



Oral History Interview with Maurice LaBrie
James Myall
July 24th, 2013.
Also present: Linda LaBrie, Maurice's daughter
Dot LaBrie, Maurice's Wife

James Myall: Okay, so today is Wednesday July 24th. I'm here with Maurice LaBrie at his home at 38 Shank Street in Lewiston, and we're going to be interviewing him about his life story. So why don't you start by telling me when you were born, and who your parents were.

Maurice Labrie: Oh, should I repeat that?¹

JM: Sure

ML: Maurice LaBrie, and I was born in 1931 on Lower Bates Street [Lewiston], a French neighborhood. My father was Lucien and my mother was Jeanne, and we lived there until I was five years old. We moved up – this was an uninsulated apartment building from the old days; it was cold – we moved up on Pine Street, and I had a radiator next to my bed; I thought I had died and gone to Heaven! That was up at 217 Pine Street.

JM: Wow

ML: They had a fire there and that building is gone. What else?

JM: What was your mother's name?

ML: Jeanne DuBois

JM: DuBois, okay. So, the first apartment you lived in – the apartment you were born in – was that one of the old mill housing blocks?

ML: No, it was down on Bates Street, and they were all wood buildings, two-story or four story, but not near the mill. The mill was more downtown. My father worked for a confectionary wholesaler, and then he started his own business which was at 145 Park Street, Lewiston, right across from the [City] Park. Then, further down the years, he built a new building at 243 Park Street, which is now the Acme building – Club building – we operated there a long time, doing wholesale confectionary and tobacco. My brother and sister were all in the business

JM: So you went into the business as well?

¹ Maurice had previously given this information as a sound check.

ML: Yah. Then, being around candy and tobacco – right in the middle of it – I started a vending machine business; started with one machine, and then I gradually bought candy. I sold cigarettes for 20 cents a pack; that’s how far back I go. Candy, five cents. Monday nights I would come home and put all this change on the table, and then we’d count that on Monday night. Then, on the cigarettes, from twenty cents, they went to twenty two cents. Well, you can’t put twenty two cents in the machine, so this is how we gave their change, is put a quarter in the machine, then when they pulled the pack out, there were two pennies on the side – or three pennies.

JM: So you taped them to the side of the packet?

ML: Yes. No, we cut the cellophane and put them inside the cellophane. When our friends would come on weekends, instead of playing cards we’d put them all to work –

JM: Putting pennies inside the cigarette packets?

ML: Yeah, every once in a while they [still] talk about it. All our friends had it up to here with us. I’d buy a hundred dollars worth of pennies.

JM: Wow. What was the name of your father’s business?

ML: *National Candy and Tobacco Company.*

JM: *National Candy and Tobacco Company.*

ML: And mine was *National Vending Company.*

JM: Oh, ok. So how old were you when you started your own business? When you went into the vending - ?

ML: Sixteen.

JM: Sixteen? Wow.

ML: Mr. Rivard was a customer of my father’s before the [Second World] War. He went into the service, and when he came out of the service, he bought the *Hayes’ Diner* – it was right across the street from the *Sun and Journal*.² You know, one of those railroad car diner types. So when he came back from the service he bought that and from *Hayes’* he called it *Silver Dollar Diner*. And of course, he had his own jukebox, his own pinball, his own cigarette machine. And every Friday he’d come down to my father’s place to pick up cigarettes for the week; that went on for a long time.

Then one Friday, he told my father, “I’m taking Maurice with me.” We were on the same street, but at different ends of town. So I went to the diner, and he trained me to put the cigarettes in the machine. Then after we get done, he go out back, get a big tray of pastry, go sit down and eat pastry, and then walk back to my father’s place. So one day he came in, told my father “Lou, I’m selling the Diner.” “Oh yeah?” “Why don’t you buy the cigarette machine, that way –” because that was a twenty-four hour

² The Lewiston Sun-Journal newspaper

diner; they used a lot of cigarettes. But when my father worked for his first company, where he worked they had [vending] machines, but they were a big headache. He said “no, I don’t want it.” So, anyhow, we went back [to the Diner] that Friday, we filled the machine up. When he brought the pastries out – in front of my father I had to call him Mr. Rivard, but we were alone, I called him Tom – “Tom,” [I said,] after we sat down, “Tom, I want that machine.” He said, “what do you mean?” I said, “I want to buy it.” He said, “You heard what your father said.” “I don’t care, I want it.” And he said “At your age, Maurice, I can’t sell it to you unless your father –” So that week, I worked – I said “You do me a favor? Don’t sell the machine for one week” – then I worked my father into the deal, then I finally bought it. That was my first machine; that’s how I happened to get my first machine.

JM: Wow, huh. So you were sixteen when you did this. Were you allowed to smoke at sixteen? Could you buy cigarettes?

ML: Yeah.

JM: Oh you could? Ok.

ML: I smoked. I give it up at 25. I was 25 when I gave it up. So from there on, I kept buying machines, and I was buying *DuGrenier*, made in Haverhill, Mass. In them days, we didn’t have cell phones or phones, so I saw one of their folders. I asked in the folder, “I’m interested in buying their machines.” Did you ever see *The Maltese Falcon* movie?³

JM: No.

ML: You don’t know Sydney Greenstreet?⁴

JM: No.

