….

Claude Bergeron: Was it French all day?
Mrs. Beaulé: It was French half a day up to, I didn’t get any English until the third grade. Miss Crane. And I’m sure she could speak French, because she had been there forever. In the third grade, we got Miss Crane. We had to learn English. See, all our friends around home were all Franco-Americans, so we spoke French. We played with kids who spoke French, and we talked their language. So in the third grade, we had to start.

Mrs. Bergeron: Really.

Mrs. Beaulé: I suppose then we had a little bit, but even religion was in French, history was in French, written math. Math to this day, many times, I count in French.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yes.

Mrs. Beaulé: You too?

Mrs. Bergeron: Yes, yes.

Mrs. Beaulé: You know, it comes naturally. I’ve gotten out of the habit of thinking, I don’t think in French and translate. I don’t know when that stopped, but at first, that’s what we did.

Claude Bergeron: There are still old people who do that. They still translate. They think in French. (End of first side of tape)

Second side of tape:

Claude Bergeron: Okay. Can you tell me anything about the neighborhood, your friends, or things that you remember, things that you did?

Mrs. Beaulé: Well, in our neighborhood, in the apartment next door, we had the Leclairs—they had eight children. Some older than I was, but there were some my age. We played games, hopscotch, we played ball, we played mothers, we played school, you know. We had these people—that was the largest family that was around, but most families had children except for the Levesques downstairs.

Mrs. Bergeron: Right.

Mrs. Beaulé: They got married old. In our apartment building, first of all, it was the Nadeaus—Alfred Nadeau that owned the apartment building, and the son became a doctor: Dr. Lawrence Nadeau. She worked. She was one of the mothers that worked. They had one son, one child. Of course he went to Bowdoin College. That was a big thing in those days. There weren’t many who went to college. They were lucky if they went to High School.

Mrs. Bergeron: That’s right. That’s right.
Mrs. Beaulé: That’s something that our parents wanted to make sure, that we would at least graduate from High School.

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh yes! They didn’t have a chance.

Mrs. Beaulé: Our mother got out of school in the fourth grade. Dad uh, they called it Le Petit Collège in those days. It must have been about a couple years of High School level. But then again, his mother died, and he had to stop and go to work.

Mrs. Bergeron: Right, right.

Mrs. Beaulé: That’s pretty much the life then. So we were……….. We did manage to go—we all went to St. Dom’s, and of course, Reggie went to college. That was quite an accomplishment for people who worked in the shoe shops and mills. It wasn’t like today where you can get grants and loans and all that, you know—maybe there was, but we didn’t know about it.

Mrs. Bergeron: Right, right.

Mrs. Beaulé: Or unless you were a hockey player or something, that’s how it probably started, those scholarships.

Mrs. Bergeron: Right, right.

I’m not sure if this is Mrs. Beaulé or Mrs. Bergeron: As far as I was concerned, my age group, on the second floor, we had the Bedards, so I had a girlfriend there, and on the third floor, I had the Ouellettes, so there was another one my age there too. So then I had somebody to play with. And they always managed to have the nice dolls, and the big carriages, and the, and I had the little hand-me-downs. It was a lot of fun just to be with them, but we were also at a point where there was I don’t know how much grass in front of the house, but it was all fenced in and you couldn’t go on the grass. So you could sit on the pipe in front to watch people go by.

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: The ball would land in the ……. So we would go in the back. In the back, we had forty apartments, which was Pierce Street. The brick building was forty apartments. So we used to go sometimes toss our balls, play ball because it was brick. Do you remember when the tore down the building next to it? Do you remember?

Mrs. Bergeron: The building next to it?

Mrs. Beaulé: Right behind our apartment. Well, there was the shed, and I bet you by the time you remember it was all renovated.
Mrs. Bergeron: Probably. What I remember are some garages in back there. There were garages where the Bedards, the hockey player lived there after he got married. Is that the house you mean?

Mrs. Beaulé: Yup. So you don’t remember when the Poles(?) and the cobbler used to live there.

Mrs. Bergeron: No.

Mrs. Beaulé: …………That’s what it is. The stench that would come out of ugh that house. People that just didn’t clean, Oh. It was pretty bad. On hot summer days, you know. We had close the windows—it was that bad. Back then, you see, it was safe to go in the park. We could go play in the park. They had sandboxes, they had swings, but did you go play, were you allowed to go play in the park?