ML: A big mean guy. Anyways, after that Sunday, I forgot [about the order with DuGrenier], I was working in my father’s place, and somebody, on the microphone, they asked for me to come out front. It was the guy from *DuGrenier*, and he looked the same as Sydney Greenstreet! I thought he was his brother. So, when he saw me, I was like sixteen, seventeen, I could tell – “Don’t tell me I came down here all the way from Boston to talk to a kid.” Anyways, he took out the pictures, and the prices, and my father’s office was at an angle, and my father was in his office, and he kept looking at me, [I was] hoping “Geez, I hope this guy comes out so I can – “. So I ordered three machines; he said “How you going to pay for them?” I said, “I’d like, like everybody else, ten days, or whatever you do. “ So my father come out, he was happy. “Yeah” he said “That’s all right” he says, “Send him the machines; you’ll get paid.”

JM: So you got those on credit, essentially? [repeated]

ML: No, I wanted like ten days, like in them days that was the normal thing. That was the same as cash; ten days. They give you a chance to look at the stuff, make sure it’s alright, you know. Then, this Mr. Rivard; my [future] wife’s sister worked for Mr. Rivard also, and one day they had a waitress missing, so

³ Warner Bros., 1941

⁴ Greenstreet played a mob boss, Kaspar Gutman “the Fat Man” in the movie.

Connie said to Mr. Rivard “I’ll call my sister” which was Dot, so Dot came in and then she started working there. But it’s funny; I never ran into her, I think we weren’t there at the same time. So one night my friend and I were coming back from the movies, said “Let’s go in for a piece of pie.” And then Dot was there and he [my friend] was making better time than I was, even though he was smaller than I was. So I double-crossed my friend and I started going alone! So that was part of that deal. Then, with the prices kept going up, the *DuGrenier* machines didn’t have the parts to keep going up. We would send them to the dump. And two years ago, on Craigslist, I saw that first same machine that I had bought, so I made a deal with the guy to bring it to – my son’s out in Quincy [MA] – then from Quincy my son and – where’s that David live, Dot?

Dot LaBrie: Mansfield

ML: And he had a pick-up truck, and picked up there, and my son in Quincy, brought it to Mansfield. When my wife went up, he gave her a ride down to the traffic circle in New Hampshire, that’s a busy place.

JM: Oh yeah, in Portsmouth?

ML: Yeah, and my friend, he went out to meet my son and her; bring my wife back and the machine back. And when we got there, he said “Maurice, I’d like to see what I’ve picked up.” It was all full of rust. “You mean I went all the way to pick up this piece of junk?” And I just sold it last week; it was right under the bridge. I made a nice machine out of it.

JM: So, DuGrenier sounds like it was a Franco-American, or a French company?

ML: Yeah, DuGrenier – in Haverhill, Mass. And you talked to people in Haverhill then [chuckles]. But he had a – he designed stuff Art Deco at that time so his machines did look dirty[?], you know. Then, getting back to schooling – you were interested in things like the school?

JM: Sure, yeah, so tell me about going to school.

ML: I went to St. Peter’s School and from the first to the fourth grade they were nuns, then on the fifth grade there was Sacred Heart Brothers from the fifth grade up. And I went there, and there was one of the yearly pictures [indicates] – I can’t remember the year – but I’m in that picture. And then there was a brother named [unintelligible] and he made a play during the [Second World] War – I remember Pearl Harbor – and I was in that play [indicates]; that [indicates] was my father’s second place, that he had built, that building. And these guys [indicates], I recognize most of them; ‘course, there’s not many left; I’m eighty-two.

JM: Right, right. So the school – were all your lessons in French?

ML: They did both, French –

JM: French and English, okay.

ML: During the nuns’ time, there was not too much English; it was mostly French.

JM: But it started to change as you got older; they introduced more English, the older you got?

ML: Oh the brothers, even though they were from Canada, they had a half English.

DL: Are they looking for things at the museum of different times, different years, or is it whatever you remember of that – let's say he puts a picture of all the school, and let's say somebody walks by and says "I know that; I was in that picture." Are they looking for anything 'pecific, or just –

JM: Just a general, kind of things –

DL: Oh general, yeah?

JM: We have a lot of different subjects on Franco-American history

DL: For people to come in and see?

JM: Yeah, for people to come in and look at; and we have some coming back to the eighteen-hundreds and some more recent; a huge time period. So, did the – and at the school, were the boys and girls kept separate? At St. Peter's?

ML: At the brothers' – I mean, at the nuns', the boys and girls were in the same class

JM: Okay, so up until fourth grade, you were together.

ML: Then at the fifth grade, the girls stayed with the nuns, and we went to the brothers. There were no girls at the brothers'.

DL: Maurice, at Holy Family [School], Linda, didn't they separate them, girls on one side, boys on the other, when you went outside to play?

LL: Yes.

JM: And that was, so that was when you were at Holy Family, Linda?

LL: Yes. I've got another picture of St. Peter's, from my aunt.

JM: Okay. What – when you were at school, did they used to – well, can you tell me some more about when you were at school, what that was like, at St. Peter's?

ML: It was just the run-of-the-mill. If a brother liked you, you got along good, and if he didn't like you, it was a little bit harder. There was one brother, that didn't like me in the sixth grade, and he let me know it, in certain ways. One afternoon-time, we were in the yard, and my father came to pick me up with a brand new car. He just happened to – so when he saw that, then after that, he was nicer to me, because my father owned a

DL: Aha! Money!

JM: Oh, because he thought your father was a big guy, yeah, yeah. Were they – were they strict?

ML: Not that strict, but – of course, I was not a cooperative student. I tended to hang with wise guys, like [indicates photo]; I was attracted to wise guys, you know. During recess, instead of – as soon as the boys went out for – what do you call it in the morning?

LL: Recess.

DL: Recess.

ML: Recess, yeah. They played baseball, and the wise guys, we'd go into the side of the school; they had these big windows on the first floor, you know, set in, and you could, you know, hide in there like, and then we'd smoke a cigarette in there, and you know –

JM: So how old were you when you were doing this?

ML: I don't know, maybe ten, eleven.

JM: Wow.

ML: So there was a store down the street; a penny candy store. In those days, the Avalon and Marvel Cigarettes were only ten cents a pack, but we didn't want a pack; then you'd get caught with it. So we'd go down there and we'd buy 'em for a penny each. So instead of the guy getting ten cents for his pack, he was getting twenty cents. So everybody was happy. So we did some of that, and then in one of the classes, I remember, they had a sponge ball, because when they went out to play, at recess, you know, they hit the ball, the Brother would pitch and, you know, they'd hit with their hands. Then he'd bring it back on his desk. And I turn around to talk to a guy in back of me; so he wanted my attention. He picked up the ball, and he threw it. And I was fast enough that I see it coming, and I duck, and it hit the kid in back of me, right in the face!

JM: Wow. Did you – so you said you played baseball. Did you guys used to play any other games, like any games that were particularly French or Franco-American?

ML: Yeah, 'cause being that they were from Canada, they brought the hockey thing. There was two there – the St. Peter and St. Paul teams – the school was St. Peter and St. Paul – so they developed two different times. I wasn't too, too, [unintelligible] about it, I was not a good skater to begin with; you've got to skate pretty good. And these guys that played, later on, after they left school, Bates Mill organized a hockey team, you ever hear about them?

JM: Yeah.

ML: And a lot of these guys were picked because they had played hockey when they played – then my father's sales manager, his name was "Speed" Produx [?], he was the manager, coach and manager

JM: Of the Bates Mill Team?

ML: Of the team, yeah. So when I went to the games, I had the opportunity in to go to the back room, where they go to –

JM: The locker room?

ML: And so – then they get the pep talk; I was in there listening to all that stuff.

JM: So was that a– were those a big deal, those Bates Mill hockey games; would lots of people watch?

ML: Oh yeah. It – Dot, could you get me a bottle of water? It attracted –

LL: [to James] Do you want something to drink?

JM: No, I'm fine, thanks.

ML: It attracted – I mean, they filled up the arena⁵ when they played and – their team was – the one that they – was the biggest competitive was in Berlin, New Hampshire. When Berlin came, it was so – I mean, everybody went. Then they did split the team, and some guys went to the European tour, so, you know, hockey was important. In fact my great-grandson plays hockey in the school league, and he was one of the high scorers, last year.

JM: Oh great.

ML: Yeah.

JM: And did other, did any of the other mills have teams, or just the Bates Mill?

ML: Well, we only had really one mill. There was Bates, Hill and Androscoggin, but it was all one company.

JM: Right, but none of the shoe shops, or anything like that, none of the others had hockey teams?

ML: No, they never went in to that. We had a lot of shoe shops here, in Auburn. The [textile] mills are in Lewiston, the shops were in Auburn. The shops were the big business; a lot of people did well, working in the shops. In them days, not everyone had cars. They'd take the trolley, then after that the bus. When we moved, I told you, up from Bates Street to Pine Street, when we had the warm apartment, we had trolley cars in them days, and come right in front of our house. And the elm trees were both sides of the street – that's on Pine Street – and they made an umbrella; that's a real, real nice street. Then they had Elm Disease, and that's the end of the trees. Then I had a sister that went to Acme Business College.

JM: And what was her name? What was her name?

ML: Georgette

JM: And her last name?

ML: Lebrun.

⁵ St Dominic's Arena, later the Central Maine Youth Arena and now the Androscoggin Bank Collis e

JM: Lebrun.

ML: And she went – we were talking about that – you found her – birth cert – not that –

LL: I've got her diploma. And her report card.

JM: Oh yeah? Neat.

DL: Is she in that picture?

LL: Yeah, that's from St. Peter's. This is the one I made for the funeral. She was the good one!

ML: And I was an altar boy, also.

JM: Oh yeah? Where was that? At St. Peter's Church?

ML: Yep, and I'd go to five o'clock mass; I had to get up pretty early. I remember that during mass, when you give the priest the water and the wine – are you Catholic?

JM: No. But I've been to a [mass].

ML: Maybe you know. You know, they have the chalice, and you pour. And when they've got enough they go up [gestures with hand] and that means stop. I had this priest, he must've liked wine. I did the wine – the water and he stopped right and –

JM: Plenty of wine, and not much water!

ML: Yeah, the bottle half empty.

JM: What else did you have to do as an altar boy?

ML: Was serving mass, and – oh yeah – and when you done serve mass, you know, when they pass the basket, when they collect –

JM: The collection.

ML: Well we would have this big bag, you know, with a strap, and when the basket was full, the guy would signal us, and we'd come down the aisle and dump it in the –

DL: I'll bet they don't have that problem today!

ML: And that was one of the things that we did. Then Sunday night, they had what they called vespers, it was a ceremony where they marched through the church, you know, with the different things that they hung on the pole. Then my brother was also ahead of me by one year, I think, and that was about it, I guess. And then I had a friend, "Blackie" Labbe, and his father had a grocery store – are you running out?

JM: No I think we're okay; I'm just keeping an eye on it [the tape recorder].

ML: He came to the school, where we were, and when his brother went into the service, then the father needed more help. So around nine o'clock he'd come to school and ask the Brother "do you think Blackie could come with me?" That went on until one day, when the father came, the priest said "look, don't send him back, keep him! There's no use doing that any more!" And today he owns Blackie's food stand on Minot Avenue in Auburn.

JM: And what was the name of his father's store?

ML: Alan C. [?] Market, on Lisbon – Lower Lisbon Street. If you ever should go to Blackie's, if ever you're on Minot Avenue, and Blackie's there, just say "National Candy" and I'll guarantee you he'll stop whatever he's doing and come and find out –

JM: Great. Neat.