Mrs. Bergeron: I was allowed to see, being the last one. Ha, ha, ha, ha. That was the advantages I guess. While you were working, I was playing.

Mrs. Beaulé: That’s right, that’s right. That’s what it is. You’re asking me about my friends. I remember my friends. After age twelve, I stopped playing outside because I was very busy working after school and working Saturdays.

Mrs. Bergeron: At the laundry?

Mrs. Beaulé: Yes.

Claude Bergeron: Was this to bring money in for the family, or?

Mrs. Beaulé: Er, Yes, it did.

Claude Bergeron: Was there any money for you?

Mrs. Bergeron: For your clothes, or,… Did you come home and give them your pay?

Mrs. Beaulé: Yes, I did. I did. It was mostly to help out. I don’t remember those days as hard days. Actually, I remember them as fun days. It was a small group—Thérèse Fournier, who is now Sister Lucille, she was working there, her sister introduced me to this nun, and that how come I started working there, because we went to school together. It was a good place to work. Thirteen cents and a quarter an hour.

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: If you talked too much, you’d get a couple hours chopped off your paycheck.

Mrs. Bergeron: No kidding!
Mrs. Beaulé: It was uh Franco-American, Catholic Franco-American. In the afternoon, we’d say the rosary as we were working, there was the *salut*. They had chapel, and once in a while we’d go to church.

Mrs. Bergeron: Was that like the Vespers?

Mrs. Beaulé: Yuh. Something like that. So once in a while we’d do that, and that’s when the work was almost all done.

Mrs. Bergeron: That was in the laundry.

Mrs. Beaulé: That was in the laundry.

Mrs. Bergeron: So you were doing what?

Mrs. Beaulé: The laundry, I used to er… We didn’t handle the dirty clothes. They had men for that, but once it came out, all wet there, we’d put it on large tables, and then we had to sort it out. With what was called *l presse*, which meant we had to take a piece of clothing and smooth it out so that we could pass it through the big big ironer. They had that machine that it would go in—all the flat pieces would go through that. And of course when you got, when I’d been working there for quite a while, you were allowed to used presses, especially for the starched clothes like, they had student nurses in those days, starched uniforms, they had—I got to do that. Then, when I was sixteen, they put me on the switchboard. And I didn’t like it.

Claude Bergeron: No?

Mrs. Beaulé: No. Well it was the old switchboard, and it’s not like we have today, you know. And then, I went in there just when they were changing to a new system—a new switchboard, so that was more confusing. Anyways, I worked there, and when I was eighteen, I was hired in the office. But they tested me. Again, they gave me, for a couple times, an extra dollar more on my paycheck. And I went back, and I said, “That’s not right. You gave me too much,” you know. That’s how they trusted me. And I was the first girl that worked in the office other than nuns.

Claude Bergeron: Wow! So, they tested you before you got the job? And then when they gave you your paycheck to see…..

Mrs. Beaulé: Uh huh. To make sure I was honest. And I had been working there since I was twelve. But, in the office I would be handling money. It’s not a question of computers or. Everything was handwritten. I worked there until I got married. I worked for nuns, I went to school with the nuns, and I worked, you know.

Mrs. Bergeron: And they wanted to make a nun out of you. Ha, ha.
Mrs. Beaulé: They sure did. A Dominican—she calls me one time, she wanted me to be a teacher. I was working at St. Mary’s at the time. And I said, “No.” I’d been working at this job, I was in the office by then, I’d been there quite a few years, and I enjoyed it. There’s no chance that they’re going to get me. Ha, ha, ha.

Mrs. Bergeron: They didn’t get her. Yuh.

Mrs. Beaulé: We had friends, you know. We made friends in High School, at least friends that we went to concerts with, or to the movies, or you don’t remember the boys. Do you remember when we used to go to band concerts in the park?

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh yes! That I remember. Oh yes.

Mrs. Beaulé: The Montagnards would play. I was a teenager then. And you could get yourself a bag of popcorn for five cents, and you’d walk around.

Mrs. Bergeron: Walk around, walk around.

Mrs. Beaulé: I remember the sailors that were in the park. Your mother was too young.

Laughter.

Claude Bergeron: Where were the sailors coming from?

Mrs. Beaulé: From the base in Brunswick. They had British soldiers in Brunswick, I think it was. They used to call the lions. Remember that?

Mrs. Bergeron: No.