ML: We were friends for a long, long time. Our fathers dealt together, and him and I dealt together.

JM: And did you – so how long were you – so, did you – you went all the way through St. Peter's? Did you go on to High School?

ML: No, I was too anxious to go to work at my father's place. It might have been a mistake, but I did all right. I didn't care for school to begin with. And when Blackie –they picked up Blackie, I thought he was so lucky!

JM: So how old were you when you started working for your dad?

ML: Fifteen, I guess.

JM: Fifteen or so, okay.

ML: Yeah, I used to go afternoons, you know, and then I started – I just couldn't wait to get going.

JM: And then how long did you work – so how long were you working in the vending machine business?

ML: I can't remember the years, but when I got done, cigarettes were thirty-five cents from twenty cents. And I can't remember – I tell him about the pennies, Dot.

DL: Oh, that was a lot of fun!

ML: All of our friends, instead of playing cards –

DL: Even the kids did it!

JM: And so – did you – did you have another job after that? After the vending machine business?

ML: Oh yeah, I have had many things. I had a Laundromat, I had a dry-cleaning thing. What else did I do now, I can't remember?

LL: Then you started with the antiques.

JM: So did you find – you were saying that your dad and Blackie’s father used to work together a lot, and you talked about, you know, when you were buying the vending machines – so were there a lot of connections between the Franco businessmen in the area? Was that like a big thing, that they would help each other out?

ML: Oh yeah, because my father belonged to the Musical Literary Club, and in the afternoon – my father was getting closer to retirement – that was his hangout. They’d go out and they’d play cards, on the third floor of a building on Lisbon Street, and a lot of businessmen, French business guys – and they hung around that way?

JM: So they’d do some of their business in those, like, French social clubs?

ML: They played cards together so, you know, they dealt together.

DL: Back in your father’s day, I know it’s not like today, but businessmen helped businessmen with a handshake. You didn’t have to sign all kinds of promissory notes, because each one depended and trusted each other.

ML: When my father made a deal with somebody, it was done. There was no changing your mind. It was nice, in them days, to do business. Then, like after the war, my father had a Plymouth car; there were so scarce, the cars, and he dealt with Advance Auto Sales,⁶ and the name was Joe Lifschitz, and then when his son took over, he changed his name to Shep Lee.

JM: Huh, oh, okay. Of the Lee Auto Malls?

ML: Yeah. But that’s how my father did business. So when he was at the garage once, with Joe Lifschitz at Advance, Joe said to him “Lou”, he said, “I’ve got some DeSotos coming in. I think you’d like that better; it’s a bigger car.” So one day he called my father and said “I’ve just received five DeSotos.” And my father says to him, “You got a blue one?” “Yeah.” He said “Is it,” they called it two-toned, you know, when the roof was a different color, “is it two-toned?” He said, “I’ll make it two-toned!” and they did a deal right on the telephone, without looking at it, or –

JM: Wow. Bought a car over the phone, huh?

ML: “So I’ll pick it up Friday” and that was it. There was a lot like that from my father. Then another thing, too. When Dot and I – we got married young, of course – when we went to the furniture place, where my family bought their furniture – you know, it seemed to me the way to make an appointment on a Monday night to buy some furniture and one floor had kitchen, and another floor had parlor, another floor bedroom, it was just all the floors, and it was getting to be eight, nine o’clock at night. So when we got back down, he said “how are you going to pay for this?” We were just a young couple, you know, and he brought us in the office and now he wanted to get away from us, because they weren’t any part of the finance thing. So the woman said “what is your name?” and we told – I told them – then

⁶ In Auburn

the salesman, “Is your father Lucien?” “Yeah.” Oh, he told the woman “that’s all right.” So he opened up a lot of doors for me. He had a good reputation.

JM: Which furniture store was that?

ML: Atherton’s. On Pine and Lisbon.

JM: Near the [Lewiston] City Hall, right?

ML: Yeah, right next to the City Hall. And my father’s first business place was just two, three houses down from City Hall. 145 Park Street. At 145 Park, when they received the stuff, the stuff came in through the back, and through the back, it went by Simones’ Hot Dog Stand. It was across the street from where – you know where it is?

JM: Yes.⁷

ML: Well, they used to be across the street. It was just a top paper shack – a red-top paper shack – and the guy that my father – when I was young kid, they’d give me a quarter to go across the street to Simones’ and I’d bring back two hot dogs, a Coke and a double dog – for a quarter!

JM: Wow, couldn’t get that now.

ML: And when Jim Simones had his seventy-fifth anniversary,⁸ he was asking for stories about – and I have a friend who eats there, and my friend told Jim “I know this guys that” “Oh, ‘course I’d like to talk to him!” But it didn’t work out ‘cause when we went down, he’d be waiting on somebody, and talking to me; so you know, that’s not – so I’m grabbing him to come over here to talk to me so we can – I know more about his grandfather that he does, because I went there so often and when he wasn’t busy, Mr. Simones,⁹ he’d say, “Maurice, you Catholic? I’m [Greek] Orthodox. Our religion is the same, except no Pope. We have the Metropolitan; we don’t bother with the Pope.”

Dot LaBrie: And they can get married.

ML: And he had a son that was a priest, his youngest son, and he explained to me, “Maurice, if he gets married before he’s ordained, alright. After he’s ordained, no marriage.” So, you know, we had a lot of talks like that. And being from a foreign country, and how he got his citizenship here – he came to fight for us in World War One, in the army. He didn’t get a free ride, that was a big thing, to go to war to gain citizenship. A lot of people don’t know this – whoever started that hot dog stand was not a Simones, it was a cousin, with a different name. And he sold it to John Simones, and hot dogs were five cents. Wonder how you made any money. Then John Simones sold it to Jimmy Simones, which now is the third generation.¹⁰ And I had a lot of talk with Mr. Simones, you know. What else.

⁷ 99 Chestnut Street, Lewiston.

⁸ The seventy-fifth anniversary was in 1983 – the business was founded in 1908 – Maurice may be remembering the 100th anniversary in 2008.

⁹ Probably John Simones, the business’s father (b.1896). Simones was a Greek immigrant to Lewiston around 1912.

¹⁰ John sold the business to his brother, James (“Jim”). He was followed by his son, George, and George’s son James (“Jimmy”).

JM: Yeah, yeah. So. With the – you talked about the Simoneses, and talking about religion – how were things with the French in Lewiston and some of the other groups, like the Greeks and the Irish and that sort of thing? Did they all tend to get along pretty well?

ML: I think so. I think that everybody minded their own business, everyone had their own churches. Course, when the French first started to come here, from Canada, the Irish people didn't like them, because they would be working in the mills cheaper. So I remember hearing stories about a lot of friction on that part. And my mother worked in the mill, and she was single, and this woman taught her her job, and down at – fifty, sixty years later, this woman was in a nursing home, and she had no family, so my mother made a point to go visit her every couple of weeks in the nursing home, and one day she asked my mother, "Jean, why do you come and visit me?" She said, "you showed me my job, and you showed it to me well, and I've never forgotten it, so that was a nice friendship. I have a – maybe you wouldn't be interested in it here, but I have a story I would like to tell you.

JM: Yes, please.

ML: When I was going to school, in the lower grade, you know, six, seven, eight years old, I'd go down the same street, and this street had an apartment building and the first floor was a garage – you know, a repair garage?¹¹ In front was always parked a Model A Ford and for – you know, a box in the back- there was a Exide Battery – they had built a big Exide Battery. And they specialized in Exide Battery, at that garage. I kept going by and seeing it. Even as a kid I guess I liked cars. I had a brown manila envelope this morning [looking].

DL: A brown –?

LL: Was it with this stuff?

ML: It had pictures in it.

DL: Is that the one of you sitting on top of it?

ML: No.

DL: I don't remember seeing it.

JM: That's okay.

ML: Anyway, I kept going by, and all the years I went by, it was always there. And the name was Evariste Domingue, the man that owned it, he was French.

JM: Can you spell that for me?

ML: Evariste E-V-A-R-I-S-T-E Domingue I think it's D-O-M-I-N-G-U-E. Can you slow down your thing, I've got to – [leaves room]

¹¹ Central Garage, 40 Walnut Street, Lewiston.

JM: Sure.

[Break in tape]

JM: Sorry, so you were saying about the car with the garage?

ML: Yeah, and there's the picture of the garage [indicates]. Then his [Domingue's] son came to work in the garage; his name was Fern. The reason I knew him – 'cause we used to hang around – there was a store around the corner; we used to hang around there. So anyway, I don't know what happened; finally it disappeared, you know, like everything else. So, if was, say, ten years old, and I'm eighty-two, so this would be, what – seventy years?

JM: Yeah, seventy years ago.

ML: So I had a Chevrolet station wagon and I needed to have it fixed, and I went to my garage. "Maurice, you'll have to have bring that to the Chevy garage, because that's one of their parts. So I made an appointment, at the garage, and one morning I left my car, and then he said "we'll get you a ride." And the station wagons pulled up, and I got it, and – oh! – it was Fern. He had been a mechanic, he had retired, and now he just brings people back and forth. So I says, "you're Fern." He said, "Yep." "Fern," I said, "I got a question for you," I said. "All these years I went by the garage and I noticed that car – that truck – and," I said, "I really, really, thought it was great. You wouldn't happen to have a picture of that truck?" You won't believe this – he reached in his pocket, sixty years later, and he had these in his pocket [pulls out photographs].

Linda LaBrie: Those are the originals?

ML: Yep. I mean how can he have – after sixty years? – and I never knew I would be riding with him, we just have [unintelligible]. I like to tell story because – but that's quite an idea, isn't it? I had them [the photographs] enlarged.

JM: Can you tell me anything about – what was it like growing up in Lewiston in – during World War 2? What do you remember from that time?

ML: Well, during the War,¹² people were making good money, but they were good, you know – like the Little Canada, that's Oxford and River Streets, the old-fashioned French families, when the kids were working in the mill and the shop, they all turned in their pay.

JM: Oh, okay, to the parents, yep.

ML: Then they give them some money, but that went throughout the war. When the boys went into service, the money came to the parents and then after the war, now the girls and the guys were starting to get married, and what the family had put aside would pay for the wedding. Because the apartments were real low price down there. When people came up on the train, they got off at the Grand Trunk on

¹² For the next few minutes there is some background noise. Maurice's son, Dennis, and his wife, Dot, are speaking to each other.

Lincoln Street, and somebody would meet them and say “You, know, I know an apartment in Little Canada,” and they were talking four, five dollars a week. So some of them people did very well, even though they were, again, big families. They’d all turn in their money, so it piled up.

But the people down there – it seemed they all had the same taste. Because when I had my dry cleaning plant, some days, when the driver was missing or something, I’d take the route. And I’d go to these different apartments, and they all had like the same type of furniture, the same type of knick-knacks, and I already noticed that if they weren’t home, and you left the clothes, it didn’t take more than an hour or two for the money – they’d come back and pay for it, they were very good that way. Little Canada has quite a history, but throughout the years, the French people moved out, and then all kinds of different people came in. Then Mr. Turgeon built some houses in back of Holy Cross Church; they were houses with no cellar; just, you know – somehow the people from Little Canada liked them, and they started moving up there.