Mrs. Beaulé: No? And one of the Lamberts, Pierre(? Lambert, she married one of them. They’re still around. I see them when they come to church. They dressed differently than our servicemen. But I know that definitely, that was a spot that you could not go to.

Mrs. Bergeron: Definitely.

Mrs. Beaulé: Definitely. We didn’t go to the base. No, no.

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: We couldn’t even go to a dance that was not a St. Dom’s dance. We couldn’t go to the Y dance or anything like that. My cousin Elaine went as far as the eighth grade. I was pretty close to that cousin—not so much in age as, they belonged to Holy Cross, but they came to school at St. Peter’s.

Claude Bergeron: Why?
Mrs. Beaulé: Because my uncle worked downtown, and he would drive them. It wasn’t a question of school buses or anything. Well, anyways, in the eighth grade, she stopped going to school, and after that, her brother came back from the service. Of course, he had friends, and she was allowed to go to dances and stuff like that. Today, I’m glad. I can see my mother’s point. Now that I’ve been a mother many times, I can see the point, but at the time I didn’t--because I loved to dance. I wasn’t about to quit school, I was going to finish. So I did two years at what was known as *Cours Superieure*. We didn’t have, they had St Dom’s for the boys. That was in 1946, I was supposed to graduate and then go to Lewiston High. And by some miracle, it was Father Drouin, he managed to have the four years (for the girls), so that’s how come I graduated with the first graduating class.

Mrs. Bergeron: You were thirteen in the graduating class?

Mrs. Beaulé: No. We were twenty-, twenty girls. Forty-two boys. When we do get together, which is not very often, we’re still very close. Grey caps and gowns. We had grey caps and gowns because Mother Aquinas who was principal at the time, didn’t her act together fast enough. We had a grey cap and gown and a white collar.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yuh. I remember that one.

Mrs. Beaulé: Well, because we weren’t supposed to graduate from High School, you know.

Can’t make out what they’re saying except, “…to figure it out, but she was too old by then.”

Mrs. Beaulé: So after that, you could go to college, and then work. You’d go to work.

Claude Bergeron: What do you remember about your family life and your parents.

Mrs. Beaulé: Well, they were good parents. My father was very religious. Until the day that he died, he would kneel down to say his prayers. He never, never missed Mass. I’ve never seen him miss Mass.

Claude Bergeron: Daily Mass?

Mrs. Beaulé: No. Sundays. He’d put on his dark navy suit. Remember that?

Mrs. Bergeron: Yup.

Mrs. Beaulé: His tie and his white shirt, and what I remember when he was younger, he would put on, you don’t remember his white Maine Baking apron.

Mrs. Bergeron: I’ve seen it. I remember seeing it.
Mrs. Beaulé: Because before he worked, when he came to America, he worked in the mill, and he worked at the bobbin shop, and he worked at the Maine Baking—all before he worked at the shoe shop. He had this white apron and he would help my mother. And he would keep his suit all day long—that was his Sunday suit. What kind of a man he was? He had faults, he had a lot of good qualities too. He didn’t talk much.

Mrs. Bergeron: No. He was very quiet.

Mrs. Beaulé: He didn’t show affection all that much, but then he wasn’t one to scold too much either.

Mrs. Bergeron: That’s right.

Mrs. Beaulé: In fact, my mother was the one who had to discipline us.

Mrs. Bergeron: And she did. Laughs.

Mrs. Beaulé: And she did. He enjoyed his family, the music, I think he was very proud of us.

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh yes. He didn’t come out—he didn’t really tell us. Probably more talking to our mother about it—we’d hear it through our Mom. But when he was sick though, and Ma Tante Lynn(?) stayed with him a lot, she got him to talk a lot, and that’s when it all came out—how much he loved his family.

Mrs. Beaulé: Right. And this is something that none of us had heard before. Or Mom, for that matter.

Mrs. Bergeron: No.

Mrs. Beaulé: It’s not—people in those days did not come and say how much they loved their kids. They didn’t talk about that, you know. It’s a wide gap—more than today, you know. It’s not that you want to be just friends with your kids, which is not all that good either. You have to be mother, but I don’t know if they were afraid, or what is it that prevented that?

Mrs. Bergeron: There again, I think it was the time.

Mrs. Beaulé: Time, parents worked, they had the authority, it was there, and you were down here, and we listened to them, and that was that. We didn’t question what was told to us. Although Mom was always questioning, you know, when it came to general politics—she had her opinions. She had questions—more so than my Dad.