JM: Oh – so he bought [sic] these houses with the intention of selling them to people from Little Canada?

ML: No – I don’t know. You know, one would buy it, and then tell the other one; there was a lot of related people down there. You know, a daughter would marry a guy from the other family, and there was a lot of that mix. I know my barber was from – I used to go down Lincoln Street – and was off [?] Wednesday afternoon – so I went one day, and he said, “Maurice,” he said, “I’ve bought a house.” He said Wednesday afternoon, when he wasn’t working, he went down and we paid cash for it.

JM: Wow.

ML: That’s pretty good. Because they were not expensive homes. But, you know, they had the cash for it.

JM: Did you used to speak French? Did you grow up speaking French, when you were young?

ML: Yes. My mother didn’t start speaking English until she was in her forties. So at the house, it was always French. And my Dot doesn’t talk French, so them brats [Maurice’s children] were all brought up in English. So I kind of forget me French. I mean, I can hear it alright, understand it, but to talk – I find it hard to make sentences. Because her [Linda’s?] husband is from Canada, and his parents live here, and the son had an operation, and my daughter called up and said, “Maurice, can you call Mr. Bergeron, and tell him everything went alright?” So after he got on the phone, I just couldn’t –

JM: Yeah, you couldn’t put the words together.

ML: I couldn’t put the – I told him in English, and he had to [unintelligible].

LL: I don’t know why he couldn’t translate hip replacement in French; I was sure that was part of his vocabulary! [laughter all round].

JM: So you started to speak English – was it went to school that you started to speak English for the first time?

ML: Well, 'cause we – I always talked English, from the time I was young. But sometimes, I'd try to fool – they'd call me a frog, because I'm not French, but I have a French accent. There's no way I could fool them.

JM: That was at school, you said?

ML: No, that was somewhere else. "Hey, you frog!" [chuckles]. "I'm not French."

JM: Were there any other times when you noticed people treated you differently because you were French, or because you had a French accent?

ML: No not really.

JM: No, just occasionally?

ML: Everything was acceptable, around, I guess. In them days, Lisbon Street, on Saturday mornings, you couldn't walk on that sidewalk, there were so many people. And then today, nobody on that street.

JM: Yeah, very different.

ML: My mother would take me with her, Saturday morning when I was too young to stay home along, and we would go shopping. And I always remember, halfway through, she'd have to go into the ladies store, and she'd give me some money and I'd go to – I don't know if it was Kreisge's or Woolworth's – they had a lunch bar, and I remember having a toasted chopped ham sandwich, a Pepsi, and a tulip sundae – that was a strawberry sundae – twenty-five or forty cents. And that was every Saturday, when I went there.

And the Strand Theater, on Main Street, my brother and I used to go Saturday for – you know they had two cartoons, and then a cowboy picture, and a comedy picture – but before the movie started my mother would pack up a little lunch, and we'd go to Maine Central [Railroad]; that's way up Bates Street, and we'd sit down on one of the carts, and we'd wait, and at eleven o'clock, the *Flying Yankee* would come by – that was the first silver train there ever was, not steam, you know.¹³ We'd just sit there and watch it go by. Then we'd go down the Strand, and look at all the movies, and stay for the second showing. You'd get outside, and the sun would hit you!

JM: Did you used to have any – were they any foods that you used to – that your mum would make anything like that, that stick out for you?

¹³ Built in 1935 for the Boston and Maine and the Maine Central Railroads, it operated the Boston-Portland and Portland-Bangor routes between 1935 and . It was retired from service completely in 1957, and is currently undergoing restoration work in Lincoln, NH. In addition to being the first train with a stainless steel exterior, it was also one of the first long-distance diesel-powered engines.

ML: Yeah, something that nobody in the world eats but us – and my kids don't want to see it – is *Ragout au Patte de Cochon*.

JM: *Ragoût à* – can you spell that for me?

ML: *Ragou*, R-A-G-O-U; *au*, A-U; *patte*, leg; *de cochon*, pig.¹⁴ Pig's knuckles. Oh, that was a favorite!

JM: And that was made with real pig's – ? That really was made with pig's knuckles, or – ?

ML: Well, in them days it was not expensive; I think it made a cheap meal, and a good meal.

JM: So that was like a soup, or something? Or a stew?

LL: I've seen you have in the fridge before – they're real pig's knuckles.

JM: Oh, okay, they're whole chunks?

ML: It's a thick sauce. I remember, they used to brown the flour which gives it that much – then they made the gravy brown - but, when you open the door, you smell that – the flour – oh! What a nice smell – then you knew you was in for a great meal! Then, during the War, she served us steak one day. I told my mother, "There's something wrong here." It was horse meat. She had tried it; nobody knew – beef was hard to get, so she had tried some

JM: But she was able to get horsemeat from somewhere, huh?

ML: Yeah, because some stores did sell it, you know.

JM: Were there other things that were hard to come by, during the War?

ML: Oh yeah, butter was really hard to come by. And we had coupons; when you went to the store, besides paying, you had to give coupons; one you ran out of coupons, you didn't get any. Then there was the same thing on gasoline. And my father had a deal with a Mr. Gendron – he owned the Tattle [?] Station, so when my father got his stamps for the month, he'd go down and give them to Mr. Gendron; then there were no questions, he could go in – ?

JM: Ah, he could just fill up as much as he wanted?

ML: Yes. In fact, there's a new station at the corner of Lisbon [Street] and South Avenue, and that was normally, way, way back, the Gendron's.¹⁵ Gendron and Gendron, the contractor – nice family. I've never met a Gendron I couldn't like, they're all nice people. And when I went there to gas up, it was one of the newer Gendrons, a younger one, and he had a picture of that old Tattle [?] Station, which was way down Lisbon Street.

JM: Were there any other kinds of food that you used to have when you were a kid?

¹⁴ More usually *Ragoût De Pattes De Cochon*, a traditional Québécois dish.

¹⁵ "Gendron's U Save" gas station and "Gendron's Seafood" are currently located on the corner of Lisbon Street and Foch Street, half a mile south-east of the location described here.

LL: The pork pie.

ML: You had *toutière*, I guess you've heard of them. It's a pork pie with – it's ground pork and potato. That was a big thing at Christmas; big. When you'd go to somebody's house, and then you'd compliment them on how good their pie was. [To Linda] Can you think of anything?

LL: I'm trying to remember what she'd [presumably Maurice's mother] would make. At holidays, that's what French people had; they don't have ham and turkey, they have pork pie.

JM: Sure. Well, did – oh, go on.

ML: Then, in them days, when it was Sunday, you know in the roasting pan, there'd be a piece of beef and a piece of pork, and then they'd put the potatoes in it – they called it yellow potatoes. And when it came out, you know, you had a combination. That I remember – it was a Sunday thing.

JM: What kind of – so what kind of thing would you do at Christmas time? You said about the *toutière*. Were there other traditions you had?

ML: Yes. The midnight –

JM: Midnight Mass?

Midnight Mass and the meal afterwards. At our house – one year it was at our house; the next year it

ML: was at my aunt's house – when they went to the Midnight Mass, a couple of women stayed back and prepare the food. Then, when they came back, it was a big thing, you know, it was 1:30 in the morning. A big, big meal. Then we had aunts and uncles that we only saw once a year, that they would come, you know, they would –

JM: Did they live in Canada?

ML: Huh?

JM: Where did the aunts and uncles live? Did they come from a long way off?

ML: No, they lived around here.

JM: Oh, they lived here in Lewiston?

ML: They just didn't visit, you know. Then, of course, everybody [was] shooting questions at them, because they hadn't seen them for a year, you know. Then, I had a cousin, and he was a party animal, and his mother was real strict, and he left home when he was sixteen, without telling anyone. We didn't see him for years and years, because he wasn't, he wasn't going to change his life. He ended up in New York; and from New York he ended up in Puerto Rico. He had some boutiques there, I guess I heard he done real well. [To Linda] Now you say you saw him at his mother's wake?

LL: Yes.

ML: We wouldn't have taken you there, it seems.

LL: Yes. Aunt Juliette?

ML: Yes, he had a long, long, pea coat – he was dressed real New York. He had a long, long coat that we had never seen around here.

LL: Yes, and he was wearing a tuxedo with lace socks, and tuxedo shoes and –

ML: I don't think he had a tuxedo.

LL: Yes. [Insistently] I remember. [To James] He was gay. He was etched in my mind, he was like the most handsome, best-dressed man I'd ever seen in my life; he was gorgeous.

JM: And what year would this have been? Do you think, roughly?

LL: I was really young.

ML: Yes, you'd have to be.

LL: I was like ten, maybe. I'd never been to such a thing.

JM: So that really stood out to you; the guy dressed in the fancy tux, and the coat.

LL: Yes, he stood out.

ML: Oh, he stood out, like a –

DL: [Leaving] I shall return!

JM: What was his name?

LL: Fern.

ML: [To Dot] Where are you going, darling?

DL: I'm going to get Dennis some clams.

LL: [To Maurice] Apparently, we're not invited. What was Fern's – what was their last name? Dubois?

ML: Berubé.

LL: Oh, Berubé.

JM: Berubé, right. Do you – oh, go on.

ML: No, go ahead.

JM: Were you involved in, like, any clubs in town, especially any, like, Franco-American clubs?

ML: Well, Montagnard Club

JM: The snowshoe club.

ML: And the Horseshoe [?] Club; course, I was in the Knights of Columbus. What other clubs did I go to? Lisbon Street had a lot of clubs.

JM: Yes, a lot of social clubs.

ML: And I had a cleaning plant, I wasn't a paid member but I'd go in for a beer. I never cared for club life, you know, smoke.

LL: He's a lone wolf. That's the K of C [indicates photograph]

JM: Oh, neat. And what – so do you remember the snowshoe conventions, and the big parades and things in town?

ML: Oh, they were big, they were big. [To Linda] Do you have a picture of the ice palace?

LL: Yes, in Kennedy Park.

ML: That was a part of the snowshoe clubs. They came different parts of from Canada and like Sunday morning and Saturday night they had that big, big, parade, you know, the drum and bugle corps, and that was a big thing, then. Well, you know, there was no TV; it was part of the entertainment, you know.

JM: So, did you used to take part in those, when you were in the Montagnards?

ML: No, well, I didn't belong to the snowshoe part. And, back along, the Montagnards had a marching band and, in summer time, Sunday night, in the City Park,¹⁶ you know, there's a – what do you call the bandstand?

JM: The gazebo?

ML: Yes, and they've that orchestra, and the marching band would be there Sunday night, and Dot and I would walk to the park and listen to the music. It was [a] well-organized orchestra and band. Then of course, in the snowshoe, it was more of a bugle and drum corps. Oh yeah, we enjoyed going to watch the different activities. And they would make an ice palace in the park, it was part of their snowshoe weekend during the – [to Linda] do you have it in there?

LL: I'm looking for it. They did that every year, right, the ice palace?

ML: Yes.

JM: Do you remember any other – was – do you remember any other kind of musical things? Was that a big part of when you were growing up, music, or French music?