Mrs. Bergeron: But to show you how it went when I started going out with Dad, and at that time, I was nineteen going on twenty, and I still remember, if I was out late, I heard about it—oh yes. They were still the authority, and were still very much—we listened to
them no matter how old you were until you were out of the house. I was probably more of a hugger, and so I think I would go up to,

Mrs. Beaulé: You were also the baby.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yuh, yuh.

Mrs. Beaulé: That makes a big difference. It makes a big difference.

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh sure. I think I got more of the hugs and the kisses—probably more because I went to you too.

Mrs. Beaulé: Right.

Mrs. Bergeron: More than wait for, you know. I think I probably had more of a childhood than you did, because as much as I wanted to work, by the time I grew up, I had to wait until I was sixteen, so I had more of a chance to have some type of childhood. Although by that time, I was alone.

Mrs. Beaulé: Right.

Mrs. Bergeron: That’s when I’d talk to myself in the mirror.

Laughter.

Mrs. Bergeron: In those days, a girl’s gotta do what a girl’s gotta do.

More laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: We also played Mass. Oh yes. Reggie would say Mass.

Mrs. Bergeron: I would play the organ.

Claude Bergeron: Where did you do that?

Mrs. Beaulé: On a dresser. Of course there was a mirror in front, and I was singing away. We’d play Mass.

Mrs. Beaulé: Well, our grandmother Desjardin and Ma Tante Alma, who’s also a Desjardin, made a whole outfit.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yes. I have it.

Mrs. Beaulé: You have it?

Claude Bergeron: You have?
Mrs. Bergeron: A priest’s outfit. The whole priest’s outfit. The whole thing.

Claude Bergeron: That’s not sacrilegious?

Mrs. Bergeron: No no no. It’s not Mass.

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: My parents, especially my mother, would have loved, wanted Mon Oncle Reggie to become a priest. But it wasn’t his vocation, you know. He was, to this day, he’s still religious, you know. That’s his nature.

Mrs. Bergeron: And I guess back then, again, it would have been such an honor to have a priest.

Mrs. Beaulé: An honor to have a priest—or a nun.

Mrs. Bergeron: But my mother never thought I’d become a nun. Laughs. My mother knew me.

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: She thought Rita might. Yes. She thought Rita might. But it didn’t happen.

Claude Bergeron: How about Mémére?

Mrs. Beaulé: My mother was pretty much like—well you see me, you see my mother.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yes, yes. I think so.

Mrs. Beaulé: My mother was outgoing—very much so, she was creative, er, she was giving—very much giving. She worked hard all her life and all. I remember her crying, then somebody would walk in, she’d wipe the tears, and she’d be all smiles. She had a lot to cry about because it wasn’t an easy life. She had had a nervous breakdown also. You know, when you go through this—things are not what they’re supposed to be. But she loved to sing. She loved, I don’t remember her singing, but we had people come over, people that had money, people that were friends of hers from way back when she used to live on Railroad Alley when she was young. From school, in her school days, they would come and she would encourage them, and she would solve, that’s the kind of woman she was, you know.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yuh. She was a beautiful woman.

Mrs. Beaulé: Yes. She was.
Mrs. Bergeron: She was. And yet she had a rough life in that Pépère’s siblings were all from out-of-State, and in the summertime, I remember when one group left in the morning and the other group arrived in the afternoon.

Mrs. Beaulé: She made the time to wash the sheets in between, she would borrow from the neighbor.

Mrs. Bergeron: The neighbor—or Ma Tante ‘Toinette. She’d bring down the dirty laundry. She’d do her laundry and bring it back.

Mrs. Beaulé: These uncles from New Jersey would go visit Canadian uncles, and on the way back, they’d stop in Lewiston again. I remember the years when they used to do that, and we used to think it was so,

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh wow!

Mrs. Beaulé: Company! Alright!

Mrs. Bergeron: Until my cousins who started coming over and they wanted to go shopping. And by that time, guess who wasn’t working. Me! So, I had to bring them shopping, and they would start from Pine Street—in those days on Lisbon Street, all the stores were open. We’d start at the corner and work our way down to Peck’s and back on the other side. Oh! It got so hot. You had to walk. But when they all came and we were in our little apartment, that meant some of us had to go to my grandmother’s to sleep, some of us had to go to my Aunt ‘Toinette’s to sleep because there was just no room.