¹⁶ City Park was later renamed Kennedy Park after the visit of President John F. Kennedy to Lewiston in 1960.

ML: Yes. Then there was St. Cecilia's Band¹⁷, there was the – I think it was St. Mary's where – St. Mary's Church was a busy place; all the people from Little Canada belonged to it. But then they died, you know. People moved away from there. Is that where you work from?¹⁸ Or is that from the mill?¹⁹

JM: No – they do have a heritage center there, but I work at the L-A College.

ML: Cause my memory is starting to leave.

JM: No, no, that's fine. Plenty of good stories. So, tell me about how you met your wife.

ML: Oh, I think I had told you that she had gone to work in the Silver Dollar Diner, and then we stopped by, my friend and I, for a piece of pie. And we kind of liked her, you know, we were flirting with her; we did that a few times. But he was gaining; he was smoother than I was, so that's when I double-crossed him; I started going without him. And I won!

JM: And how old were you? At this point?

ML: Seventeen.

JM: Seventeen or so, okay.

ML: But it wouldn't have been for Mr. Rivard, or her [Dot's] sister, we wouldn't be sitting here, talking, you know. Then I had a - before Mr. Rivard bought it, it was Hayes' Diner, and I had a paper route. I did well, I made like fifteen dollars a week. That was early in the morning, the *Daily Sun*. Saturday morning, we'd go down, you know, we'd collect our orders Friday, then go down and pay for the papers for during the week. And me and two, three other guys, who had just get – our big thing was, after we get our bills paid, we'd go across to Hayes' Diner, and I remember getting a blueberry muffin and a chocolate milk. That was a treat every Saturday morning. But to make fifteen bucks, in those days, for just a kid, that was alright. So, Mr. Rivard played a few important things in my life without knowing that they happened.

JM: Were there any other stories you wanted to tell me, or anything else you wanted to talk about?

ML: Oh, after you leave, I'll know [unitntelligilble]

LL: Tell him the one about the coal cellar.

ML: The what?

LL: The coal cellar. You forgot?

LL: No –

¹⁷ The *Fanfare Ste. Cecile*

¹⁸ Maurice is referring to the Franco-American Heritage Center, which is housed in the former St. Mary's Church building.

¹⁹ Museum L-A is housed in the former Bates Mill.

JM: The coal cellar, I think.

LL: Didn't you and your friends have coal delivered to somebody?

ML: Oh, yeah. We were mad at our friend, and one of my friends could talk like a grown-up, you know, and he called P&P Fuel, and he ordered a truckload of coal, you know.

JM: To somebody else's house?

ML: Then, what we'd do, at nighttime, we had nothing to do. He'd be calling taxis to come across the street, you know, and they'd be beeping their horns. And once, he called the people across the street, and he said "This is Joe Kelly from Central Maine Power; we'll be doing some work. Would you mind closing your lights for about thirty minutes?"

JM: So you used to pull a lot of pranks like that?

ML: Yes. Then, you know, another one that was not a prank, but – do you ever here the World of Mirth Carnival?

JM: No.

ML: Big, this was big. When they used the fairground, they filled the whole fairground, you know, with a nice entrance, and a tent, and amusements. And the guy who owned it looked like Kentucky Fried Chicken, the Colonel, he looked just like him, with a cane. And this friend of mine, his father was a lawyer, and he was a lawyer for the World of Mirth. And when they came here, if anything happened and they needed a lawyer, he would take [unintelligible]. So that night, I was hanging around with him, because the father was gone to meet "the Colonel," and we went with him and they shook hands and talked, and then "Oh, so that's your son?" to my friend; he gave us a gold pass. We could – anywhere's free in there. That was a fun time.

JM: What did you say the name of the carnival was?

ML: World of Mirth.

JM: World of Mirth.

ML: Oh, big, big carnival. They had their own train. They'd park their train at the train station, then everything was on wheels and truck – they'd truck everything up. I was fascinated by it, and I went to [watch them] tear it down a few times, at night, when they'd move out because I was fascinated, you know. Then, one of the last times, I happened to pick – they had black dancing girls, with a black band, and so the guy was looking for a couple more kids – and this was like midnight – and he talked French to me, and I was fascinated. I'd never heard, you know, a colored person talking French. And had, you know, the real French, the Parisian French, and I thought that was great, you know. Then, they had some elephants, and by that time I was following the thing to the train station, and I wanted to see how they did it. And when they were putting the elephants in the car, one of the elephants didn't want to go, and he took a fit. You know how most freight cars have a ladder on the side? He went for the

ladder. Then they finally calmed down the elephant, but he really didn't want to go in the – In those days, the railroad was real important, to deliver freight. I used to go to the freight station and fill up my father's truck with stuff that was coming in. But then that died out with all the trucking.

JM: And did they used to have – was that mostly the Maine Central where freight would come in.

ML: Yes. The Grand Trunk was very little. The Maine Central.

JM: And did you ever – so, were your parents born in Canada, or further back?

ML: My father wasn't; my mother was.

JM: And did you ever go back to visit family in Canada, or anything like that?

ML: I didn't, but my sister would bring my mother on vacations. Not so much – there was not many relatives left, but to go back to that small town where she came from?

JM: Do you remember what the name of the town was?

ML: It was a funny name; I can't think hardly any more

ML: I've got it at home, I've got Grammy's birth certificate.

ML: Oh yeah? It was a funny name. Some day's I'm [snaps fingers] and then some days I don't have it.

JM: That's okay, it doesn't matter. So was there anything else you wanted to tell me?

ML: I can't think of – I mean, I didn't give you too, too much.

JM: Okay, no, that's great. I think we got a lot of material. Let's finish up there, then.

[End]

[41:50]