Mrs. Beaulé: No room. And get this—heating with a wood stove in the middle of the summer to cook for these people.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yes, yes. But they kept coming back.

Mrs. Beaulé: They kept coming back because it was a lot of fun at my house. Yuh.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yup. It was cheap.

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: People didn’t go into hotels then. No. They came to visit relatives.

Claude Bergeron: They they contribute to the food, so your parents would pay to entertain them?

Mrs. Beaulé: No. We’d get an ice cream cone. That was about the only time—they used to cost a penny. Payday, we used to get a penny, and we used to go to Nadeau’s store, which was right in front, not in the same part of the building, but in the front.
Mrs. Bergeron: It must have been like in the cellar, actually.

Mrs. Beaulé: Yes. Yes. We used to buy candy. We had a penny. So when the company would come—people from New Jersey, they were in the money! Hey, they were from New Jersey—they’d give us a nickel to buy and ice cream cone.

Mrs. Bergeron: Then would you go to Priscilla Pharmacy to get it?

Mrs. Beaulé: No no. Mr. Nadeau had the ice cream. Cross the street? What do you think?

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh.

Laughter.

Mrs. Beaulé: After a while, I was allowed to cross the street.

Mrs. Bergeron: I was allowed to go to Priscilla Pharmacy to get my ice cream. I had privileges.

Mrs. Beaulé: Oh wow! I guess so.

Claude Bergeron: Was Pine Street busy at that time?

Mrs. Beaulé: Pine Street was two ways. I remember Pine Street when they had the trolleys.

Mrs. Bergeron: The trolleys!

Mrs. Beaulé: I think I remember going on the trolley maybe once—to go to Ma Tante ‘Toinette. It must have been a rainy day and we took the trolley. I think the buses used to turn around where Ward’s is.

Mrs. Bergeron: I don’t really remember the that.

Mrs. Beaulé: No. I’m sure you don’t, because I barely remember them. Yuh. And parades would form in the park and go up Pine Street. We had the raquetteurs—do you remembers les raquetteurs?

Mrs. Bergeron: Yuh. And they had parades.

Mrs. Beaulé: They had Memorial day parade, Fourth of July parade. We’d watch the parade go down, then march back to the park. To this day, I love parades. That’s what, our excitement, you lived in those days.
Mrs. Bergeron: Yup.

Mrs. Beaulé: We managed. No TV. Heck, no. We had our TV, I was about ready to get married.

Mrs. Bergeron: I was a Junior in High School, and the big debate was that I was sure, If we bring in a TV, you would still do your homework. By that time, I was the last one, the rest of you were done. Yes, I had to tell them, Yes, I would, Yup.

Claude Bergeron: That would be when?

Mrs. Bergeron: Probably 1954. '54. We got a TV. A big console.

Mrs. Beaulé: That was, that was quite something. But there again, all English, and my parents couldn’t understand it. They could speak it, but they didn’t want to speak it in front of us. Mom was born in the States, but her mother, of course was born in Ste. Croix, also Ste Croix de Pinière, and she was so—we couldn’t understand a word. She was so set that her kids would not speak in front of her. She was insulted. Her stepchildren—she was the last of the four wives.

Claude Bergeron: Four wives?

Mrs. Beaulé: Yuh. Her stepchildren worked in the woods. Her stepsons. And of course, they came back and spoke English with my grandfather. So, Marie-Louise was very upset. She would be very upset. So, my mother could read it. I remember Mom, my mother, taking a dictionary—I had English homework to do. I don’t know why I remember this, but it was purple printing on a type of mimeograph paper.

Mrs. Bergeron: Yuh, Yuh.

Mrs. Beaulé: And she would take her dictionary and look up the words, to find the words to see what the questions meant, because I couldn’t understand, okay.

Mrs. Bergeron: Oh wow!

Mrs. Beaulé: I may have been in the third or fourth grade, and she would get my homework. She pretty much learned it.

Mrs. Bergeron: She learned it by herself!

Mrs. Beaulé: The funny part, is that my father, because he went to work in the mill, he could speak English, and he would dare speak English as opposed to my mother—who would not. It’s odd.

Mrs. Bergeron: One thing I remember as far as French-speaking is concerned is at our house is I remember doing, by the time I was in High School, saying, “Wow! Okay?
During suppertime, I’m not going to speak one word of French. I’m just going to speak English. (End of tape)